

Organizing Women: Diversifying Leadership and Addressing Discrimination in Political Science Departments

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How might political scientists address the underrepresentation of women and overcome gender bias in their departments? We draw on the politics and gender literature to argue that women need to establish their own organizations in political science departments.¹ We investigate this strategy by examining women's organizing in one department and find that lessons from politics and gender scholarship can apply to academia.

The motivation for this article arises from the underrepresentation of marginalized groups, especially women of color, in political science departments, and persistent discrimination in the academy. A substantial disjuncture remains between, on the one hand, the nationally visible inclusion of women in the leadership circles of the APSA and regional political science associations and, on the other hand, the daily realities faced by political scientists in their departments, where even white women at senior ranks are rare.

Consider the presence of women of all races at the rank of full professor and in departmental leadership positions. In 2001, among political science departments awarding PhDs, women constituted 37% of assistant professors, 26% of associate professors, and 18% of full professors (APSA Task Force 2004). In 2012, women chaired 22% of departments in four-year colleges and universities and 16% of all PhD granting departments (personal communication, Jennifer Diascro on APSA database, March 2012). In 2012, women chaired 12.1% of the top 33 political science departments ranked by the National Research Council (Sides 2010; departmental websites, March 2012). This share dipped to 9.1% as of April 2013 and rose to 21.2% as of May 2014. Disaggregating the 2014 data by race and gender, of the seven female chairs among top departments in May, two were African-American. None of the department chairs were men of color. Thus white men chaired almost 80% of the top departments in 2014 (Sides 2010; departmental websites April 2013 and May 2014). Some signs of progress appear but must be treated with caution given the impact of turnover in just a few departments.

More broadly, policy reform in the academy has not sufficed to remove obstacles to women's advancement (Mershon and Walsh 2015). Studies of academic settings find that pervasive

stereotypes are perpetuated by the attitudes and practices of both women and men, who reward those who hew most closely to white, heterosexual, masculine, and middle-class norms. The politics and gender literature shows that individual attitudes and institutional practices such as these sustain inequality. By offering institutional explanations for reform, this literature supplies vital tools for redressing underrepresentation and discrimination in political science departments.

This article first discusses the promise of extracting lessons from politics and gender research for increasing women's representation and promoting institutional transformation. Second, we analyze women's successful organizing in the University of Virginia's department of politics. Last, we highlight how women's organizing in their departments can generate new insights about institutional change.

LESSONS FROM POLITICS AND GENDER RESEARCH: ORGANIZING WOMEN

Politics and gender research establishes that more women in leadership positions can facilitate transformation. For example, with greater numbers, women legislators can populate a caucus that challenges institutional discrimination and opens the door for reform (Walsh 2012). Yet numerous women are neither sufficient nor necessary for policy change. They do not suffice because not all women advocate change and those who do so can be thwarted by individual attitudes and institutional bias (e.g., Franceschet and Piscopo 2012). Large numbers are not needed, because, as Kittilson notes (2015), politics and gender scholars find that a few "critical actors"—including men—can lead the charge for change. Hence diversification, the transformation of institutional norms, and policy change can be pursued simultaneously (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007).

Gender scholars agree that organizing women in a strong, autonomous movement constitutes the single most important factor in challenging discrimination (e.g., Weldon 2011b; but see Htun 2003). Women's movements provide a venue for developing skilled leaders and identifying "shared priorities" among women (e.g., Weldon 2011a, 445; cf. Basu and McGrory 1995).

To emerge as strong political actors, however, women's movements require more than skilled leaders and an agenda.

