

**THE EFFECTS OF TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE OF POLITICAL  
VIEWS AND OPINIONS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the relationship between classroom disclosure of political views and opinions by professors and student perceptions. A sample of students (N = 158) chose to participate in a survey asking questions about their perceptions of the amount, depth, and inappropriateness of teacher political disclosure, as well as whether or not they agreed with their professor's disclosed political ideology. The questionnaire also measured student perceptions of the teacher's subsequent competence, goodwill, trustworthiness, student state motivation, and student affective learning (content and teacher). The data revealed negative relationships between perceived inappropriateness of political disclosure and perceived competence and goodwill of the professor. Another finding of this study was that students who disagreed with their professors' disclosed political views tended to perceive those professors as less competent and trustworthy, and reported lower state motivation and affective learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

The political and scholastic realms are often discussed in conjunction with each other, with colleges and universities seen as having political rhetoric and dogma inextricably embedded within their teachings. However, despite the common sense that, with teaching, there will be some politics inserted into the curriculum, either unknowingly or purposefully, there is little research on this topic. Indeed, scholarly writings have focused on only general aspects of educational disclosure, while largely ignoring the latent political aspects. Similarly, papers have been written on political disclosure, but rarely in a classroom setting.

This work serves as a first step into exploring this relationship between teacher political self-disclosure and college students' perceptions of such; hopefully it will spur others to conduct similar social observations in order to expand and refine our knowledge of this relationship.

The current study hopes to reveal how negative political disclosure affects classroom relationships, as well as pinpoint what disclosures students view as inappropriate. What factors into how students judge their professors? Most importantly, how do students feel about political self-disclosure in class?

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **Teacher Disclosure**

McCarthy and Schmeck (1982) performed an experiment to test whether instructor self-disclosure affects memory, as well as teacher ratings. While the latter hypothesis was not supported, as teacher rating was not correlated with their self-disclosure, their findings suggested that self-disclosure is related to memory and cognition, with differences between males and females. Using two versions of a taped recording of a male lecturer, one for the control and one for the experimental group, McCarthy and Schmeck observed how self-disclosure, or lack thereof, affected recall and retention of material.

The study found that while there was no significant effect on recall alone, the interaction of sex and self-disclosure did have an effect on students. Males who watched the tape containing self-disclosures generally outperformed females, an unexpected result. The authors speculated that the difference could be due to the fact that male students would relate more to the male lecturer's self-disclosure than females. This would facilitate self-reference and make the lecture more concrete in the males' minds, due to the personal examples given by the lecturer. Other research supports this explanation; same-sex dyads have been found to relate to each other more and communicate more effectively, and those sharing the same experiences were more intuitive in general (Hill, 1975; Mood, 1979).

Sorenson (1989) measured frequency of common classroom disclosures according to pre-determined disclosive statements. The statements were assessed for their impact

value on self disclosure; the purpose of the study was to examine what teachers do in the classroom regarding self disclosure and thus provide the opportunity to alter behaviors in order to promote teacher effectiveness. Students were dissatisfied with teachers who were trained only to spit out material to be learned. According to Sorenson, they did not relate well to students and build rapport. The premise of the study was that it is not what is being taught, it is how it is being taught, where it is being taught, and with what attitude. There is a link between interpersonal communication and learning outcomes. Teachers are not trained to build rapport with students, stymieing the incentive to learn.

Sorenson (1989) conducted this study to find recommendations for effective teaching methods. She concentrated on studying affect and interpersonal relationships, because these two facilitate the identification of many teacher self-disclosure components. It is not how much disclosure the teacher engages in that furthers the relationship and leads to teacher effectiveness; it is the content of that disclosure and whether the student perceives it as positive or negative. Statements of self-disclosure by teachers and student reactions can be categorized.

The communicator's style, honesty, and affective learning and behavioral commitment contribute significantly to the model used by Sorenson (1989); results indicated that teachers should try to present themselves as honest and open in their self-disclosures, although the study does not elaborate on what behaviors and speech are appropriate.

Sorenson (1989) found that while the innate abilities of students dictated cognitive and psychomotor learning, it is the teacher's communication and self-disclosure skills that drive affective learning. Communicative messages may include two



components: report or content, and command or relational definition. The report component contains information, whereas the command or relational component, which includes self-disclosive communication, defines the message's intent, and provides insight into the relationship between communicators. Immediacy was also examined in this article; it accounted for more favorable ratings of instructors and classroom learning, and, as expected, competence and self-disclosure levels were directly correlated to a teacher's popularity and teaching effectiveness.

Goldstein and Benassi (1994) found that instructor self-disclosure affects student participation. Focusing on the college classroom, the researchers did naturalistic experiments in lieu of controlled, artificial studies. Instructor self-disclosure occurred, and while the dimensions of class participation were measured through class discussion, question asking, and students' willingness to express their feelings and opinions while in class, these exercises simultaneously served to reveal student perceptions. Using two separate questionnaires, one for each student and one for each faculty member, Goldstein and Benassi measured student perception of instructor self-disclosure, the amount of their participation in class, and how well the instructor utilized examples and illustrations.

