The Face-Off: Should teachers bring their personal politics to the classroom?

For the past three years, I have had the privilege of taking a wide variety of classes that have, for the most part, enabled me to gain a better understanding of how our country operates, at least politically. My own political views were not obtained through the perspectives set forth in the classroom but rather through research of my own. Since I am a political science major, I had had the opportunity to learn how Congress is run, the importance of political parties and how our current president has carried out initiatives that will bring about the demise of our government.

I can understand the difficulty of being a teacher in a school like Rider that has a large liberal populace; it must be awfully hard to restrain one’s political views from the classes you teach. It must be even more challenging for political science teachers to leave their partisan beliefs out of the confines of their lectures so that the students may have a non-biased view of political philosophy, congress and other aspects of politics and the government.

Most of the students who attend Rider are Democrats and even those students here who are Independents or who have not yet declared their political affiliations are liberal enough to be considered Democrats. These students enjoy going to class and having their political opinions and decisions supported through their teachers’ lectures or, rather, their teachers’ asides. However, there is a small population of students at Rider who are either Republican or conservative in terms of the political arena. For any Republican looking for aid in becoming a Democrat, there is sure to be a teacher who will help you along the way.

I am a moderate Democrat who, for the most part, agrees with a lot of the ideas that my professors discuss. However, I feel that students should not be told about the futility of this country and the evils of our president. Instead, they should learn to appreciate their freedoms and grow together.

The problem in politics today is that there are only two perspectives that are accepted: Democrat and Republican. Democrats state that Republicans are wrong in their ideology and Republicans say the same of Democrats. This partisan warfare is resulting in nothing but a stalemate that causes each side to be quite bitter.

I fear that we have seen the end of comity and civility in the political spectrum. We should be able to agree to disagree but we cannot. It is bad enough that the media portrays politics in a negative light but it would be even worse to be taught about the futility of politics. I do not know how we can solve all of these problems, but considering that your views are opinions rather than fact is one step that we all can take.

The discussion of politics within any given classroom is nigh unavoidable. However, are professors’ partisan views leaking into classroom discussion a bad thing? The answer to that is no, not at all.

Naturally, a liberal professor isn’t likely to praise a conservative president. Likewise, a conservative professor isn’t likely to concede any ground concerning the president’s performance. If students disagree with their professors, they should speak up.

Rider is largely liberal — try to find a college campus that isn’t. But is the majority of the student population either Democrat or Republican? Easy question — neither. I don’t know any students who are card-carrying members of either party and frankly I’ll be a little put-off if I actually did know some true Republicans and Democrats. The liberals and conservatives I do know don’t so far set in their ways that they feel they have to choose a party; they’d rather choose the candidate who would serve them personally. But if they’re allowed to blame it on the two-party system or blame it on electromerising, but neither party is entirely liberal or conservative. It’s impossible for two parties to represent every side of an issue and I just don’t see eye-to-eye with either platform.

The reason why professors are employed is because of their ability to profess; they teach us a little book-learned knowledge and we share a little practical experience — but every communication is biased. It’s unavoidable. Everyone, intentionally or unintentionally, has a bias in the way they communicate, who they communicate with and what they are communicating.

If the weak dollar or the unитель likely muttering of our president come to his class, why shouldn’t we talk about it? Oh wait — I’m sorry, studying the Bush administration’s performance must show a bias… the Commander-In-Chief hasn’t changed since 2000, so who the hell else should we study!

As far as teaching students to respect their freedoms, what could be more productive than learning about Guantanamo Bay or the Patriot Act? Seems to me that our freedoms seem a whole lot more precious (and worth defending) when you realize they’re slipping through your fingers. If you want to learn about partisan bias, why not discuss how Robert Novak’s column outing Valerie Plame was handled. Or better yet, the Jim Gukker/Jeff Gannon circus at the White House.

Maybe our political discussion is so bitter because of the basic nature of politics, not because of bad media or passionate debates. The basic question behind politics is “who gets what, when and how?” and correlatively, who decides who gets what, when and how.

Thanks to our reliance on the two parties, there are only a handful of the millions or so who will be steamed about who wins an election. Our government doesn’t clamp down on its channels for dissent (often), why should Rider close off ours?

Letter to the Editor: A crucial trip that almost wasn’t

The recent successes of our basketball teams at the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) Championships in Buffalo, N.Y., are something to celebrate. However, did its students get a good service by offering fans a $40 package that included bus, hotel, breakfast and tickets for the Saturday and Sunday men’s games. When the Broncos won both of those games, the University generously paid for the students to stay another night so they could attend Monday’s championship game.

As reported in the last issue of The Rider News, these efforts gave our teams a small but stalwart cheering section in a faraway arena that was effectively “home” to two of our opponents. The Rider fans represented our school for three days on network television and enjoyed a community event that I’m sure they will remember fondly. In addition, the cheer leading squad, the dance team and the band all made it to Buffalo and on to thousands of TV screens.

The dance team and band members, unfortunately, had to pay their own way and the band could only afford to stay for one game. One only has to calculate the cost of even a few seconds of exposure on MSG or ESPN 2 to realize that whoever decided not to fund the travel of these groups made a poor choice.

Since our teams go to the league tournament every year, I have a few other suggestions. The weekend should be publicized much earlier — why not as early as September? Details would need to be worked out once the exact schedule of plays was established, but students could set aside the dates and be prepared for a trip on either Friday or Saturday. Faculty could be warned in advance that some classes might be impacted.

Finally, the publicity for Rider’s trip was almost nonexistent. I first heard about it from students — and first saw a flyer about it — on Friday, just hours before the 1 p.m. deadline to sign up. When this deadline was extended to 3 p.m., I went to several colleagues and urged them to announce it in their 220 classes. By 3 p.m., the bus was still four students short of the minimum needed. At that point, three faculty members collectively donated $160 of their own money to make the trip happen — over the objections of those in charge, who seemed eager to cancel.

It’s too bad that this wonderful opportunity provided by Rider had to be marred by logistical struggles. I urge those in charge to think ahead next year so students who want to support our athletic program can make plans long in advance with certainty that the trip will go as announced.

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