

The Politics Classroom

Host: Professor Floros

Ep. 2022.20: Love, Comps, and IR

In the Classroom: Anya Stewart

(University of California, Davis, PhD student in Political Science)

Professor Floros: I received my PhD in 2008, having spent six years in graduate school in pursuit of that degree. Since then, I've been a professor, and while I sometimes look back on my grad school years with nostalgic longing for a simpler time, I am then typically brought back to reality with PTSD-like flashbacks to the many struggles and insecurities that nearly tanked my graduate studies. In this era of the Great Resignation and "quiet quitting," I think it's useful to reflect on how we got where we are and think about the path not taken. In service of that reflection, today I'm speaking with a graduate student in the thick of her studies about what she's done, what she's doing, and what she hopes to do in the future. So, let's get started in The Politics Classroom recorded on September 10, 2022.

Intro and Outro Music: Three Goddesses by Third Age

Professor Floros: You're listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC Radio. I'm Professor Kate Floros, a Clinical Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois, Chicago. You can find me on Twitter and TikTok @DrFloros. You can also learn about me, my guests, and the podcast at thepoliticsclassroom.org.

My guest in The Classroom today is Anya Stewart. Anya received her bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California-Davis, and is currently pursuing her PhD in political science, also at UC Davis. While still an undergraduate, Anya interned in the office of the California Lieutenant Governor, and between undergrad and graduate school, she served as an academic advisor in the UC Davis Political Science Department, and as the membership director and the legislative aid for the Personal Insurance Federation of California, an industry lobbying firm. She's currently studying international relations and comparative politics, and, in the interest of full disclosure, she is currently employed as a research assistant through a National Science Foundation grant on which I am a co-principal investigator.

Anya Stewart, welcome to The Politics Classroom.

Anya Stewart: Thank you so much for having me.

Professor Floros: So, I like to ask all of my guests what led them to their field of study. So, why political science, and what was it about the subject that led you to want a career in the field?

Anya Stewart: So, my mom is a physician. I remember her dropping me off at the dorms. I came into UC Davis as an undergrad undeclared and like, very classic, you know, "I need to figure out my life" kind of journey. She dropped me off at the dorms and she looked at me and she said, "You know, you'd make a great doctor." And I'm like, "Okay." So I, uh, tried my hand at, uh, Introduction to Chemistry, and safe to say, it, it did not go particularly well.

Professor Floros: Oh no.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. The whole, the whole, um, orbital thing and, and an atom is a whole, yeah, it's not my thing. Not my deal.

Professor Floros: Okay.

Anya Stewart: But at the same time, this was 2012. I was also taking Introduction to American Politics. And this was during the presidential election for 2012. And we watched the presidential debates and, you know, from then on, it was, I was pretty much hooked.

I had been interested in politics my whole life, but having grown up in Alaska, my views were not well represented. I, I didn't feel like I had a, a strong voice. And so I didn't feel compelled to pursue it at least while I was growing up, but moving to California and experiencing, um, viewpoints that were similar to mine, and especially, you know, during that 2012 presidential election was, was very exciting and, uh, got me hooked from then on.

Professor Floros: So do you intend to become a professor after you earn your PhD? Or do you have a different career path in mind?

Anya Stewart: Uh, the career path I have in mind is very fluid. I would be definitely open to being a professor, but it's not something I have my heart dead set on.

Um, similar to when I was an undergrad, I'm sort open to the journey ahead of me. And I would be very happy teaching at a, at a prestigious university. I think I would also be very happy teaching at a community college and writing a book on my own time. You know, not feeling pressured to publish all the time, but teaching, I do think I would be good at, and I, I think I could see it in my future.

Professor Floros: Okay. You know, I think that's such a healthy attitude because, I mean, I came into graduate school wanting to be a professor, but wanting to be a professor at the type of institution that I went to, which was a small liberal arts college Mm-hmm, when I got to graduate school, the messages I got were you wanna be at a research university, you wanna focus on research, you wanna publish public. And at some point I kind of lost sight of my own ambition, or I was scared to express what I really wanted and it led to some less than stellar outcomes for my career.

So, I think like being open to a variety of possible outcomes, I think is probably gonna be much better for your mental health than how, how I approached it. So, so good for you. Okay. So there's so much about your biography that I wanna talk about, but before that I understand that you met your person in an Intro to International Relations class taught by your current work supervisor and my co-principal investigator, Professor Heather Elko.

So, what is it about international relations that was so conducive to finding love?

Anya Stewart: Oh, oh, good question. Oh my goodness. Well, so the story of that goes is that camera and my husband and I had two classes together, uh, and his strategy for every class that he would take is he would raise his hand and ask it really smart sounding question on the first day of class so that he would make a nice first impression and then never go to class.

So I was there for his first two beautiful questions. And I was like, oh my gosh, I gotta study with this guy. And, uh, so I introduced myself, uh, in Heather Elko's class. And I, I swear, I saw like little hearts above his, above his head in a very animate style. And I was like, I'm Anya, he's like, Hi,

Professor Floros: Laughter

Anya Stewart: And so, you know, sort of the rest is history, but, uh, I think what really brought us together for IR was the Bach Stravinsky game or the battle of the sexes game. Classic for learning IR and, uh, helped us decide on our dates a couple of times. It's good.

