

Fall 2015: Intro International Politics (GOVT204-0102-F15): today's class

From: David A Dessler <dadess@wm.edu>

Sent: Friday, October 23, 2015 10:58:36 AM

Subject: Fall 2015: Intro International Politics (GOVT204-0102-F15): today's class

This is really hard to believe. Last night at 11pm I told someone, "this is the most important email I have ever written to students." Meaning to you. I stayed up all night writing it. To prepare for it, I met with friends Wednesday night, I slept only two hours that night, and met with friends all day Wednesday. I need to address the email you received from my mailbox at 12:22pm. The one thing I knew, and everyone knew, is that it might have to be a moderately long email, and with luck a medium long email. It clearly could not be a short email.

I was just about to send it, and my computer crashed. Blue screen. I lost 11 hours of work. And I can't replace it with a short email.

But I do not have time for a long email. But look. You are William & Mary students. This might not be possible, but if it is, you are the students who can do it with me. So here goes.

The email you got from my mailbox at 12:22pm was not sent by me. The story it told was the exact opposite of what was happening in my life, and was told in a way to make you most upset about me. I know that is hard to believe, but what is harder to believe is that I can prove it. Now what questions do you have? Many. I know them. I stated them. I spent eleven hours answering them. They are no longer here and I do not have time to write them again.

I heard many statements about how upset you were about that email on Wednesday when the police prevented me from getting to class. You were upset. I was confused because I did not know you got that email. I thought you got the one I actually wrote, which was the opposite of what you got. Namely, the truth.

I had a great plan for class, and fourteen people helped me develop it over two days.

Alright, let's proceed this way. Please show up for class. I promise you that you won't be frightened if you attend, though I know that many of you could only have been frightened of that email. You won't be frightened in class because the person who wrote that email, and the person described in that email, in fact the person you thought wrote that email, is not me. I know this is totally bizarre, incomprehensible, of course, which is why I needed that fourteen hour email I lost.

Part of the class, by the way, will be a segment of a lecture on World War II I am moving up to today. So not only will you not be frightened, you may even be bored.

How about this. Please come and help me deal with the most serious problem created by that email, which is worry among faculty (my colleagues) about this course. I also want to talk to you about reassuring your parents. I am very sorry for what has happened to you. But you do know me well enough to know that the email you got could not possibly have been from me. I am amazed at how incredibly smart and brave you are. That email could only have been upsetting and confusing and disappointing and here your assignment is to get out a thesaurus and add more adjectives about being disturbed. But I can explain to you, and you will see that you are alright, and our question will be, okay, how do we proceed from here? The discussion is about you, your education, what is in your interests. That is the focus. The context is a little complicated because faculty who also do not understand that email are responding in ways that you need to know about, and maybe you will decide you want to help me address.

The attitude to take is this: something really weird and nearly incomprehensible has happened, but let's treat it not as an emotional problem to be addressed with therapy but as a practical problem of meeting the educational goals of the class. On the one hand, I could not be more sorry you have been put in this position. It is unfair to you. On the other, I am glad it is you, not because I want you to be victims, but because I know you can handle it. You can make the right decision. What can I say, this is life. Another attitude to take, by the way, is: this is really interesting. Because I can assure you nothing like this will happen to you in any other class in college. Or after college for that matter. I hope.

By the way, if I appear tired, it is because I have not slept, and if there is evidence of concern, look at what I have told you about that email. But I am not freaked out about it. Like I said, you will not be frightened. If you want to be frightened, I will give it a try, but as you already know, I have only limited abilities as a teacher, and I do not think I will be able to pull it off.

I keep thinking: this email needs to be longer. But let's do with what we got. See you in class.

Prof Dessler