Results support the hypothesis that professors' self-disclosure is positively correlated with student classroom participation, regardless of gender, race, or other external differences among instructors. Notably, they defined class participation as the amount of actual participation in class activities and the student's willingness to engage in those class activities. Three models were proposed to explain these results: the social exchange, modeling perspective, and trust models. The first model suggests that teacher disclosure obligates the student to reciprocate in kind, while according to the second

model, “vicarious reinforcement and imitation” are key. The final model suggests mutual reciprocity as an explanation, whereby student and teacher disclose to each other because of mutual amity.

Cayanus and Martin’s 2004 study tested the reliability and validity of their Instructor Disclosure Scale, finding that teacher self-disclosure was positively related to specific student motives, and was also related to communication between teachers and students that occurred outside the classroom. Using two separate studies, they found that students are motivated to communicate with their instructors; they classified these motives as “relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, and sycophancy” (p. 253). The style preferred by the student predicts how often and how intimately they will communicate with the instructor.

Also, the instructor’s disclosure style (lively, assertive, positive, etc.) affects which communication style the student will use to communicate with them.

The expected results were not found in the first study; there was no significant relationship between perceived teacher self-disclosure and functional and participation motives, student affect, and student affective learning.

The results of Cayanus and Martin’s (2004) second study, which measured perceived instructor self-disclosure, out-of-class communication, and student interest, were more in line with the authors’ expectations about instructor out-of-class communication, and supported the hypothesis that instructor self-disclosure would be positively correlated to out-of-class communication. The questionnaire measured out-of-class disclosures, as well as student interest. The second hypothesis, that a positive relationship between perceived teacher self-disclosure and each of the three dimensions

of student interest (impact, meaningfulness, and competence) existed, was partially supported. Impact and meaningfulness dimensions were indeed correlated to self-disclosure, but competence was not.

Gregory (2005) explored instructor self-disclosure behavior in higher learning, as it related to student achievement and learning, as well as students' attitudes. The author first explored the literature on power relationships, noting that college student behavior has a more mature and involved tone than previous scholastic levels, then made reference to the lack of material regarding the influence teachers have on their students' beliefs.

The two research questions, "Do students perceive their teachers as influential as measured by student intention to utilize classroom behaviors in real life?" (p. 65) and "Do teacher believe that they influence their students?" (p. 66) led into the hypothesis that positively perceived instructors would positively affect student learning outcomes. Additionally, taking the social perspective into consideration, Gregory posed six more research questions: "How are the student-reported topics of teacher self-disclosure perceived by students?" (p. 66) "To what level do teachers perceive themselves as self-disclosing to students?" (p. 67) "Are there topics that are considered taboo in teacher self-disclosure by students or teachers?" (p. 68), "According to a) students and b) teachers, what topics of self-disclosure are used most frequently and perceived as useful most often?" (p. 68) "Are personal characteristics of student and/or teacher related to perceptions of teacher self-disclosure?" (p. 69) and "What are teachers' explicit goals for their use of self-disclosure?" (p. 70). Other hypotheses regarding teachers' use of self-disclosure were also used in this extensive study.

The students participated in a survey designed to measure student perception of teacher disclosure, and the teachers answered questions about how students perceived their disclosures. The results supported the theory that self-disclosure makes teachers seem more accessible and friendly to their students, who in turn respond by performing better. Information gleaned from student participant responses held that political beliefs are generally considered to be a taboo topic, with accounts of feelings of ill will towards a professor who did not share their political views. Similarly, teachers felt that political beliefs of students were best kept out of the classroom (Gregory, 2005).

Lannutti and Strauman (2006) examined the influence of the intent, amount, positiveness, depth, and perceived honesty of teacher self-disclosure on students' evaluations of their teachers. These self-disclosure categories were used to clarify how teacher self-disclosure impacts the classroom interpersonal dynamics. Their first hypothesis posits that greater amounts of instructor self-disclosure will be positively related to more positive evaluations of the instructor. The second hypothesis has three sub-foci: instructor self-disclosure that is perceived as more intentional will result in more positive evaluations of the instructor, more honest self-disclosures will encourage positive evaluations, and more positive (portrays instructor favorably) disclosures will affect evaluations positively. Finally, the third hypothesis holds that teacher self-disclosures with more depth will be associated with negative evaluations of that instructor.

Results showed that "intent was positively correlated with positiveness and honesty, and negatively correlated with depth. Self-disclosure positiveness was also positively correlated with honesty and depth. Honesty and depth were negatively correlated.

Amount of self-disclosure was positively correlated with positiveness and depth, yet amount was not significantly correlated with intent or honesty of self disclosure”

(Lannutti & Strauman, 2006, p. 94).

Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) studied one of the newer forms of communication, social networking, as it relates to the student-teacher relationship. Factors such as font use, language, and punctuation all affect student perceptions of teacher immediacy via computer-mediated channels. Their first hypothesis predicted that students would expect more stimulation and motivation from a teacher whose Facebook site is high in self-disclosure, as opposed to those low in self-disclosure. The second held that those who view high self-disclosure sites for instructors anticipate greater affective learning than those who view low self-disclosure sites. Finally, the third hypothesis posited that the pages of high self-disclosure instructors induced students to expect a more positive classroom experience than the pages of low self-disclosure teachers. Mazer et al. also sought answers to the research question of “how appropriate do participants perceive teachers’ use of Facebook?” (p. 6).

