Teaching and Learning Strategies Seminar

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Department</td>
<td>Political Science and International Studies</td>
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Typically, participants are awarded a course release in order to make time for their participation in the seminar. However, in select cases, we will consider awarding a stipend instead of a course release if the applicant's department can't cover the course release.

Please indicate whether you will be requesting a course release or stipend if you're chosen to participate in the seminar:

| Has your chair sent an email to the Director of the CTL indicating his or her support of your application and willingness to find coverage for your course reduction (if you are requesting one)? | Yes |
| In which semester would you prefer to participate in the seminar? | Fall |

| Project Title | How to Craft Research Assignments for Theory Courses |

Project Proposal (500–750 words, including a rationale, project description, a discussion of the benefit to the Stonehill community, and your "community outreach plan") -- see full requirements on the CTL website.

If accepted to the Teaching and Learning Strategies Seminar, I would explore the pedagogical question of how to craft strong research assignments for theory courses, particularly my first year seminar and my moral inquiry courses? The context in which I teach research skills has some unique challenges. Among the subfields in political science, political theory courses are distinct in their focus on interpretation and analysis of philosophical texts as well as in their significant engagement with normative questions. When asked to do research, students often focus most, if not all, of their attention on gathering facts or describing situations. They struggle to engage in theoretical research. One can certainly solve some of these challenges by engaging in philosophical debate using hypothetical examples; yet, as a member of a political science department I believe it is important to draw connections between theory and the kinds of political problems that interest students.

In order to help students with theory research, I began by trying to facilitate access to theoretically relevant research. Working with a librarian through a Faculty Librarian Partnership we developed a libguide of basic political theory research resources. This did not make a substantial difference in the quality of student research. Despite library guides and rubrics, students still struggle to craft a theoretically informed paper that also incorporates reference to empirical research. I think the problem lies more in the assignments I am creating. I sought to address this by developing research assignments that incorporated elements of problem based learning with scenarios that require students to address moral questions. What I liked about problem based learning was the idea that students would explore a moral dilemma by asking themselves what they needed to understand in order to decide what action is morally permissible. Students engaged in more research but still focused primarily on practical matters missing morally relevant questions. I am no longer sure problem based learning is the approach I should be taking in a theory course.

The results of my research into different strategies for teaching students how to engage in research that addresses theoretical questions could be disseminated at Stonehill in a few different ways. I would find it interesting to coordinate...
with other faculty through an academic development day panel on strategies for incorporating research into theory courses. My project would also benefit the college because it would be applied in my general education courses. For example, crafting better research assignments would help ensure that my first year seminar included more creative ways of realizing the objective of information literacy instruction. Finally, I can see discussing my research at a department meeting. My department has recently decided to make information literacy instruction more of a focus in our courses. Facilitating discussion on strategies for teaching research skills could also generate more explicit links among the theoretical and empirical courses the department offers.

By the end of a semester, I plan to have completed significant research and reading into strategies for incorporating research into theory courses. My goal is to then design two research assignments—one for my first year seminar and one for my upper level moral inquiry course. After the TLSS semester, I hope to use my research as well as my experience with application of the assignments to prepare a conference presentation for the American Political Science Teaching and Learning Conference. The conference has as a track specifically devoted to teaching political theory, which asks for papers that explore the question: “what are best practices for incorporating theory into empirically-focused curricula?”

The time for research and space for discussion afforded by a TLSS would provide me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of strategies for teaching research.

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Syllabus (optional) -- can also be emailed as an attachment to Patricia Neagle (pneagle@stonehill.edu)

I will send copies of my FYS and moral inquiry course to Pat by email.

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