

# Bringing the World into the Classroom

**Marieka Klawitter**  
Co-Editor

I will go out on a limb and guess that all public affairs instructors use real-world examples in their courses. Those examples might be delivered as traditional case studies, simulations, video clips, multimedia cases, or links to media coverage. Let's not waste time critiquing the specific format for delivery—we can use any of these effectively. Instead, let's continue to use *JPAE* to explore how to best create learning by bringing these materials into the classroom. Some recent examples of this include McFarland et al. (2016); Kilonzo, Sandfort, and Liu (2016); and Ku, MacDonald, Andersen, Andersen, and Deegan (2016).

When I started teaching in 1990, I had piles of yellowing newspaper clippings to copy and give to students. These provided policy examples, information, and ideas on topics not covered by textbooks, like gender and gender identity or sexual orientation. Now we can easily provide students with access to an amazing variety of materials via the Web or on paper. Sometimes it is critical to have up-to-date policy or scientific information, but examples from decades or even a century ago can also be very effectively used.

The foundational equation is something like this:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Learning} \\ \text{objective} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Learning object}^1 + \\ \text{Engagement plan} \end{array}$$

Usually, we start with the learning objective by identifying what we hope students will take away from a particular class session. But sometimes we get excited by a case or simulation, or even a new teaching technique, and just have to find a place for it! Either way, we need to articulate the learning objective to ourselves while we are planning and later for students so they can understand our purpose.

We also need to mindfully choose the engagement plan and then articulate and justify it to students. Our plan for how to use the example might include some mix of pre-class assignments, postclass assignments, and in-class activities like role-plays, small group discussions, large group discussions, and student presentations. Any example, old or new, paper or multimedia, can be used dynamically by asking students to imagine how it would play out with different actors or in different environments; asking students to work in groups to create, analyze, generalize, or typologize; or getting students to connect it to other examples or theory. I think of this as bringing a shiny object to the class and asking students to toss it around or crush it, or as giving students magnifying glasses and microscopes and asking them to examine it as a group. Whatever the game, the point is to get students to play with that shiny object in a way that will create wonder and muscle memory. But students will be more likely to engage and learn if we tell them what we want them to learn and how the activity will lead to that learning.

Be bold in bringing your shiny examples, whatever form they take, and offer them with mindfulness and playfulness.

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**NOTE**

- 1 Kilonzo et al. (2016) provide a nice discussion of learning object, an umbrella term for cases, simulations, and other examples.

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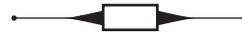
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