All three hypotheses are supported by the data. High teacher disclosure is positively related to student expectations of motivation/stimulation, affective learning, and a positive classroom experience (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007).

Cayanus, Martin, and Myers (2008) examined how teachers self-disclose in the classroom, and how students seek information through various channels. Amount, positiveness, and relevance were quantified as they related to teachers’ disclosure, and the categories of information seeking measured were overt, direct, third party, testing, and observing.

The overt strategy is the only one that involves a face-to-face dyadic interaction, while the others fall under the category of ‘monitoring’. The passive monitoring system takes in information from the environment, and the student may not have a specific information source targeted. The third party strategy is a non-confrontational approach, utilizing a third person or middleman when the desired information holder is either not physically available, or the seeker does not wish to directly interact with them. A testing strategy seeks to induce the information holder to approach the seeker; the seeker acts outside the organizational norms to draw attention. An observing strategy is the most unobtrusive method, in which the seeker simply watches the information holder in order to gain information. Cayanus et al. (2008) briefly address the type of disclosure that teachers use while discussing the positiveness dimension, writing that teachers who wish to appear positive avoid disclosing information that puts them in a negative light.

The authors found that students’ information seeking behavior would change in accordance to how they perceived their professors’ self-disclosures. Disclosure containing relevant content was met with overt, third party, or observing tactics, while overly positive disclosures induced students to avoid using indirect, testing, or observing approaches. “Depending on the content of self-disclosure and the context of the interaction, self-disclosures may have limited effect in the classroom” (Cayanus et al., 2008, p. 20).

Cayanus et al. (2008) also found that positive and/or relevant disclosures impact students more positively, with students indicating that their interest was increased by these types of statements. Reiterating previous studies, the authors posit that students will, over the course of a semester, engage in multiple categories of communication

behaviors in order to glean the most information from their course and their instructor. Examples of these behaviors that will solidify their perceptions include asking questions about coursework, requesting that the teacher reiterate misunderstood information, asking the teacher personal questions, inquiring about progress and/or mastery of course material, and challenging the teaching methods of the instructor.

In another study, Cayanus and Martin (2008) revisited instructor self-disclosure with this article, this time focusing on the dimensions of amount, relevance, and valence. The stated goals of this study were to expand the Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale, and discern whether or not those dimensions were related to affective learning, student motivation, and teacher clarity. The affective learning dimension encompasses teachers using behavior alteration techniques (BATs) to influence how students perceive them, thereby generating interest in the course material, as well as in the instructor. There were two research questions for this dimension, inquiring whether the amount, relevance, and negativity of the teacher's self-disclosure related to student affect for the course, and whether the same criteria affected student perception of the instructor.

The third research question aimed to determine whether or not the three dimensions of teacher self-disclosure related to student motivation; that is, how involved the student is in the course of their own accord. Student motivation hinges on how interested the student is in the course, the school (environment), and the instructor teaching the material. Finally, clarity, the third dimension, provided the basis for the fourth research question, asking whether teacher self-disclosure dimensions affected the students' perceptions of teacher clarity. The results of the study indicate that for RQ1, amount and negativity has only a slight impact on student affect for a course, and the

results for RQ2 and RQ3 were similarly slight. The final research question however, whether teacher self-disclosure dimensions affected the students' perceptions of teacher clarity, revealed negativity and relevance accounted for 25% of the variance in student perceptions of instructor clarity (Cayanus & Martin, 2008).

Zhang, Shi, Tonelson, and Robinson (2008) conducted a study on teacher self-disclosure at the K-12 level to examine the teachers' perceptions of different self-disclosures. Using a Likert-type scale, the authors measured five dimensions of self-disclosure: common purposes, consideration of students, uncommon topics, uncommon purposes, and common topics. The results drew demarcations between preservice and inservice teachers on some dimensions, while on others responses were more congruent.

Most relevant of these findings was that "this study found that both preservice and inservice teachers believe that disclosure of their political perspectives and religious beliefs is inappropriate" (p. 6). The authors expressed an ambivalent outlook on this, citing that in some circumstances, such as teaching a civics course, discussion of political value and beliefs is critical, though it must be carefully implemented in the proper way.

Also telling is the data that suggests that inservice teachers are less accepting of uncommon topics, such as politics, than preservice teachers who lack the firsthand experience of teaching in a classroom. This indicates that, at least at this level of education, instructors are less likely to knowingly inject politics into the classroom, in fact, this study indicates the opposite; something that the authors speculate may have to do with maturity levels of the pupils. Citing beliefs of teachers, the article says that as grade level increases, so too does maturity level, making certain teachings that were previously considered inappropriate more accessible.



