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# Marriage of convenience, love at first sight? A brief manual for teaching international relations in Brazil and beyond

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## Abstract

Professors may start teaching either out of love or out of convenience, with limited resources. This article provides a brief manual for planning, designing and implementing PS&IR courses. We discuss syllabi, from the basics to the inclusion of transversal topics, then present eight active learning strategies plus traditional lectures, and debate assessments. Although we consider the context of new teachers within Brazilian universities, we believe this is useful for professors from all countries and levels of experience. Thereby, we provide practical advice for teachers to live happily ever after in their pedagogical love story (even if it did not start that way).

**Keywords:** teaching practices; teaching methods; IR teaching; teaching challenges; active learning.

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## Introduction

In Brazil - as in many other countries - research is intrinsically linked to teaching. This is especially true in public universities, where academic work is based on the teaching-research-extension tripod. Thus, whereas for some teaching might come naturally - a love at first sight - for others it is more like a marriage of convenience, in which love may or may not come later. In both cases, young professors often start teaching with little or no classroom experience (Gokcek 2019). Generally, teaching skills are acquired by graduate students in experiences such as teaching internships (not mandatory in all programs), training workshops or temporary opportunities.

This article aims to help international relations (IR) teachers with different levels of classroom experience by addressing both

basic issues linked to course planning and teaching (with special focus on active learning) and new issues and challenges. Although the paper is based on the Brazilian<sup>1</sup> context, we believe our contribution is useful to IR professors in general, regardless of the country where they teach.

The first reason to explore this issue is legal. The fulfillment of the Brazilian National Curriculum Guidelines (*Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais* - DCNs, in Portuguese) for bachelor's courses requires teaching skills that are not systematically, formally or intentionally worked on at any stage of academic training. A second reason for this article is academic. Several international political science and international relations (PS & IR) scientific associations<sup>1</sup> and journals<sup>2</sup> recognize the importance of discussing teaching academically and we wish to contribute to this literature.

Lastly, the 21st century has brought distinct challenges for teachers in general. The amount of information easily available online may cause internal crises in teachers (who might (re)think their supposedly decreasing relevance in the classroom). On the other hand, the generation from which most undergraduate and graduate students are coming from at this moment in time - the so-called Generation Z - faces devastating emotional consequences from socioeconomic instabilities and Covid-19 (Alves and Ferreira 2022), violent threats (Deole 2018), food insecurity<sup>3</sup> (Martinez et al. 2020), environmental problems (Wray 2022) and other crises, which are not easily sidestepped in the classroom (Zartner 2018).

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 we focus on how to prepare a course syllabus. In section 3 we present a “teaching trousseau” of techniques that can be used fruitfully in the IR classroom. In section 4, we approach issues around teaching assessment. We close discussing future perspectives.

## Designing a syllabus: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue

Whether one teaches out of love or is in a marriage of convenience with teaching, designing a syllabus is a great way to reflect on where one stands. For instance, a common trend is to replicate techniques and methods experienced as a student, without second thought (Oleson and Hora 2014). Also, although part of a professor's role is to explain complex issues, in many cases students will not necessarily retain content, but develop skills such as reading effectively, writing objectively, or delivering meaningful oral presentations. Thus, the teacher should reflect on the means (the

<sup>1</sup> See the International Political Science Association (IPSA), the American Political Science Association (APSA), the International Studies Association (ISA), the European Political Science Network (EpsNet), and the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), to name a few. APSA promotes the Teaching and Learning Conference and APSA Educate. In Brazil, there are efforts among the PS & IR associations (ABRI and ABCP, respectively - acronyms in Portuguese).

<sup>2</sup> *Arts and International Affairs, European Political Science, International Studies Perspectives (ISP), Journal of Political Science Education, PS: Political Science and Politics, Politics, Teaching Public Administration, Teaching Political Science*, etc. In Brazil, there are special issues published by journals *Carta Internacional, Meridiano 47, Mural Internacional* and *Revista Brasileira de Políticas Públicas e Internacionais (RPPI)*.

