and I felt strongly that my voice mattered in the field. My advice to the next generation of scholars, particularly black scholars who are seeking but not receiving support and validation, is to pursue this outside of your current environment. Understand that there are scholarly communities that want to support and encourage you on your journey. Seek out opportunities to connect with students and faculty in the same department at another institution, attend their colloquia and speaker programs, take a course via your institution's interinstitutional program, conduct informational interviews with faculty who reflect your interests, and find ways to connect with minority-serving programs and conferences including the Ford Fellowship, the PhD Project, and Ralph Bunche programs. The community that you are seeking may be outside of your department or even your institution, but it does exist.

As a graduate student at Rice University, I had an amazing opportunity to teach my own course, "Race and Public Policy." This experience single-handedly shifted my career focus because it confirmed my love for teaching, advising, and mentoring. However, I grappled with the idea that these passions were contradictory to the prescribed path for a student earning a PhD from an R1 institution, where my time and energy should be squarely focused on research. Furthermore, the prescription was to land a tenure-track job at a research-focused institution and progress accordingly.

However, my instincts and passion for teaching nudged me toward a postdoctoral-lecturer position at Princeton University rather than a tenure-track offer from a midsized state institution. This was a pivotal moment in my career because my plan was to spend a few years teaching and conducting research at Princeton, with the eventual goal of getting a tenure-track job at a small liberal arts college. It was important to me to pursue an academic career at an institution where teaching was rewarded with the goal of moving into administration after tenure. I believed that a small liberal arts college would be the perfect fit.

Those plans quickly changed when I was offered an administrative role after my first year teaching at Princeton, which subsequently led to my current role as a dean in the graduate school with the option to teach. In this position, I find that my REP training and research are extremely beneficial because, as a descriptive representative from an underrepresented group, I am able to create programs as well as inform policies, processes, and procedures that substantively and positively impact underrepresented students. I recognize that my training is not limited to the legislative studies field but also is transferable and meaningful in various contexts. Therefore, my final piece of advice is to make decisions about your career path that feels purposeful to you, even if this means you disappoint your advisor, your committee, or your colleagues. I know it sounds cliché, but follow your passions—they may lead to wonderful and unexpected places.

In summary, I do not regret the administrative path that I have taken and I am incredibly fortunate to have received the insight and training in the REP legislative studies field. This training shaped my view of the theoretical concepts that I learned during my graduate-school career and led me to a clear roadmap for how I analytically approach my daily work. Importantly, the field has shaped my passions about the tangible and quantifiable impact of diversity and inclusion at all levels in the academy—work that continues to need improvement. ■

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HOW DIVERSITY MATTERS AND CHANGES INSTITUTIONS

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Legislative politics was seen traditionally as a male-dominated subfield in political science. Do you think the landscape has changed or is changing? More broadly, how has your identity as a woman of color shaped the way you navigate the discipline?

I kind of fell into the study of legislative politics. I loved the study of institutions and rules—how knowing how the rules work helps protect people already in power but also could present opportunities to transform political spaces. I dipped my toe into studying public policy under Randall Ripley and into parties under Paul Beck, but it seems that I always came back to legislative studies. My first legislative politics courses were with Samuel Patterson. He was well known for the study of comparative legislatures. In a course that I took with him, I floated the argument in a paper that there might be some democratic tenets in single-party legislatures with an examination of Ghana and Japan. I did fine on the paper, but the feedback that I received was mostly dismissive. Now, years later, I can see that there were major flaws and lots of naiveté in my argument but, at the time, I mostly just felt dismissed and out of place.

The papers that were applauded were those that addressed fairly simple questions using existing data and showcasing simple quantitative models (we were first-year graduate students, after all). I did not find them to be especially interesting or inspiring. What they did well was demonstrate that the students, almost all uniformly male, knew the currency of the subfield and could deliver it. One thing that I remember vividly was being told that there were no "real" political scientists in Africa. Now, I had

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studied African politics as an undergraduate. My undergraduate advisor, Dr. Dwight Mullen, had been a Ford Fellow in Ghana right after the Ghanaian independence movement. There was real politics in Ghana and individuals who were studying Ghanaian politics beyond the perspectives of Europeans and colonialism. After the graduate course in which my ideas seemed dismissed, I felt that maybe political science was not really for me.