## **Political Disclosure**

Argyle, Trimboli, and Forgas (1988) conducted an Australian experiment to study the connection between topic and relationship in college students' self-disclosures. Unique to this study is the recognition –and subsequent coining –of the terms “peak” and “trough” to refer to the areas of specialized disclosure that dictate to whom a person discloses to, and about what. Their first hypothesis succinctly states that there should be an expected relationship between topic of conversation and target person. The second hypothesis holds that among these disclosures, certain relationships will have single peaks, defined as areas of specialized disclosure, while others will have single troughs, defined as special taboo areas, and still others will exhibit “flat” or “variable” profiles. Hypotheses three and four focused on female disclosure, holding that women would be more likely to disclose than men; and when disclosure occurred, intimate topics would be reserved for close family and friends.

Hypotheses one and two were supported, but three was not supported; the results found little gender difference in willingness to disclose. Hypothesis four was supported, with the most relevant results revealing that women disclosed less about politics to doctors, ministers, lecturers, and neighbors; Argyle et al. (1988) conceded that this may be due to perceptions of these occupations as principally male, making this a gender issue.

Karamcheti and Lemert (1991), in their article on political correctness, outlined the absurdities and contradictions it entails. Most apparent in college campuses, as an anecdote at the beginning of the article illustrates, political correctness was spawned from the 1960s Civil Rights movement in an effort to salve the political and psychological

wounds of the disenfranchised. It is the authors' opinion that the political and social climate is responsible for the apparent ineffectiveness of P.C. at equalizing the nation. Karamcheti and Lemert's work underscores the fact that people often have strong, emotional reactions to political disclosures, and the words chosen to articulate those disclosures.

Button (2005) examined the different, often conflicting philosophies of Arendt and Rawls regarding the conduct of political discussion in a pluralistic society. Button contrasts Arendt's tenants with those of Rawls, laying out the insights and inadequacies of each. For Arendt, an individual's participation in the "grammar of public reason" cements his or her moral standing as a good citizen. Public reason, as defined by Rawls, sets the standards by which public officials and citizens should apply political justice to laws and conduct in the public sphere. Rawls argues that citizens have a moral obligation towards civility – to commonly held, logical (science-based) beliefs, for the most part. In this system, civic friendships are created through mutual respect and absorption of similar, if not homogenous values.

In Arendt's view, political action and speech are primarily self-disclosive, serving to display a person's unique political mindset to an audience of peers. Subsequently, people cannot hide or falsify beliefs fully; their true convictions are apparent in who they are, how they disclose, and how they conduct themselves. In light of this then, any attempts to set standards or compose rules of conduct in the public political sphere will result in the suppression and conditioning of this natural urge to disclose honestly. To act against this self-disclosure is to squelch humanity itself, says Arendt, who, at odds with Rawls, argues that where there is an opportunity for political discourse, there is an

irrepressible propensity for personal political self-disclosure. Religious and moral beliefs are not part of the “private self” – they are expressed politically, making it a human impossibility to become, or stay, abjectly objective.

From Argyle et al. (1988), Karamcheti & Lemert (1991), and Button (2005), we find that although there is little literature on political self-disclosure, what little there is seems to agree on a few points. First, as Argyle (1988) found, all studies done on disclosure have found that context is highly important – the disclosure must be appropriate to the relationship, otherwise the discloser risks making their conversational partner uncomfortable. Second, people care about the language of political disclosure; whether or not one agrees with the sentiment of articles such as Karamcheti and Lemert’s (1991), most people agree that political disclosure requires discretion. Caution in disclosing political views is important in preserving interpersonal relationships, especially in the context of a college classroom. Finally, echoing Arendt’s sentiment, as reviewed by Button (2005), political disclosure cannot be suppressed, and one’s political views and opinions cannot be concealed. In light of these findings, this study hopes to expand the available literature on political self-disclosure as it is manifested in a typical college classroom.

## **FOUNDATION FOR THESIS**

While many studies have already been conducted to examine the self-disclosure of teachers, and articles have been written on political self-disclosure, rarely have the two concepts existed side by side in the literature. In this thesis, the relationships between teachers' political self-disclosure and students' perceptions of the classroom environment, as indicated by student perceptions of teacher competence, trustworthiness, and good will, and student reports of state motivation and affective learning are examined. The paucity of research addressing these relationships provides a foundation for this thesis, which will in turn serve as a potential starting point for future studies in this avenue. To that end, this study examines the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between teacher political disclosure and student perceptions of teacher competence?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between teacher political disclosure and student perceptions of teacher trustworthiness?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between teacher political disclosure and student perceptions of teacher goodwill?

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between teacher political disclosure and students' reports of state motivation?

Research Question 5: What is the relationship between teacher political disclosure and students' reports of affective learning?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants and Procedure**

A sample of 158 students from a COM 1000 class participated as a convenience sample. With prior approval of their instructor, the students were given the choice to complete a survey in order to gain extra credit from their course; participation was anonymous throughout the study, and students could choose to cease participation at any time during the survey.

Of the 158 people who completed this survey pertaining to the 2008 Presidential election, 155 were first time voters. Of the three people who also had been eligible to vote in the 2004 election, only one reported voting in the 2008 election. In response to the item, “Have you had this instructor before?” seven participants affirmed that they had had that professor previously, twenty did not answer the question, and the remainder (131) had never had the instructor before the current class. Seventy-one of the participants were freshmen, fifty-three were sophomores, twenty-four were juniors, ten were seniors, and zero listed themselves as graduate students, although that option was also listed.

