

**COVER PAGE**

**Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Teaching**

**Nominee:**

**Jean-Germain Gros  
Associate Professor of Political  
Science and Public Policy Administration  
Department of Political Science  
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1 University Boulevard  
University of Missouri-St. Louis  
St. Louis, MO 63121-4499**

**Nominator:**

**Dr. Lana Stein  
Professor of Political  
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and Department Chair  
Department of Political Science  
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**Date:**

**April 6, 2006**



April 20, 2006

College of Arts and Sciences

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**Committee for Faculty, Teaching and Service Awards  
c/o Administrative Assistant, Faculty Senate  
258 General Services Building**

**Dear Colleagues:**

**I am pleased to nominate Associate Professor Jean-Germain Gros for the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. Since his arrival here in the fall of 1994, he has taught a wide variety of courses and always taught them well. In a department of award-winning teachers, he has been evaluated above the mean for a majority of his classes and his teaching has never been ranked less than good.**

**This is significant for a number of reasons. English is not Professor Gros' first language. Nor did he spend his first formative years in this country. Yet, he has shown a remarkable aptitude in relating to UMSL students. He has taught a large number of classes at the introductory level. These now 1000-level courses draw many non-majors and some of our department's seasoned veterans find them difficult and sometimes try to avoid teaching them. Not Prof. Gros. He always requests one class at the 1000-level every semester and enjoys the challenge of introducing our students to other worlds, other cultures, other politics. He has had the highest evaluations in Introduction to Comparative Politics (12, 1500) this past decade. He has made it possible for students to enjoy learning outside previous parameters.**

**Professor Gros has a quarter-time appointment with Public Policy Administration and also has done a good bit of teaching in that area. He teaches half of the proseminars in public policy administration and a number of students in that class have selected him as an advisor. The proseminar is not always easy to teach. It combines MPPA students with political science doctoral students. The class is required for both degrees. It is also the most theoretical required class in the MPPA curriculum and demands considerable reading. Dr. Gros has done as well with this class as any other instructor in recent memory. He has been highly successful when teaching in his specialization, comparative health care policy.**

**Prof. Gros takes teaching very seriously. He always requests a free hour between classes so that he can rehearse lectures and prepare material for each class. He is always available for office hours and at other times and goes the extra mile to help students.**

**His work with our doctoral students has been extraordinary. He has been chairing committees for students that many of us have considered difficult. Already he has helped to produce two solid dissertations from students many thought would never finish. His work with them has been tireless and he certainly has helped them to have**

faith in themselves and their work. He has also involved his colleagues in helping to place a newly-minted Ph.D.

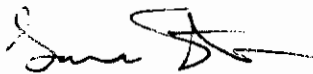
It is evident from the attached letters that his teaching is held in high esteem by students and a highly recognized colleague whose own teaching has been widely honored. The students writing on his behalf all remark about his mastery of the classroom and his continual attention to students and their learning. He has brought students to our major and has set a high standard for those of us in political science to equal.

Prof. Gros clearly has expanded his students' horizons. Laura Ezerdal says, "Professor Gros teaches his students how to think about political solutions." Another undergraduate, Christopher Krienzie, notes that, "He changed my life by showing me a different world." Daniel Szyman says that Prof. Gros "managed to give me a new perspective and understanding of the world we live in."

From a different world himself, Jean-Germain Gros has succeeded in expanding student understanding of life in politics outside the United States. This is no mean feat given the ethnocentrism so present in our country and among UMSL students. It is clear that Prof. Gros is able to reach our students and that he cares a great deal about doing so.

For both his ability to convey knowledge and his ability to motivate both undergraduate and graduate students, he is deserving of these awards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lana Stein', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lana Stein  
Professor and Chair

## Personal Teaching Philosophy

Jean-Germain Gros

One of the ironies of higher education in the United States, and perhaps elsewhere, is that teaching plays a secondary role to other activities, when it should have been at least a co-equal partner (e.g., with research). For, frankly put, parents consent to unbelievable sacrifices to send their children to university to learn from faculty, not help the latter write books. In many large research universities, the job of teaching undergraduates devolves to graduate students, many of whom may go through their entire program and receive the PhD – the de facto requirement for teaching in academia – without ever being trained in pedagogy. Graduate teaching assistants are often thrown into the maelstrom of undergraduate teaching, with only the most cursory of supervision by faculty. Upon clinching the almighty doctorate, they join a profession for which, strangely, they were incompletely trained (i.e., most doctoral programs train students for research rather than research and teaching).<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, when it comes to teaching, most of us have had to learn on the job. This is a pity, for it can easily be shown that the greatest influence faculty will ever have on students, undergraduate students in particular, is likely to come from teaching, not research. After all, how many students, past and current, have read our publications? Furthermore, a persuasive case can be made that an activate research agenda requires a commitment to teaching, inasmuch as teaching materials and classroom experience can serve as inspiration to research (see below).

