



# Migration and Citizenship

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## Teachers' Corner

### Teaching migration and citizenship studies – a comparative analysis of 100 interdisciplinary syllabi



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Migration and citizenship issues are at the forefront of public debates, the media discourse and public policies in all corners of the world. Refugees are fleeing and are received; immigrant men and women are selected, arrive, integrate, become citizens, are ostracized as irregular migrants and remain transnationally active; emigrants leave, remit and return; and a host of public policies are being debated and designed to govern human mobility and citizenship and to regulate refugees and migrants' access to political representation, employment, healthcare, education, and other services.

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To facilitate exchanges on how to teach human mobility at universities, in 2013, the American Political Science Association’s organized section on Migration & Citizenship established a syllabus bank.

From the initial 44 syllabi, by fall 2017, the collection had grown to 97 teaching resources, reflecting a diverse set of courses being taught at the graduate and undergraduate level. While the open-access syllabus bank posts syllabi of non-section members in any discipline, at the time of writing political scientists contributed the majority of collected resources.

In this essay, we provide a comparative analysis of the close to 100 syllabi in the database that aims at promoting further scholarly exchanges and highlighting where we see gaps and missing elements. We used a standardized coding methodology that often relied on keywords but that also provided space for qualitative aspects of the resources. The syllabi in the collection have been submitted by instructors who received the section’s calls or who found the syllabus bank online and decided to submit their course plan. While this is not a random sample of syllabi that allows us to make generalizations for all migration-related courses, we believe that the analysis of 100 current syllabi provides a snapshot of key issues in today’s teaching landscape and enables instructors to learn from specific course designs, lesson plans and assignments.

In the remainder of this essay, we provide a short description of the sample we analyzed and proceed then to our analysis of issues that might be particularly relevant for teaching migration and citizenship studies. This includes whether syllabi are explicitly interdisciplinary and if they highlight the securitization of migration, gender, migrants' human rights, or issues on ethnic or religious identity. In addition, we also explore select modalities of assignments, particularly on the incorporation of current news, as well as the adoption of technology.

The selection of these issues is based on a three-pronged strategy that combined empirical, applicability and normative elements. First, preliminary coding of a random subsample revealed categories as key elements in a range of syllabi. Second, the categories analyzed across all syllabi needed to be issues that are transversally applicable to a range of migration and citizenship questions. Lastly, we applied normative considerations on why certain aspects matter for discussing migration and citizenship. In each section, we briefly outline the relevance of the chosen categories for the field as a whole. Needless to say that this is not an exhaustive list of relevant aspects of migration and citizenship syllabi. Despite our best efforts, we recognize that the selection reflects our own preferences.

### The migration and citizenship syllabus bank

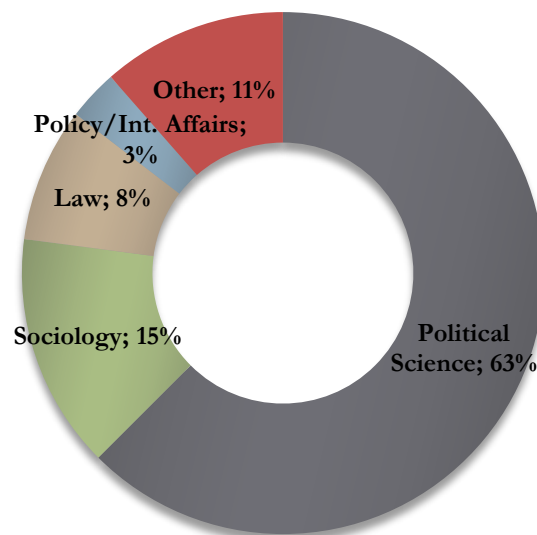
The APSA migration and citizenship bank contains 97 syllabi for courses that were taught between 2008 and 2017. The average and median year was 2014 and a third of the course plans (32%) were from 2015 and later. There was a fairly equal gender balance in terms of instruction, with 51% of syllabi developed and taught by female instructors and 49% by male instructors. The bulk of courses were taught at the undergraduate level (65%), while a fifth of the sample represent graduate courses (21%) and 5% are open to both, graduate and undergraduate students. In terms of discipline, 63% of syllabi are from political science, 15% are from sociology, 8% are from law, 3% are from international affairs/public policy, and 11% are from other disciplines, including history and philosophy. As to geographic origin, 80% of syllabi were taught at US universities, 7% in Canada, 7% in Europe, 5% in Asia, 1% in Oceania, and none in Latin America or Africa. Two courses were held online and one as a hybrid class.