<sup>3</sup> A discussion on this issue can be found at <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/food-for-thought.amp>

how), as much as the end (the what). How can students learn to work as a team or to ask good questions? How can a cooperative environment be created to stimulate different learning paths and contemplate diversity? Such questions are important when planning a course and designing a syllabus. It is also important to think back on one's broader teaching philosophy, which can be recorded in the form of a teaching statement and revised whenever necessary. As in wedding vows, a teaching statement should reflect one's commitment to the craft (Beatty et al. 2009; Goodyear and Allchin 2017; Laundon et al. 2020). In this section we discuss: 1) the basics of preparing a syllabus; 2) the importance of including transversal issues and diversity; 3) how to translate a syllabus into lesson plans; and 4) contemporary challenges linked to syllabus planning.

### Something old: the basics of planning a syllabus<sup>4</sup>

According to Parkes and Harris (2002), syllabi can be used to serve three main roles: to be i) a contract, ii) a permanent record and/or iii) a learning tool. In the first case, it should make clear what the teacher expects of students during the semester and, thus, guide the behavior of both. In the second case accountability and documentation are central. The permanent record syllabus should include detailed information on a number of elements, such as course name, date, credit hours, prerequisites, required texts, learning objectives, content, calendar, assignments and assessment. In the third type, the document is a learning tool itself. According to the authors, "a well-designed syllabus can provide information that assists students to become more effective learners in areas that go beyond the scope of our own courses" (p. 58). Thus, such a syllabus must provide students with: 1) tools for students to become effective learners, 2) guidance on the course itself, 3) information on whether that course is for each student, 4) context about content (including in relation to other courses), and 5) a model of professional thinking and writing.

All of these types of syllabi can be adapted throughout the course, with greater or lesser student participation, depending on each professor's style<sup>5</sup>. Certain items of the syllabus may also be affected by class size or other characteristics, some of which may only be known after a few classes. In some cases, especially in higher level elective courses, students may ask that specific themes be included in the program. Nevertheless, although adaptations are possible, most of the planning must be carried out before the beginning of the semester. Therefore, considering that classes may be large and include a diversity of students, or that even in smaller class contexts, the teacher will only get to know students after a while, it is important to consider different possibilities.

<sup>4</sup> To access further content on IR teaching visit Mettrica's Lab website <https://sites.google.com/view/mettrica-lab/biblioteca-online>, the Brazilian IR Association website [https://www.abri.org.br/conteudo/view?ID\\_CONTEUDO=1181](https://www.abri.org.br/conteudo/view?ID_CONTEUDO=1181) and the SuperiorRI Youtube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyFKaTIm9zh4HomSKN46fz>.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Marcelo Valença website offers interesting examples of syllabus at [www.marcelovalenca.com/ensino](http://www.marcelovalenca.com/ensino)

Here we would like to insert a brief note about multiple intelligence theory (MIT)<sup>6</sup>, learning styles<sup>7</sup> and multimodal teaching and learning. Despite controversies<sup>8</sup>, the literature has discussed the utility of such perspectives in the PS & IR classroom (Driver et al. 2008; Ulbig 2016). For more experienced professors, it is crucial to constantly self-evaluate and reevaluate one's practices on different levels (Bain 2004), as it might be easy to become accommodated with certain methods and techniques over the years, which may not necessarily work with all classes or even generations. For instance, Schlee et al. (2020) have found differences between attitudes towards group projects between Millennials and Generation Z students, while Purcell (2020) successfully tested a "Generation Z-focused method" in a public policy course. Finally, it is important to choose recommended texts and authors carefully, considering transversal issues and diversity. Parrish (2007), for example, lists advantages and disadvantages of using canonical and noncanonical political theory in the classroom. In fact, noncanon can be a doorway for dealing with transversal themes and increasing the diversity of authors to be read, as explored in the next section.

### Something new: transversality and diversity in the IR syllabus

Since 2017, preparing syllabi for IR courses in Brazil must transversally, continuously and permanently integrate 1) environmental issues, 2) human rights and 3) ethnic-racial relations and African-Brazilian, African and indigenous histories and culture (Ministério da Educação 2017: article 1). Dealing with transversality and diversity can also promote civic engagement, which in turn can foster important competencies for PS & IR students. However, there is still institutional resistance and faculty unpreparedness (Raymond 2017). In this section, we address each of these topics plus an additional one: gender and intersectionality.

