

Leveraging Diversity in Political Science for Institutional and Disciplinary Change

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How are we to grow as a discipline and leverage diversity in political science? Doing so is imperative if the discipline is to remain socially and intellectually relevant in rapidly changing, increasingly diverse national and global contexts. In an era in which students and other “knowledge consumers” will more frequently be able to select their instructors from amongst a handful of scholars in a handful of disciplines via online courses of upwards of 25,000 students,¹ representation of a variety of experiences, perspectives, and expertise becomes a necessary and valuable commodity in the marketplace of ideas. If political science is to remain relevant in contexts where women and people of color are growing in number, demanding equitable power-sharing, and flexing political muscle through state-sanctioned and unsanctioned means, the discipline must definitively address its own lingering problems with race and gender diversity. Enlarging the ranks of women and faculty of color, in particular, women faculty of color, is instrumental to ensuring a dynamic and relevant political science in the twenty-first century. Not only is increasing faculty diversity important, but also recognizing how to leverage diversity institutionally is crucial.

Diversity is big business in the academy. Nationally, foundations such as Ford, Carnegie, and Robert Wood Johnson support academic efforts to diversify the professoriate (Smith 2011). Colleges and universities across the country are investing significant resources, sometimes measured in millions of dollars, in diversity efforts.² In the last decade, institutions of higher education of various sizes and missions have hired chief diversity officers (CDOs) to manage faculty recruitment and retention, assess campus climate, provide diversity training, coordinate and disseminate diversity efforts institution-wide, and create opportunities for engagement with local communities (Williams and Wade-Golden 2007; 2008).³ The academy appears to be following trends established in the corporate sector where 60% of Fortune 500 companies have CDOs on their top-executive staffs (Kwoh 2012; Leon 2014).

Despite hires of CDOs and other administrators, the data show limited gains, if any, in achieving diversity goals on campuses generally and within political science in particular. While the numbers of women in political science have shown modest growth over the last two decades, the number of women of color has largely remained flat (Beutel and Nelson 2006). The static numbers of Black, Latina/o, Asian Pacific

Islanders, and Native Americans in the discipline highlight a retention problem, and indicate that at the departmental level a “revolving door” is operating (Moreno et al., 2006).⁴ Reliance on replacement rather than growth among minority faculty in political science undermines institution-wide investments in diversity, making it difficult to leverage diversity in ways that serve the interests of institutions, departments, students, and minority faculty.

In what follows, I present some observations about how and why faculty in political science can interrupt diversity “business as usual” to foment change in the discipline and contribute to broader institutional diversity objectives. As a central theme in this discussion, I show that scholarship on minority representation in US legislatures sheds light on how organized women, racial/ethnic minorities, and their allies can promote diversity and inclusive practices to bring about lasting change in the discipline. I conclude by briefly reflecting on the limitations of mentoring to mitigate realized patterns of isolation, discrimination, marginalization, and (in)voluntary exit amongst minority scholars.

BUILDING A DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The building blocks of a diversity infrastructure begin with the capacity of individuals to organize and push for a diversity-friendly agenda. Capacity is predicated, in part, on sheer numbers: in the absence of minimal numbers of women and minorities, the capacity to organize for advocacy will likely be weak or absent. Gender and racial caucuses are a key source of diversity capacity in institutions. For instance, research on the impact of diversity in Congress identifies racial and ethnic caucuses (the Congressional Black, Hispanic, and Asian Pacific American caucuses) and the newer Tri-Caucus comprised of members of the CBC, CHC, and CAPAC as agents of change that encourage information and resource sharing, enhanced communication, and collective action on behalf of racial and ethnic minorities (Minta and Sinclair-Chapman 2013). Through a diversity infrastructure that includes caucuses, task forces, and organized voting blocs, minority legislators have kept low-salience civil rights issues on the congressional agenda despite waning public interest. Research also shows that group-based coethnic politics improves black and Latino representation over that of liberal legislators and fellow Democrats (Hero and Preuhs 2013) and that women’s congressional caucuses (although more heterogeneous in

terms of party, ideology, and race) have raised awareness of issues of concern to women (Swers 2002).