The syllabi in the bank are grouped according to their main focus. As such, 72% are on migration, 20% on citizenship and ethics of migration, and 4% each, on refugees and other issues. In addition to this broad categorization, we found that 33% of syllabi

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focused exclusively on migrants, 5% focused exclusively on refugees or forced migration, while 57% focused on both groups, even though in many cases the focus on refugees was not revealed in course name. 5% did not focus on either. Whereas the majority of syllabi addressed both categories, the balance within syllabi was heavily tilted toward immigrants and migrants, usually with only one week addressing refugees and forced displacement. While overall migration is larger in scale than refugee flows and to some extent encompasses issues pertaining to those forcibly displaced—as is also recognized by the literature on mixed migration—the political and media focus on refugees, the specific legal and moral arguments, and students’ interest in the topic may call for an increase in courses that focus specifically on refugees and forced displacement.

**Figure 1: Syllabi by discipline**



### **An interdisciplinary approach promotes a holistic understanding of mobility**

While migration research has not yet fully developed as a social science in its own right (Brettell and Hollifield 2015), we believe that insights from different disciplines are necessary to understand the complex realities of migration and citizenship. Thus, courses might rely on concepts and readings from sociology, history, economics, demography, human geography, anthropology, political science, public administration, gender studies, media studies, social psychology, philosophy, and law, to name only the most prominent disciplines. To assess the extent to which courses are explicitly inter- or multidisciplinary, we coded whether a course self-categorizes as such in the course description or enumerates several disciplines that it draws on. This means that courses that are *de facto* interdisciplinary by using texts from multiple disciplines without highlighting this in the description are not coded as such. Based on this methodology, we found that less than a quarter of

the courses (23%) adopted an explicit interdisciplinary approach, while the remaining three quarters (77%) did not.

### Securitization matters to understand policies on human mobility

What is the relationship between migration and security, and when is migration a securitized issue? In the current US and global political climate, these are questions of the utmost importance. For 33% of syllabi in our sample, the issue of security was either a

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major part of the overall course or was the topic for at least one week of instruction. Some syllabi asked whether migration represented a threat to national security, while others focused on the issues of borders or internal policing. Many US-focused syllabi critically examined the border between the US and Mexico, while others focused on the potential security threat posed by the so-called refugee crisis in Europe. One syllabus asked students to consider what approaches exist to “de-securitize” forced migration topics, as well as what changes when we consider “human security.” Since only about one third of the syllabi included security as a major topic, this is one area that instructors might consider further in

future classes.

### Teaching migration should emphasize the role of gender – though it rarely does

Migration is a highly gendered process. Gender affects who migrates and the effects, risks and opportunities for men, women and their respective gender roles. For this reason it is paramount to highlight gender as a key lens to assess migrant experiences, policy discussions, laws, migrant-specific needs and representations. In our analysis, we counted syllabi as having a gender-focus when they had a specific session on migration & gender or if they contained readings in at least three sessions that had an explicit gender focus, using the search terms gender, women, male, sex, and feminist. Surprisingly, less than a quarter of the sample (23%) meets the gender criterion. This includes two courses that are specifically dedicated to migration and gender. When divided by discipline, political science courses are least likely to include a gender focus (15%), followed by sociology (21%) and law classes (38%). While all courses taught at public policy and international affairs departments had a gender focus, there were only three such classes, taught by two instructors. With 28%, graduate courses had a slightly higher share of syllabi with a gender focus, compared to 19% among undergraduate classes.

