

Michaele L. Ferguson
President's Teaching Scholar – Research Proposal

Overview: I propose to study whether Reacting courses (courses including at least one Reacting to the Past game) improve students' (a) public speaking skills and (b) leadership skills. I will conduct three sets of surveys to assess the development of these skills: (1) pre- and post-treatment surveys of students enrolled in a Reacting course; (2) pre- and post-treatment surveys of students enrolled in one or more "control" courses (in which there is no Reacting component); and (3) surveys of Reacting alumni – students who have previously taken a Reacting course. The results will be written up in a paper to be submitted for review at the *Journal of Political Science Education*.

Justification: The academic literature on Reacting games has long established that these games increase student engagement, retention, critical thinking, and emotional response, compared to conventionally taught active learning courses (e.g., Lightcap 2009, Gorton & Havercroft 2012, Lazrus & McKay 2013, Olwell & Stevens 2015, Weidenfeld & Fernandez 2017; Joyce et al. 2018). Yet one of the most attractive features of these games for me is one that has not been studied: how, as a colleague who observed one of my Reacting classes once put it, the games do not just teach students *about* politics, they teach them to *do* politics. I propose to contribute to the scholarly literature by studying how Reacting games teach students to effectively advocate for a cause and to organize others to work to achieve common goals. More specifically, I will assess how Reacting games cultivate two important political skills: public speaking and leadership.

Methods: The central component of the study will be three sets of surveys. First, I will survey students enrolled in my FYSM 1000 Reacting course, "Playing Politics." At the beginning of semester, I will establish a baseline with a survey of their assessment of public speaking and leadership skills. At the end of the semester, I will administer a post-treatment survey consisting of the same questions to assess whether or not students believe their skills have developed over the semester.

Second, I will administer the same surveys in one or more "control" courses which do not include Reacting games. I will survey two control courses: one Political Science course and one first year seminar. I will administer the same pre- and post-treatment surveys to the students in the control courses to assess whether any change in skills is a consequence of student learning or maturation, rather than a result of Reacting games.

Third, I will conduct a survey of Reacting alumni: students (whether currently enrolled or graduated) who have taken a Reacting class with me over the past six years. This survey will assess whether Reacting alumni attribute any development of public speaking and/or leadership skills to their Reacting coursework, and to understand how Reacting games may have impacted alumni in the years since they took the course.

Timeline:

- Fall 2020** Develop research design & apply for Institutional Review Board approval
- Spring 2021** Identify control courses & obtain consent from instructors
Apply for Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program grant to support 1-2 undergraduate research assistants
- Fall 2021** Conduct pre- and post-surveys of Reacting course and control courses
Conduct surveys of Reacting alumni
- Spring 2022** Draft paper and submit to *Journal of Political Science Education*