Overall, the IR teacher has three main responsibilities when bringing transversal issues into the classroom: 1) transmitting relevant information on the topic while helping students identify the many interfaces with IR and with other issues; 2) preparing future IR professionals to consider and contribute to these issues, whatever area they come to specialize in; and 3) helping students deal with such issues proactively. That is why special care must be given to communicate such issues in a manner that generates more action than fear (Markowitz and Graves 2020).

Regarding environmental issues, although, to the best of our knowledge, there are no empirical studies evaluating how it has been dealt with in IR courses, it is safe to say that their incorporation in the IR classroom has been slower than other topics. Ideally this dimension should be included

<sup>6</sup> According to Ferrero et al. (2021), MIT proposes "the idea that human beings possess not one but multiple intelligences". The proponent of the theory lists eight types of intelligence, which work together: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist (Gardner, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> "the view that different people learn information in different ways" (Pashler et al. 2009).

<sup>8</sup> On one hand, it is still hard to evaluate the effectiveness of MIT (Ferrero et al. 2021). On the other hand, there is a lack of consensus on the validity of learning styles (Young 2010) or associated multimodal teaching and learning (Gravin 2020). In addition, research still lacks strong statistical evidence against the learning styles approach (Li et al. 2016).

transversally, i.e., each course should show the links between the topic studied and environmental conservation and/or destruction. Although we also lack systematized data on this, we believe PS & IR professors in Brazil are still largely unprepared to include environmental dimensions within their courses<sup>9</sup>. Most PS & IR programs implemented the 2017 guidelines by formally including a specific course to deal with environmental issues (“international environmental policy” or “global environmental policy”, for instance). The problem with this approach is the danger of keeping environmental issues “in a box” as opposed to showing students their multiple connections to IR and other disciplines. Furthermore, such subjects might not necessarily be offered regularly when placed as electives.

In theory, this should not be a hard task, as protecting the environment is a classic IR problem in several ways: biodiversity is distributed asymmetrically around the planet, information about the environment is uneven, most environmental problems do not respect borders and often problems caused by developed, industrialized countries strongly affect nations that have little power within the international system (such as island-countries). Yet, protecting the environment remains a preeminent necessity of our time, and IR teachers’ role is crucial: after all, although concern for the environment and pro-environmental values and beliefs have increased substantially over the past decades, empirical studies consistently show that this does not always translate into practice (Kennedy et al. 2009; Tam and Chan 2017).

The 21st century has also brought together a dangerous combination that must be dealt within the IR classroom: in addition to the inconsistency between pro-environmental concern, values and belief and practice *per se* and a climate emergency close to tipping points (Lenton et al. 2019), there has been a growth in anti-environmentalism, possibly as part of a broader historical context (Boynton 2015). Additionally, when teaching about the inevitable doomsday scenarios that might come up, it is important to inspire action, as opposed to generating feelings of indifference and inefficacy (Cameron and Payne 2011; Peters et al. 2013). Regarding practical tips, we recommend environmental education literature (Sauvé 2005), which for decades has been developing techniques that can inspire PS & IR teachers and Santos et al (2022), which provides an experience on implementing a free simulation platform on decarbonization policies.

As with environmental issues, teaching human rights must be done with care, as it touches on topics that are emotionally difficult to deal with, such as genocide and torture (Zartner 2018). According to Murdie (2017), unlike legal studies or philosophy, the social sciences were more reluctant to focus on human rights due to its normative roots. Nonetheless, she highlights that human rights research has been showing up at an increasing rate in top IR journals and has enriched cross-disciplinary and practitioner/policy experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Some useful data sources are: World Bank Data, the International Regimes Database and Ecolex; indexes such as the Environmental Performance Index and the Ocean Health Index; websites of the different international environmental agreement secretariats, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In the case of Brazil, a country that (for instance) ranks 5th in femicide rates when compared to other 83 countries (Waiselfisz 2015), teaching human rights is crucial at all levels, but how can it be implemented? Kille (2002) details the parameters to organize a simulation that consists in the creation of a new international treaty on human rights. The author provides all of the to support the activity, considering educational goals, parameters for organization, procedures, assessment and debriefing sections. We also recommend the Global Campus initiative, which includes specific activities for human rights education<sup>10</sup>.