Participants were instructed to respond to the prompt based on their instructor “for the course you last attended before this class.” This method has been used previously to provide a broad cross-section of instructors while maintaining instructor anonymity (e.g. Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 1990). Participants then completed scales (described below) measuring their perceptions of teacher political self-disclosure, teacher source credibility (competence, trustworthiness, goodwill), student

motivation, and student affective learning (content, teacher).

## **Measures**

The instruments used in this study were gathered from research on similar topics, and have been slightly modified in some cases.

### ***Teacher Political Self-disclosure***

Cayanus and Martin's (2008) Teacher Political Self-disclosure was modified to reflect hypothetical political disclosures that may be observed in a typical college classroom. Their five-step Likert-type scale was also further modified to give it a wider range of possible responses, so that the scale runs from 1 (Strongly disagree), to 7 (Strongly agree). The added options are "slightly disagree" and "slightly agree." The ten items comprising the overall teacher political disclosure scale fell into four sub-categories. Four items focused on the volume of political disclosure: "My instructor often gives his/her opinion about politics"; "My instructor often shares his/her political dislikes and likes"; "My instructor often presents his/her attitudes towards state or local political issues"; and "My instructor often presents his/her attitudes towards national political issues." Two items focused on the depth of political disclosure: "My instructor talks about his/her political party affiliation"; and "My instructor discloses whom he/she is planning to vote for/has voted for." Two items addressed the inappropriateness of teacher political disclosure: "Too much class time is spent talking about politics"; and "My instructor's political comments cause division among the students." Two items also

examined the degree of agreement between teacher and student political views: “My instructor’s political opinions are quite different from my own opinions” (reverse scored); and “My instructor’s political views and opinions are similar to mine.”

### *Source Credibility*

The three traditional dimensions of source credibility used in this study are competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill/caring. Scales to measure these dimensions provide separate scores to gauge the credibility of teachers, using the instruments developed by McCroskey and Teven (1999), which employ a semantic differential scale with seven degrees of measurement. The competence measure is intended to interpret how the student feels toward the instructor’s teaching ability; i.e. whether or not they feel the instructor is qualified to teach that particular class. Trustworthiness examines the sense of being able to trust a teacher to be objective, use discretion, or otherwise treat students equally. The goodwill/caring dimension records the student’s impression of the teacher’s personality, and whether or not they feel that the instructor is a steward of their class, or is more or less apathetic to individual students’ classroom experience. These three measures, although all falling under the umbrella of source credibility, will be treated as separate constructs, as McCroskey and Teven (1999) suggest.



### *Student State Motivation*

Student motivation was also recorded and measured using a semantic differential scale from the work of Richmond (1990). Although this scale has been used to estimate students' trait motivation, it is generally used as a measure of trait motivation (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994), as will be the case in the current study. The scale measures how motivated students are in their class, and whether the instructor either enhances or diminishes that motivation. An example question from this section would be, "Are you dreading this class, or looking forward to it?" Pairs of antonyms separated by a seven-point scale served to measure the response.

### *Affective Learning*

Following Cayanus and Martin's (2008) lead, the current study uses the affective learning scales developed by Anderson (1979), but only affect for the course (content) and affect for instructor scales were employed. As with the student motivation scale and the source credibility scale, this was achieved through the use of a semantic differential scale. The setup included seven degrees of affect, ranging from very high (7), to very low (1). The two main paths of inquiry were, "The content/subject matter of the course is..." followed by four seven-point measures: bad/good, fair/unfair, positive/negative, and "My instructor for the course is..." followed by the same measures.

## **RESULTS**

### **Reliability of Measures**

Ten scale items dealt with the independent variable, teacher political disclosure. Analyses were performed treating the items as one overall scale; and analyses were also performed on the individual elements of disclosure volume, disclosure depth, disclosure inappropriateness, and disclosure agreement. Scale reliability analysis of all ten disclosure items as a single scale indicating overall disclosure revealed poor correlations for the two disclosure agreement items: “My instructor’s political views are quite different from my own opinions” and “My instructor’s political views and opinions are similar to mine,” suggesting it would be inaccurate to include agreement as part of the overall disclosure construct. Reliability analysis of the remaining eight items produced an alpha of 0.89 for overall political disclosure. Reliabilities of the four items comprising disclosure volume produced an alpha of 0.95. As expected, the scales with only two items yielded lower reliability scores, but were calculated nonetheless. The alpha reliability for disclosure depth was 0.64 and the reliability for disclosure inappropriateness was 0.61.

Scale reliability analysis was also undertaken for each of the dependent measures. For Source Credibility/Competence, the alpha was 0.91, and there were six items in the scale, with 156 cases in total. Source Credibility/Goodwill had six items, 158 cases, and an alpha of 0.88. Source Credibility/Trustworthiness, also with six items and 158 cases

yielded an alpha of 0.89. Under the Motivation dimension, the alpha was 0.92, there were six items, and there were 158 cases total. Affective Learning/Content, which measured the affect towards the course content, yielded an alpha of 0.87, with five items, totaling 157 cases. The Affective Learning/Teacher dimension, measuring affect for the teacher, had four items, 157 cases, and an alpha of 0.92.