We highlight four strategies identified by the politics and gender literature as essential for women's organizations: obtaining resources, carefully framing group messages, exploiting openings in the political opportunity structure, and winning external support. To be sure, not all strategies might be feasible in every department. Most relevant, women must take action, which requires the presence of at least two women, preferably with tenure, in a department.² Moreover, none of these strategies directly attacks the societal factors contributing to underrepresentation and discrimination, such as unexamined gender bias and work-family responsibilities. Yet they do furnish the means for women political scientists to recognize and address their

Women's movements also have benefited from external support (e.g., Waylen 2007). The transnational women's movement, for instance, has provided consciousness-raising, networks, and advice born of experience. International donors have funded local women's movements. Political science departments likewise function in a context that can facilitate change. Accrediting bodies, the APSA, and provosts can press for department-level reform by using rankings and funding to expose inequalities and support those dedicated to transformation. External actors might also set national standards for political science departments and honor departments that meet them. Groups in the discipline dedicated to advancing diversity, along with journal editors and publishers, contribute to these efforts by disseminating research that raises awareness about underrepresentation and discrimination.

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shared priorities that can lead to direct confrontation of implicit bias and the sexual division of labor.

The politics and gender literature designates networks and material resources, in addition to skilled leadership, as crucial for the formation of women's movements. Networks, particularly pre-existing networks such as membership in a professional association, provide women leaders with linkages to potential members, as well as to power brokers. Material resources such as funding permit an organization to consolidate and spread its message (e.g., Baldez 2003). The implication for women political scientists, as Sinclair-Chapman in this symposium (2015) notes, is that they need to forge links with women in their department and with powerful university insiders, for example through university-wide faculty self-governing bodies. University funding can support activities among departmental women.

Women's movements can also win supporters through appeals that connect with popular social goals, such as equality, and by acting when opportunity knocks (e.g., Baldez 2003). Women in political science departments might consider not only framing messages in appeals to equality, but also tying those appeals to department goals, for example by emphasizing that policy improvements will match the best practices of departments at peer institutions and thus enhance retention.

The political opportunity structure must signal the potential for positive outcomes if women are to organize *as women*. To illustrate, in a cross-national comparison, Baldez (2003) finds that, when political parties in the democratic opposition redefined agreements on alliance membership and policy while excluding women, women organized and exploited this shift in the political landscape to press their demands. Opportunities such as these occur in political science departments, including during negotiations for a new chair or a realignment of departmental factions. As new leaders and factions seek to solidify their support, a mobilized women's organization can make demands.

Politics and gender scholars have also found that women's movements must maintain their autonomy, preventing co-optation by, for example, party leaders who alter the movement's agenda to suit their own purposes (e.g., Hassim 2005). In departments, the threat of co-optation is likely to come from faculty and administrators committed to insulating the department from criticism and protecting its image. They may stymie transformation with appeals to tradition or bureaucratic claims. Critical elements for surmounting such obstacles include cultivating skilled women leaders, networks comprising an array of women and powerful allies, and funds independent of administrative whim, all addressed here.

Women's movements do not always live up to their ideals or achieve their goals. Most importantly, some women's movements, such as that in the US, have a history of marginalizing minority women. Yet women's movements can avoid these pitfalls when they adhere to inclusive norms (e.g., Weldon 2011b). For women in political science, inclusiveness means that tenured women should encourage junior women to confer across rank and all women to confer across race and other salient differences (and likely include men from marginalized groups) so as to develop their shared priorities. Tenured women, too, must commit to listening as a particularly effective form of leading (Rockquemore 2013), while protecting junior faculty. Given the prevalence of multiple hierarchies in departments, inclusivity is a significant challenge.

Several additional factors might contribute to success. In cross-national investigations, Htun (2003) underscores the importance of taking a technocratic approach to policy initiatives when organizing in a hostile environment; Walsh (2011) highlights how women's activism in less hostile contexts can advance reform by prompting leaders to publicly endorse equitable standards. In political science departments where power is centralized and open debate uncommon, women's caucuses might work with powerful allies to present reform proposals to administrators in bureaucratic language. In less hierarchical

settings, having powerful allies champion the goals of the women's caucus in departmental meetings can enlarge debate and trigger policy change. The politics and gender literature thus points to strategies for mobilizing women and attaining transformation. These lessons guided strategies in one political science department.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Women's organizing played a critical role in engendering reform in the University of Virginia's politics department. Despite Equal Employment Opportunity policies in place at UVa, gender concerns persisted for women faculty in the politics department. An increase in the number and racial diversity of women from AY 2005–06 to AY 2007–08, along with mentoring and leadership training from external sources, led women to hold informal meetings on the gender climate.³ Yet the achievements altered neither the gender climate nor policies in the department or the university. Progress hinged on two further factors. First, women faculty had to organize using the strategies flagged here, centering on resources, framing, the political opportunity structure, and external support. Second, the resulting caucus needed to adopt additional strategies identified by politics and gender research.

