

GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS – ALUMNI EDITION!

A Question for Our Recent PhD Alums: How did you adapt to teaching remotely this semester?



Ndifreke Ette (2018)

*Visiting Assistant
Professor of Political
Science
Amherst College*

My fall semester was a success. That is, when compared to spring. The switch to an online, hybrid mode in March caught me, and everyone else, by surprise. One week a classroom; the next week, Zoom. It was an untenable situation and I did a poor job.

Amherst College prepared faculty to do a better job for the fall. Faculty attended a comprehensive one-month crash course on online pedagogy. Beyond the bells and whistles, I found the most useful lesson to be the simplest: Classrooms and the Internet are different environments. Thus, it is foolhardy to demand similar results, whether with regard to student expectations, teaching objectives or assessments. The medium transforms the delivery of information.

The most significant change to my teaching is class discussions. Lectures

are now considerably shorter. When students read the assigned materials, generating conversation about significant concepts becomes easy. Occasionally, I step in to return discussions to pertinent ideas that may go overlooked. However, I miss analyzing texts with students in real-time. When the laptop screens used for Zooming are simultaneously used for reading—most students don't have printers at home—my technique became inefficient. Thankfully, there is always a new semester to work on that.



Kenicia Wright (2018)

*Assistant Professor,
School of Politics, Security,
and International Affairs
University of Central Florida*

Both of my courses are online this semester; I've missed seeing students for lectures and learning more about them during my office hours. The parking at UCF is almost as stressful as UH, so not having to deal with that has been great. There have been two major benefits to transitioning to Zoom: (1) I've updated the decorating of the walls in my place, so no one worries if I'm in a holding cell and (2) Purchased new shirts - especially those that pair with pajama pants! :)



JEFFREY CHURCH
Professor and Chair,
Dept. of Political Science

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

2020 was a difficult year for so many of us—lonely, stressful, tedious. If you have young kids like me, it involved learning how to work full time and also home school. But now that 2020 is behind us, I am hopeful that this year will bring some return to normalcy—and of course a return to seeing one another in person. At the same time, while collecting stories for this newsletter, I have found

it useful to reflect on what we have learned from this Fall of (mostly) online teaching—how, for example, Zoom teaching can be dreadful, but also how the technology can open up new possibilities for engagement across the country, even across the world. To help us all think about online teaching, I contacted several recent PhD alumni who, undoubtedly excited about in-person teaching, were suddenly thrown without preparation into online instruction. As you can see below, they can teach us a good deal. Also, our undergraduate students continue to persevere and win awards despite the inhospitable conditions to academic success. Our faculty as well have somehow found time to do top-notch research even when we cannot travel anywhere or see anyone. Congratulations to students and faculty alike! I send you my very best wishes for a much better year this year.



Matthew Ward (2018)

*Visiting Assistant Professor
of Political Science
University of Louisiana*

I have had the great fortune of being able to teach my three courses fully online this semester and in the spring. I have been very lenient about due dates and makeup work, as long as students alert me to the completed back-work. We've also had a number of hurricanes in Louisiana, which has added to the student stress and inability to complete work on time. Hopefully things will be back to normal more or less by the fall semester of 2021.

GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS



Markie McBrayer (2017)

Assistant Professor of Political Science University of Idaho

We as educators are all trying to adapt to online learning, but online platforms also need to adapt to us. There have been some serious shortcomings in platforms and technology.

For instance, in HyFlex, even in the best circumstances, the students who are participating online oftentimes can't hear the in-person students, and it's very difficult to be engaged with both the Zoom and in-person students at the same time.

As professors and educators, we are all used to learning and experimenting with what works and what doesn't with teaching. Sometimes a class or

lesson falls flat, and you reflect on and learn how you might be able to alter that moving forward. But this year really puts our ability to respond and adapt to the test because we're oftentimes having to deliver in multiple novel modalities. I've taught a 4-4 before, and the 2-2 this year is far more time consuming on our end when delivering a quality and consistent class in three different formats.

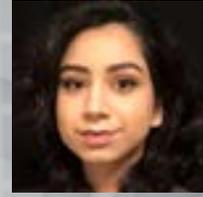
I think Zoom has been extremely useful for online delivery while traditional classroom experiences are not available. But, I definitely miss the in-class interactions and more dynamic discussions that come with face-to-face delivery. Reading non-verbal cues is extremely hard on Zoom, especially when cameras are muted. I rely a lot on nonverbal communication and responses to gauge understanding and reactions when something is said. I hope that the new normal for higher education includes a return to traditional course delivery.

