

**Christopher Richmann:** Welcome to Professors Talk Pedagogy, a podcast from the Academy for Teaching and Learning at Baylor University. I'm your host, Christopher Richmann. Professors Talk Pedagogy presents discussions with great professors about pedagogy, curriculum and learning in order to propel the virtuous cycle of teaching. As we frankly and critically investigate our teaching, we open new lines of inquiry. We engage in conversation with colleagues, and we attune to students' experiences, all of which not only improves our teaching, but enriches and motivates ongoing investigation, and so the cycle continues.

Today our guest is Dr. Rebecca Flavin, senior lecturer in Political Science and director of Engage Learning Curriculum at Baylor University. Dr. Flavin has research and teaching experience in constitutional law, the history of political philosophy, and American politics, particularly in the area of religion and politics. She is also co-author of a widely used textbook on Constitutional Law. Rebecca also serves as faculty advisor for Baylor's Model United Nations. We are delighted to have her on the show to discuss the many permutations of engaged learning, how the teacher's role changes based on context, and much more. Rebecca Flavin, thank you so much for joining the show today.

**Rebecca Flavin:** Thank you for having me.

**CR:** I would love to begin by talking just in kind of general terms about what we mean here at Baylor about engaged learning. You are the director of the engaged learning curriculum. And I think some folks at Baylor know what that is. Some maybe don't yet. And I'm sure part of your mission is to increase awareness and education, so we were talking just before we hit record about the difference between engaged and experiential. So maybe that's a good place to start as well.

**RF:** Yeah, thank you. So, I'm still new in this role, just a year in it. But that was my first question when Dean Andy Hoag asked me to join the Office of Engaged Learning Team was, well, engaged learning, experiential learning, I was using the terms interchangeably. Said, wait a minute.

**CR:** All right.

**RF:** When we mean engaged learning, there must be an emphasis on the public good. We're not just you know, engaging in the community. We're not just stepping outside the classroom, but at the forefront, really, the purpose of it is for the good of the community and for promoting human flourishing. Locally, nationally and globally.

**CR:** Yeah. So how does that fit in with the curriculum here at Baylor? We've had some adjustments in the last couple of years with our core and the distributions of general education requirements and things like that. So, I don't know, is there a high-flying view of that that would help our listeners?

**RF:** Yeah, absolutely. So, without getting too deep in the weeds and going too far back, the really brief history is that in 2019, the College of Arts and Sciences launched its new core curriculum. And the one piece of the new core curriculum that was adopted unanimously and enthusiastically

was at that time, called a civic engagement requirement. But it was adopted in a pilot phase. In other words, what it would consist of, how it would be implemented, was in development. And the reason for that is, you think about all the other elements of the core curriculum. For instance, my home department, Political Science, we teach political science courses. English teaches English courses, history, teaches history, et cetera. But for civic engagement, we don't have a civic engagement department. Indeed. That's really, you know, the job of all of our departments. And so, thinking about how that would be implemented was something that was projected to take place over a longer term. But then, of course, COVID happens the next year. And so that meant, you know, really rethinking about, you know, how we engage with the community and how you engage in the community in the midst of a pandemic. And so just this past Fall in August 2023, the College of Arts and Sciences Council of Chairs adopted the new engaged learning requirement, which encompasses civic engagement, but it's more than that. It's thinking about engagement with the community broadly speaking, both the community and Waco, but globally as well.

**CR:** Yeah. Well, we're still thinking about this primarily in terms of, like, courses with a course call number, right? And that kind of thing. So, what are, is there such a thing as a typical course here, or what are the kinds of endeavors that faculty usually embark on to be part of this curriculum.