Like racial and ethnic minorities and women in Congress, women in political science have had to organize beyond their departments and within national and regional associations to advocate for their disparate and shared interests. Such organization has met with measurable success. The major regional and national associations each host multiple representative caucuses. These caucuses independently recognize stellar scholars and scholarship, organize panels to present new research, welcome graduate students and introduce them to the profession's work, encourage junior faculty, and cooperate to organize panels across arenas of shared interest and expertise. Collectively, membership in these caucuses numbers in the hundreds, albeit with some overlapping members. Once organized in caucuses, diversity insurgents like these are poised to seize opportunities and interrupt business as usual.

A CHANGING OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

A classic tenet from social movements research provides a useful departure point for discussing opportunities. Doug McAdam (1982) and others since have argued that insurgent efforts succeed when the political opportunity structure opens sufficiently to allow change to occur, particularly through changes in policy, external pressure, and shifts in perspective amongst elites. In conditions when the status quo becomes vulnerable, activists must have capacity, shared consciousness, and resources to take collective action.

I suggest that the heightened attention to diversity at institutions across the academic spectrum presents an opportunity that women political scientists can seize by presenting themselves as credible stakeholders in larger efforts to diversify the academy. Public pronouncements from politicians and administrators, as well as demands from students, alumni, parents, and donors that university campuses look more like the nation or better serve local communities can turn institutional leaders into allies. The stakeholder status of women political scientists may not be immediately obvious to upper-level decision makers. I would argue, however, that we can offer a compelling case for why political science is the proper place to invest resources, to run innovative pilot programs, and to expect results that yield a positive return on institutional diversity investments both for students and faculty.

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A BRIEF CASE FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

Despite the slow and uneven pace of change, a 2004 APSA Task Force on Women's Advancement in Political Science notes that the discipline has made strides in advancing women. More women are pursuing undergraduate degrees in political science; women are faring as well as men on the

job market, approaching pay equity with male colleagues, and are increasing in the ranks of full professors (APSA Task Force 2004). The report nonetheless identifies four areas of concern: the leaky pipeline, burdens of the tenure-track and family responsibilities, "inhospitable" institutional climates, and research norms that discount collaborative work that could nurture women's careers (APSA Task Force 2004, 2). In 2000, women of color were 6% of all tenure-track faculty, 4% of all associate professors, and less than 1% of all full professors in political science. The APSA Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century (2011) reports that in 2010, women of color comprised 13.5% of female political science faculty, which is more than double their numbers in 1980. This improvement remains relatively modest compared to the nearly 300% increase in women faculty over that span (APSA Task Force 2011). The advances in Political Science amidst these remaining challenges make our discipline a promising site for institution-wide diversity investments. Yet the APSA Task Force on Advancement of Women in Academic Political Science in the United States (2004) notes the necessity of finding new and differentiated strategies to address challenges faced by women of color. Among those differentiated strategies must be leveraging the discipline's popularity among undergraduates and its expertise on activism.

Students as Stakeholders and Teaching "Smart Activism"

At many institutions, political science is a top undergraduate major and a draw for graduate study as well. The APSA Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century (2011) reports that, in 2010, political science was the preferred undergraduate major out of seven fields including economics, anthropology, and sociology. Political science undergraduate students, already recognized as stakeholders by university leaders, are important allies in our efforts to change the discipline at the departmental level. Because administrators can "wait students out" for the several years in which students may attend to diversity efforts, we will need to consider ethical ways to encourage "smart activism" amongst our students. Personally, I have seen dozens of students, especially minority students, raise the issue of having a more diverse faculty repeatedly with administrators, only to graduate, leaving the task for the next cohort. The situation is sadly cyclical. Alternatively, smart activism encourages students to investigate the issues, formulate long- and short-term goals, determine

the scope of their influence, identify allies and opponents, construct informed arguments, and make specific demands with measurable outcomes.