### **Correlational Analyses**

Correlational analyses were performed to document relationships between the independent variables (disclosure-overall, disclosure-volume, disclosure-depth, and disclosure-inappropriateness) and dependent variables (perception of teacher competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill; student motivation, affect toward course content, and affect toward instructor). At an alpha level of .01, there were statistically significant, negative correlations between inappropriateness of political disclosure and perceptions of teacher competence ( $r(154) = -.214, p = .007$ ), partially addressing RQ1, and between inappropriateness of political disclosure and perceptions of teacher goodwill ( $r(156) = -.205, p = .010$ ), partially addressing RQ3.

Since the disclosure-agreement scales appeared to be measuring a construct different from overall disclosure, agreement was treated as a separate variable. Initial analysis of the data also revealed that the two agreement items, “My instructor’s political views are quite different from my own opinions” and “My instructor’s political views and opinions are similar to mine,” although lexically simple opposites of one another, did not correlate well (after recoding to orient both in the same direction). Since the reversed

item (My instructor's political views are quite different from my own opinions) was the only reversed item in the disclosure scales, it is possible that some participants did not perceive the reversal. Due to this apparent discrepancy, only data from the directly phrased item (My instructor's political views and opinions are similar to mine) were utilized. To analyze the effect of homogeneity of political views between instructor and student, the responses to the prompt "My instructor's political views and opinions are similar to mine" were separated into tertiles. Cases falling into the first tertile were deemed the "disagree" group, cases in the upper tertile were classified the "agree" group, and cases in the middle tertile were ignored for this analysis. An independent samples *t*-test was performed for each dependent variable. For instances where Levene's test indicated the assumption of equal variances could not be made, Welch's *t*-test was utilized.

With regard to source credibility (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3), students in the "disagree" group rated their instructors less competent ( $M = 34.52$ , s.d. 7.34) than students in the "agree" group ( $M = 39.21$ , s.d. 4.66) to a statistically significant degree (Welch's  $t(52.18) = -2.56$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Students in the "disagree" group also rated their instructors less trustworthy ( $M = 32.80$ , s.d. 6.84) than students in the "agree" group ( $M = 37.63$ , s.d. 4.44) to a statistically significant degree (Welch's  $t(51.17) = -3.35$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Differences in student ratings of instructor goodwill, however, were not statistically significant ( $t(62) = -1.56$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Regarding student motivation (RQ4), students in the "disagree" group reported lower levels of motivation ( $M = 21.73$ , s.d. 7.77) than students in the "agree" group ( $M = 28.58$ , s.d. 6.33) to a statistically significant degree ( $t(61) = -3.39$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

Analysis of the reports of affective learning (RQ5) revealed students in the “disagree” group reported lower affect for course content ( $M = 24.68$ , s.d. 3.79) than students in the “agree” group ( $M = 20.93$ , s.d. 5.16) to a statistically significant degree ( $t(61) = -2.85$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Students in the “disagree” group also reported lower affect for the teacher ( $M = 21.62$ , s.d. 6.31) than students in the “agree” group ( $M = 25.89$ , s.d. 3.48) to a statistically significant degree (Welch’s  $t(54.66) = -3.48$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

Research Question 1 asked about the relationship between teacher political disclosure and student perceptions of teacher competence. The results indicate a negative relationship between perceived inappropriateness of political disclosure and student perception of teacher competence. The more inappropriate the political disclosure is deemed to be, the less competent and caring the teacher is from the students' perspective. Also, students who disagreed with their professor's disclosed political views perceived those professors as less competent and less trustworthy than students who agreed with their professor's political views.

Research Question 2 asked about the relationship between teacher political disclosure and student perceptions of teacher trustworthiness. Although no statistically significant relationship between political disclosure in general and student perception of trustworthiness was revealed, students who disagreed with their professor's disclosed political views regarded those professors as less trustworthy than professors with whom they agreed.

Research Question 3 asked about the relationship between teacher political disclosure and student perceptions of teacher goodwill. The results indicate a negative relationship between perceived inappropriateness of political disclosure and student perception of teacher goodwill. The more inappropriate a teacher's political disclosure is deemed to be, the less the student perceives that teacher to be a well-intentioned person.

Research Question 4 asked about the relationship between teacher political disclosure and students' reports of state motivation. Although no statistically significant

relationship between political disclosure in general and reported student state motivation was revealed, students who disagreed with their professor's disclosed political views reported less state motivation than students in classes with professors with whom they agreed.

Research Question 5 asked about the relationship between teacher political disclosure and students' reports of affective learning. Once again, no statistically significant relationship between political disclosure in general and reported student affective learning (either affect toward content or affect toward teacher) was revealed, but students who disagreed with their professor's disclosed political views reported less affect toward both the content and toward the professor than students in classes with professors with whom they agreed.

In sum, for each indicator examined, the data revealed circumstances where teacher political disclosure was related to a negative outcome. As an instructor, political disclosure, according to these findings, should be avoided. Unless a specific class calls for such political self-disclosure, it is best kept to oneself to avoid alienating students, or fostering classroom hostility. Perhaps, in political science classes, a reasonable amount of disclosure is necessary, but discretion is still advisable. To disclose one's political views is rarely advantageous to a teacher.