**RF:** So, you can think about engaged learning courses as having different typologies. I think, when we think of civic engagement and civic learning, you know, we certainly think about those high impact practices that, you know, the American Association of Universities promotes and you have internships. For example, you have service learning. Those are two really essential examples of high impact practices that are also experiential and engaged learning. You know, we often initially when we think about engaged learning, we think about service learning, but it can be more than that and, you know, specifically, of course, internships, but also applied research. And I think that that's one of the ways when we brand it as engaged learning, rather than civic engagement, then I think it opens up the possibilities or at least the vision that this is truly a university wide enterprise, and that it's not the province of any one particular department. So, back to the call letters question. The second part of your question. For this first wave of courses that will be on the books this Fall. So, for students entering in Fall 2024, we have 27 classes. So, a significant number. Some of those are the philanthropy and public service courses which are housed in the office of engaged learning, but we have courses in biology and physics and the psych neuroscience department, theater courses. And of course, political science courses, too. We have several. So, we have courses from departments across the College of Arts and Sciences. And while this is a core curriculum requirement for College of Arts and Sciences, other divisions could submit courses to a part of it as well. So, it's housing arts and sciences, but truly, can, and I hope will be university wide.

**CR:** That's right. So, we've been talking kind of abstractly here, so maybe let's get a bit more concrete with the actual kind of courses that are happening under this umbrella. Without casting aspersions on anybody that we don't mention, are there some standout like exemplar courses or maybe courses that are just kind of like in development, you know, like that you're helping to kind of midwife into existence that you're really excited about.

**RF:** The answer is I'm excited about all of them. And you know when I start listing.

**CR:** You're the right person for your job.

**RF:** And you know later I'll walk away, I missed this one. So, I think the first set of courses to highlight are the courses that are offered under the philanthropy and public service heading. And those courses, what's really unique about them is that they're offered by experts in the community. So, we have local community experts who are offering the courses. And I think that's one of the things that is, you know, truly fantastic about that specific course, so it's PPS 1100. And just to give you an example of some of the courses that are offered under PPS 1100, there's a course called Poverty and Waco. Josh Caballero teaches that. He is the community engagement officer for the City of Waco. For instance, we have a course called Law in Public Service that Kent McKeever of Greater Waco Legal Services teaches, Family Community Medicine offered by Jeremy Korteweg from Waco Family Medicine, Urban Farmers Markets, Bethel Erikson-Bruce from the Waco Downtown Farmers Market offers that. I mean, there are more than a dozen sections of PPS 1100. And those are primarily taught by local experts from the Waco community. That is part time instructors who bring their expertise onto campus. And this is expertise that we don't have that I as a faculty member don't have instruct. So, I think that's something that's truly unique. But that's not the only the only set of courses. So, just to provide, you know, an example of some of the other courses. We have a new course that I'm really excited about that's being offered for the first time Karena Malavanti and Psych & neuroscience. I know that she's done work with that ATL is offering psychology and culture, a new course that she's developed, and she received the arts and sciences teaching and innovation grant to develop that. Jodien Johnson has an applied sociology course, and she's been working on that, and it's part of her research agenda too, where students, you know, take sociological research and use it for the benefit of the community. And our department and political science, one of my new colleagues, Dr. Humphrey, has a course called Urban political Processes where students will be working with various entities in and around Waco to learn and see how cities work, how local governments work.

**CR:** You're not doing this for this purpose, but you're giving me names for future future [inaudible].

**RF:** Absolutely.

**CR:** I've actually had Karena on the show, but we could have her on again to talk about.

**RF:** You should. She'd just have her own series.

**CR:** Her subseries of the podcast.

**RF:** Sub series. I'd listen to it. I'd listen to it. She's great. Another course, that is part of the engaged learning distribution list. And this is, you know, in partnership, OEL partners with the Center for Global Engagement is intercultural competence abroad. So, every student who studies abroad takes GBL 1102. And so, starting this Fall, that will be part of the engaged learning list as well.

**CR:** All right. Yeah. That's news to me. Thank you for that. I didn't know that. Yeah. So maybe I could ask you to kind of take the role of sort of Baylor spokesperson. If you don't mind just a little bit from your corner of the world, why is this important to a place like Baylor? And maybe, like, relatedly, how does Baylor do this in a Baylor way that maybe not better necessarily than another institution because our listeners are not only Baylor people. But you know, like, every institution kind of wants to have its own, you know, brand on certain things, too. So, can you talk about how Baylor thinks about this in that Baylor way?

