DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Meet the 2025-2026 Diversity Fellowship Program Spring Fellows

INDIA SIMMONS | PROGRAM MANAGER, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PROGRAMS

The APSA Diversity Fellowship Program was established in 1969 as a fellowship competition to diversify the political science profession. DFP provides support to students applying to, or in the early stages of, a PhD program in political science. Since its inception, the APSA Diversity Fellowship Program (DFP) has designated more than 600 fellows and contributed to the successful completion of doctoral political science programs for over 100 individuals. APSA has once again awarded a new cycle to provide support for PhD students currently in their first or second year as of Spring 2025. Please join us in congratulating the 2025-2026 class of fellows. Learn more about DFP at https://apsanet.org/dfp.

PHARRELL ALLEN

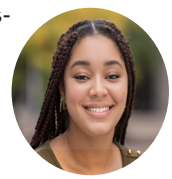
Pharrell Allen is a first-year PhD student and Cota Robles Fellowship recipient at the University of California, Irvine, in the department of political science. His subfields are American politics and race, ethnicity, and politics. Pharrell's research interests include race, gender, public opinion, and elections.



His current work analyzes the voting behavior of white voters to examine how racial attitudes and sexism affect electoral races for statewide offices. After completing his doctoral degree, Pharrell hopes to pursue a career in academia where he can conduct research, teach, and inspire future scholars to approach political science through an intersectional lens that incorporates various aspects of identities to paint a fuller picture of American politics and public opinion.

NIA ATKINS

Nia Atkins is a first-year PhD student in Princeton University's politics department. Her subfields are race and ethnic politics and American politics. Her research interests consist mainly of Black American political attitudes, communication, and behavior. More specifically, her projects have focused on traditional and social media, social policy areas including labor, public health, and child welfare, and attitudes towards gender and masculinity. Moving forward, Nia hopes to investigate the lasting socio-political impacts of historical racial exclusion policies in the United States. She also intends to examine how race intersects with gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and immigration to influence political attitudes among Black Americans and other marginalized communities. Furthermore, she aims to employ various methodological tools in her exploration of such topics, including survey data, text analysis, experimental methods, and qualitative interviews. Ultimately, through her research, Nia seeks to deepen our understanding of race and power in American politics. By investigating the historical and contemporary mechanisms that shape Black socio-political engagement, she hopes to produce scholarship that not only diagnoses systemic inequalities but also informs meaningful change.



STEVEN BRADFORD

Steven Bradford is a second-year international relations PhD student at American University's School of International Service. He earned his BA in psychology with a minor in history from Texas State University. While working on an MA in history at Texas State, he researched the evolution of Japanese-American relations since 1853, focusing on the impact of strategic alliances and shifting power dynamics. A professionally trained culinarian, Steven brings a unique perspective to international relations by integrating cultural experience and political inquiry. His current doctoral research investigates the weaponization of food by authoritarian regimes, emphasizing how targeted attacks on food systems during the Syrian conflict have disrupted civilian life, eroded cultural identity, and reinforced state control. Using oral interviews, ethnographic analysis, social media discourse analysis, and archival research, he explores the nexus of food, conflict, and authoritarian resilience. His archival work at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library—and upcoming research at the Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Libraries—examines how sustained Cold War alliances, particularly between Syria and Russia, have shaped modern patterns of violence and impunity.



CHASE BROWN

Chase Brown (she/her) is a first-year PhD student at George Washington University and an alumni of Rice University, where she graduated cum laude with a double major in political science and Spanish, and a minor in African-American politics. Currently, she studies American politics and research methods. She was inspired to pursue a PhD to combine her leadership experience from the Rice Black Student Association with her policy research experience, which expanded during her work in the 2022 Cohort Jesse Jones Leadership Center Summer in DC Policy Research Internship Program. Particularly,



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Chase has an interest in social movements, political organizing, racial politics, and intersectional identity. She is currently working on a paper studying the partisan factors that influence support for gender-affirming care, which she will present at the 2025 APSA Conference. Chase has dedicated her research agenda in graduate school to producing research that solves the problems that affect intersectionally marginalized communities. She loves connecting with other people and welcomes interested scholars and advocates to reach out to her at chaseb@gwmail.gwu.edu.