One of the findings of this research includes a measure of a student's perception of the appropriateness of an instructor's political self-disclosure. It was found that students who perceived something as inappropriate also lost respect overall for that professor, as defined by a drop in perceptions of goodwill and competence. Ergo, it is wise to avoid inappropriateness, but how is inappropriateness itself defined? In this

study, students responded to the prompts “Too much class time is spent talking about politics”; and “My instructor’s political comments cause division among the students.” One would expect students to have differing opinions on how much time is too much time and what constitutes “division among the students,” based upon their beliefs, worldview, and other factors. Thus, while teachers might think they could disclose their political view in ways that were not deemed inappropriate by students, there would likely be a different inappropriateness trigger for each student.

Agreement is yet another ill-defined variable, because its definition varies between individuals. There is no evidence of a positive relationship between agreement and any of the variables studied, but disagreement is related to several negative outcomes. Since teachers’ views are unlikely to mesh fully with all of their students’ views, negative effects would be a likely consequence for disclosure. Competence, trustworthiness, motivation, and affective learning are linked to attitude towards the teacher, so a fundamental dislike for an instructor could manifest in various ways in the classroom.

In short, it is impossible to disclose politically in a way that might not offend some of one's students. The logical solution is to avoid political self-disclosure in general. Although previous studies (e.g. Sorenson 1989; Goldstein and Benassi 1994; and Gregory 2005) have indicated that teacher disclosure in general may have positive results, the current study, examining political disclosure only, indicates no instance where political disclosure is related to favorable outcomes and several instances where political disclosure is related to negative outcomes. It would appear teachers have no promise of



gain and the real possibility of loss when disclosing their political beliefs to their students.

### **Limitations**

As with all studies, this thesis is not meant to be all encompassing in its scope, nor could it practically cover all known instances of teacher-student political communication. Instead, the focus was upon first-year college students at one southeastern university, specifically a segment of a politically neutral class that should have provided a sampling of diverse political backgrounds for effective data collection. More time could have been spent distributing the questionnaire to several other classes, in order to both increase the sample size and offer diversity among majors, time spent in a college atmosphere, and other social clusters. The questionnaire itself could be improved, as there were some items that students misunderstood, and thus answered incorrectly, or not at all, which skewed the data.

### **Future Research**

Additional research could expand upon the findings of this study, extrapolating them to college students in different locales, or perhaps studying the impact of politics in international classrooms. Also, a political dogma scale could be used on top of this research to explore further how students and teachers perceive each other's affiliations, because whether a student is dogmatic or not shapes how tolerant they will be of others'

views, including teachers' politics. In addition to a dogma study, different social or political groups might be used to compare how different people react to different political disclosures. This would allow researchers to see if political belief, plus ethnicity, plus sexuality, for example, has a measurable and predictable effect on perception of a teacher.

## CONCLUSION

Research has shown that certain types of instructor self-disclosure are beneficial to students. Being able to present oneself as a human being, rather than just a professor with a singular objective – to teach – encourages discourse between students and teachers, which can increase motivation, trust, and respect for the teacher, as well as promote a positive learning environment. However, the data from this study suggests that political disclosure is a striking exception to the rule. None of the data reveal a relationship between teacher political disclosure and a good educational outcome.

It is inevitable that a substantial portion of any professor's students will not share the professor's political views. It is likely that at least some students will find a professor's political disclosures inappropriate. Neither circumstance bodes well for the student's perception of the professor. Although it may be impossible to put into concrete terms what is considered inappropriate disclosure, it is possible to conclude that all political disclosure should be kept to a minimum, if not avoided all together.

**APPENDIX A**  
**RESEARCH CONSENT FORM**

### *Informational Letter*

You are being asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Dr. James Katt, Assistant Professor, and Ms. Regina Weiler, Graduate Student, of the UCF Nicholson School of Communication. We are studying teacher-student communication and will ask you to fill out a survey and answer some questions. The entire process will take about 15 minutes. To ensure anonymity, your name should not appear anywhere in this packet. All responses will be anonymous and you must be 18 years of age or older to participate. None of your teachers will know your answers, and your participation will not affect your grade in this or any other class.

We hope you will answer all of the questions, but you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Submission of a completed questionnaire constitutes your consent to participate. There is no anticipated risk or direct benefit to you as a participant and the information obtained will be used only for the purposes of this research project. Although you will not be compensated, your participation is greatly appreciated.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact Dr. Katt at 407-823-3296 or Ms. Weiler at 407-823-2681. Research at the University of Central Florida is conducted under the oversight of the UCF Institutional Review Board. Questions or concerns about research participants' rights may be directed to the UCF IRB office, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246, or by campus mail 32816-0150. The hours of operation are 8:00 am until 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday except on University of Central Florida official holidays. The telephone numbers are (407) 882-2276 and (407) 823-2901.

