

Dr. Austin Trantham

The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence is proud to highlight Dr. Austin Trantham, whose innovative approach to teaching Political Science helps students connect complex ideas through immersive learning.

Dr. Trantham uses experiential simulations that place students inside real-world decision-making environments. “My American Presidency students engage in a White House Crisis Simulation where they assume the role of an administration official to assess and advise a sitting president on a domestic or foreign policy crisis. Each of my Constitutional Law classes feature an end-of-term Moot Court Simulation that transforms the classroom into a courtroom. Students role-play attorneys or Supreme Court justices in an oral argument about a fictitious case illustrating a key course topic.”

He explains, “In both types of simulations, students must constructively engage with one another while continually making choices about the proper advice to give or evidence to present while staying true to their role. I find it extremely rewarding to witness students using terminology correctly, tying concepts together, and demonstrating our Core Values of Respect and Excellence with their peers.”

A moment early in his teaching career continues to shape his approach. “The first course I taught independently was Introduction to Political Theory while in graduate school at the University of Kentucky. One day, we were considering civil rights in America. One of the non-traditional students in the class told a story about how he and his mother were unfairly treated at a local department store in the 1960s due to their skin color. This anecdote still deeply resonates with me. It made me realize that students are experiencing our content in meaningful ways, and it is our responsibility to make time and space during classroom conversations for them to share their authentic selves.”

His scholarship is equally central to his work. “My current research focuses on understanding the behavior of political executives. This has led to published work on why presidents nominate certain individuals to appellate court positions. I am currently co-editing a volume on presidential scandal from historical, political, and legal perspectives.”

He also emphasizes mentoring through collaboration. “I most enjoy working on publications with undergraduates. Over the past year, I have co-authored encyclopedia entries with five Saint Leo students for edited volumes on the American presidency and youth activism in America. These opportunities allow me to blend research productivity with ‘teaching moments’ about how to locate accurate information from reliable sources and writing concisely while also effectively communicating with editors.”