**RF:** Yeah. So, if you I mean, just starting with Baylor's mission, right? We're educating men and women to be worldwide leaders and to serve in their communities not just to serve in the community, but it's part of our Christian commitment. So, I think you know, on the one hand, it's part of who we are, right? It's part of the mission. And I think that that one might make it easier to sell, but also it means that this is a mandate, right? This is a command in the Gospel, you know, to love others and, you know, to care for the least of these. And so, I think that, you know, there are a lot of universities in the United States that are doing engaged learning and doing it well. What Baylor might do differently, or what is different about our mission is this Christian land.

**CR:** Yes. Yeah. That's fantastic. Yeah. So, what I love about this type of project, if I can just use like project as a very generic way to describe this kind of thing, is that it reframes teaching to some degree. Now, you'll have maybe a spectrum of courses that on one side, they're maybe closer to, like, a traditional we're sitting in a classroom, but we have certain topics that we're going to address that we wouldn't normally in this type of class. And then, as you've described, you've got series, out in the community kinds of learning experiences, too. But either way, it's reframing like how does the environment around us? How does the atmosphere in which teaching happens like actually affect the pedagogy. And I don't know if maybe as an instructor yourself, you could comment on that or sort of relaying for us what the instructors who work with you say about that way because it puts you in a different way of teaching, right?

**RF:** Right. Yeah, I mean, one of the things and if you look at the Office of Engaged Learning website, the definition there that you see of engaged learning, part of the description is that engaged learning is often unscripted. So, which needs to be unexpected. And it puts you as an instructor in in a vulnerable position, right? And I would say in a humbling position, but in a good way that there are instances in which I am not going to be the expert in the [inaudible]. And so, just to give you one specific example from a course I taught this semester, I taught the Public Service internship course for political science. So, it's part of the engaged learning distribution list. I'd never taught it before. I stepped into it this semester, in an interim role, but also I thought if I'm going to work with faculty on engaged learning courses, I need to make sure I'm doing this myself. And also doing it from the perspective of a brand-new course I'd never taught before. So, building it from the ground up. And so, part of what the weekly seminars involved was having local experts from the community come in and talk about the work that they are doing. And I learned something new every week. And it was a definite role reversal. I was not the expert in the room. On any of these days. Yeah.

**CR:** That's just one of the days.

**RF:** On any of the days. So yeah, it was that was definitely out of the ordinary. It was humbling. And after the first couple of weeks, you know, I just leaned into it and I found myself really having to restrain myself from asking too many questions and, like, jumping in ahead of the students to ask questions. So, you know, just for example, one of the days we had Chief Sheryl Victorian, Waco Chief of Police and hearing her talk about her career trajectory and the work that she did prior to coming to Waco. She just has amazing stories. So, I wanted to hear all of her. Basic stories.

**CR:** Hey, you need to take her out for coffee.

**RF:** I really did. So, I asked this: Do you have questions, and they did, and I said, Oh, I have questions. You know, it helped that it was at 8:00 A.M. You know, they were maybe still a little bit asleep. But just, you know, it was just a wonderful opportunity that I don't often get in class to learn, to learn from others and to learn from experts in the community.

**CR:** Yeah. So, what does that mean for how you see your role as a teacher in that situation?

**RF:** Yeah, for that specific class, I was more, I would say, of a host than a teacher. You know, we had other days where we walked through together, for instance, the tool kit from the community, global based community learning collaborative that Baylor is part of as of this year, you know, thinking about what does it mean to be responsible stewards of, you know, of resources. But how do we engage in the community in a way that is responsible and ethical, too. And so, on days when we didn't have guest speakers, we worked through, you know, different readings from the toolkit, different lessons, had really wonderful discussions. So those days felt more like a traditional seminar. And so, building that into the schedule made it more like a traditional class.