Teaching about ethnic relations and African and indigenous histories and cultures may also be challenging. According to Vargas and Castro (2020, 136), teaching ethnic-racial relations and Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture (ERER, in Portuguese) in IR means “to highlight the contribution of black populations to the production of human knowledge in all areas, [...] to recover and disseminate the participation of black populations in the formation of Brazilian society as social agents and not just as victims of the process of enslavement”. These authors found that only 24% of public IR undergraduate courses in Brazil have adopted specific ERER content in their programs and also verified a gap in specific training in graduate programs.

Also, when race and racism discussions are present in IR curriculum they are often categorized as “critical approaches” (Sen 2022), which may give students the false impression that they are separate/distant from so-called mainstream perspectives. In order to overcome the specific limitation on training, one experience from the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) created a yearly teaching project on ERER. One of the goals was to transversally insert specific literature among courses, and a playlist<sup>11</sup> of African and African-descendent intellectuals was produced by the students. In 2022, the focus has been on African and African-descendent world leaders. Bringing indigenous themes and perspectives into the PS & IR classroom appears to be even more rare. Soares (2020) revised Brazilian and Canadian texts on the subject and suggests some readings. Boylan et al. (2021) also suggest an approach to study the Arctic Council, which may be adapted to other instances of indigenous governance.

Although it also took long to incorporate gender into IR analyses (Halliday 1994), there has been a growth in such studies since they began in the late 1980s. The special 1988 number *Women and International Relations*, of the *Millennium* journal, seems to mark the beginning of the gender and international relations studies (GIR) subfield (Thorburn 2000; Hoffman 2003). Two years later, the first edition of Cynthia Enloe’s (1990) seminal book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* drew attention to the invisible women in IR, such as diplomats’ wives, prostitutes hired by soldiers, refugees in camps, plantation workers, and hotel room maids.

Within broader gender studies, and later within GIR, academics have inserted the debate on intersectionality, which considers the multiple experiences of women depending on sexuality, ethnicity and socioeconomic context, for example (Nicholson 2000). Gender and intersectionality

<sup>10</sup> Global Campus of Human Rights. Networking and Outreach. <https://gchumanrights.org/education/global-classroom.html>

<sup>11</sup> Playlist with students presentations on black intellectuals: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j8g9xSPFzA>

are not formally included in the Brazilian IR curriculum guidelines, but it is crucial to approach these issues in the classroom in at least two ways: 1) by presenting gender perspectives and data<sup>12</sup> on the topics being dealt with in the course and showing links between the gender dimension and other issues; and 2) by including more female authors and gender perspectives among mandatory and optional readings<sup>13</sup>. On intersectionality, Rasmussen (2014) suggests that four key features be considered by teachers towards an intersectional political science pedagogy: “focusing on multiple identities, a foregrounding of power and processes, transforming courses through inclusion, and employing a normative commitment to equality” (p. 105).

### Something borrowed: translating the syllabus into lesson plans

Although in some areas of academia, borrowing is not something good (i.e., plagiarism), borrowing ideas, models and overall teaching tools - both from outside and within the field - can help develop new teaching skills. Several online resources can inspire syllabus creation, such as Open Syllabus<sup>14</sup>. There are also repositories that focus on specific topics, like civic engagement<sup>15</sup> or gender<sup>16</sup>. Different syllabi can also be found easily on university websites and academic social media sites like Academia.edu or ResearchGate. Syllabi can be translated into practice through individual lesson plans, crafted for each class listed. Often not mandatory in higher education, lesson plans can still come in handy, especially for new teachers or when the content/course is new for the teacher. They can also be useful for professors that find it hard to stick to the time set for the class. In this case, teachers can detail how much time they wish to spend on each activity or theme.

IR lesson planning has a lot to borrow from the field of pedagogy, which suggests different models to structure such plans. Although mostly focused on primary and secondary students, there are several helpful online tools to design lesson plans. Many suggest that the teacher ask questions before starting to plan, focusing on students' profiles, learning objectives, ways to engage the class, time available and time breaks, materials and methods, what to do in case of unforeseen situations, and assessment. One interesting question to keep in mind is: would another teacher be able to give your class solely by following your plan? Another way of enriching lesson plans is by seeking inspiration from techniques and activities created by other professors, such as those published in the *Journal of Political Science Education* or in blogs such as ALPS<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Databases such as Gender Stats (<https://genderstats.org/>) may help in this sense.