Professor Floros: Oh, that's really fun. So he actually went to class then just so he could hang out with you.

Anya Stewart: Yes. He went to those classes much more frequently than any other class.

Professor Floros: That's fantastic. Well, then you are also partially, uh, should be credited with his career as well then.

Anya Stewart: That's very true. I agree with that.

Professor Floros: okay, great. That's great. When we used to have like paper syllabi, I had a section where I would leave space for people to write down the name and email address or phone number of someone in class.

And I always said, don't use this to be a stalker, but if you end up finding love as a function of this, then Invite me to the wedding and I'll get you a present. And to this day, I still have never been contacted about a wedding coming from, from my class. So

Anya Stewart: not yet,

Professor Floros: not yet, but Heather definitely has one up on me there.

Uh, you are the, a true love success story from international relations. Okay. So, are you focusing on IR as a graduate student in order to fortify your marriage and to keep going smoothly because it began in an IR classroom?

Anya Stewart: You know, that is the secret to a successful marriage. I gotta say is pursuing a, uh, very lengthy degree to fortify, to fortify all the information that went into the beginnings of your relationship.

No, no, I, I am pursuing IR just because I find it. Endlessly interesting. My thirst for knowledge for IR is never stated. And so I'm pursuing the degree in, uh, self-masochism and also, you know, self-fulfillment as we grad students tend to do.

Professor Floros: Yes. And we will definitely talk about that in just a minute. Okay. So during your undergraduate studies, you interned in the Lieutenant Governor's office.

Anya Stewart: mm-hmm.

Professor Floros: So, what led you to pursue an internship in that particular office?

Anya Stewart: Yeah. So as a student, uh, I was a peer advisor for the political science department. I obviously went on to be, become a staff advisor, but during that time, uh, I would often advise my peers to seek internships and I thought I'd take my own advice. At that time as well, I sort of had, uh, an open schedule, I'd fulfill my requirements and had the time to do an internship and the really cool thing about Sacramento is that it's a very important state capital. and it is one of the most accessible sort of political stepping stones in the country, aside from like DC and even DC is very closed environment. Even if you have the chance to intern there, it's, it's hard to get in with, with the people. Um, so working in Sacramento and interning in Sacramento is a really good opportunity if you're interested in rising in politics. And so, I chose the Lieutenant Governor's Office because one, there was an opening there, which was great. and two, they have a really interesting sort of staff structure because interestingly, while, uh, Arnold Schwarzenegger was, was. governor, he had a very active Lieutenant Governor who often was vocally opposed to Arnold's policies. So, Arnold slashed the budget of the Lieutenant governor's office and

Professor Floros: wow. That's lovely.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. And so now they have like five staff members doing 20 different jobs and they're in desperate native interns all the time. So, I got to do a ton of different sorts of work. I'd worked on constituent issues. One of my favorite things ever was that I got to, uh, help, uh, an elderly

couple register to vote because, they didn't have access to do it online. So, I got to mail them a voter registration thing. So that was one of my favorite things. But Lieutenant governor at that time was Gavin Newsom, who's of course, governor. Now I have selfies with him because I'm a trash person and I chose to do that and yeah,

Professor Floros: clearly he was okay with it.

Anya Stewart: Yeah.

Professor Floros: That's really funny. and so did working in a state office help you decide you wanted to work in IR and not in state or local politics or that the two are unrelated.

Anya Stewart: Well, as any person who deals with The Public, you know, T and P capitalized working in a constituents office or working in customer service, the public is often difficult to deal with.

Professor Floros: Mm-hmm,

Anya Stewart: especially those that call in and, and want to express very extreme views. That happens a lot. So that's kind of a turnoff for someone like me who tends to be a little more introverted and less combative, and like less ready for the fight. Right? Uh, as opposed to my husband who is like very, very much a people person and then very much ready for the fight.

So to speak. In undergrad, I had focused on IR and I tried, it was like, it's like, I came back to my love of IR rather than, than, uh, I was turned off of, you know, anything to do with like local or especially American politics. American politics continually makes me sad. so I, yeah. Try not to pursue it, but then I, and then I think about things like war and, uh, climate change. So, you know, who know.

Professor Floros: Yeah. When I started in undergrad, I had an internship in DC and my expectation was that I was gonna be like a social justice lobbyist in DC, and I did it for a semester and there were some extenuating circumstances. Like my supervisor went on paternity leave halfway through, and like, I was less supervised and, you know, there was a lot, but there were also two pieces of legislation that I was working on during that semester and both of them died for, in my opinion, really stupid reasons.

One reason being the person who was gonna introduce the legislation, got the flu. And I'm like, if I'm working my butt off on something that dies because someone got sick one day. So I realized from that experience that I do not have the personality to do that type of work.

Anya Stewart: Right.

Professor Floros: And so that internship was really important for me to realize, like, what I think I'm going to do for my career is not going to be something that I'm going to want to do for a career. And so even though, that was the outcome, I was really glad that I did it. So would you do it again, working in the Lieutenant Governor's office, even knowing that you don't want to pursue a career in state politics or, you know, whatever is, is it something that, that you felt was worthwhile enough that it was that if you had to do it over again, you would do over again?