**CR:** I love that you brought up the unscripted thing because as I was perusing the website before that one come and I put it in my notes here because so, you know, the traditional teaching is in most college courses, is a highly scripted affair. And there's two ways of doing that script, if I can just speak like in big general terms. One is a teacher centered approach where everything is scripted because I literally decide as the teacher, what I'm going to say and when I'm going to give the mic to somebody else, right? So that's scripted in that sense. And in other way is a more learner centered way where things are still very scripted, but they're scripted in the kind of a puppeteer sort of way, not like in any kind of malicious way, but, like, you're driving everything towards learning objectives. And most centers for teaching and learning, ours included, you know, really want to help instructors grow more in the direction towards scripting for learning objectives. And that's a very healthy thing because you're thinking about how should this course, you know, change your students. And that's kind of what we're here for in education. And yet, there's something very exciting about the tension, I think, of conceiving of course as unscripted, like in its bones. Right? Because there's some tension in there with, like, the learner centered kind of approach of, like, I know what you're supposed to learn from this experience before you've had it. So that's a comment in search of a question, but if you've got any reflections on that.

**RF:** So, I think the question for this is, what am I going to learn? What assumptions do I have that are going to be challenged from this opportunity. But more importantly, when you think

about bringing in community experts. What am I going to learn from them. And, part of what engaging with the community means is we're not going to have all the answers. And so, I think that my colleague, Molly Simpson, who works with the community organizations, and so my role is helping faculty to develop courses, but I work closely with her and her role is to serve as a liaison with community partners. And so what we have to be very careful about and very mindful of is that we're not doing harm. And that, you know, we may have, we the faculty may have an idea about what the community needs, but it may, in fact, not be what the community needs. And so we want to be careful that when we're sending students out into the community that we're helping and not hurting. So, what does it mean to have people from the university to step in and perform service? Is this something that's actually helping? That has to be, you know, part of our consideration. And so, it's listening to the needs and the expertise of others. And I think that that's something that as academics, we're used to being the experts ourselves. And so, this is part of where the script is flipped a bit.

**CR:** Yeah. So a lot of that work is done in the background like in the lead up informing partnerships and negotiating, like, what's a good project or what's a good partnership to engage in? Does some of that also surface within the class itself when you're talking with students about do no harm.

**RF:** Absolutely.

**CR:** How does that, have you had those conversations with students?

**RF:** I have. So, you know, this semester without, you know, getting into specifics with, you know, particular students so as not to violate confidentiality. But debriefs with students about their internships and the work that they were doing, thinking about what it meant for them to be there as an intern. And so that made this class especially different than any other that I've taught with respect to how I evaluated the work that they did on the internship, because I wasn't their internship supervisor. I was the instructor. I was the person in the end who gave them a grade for the course, but they were doing you know, the bulk of and the heart of the work for someone else. And so communicating with the internship supervisor about what their needs were, if the student was meeting those needs, but also communicating gratitude because it takes a lot to mentor someone. And so, you know, when we, it wasn't something that I think that I thought deeply about until the semester and I saw in action, what is service the internship providers were doing for us by providing this opportunity for our students by giving their mentorship. So certainly our students were helping and we're doing volunteer service work. But there was, you know, reciprocal, and I hope and even, you know, and hope there was reciprocity with the internship supervisors teaching them and being professional mentors for them as well.

**CR:** So with internships, but also with more traditional kind of kind of classes, you tell I'm searching for, like, the right words here. How do we know what students are learning from these experiences? And is that measured in ways that are different than in traditional traditional courses?

**RF:** The traditional traditional courses. So, this is something that I've talked about with faculty when developing courses. And so you think about the shape that the community engagement will

