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From Governor to Educator

10.11.2010 | Faculty, Campus and Community, Students, Law

Students in the University of Dayton's legislative politics course POL 350 differ in what they call their instructor. Some call him "professor," others call him "governor."

Former Ohio Governor Bob Taft, who came to the University of Dayton in 2007 as a distinguished research associate in the School of Education and Allied Professions, is making his teaching debut this semester.

"I've done a lot of lecturing on political topics, but this is my first time leading a course," Taft said. "I've always been passionate about education, and my primary interests at the University of Dayton have been on improving education and access to college."

With a career spanning 30 years in elected office, Taft brings invaluable first-hand experience to the classroom. He comes from a family with considerable experience in all three branches of government: his father and grandfather were both U.S. Senators, and his great-grandfather, William Howard Taft, was president of the United States and later served as U.S. Supreme Court chief justice. Taft's network of contacts in Columbus and Washington, D.C., facilitates VIP guest visits and connections with Capitol Hill officials.

"Having cut his political teeth in the Ohio statehouse and with the unique vantage point that comes from his gubernatorial experience, Gov. Taft is providing students a first-rate learning experience on how legislatures really work," said Jason Pierce, chair of the political science department.

"He has such great connections," said Tyeshia Garrettson, a senior political science major from New York. "I've never been in any other class where I have access to so many people in Congress. And who better to have teach you about politics than someone with actual experience?"

Taft's experience helps with lectures and scheduling guests, but it also helps with assignments, said Ashley Merino, a sophomore political science and pre-law double major from Columbus.

"One of our assignments is to write an advocacy letter to our Congressional representative," Merino said. "Gov. Taft has been able to show us actual letters he has received and give us practical tips on how to write them. What we're learning in the classroom is applicable to our everyday lives"

Other assignments in Taft's class include writing a staff memo on legislation currently pending in Congress. With 2010 an election year, students must also study a Congressional race by following the campaigns and interpreting and analyzing the results of the election.

"It was a lot of work for me to prepare the syllabus, select the textbook, develop the writing assignments for the students and then, of course, class presentation and grading are a new adventure for me," Taft said. "But it's giving me a great opportunity to connect with students and contribute to the University in a new way."

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