<sup>13</sup> On female underrepresentation in IR see, for instance: Maliniak et al. 2013; Colgan et al. 2017; Baccarini et al. 2019; Scola et al. 2020

<sup>14</sup> <https://opensyllabus.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Project Pericles. <https://www.projectpericles.org/course-syllabi-database.html>

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, the syllabus collection of the Consortium on Gender, Security & Human Rights - <https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/syllabus-collection>.

<sup>17</sup> Active Learning in Political Science - <https://activelearningps.com/>

## Something blue: the challenges of syllabus implementation

Implementing a syllabus (a.k.a., teaching) involves several challenges. Here we highlight two: emotional issues and connecting theory and practice. Teaching and learning are intrinsically connected with our emotions (Kolb 1984). According to Zartner (2018, 2), “Finding a sense of hopefulness in the middle of case studies about torture, climate change, racism and xenophobia, conflict, and vast discrepancies of development [...] can often feel like an uphill battle”. Working with such topics, students and faculty can experience compassion fatigue and burnout. The Covid-19 pandemic also brought further emotional challenges, as insecure contexts may negatively affect learning (Alves and Ferreira 2022). Thus, Zartner (2018) lists a number of techniques to help us focus on the positive, such as implementing creative activities as therapeutic assignments and impact projects.

The second main challenge, integrating theory and practice, is maybe one of the greatest in contemporary teaching (Maliniak et al. 2020). The Brazilian IR DCNs (Ministério da Educação 2017) require “teaching and learning methods that stimulate students’ comprehensive graduation through didactic and pedagogical proposals that favor skill enhancement and cognitive and socioemotional abilities; ways to integrate theory and practice; and ways to guarantee the inseparability of teaching, research and extension”. However, the Teaching and Research & International Politics (TRIP) survey found that only experienced professors adopt more applied approaches in their teaching (Maliniak et al. 2020).

One way to promote the integration of theory and practice is through active learning strategies. Although active learning definitions vary, they generally share common priorities: a) students need to do more than just listen; b) the teacher should aim to develop skills and abilities, according to the learning objectives outlined (Lantis et al. 2000; Mitchell and Manzo 2018), and not just transmit information; and c) students should participate in activities that interact with the content, and be encouraged to analyze and criticize specific theoretical elements (Fink 2013). Gonçalves and Lima (2020) share initiatives to integrate theory and practice in IR. The following section describes eight active learning strategies for the IR classroom, plus one section to address the regular lecture method.

Besides active learning, the practical approach may also be introduced through community service. In 2018, Resolution No. 007/2018 MEC/CNE/CES established, in Brazil, a 10% minimum workload dedicated to extension, which proved to be a challenge for undergraduate courses. Raymond (2017) discusses three different ways to do it: 1) through direct experience in the community; 2) by community-based service-learning; and 3) through projects that promote greater political agency for the community itself. The last is the preferred way of the three, according to the author, as the others prioritize students rather than communities, often treating communities as laboratories which may reinforce perceptions that communities are helpless. Matto et al (2021) consolidate several reflections, ideas, concepts and more than twenty experiences on civic engagement globally which may inspire teachers.

International service learning, for example, may be a unique experience when students can immerse themselves in a diverse culture, with different peoples, societies and political and economic contexts, providing the possibility to experience the complexities of the globalization process. It requires careful preparation and financial resources that may not be available in every context, especially in developing countries. Other common problems are the absence of minority groups among students and the experience's short duration (Hosman and Jacobs 2018).

## The teaching trousseau

This section focuses on nine teaching techniques that may be useful for those who decide to fire their own love story with teaching. Although teachers learn many techniques and activities as a student, as in a marriage, even though we are given basic items for our house during the wedding party, only later we acquire other items or even buy (or build) some of our own.

## Everyone needs a toolbox: a glimpse into problem-based learning (PBL)

Problem based learning (PBL) consists in the introduction of relevant problems in the beginning of a learning cycle in order to build a context and motivate solutions (Prince 2004). PBL is student-centered and designed to promote independent learning, based on real/practical problems, and can be a good strategy to promote interdisciplinarity (Lieux 1996).