Since I entered the classroom for the first time as a young graduate teaching assistant 20 years ago at SUNY-Binghamton, my teaching philosophy has been guided by these two principles: excellence in teaching is the best way to reach students in the classroom and beyond, and a strong research agenda should be informed and complemented by a strong commitment to teaching. I have had an added incentive to being as good a teacher as I can be. English is not my primary language, Haitian Kreyòl and French are. Somehow the effects of poor teaching are magnified when one has to learn in a language other than one's birth tongue, and since the American university is the most cosmopolitan of universities in the world, it is imperative that faculty be excellent teachers. In the age of globalization, the consequences of poor teaching in most American universities could have reverberation well past the borders of the United States.

But what is teaching? *Webster's New Unabridged Dictionary* defines teaching as "the act of showing how to do something," or simply "to guide the study of." This definition implies that teaching need not take place in a formal setting, such as the traditional classroom with its staid physical arrangement and authoritarian culture. Indeed, increasingly it is recognized that the classroom may be a great place for giving instruction but not necessarily for "guiding the study of."

I would modify *Webster's* definition somewhat to emphasize that teaching is the reciprocal transfer of knowledge between two or more parties. That is to say, the relationship between teacher and student can never be horizontal or flat. We, faculty,

should know more than our students — that's why they and their parents pay us — as a result, we have more of one thing (knowledge) to transfer. Thus I do not believe in the recent fad in the academy (post-modernism) where faculty are expected to be little more than impartial mediators of disparate viewpoints, all of which are equally worthy of being debated because there are no right or wrong ideas. At the same time, knowing more than our students, and, consequently, having more to transfer unto them, does not entail that faculty have absolutely nothing to learn from their pupils. We are not gods. At a most basic level, students have different cognitive and physical abilities; a one-size-fits-all teaching delivery method is likely to leave some students behind and (or) exacerbate inequalities that the educational system may have created in the first place but should do its utmost to reduce. In addition, some students, who may be very bright, may do better in an environment that fosters cooperative learning, which reduces the stresses induced by a focus on individual performance.

Thus even though my classroom remains teacher-centered —undoubtedly a holdover from a Jesuit early education — I have learned the value of incorporating different delivery methods in my teaching, depending on the course level, student need and subject matter. Some examples here are à propos.

In my *Introduction to Comparative Politics* class (PS 1500), I have a student who is nearly blind and has not been in a classroom in years. He cannot see the blackboard, yet because of his age, does not feel he has a strong enough connection with the “traditional” students to ask one of them to copy his/her notes. After learning of his dilemma I asked the graduate teaching assistant, who is of his age group, to make blown-up copies of her notes available to the disabled student. I further counseled him to tape my lectures and compare the recordings with the photocopied notes from the TA. In this way, the student has at least two ways of collecting classroom information, a redundancy that is an asset in this situation, given his disability. In addition, I frequently tutor this student one-on-one outside of the classroom.

On the other hand, in my *Pro-Seminar in Public Administration* (PS 6440) I have always found it useful to combine the “classic” authors in Public Administration (Woodrow Wilson, Max Weber, Herbert Simon) with contemporary cases in managerial role-playing (see syllabus). I normally take the lead in discussing the former, but seminar participants are entirely responsible for the latter. They divide themselves into groups, collectively choose cases from Robert Watson's *Public Administration*, role-play case characters in class and are evaluated by their peers. In this way, students come out with solid grounding in public administration and organization theories and history, as well as simulated experience in public administration as a profession gained from cooperative effort with, and feedback from, their classmates. It would be “crazy” to teach a graduate seminar in public administration without giving students a sense of what public administrators do in the real world (hence the case studies), and as just as foolhardy to let them enter that world on an individual basis, when success in the workplace necessitates teamwork (hence the cooperative role-plays).

There is more. Students can actively, rather than passively or circumstantially, teach us. The sheer amount of information that is available on Internet and the ease with which it can be extracted mean that the gap between students and faculty may not be as wide as it used to be. More than once students have shared information with me to which I was not privy.

Last Fall (2005), for example, I taught *Comparing Different Worlds* (PS 2500) in which I was asked how racial and religious minority representation in the U.S. House of Representatives compared with racial and religious minority representation in the British House of Commons. I did not know the answer to the question, but a student came up with it two days later. He had gone on the websites of the two institutions and found that, although there were more racial minority members in the U.S. House of Representatives, mostly African-Americans and Hispanics, there were more religious minority members in the British House of Commons, mostly Muslims. In other words, the House of Representatives had more racial diversity, but the House of Commons had more interfaith diversity than its American counterpart, as well as legislatures throughout Europe. This is information that, in an earlier time, would not be available to most students and would have taken much faculty time to research. I learned of it from a student, thanks to classroom discussions, in 48 hours. When the cartoons controversy was raging earlier this year, I had an explanation, or “theory,” based on the information. I surmised that the British government’s decision to discourage major papers in the UK from publishing the offensive cartoons may have been due to the relatively large presence in the British parliament of Muslim lawmakers.