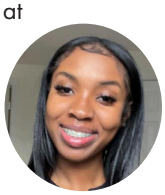
GAVIN BUEHRING

Gavin Buehring is a PhD student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studying American politics, political psychology, and political methodology. He received his BA in political science from the University of Tennessee. Gavin's research concentrates on identity politics, mental health, and belief socialization, focusing on how social identities interact with an individual's emotions, beliefs, and political engagement. He is interested in exploring both traditional and non-traditional facets of identity in his work. Gavin utilizes a variety of methodological approaches in his work to ensure representation of unheard voices in academic research. After graduation, Gavin hopes to work in academia as a professor of political science and mentor to students who are the first in their families to attend undergraduate and graduate school. By being a strong advocate for first-generation students, he hopes to be a helpful resource for students who are unfamiliar with academia and feel out of their depth.



TAYLOR CARROLL

Taylor Carroll is a first-year doctoral student in Cornell's department of government. Her subfield of study is American politics, and her research investigates the relationships between race, citizenship, and public policy. Before studying at Cornell, she completed a BA in political science at Yale. There, she began research to uncover the perceived political and epistemological consequences of restrictions on race-related studies for American democracy. As a doctoral student, Taylor is extending this work to investigate whether and how curtailments of race-conscious education practices (i.e. race-related studies; affirmative action; culturally-responsive pedagogy; diversity, equity, and inclusion) influence the ways that race-marginalized students perceive government, democratic citizenship, state power, and their own political efficacy. Taylor's work has been published in Cambridge's *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, and she is a recipient of Cornell's Dean's Excellence Award. Currently, Taylor serves as a research assistant to Dr. Jamila Michener and an education ambassador at DuSable Black History Museum. As a graduate student, she is eager to gain expertise in qualitative field methods, scholarly writing, and interdisciplinary approaches. Upon completing her PhD, Taylor hopes to pursue a career in academia or public policy to advance racial equity in education.



LISETTE GALLARZO GUERRERO

Lisette Gallarzo Guerrero is a second-year PhD student in the department of political science at the University of California, San Diego. Before pursuing her doctorate, Lisette earned her BA in government from Cornell University, where she was a Ronald E. McNair scholar. She is currently a member of UCSD's Race and Ethnic Politics (REP) Lab and the Latine Graduate Student Association (LGSA). Specializing in both American and comparative politics, Lisette's research interests focus on intraregional migration in Latin America, Latine political behavior and partisanship, misinformation, and immigration attitudes more broadly. Her current project explores the drivers of anti-immigrant sentiment in Latin America by looking at public opinion in Colombia. She plans to extend this line of research to additional countries in the region and explore the role of misinformation in shaping these attitudes. After completing her PhD, Lisette aspires to pursue a position in academia, where she can continue conducting research that supports Latine and immigrant communities, while also empowering first-generation and underrepresented students through mentorship.



CLAIRE HAZBUN

Claire Hazbun is a PhD student in comparative government and a Patrick Healy Graduate Fellow at Georgetown University. Her research focuses on political violence, identity politics, democracy and elections, and African politics. Prior to starting her PhD, she spent several years working for a democracy and governance NGO in Washington, DC, initially on the organization's Ethiopia portfolio and later in evaluation and research. She received her BS in international politics from Georgetown in 2020, where she wrote an African studies thesis on ethnoregional politics and the Anglophone separatist conflict in Cameroon.



AKAYLA HENSON

Akayla Henson (she/her/hers) is a second-year PhD student at the University of Illinois' department of political science. Her research focuses on American politics, with particular interests in gender, representation, and race, ethnicity, and politics (REP). She is especially interested in how one's identity shapes marginalized groups' experiences and political behavior. Before attending the University of Illinois, Akayla graduated cum laude from Murray State University with a BA in political science. She is a proud alumna of the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program and Marvin D. Mills Scholarship Program at Murray State. While in the McNair Scholars Program, Akayla published research on substantive and descriptive representation with her advisor, Dr. Brittany Wood. Upon completing her doctoral studies, Akayla plans to pursue a career in academia where she can empower future generations inside and outside of academia.