The political opportunity structure opened in spring 2008 when an incident of sexist behavior spurred a woman's complaint to the male departmental chair. The complainant and several powerful male allies became critical actors pushing for change. Their efforts culminated in a gender audit administered by two external faculty (one female, one male, both white), who interviewed each politics faculty member and wrote a Gender Report on the department in fall 2009. The Report concluded that the climate was "unintentionally hostile" to women faculty and emphasized the "problematic ... absence of even a single woman at the rank of full professor" other than the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, an ethnic minority political scientist. The Gender Climate Committee (GCC), created in summer 2010 in response to the Report, did not meet or hold email discussions during AY 2010–11, but the male GCC Chair met once with women faculty to gauge their reading of the contentious departmental meeting that addressed the Report.

In line with politics and gender research, change required greater organizational efforts and strategic mobilization. In fall 2011, white women took on more leadership roles as one had attained the rank of full professor and four were now tenured. The departmental chair appointed a tenured woman to chair the GCC. The political opportunity structure opened again with the announcement of likely external support from the provost's office to fund diversity initiatives. Seizing this opportunity, during AY 2011–12 women faculty drew on the network developed through their informal meetings to establish an autonomous Politics Women's Caucus (PWC) for all women faculty, held group email discussions and meetings to identify shared priorities, and drafted a reform agenda for submission to the GCC. In response to that agenda, which gained GCC support, the department chair made an annual, ongoing budget commitment to both the GCC and the PWC,

which used the resources to fund a research assistant, guest speakers, and PWC luncheons with female graduate students. The PWC extended membership to women graduate students, boosting its organizational capacity and facilitating mentoring.

In AY 2011–12, the GCC, renamed the Gender and Diversity Climate Committee (GDCC) to promote inclusiveness, met regularly and, with PWC input, prioritized hiring and parental leave. Two critical actors in the PWC and GDCC ensured the airing of women faculty's shared priorities in the GDCC; male allies on that committee suggested constructive framing strategies. To prevent female faculty service overload, the Department recognized the PWC and GDCC as committees and included both when assessing—and adjusting—service responsibilities. Even so, setbacks occurred: three African-American faculty, including one woman, left for other institutions; only one woman of color remained. The department's share of women dropped to 16% and of African-Americans to zero, galvanizing the remaining women into further action.

Another opening in the political opportunity structure occurred in spring 2012 when the department hosted an External Review Committee. The timing was propitious, as the Chair had named one tenured woman to a leadership position. Hence the report prepared for the Review Committee voiced concerns about the gender climate and the dearth of diverse faculty, and the Review Committee met with all women as a group, a first in departmental history. That Committee's report issued a resounding call for remedial action on gender and diversity. Thus an opportunity to advance policy change arrived through routine channels; women's organizing and critical actors enabled them to exploit it.

At the end of AY 2011–12, critical actors, technocratic framing, and women's mobilizing helped bring policy change to the department. At the Chair's request, two members of the GDCC and PWC compiled an Action Items list on gender and diversity. That list, couched in bureaucratic language, showed inaction in some areas flagged in the 2009 Gender Report and progress on others. To accelerate such progress, the Chair named a committee to evaluate hiring practices; that committee consulted with the GDCC and individual women faculty as it drafted recommendations for reforming existing rules. Moreover, the department formally committed to prioritizing diversity hires.

The Chair continued to remind hiring committees and the department of this commitment, which many men increasingly supported. From AY 2011–12 to December 2014, the department extended a total of fourteen offers, including seven to women, three of whom are scholars of color; it used an endowed chair position to recruit senior women. Resulting hires are one white woman and four men, one of color, all at the junior level; an endowed chair offer to one woman was recently declined. Departmental leadership, too, continued to evolve, with another white woman promoted to full and one serving as Interim Chair.