Anya Stewart: Absolutely. It was a very informative experience and it, you know, there was nothing that was bad about it. It was just, I didn't feel fulfilled by that type of work. And that was very useful knowledge to continue forward. And I met a lot of really good people as well. So that's, you know, as long as you live, no matter what career you're in, you're never gonna escape networking. It's just a part of life. Yeah.

It's hard for people like myself. It's easier for other people like my husband. So, you know, it's a skill everybody has to work on at some point.

Professor Floros: And so would you, so you recommended it when you were a peer advisor, you recommended internships. I'm assuming when you were a staff advisor, you recommended internships.

If someone was hemming and hawing about doing an internship, what would you say to them to convince them that doing an internship is a good thing.

Anya Stewart: Well, of course, for that person, you would wanna make sure that they have the, the time and opening in their schedule. They have fulfilled all the requirements, right? So that, that would be the next step so that they're not spending their time on an internship when they shouldn't be, but if they were hemming and hawing about it, I would say it is so much more useful to get real time experience in a career or in an office that you could possibly see yourself in, then just You know, jump into it and be in a job because internships have classes, biases, because you're not paid. And so people who don't have to be paid are, you know, much more likely to be much more able to get an internship. So there's that, that's something I feel it's important to mention.

Professor Floros: Sure. Yep.

Anya Stewart: But when you commit to working in a job, You wanna stay there for at least a year and working in a job that's not good for you. It's not doesn't work for your personality. It just sucks. It just sucks. So you might as well get the experience out of an internship to know whether or not you like it.

Professor Floros: Yeah. So advice that I would give to students is, if you can get credit for that internship, then you should absolutely do that. So in the UIC political science department, we have a six credit internship class that has a one hour a week class component and a 10 hour a week internship component.

So you're at least getting class credit for doing the work. But also, and maybe this is increasing, given what you mentioned about historically people with means have been able to forgo part-time work or whatever, while they're doing their internship. UIC has started a fund that you can apply to and get paid for your internship hours.

And you know, so at your college or university, you might wanna check and see if, if your university does something similar where you can get paid from your university, for the, the hours you're working at your internship. Because I think that, I think that point was an excellent one to make, that the experience, whether it's finding out that you're good at something not good at something building skills suited for a career or not. Those opportunities should be open to everyone, regardless of means. And the fact that historically, Only privileged people were able to, to carve that time out for that. A lot of people do internships over the summer when a lot of students like need to work full time so that they can pay their tuition and things like that.

So, definitely, um, check with your university to see if they have a program that can help with funding during your internship. And if they don't, ask them why not? I mean, they should. Okay. Thank you. Before we leave your undergraduate career.

Anya Stewart: Oh boy.

Professor Floros: You know, what's coming. Don't you really?

Anya Stewart: Yeah.

Professor Floros: You were the president of The Spokes, an all female acapella group at UC Davis.

Tell me about The Spokes. And did you like do competitions, like PitchP erfect?

Anya Stewart: Yeah. I lived out my Pitch Perfect dreams with The Spokes. Yeah. So for listeners, UC Davis is a very bike friendly town. It is one of the biking capitals, I don't know, maybe of the United States.

Professor Floros: Okay.

Anya Stewart: And so the spokes obviously is, you know, all the, the sticky-outi things in the scientific terms on a bike?

Professor Floros: Um, yes. Okay.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. And I lived at my pitch perfect dreams with, with The Spokes. Had that talent show, you know, dream in high school, like, oh, I'm gonna, wow everybody. You know? Like in a very Disney way and it never happened, and I got to live out those dreams as well, uh, with my acapella group, which was very nice.

Uh, yes, we did compete. Uh, I think the best that we did was we came, I think we came in fourth in a semi-final. Which was pretty good for the west coast. Semi-final. I won award and award for my beatboxing, which was the, my peak. Like I peaked in college, man. I'm on my way down now, but it was a good peak and I appreciate it for its time.

Professor Floros: would, would you like to provide an example of your beatboxing skills, uh, for the podcast?

Anya Stewart: Oh, I don't know if it's gonna sound good.

Professor Floros: okay. I'm not gonna force you, but that would be really funny.

Anya Stewart: oh boy. All right.

Beat Boxing

There you go.

Professor Floros: That's amazing. Good job. That was really awesome. You guys don't have a CD, do you?

Anya Stewart: Uh, we're on Spotify.

Professor Floros: Are you really?

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm.

Professor Floros: Is the group still going?

Anya Stewart: The group is still alive. So we would do an annual, a big, big annual show called Hella Capella Uhhuh. And we would be in the Mohabi Center on the east Davis campus, which when we would sell out 1800 seats in the Jackson Hall, in the Mohabi Center.

Uh, and it was, and we would invite groups from over California, in Oregon, as well as from Oxford. So we would invite a ton of groups to come join us. So the, the group suffered a little bit during the

pandemic, since, since they couldn't put on Hella Capella and get a little bit of a profit from that and donate some of the proceeds to a charity of their choice.