According to Ala and Hyde-Clark (2006), in order for PBL to be successful, lecturers must ensure the course is critically aligned. Prince (2004) presents a variety of PBL implementation strategies. There are also interesting projects from the Global Campus platform, where students from around the world can develop problem-solving skills.

## The joy of reading together: a library of teaching cases

Teaching cases have great potential for application in PS & IR, as it requires students to discuss and discover the answers along the way (Hawes 2004). Students are inserted within a particular situation such as a crisis, something complex and difficult to decide, and are stimulated to develop skills such as description, explanation, and prescription. While students ask questions, suggest explanations, and learn from peers, the teacher's role is to facilitate and structure students' contributions, considering multiple possible answers (Lamy 2007).

Designing a good teaching case is complex (Alberton and Silva 2018) and requires different preparation strategies (Holsti 1994) as it needs to aggregate a set of qualities: a) in-depth descriptions of the key actors (Golich et al. 2000); b) enough information to explore varied responses; and c) no obvious solution. Students need to identify key actors and review their positions, and one possibility is to frame the solution to answer the who, what, when and how (Lynn 1999).

## Arguments may show up sometimes: don't forget to debate

Debates are widely employed to promote critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Davis et al. 2016). Although most professors encourage students to debate in class, fewer do so in a structured way (Oros 2007). In addition, greater political polarization makes the role of universities in framing discussions and mediating arguments even more important. Snider and Schnurer (2002) suggest that debates be adopted to deal with subjects with many perspectives, to teach students to address complex problems through political communication.

Debates also promote engagement, cooperation, and the construction and deconstruction of ideas through argumentation. The teacher should: 1) choose an interesting topic, preferably not commonplace; 2) give a brief presentation on the topic; and 3) pre-select reliable sources. The debate *per se* can follow the ARE method (assertion, reasoning, and evidence). The authors also discuss eight different debate formats: public forums, spontaneous argumentation, group discussions, policies formulation debates, role playing debates, mock trial debates, panel, and congress debates.

## It is simply necessary to love<sup>18</sup>: the art collection

In an interview<sup>19</sup>, political scientist and Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom once reported on the role of collaborative artisanship (with her husband Vincent and their friend Paul Goodman, a carpenter) on her intellectual life: “You might be working on something like a cabinet and thinking about the design of it, and thinking this idea versus that idea, and then Paul could pick up a board and say, oh, you shouldn't use this one because it will split. He could see things in wood that we couldn't. So the whole idea of artisans and apprentices and the structure of a good workshop really made an impression on us”.

Similarly, the arts can be used in the PS & IR classroom to help students see things in less usual manners (including movies and documentaries, discussed in the next section). Bray and Chapell (2005) discuss the role of theater for civic education, for instance. Bowers (2018) suggests a flipped classroom technique using photography. Lobasz and Valeriano (2015) cover the use of science-fiction literature, while James (2021) suggests spy novels to teach a security course. Ramel and Jung (2018) present a case that links music and diplomacy and Oliveira et al. (2021) show how listening to music can be a useful pedagogical tool in the Global South. In fact, regarding music, several playlists can be found online with songs that can be used to explain IR concepts and

<sup>18</sup> “Everyone discusses my art and pretends to understand, as if it were necessary to understand, when it is simply necessary to love” - Claude Monet.

<sup>19</sup> “What a prize: Nobel winner Elinor Ostrom is a gregarious teacher who loves to solve problems”, Herald Times, 6 December 2009. Available at <https://www.heraldtimesonline.com/story/news/2009/12/06/obel-winner-elinor-ostrom-is-a-gregarious-teacher-who-loves-to-solve-problems/117790374/>.

theories, by academics such as Pedro dos Santos<sup>20</sup> Michael Tierney<sup>21</sup>, and Stephen Walt (2009). Other resources include the International Studies Association's Science, Technology and Art in International Relations section (STAIR) and the *Arts and International Affairs* Journal.

