

APSA 2015 Short Course Summary

Generous support from the National Science Foundation (SES #1447782) brought together around twenty scholars to discuss "Coalition Building to Advance Diverse Leadership and Address Discrimination in Political Science". The 2015 APSA Short Course, convened by co-PIs Carol Mershon and Denise Walsh,¹ featured themed panels, a group activity, and productive dialogue. Opening remarks by Mershon and Walsh contextualized the Short Course within a multi-year effort to identify obstacles to diverse leadership in the profession, and articulate solutions to redress inequities.² Coalition building clearly is critical for achieving the aims of advancing diverse women's leadership, and the APSA event featured three panels addressing distinctive dimensions of this theme. Here we provide a brief overview of the panels, and highlight topics that emerged in discussion.³

Panel 1: "Agenda Setting for Diversity Coalitions".

Moderator: Alice Kang, University of Nebraska-Lincoln⁴

Panelists drew attention to challenges posed by diverse coalitions that consist of more and less privileged members. Since agenda-setting is a key locus of power's operation, we must be sure agendas amplify voices of the most marginalized. **Zein Murib⁵ & Dara Strolovitch⁶** argued for the importance of "intersectionally responsible coalitions",⁷ sharing research into distinct challenges faced by LGBTQ faculty (e.g. the issue of gender-neutral bathrooms) that reveal the kinds of issues we might overlook if our coalitions are insensitive to overlapping sources of marginalization. **Alana Jaydel⁸** made a similar point by reminding us of the "fourth face of power"—vested interests have shaped the discipline such that we might not even recognize certain things as problems. How often do we think to question the tenure system as such, for example, or to spearhead efforts to unionize graduate students and adjunct faculty? **Duchess Harris⁹** rounded out the panel by reflecting on her experiences with the *National Political Science Review*.¹⁰ Recent efforts by a group of Black feminist scholars to grow the publication demonstrate "marginalization" in research practices—despite its importance and the prestige of many who publish in it, this journal was not indexed, and it ranks at the C-level.¹¹ Harris' comments prompted an extended conversation in the Q&A about the "citation gap" and we define 'impact' in the discipline. Panel 1 was followed by a lively discussion in which participants together articulated some concrete agenda items for coalitions whose goal is to end discrimination and advance diverse women's leadership. Proposals included:

- Issues of governance: how can we use coalitions as sites for improving governance—institutionalizing systems and procedures so that our concerns and suggestions can be communicated and implemented?
- Metrics of evaluation and impact assessment: how can we challenge and transform the epistemological and methodological standards by which scholarly impact is measured, so that socially relevant and publicly engaged work—as well as strong undergraduate teaching—is rewarded more systematically?
- Increasing visibility: generate a list of work done by marginal communities, a database of journals that focus on questions of identity, etc., so people find our work more easily. (Task for APSA?)
- "Uproot the trees" altogether: challenge the entire model of publishing; reconfigure the hierarchies of institutions (R1, Liberal Arts, Community Colleges); *quit reproducing the academy* through our efforts.

Panel 2. “Forging and Expanding Inclusive Diversity Coalitions”

Moderator: Susan Olson, University of Utah

The second panel reflected on the kinds of communities that are represented in, constructed with, and enacted through diversity coalitions. Forging and expanding coalitions is a practical endeavor that could point in many directions. **Tavishi Bashin**¹² discussed the challenges associated with the need to bring powerful allies, who benefit from existing arrangements, into our coalitions. ‘Enclave spaces’ are key—there, marginalized groups feel comfortable speaking freely about their concerns and articulating demands.¹³ **Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe**¹⁴ was also concerned about less privileged groups being co-opted or “divided” in broad coalitions (especially as they are subject to the conforming pressures of “the center”). Weaving together bell hooks, W.E.B. DuBois’, and research into black women’s leadership¹⁵, she argued it is critical to legitimize voices at “the margins”, and allow their perspectives—derived from life experiences that provides a source of uniquely valid and valuable knowledge—to change how we assess disciplinary fundamentals. Coalitions are a means to an end—to decenter dominant power, and the narratives, epistemologies, and ideologies that undergird it.

Brielle Harbin,¹⁶ a PhD candidate in American Politics at Vanderbilt University, urged us to think of grad students as “full coalition partners”—they are the future of the field and have not yet been fully socialized into existing norms of scholarship. Still, as a group, graduate students are vulnerable, and may harbor myopic views about what is possible, desirable, and in their best interests. Models of feminist identity development are helpful, Harbin argued, for identifying where different coalitional partners are in their understanding of problematic sources of marginalization within the discipline. Finally, **Valerie Lehr**¹⁷ looked at forging and expanding coalitions in institutional types that are less highly regarded by academia (i.e. community colleges, Liberal Arts schools). At these “margins”, new possibilities can be envisioned and enacted, especially when the priorities of faculty are different in desirable ways (e.g. concern with service, teaching, and engaged research).

Panel 3. “Sustaining Diversity Coalitions”

Moderator: Paula McClain, Duke University

The last three speakers spoke about their personal experiences in coalitions, in the tangled web of market-driven and crisis-ridden University systems. **Joely Proudfit’s**¹⁸ approach to diversity is conditioned by the reality that U.S. educational systems methodically fail to recognize the distinctiveness of Native epistemologies, to tell the histories of colonized peoples, or to prioritize needs facing disparaged indigenous communities. One of only a few Native political scientists, Proudfit works with organizations and people outside of Universities to build coalitions that are not so hewn to academic structures, but can nevertheless be impactful.¹⁹ **Terri Givens**,²⁰ who served as the first African-American female Vice Provost at the University of Texas and worked closely with the President on diversity initiatives, learned even the best coalitions may crack under unforeseen systemic pressures. Despite ideal conditions, their efforts could not survive the assault on higher education launched by then governor Rick Perry, or withstand the 2008 financial crisis. Even success undermined strength—many who led the charge to recruit and retain diverse faculty won narrow gains in the form of Centers and interdisciplinary programs, only to become siloed into new departments with less time to put toward continued reform initiatives.