take. And so for some courses, it's going to be students engaging in service learning, and that's going to be the heart of the course. In other courses, it may be that the students need to spend much of the semester learning about and building the theory and preparing before they're ready to be sent out. And so that's why, for instance, you know, this particular requirement doesn't quantify the number of hours, right? So it's something we're not saying, well, every student spends 1 hour a week or 2 hours a week or 3 hours a week volunteering in the community. It's not regimented in that way. Rather, it's all geared toward mission. So this idea that you're going to develop a holistic understanding of whatever discipline that the particular engaged learning course is housed in, you need to develop a holistic understanding of all of the complex issues that surround, you know, just taking, for instance, a couple of the courses I talked about before, Poverty and Waco. Before, you're then ready to step out into community. Now, I mean, I think there are a couple of other models as well. So you can think about one model where students are doing applied research where the community partner has a problem that they want the students to work on and to solve. And so one of the courses that I'm really excited about, that's in development next year with the Baylor Collaborative on hunger and poverty is a restorative justice initiative that they have. So students will be participating in a competition in which they'll be designing projects related to food insecurity and restorative justice. So attempting to, you get to the heart of a really complex issue, which is formerly incarcerated individuals experience food insecurity at just really just exponentially higher rates than the rest of the population. And so the students will be competing. Through the semester, they'll develop projects and they'll compete for seed money to then implement their project. So there's one example of students are learning, getting the skills, and then they make a proposal and get to implement it.

**CR:** You brushed on this a little bit when you were talking about the do no harm in the community. But let me ask a question that's, I think, by this point, kind of an obvious question, too, which is, how do we help students engage with these things with all the right motivations and also without the savior complex?

**RF:** Exactly.

**CR:** Maybe that is maybe that is the question.

**RF:** That is the question. And I think that that is, you know, part of where the classroom component is so important, right? You have to have that context and think about, you know, I think, first and foremost, cultural humility, right? And especially when you're thinking about engaging with others in the community. So, for example, one of our courses is called Learning for the World PPS 1101, and all of the students who are in that course, tutor ESL. You know, I can say, I don't like to make broad generalizations, but I will for this class. Every student who takes that class is just so deeply affected by it and just raves about how wonderful it is. It changes them, right? When we think about transformational education, you know, that course in particular, I don't teach it. I can't take credit for it. That's my colleagues in OEL teach that course. But part of, when students talk to me about the course they talk about, you know how incredible it is to connect with people in the community and they talk about learning about the people who are our students in the course about what their backgrounds are.

**CR:** The actual people.

**RF:** The actual people, those human connections, and they're learning from and befriending them and, you know, it's accompanying them, right? It's learning alongside them. And so I think that's a really important disposition that the students are instilled with before they step into the ESL classroom.

**CR:** Well, switching gears just a little bit. Another type of teaching that's not classroom teaching is the model UN. And you've been involved in this for many years. I don't know how many years.

**RF:** 14.

**CR:** 14. Okay. That classifies as many. Yes. So I would love to hear your thoughts about how being, you don't call yourself an instructor when you're in that role, but there's obviously some teaching that's happening there. So how do you conceive of the difference in the role as what do you call it?

**RF:** advisor?

**CR:** Advisors. A model you as an advisor versus when these students are like, in your course and your instructor of record and you're giving them a grade. How does it change the way you approach your teaching?

**RF:** So I will clarify that it is a course. It has a course. It's co-curricular but it's a class and a club.

**CR:** Got you.

**RF:** That said it's different from every other class that I. So my teaching is primarily in constitutional law. And so when students have me for a constitutional law class and then they also take Model UN sometimes even in the same semester. That's a lot of flaying time. But, for them, sometimes it's jarring the difference because the course, the Model UN course, it has to be student led. And so a lot of what we do during class time is student led workshops. It's not me lecturing. It's students. Teaching with and facilitating one another. Now, that doesn't mean that, you know, students are turned loose to do what you will. What it means is that outside of class, I'm working with students to put together workshops that are going to prepare the team, their peers to succeed at conference. And so one thing I've learned over the years, and if any of my students from the early years happened upon this podcast, they'll probably call me and demand that I that that I've gone soft in my old age is that, I admittedly tried to do too much. I tried to do too many writing assignments, reading too much. And it was overwhelming. It was overwhelming for me, and it was overwhelming for them. And you know, trying to think about, how do you have a course where students are broadly informed about the structure of this just behemoth organization. That has so many parts that even after all these years doing it, that I'm still learning about facets of the UN versus learning well one particular part because what we do when we participate in conferences and that's what we're. We're working toward each semester is we have a slate of committees that we're assigned. And those committees are situated different places within the broader United Nations structure. And then we're also preparing to represent a



