Faculty Profile: Bryan Garsten

Yale Professor of Political Science Bryan Garsten often relies on one question to drive classroom discussion. Why do you become angry when you see Injustice? Is self-reliance a form of selfishness? Have you actually consented to your government? These queries open doors into the complex works of Plato, Emerson, and Locke and explore their continued importance for modern politics. According to Garsten’s students, this technique works, and in 2008 he received the Poorvu Family Award for teaching excellence.

“I want students to take what they read personally—to see what is at stake for them in theoretical writings about ethics and politics,” Garsten said. “And I listen to them—I am always curious about how they will respond to these books. When they feel invested in the issue and listened to, the in-class debates take on a whole new dimension.”

Garsten teaches the history and politics track in Directed Studies as well as popular courses on political judgment and democratic rhetoric. These offerings cross into a variety of subject areas, such as the social sciences, the humanities, philosophy, and literature, mirroring the professor’s own scholarly interests. His first book, Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment, won the prestigious First Book Prize of the American Political Science Association, the Thomas J. Wilson Prize from Harvard University Press, and the Delba Winthrop Award for Excellence in Political Science. At present, he is completing a second book, The Heart of a Heartless World, and he is editing a collection of writings by French writer Benjamin Constant. Garsten earned his bachelor’s and doctoral degrees at Harvard, and before coming to Yale in 2004, he was an assistant professor at Williams College.

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