KYAW HSAN HLAING

Kyaw Hsan Hlaing is a PhD student in the department of government at Cornell University and a 2024 recipient of the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans. He studies comparative politics with a focus on regime change, political violence, authoritarianism, and rebel politics. Before enrolling at Cornell, he resumed his undergraduate studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in January 2023—following a seven-year hiatus from his studies at Yangon University of Distance

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Education at Sittwe University—and received his BA in Asian studies in July 2024 with high academic distinction. Prior to his academic pursuits, Kyaw Hsan worked as an independent journalist and analyst, reporting on armed conflict, the military coup, protest, and human rights violations in Myanmar for a range of international media outlets, including TIME Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Foreign Policy, The Diplomat Magazine, and Al Jazeera. At Cornell, he is a graduate affiliate of the Southeast Asia Program (SEAP) and serves as the SEAP Representative for Graduate Education and Training in Southeast Asia (GETSEA), a consortium aimed at enhancing graduate education in Southeast Asian studies across North America.

JAKE KNIEVEL

Jake Knievel is a doctoral student and graduate teaching assistant in the department of political science at Idaho State University. His subfields are American politics and public administration. Inspired by his background as a library worker and local political pressures of censorship, Jake and Dr. Edward Kammerer set out to investigate the political self-conception of drag performers involved in reading time programming. The project seeks to understand the mission of these programs, their community impact and response, and if the performers view their work as a political act. Alongside LGBTQ+ politics, Jake's undergraduate degree in music and background in performance, education, and arts leadership usher in additional research interests at the intersection of public policy and the arts. Attention to issues of funding development, governance, access, advocacy, inclusion, education, and diversity in the arts is critical for communities around the globe, particularly in times of rising authoritarianism. The arts and politics are Jake's vehicles towards transformational change.



ZERAH LAMORENA

Zerah Lamorena is a first-year PhD student in the department of political science at UCLA, specializing in comparative politics and methodology, with minor interests in international relations. Her research lies at the intersection of political communication, gender, and the political economy of development, with a regional focus on Southeast Asia. In particular, she is interested in how social media shapes electoral outcomes and voter perceptions, especially of women candidates. Prior to graduate school, Zerah worked as a research assistant for faculty at Yale University, Emory University, and UCLA, contributing to projects spanning from macroeconomics to international security. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in economics and a Bachelor of Science in business management, both summa cum laude, from Stony Brook University, where she first became involved in faculty-led research as an undergraduate. At UCLA, Zerah aims to combine fieldwork, survey experimentation, and computational methods to produce actionable insights in political science. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career that enables her to continue contributing to policy-relevant research.



KENNEDY LIGHTY

Kennedy Lighty is a first-year PhD student in political science at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she specializes in race and ethnic politics, Black politics, and public policy. She is a proud graduate of the illustrious North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in political science in May 2024. As a passionate scholar-activist, Kennedy brings a strong advocacy and grassroots organizing background to her academic pursuits. She is committed to producing research that uplifts the voices of marginalized communities and informs policy solutions rooted in equity and justice.



AUTUMN LOTT

Autumn Lott is a first-year PhD student in political science at Duke University. She earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Brigham Young University, where she also served as a research and teaching assistant. Her research interests lie at the intersection of political behavior and identities and race and ethnicity politics, with a particular focus on Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. She is especially interested in how racial and ethnic identities shape political attitudes, behaviors, and civic engagement. Looking ahead, she aspires to pursue a career in academia, where she can continue her scholarship and teach courses on race, identity, and political behavior.



MARIA ISABEL MOSQUERA

Maria Isabel Mosquera is a PhD student in government at the University of Texas at Austin, specializing in American politics and methodology. Her research centers on race and ethnic politics, with a focus on Latine political behavior and immigration. She is currently examining how U.S. immigration judges made decisions during the Trump and Biden administrations, with particular attention to how judicial behavior shifts across political contexts. Maria earned her BA in political science, summa cum laude, from DePaul University, where she also minored in international studies. As a Ronald E. McNair Scholar, she developed a strong commitment to research and decided to pursue graduate study. A proud Chicago native, Maria's scholarly interests are deeply informed by her upbringing as the daughter of immigrants. After completing her PhD, she hopes to remain in academia, where she can continue conducting research, teaching, and supporting the next generation of scholars in race and ethnic politics.