**Congratulations to Robert on recently getting tenure!*



Robert Ross (2013)*

Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of Graduate Studies Utah State University



Daniella Mascarenhas (2018)

Assistant Professor of Political Science Xavier University of Louisiana

As a newly hired professor in a department with less than 100 majors, there is already a strong expectation to build mentorship/advisor relationships with students. This expectation was especially apparent this semester when faculty across the nation were instructed to exhibit a higher level of care for students' well-being. Achieving this level of care was complicated in many ways. Online classes force us into an unnatural rhythm of discussion. Even in-person classes create face blindness since we all wear masks and socially distance in auditorium-sized classrooms. To try and mitigate this, I spend 2 minutes at the top of class (online and in-person) asking students to share positive things in their lives. It can be as big as a new internship or as small as a TV show recommendation. These little moments of brightness help build student-to-student relationships and professor-to-student relationships which is vital during this semester when many feel isolated.

GRADUATE PLACEMENTS

Phillip Pinell (BA/MA Program, 2020) began his PhD in Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in Fall 2020.

Douglas Van (MA, 2020) began his PhD in Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley in Fall 2020.

Daniella Mascarenhas (PhD 2018) began as Assistant Professor of Political Science at Xavier University of Louisiana in Fall 2020

Ndifreke Ette (PhD 2018) began as Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science at Amherst College in Fall 2020.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT NEWS



POLS major Wasiq Javed Wins Phi Beta Kappa's Inaugural Key into Public Service Award

This year political science senior Wasiq Javed was only one of 20 undergraduates in the country to win Phi Beta Kappa's new award, the Key into Public Service. Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's oldest academic honors society, recognizes select undergraduates for exceptional public service and provides them with a \$5000 scholarship and "training, mentoring, and reflection on pathways into active citizenship in the tradition of Phi Beta Kappa's founders."

Javed has indeed done a tremendous amount of public service already. He was a member of the Mayor's Commission Against Gun Violence and was an intern with Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Council on American-Islamic Relations, Raj Salhotra Campaign for Houston City Council, and Battleground Texas. He is active in UH student government, and has done extensive organizing in his local community. He delivers sermons in the Houston Muslim community, and is passionate about increasing civic involvement in the Muslim community.

Mr. Javed is also talented academically, having won several awards, including the U.S. State Department Critical Language Scholarship, which he used to study Urdu abroad in Lucknow, India. He was selected as a 2021 Hobby Fellow, so he will intern in the Texas Capitol during the upcoming legislative session. He plans to pursue a JD degree and concentrate in civil rights law to prepare him for a career as a public interest lawyer in advocating for and mobilizing marginalized populations.

His political science major has helped him achieve success. As he puts it, "I believe my Political Science classes helped solidify my foundation in learning about the history and development of political systems and thought both in the U.S. and abroad. This combined with a practical application of modern theories and service-learning opportunities have allowed me to have a holistic understanding of my generation's role in public service, civic engagement, and politics today."

Congratulations December 2020 Graduates



Cassandra Khatri, Devon Arnold, and Yongkwang Kim celebrated with their advisers Scott Basinger and Jennifer Clark



POLS Major Shana Hardin recognized by Provost for Outstanding Research

Shana Hardin, a Senior Political Science major, presented her research on women in the U.S. Congress at the Undergraduate Research Day. Provost Paula Short attended the Research Day, which features over a hundred undergraduate research projects, and was quite taken with Ms. Hardin's work. In a subsequent address on the highlights of the Day, Provost Short mentioned Ms. Hardin's research along with the work of two other students.

Ms. Hardin was awarded a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) to work under the supervision of Professor Ling Zhu this past summer. Her project, "Factors That Determine Women's Electoral Success in Running for Congress", sought to understand what aids women's electoral success. The research utilized data from the 2018 midterm election to develop a large-n quantitative analysis of district-level data on

candidate emergence and electoral return. To explore what factors shape women's electoral success, Ms. Hardin gathered district-level data on candidates' personal background, party affiliation, campaign resources, race, and ethnicity. Her research indicated that overall, Democratic, White Women from predominantly liberal states showed the greatest probability of being elected to Congress. By contrast, women who were Republican, racially diverse, or ran a Congressional campaign in a less progressive state were less likely to be elected to Congress.

Professor Zhu loved the experience of working with Ms. Hardin—a "sheer pleasure," in her words. Indeed, Professor Zhu and Ms. Hardin are planning on continuing the research partnership, expanding the undergraduate research project into a co-authored manuscript to be prepared for submission to an academic journal.



SWAGS Goes Virtual

The Summer Workshop on Applying to Graduate School (SWAGS) finished its 4th year by going virtual. Professor

Elizabeth Simas met with five of our best undergraduate students to mentor them on how to polish their applications for graduate school. Professor Simas described the process of going virtual: “It was more challenging to switch to an online format. When we have done this in person, it’s very question-driven. But online, I think students were more hesitant to speak up. I think there’s something about the face to face environment that makes people more comfortable and builds more of a sense of cohort. Online, I think they were more worried about asking the silly question or something that they “should” know. But overall, I think it went well and we hopefully helped these students.”