Carroll Seron²¹ ended on a positive note, sharing how the University of California, Irvine, has extended the reach of an NSF ADVANCE targeted at STEM fields. UCI *institutionalized* many efforts initially supported by the grant, putting in place structures to tackle similar problems across departments and colleges. University-wide innovations included the creation of an “Equity Advisor” position—every school has a person on the Dean’s advisory board who oversees faculty searches and promotions, and works with the Dean to make sure major decisions do not compromise commitments to diversity.²² Efforts have also extended beyond recruiting, retaining, and advancing women faculty, to include graduate student representation, and racial and ethnic minorities.

Concluding Thoughts

During and after Panels 2 and 3, discussions merged, giving rise to some related and recurring themes, many of which overlap with and continue conversations from the first half of the day:

- Leadership matters: Departments and centers, schools and graduate schools, interdisciplinary programs, administrative bodies, etc—who the leaders are matters *at all these levels*, and should intersect with leadership in diversity coalitions. Socializing junior faculty and graduate students to be good, effective, and just leaders who care about broader diversity issues in society will be key for achieving our aims.
- Engage with society: This could mean finding ways to bring civil society activists into diversity initiatives at Universities (e.g. an oversight body like a ‘Council of Outside Advisors’ could present timely research and serve to check to well-meaning but resistant people in power; a Native American community leader could be hired to run a Center for Native Studies so that its work is in line with the needs of local tribes). It could also mean working harder to put ourselves and our work out into the broader political sphere, (e.g. publishing on Monkey Cage, organizing speaking events in our areas on salient issues) and valuing those of us who already do (junior scholars and graduate students must be encouraged that this is okay).
- Leadership and responsibility with a younger generation. We must model what we want to see to our graduate students. We must apply our work to communities to make it relevant. Our programs should encourage place-based learning and engage with liaisons from local communities, our centers should be focused on research to promote the interests of those marginalized groups they claim to work on behalf of, and those who are nearby at that.
- Too much ado about ‘allies’? We may not need ‘allies’ as often as we think; excessive attention to *how to work with ‘them’* may distract from building power ‘in the trenches’ among the most marginalized.

¹ Carol Mershon is Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia, and Denise Walsh is Associate Professor of Politics and Women, Gender, and Sexuality.

²For more information on the genesis of this initiative and its earlier stages, see the special symposia in *Politics & Gender* (Sept. 2014, “Advocating for Change in the Discipline”) and *PS: Political Science & Politics* (July 2015, “How Political Science Can Be More Diverse”). In each, see especially the “Introduction” by Mershon & Walsh.

³ To get a full sense of the substance of the Short Course, we have made available for download the individual papers and presentations, which can be found at <http://genderingpoliticalscience.weebly.com/>.

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⁵ Zein Murib is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota; murib003@umn.edu

⁶ Dara Strolovitch is Associate Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies and Affiliated Faculty in the Department of Politics, Princeton University; dzs@princeton.edu

⁷ These are coalitions “viewed as sites for exchanging information, sites of experimentation, and ways to challenge assumptions about inequality and marginalization.”

⁸ Alana Jaydel teaches at American River College; JeydelA@arc.losrios.edu

⁹ Duchess Harris is Department Chair and Professor of American Studies at Macalester College; harris@macalester.edu

¹⁰ NPSR is published by the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS), and is central to the work of many scholars.

¹¹ We have here a common “chicken and egg” problem: the journal isn’t cited because people don’t realize it exists, they don’t realize it exists because it doesn’t rank highly, and it doesn’t rank highly because it isn’t cited.

¹² Tavishi Bashin is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Affairs at Kennesaw State University; tbhasin@kennesaw.edu.

¹³ In the Q&A, some people urged caution in advocating “women’s only” spaces. These may be more complicated ideals than some make them out to be—we must continue to trouble the gender binary this term presupposes, or we run the risk of further marginalizing queer and transgender persons or groups.

¹⁴ Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe is Associate Professor of Political Science at Eastern University; sgrambys@eastern.edu

¹⁵ Gramby-Sobukwe has worked closely with leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement. She discussed how it is instructive and unique in that historically, we have never seen a movement lead by black women about issues faced by women and women of color. And, black women have a deeply felt understanding of and experience with patriarchy—the civil rights movement struggled with this, and it goes further back historically in the black church, so often seen as a site of liberatory politics in the black community.

¹⁶ Brielle Harbin is a PhD candidate at Vanderbilt University; myra.harbin@vanderbilt.edu.

¹⁷ Val Lehr is the Vice President of the University and Dean of Academic Affairs at St. Lawrence University, and was previously Professor of Government and Coordinator of the Gender Studies Program; vlehr@stlawu.edu

¹⁸ Joely Proudfit is Associate Professor of Sociology and Native Studies at California State University, San Marcos, and serves as Director of Native American Academic Strategic Planning; jproudfi@csusm.edu

¹⁹ “Build a name for yourself outside of the Academy so that you can have more power within it”, she was told by an adviser in law school.

²⁰ Terri Givens is Provost of Menlo College, formerly Professor of Political Science at University of Texas; www.terrigivens.com/#contact

²¹ Carroll Seron is Interim Dean of the School of Social Ecology and Professor of Criminology, Law & Society at University of California, Irvine; seron@uci.edu.

²² This has led to further initiatives—for instance, using University gifts to fund a ‘Diversity Award’ that goes to research teams whose work aids our understanding of gender, racial, and ethnic inequities.