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Balanced Presentation a Dishonest Exercise in Presidential Race

Abstract

I have been teaching courses in American government for more than 25 years. I enjoy getting students interested in and excited about politics. I especially love engaging with them during a presidential election. Their interest is at a high point - most of them voting for the first time. My goal is to pull them into the process and get them hooked on real politics, making them eager to study political science. [*excerpt*]

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I have been teaching courses in American government for more than 25 years. I enjoy getting students interested in and excited about politics. I especially love engaging with them during a presidential election. Their interest is at a high point - most of them voting for the first time. My goal is to pull them into the process and get them hooked on real politics, making them eager to study political science.

Toward this goal I strive to be very careful about revealing my own political leanings. Hard as I try, I imagine most of them have it figured out by the end of the semester. If they are continuing in political science they might notice that I teach feminist political theory - not a subtle clue.

As a liberal, I have no problem extolling the virtues of Democrats. And because of that, every year I go out of my way to create some semblance of balance. Two of the three books in the introductory course are written by former Republican members of Congress: Joe Scarborough and Mickey Edwards. I admit that no assignment includes Pat Buchanan or William F. Buckley, but I am trying to find a balance.

Dwight Eisenhower lived in Gettysburg and wrote his memoirs from an office on our campus. Our Eisenhower Institute is a policy-focused program for undergraduates. So at Gettysburg, we still like Ike. In class, I make the connections obvious - discussing "moderate" Republicanism and the virtues of pragmatism. In 2008, I assigned Christie Todd Whitman's book, *It's My Party Too*, and facilitated bringing the former New Jersey governor to campus.

In lectures, I highlight the accomplishments of Ronald Reagan: the great communicator. Richard Nixon, Watergate aside: foreign policy. Gerald Ford, both Bushes: good public servants with a commitment to governing.

You get the picture. But this time there is a potentially long national nightmare just beginning.

A Donald Trump presidency, in my view, is truly unthinkable as well as unteachable. My comment is neither partisan nor ideological. Despite his attempts at the recent GOP convention, Trump stands for no party and represents no ideology. Trump has no lasting or even temporary relationship with the Republican Party, as evidenced by the number of high-

ranking Republicans who did not attend the convention. He is still attacking former competitors - and most recently a Gold Star family - while the party leadership runs for cover.

His support in the primaries, despite enthusiasm, represents only a narrow slice of the Republican electorate. Ideologically, he is unhinged, changing positions with the wind - or the use of a teleprompter. His harsh and distasteful commentary regarding religious and ethnic groups, as well as women, only serves as a lightning rod for promoting further hate. He displays neither a record of public service nor an understanding of the word *statesmanship*. In the history of our country, it is hard to recall anyone less prepared to take office.

I have never before been faced with the prospect of attempting to stay "balanced" with a presidential candidate who I think is unqualified for the job by every conceivable measure.

In many ways, my dilemma is not unlike the one facing the news media in their attempt to offer "balanced" coverage of the presidential campaign. Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institute recently raised the question of whether news organizations are failing in their jobs by creating a "false equivalence" between two candidates who so clearly do not exist on the same plane.

In the name of balanced, fair, and accurate reporting, the press has treated Trump as if he deserves to be in the presidential arena when - due to bigotry, hate, fearmongering, and a scarcity of leadership skills - he so clearly does not. Mann's analysis is worthy of further consideration. It inspires me to think more carefully about my teaching.

Everything we stand for at Gettysburg and other liberal arts colleges is at risk in the face of a Trump presidency. More than the knowledge acquired in any specific field of study, we teach our students to be global citizens, that we are one community on this planet, not a walled-in country. We promote the understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, not fear and loathing. We practice informed and respectful discourse, not name-calling and senseless slogans. We help students gain an understanding that citizenship is more than claiming rights - it is also claiming responsibility, not a cry of "every man for himself."

What, then, of balance? My approach for the fall semester will be boldly honest: It is a disservice to students to attempt to provide balance when I know that balance is an offense to the truth.

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http://articles.philly.com/2016-08-08/news/74894017_1_republican-party-donald-trump-political-science