But so I think they are, they sort of had to get creative over the last few years, but they are still alive.

Professor Floros: That is amazing. That is amazing. Okay. We're gonna take a quick break. We'll be back with Anya Stewart. You're listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC radio.

Transition Music: The Spokes, UC Davis

Professor Floros: You're listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC radio I'm professor Kate Floros and in the classroom with me today is UC Davis graduate student Anya, Stewart.

Okay. So after, uh, your undergraduate time, you were a staff academic advisor in the UC Davis political science department. So in your opinion, what makes a good academic advisor?

Anya Stewart: Hmm.

The field of academic advising has actually changed a lot in the last few years. Its become less, very clinical. These are your requirements, and you have to fulfill them taking a much more holistic approach to the student, trying to, to meet the needs, uh, or direct them to someone who can professionally meet their needs.

Um, such as, you know, a mental health professional, because, Sometimes, as an academic advisor, you, you get a student in their most stressful time of their life. And that turns into a stress dump, which just happens and that's okay. Uh, what makes a good advisor though, is, is patience. I would say. Because not only do you have to deal with students who are navigating a bureaucracy sometimes for, you know, the first time in their family, like I said, first generation college student, they don't.

Um, like the family institutional knowledge to help them navigate. So that's brand new to them, but you yourself are also navigating a, a bureaucracy and trying to find loopholes and workarounds and all of the red tape. Um, so I think patience is, is really what is key?

Professor Floros: What can students do to have a really productive, meaningful interaction with their academic advisor?

Anya Stewart: Come prepared. Because the, the amount of time that an academic advisor spends explaining the requirements, takes up a lot of time. And so if the student wanted more of a, uh, more of a career advising appointment or something that is less sort of robotic, then the student needs to know. And like I said, I, I do like to teach and the academic advisor, part of that did exercise sort of a teaching part of my brain.

It does, it does come in there for sure.

Professor Floros: But students would come in and just be like, advise me. And you were like on what, what do you need? and they didn't know.

Anya Stewart: Yep. Yep. And they'd be like, "what do I, what do I need to graduate"? And I, I had one student who was, we were emailing, we weren't in a face-to-face appointment, but they just refuse to understand the, the requirements where you had to take three classes from this piece of your major and the three classes from over here. And if you took a certain class from each of those parts, you couldn't do something else because of the way majors are set up in, in universities. Sometimes it's very frustrating. And I had to explain those requirements. I swear like 50 times. And I'm like, "buddy, can you just, can you just come in? Can we just talk about it?" And he just refused?

Professor Floros: Oh, no.

Anya Stewart: Yeah.

Professor Floros: Did he eventually get it?

Anya Stewart: Yes, he did. Okay. Because he wasn't gonna graduate unless he finished those requirements. So it how it goes.

Professor Floros: what do the faculty need to understand about academic advising that they are probably clueless about and probably make academic advisors lives more miserable?

Anya Stewart: I would say leave the requirements to the advisors. Don't advise the students on something that, that, that faculty know less or nothing about. And also, if an institution uses academic advisors to schedule classes such as UC Davis, you get what you get and you don't throw a fit.

Professor Floros: What do you mean by that?

Anya Stewart: So I scheduled classes and I had some complaints about, so what we had to do is in, there were peak hours between nine and four. And you had to schedule 25% of your classes outside of the peak hours, because, there was only so many classrooms on campus that you can do that.

Anya Stewart: Sure.

Professor Floros: And so there were people who were definitely fine with teaching very early in the morning, Heather was one of them.

Um, but there were people who made it, their, their life's mission to be between the hours of 10 and two, which are obviously even more popular. So that makes scheduling hard. And as a, as a faculty member, when your classes are scheduled, you get what you get and you don't throw a fit.

Professor Floros: And that was your job.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: that seems like a lot of responsibility for someone who probably wasn't very senior in the hierarchy.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. I was a very frightening game of Tetris and it was my first, um, it was my first like big kid job.

Yeah. And, you know, and working with professors that I had taken classes from, so I was, I was very intimidated and it was a lot to learn, but it was also a good learning experience.

Professor Floros: Good. Okay. Because there's so much freedom with our job in terms of , you know, you don't have to punch a clock, you can work in a coffee shop. You can, you know, you're basically in your head a lot of the time.

Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: I think we forget about how to interact with people in a respectful and professional way sometimes.

And I think we need to do better about that. Especially dealing with staff who certainly do not get paid enough to deal with temper tantrums.

Anya Stewart: Well, and, and staff in my experience, especially advisors have to deal with frustrations from both the student side and from the administration side, which can include, include faculty, but sometimes it doesn't sometimes it's just like the bureaucracy itself, and rules made up to, to give us all headaches. And so staff at universities do really great work and, and, uh, they should be more appreciated.

Professor Floros: Okay. Good. All right. So after you were an undergraduate or an academic advisor in the political science department, you became a lobbyist for an insurance company.

And when I found this out about you, I teased you a little bit about working for the dark side because you lobbied for an insurance conglomerate. I don't even know what right now is. But tell me about the work you did for them. And like what you learned about why insurance companies need lobbyists.