As a Black woman from a small North Carolina town, I had been on the fence about attending graduate school in the first place. I won a Women's Research and Education Institute fellowship to work on Capitol Hill for a year and was placed in the office of Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA). That experience changed my entire trajectory. When I returned to graduate school, I had a kernel of an idea for a new and novel research project. I was clearer about the questions that mattered to me. In addition to continuing to learn from Dr. Patterson, I worked with amazing scholars, including William E. Nelson, Jr., Katherine Tate, Herb Weisberg, and the person who eventually became my dissertation advisor, Janet Box-Steffensmeier. Also, by the time I returned, the number of students of color in the graduate program had more than tripled. Black women were studying international relations, comparative politics, and political behavior; several of us worked in the survey research lab under Dr. Weisberg. Becoming a scholar is not a solitary effort. Having a strong, diverse, and talented intellectual community helped me to find the confidence to wade into uncharted and not especially friendly territory in legislative politics.

Navigating the maleness and, more explicitly, the white maleness of the subfield has not been easy, but I have had plenty of support and encouragement along the way. I remember in one of my graduate courses in legislative politics that a particular male student who was reviewing my research proposal told me that my project really did not have much to offer. Unfortunately for me, I believed him. Fortunately, my advisor and my committee had confidence in me. Jan told me then to trust my own ideas. She encouraged me to value them. I tell students now, "Take your own ideas seriously—not so seriously that you cannot hear criticism but seriously enough that not just anyone can dissuade you."

The subfield has changed considerably since then and many more scholars have done work on bill sponsorship. These women have gained influence in the field and left meaningful marks on the discipline.

Mentoring students and being an advisor are important aspects of being a professor. How do your experiences influence how you mentor your students? What is a small piece of advice for graduate students studying legislative politics?

This is a really interesting question. Mentoring is a huge part of what we do as scholars. In some ways, we are literally lifting as we climb. It has been important for me to work with all kinds of students, especially with women and women of color. I am drawn to the students with big ideas and some uncertainty about how to proceed. I am less inspired by students who do what my former colleague and legislative politics scholar Dick Fenno once described to me as "pothole political science." He said that some scholars answer relatively small questions using existing data, adding a variable here or a new modeling technique there. This was, in essence, "pothole" research: the filling in of gaps by making small, incremental advancements in the literature. There clearly is a place for that kind of work.

Other scholars charted new terrain, carved paths, thought big thoughts. This often takes longer, takes more creativity, more—well—bravery in some ways. Thinking big can be a lonely enterprise. Mentors can encourage us to do both—to think big and to fill in the gaps. I have had a zigzag pattern into and out of the academy. I have had amazing opportunities, mentors, colleagues, friends, and students. Building an intellectual community is indispensable to scholarship.

Building an intellectual community is indispensable to scholarship.

In legislative politics, the inner networks—those who perform the gatekeeping—are pretty insular and mostly white. There are more women now, but the nature of inquiry and the kinds of questions remain mostly the same. This means that a great many of us who study people in legislatures—for example, political representation—are not considered legislative studies scholars. It also means that the kinds of questions being asked and valued often are devoid of the insights that could happen if scholars took a minute to see the actual world around them. For instance, in the study of landmark legislation, many of the most important policies that changed the lives of women, Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Indigenous people are overlooked. Not all, of course; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 always make the cut. But I have wondered what a compilation of the landmark legislation for previously marginalized groups would look like. What are the characteristics of the individuals who are credited with sponsoring those bills? Why did those people ultimately sponsor the bills rather than someone else? What outside organizations helped shape these landmark bills? Why were they supported and why have the same kinds of legislators supported these kinds of policies over time? When have coalitions expanded or contracted and why? In other words, whose experiences are left in the shadows of so-called landmark legislation? What can we learn about politics by looking in the corners that often are left unexplored or not seen?

You have published on a variety of topics throughout your career. What is next? Are there any topics that you are particularly interested in currently?

