

Professor goes against the grain

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Mark Vail's research looks at big themes in European politics. His recent research has culminated in an upcoming book that focuses on how countries' political traditions shape fiscal and labor-market policy in times of economic crisis. *Liberalism's Legacies: How Liberal Ideas Shape Illiberal States* is Vail's second book and a chance for him to write about a subject he is passionate about.

"Rather than write another book on a specific policy such as labor-market policy, I decided I'd ask the big question: How do national traditions shape states?" says [Vail](#), a professor of political science at Tulane University as well as a Tulane Scholars mentor and a member of the [Murphy Institute](#).

Vail is going against the grain with his research, and he emphasizes the necessity for students to think outside the box and to look for new trends within their research as well.

"It's important for undergrads to be involved in research to understand the importance of conceptualization and context, and you don't get that from a PowerPoint slide, you get that from interacting with people."

To Vail, being able to share his research with his students is the best way to make his discoveries about European governments meaningful: "One needs to understand the joy and difficulty in understanding each other and the world and asking these big questions."

Doing research on political systems is not only Vail's way of adding to the scholarly community; it is about bringing students into that community as well.

"The whole point of being a faculty member and a scholar is marrying your love of a subject and research to being able to communicate that love to others," Vail says.

"Researching something is about doing something you love — that thing that gets you up in the morning. You cannot sustain a research project over multiple years if you do not care about it, no matter how self-disciplined you are."

Claire Davenport is a sophomore at Tulane University, majoring in English and political science.

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