Anya Stewart: Yeah.

Um, so I, myself was never a registered lobbyist. Uh, was I directed a pack, a political action committee as well as I was a legislative aid for the lobbyist. So I tracked a lot of legislation and helped them determine where a bill was in its life cycle so they could lobby it or not. So what I worked for was a trade association of insurance companies.

So, five or six insurance companies got together and they were like, "Hey, we need to coordinate on these legislative issues. Let's start this nonprofit trade association and pay some staff In order to, you know, sort of get some collective action going and try to win out or not lose on these legislative issues." And so, yeah, I still being a very liberal person, was working for a much more moderate sort of moderate politics even to the right sort of firm and it was definitely a learning experience.

I, I ended up in the center on a lot more issues than I thought to clarify it wasn't the, the trade association I worked for did not have like any health insurance or anything. It was like personal. It's home and auto insurance. And so they worked on issues like wildfire issues in California, which are obviously a big.

Preparing for earthquakes and retrofitting homes for earthquakes. And the interesting thing about California is that there is an elected insurance commissioner, which is not California, is not the only state that has an elected insurance commissioner, but it is one of only a handful of states. And so what it does is it makes the insurance commissioner position political.

So often you have people who use it as a stepping stone to, to try to run for something else. It's like an interim. Like I was an assembly member or I was a Senator for a long time. I've turned out of my, uh, ability to be in the legislative branch. So I'm gonna go into the executive branch and see if I can wait out something more important, at least that's my, that's my IM interpretation of it.

I only speak for myself there, but...

Professor Floros: And what did the, in the elected insurance commissioner do? Like, I don't know that I even thought that there would be an elected official that deals with insurance. So tell me about that. Educate me.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. So the insurance commissioner is, uh, runs the department of insurance, at least in California.

They can sort of sponsor legislation. They can't, you know, introduce legislation, but they can work with, uh, legislators to get legislation going. And they work with, uh, career, you know, career bureaucrats in the department of insurance to, to try to correct market failures, uh, in the insurance market and then sometimes over correct on market failures. So, yeah.

Professor Floros: Okay. So what, what are some of the perceived market failures that, that they were dealing with when, when you were working for this organization?

Anya Stewart: Yeah. So when I was working there, wildfire was, and probably continues to be the big issue. So, uh, insurance rates in California are constrained by something called Proposition 103, which passed in 1988.

Uh, all this knowledge, just slu, suddenly coming flooding back to

Professor Floros: It's always there. You never lose it.

Anya Stewart: It's always there. And, uh, so they're constrained, uh, by Prop 103. So the insurance, especially the property insurance rates in California are heavily suppressed and it means that insurers can't charge what they need to charge in order to mitigate the very serious risks to property that are in California.

So for example, in Colorado, where fire risk is also a very big deal, Insurance rates are 50% higher in Colorado than they are in California. And you can imagine that Colorado probably doesn't have to deal with as many flood risks or as many, you know, earthquake risks. I am not an actuary. So, you know, don't quote me on that.

So there's that? Yeah. So that, that, those were definitely some of the, um, the obstacles that the trade association was trying to overcome.

Professor Floros: So were they, were they hoping to raise the artificially lowered premiums they could? that they could charge customers? I don't know. This is like super nerdy wonky stuff, but I'm, I'm actually really interested in how this works.

Yeah.

Anya Stewart: It, it actually really is interesting. Uh, especially if you're a politics nerd, which I'm positive, all of your listeners

Professor Floros: That's right. That's right

Anya Stewart: And so it wasn't as if they were trying to raise the rates. I mean, it, they would've been very happy if they could have raised the rates, but it, they more often than not were trying to stop the lowering of rates, because if once the, the required rates, the limits on rates got too low, insurers might consider leaving the state.

Professor Floros: Okay.

Anya Stewart: And, uh, so I think that happening in Florida as well, where there were some insur, insurance companies that could no longer write insurance in Florida because they couldn't charge the rates that they needed to, to cover the risk.

Professor Floros: But that's still for like the consumers, the insurance was probably still really high for them, but the risk was so high that the premium should have been high, but no one wants to pay super high premiums for their insurance.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. Yeah. And then, you know, as you have insurers, leave the market, you have less competition and less variation on rates as well.

Professor Floros: And so did this department of insurance. Were they able to dictate to ensures about like, cause one thing you always hear about is, you know, something flooded, but it, you, the flood isn't covered or the damage from the swell isn't covered only the flood and blah, blah, blah.

It's like all of these carve outs in the, in the rules, is that something that the California legislature tinkered with? And so that would, might be another thing that they would be interested in the legislation is, you know, what they could exempt out and things like that, or was that like within the sole whatever of, of insurers.

Anya Stewart: So what insurers do is they make a rate filing, um, with the Department of Insurance. Um, and there's a lot of moving parts to it. And where the legislature comes in, is they, in my experience, in my very, hazy memory of it, they want to, they want to force insurers to write in certain areas. And some of those areas included what is referred to as the wooye, which is the Woodland Urban Interface, WUI, the WUI where

Professor Floros: okay.

