

## 2009-2010 Grant Proposals

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Robert Rodgers

"Measuring the Influence of Course Preparation Assignments on Student Learning Outcomes"  
Pedagogy Travel Grant

**Project Description:** I seek funding for expenses related to my participation in the American Political Science Association's Teaching and Learning Conference (APSA TLC), which will be held in Philadelphia on February 5-7, 2010. William Ewell (who is submitting a separate grant application) and I have been collaborating on research into the effectiveness of course preparation assignments (CPAs) in the introductory American politics course, and our application to present the findings of our research has been accepted by the APSA TLC.

The scholarly literature on teaching and learning claims that CPAs improve student learning, class preparation, and ownership of course material by providing opportunities for significant guided learning beyond the classroom. CPAs may take many forms, but in general they entail low-stakes writing assignments that emphasize critical thinking and analysis of primary or secondary source materials. Their advantages over unaccompanied reading assignments, quizzes, and reflection papers are emphasized in the literature.

The literature, however, provides little evidence as to the effectiveness of CPAs to improve student engagement and learning. Our research project measures the effectiveness of CPAs across three sections of an introductory American politics course and examines different methods for utilizing CPAs. The research design utilizes within and across classroom evaluation methods to achieve a robust examination of CPAs. This design allows for an examination of semester long effects of CPAs and their impact on preparation for class, classroom participation, and overall learning. The within classroom design seeks to measure the effectiveness of individual lessons compared to lessons that do not utilize the CPA method. The design also compares the effectiveness of CPAs for political science majors and non-majors. Our study seeks to determine the effectiveness of CPAs to increase student learning, participation, preparedness, and engagement.

Our participation in this conference will provide an excellent opportunity to gather feedback on our research. We will engage with others who are also investigating the best methods for encouraging student preparation for the classroom. We fully expect to continue our research into the effectiveness of CPAs with the goal of publishing our findings after gathering and analyzing additional data.

Our participation in the APSA TLC goes far beyond the presentation, discussion, and refinement of our research on CPAs. A concomitant goal is, of course, to improve our teaching and our students' learning through the most effective means of fostering student preparation for classroom activities. In addition, the APSA TLC conference, which fosters discussion of cutting-edge approaches and methodologies for teaching political science, employs the working-group format. This format allows small groups of scholars to engage with one another on a common theme throughout the conference. Prof. Ewell and I will be participating in the "core curriculum and general education" working group. We will thus have many opportunities to develop our understanding of the most current thinking on teaching and learning within general education programs.

Upon our return from the conference, Prof. Ewell and I will present to the Political Science Department all that we have learned about innovative methods and techniques of teaching and learning, which then may be incorporated into the courses offered within the department. We will also organize (with the approval and assistance of the Center for Teaching and Learning) a seminar for Stonehill faculty to discuss strategies to encourage effective student preparation for class.

**Budget:** Given the monetary cap of the Pedagogy Travel Grant, we have listed only the major budget items associated with our travel to the APSA TLC.

Conference Registration (early discounted rate): \$220

Round trip airfare to Philadelphia: \$175

Taxi to and from the airport: \$57

Lodging in Philadelphia (two nights at \$139 per night plus tax): \$320