

IEUSS REVIEW OF BOOKS

Jonathan Olsen and John McCormick. [The European Union: Politics and Policies](#), 6th ed., Taylor & Francis, 2018.

Teaching the European Union (EU) to undergraduates can be a challenge, although of course a rewarding one. While some students come into the class with some idea of what the EU is others think it is European politics or international organization, etc. Scholars have had difficulties in theoretical terms as well. So, to design a course and pick a textbook are always difficult. For my purposes, *The European Union Politics and Policies* is simply excellent.

How does one “start” to teach about the EU? The first priority is to provide a general definition and history that is accessible as well as challenging. In a perfect world, students would have a European history course and a politics course. However, this text provides the well-written general background necessary to begin the study of the EU. It has the necessary information to have students appreciate the long history of European integration and the fits and starts of what became the EU. The introduction in ten pages is simply superb in setting out the text but also explaining the EU (along with maps and a table of the EU in figures). Chapter 1 attempts to define the European Union in practical and theoretical terms. The next chapters provide the broad sweep of history. Of course, the limits of printed texts in a constantly changing world will make them somewhat outdated almost immediately. However, that is not a criticism of the text just a commentary of any traditionally-published text. The instructor is always kept on their toes so to speak. Last semester (Fall 2020), the negotiations on Brexit were not completed until after the semester ended even though much of student interest and discussion were on that topic.

Part 2 of the book is the institutional component. Students can find institutions dull (or at least the discussion of them). EU institutions can also be confusing, especially the various councils. Where to place the European Council in a text and a class has been at times problematic. The chapters on institutions are well done and clear and help students wade through some difficult issues. There are helpful boxes on issues interspersed which help immensely — including a list of commissioners and examples of how the Court of Justice works (beer and the single market often gets students and their instructor interested). These examples are often the guide for class discussion.

Part 3 deals with budgets and policy areas, including the relationship of the EU to the United States and the world. These chapters are overviews of various policy areas and provide the basis for in-class simulation activities. As in Parts I and II, the chapters include questions to consider and recommended readings as well as tables and maps. The strength of the policy chapters is in integrating the policy background and current policy.

In summary, the text is excellent as an undergraduate text and provides a well-written and accessible introduction. Students enjoy it and actually read it. As a framework, it is incredibly useful.

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