

# NEWS

## for Teachers of Political Science

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### In this issue...

#### International Studies

- Using FBIS Reports, p. 1
- Workshops, p. 1
- World Food Politics, p. 5

#### Teaching Strategies

- Socratic Method, p. 6
- Moot Court, p. 7
- Simulation, p. 13

#### A Course on Ethics and Health Policy, p. 8

#### Audio-Visual Resources on Central America, p. 15

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## Bringing the World to the Classroom: Using FBIS Reports in the Int'l Politics Course

by John Merrill, Lafayette College

Many recent reports have voiced alarm at the decline of international and area studies in the United States. Symptomatic of this problem is the disturbing fact that only 15 percent of American high school students study a foreign language.<sup>1</sup> This inadequate background is also apparent among students in introductory international politics courses. Few have traveled or lived overseas. Most have only a nodding acquaintance with foreign opinion garnered secondhand from newspapers and news weeklies — and not all can be supposed even to read these regularly. In this situation, the results obtained by assigning research papers are likely to be disappointing: many students simply lack the background to do a credible job. They feel put upon by the paper, postpone it until the last minute, and then cobble together a hasty paraphrase of a few stories and articles. Assigning "think pieces" on set questions is not much of a palliative. Such papers run the danger of being too conceptual for introductory students who are already overloaded with new names, concepts, and theories.<sup>2</sup> The instructor is faced with the tedium of correcting scores of repetitive papers on questions that are obviously over the heads of many students.

In an attempt to overcome this difficulty, I have begun to assign papers based upon the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service's (FBIS) *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts* to students in my introductory international politics course at Lafayette College. I have used this extension of the familiar "clipping paper" format for the last four years, employing radio monitoring reports instead of the daily newspaper.<sup>3</sup> This not only helps to surmount the language barrier by exposing students directly to overseas perspectives on

the news, but also gives them firsthand experience in using primary sources. This approach works especially well in a course using Steven Rosen and Walter Jones' textbook, *The Logic of International Relations* (Little, Brown, 1982), because the first section deals extensively with how history, culture, and interests shape national perceptions of events. Students also learn for themselves the truth of the old saw: because all politicians are self-serving, the question to ask about their statements is not whether they are true or false but why they were made.

The *FBIS Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts* provides translations of foreign radio and television newscasts, usually a week to ten days after they were originally aired. The service was established by the Federal Communications Commission early in 1941 to monitor and translate foreign radio broadcasts and other "open source" materials. After the war it was inherited by the predecessor organization of the Central Intelligence Agency, which now manages it as a "service of common concern."<sup>4</sup> Eight regional issues, typically 30 to 60 pages in length, provide worldwide coverage. A ninth series analyzes "Trends in Communist Media." The cost of subscribing to a single series is \$165, steeply discounted as additional series are added. Lafayette subscribes to all eight of the geographical series for \$575 per year. The FBIS offers broader and more concentrated coverage than *World Press Review* or *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, translating well over 100,000 individual articles annually.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, it evidently does not include all radio broadcasts monitored. The criteria for selection are

(continued on p.2)

## Workshops and World Order Studies

by Raymond McCandless  
Findlay College

### Introduction

My classroom experience over the past seven years has convinced me that teaching does indeed offer a special opportunity for learning. Obviously this conclusion has been reached by a countless number of instructors who have taken a serious approach to their teaching. A special understanding and confidence in one's knowledge of the subject-matter comes through the preparation and presentation of a course or even a singular class lecture.

I have attempted to provide undergraduate students with the opportunity for this type of learning experience. A method employed by many instructors is to have students present research projects/papers in class. Although this exercise does approximate the teaching experience, many times the session degenerates into the mere reading of a prepared research paper.

In order to improve upon the basic notion of "earning through teaching," I designed and implemented a seminar on world order studies with an emphasis placed upon student teaching.<sup>1</sup> A workshop component of the course required students to present a world order workshop in a local high school. The success of the course has encouraged me to present its design to colleagues for their considered use. The design is not necessarily relevant only to international relations classes, but can be easily utilized in a variety of courses.

### Course Objectives

Burns H. Weston in his paper, *Peace and World Order Education: An Optimal Design* states, "Our educational institutions must strongly encourage all our young people to involve themselves in some form of lifetime commitment to the improvement of the human condition at

(continued on p.3)