### A walk to remember: movie night

Using movies in the classroom is an old technique, yet there is still ample room for their use in IR courses (Neves Jr. and Zanella 2016; Iretzberger 2021). In IR, movies can: be used for historical context (Valeriano 2013; Inoue and Krain 2014; Saltzman 2019); for immersion in a proposed scenario; to stimulate debate (Zanella and Neves Jr. 2015; 2017); or to awaken interest in a given subject (Brandle 2020). Movies can also be an object of analysis themselves, as Zanella and Neves Jr. (2017) suggest, through the use of three methodological resources: text analysis, the external-aesthetic method, and thematic contextualization. In the first case, the focus is on the story told. Students analyze, question and debate the historical facts narrated. The second tool also inserts elements external to the movie, by analyzing everything from the director and actors to the costs of production and sources of sponsorship. The third and last method is that of thematic contextualization. Here, the idea is to position the film in relation to the chosen theme in order to contrast it with other works involving the same historical context. Zanella and Neves (2017) maintain that in this method cinema becomes a historical and political agent.

Lobasz and Valeriano (2015) present films after a half-hour pre-movie lecture that introduces concepts and facts about the screenwriter, director and historical context of the movie. This is followed by a half-hour post-movie wrap up and discussion that connects the film and concepts. Like the other active learning techniques listed here, it requires preparation from the teacher that begins with the selection of the film to be used. Using different visual languages also allows students to move forward from the aesthetic comfort zone they are used to. In Brazil, a three-book collection is available with a list of films to be used in IR courses (Zanella and Neves Jr. 2015).

### Relieving the stress: game night and a little role play

According to Huizinga (1938), games have been a way to pass on knowledge since the beginning of recorded history. Kapp (2012) proposes that every teaching process is a kind of game, as it can replicate the structure of learning. Games are special in the sense that they are able to create abstract environments. Thus, they allow students to get in touch with themes in scenarios that encompass global politics; to develop skills useful for real life (McGonigal 2011); to engage with content using a logic of rewards and inputs (Hakulinen et al. 2013); to receive

<sup>20</sup> Pedro A. G. dos Santos. International Relations Playlist Podcast and Blog. <https://www.professordos.net/occasional-blog/international-relations-playlist>

<sup>21</sup> Michael Tierney. IR Playlist. <https://mjtierney.weebly.com/ir-playlist.html>

instantaneous feedback on their performance, and; to perceive steps and tasks required as a group or individually (Kapp 2012).

Cooperative and non-cooperative board games, for example, can teach about rationality (or lack of) in the decision making process, and help students develop empathy and consider alternative perspectives (Darr and Cohen 2016). Simulations are, maybe, the oldest (Hodge 1963) and most popular teaching tool in IR undergraduate courses, especially formal and structured “United Nations model” formats. They require team effort and promote the development of different cognitive skills. Yet, simulations require long-term preparation and may take months to prepare depending on the format. However, there are also simple and informal simulations (Ebner and Winkler 2008; Gormley-Heenan and Lightfoot 2012) that may need only a few classes. They can reproduce a historical event or simply apply a theoretical framework in the real world (Lantis et al. 2000). The *Simulation and Gaming* special issue for international relations (Crookall 2003) and the book by Ishiyama et al. (2015) are good starting points for those who want to try in-class simulations.

### Thinking back on the good and bad times: biographies and autobiographies

Using biographies in the PS & IR classroom can fulfill two main roles: 1) making class content more palatable, and 2) inspiring students in their own careers. In the first case, Warren (1992) highlights that biographies are pleasurable for students, make historical personalities more accessible and knowable, and provide context for periods of time and places that may be unfamiliar. Farias (2017) points out that biographies can be used to analyze individuals’ role within different theories. In the second case, biographies of PS & IR academics can give students a better idea of the profession, especially for those who want to pursue an academic career<sup>22</sup>.

In addition to biographical and autobiographical books and films, two interesting sources are the Bibliographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations<sup>23</sup> and Conversations with History<sup>24</sup>, the latter a series of hour-long interviews with PS&IR academics, activists and other notable people, since 1982. An example of how these sources can be useful is the 2004 interview with prominent IR theorist Robert Keohane<sup>25</sup>, where he speaks of influences from his parents, teaching difficulties in the beginning of his career, and even briefly on gender issues around his PhD mentor, as well as his perspectives on IR theory.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Intervalos’ shares PS academics professional trajectories and it was produced by graduate students at <https://www.youtube.com/c/RDPolíticaUSP/videos>