Given my philosophy of teaching – namely: it is important, reciprocal and transcendental (i.e., unbound by physical and other barriers) – my approach to teaching is necessarily synthetic. It combines the traditional method of lecture and discussion in undergraduate courses and discussion and (limited) lecture in advanced undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. Furthermore, I encourage students to cooperate, and thus learn from, each other through team-based class activities (role plays). I use communication technologies, especially My Gateway. I have taken to posting syllabuses, exam questions, lecture notes and announcements on My Gateway. Because I make the term paper a requirement in all of my classes, I have taught students how to access and reference materials on Internet. I show them how to distinguish among Internet-based materials. I have an extensive list of the website addresses of intergovernmental organizations (UN, EU, World Bank), governmental organizations (State Department, CIA) and non-governmental organizations (Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders) that I share with students and to which I encourage them to add. Finally, I require that all term papers contain references from books and journals, as well as Internet.

I teach beyond the classroom and UM-St. Louis. Perhaps the most rewarding phase of my teaching career has been the past three years, during which I have had the pleasure to work with 3 graduate students, two of whom have now completed and defended their doctoral dissertations. Helping these new scholars think through difficult concepts and operationalize them in their research on a one-on-one basis has not only enriched, I

believe, their experience, it has made me a better teacher and researcher. Two of the 3 graduate students, whose dissertation I have supervised, have also served as my teaching assistants. This has enabled me to provide them with the type of supervision that most graduate teaching assistants do not receive. It is my practice to have TA's lecture twice during the semester in my presence, after which I share with them my assessment of their performance. Finally, I met all three students for the first time in graduate seminars. In other words, I was their teacher before I became their doctoral research supervisor. This is not a coincidence: evidently, my performance in the classroom was not a detriment to their wanting to conduct research under my guidance. This is strong proof of the connection between teaching and research, and strong proof that graduate student training need not sacrifice one for the other.

In Fall 2004, I had the additional pleasure of teaching comparative public administration at the University of Ghana-Legon. As a result of that experience, one student from Ghana applied for, and as been admitted to, our MPPA program for Fall 2006. This is evidence of my influence as a teacher. In addition, I have served as an informal adviser to numerous students of color in my 12 years at UM-St. Louis. They identify with me, as do I with them. This, too, is part and parcel of teaching: the ability to serve the larger community. I have given lectures before the St. Louis Cooperative School Districts Association, the St. Louis Ethical Society and the St. Louis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As a member of the MPPA faculty, I have participated in the Chancellor's Certificate in Public Administration for the International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers (IACREOT), one of the university's extension programs. This is evidence of my interest in crossing the boundaries between academe and the professional world, and commitment to extending teaching beyond the classroom. Finally, I was most gratified a few days ago (April 12, 2006) to have awarded the Disability Meritorious Service Award by the Office of Disability Access Services.

I am committed to teaching, but it has not affected my research. I maintain an active research agenda, which has resulted in the publication of 3 (edited) books and more than a dozen journal articles. I am working on a single-authored, book-length manuscript. Faculty do not have to choose between teaching and research. They can – and should – do both. Higher education in the United States would be all the better for it.

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<sup>1</sup> The critique is not an argument for abolishing the teaching assistantship. It is argument for using the assistantship to teach aspiring faculty how to teach.

Jean-Germain Gros  
List of Courses and Number of Students  
Taught Since Winter 2002

Course Title	Semester	Number of Students
	Winter 2002	
<i>Comparing Different Worlds</i>		19
<i>Comparative Health Policy</i>		4
	Fall 2002	
<i>Intro. to Comparative Politics</i>		60
<i>Pro Seminar in Public Administration</i>		16
<i>Dissertation Research</i>		4
	Winter 2003	
<i>Intro. to Public Administration</i>		6
<i>Comparing Different Worlds</i>		32
<i>Dissertation Research</i>		3
	Fall 2003	
<i>African Politics</i>		9
<i>Pro Seminar in Public Administration</i>		21
<i>Dissertation Research</i>		3
	Winter 2004	
<i>Intro. to Comparative Politics</i>		53
<i>Comparing Different Worlds</i>		14
<i>Masters Thesis Research</i>		4
<i>Dissertation Research</i>		3
	Fall 2004	
<i>Comparative Public Administration</i> <i>(UG-Legon)</i>		185
<i>Dissertation Research</i>		2



Winter 2005

<i>Intro. to Comparative Politics</i>	64
<i>Pro Seminar in Public Administration</i>	13
<i>Dissertation Research</i>	2

Fall 2005

<i>Comparing Different Worlds</i>	36
<i>African Politics</i>	18
<i>Dissertation Research</i>	2

Total Number of Students Taught in Last 4 years	<u>573</u>
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