

# The Teacher

## Mainstreaming Gender Research into the Classroom: Cases from Contemporary Western Europe

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In March 1995, a group of scholars and teachers of political science met at the University of Washington to participate in a two-day workshop called, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Europe: A Curriculum Development Workshop".<sup>1</sup> The following articles, by Dorothy Stetson, Leslie Eliason, Joni Lovenduski, Sonja Elison, and Christine Di Stefano, capture a large portion of these discussions. At the workshop, we were concerned with two critiques that might be directed at the integration of gender studies and political science in the classroom. First, how does the study and teaching of gender fit with political science? Second, assuming there is a fit, why should Western Europe be treated as a 'special case' within the broader undertaking? The five articles that follow help address these questions and also help teachers to integrate gender into the curriculum in ways that strengthen the analytical, empirical, pedagogical, and participatory content of political science courses.

As recent state of the field articles show (e.g., Carroll and Zerilli 1993; Randall 1992; Sapiro 1991), the area of gender and politics is growing significantly in a variety of directions. We purposefully use the label "gender and politics", as opposed to women and politics or feminist political science, for this area of study in order to include the broadest possible spectrum of scholarship.<sup>2</sup> In this optic, gender and politics research incorporates work that seeks to re-define political science theories, concepts, and methods in terms of gender dynamics as well as interpretivist and empirical work—both quantita-

tive and qualitative—that focuses on gender and sex-specific phenomena as explanatory variables or objects of analyses to strengthen existing political science theory. This workshop and the following collection of essays that emerged from it represent the complexity of this burgeoning field.

Participants focused on how better to integrate gendered analyses of contemporary Western Europe in a variety of classes so teachers could provide a fresh and clearer understanding not just of European politics and society, but of general democratic change. Indeed, as the following essays demonstrate, introducing gender and politics scholarship into the classroom allows instructors to bring in notions of democratization and the fundamental question of what makes a society democratic into courses that often assume that democracy is stable and has been achieved. Using gender and politics materials in this context stresses that issues of democratic development and change are not confined to "the developing world." Mainstreaming work on gender and politics in Western Europe into the classroom responds, therefore, to George Ross' recent assertion that research on Europe needs to shift away from the outmoded notion that "North American and European capitalist democracies would come to represent some final safe haven for civilization, standing as an irresistible inspiration for developing societies." Instead, given the "multi-dimensional fluidity and uncertainty" of contemporary European society, Ross asserts that European studies should consist of "careful and lucid efforts at nuanced understanding,

not only out of pure intellectual interest, but because of its [Europe's] role in our common future" (Ross 1995, 4).

In her article, Dorothy McBride Stetson argues that the fundamental problem facing those who wish to "genderize" their courses is that scholarship itself remains poorly integrated. She identifies two approaches to work on European politics that she labels "feminist" and "non-feminist". The assumptions and tools underlying each approach are markedly different. Only by integrating these two disparate strands of inquiry, she argues, can we have a solid foundation for comprehensively covering gender and politics within the curriculum. Leslie Eliason highlights one area in which the integration of feminist and non-feminist scholarship approaches a desirable level. She demonstrates that the literature on the Scandinavian welfare states incorporates gender as a central concept for both measurement and evaluation. Since integration has taken place in the literature to which Eliason refers, the main task for those using the Scandinavian case in the classroom is to incorporate it into a broader course. Eliason recognizes that few universities and colleges have courses focusing uniquely on women and the welfare state in Scandinavia, but argues that the Scandinavian case lends itself to a variety of European and non-European comparative courses. For example, it could constitute the module on welfare states in a general introduction to comparative politics course as taught in most political science programs.

Joni Lovenduski points to another

option for motivated teachers. Rather than seeking literature or case studies in which integration is already present, Lovenduski shows how a careful teacher may synthesize the feminist and non-feminist approaches within a particular course or module. Lovenduski has, of course, done this in her own research and scholarship; here she shows how any teacher can do this in the classroom. She presents the cases of Britain and former West Germany. A third strategy is presented by Sonja Elison who has incorporated into her classroom some participatory exercises that enrich students' perceptions of the importance of gender as a concept in political science. She describes three ways by which students can be drawn into the discussion of women and politics.

Christine Di Stefano provides the viewpoint of a feminist theorist on integrating gender into the general political science curriculum. She differentiates between the concepts of gender, women, and feminism to indicate that while gender and politics research is not necessarily done by individuals with feminist goals, its application in the classroom potentially helps answer the question of how to make democracy more "accessible" and "safe" for women. Di Stefano's essay closes our discussion by placing the concrete act of mainstreaming gender into the broader perspective of theory and practice; hence she provides a roadmap for those who choose to pursue this challenging but worthwhile endeavor.

These articles are not intended to

be a critique of political science so much as a practical guide to the challenges, benefits, and pitfalls of introducing gender into political science courses that particularly focus on contemporary Western European politics. They demonstrate some of the drawbacks of using published research in the classroom—although all the authors argue that the drawbacks are outweighed by many benefits. The articles also give practical advice on the incorporation of such material, from Eliason's careful case constructed from Scandinavian welfare state literature and Lovenduski's discussion of the case of participation to Elison's hands-on approach.<sup>3</sup> As Di Stefano suggests, the most important benefit of integrating gender into teaching European politics is its impact on our understanding of both the concept and the reality of late twentieth century democracies.

### Notes

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2. See Christine Di Stefano's article below for a discussion of definitions of gender.

3. For syllabi collections in Gender and

Politics see Kenney (1996). The CWES at the University of Washington has begun a collection of 'gendered' syllabi across the disciplines in European Studies (for more information, contact John Keeler, Director).

### References

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## Gender and European Politics: The Limits of Integration

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An instructor who integrates gender into a course on European politics and society has at least three options: (1) to add a separate section on women; (2) to supplement the material in the text with a specialty reader on gender (such as Loven-

duski & Norris 1993; Kaplan 1992); or (3) to include topical articles on women and politics in a course packet (e.g. Siim 1994; Rule 1987). While these options expose students to information about women and politics, gender issues and relations,

and feminist politics in Europe, they do not solidly integrate the study of gender and European politics into the political science curriculum.

The European politics curriculum presently neither embraces gender as an analytical category nor regards it