specific member state. So this year in the Fall, we represented Japan, this Spring we represented France, next Fall, we'll represent Republic of Korea, South Korea, that is. And we need to become experts on their diplomatic positions, but also on the work of a particular committee. So in the early years I was trying to make the students experts on the UN broadly, and it was. It was too much. So now you have to think about how to go deep within a particular committee and on particular topics, but also from the perspective of a specific member state, and all that while learning parliamentary procedure. How to do research, citation, public speaking.

**CR:** So, that's a lot.

**RF:** I rely on the students to help with that a lot.

**CR:** But your initial comments about how it might be jarring for a student who's had you in, like, a large lecture room kind of class, and then this experience gets me thinking about how different courses bring forth different parts of who we are as instructors. And just like I think most good instructors kind of cringe a little bit when we were just talking about entering grades before we turned on the mic. Because we were in the finals and like, did you enter your grades? Yep, yep, yep, it's so nice. Like we cringe a little bit by like, you know, Sally Jones is not 89.4. That is not who she is, you know, like, in the same way we have different sort of facets of who we are in different courses, and it's always going to be a little bit reductionistic. We try to break out of that a little bit, but the systems we inhabit kind of don't always allow that. Yeah. Is there any cross-pollination that you've seen in your 14 years of doing the Model UN where you're like, I need to bring that more into my large courses, or vice versa.

**RF:** Yeah, so I'll say the simulation model, which is inherent to model UN. We're simulating the work of committees, and that means it's student led. And the students are participating by doing. They're, you know, giving speeches, they're writing and collaborating, producing documents based on research that they've done outside the classroom. So there's very little in terms of a traditional content lecture. So all of that I've actually flipped and it goes on Canvas, the lectures they watch in advance so that we have more time to practice and work and collaborate in. And so in my other upper level courses, I'll say I always have, but I routinely use some kind of a simulation or experiential here, experiential rather than engage as the proper term element. So, for instance, in my 4,000-level constitutional law class that focuses on institutions, the capstone experiences, a mock constitutional convention. We've learned about institutions. Now, if you had the opportunity to be in the room when it happened, what would you do? What would you change?

**CR:** What was the Hamilton reference?

**RF:** It was Hamilton reference.

**CR:** Thank you.

**RF:** Out with Hamilton. I love Hamilton. And so I did that in my 1,000-level class last week, too. It was, it gets a little out of hand when you have 200 plus people trying to do a simulation. It goes from excitement to chaos really quickly. Bu, yeah, so I would say that those are ways that

it's cross pollinated. But back to the point where you said, you know, Sally Rogers. I forget the name. You gave the student. So we'll say Sally Rogers, the student is not an 89.4. I will say that having students in one class and then having them in model UN allows me to see them in a different light and to see all of their strengths. Strengths that may not necessarily come out in of course with different content. And it's made it possible for me to write letters of recommendation that I'm just not able to write when they're in a different course. I get to know them and know, you know, their gifts in a wholly different context in ways that I'm able to, I hope you sell them. You know, sell them to future employers, to graduate schools. And that's a real that's been a real blessing of being the model unit advisor is just getting to see students shine in that way that you don't typically or in ways that you don't typically get to see in a traditional seminar. Even if they're sharing wonderful insights.

**CR:** Right. Yeah. Well, I think that's a great place to end, Dr. Rebecca Flavin. Thank you so much for joining the show today.

**RF:** Thanks for having me.

**CR:** Our thanks again to Dr. Flavin for joining the show today. If you would like to learn more about the American Association of Colleges and Universities discussion of high impact practices, which Dr. Flavin mentioned, you can follow the link in our show notes. We're glad you joined us for this episode, and if you've enjoyed this or any of our episodes, please subscribe to the show and give us a five-star review. Well, that's our show. Join us next time for Professors Talk Pedagogy.