In addition to addressing the representation and leadership roles of marginalized groups, the department responded to women's mobilizing by supporting action to improve the diversity climate. At a spring 2012 departmental faculty

meeting held after the External Review, powerful male allies underscored the need to improve departmental gender norms and committed the department to ongoing discussions of the gender climate. Thus departmental leaders publicly acknowledged that harm had occurred, was beyond dispute, and required remediation. What remained unclear was how remediation would be achieved.

To move toward that goal, in spring 2012 two GDCC members and the Committee's RA conducted a survey of all departmental faculty and graduate students, which informed

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subsequent GDCC action. Since AY 2012–13, the PWC and GDCC have sponsored, inter alia, a guest speaker from another UVa unit who addressed mentoring and diversity; an external speaker who transformed rules, procedures, and the departmental climate at Rutgers (Daniels 2014); and informal faculty gatherings to enhance collegiality, productivity, and retention.

Efforts to foster policy change in the department have resonated more widely. At the University level, the Department Chair and GDCC advised the Vice Provost's Internal Policy Working Group on revisions to the UVa family leave policy. Bringing forward departmental concerns, the Department and GDCC Chairs provided key input on the creation of new administrative positions whose incumbents will handle personnel matters brought by faculty and graduate students within the College of Arts and Sciences. Not last, in response to the November 2014 *Rolling Stone* article about the alleged brutal gang rape of a UVa female undergraduate, the GDCC initiated the drafting of a departmental statement supporting sexual assault survivors.

Although change is possible, the experience of the UVa politics department suggests that it is uneven. Htun (2003) has argued that gender is not one issue but many. Similarly, this example reveals that diversity is not one issue but many: absent quotas, shifting hiring outcomes and improving retention likely require more time and persistence than do altering hiring priorities or policies, promoting women to leadership positions, or even improving the departmental climate.

Nonetheless, this example, still in evolution, indicates that strategies from the politics and gender literature can yield change in formal rules and informal practices. The UVa example suggests that conventional efforts to improve diversity and combat discrimination by diversifying personnel and giving them leadership training, though crucial, do not suffice. To advance change, faculty need to organize and pursue strategies to that end. These steps can facilitate change in institutional practices and policies at the departmental level. In our experience, they have enabled department

committees and leaders to advocate for change at the university level.

CONCLUSION

This article and the symposium to which it contributes seek to diversify leadership and foster reform within political science. We build on politics and gender research, investigating how and how much the strategies this literature identifies can be adapted to departments. We find that success requires that women's organizations exist, exploit openings in the political

opportunity structure, frame appeals to win support and external allies, and access resources. We find too that approaching informal rules through technocratic measures can advance change, and that women's activism can prompt powerful leaders to publicly endorse equitable standards that expand the content of public debate. Success also takes vigilance and hard work.

Political scientists from underrepresented groups who attempt to change discriminatory practices that shape the climate in their departments have inside knowledge of the workings of institutions affecting their professional lives. The case study in this article enhances the discipline's understanding of the relationship between informal and formal rules by demonstrating that women's organizing can generate changes in both. Hence we shed new light on conditions for and processes of institutional change, questions of central concern throughout political science. This paper and symposium show that activism in political science departments enriches the knowledge of political scientists and that politics and gender research matters for the daily experiences of political scientists working in academe. ■

NOTES

1. We treat race as the primary difference among women because data on political science faculty disaggregated by other salient social locations are unavailable. We recognize marginalized groups in the profession other than women of color; for example, black men are severely underrepresented in political science (APSA 2011, 44).
2. Women in a department not meeting these minimal conditions could organize an interdisciplinary women's caucus, much as women elected to a legislature with few women organize across party lines. A departmental diversity caucus may also be feasible.
3. The number of women in UVa Politics rose from five in AY 2005–06 (~10% of faculty) to nine in AY 2007–08. In 2011, among 62 AAU institutions, UVa ranked 56th in percentage of tenured and tenure-track women faculty and 57th in percentage of tenured and tenure-track minority faculty (UVa ADVANCE 2013).

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