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While a third of all female instructors included a gender focus (33%), this was only the case for 13% of male instructors. In recent years, scholarship on migration has made progress to address the invisibility of women and gender in international migration scholarship (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Donato and Gabaccia 2015). Given the considerable importance of understanding the gendered dimensions of migration, our analysis suggests that course instructors take note of these advances and help students to address these questions more explicitly.

### **Migrant rights can be addressed through individual or group rights**

The “rights paradox” facing migrants and refugees was identified most prominently by Hannah Arendt. If human existence is defined by political belonging, and the assurance of rights exists only within this construct, to whom can the non-citizen appeal for protection of rights? This question posed more than fifty years ago is still highly applicable today, and many syllabi in our sample address this issue. A focus on migrants as rights-bearers also emphasizes their agency, the normative dimension of migration, and shifts the discussion away from victimizations.

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We found that just over half (57%) the syllabi explicitly addressed migrants’ rights. This needed to be either a substantial focus of the course overall, or had at least one week devoted to the issue. Some syllabi assessed the range of rights granted to migrants or refugees: access to legal status, employment, social services, or protection against deportation. Some instead focused on group rights, such as cultural and religious rights or anti-discrimination measures. Others looked internationally, examining rights granted under the global refugee regime, or looked at the relationship between human rights and migrant rights from a gendered perspective. One syllabus examined the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the rights of trafficked persons.

## Understanding ethnic identity

Though migrants and refugees leave their home countries, they may retain their national identification, assimilate into the culture of their host state, or adopt a transnational or diasporic identity. Just over one third (37%) of syllabi addressed issues of identity, meaning that the syllabus explicitly mentions ethnic, racial or religious identity in the course description, the learning outcomes, or it was a focus of a session. References to national identity, in the sense of the identity of a particular nation-state, were not considered. Of those syllabi including a discussion of identity, prominent topics included: cultural belonging, the politics of identity, and identification with a particular ethnic group, particularly in the US context. Other topics mentioned less frequently were: ethnic competition theory, gendered ethnicity, transnational identities, and the religious identities of migrants and refugees.

## Creating links to current affairs: integrating news and media

There are few current topics that are as present in today's print and online media as migration and citizenship (Bleich, Bloemraad, and de Graauw 2015). The visibility of these issues highlights the relevance to students and makes it easy for course instructors to show that the course contents are applicable to real world phenomena that students are confronted with on a daily basis. We coded three levels of incorporating current media. Almost half of the courses did not have any explicit mention of news and media (48%). A fifth (20%) encourage students to follow the news but do not contain a special assignment or weekly platform to discuss news items. Finally, a third of the sample (32%) – including one course specifically dedicated to migration and the media – contain a specific assignment or weekly news discussion.