Anya Stewart: Much of the fire risk is

Professor Floros: Sure.

Anya Stewart: And, uh, they wanted, they wanted to force insurers to write in the WUI and they wanted to force them to charge very low rates for it. And which is great for consumers, but

Professor Floros: sure.

Anya Stewart: The insurers are like, if you're gonna force us do this, we can just leave. So. Bye

Professor Floros: And so did that happen a lot? Did insurers leave a lot?

Anya Stewart: Uh, you would have very sort of sensationalist bills. I, to my knowledge, I, I don't think insurers left California yet. Um, but that's those very sensationalist bills would get introduced and that's where the lobbyists would come in and be like, "Hey, this looks great on paper for for, for the consumers in the area, but we can't do this". Um,

Professor Floros: yeah.

Anya Stewart: And so that's where you have these industry experts that have to come in and teach, teach legislators how insurance works and how it doesn't work.

Professor Floros: And you said they, that the, the companies in your trade association also dealt with car insurance.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: California recently just passed something about like you can't, you soon won't be able to buy internal combustion engines.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: like cars, right. They have to be electric in like 10 years or something. So, is this something that the insurance companies would've jumped in on and been lobbying about because that's gonna affect? I'm assuming that insurance rates on electric cars are different than on internal combustion cars or what I mean, I don't know. And I know you're not working in this industry anymore, but would that be the type of legislation that an insurance company might be involved with while it's working its way through the Assembly?

Anya Stewart: Well, it kind of depends. Um, I. In my uninformed and, and layman opinion, I don't think that they probably would've had a huge, big problem with it. It would've depended on if the car dealers asked the insurers to get in on it. And so you might see some, like, sort of coordination and back scratching with between the lobbying firms.

You know, “If you can help us lobby this issue, we can maybe help you with something in the future,” that kind of thing. So I'm sure that the new car dealer's lobbying group would have would've vehemently opposed such legislation. And you know, again, again, that's just a guess on my part, but I, yeah, I, I think you're right, that insurance rates would be different on, uh, electric cars rather than combustion engines, but at the same time, uh, insurance companies are getting in on this like very, uh, software tracking technology where it like tracks how often you break and what speed you travel at, and the, the good side of that is that, you know, if you're a safe driver, according to these metrics, then you get a lower insurance rate, which is great.

Um, for a Luddite, Alaskan hermit such as myself, that scares the crap outta me. And I want it nowhere near my car.

Professor Floros: So yeah, I, um, Every time. I see that, like, my insurance also is like, “oh, you wanna be in this program?” And I'm like, oh, that sounds like a good program. And I looked it up. I was like, Nope, mm-hmm mm-hmm lead foot here.

Nope. I don't want you to know, because the thing is, it's one thing to say now, like, oh, we'll lower your insurance rate if you're a good driver, but the unimplied, other side of that is if you're a lead foot, then we could raise your rates at some point too. And that,

Anya Stewart: Yeah,

Professor Floros: I don't want them anywhere near my car either.

Anya Stewart: Right.

Professor Floros: Uh, okay. Let's take another break. You're listening to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC radio.

Transition Music: The Spokes, UC Davis

Professor Floros: Welcome back to The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC radio I'm Professor Floros and I'm in the classroom today with UC Davis graduate student Anya Stewart.

So Anya let's actually talk about graduate school. So you you've mentioned that you chose IR over American or local or state politics because you're insatiably curious about it and the idea of American politics? Well, it makes me sad. So I guess I'm projecting that it makes you sad as well.

There are some days when I'm like, oh, I guess, I guess local and state politics isn't that bad. And then I realize why I'm happy studying international relations. It's just, I don't, I don't know how people study their own country.

Like to me, I, I don't know how people do it. I, I, I could not do it.

Anya Stewart: Way too close to home, literally. And American politics makes me so sad.

Professor Floros: So, yay. Congratulations. Good choice. what, what advice do you have for people who are thinking about going to graduate school in general, but then also, maybe for political science?

Anya Stewart: Yeah. In general, don't use graduate school as a way to put off entering the work. As an academic advisor, I saw a lot of students thinking about grad school just because they weren't, they weren't ready sort of to adult after that. And, uh, it is a really difficult transition to going from, from your college experience to like, Doing, you know, the rest of your life.

I, I don't wanna minimize that, but at the same time, you shouldn't spend years of your life and a lot of money sometimes pursuing a degree that's gonna mean nothing for your career. So, just jump in, enter the workforce. If you're in a job that sucks. It's okay. Everybody's been there. Stay there for as long as you can that, you know, in a sense that it doesn't harm your mental health or your, your physical health and then look for something else. That's just, that's just the way life is

For political science specifically, you know, as always talk to your political science professors. They're the ones who, um, went to, went to grad school, did the thing, and you can, you know, get a sense of what they're interested in and, uh, how, how they have continued to be interested in certain subjects.

And at the same time, you can also kind of get a sense of what their lifestyle is like. You know, sometimes the lifestyle of a professor can be very attractive, you know, um, being able to do you still have to work during the summer, but you may not have to teach classes during the summer. And so you may be able to have a little bit more freedom in the work that you pursue.