Political scientists are uniquely situated to provide effective tools for engagement (APSA Task Force 2011). Guidance around smart activism might take place during lectures on

civil rights, social movements, and political participation, as these topics appear on the syllabi of many political science faculty, or during office hours or meetings of student organizations. Student demands, I believe, will be a key resource in tying the goals of political scientists committed to diversifying the profession to broader institutional efforts and objectives. Additionally, students become alumni, and some alumni become donors. Smart activism can help students leverage their stakeholder status and resources toward shared goals for departmental, institutional, and disciplinary change.

Leveraging Networks

Political scientists will also need to leverage our networks by strategically raising questions of diversity, particularly growing the numbers of faculty of color, while performing university service outside of the department. The literature

do not share the same interests or sense of urgency about diversity initiatives, the value of insurgent actions must not be overlooked. Research on minority and women's politics routinely describes the insider-outsider status (and strategies) of representatives from historically marginalized groups (Fenno 2003; Swers 2002; Cohen et al., 1997). Women political scientists must likewise be thoughtful about how to bring external pressure and incentives to bear on our own departments. One way to do so is to encourage connecting departmental diversity objectives to the larger diversity mission of the institution. As noted, political science ought to be a competitive site for resources that increase the capacity for diversity—e.g., opportunity hires, postdoctoral fellowships, new monies for interdisciplinary research centers (APSA Task Force 2011). Political science, arguably, also bears a responsibility to address the politics of a diverse nation and world.

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on minority representation again provides direction. In the two decades following its inception, the Congressional Black Caucus intentionally expanded the presence of minority legislators beyond traditionally minority-focused committees to include powerful committees such as Appropriations or Ways and Means (Clay 1992). Legislators used these committee assignments not only to gain personal power and influence, but also to deliver resources to minority communities (Canon 1999). Hence advocating for diverse interests was not limited to discussions in caucus meetings, but deliberately spilled over into floor speeches, bill sponsorships, and participation in committee hearings (Canon 1999; Minta 2011). For political science faculty, soliciting support from committees in the faculty senate or raising the issue of faculty diversity in unexpected venues such as student services can advance the cause by raising awareness and presenting a “new,” viable path forward on diversity initiatives.

Seeking allies in interdisciplinary departments or institutes may also be productive. Women and Gender Studies, African and African-American Studies, Latino Studies, Asian and Asian American Studies, Indigenous Population Institutes, Intercultural and Multicultural Centers each present opportunities for shared interest in advocating for diverse faculty, perhaps even carefully crafted joint appointments or cluster hires.

Incentivizing Departments

When political science department heads and senior faculty are on board, yet another set of allies emerges. Certainly, buy-in from those who name search committees and make influential recommendations is indispensable. Male colleagues and university leaders are also important allies. Ensuring that male faculty members serve on diversity committees, act as change agents, and become diversity champions is also key to reforming department policies and culture. When department leaders

ORGANIZING CAUCUSES AND COALITIONS

Can women political scientists capitalize on their numbers to present themselves as insurgent-insiders in efforts to diversify the faculty and challenge discrimination? As evidenced by the number of women's and racial and ethnic caucuses across our national and regional professional associations, the answer would seem to be, “yes.” As Carol Mershon and Denise Walsh (2015) discuss in this symposium, however, organizing at the departmental level to advance change is challenging. Will women, confronting the reality of tenuous holds on power in institutions as newly tenured faculty, or newly-arrived department heads in spaces dominated by men, see organizing caucuses at the departmental level as a viable option? If organizing succeeds, how will a non-discriminatory, racially/ethnically inclusive agenda be ensured or at least encouraged? What will be necessary to maintain such efforts? One form of support may be through macro-level organizing.

Prospects for a Grand Coalition

Beyond individual departments, women political scientists should consider ways to leverage our numbers at a macro level, as Karen Beckwith (2015) and Miki Caul Kittilson (2015) indicate in this symposium. For instance, when, if ever, have the heads of regional and national political science women's caucuses and their members jointly convened? Imagine the significance, signal, and message of publicly calling a meeting of women to share resources and knowledge and, to the extent possible, coordinate agendas.

If increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the discipline is to be a primary goal, then women's caucuses will need to solicit partnerships with existing race and ethnic caucuses in the discipline. In my experience, as a member and leader in APSA's Race, Ethnicity and Politics section and the Southern Political Science Association's Women's Caucus of

Political Science- South, caucus meetings are open but not highly integrated spaces. Here we confront the challenges of coalition politics, which include ensuring respect, reciprocity, and voice, while recognizing power differentials, silencing, and intersectionality (cf. Ture and Hamilton 1992). How will a grand coalition of women political scientists address not only the goodwill and benefits of diversifying our ranks, but also what Winifred Breines (2006) notes in analyzing racial integration in second wave feminism as “the trouble between us?” While recognizing the idealism embedded in notions of universal sisterhood, how will this effort avoid casting faculty women of color as handmaidens rather than full partners in the work of transforming our discipline?

The challenges here are real and grave. That white women are often leaders of diversity efforts is not coincidence. How can this aspect of privilege be used to the advantage of an inclusive women’s movement in political science? Conversely, how do racial disparities in institutional leadership, authority, and power make such a movement vulnerable to divisions that can be exploited to maintain the status quo? In response, consider the path-breaking work by Rodney Hero and Robert Preuhs (2013) examining how the zero-sum, competitive politics that characterizes Black and Latino relations at the local level has been overcome at the national level. The authors find that national Black and Latino caucuses have carved out issue niches that are independent, cooperative, and complementary, resulting in positive gains for both groups. This kind of “politics of parallel play” presents one strategy for addressing the challenges of highly independent but cooperative caucuses in political science (Sinclair-Chapman 2013, 261).

THE REVOLVING DOOR AND (IN)VOLUNTARY EXIT AMONG MINORITY FACULTY

In place of conclusions, I end with a call for attention to a crisis afoot in political science. In what may be unprecedented fashion, faculty of color are departing the discipline at alarming rates. Certainly, there are those who are not awarded tenure or promotion in one political science department, but later move on to a different political science department. This problem of retention is problematic and worthy of investigation and action, but here, I am concerned about the minority political scientists who have left the discipline to join interdisciplinary departments, centers, and institutes such as women and gender studies and African-American studies. Political science is losing faculty to presumably more hospitable fields where these scholars continue to engage in political science scholarship.

In the absence of systematic data collection, my evidence is anecdotal, yet I propose that trends amongst minority faculty who have exited the discipline voluntarily or involuntarily merit new strategies of intervention. Mentoring does not remedy this pattern in political science as its task is to teach people how to survive in institutions, not how to change them. The very presence of black women on academic faculties and in front of classrooms disrupts dominant norms in the academy (Sampaio 2006). Despite good, widely shared intentions, the discipline cannot “mentor” black women out of the racism, sexism, and classism that bind them in multiple ways. At best, mentoring will help women faculty of color expand

their social networks, establish important professional relationships, and better navigate minefields. At worst, mentoring will help some number survive while maintaining longstanding power disparities in the discipline, failing to ameliorate the conditions that routinely challenge and undermine women of color at all ranks of the professoriate. Political Science must tackle this crisis swiftly so that the strategies identified in this article and symposium might be broadly advanced. ■

NOTES

1. For instance, a single online course offered on Artificial Intelligence enrolled 150,000 students in 2012 (Pappano 2012).
2. These efforts include faculty hiring initiatives, establishing offices dedicated to faculty diversity, diversity scholarships and fellowships, as well as hosting conferences and workshops. In perhaps an atypical example, the University of California, Berkeley, invested a million dollars in planning its diversity initiative, was then awarded a \$16 million grant, and now hopes to boost that figure to \$30 million to pursue a 10-year diversity plan (Williams and Golden 2013, Chapter 5; APSA Task Force 2011, 30).
3. A 2013 study based on survey data from 700 CDOs and more than 100 interviews reports that three-quarters of CDO positions were created in the preceding decade (Nixon 2013).
4. In a study of a sample of California colleges and universities, Moreno and colleagues (2006) documented a revolving door, where newly hired underrepresented minority faculty frequently replaced departing minority faculty rather than growing diversity in the faculty.

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