All five students completed the workshop, and will receive a scholarship to help offset the costs of applying. Congratulations to Salomon Huerta, Forum Shelat, Nickolas Rios, Maurice Straub, and Patrick Etcheverry.



POLS Major Taylor Hall wins Peek Scholarship

Taylor Hall, a senior majoring in Political Science, has won the Peek

Family Scholarship for this academic year. The Scholarship, supported by alums Kathryn and Howard Peek, honors stellar undergraduate academic achievement, especially in Political Science. Ms. Hall, currently earning a 4.0 GPA in her major, is “one of the most promising undergraduate students I had the chance to work with,” says Alin Fumurescu, who wrote her recommendation letter. Because of Ms. Hall’s exemplary performance in Professor Fumurescu’s Introduction to Political Theory course, he invited her to join his graduate class on Modern Political Thought. He writes, “As an undergraduate student, being “thrown” in the midst of graduate students, while required to perform all the tasks as well as them, might be a frightening prospect. Nevertheless, I am happy to report that Taylor not only did raise to the challenge, but surpassed my expectations. Her overall performance was not just a pair with that of her fellow graduate

students, but in many cases significantly better.”

Ms. Hall aims first to become a human rights lawyer and then to pursue a career in politics. As a lawyer, she hopes to better the lives of those seeking justice and help. She has a passion to protect and assist victims of human and sex trafficking, and would like to provide justice for these victims. Later in her career, she intends to run for Senate and to represent the state of Texas. Her overall interest is to advocate for causes concerning immigration, public health, education, and disaster relief.

Her political science education has helped her along the way. As she puts it, “what I find most fulfilling studying Political Science at UH is that I have learned how to think, not what to think. The courses I have taken have developed my ability to think critically about what I study and the world I live in. In consequence, my understanding of the role of government can go beyond my limited perspective.”

FACULTY NEWS



Professor Jason Casellas Elected President of WPSA



Associate Professor Jason Casellas has been elected by unanimous vote to preside over the Western Political Science Association (WPSA). He will serve as Vice-President in 2022-2023, and then President 2023-2024. Founded in 1948, the WPSA is an association of more than 1250 political scientists.

Professor Casellas is also active in his service to the community. In July, he co-authored a report USC Schwarzenegger Institute on the California Redistricting Commission. The report evaluated the diversity of the 2020 Redistricting Commission, and made several recommendations on how future commissions can increase racial and ethnic diversity. That report can be found [here](#).



Professor Patrick Shea's Article Accepted at the JOP

Associate Professor Patrick Shea has just had a co-authored paper accepted at one of the top three Political Science journals, the Journal of Politics. His article, "U.S. Patronage, State Capacity, and Civil Conflict," argues that external support from the U.S. can help countries build state power, thereby alleviating grievances against the state or deterring rebels from mounting a military challenge.



Professor Zachary Zwald Wins Bernard Brodie Prize

NTT Instructional Assistant Professor Zachary Zwald has won the Bernard Brodie Prize for his co-authored article "Why Language Matters: Shaping Public Risk Tolerance During Deterrence Crises," published in the journal Contemporary Security Policy. The prize is given annually to the most outstanding article published by this journal. Professor Zwald's article argues that the public's tolerance for risk during a conflict is not stable over time but depends on how the risks are framed by elites.

The Washington Post

Professors Elizabeth Simas and Alex Badas Featured in Washington Post

Associate Professor Elizabeth Simas and Assistant Professor Alex Badas co-authored a post that appeared on the Monkey Cage, a Political Science blog published by the Washington Post. In their post, they argue that voters punish their Senators if their Senators do not vote to confirm for their preferred Supreme Court nominee. The article was published during the Amy Coney Barrett hearings. Their article can be found [here](#).

DEPARTMENT EVENTS



Political Science teamed up with Hobby for a webinar after the election on “the perils and possibilities” of polling. It drew on faculty at UH as well as noted scholar Andrew Gelman and polling expert Natalie Jackson.



The Center for Comparative and International Studies partnered with the Hobby School of Public Affairs to put on two webinars this Fall. One was on the consequences of the election for International Relations and American Foreign Policy, while the other was about the impact on Domestic Policy. Both drew from faculty in Political Science and in Hobby.



This Fall, the department’s regular brownbag series went virtual. Associate Professor Niki Marinov chaired a committee that lined up a series of research talks nearly every Wednesday of the semester. Even though the department faculty and graduate students could not meet in person, we were able to make use of Zoom to connect with one another and continue to discuss research.



Associate Professor Jeronimo Cortina and Professor Brandon Rottinghaus discussed the 2020 election in a well-attended webinar, co-sponsored by the UH Alumni Association and Houston Public Media. The event was recorded and can be found [here](#).



ALUMNI: Please send us updates about notable things in your career and life! We will include them in the newsletter.