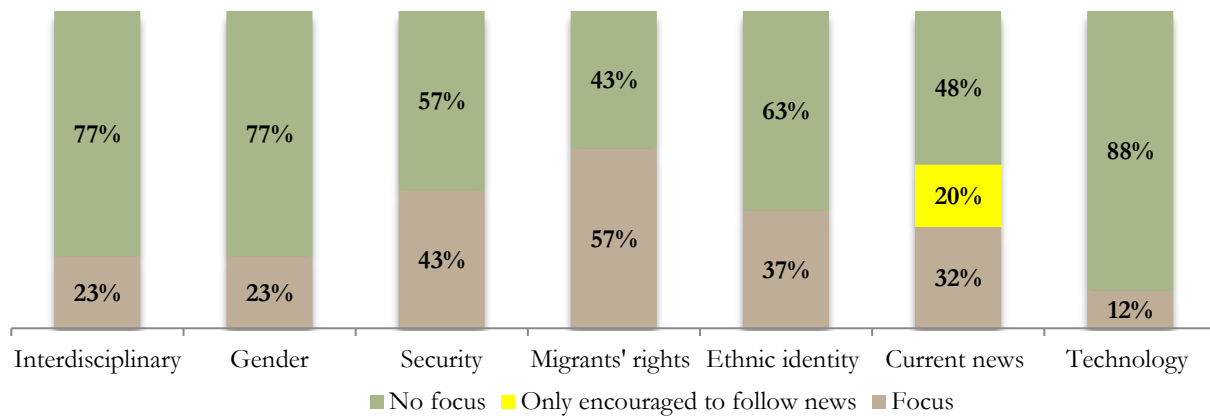
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Specific assignments range from reserving the last ten minutes of each class for discussions on current news that can be suggested by students or the instructor, requiring students to follow specific immigration blogs, short student presentations on linking news to weekly readings, to group research that involves media analysis. In one course, students select contemporary media pieces (print, visual, audio) and then write a media journal entry about the pieces in response to a specific question.

## Few courses make use of technology

Technology provides opportunities for instructors to engage students and to enhance learning outcomes in different ways. As only 12% of syllabi include a technology element this area can be taken further advantage of, especially given the many options for use of technology in the classroom today. Those syllabi that already include a technology component do so in numerous and varied ways. One syllabus asks students to conduct a data analysis using publically available data to assess a specific stock and flow of migrants, the effect of their presence in host countries, and the effect of their departure on sending communities, and to practice presenting these these data to support an argument. But not all uses of technology involve quantitative analysis. Several syllabi ask students to volunteer to post to a class blog. Students are encouraged (but not necessarily required) to post their thoughts in text or to post any links to current events or other online resources related to the topics covered in the course. One syllabus incorporates podcasts as required “readings,” and yet another course encourages students to use an app to upload short videos with key take-away points after each class that the app automatically aggregates into a joint class-video.

Figure 2: Share of syllabi with specific thematic elements



## Conclusions: Towards a comprehensive teaching agenda

This brief analysis represents a first attempt to take stock of the teaching being done in the field of migration and citizenship. The collection of almost 100 syllabi is a useful resource for novice and seasoned instructors alike to formulate ideas for the design of entire courses, specific sessions, or to compare assignments and key readings. To further improve its usefulness the analysis suggests that the syllabus bank should increase by size and breadth. In particular, it would be advantageous to include further syllabi from other disciplines outside of political science, including sociology, anthropology, human geography, and economics. This is also true for topics such as diaspora studies and emigration



that are thus far underrepresented. This might also promote the interdisciplinary character of courses. At current, the syllabus bank is also heavily skewed toward US institutions, so recruiting further syllabi from other geographic regions would help us better understand how instructors are approaching migration and citizenship globally.

The analysis of the collected syllabi reveals that future syllabi can do more to include a focus on gender, adopt an explicit interdisciplinary approach, highlight migrants' rights, the meanings of ethnic identities, and securitization issues, as well as incorporate current news in a meaningful manner – all of which seems to be of particular relevance for a comprehensive understanding of human mobility and citizenship.

Lastly, there is room for further creativity in terms of assignments and student engagement beyond the classroom. One notable assignment asked students to give “TED Talks” on a migration topic of their choosing. Another syllabus featured an optional community service learning component, and a third asked students to submit two short papers describing their “participation beyond the course material outside of class and its readings—that is, by attending campus lectures, presentations, conferences, films, or other activities.” Finally, one syllabus required students to hold a “migration and citizenship mini-conference” as part of the coursework. Given the myriad ways that migration and citizenship-related topics intimately affect our campuses and communities, there is ample opportunity to think about facilitating student engagement with these themes in interesting and new ways.

APSA Migration and Citizenship Syllabus bank: <https://connect.apsanet.org/s43/syllabus-bank/>

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