You know, it's, it's, it's choices like that, that seem very superficial, but are actually very important. Sure. and, uh, there's, you know, I, I was implied at the top of the podcast. Like you can pursue careers that are outside of academia as well. So think tanks, CIA, even, you know, NSA. Go for it.

Professor Floros: So you are doing me this huge favor of talking to me in the midst of taking your comprehensive exams. I mean, not literally because that would be insane for you to take time out of your actual exam time to talk to me, but you have taken one set of comps. You're gearing up to take another set of comprehensive exams. Tell me about that experience in terms of whether or not, you see the value in comprehensive exams or whether it's just kind of a right of passage that everybody has to get through.

Anya Stewart: I see it much more as a right of passage. Let me just put it in no uncertain terms, this sh** sucks.

Professor Floros: It's terrible. It is a terrible experience. Yes. Go on.

Anya Stewart: Personally, I don't see the, the career value in it, cuz I'm never gonna have to do this again. I'm never gonna have to spend 48 hours dumping all of my knowledge of a subject into 30 pages of work. Hopefully, you know, the work will be useful in the future where I can just drag and drop into a lit review or something like that if I need it. So that's good. I've also spent the entire summer relearning all the material so that's a good exercise for my brain.

But at the same time, there's in my view, no need to do this in 48 hours, we could have a week to write it. And in my view, we don't have to do it in two subjects, we should only have to do it in one, but so it goes, academia is a longstanding institution and we have to pay our dues.

So it is what it is.

Professor Floros: Yeah, I think part of it is a screening mechanism, right? If you can't do this somehow, that means you probably won't have a successful career. So it's a way to weed people out.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: At the same time. I mean, I, I thought comps sucked too. So I'm not, I'm not trying to be apologist about it, but especially if, you know, you mentioned that you could see yourself being happy teaching at a community college.

You would have to teach more than one field, right? I mean, there, there are professors who are teaching American, comparative and IR, right. And so having not, now at the same time, if you can do the work that's necessary to get a PhD and then find out you have to teach a field that you did not test in, you can also learn it, learn what you need to do at that point. Yeah.

It, it, comps are, comps are crazy, but once you do them, you have entered into the realms of just your dissertation. So, have you had an opportunity to think about what you want to do your dissertation work on or are you just trying to survive comps first before you dive too deeply into that?

Anya Stewart: Are you trying to kill me? Is this, is this my death we're recording?

Professor Floros: No, this is, this is the completely oblivious. Every adult who knows somebody who's getting a PhD, either not knowing or forgetting how stressful it is when people ask them about their dissertation and when they intend to be done with it.

So this is me just, uh, modeling the questions you are gonna get until you actually defend and leave.

Anya Stewart: Well, see that I can get on board with, because it does actually prepare me for something that I would encounter later in my career.

Professor Floros: (laughter)

Anya Stewart: uh, to answer your question, I, well, based on the work that, uh, that I do for you, uh, very interested in insurgency and in civil war. I think I have an idea that might have legs, but I dunno, we're gonna find out. So after, after I complete comprehensive exams, I then have to do a qualifying exam. So

Professor Floros: what!!

Anya Stewart: we'll see if I

Professor Floros: What, that's a different thing

Anya Stewart: Yes, that's a different thing.

Professor Floros: Tell me about this

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm So yeah, so for our listeners, uh, a comprehensive exam is a big giant knowledge dump qualifying exam is much more like a, like a research design present. It's like a little tiny mini defense where you, where you come up with an I an idea that should be publishable. It doesn't necessarily have to relate to your dissertation, but it would be probably good if it did.

You, you complete as much of this research design as, as is, uh, reasonably possible. And then you present it and, um, for IR, uh, there are some old guard IR folks on the faculty that like, to also use that opportunity to do sort of like an oral IR exam of like, okay, tell me about realism. Go.

Professor Floros: Even if it has nothing to do with your paper.

Anya Stewart: Yeah.

Professor Floros: Okay. So in, in my graduate program, we did have a PhD paper as part of our exam process. We didn't call it an exam, we called it the PhD paper.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm.

Professor Floros: That was supposed to be a test run. Well, actually it didn't have to be a test run on the dissertation. It usually was though.

Anya Stewart: Yeah.

Professor Floros: So then do you also have to do like a prospectus defense?

Anya Stewart: Yeah, I think so. I think so. I'll let you know when I get there.

Professor Floros: Yeah. There are lots of hurdles. And again, it's gate, it's gatekeeping and you know, another day we might have a whole conversation about if we really wanna diversify the academy, which everybody at least pays lip service to doing, but no one is willing to reassess the gatekeeping that we do.

Then it seems like we're only paying lip service to the idea of broadening who can be successful in the academy because we're actually doing nothing to change how we're assessing success in the academy. I, that's just a lot, that's a lot to have to jump all ot of hoops to have to jump through.

Anya Stewart: It certainly is. It certainly is. I, um, I'm just gonna focus on my own work and see if I can make it through those gates. But, I personally am in a very privileged position. Uh, so. I don't know. I don't know what to say about it. It's being, being a part of the system is being complicit, but also gives you the most leverage to be able to change it. So, I, it's hard.