<sup>23</sup> IO BIO. Biographical dictionary of secretaries-general of international organizations. <https://www.ru.nl/politicologie/io-bio/io-bio-biographical-dictionary-sgs-ios/>

<sup>24</sup> Conversations with History. <https://conversations.berkeley.edu/>

<sup>25</sup> Conversations with History: Robert O. Keohane. [https://conversations.berkeley.edu/keohane\\_2004](https://conversations.berkeley.edu/keohane_2004)

## Repeating the honeymoon again and again: field classes

Commonplace in other disciplines, especially in the natural sciences, field classes are not the norm in PS & IR. According to Pahre and Stelle (2015), PS field classes have been limited mostly to visits to government offices. In their article, they advocate teaching students about environmental policy in natural parks. Our own experience as professors corroborate that field classes can be extremely productive, once it stimulates five senses and different kind of skills enabling long term memories through experiential learning.

Visits to public conservation areas, for instance, can be an opportunity to study institutional interplay, collective action, civil society influence, advocacy networks among other complex and abstract theoretical concepts. One of the authors has taken students of different courses to a coastal region off the Pernambuco and Alagoas states, visiting conservation areas managed at the municipal, state and federal levels and observing; examples of ocean grabbing; activity by local and international civil society groups, and; issues related to domestic and international environmental policy.

## Keeping some staples in the pantry: a note on the good old lecture

Active learning does not mean not lecturing, or that lectures are unimportant (Felder and Brent 2005). Not every teacher wishes to adopt active learning techniques, and learning objectives can be achieved in many ways. An interesting resource for those who wish to improve their lecturing skills is Bligh's (2000) *What's the Use of Lectures?* Regardless, by doing too much of anything, the professor may fall into a predictable pattern that may negatively impact learning.

Felder and Brent (2005) report the experience of a teacher who started to use Powerpoint and noticed a decrease in student attendance and interaction in the class because the content was completely covered by the slides. One suggestion is to mix strategies and techniques seeking to generate expectations for the class in order to improve the course's effectiveness. Barkin (2020), for example, recognized he was not a charismatic teacher; accordingly, in addition to his lectures, he decided to adopt techniques that encouraged students to interact with each other.

## Assessment: how and when to take the class to "therapy"

When it comes to assessment, Bain (2004) differentiates two types. The first and most employed are learning assessments, which can be measured through activities in order to provide learning evidence. Although tests might be an important tool here, group projects, oral presentations, and other kinds of strategies may also be employed in order to gather information on students' learning.

The other kind are end-of-semester teaching assessments. On the one hand, Bain (2004) finds that well evaluated teachers usually teach elective subjects, chosen by the students themselves

and thus considered more challenging and useful. Therefore, students are more motivated and they feel they have learned more. On the other hand, teachers who get lower scores are usually responsible for compulsory courses that are the prerequisite for others, and may be perceived by students as unnecessary. In these cases, students often lack motivation and, consequently, may report low levels of learning.

Although this information might be useful to rethink teaching strategies, Bain (2004) finds that the best teachers usually collect feedback about their practices along the semester, formally or informally. More importantly, they do own self-evaluations in order to sincerely investigate the effectiveness of subjects taught, with the following questions: 1) How have I tried to help and encourage students to learn? 2) Why are the defined learning objectives worthwhile for the course I am teaching? 3) What strategies did I use? 4) Were these strategies effective in helping students learn? Why or why not? Based on sincere answers of these questions and a careful look on our suggestions, we believe teachers might start a way towards improvement.

## Final considerations: sparking or rekindling the fire

Teaching is not an easy task and is not always straightforward or intuitive. It takes time and practice to get along with this highly demanding activity. As time goes by, as in any relationship, teaching can become boring, and routine may cause problems that reflect on student learning. Teachers in developing countries face additional challenges to their relationship, such as poor infrastructure and students' frail socioeconomic conditions.

The good news is that any teacher can improve their teaching effectiveness to some degree, and the challenges of higher education in PS & IR (and other disciplines) to underprivileged groups is beginning to be discussed by the literature (Martinez et al. 2020; Oliveira et al. 2021). The best professors seek to become familiar with the literature on teaching in order to improve their practices, and adopt paths and strategies that complement their own personality and talents. That way teachers may live happily ever after in their pedagogical love story (even if it did not start out that way).

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