I have found that, over time, my interest keeps returning to the effects of diversity on institutions. I am still interested in how changing who is in the legislature changes what the legislature does. When I think about a smallish institutional space such as a department, it is easy to see many of the influences that a more-diverse faculty has on the kinds of things that a department does. A department's core functions remain regardless of who sits in the seats, but some of what it does with its discretionary time and

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resources shifts as the people do. So, for instance, a department with more than one woman (some would say a critical mass is necessary) might devote more resources to recruiting female graduate students. Similarly, a department with one or more tenured Black or Latino faculty members might make different hiring decisions or institute new policies to diversify the curriculum, such as offering more REP courses or auditing course syllabi to ensure the inclusion of work from scholars of color. It also could be the case—and has been in my own experience—that in a more-diverse department, white faculty take up more diversity work.

The same process that underlies the exchange of ideas, interests, and skillsets in a department could translate to much larger institutions, such as Congress. It may well be the case that white, male members of Congress hear about or engage in conversations about gender or racial and ethnic issues and then use their own experience in the legislature to move issues along that otherwise might have stalled. The DREAM Act is one key example. It began as bills going nowhere, introduced by junior members of Congress and then was taken up by Senators Orrin Hatch and Dick Durbin, renamed, and moved forward. The DREAM Act failed by five votes in the Senate in 2010, after years of advocacy and having already passed the House of Representatives. Diversity—and inclusion—may lead to both innovative opportunities and innovative solutions.

In my own scholarship, I am working with a fabulous interdisciplinary team of scholars on the effects of diversity in social movements. I also am still very interested in symbolic politics and bill sponsorship. I take every chance I get to remind researchers that the simplest way that people understand politics is through symbols; therefore, understanding the ownership, definition, and manipulation of symbols is crucial to understanding the political enterprise. Dismissing symbols or symbolic gestures because they are difficult to measure consistently is a mistake. Our current politics is replete with symbols and not only the obviously symbolic ones, such as naming schools (or military bases), but also less obvious examples, such as introducing bills in one chamber that have zero chance of passing the other chamber and voting 20 times to repeal bills such as the Affordable Care Act.

Minority representation is an area that is ripe for innovation and new inquiry as the Congressional Black Caucus and the Hispanic Caucus mature and their members age. We are now at an interesting juncture in which retirements and credible primary challenges will arise. It reminds me of the 1990s, when Black legislators began vying for the seats of white Democrats. What is on the horizon now? How will representation change generationally, racially, and ethnically to reflect new issues and demographic shifts in districts? So many questions remain. It is really a rewarding time to study legislatures, legislators, and legislative institutions and behavior. ■

THE CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDYING THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS

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What Were Your Initial Motivations to Study African American Lawmakers?

My motivation for studying Black lawmakers was actually the suggestion of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Lorenzo Morris. I initially wanted to focus my dissertation on the state of school desegregation on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling. I thought my research would be very relevant. Dr. Morris told me that because I was working as a congressional staffer, I should consider doing something on the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). It had not occurred to me to write about the CBC. I ultimately focused my dissertation on the response of the CBC to the War on Drugs, specifically mandatory minimum laws for crack and powder cocaine. My career in Congress spanned from 1996 to 2004; I took leave in 2003 to complete my dissertation but returned in 2004 before taking my first tenure-track position at Prairie View A&M University later that year. Focusing on the CBC was a good decision because it allowed me to explore more deeply the complexities of Blacks in Congress. It had been relatively recently (i.e., at the time of my doctoral studies) that the CBC increased its numbers as a result of the creation of majority-minority districts following the 1990 US Census. After the 1992 congressional elections, the 103rd Congress (1993–1994) had the most new Black members in history (Committee on House Administration 2008, 8). The number of African Americans in Congress reached 50 by the 115th Congress and 57 in the 116th, the highest number in history (Brudnick and Manning 2020).

The CBC was founded in 1971. By the 103rd Congress, it was composed of experienced members (e.g., Charles Rangel, D-NY, and John Conyers, D-MI) as well as those from states that had not sent a Black member to Congress since Reconstruction. Thus, studying, researching, and writing about these dynamics and racial politics in general were important contributions to the literature. Given the motto of the CBC (i.e., "Black people have no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests") and given that its members have their own constituencies who also must be considered while they are engaged in their duties as a group, the CBC posits itself as the "Conscience of the Congress."

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Has the Field Changed Since You Started as an Assistant Professor? If So, How?

I read part of the Winter 2019 *The Legislative Scholar* that featured an interview with Dr. Nadia Brown (Harbridge-Yong and Sin 2019). The interviewer mentioned that of the 101 authors who

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