

## Towards Best Practice Politics

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, SEP 11 2013

Along with my responsibilities for the graduate program here at CEFAM and, of course, my role as a professor teaching international politics, this year I have taken on some additional responsibilities with regards to pedagogy, teaching, and learning at the school. After some human resource shuffling over the summer, I am now responsible for managing the faculty here at CEFAM both in the undergraduate and graduate program, with a particular emphasis on the quality of the teaching and the achievement of world's best practice in college teaching. It's an exciting promotion for me as I get to continue with the parts of my job that I enjoy most – teaching, research, strategic planning and curriculum design – while further developing skills in people management and getting more involved with the fantastic faculty we have here at the school.

Part of my new job includes driving a new faculty working group I launched in August that is tasked with establishing a best practice yardstick for the faculty that can then be used to inform faculty evaluations, observations, student evaluations of teaching and even peer-reviews of teaching. In the course of working with the team of 8 faculty members from a variety of academic departments in the working group, I've had the chance to get many different perspectives on exactly what best practice teaching is.

Of course there are some things that are consistently mentioned whether by a professor of economics, management, accounting or politics. Superior and up-to-date knowledge of the subject area is one, and an interactive classroom facilitating student-faculty exchanges is another. Elements like modern teaching technique and strong IT skills are mentioned as elements that a strong college professor would maintain no matter the discipline they teach in, but some things, though, are more subject-specific. For example, keeping up with a changing literature and trends in the field seems far more important in a social science or humanities subject like IR or art history than it might be with a subject like math or statistics.

This process of seeking to define best practice has me reflecting on what exactly a college professor is tasked with doing in their classroom. In particular, what is a professor of international politics actually meant to achieve in the classroom if he or she is providing a world's best practice pedagogical experience?

Certainly there would be expectations with regards to the delivery of knowledge; after all, students should leave the class knowing more about international relations than when they arrived. There are also certain expectations with regards to the clarity of communication, the setting of objectives for a specific class and the course in general, and the difficulty and appropriateness of assignments in the course. To some extent the organisation and logistical skills of the professor are expected to be of high quality: syllabi need to be complete, papers need to be graded quickly, and the course should stay on track week to week.

But there are also other expectations that I think are equally important. For example, I believe a best practice politics professor will create an environment where debate can flourish, where discussion of current international affairs is encouraged and where, very importantly, it is OK to be wrong. A best practice politics professor needs to be willing to admit when they do not know the answer to a specific question, with this admission more likely pointing to the impossibility of staying current in a field as broad as ours undoubtedly is. A best practice politics professor understands the importance of presenting multiple sides of an international issue and multiple perspectives on a single set of facts. A best practice politics professor challenges and confronts his or her class in an effort to push

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them further in their arguments.

Over the course of the semester I will be working with CEFAM's faculty team to determine exactly what best practice college teaching involves, how we will measure and assess it, and how – where we fail to hit our own standards – we can improve. It's an exciting and engrossing new challenge for me but one I am so far taking to with confidence and enthusiasm.

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*Read more from Dylan Kissane in his e-IR blog [Political Business](#)*

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### **About the author:**

**Dylan Kissane** is Professor of International Politics at CEFAM in Lyon, France. He is the curator of The Ivory Tower blog on E-IR.