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E. Leroy Hall Award winner Daniel Galvin shares his approach to teaching undergraduates

By Daniel P. Smith

Political science professor **Daniel Galvin** has been named the **2015 E. LeRoy Hall Award winner**, the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences' highest annual prize for distinguished teaching.

A faculty member at the college since 2006 and an award-winning scholar, Galvin teaches a range of courses on American politics, including a popular lecture on the American presidency that explores the structural foundations and historical development of the nation's top leadership post to address an age-old question: is it "the person" or "the times" that shape presidential success?

Galvin, who accepted the Hall award at a June 3 ceremony, discusses his spirited work in the classroom.

Why do you think your students pushed your nomination?

I love the course material, and that fascination and enthusiasm probably comes across to the students. I can also get pretty animated and passionate as I try to convey the importance of the material, which is something the students say they like in their course feedback.

Of course, I'm fortunate that political science topics speak to people and are relevant. I try to connect the material to real-life developments and contemporary events, such as the Iran nuclear deal or President Obama's negotiations with the speaker of the House, which better allows students to understand the theories and frameworks we're studying.

How would you describe your approach in the classroom?

I cover a lot of historical developments so that students can see how historical trajectories shape contemporary problems. I emphasize political science theory as well, always encouraging students to poke holes in what they learn and come up with exceptions to the rules.

What do you most enjoy about teaching?

It's really the students at Northwestern. They want to learn. They work hard and want to engage with the subject matter. When you combine that with material that is fascinating intellectually and important politically, you have a good formula for a rich classroom experience.

What do you hope students take away from the courses you teach?

I hope they gain a keener understanding for how history has shaped contemporary issues, but also a sense that politics really matters — that politics is not incidental or peripheral to, say, economics. Whether it's through the shape of public policy or civic participation or issues of administration, politics can really make a difference in people's lives.

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