MIRENA A. MUNICH

Mirena A. Munich is a first-year PhD student in political science at the University of California, Riverside. Her research explores institutional trust among Latino immigrant communities in the United States, particularly emphasizing healthcare access, political behavior, and the intergenerational transmission of institutional skepticism. As a first-generation college graduate and minority scholar, Mirena is committed to addressing racial and ethnic inequities in public policy and political engagement. She is developing a research agenda that bridges political behavior, racial and ethnic politics, and institutional analysis, using mixed-methods approaches to investigate how immigrant ex-

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periences with public institutions shape broader attitudes toward government legitimacy. Her early projects examine the impact of systemic exclusion, such as language barriers and healthcare discrimination, on institutional trust across generations. Mirena's broader areas of research and teaching interest include comparative politics and mass political behavior, focusing on race, ethnicity, and identity politics. Through her scholarship, she seeks to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in political science while contributing to research that informs policy change. As an APSA Diversity Fellow, she looks forward to engaging with scholars across subfields and mentoring future generations of underrepresented students in the discipline.



ERYKAH PASHA

Erykah Pasha is a first-year PhD student in the government department at Georgetown University. They are in the American government field and are a member of the Gender, Race, and Ethnicity Politics (GREP) Lab. Their research interests are in organizing, social movements, and intersectionality. Before attending Georgetown University, Erykah graduated magna cum laude from Syracuse University with a BA in political science and sociology. There, Erykah became interested in pursuing a PhD as a Ronald E. McNair Scholar, researching Black queer political thought and behavior in upstate New York. After completing their PhD, Erykah aims to pursue a career in academia while conducting interdisciplinary research useful to organizers confronting questions of collective action and intersectionality.



HAILEY STEPP

Hailey Stepp is a graduate student in American politics and research methods at the University of Arizona, where she is completing her PhD with a focus on racial and ethnic political psychology. Specifically, her research aims to understand the political behavior of multiracial Americans and those with conflicting racial identities and the subsequent political consequences that may arise from having a fluid racial identity. Hailey is a recent dual degree graduate from Washington State University, studying political science and strategic communication. She has an extensive background in speech and debate, political efficacy and linguistics, racial policies, and advocacy. Her future academic endeavors include furthering theoretical and experimental political research on multiracial individuals and pursuing work in higher education to teach public speaking, political theory, and systemic inequities.



SYNIA TAITT

Synia Taitt is a is a first-year PhD student at Cornell University in the government department. Her subfield lies in American politics, studying the political perspectives of Black individuals through linked fate towards American institutions as it relates to race and ethnicity politics. Currently, Synia is a fellow in the Racial Justice and Equitable Futures Center at Cornell, led by her mentor Dr. Jamila Michner. Synia holds a BA in political science from Howard University and is a proud alumnus of the APSA Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (2023-2024) and the Mark Q. Sawyer Summer Institute as a part of the UCLA x HBCU Initiative (2023-2024). In progression toward her PhD, Synia is working on mixed methods research to analyze Black group cohesion towards institutions, to assess nuance in negative/positive emotions, and how they inform political participation through various facets. She hopes to inspire future generations of Black scholars in Academia post-PhD.



MACKENZIE TARADALSKY

Mackenzie Taradalsky (she/her) is a second-year PhD student in the department of government at Georgetown University, where she specializes in American politics with a focus on race, gender, gender expression, sexuality, and political institutions. She is also a member of Georgetown's Gender, Race, and Ethnicity Politics (GREP) Lab. Her research explores the political experiences of Black lesbian politicians in US legislatures through a mixed-methods approach that includes interviews, media analysis, archival research, and experimental design. Mackenzie is particularly interested in developing intersectional frameworks that more accurately capture how power and discrimination shape the institutional experiences of multiple marginalized individuals. She earned her BA from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she graduated with high honors and was a distinguished Ronald E. McNair Scholar. After completing her PhD, she plans to continue producing research that centers marginalized voices and to inspire future scholars to critically engage with questions of power, identity, and inequality in U.S. politics.



FIORELA VILLEGAS

Fiorela Villegas (she/her) is a first-year political science PhD student at Duke University. Her fields of study include political behavior and identities, as well as race, ethnicity, and politics (REP). Her research interests encompass Latino political representation, political efficacy, political engagement, and racial tensions among Latino sub-groups. Fiorela is currently analyzing immigration perspectives among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans to better understand the dynamics between the two largest Latino subgroups in the United States. She earned her bachelor's degree in political science and medical anthropology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in May 2024. After completing her doctoral studies, she plans to pursue a career in academia and continue expanding scholarship on minority groups within the US political system. ■



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