Professor Floros: Yeah. Well, speaking of change from within you are a member of the grad student union at UC Davis and held leadership in the union or on the bargaining committee. Is that accurate?

Anya Stewart: I was a head steward with the UAW 2865, which is the academic student employees union at UC Davis. I was not on, I am not on the bargaining committee.

Bargaining continues. Uh, even now,

Professor Floros: contract are you outta contract?

Anya Stewart: I don't know, it's, it's very possible that we are, uh, they voted to extend the, the contract definitely ended, Um, but they voted to extend it a few times. I don't know if we continue to be in contract right now. So three different, uh, units are bargaining at the same time.

So we have the, we have the TAs essentially, but also include tutors, readers and other academic student employees. Then we have the graduate student researchers union, which is arguing for the very first time. And then we also have postdocs that are bargaining right now, post-docs union. Uh, so it is significant, uh, leverage over the UC, um, right now.

So they're using that opportunity to try to get cost of living increases and, uh, have students not be rent burdened anymore. And, there's quite a lot of bargaining yet to, to be resolved.

Professor Floros: And so you're, you're a, a subsidiary of the United Auto Workers.

Anya Stewart: Yeah, mm-hmm UAW International.

Professor Floros: How, how did that happen?

Anya Stewart: Oh, for, I have no idea. I am confused by it every time it's explained to me, but UAW covers like 400,000 workers and many, many different industries across the world. So who knows? And it, you know, in terms of like pay, uh, the, the union line, which is true and, and it's, it's

surprising for, so the UC is the largest employer in the state, and it's a \$40 billion institution, TAs have about 50% of the teaching load and make up less than 1% of the budget. And so, yeah,

Professor Floros: You mean teach independently or just the, their face time with students?

Anya Stewart: Face time with students, um, grading, um, you know, running, you know, your sections or your maybe called something at other institutions,

Professor Floros: But right. No. Yeah. and that's half of the teaching that's done.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: and less than 1% of the budget.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. I do wanna end that part with like a note of hope that like right now is because three unions are bargain or three units are bargaining all at the same time. That's never happened before in the history of our unions, and it's like the perfect storm of leverage over, over the UC. Any large bureaucracy or employer has incentives to create, you know, the most efficient product out of their workers. And sometimes that ends up abusing the workers. And so that's why we have the unions come in and have to demand concessions from the employer. That's just the way it is. And now that we have three units bargaining at the same time, it's really looking like we can, we can beat back some of the encroachments that the UC wants to make on protections for TAs and GSRs and even win more concessions. So holding out hope and, and, um, looking forward to ending the bargaining in a good place.

Professor Floros: Yeah. Are you, is it moving toward some kind of work stoppage? Because I imagine if you have basically the entire student workforce,

Anya Stewart: mm-hmm,

Professor Floros: going out on strike. The amount of disruption that that would bring to the university would be calamitous. So do, do you think it will get that far? Or the university will come to its senses before that happens?

Anya Stewart: I think. And this is me just speaking for myself. Sure. Yes. The bargaining committee must continue to bargain in bargain in good faith and, and not be planning a strike, uh,

Professor Floros: Right.

Anya Stewart: Because. That's the whole point of good faith, but yeah, I think a strike's gonna happen. Uh, I think, I think at least it has to reach a credible threat before the UC will realize that, that it's a really serious cuz there it's like 40,000 workers.

Professor Floros: Yeah.

Anya Stewart: Which would bring the whole, whole circus to a grinding halt.

Professor Floros: So this isn't just workers at Davis. This is workers across the system.

Anya Stewart: That's right.

Professor Floros: Oh. Now, understanding that you're not just talking about Davis graduate employees, you're talking about the entire system. That is, that is huge.

Anya Stewart: Yeah. Yeah. It's gonna be, it's gonna be a wild time. It's gonna be a big deal and uh, hopefully we'll get a lot of coverage.

Professor Floros: Yeah. Do you have any thoughts about work, life, school, the future that you wanna share with interested listeners?

Anya Stewart: Uh, my second and more difficult comprehensive exam is next week. Uh, I'm looking forward to the very immediate future of next week.

Professor Floros: Being done with next week.

Anya Stewart: Being done.

Professor Floros: Okay. Well, I appreciate you very much for the work that you are doing to forward my research goals. And I am glad to hear that at least some of the work that you're getting paid to do is inspiring your intellectual interest, because that's always fun knowing that you're not asking people to do things that, that are just completely worthless to them. That, that always feels nice. I wanna thank Anya Stewart for giving so much of her time for this interview today. I wish you the best of luck with your comps next week, your studies going forward, and whatever career path you choose.

Anya Stewart: Mm-hmm

Professor Floros: best wishes.

Anya Stewart: Thank you so much for having me.

Professor Floros: Anya Stewart is a PhD student in the political science department at UC Davis studying international relations and comparative politics.

Thanks for joining me today in The Politics Classroom, a podcast of UIC radio. I'm Professor Floros. Find me on Twitter and TikTok at Dr. Floros.

That's all I've got for this week. Class dismissed.

Intro and Outro Music: Three Goddesses by Third Age