**Thank you for your participation and cooperation.**

**APPENDIX B**  
**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Instructions: Answer the following question about your instructor **for the course you last attended before this class**. Please circle a number for each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

My instructor often gives his/her opinion about politics.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor often shares his/her political dislikes and likes.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor often presents his/her attitudes towards state or local political issues.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor often presents his/her attitudes towards national political issues.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor's political opinions are quite different from my own opinions.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor talks about his/her political party affiliation.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor discloses whom he/she is planning to vote for/has voted for.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

Too much class time is spent talking about politics.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor's political comments cause division among the students.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

My instructor's political views and opinions are similar to mine.

completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 completely agree

*continue to the next page*

Instructions: Regarding the same class (the course you last attended before this class), on the scales below, circle the number that best represents **your feelings about your instructor**. Numbers 1 and 7 indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers 2 and 6 indicate a strong feeling. Numbers 3 and 5 indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number 4 indicates you are neutral or undecided.

Intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unintelligent
Cares about me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn't care about me
Honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonest
Untrained	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trained
Has my interests at heart	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn't have my interests at heart
Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Inexpert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Expert
Self-centered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not self-centered
Honorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dishonorable
Informed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninformed
Concerned with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unconcerned with me
Moral	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Immoral
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Competent
Insensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sensitive
Unethical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ethical
Bright	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Stupid
Not understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Understanding
Phony	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Genuine

*continue to the next page*



Again regarding the course you last attended before this class, please circle the number that best represents **your feelings**. Numbers 1 and 7 indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers 2 and 6 indicate a strong feeling. Numbers 3 and 5 indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number 4 indicates you are neutral or undecided.

About the class, I generally felt:

motivated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	unmotivated
interested	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	uninterested
uninvolved	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	involved
bored	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	excited
dreading it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	looking forward to it

The content/subject matter of the course is:

bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	good
valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	worthless
unfair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	fair
positive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	negative

My instructor for the course is:

bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	good
valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	worthless
unfair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	fair
positive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	negative

**Finally, please answer the following questions about yourself.**

Have you had this instructor before? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

I am \_\_\_ years old My sex is \_\_\_ female \_\_\_ male

My current college major is \_\_\_\_\_

My current academic status is

\_\_\_ Freshman \_\_\_ Sophomore \_\_\_ Junior \_\_\_ Senior \_\_\_ Graduate Student

I voted in the recent presidential election. \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

**APPENDIX C**  
**IRB APPROVAL FORM**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Notice of Expedited Initial Review and Approval

From : **UCF Institutional Review Board**  
**FWA00000351, Exp. 6/24/11, IRB00001138**

To : **James A. Katt** and Co-PI: **Regina Weiler**

Date : **November 10, 2008**

IRB Number: **SBE-08-05910**

Study Title: **The Effects of Teacher Self-Disclosure of Political Views and Opinions**

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol noted above was approved by **expedited** review by the UCF IRB Vice-chair on 11/9/2008. **The expiration date is 11/8/2009.** Your study was determined to be minimal risk for human subjects and expeditable per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.110. The category for which this study qualifies as expeditable research is as follows:

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

A **waiver of documentation of consent** has been approved for all subjects. Participants do not have to sign a consent form, but the IRB requires that you give participants a copy of the IRB-approved consent form, letter, information sheet, or statement of voluntary consent at the top of the survey.

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

To continue this research beyond the expiration date, a Continuing Review Form must be submitted 2 – 4 weeks prior to the expiration date. Advise the IRB if you receive a subpoena for the release of this information, or if a breach of confidentiality occurs. Also report any unanticipated problems or serious adverse events (within 5 working days). Do not make changes to the protocol methodology or consent form before obtaining IRB approval. Changes can be submitted for IRB review using the Addendum/Modification Request Form. An Addendum/Modification Request Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <http://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

**Failure to provide a continuing review report could lead to study suspension, a loss of funding and/or publication possibilities, or reporting of noncompliance to sponsors or funding agencies.** The IRB maintains the authority under 45 CFR 46.110(e) to observe or have a third party observe the consent process and the research.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 11/10/2008 09:56:18 AM EST

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Joanne Muratori'.

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX D**  
**CORRELATION MATRIX**

### Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Disclosure - Overall	—	<b>0.964</b>	<b>0.678</b>	<b>0.692</b>	0.002	-0.029	0.049	0.107	0.126	0.059
2 Disclosure - Volume		—	<b>0.497</b>	<b>0.552</b>	0.078	0.014	0.105	0.169	0.150	0.099
3 Disclosure - Depth			—	<b>0.455</b>	-0.098	-0.016	-0.027	-0.005	0.058	0.020
4 Disclosure - Inappropriateness				—	<b>-0.204</b>	<b>-0.209</b>	-0.141	-0.115	-0.007	-0.123
5 Credibility - Competence					—	<b>0.501</b>	<b>0.711</b>	<b>0.659</b>	<b>0.570</b>	<b>0.654</b>
6 Credibility - Goodwill						—	<b>0.715</b>	<b>0.652</b>	<b>0.415</b>	<b>0.584</b>
7 Credibility - Trustworthiness							—	<b>0.680</b>	<b>0.509</b>	<b>0.648</b>
8 Student Motivation								—	<b>0.605</b>	<b>0.652</b>
9 Affective Learning - Content									—	<b>0.781</b>
10 Affective Learning - Teacher										—

correlations in **bold** are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

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