TEACHING AND LEARNING

2025 Teaching and Learning Conference Highlights and Track Summaries

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From February 7-9, attendees gathered in Alexandria, VA for the 17th Teaching and Learning Conference. The program committee organized a dynamic conference built around former APSA President John Ishiyama's Presidential Taskforce on *Rethinking Political Science Education*. The three-day conference asked participants to engage in discussions exploring how and why "Teaching Political Science Matters." Friday morning began with a series of pre-conference short courses centered on three different themes: civic engagement, artificial intelligence and teaching, and pedagogy training. The conference kicked off with Michelle D. Deardorff's (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) plenary titled "Finding Joy in Teaching during Dark Times." APSA President, Taeku Lee (Harvard University) presented two prestigious teaching awards. The Michael Brintnall Teaching and Learning Award was awarded to Intae Choi (University of Missouri) and the APSA Award for Teaching Innovation to Shamira Gelbman (Wabash College).

During the conference, attendees engaged in one of seven themed tracks and had the opportunity to select from a variety of interactive workshops. The track summaries are published in the following pages. These summaries include highlights and themes that emerged from the research presented in each track. Throughout the tracks, participants returned to the theme of "Teaching Political Science Matters," tying their track discussions to broader questions of how teaching political science matters today. Recommendations for faculty, departments, and the discipline are included in each track summary.

Since 2018, the standalone TLC conference is a biennial conference and a central part of APSA's commitment to teaching and learning. The eighth annual TLC at APSA mini-conference will take place on Saturday, September 13 in Vancouver, BC, Canada as part of the 2025 APSA Annual Meeting.

The presentations discussed below are available on APSA Preprints.

21ST CENTURY SKILLS: AI, LITERACY, ANALYSIS, RESEARCH AND WRITING

ERIC LOEPP, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, WHITEWATER
KIM MACVAUGH, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
ANDREEA MAIEREAN, WILKES UNIVERSITY
STEPHANIE SLOCUM-SCHAFFER, SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY

This track brought together scholars from around the world to showcase innovative pedagogy and research that centers on preparing students to enter a highly complex, highly digitized social and political world. The track was broken into four segments: *Critical Thinking and Information Literacy, Teaching Tools for Skill Development, Equity and Student Success,* and *Tools to Develop Student Learning*. Papers cover a wide range of topics, ranging from ethical use of artificial intelligence to inquiry-based learning, yet the track as a whole was unified by a common theme: critical thinking. Papers and projects across the disciplinary spectrum aim to cultivate in students a capacity to rigorously, thoughtfully, and compassionately analyze political phenomena. Below we summarize highlights from each of our track sessions.

CRITICAL THINKING AND INFORMATION LITERACY

The first panel of the track focused on critical thinking and information literacy, with four papers contextualizing the approach of teaching fundamental skills of media literacy and academic research in their courses. Two of the presentations: "Misinformation, disinformation, mal- information: Teaching information gathering in the age of social media," by Herma Percy (American Public University), and "Informed citizens: Teaching least biased sources in an age of misinformation," by Mark Springer (University of Mary), discussed assignments that enable students to critically evaluate traditional and social media sources.

Percy used an interdisciplinary course at American Public University as a case study for filling gaps in her students' digital information literacy. Starting at the micro level with fact-checking and source-evaluation exercises, she taught students the tools needed to analyze the quality of resources for their research needs. She also invited librarians to teach the class about academic integrity and citation best practices. Similarly, Springer was concerned with students' consumption of political information from sources that confirm their preexisting biases, and how to teach them to explore a wider range of material. Springer developed an assignment to teach students how to triangulate their information gathering by utilizing the "least biased news" media sources. At the start of the course, students take quizzes to assess their own ideological leanings to increase self-awareness of potential biases, then they are partnered with other students to complete fact-checking and source-evaluation activities using a selection of news sources that are routinely rated as the "least biased" or most trusted in a number of national surveys. Springer has tested his model to determine if exposure to "least biased sources" decreased students' inclination to seek poor information from social media sources, and early findings are promising. Track participants encouraged him to pursue the study with IRB in future iterations of the course.

The other two presentations of the session: "Fostering critical thinking in the age of AI: Why information literacy still matters," by Kimberly MacVaugh and "Capstone 2.0: Elevating research through AI literacy," by Shannon McQueen (West Chester University), proposed means of engaging students in responsible

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use of AI research tools as part of their political science education. McQueen discussed her incorporation of AI into her senior capstone course, by developing and discussing an AI policy with the class, by sharing and demonstrating AI-enabled research tools during class, and by including prompt engineering exercises and AI chat draft review into the writing process. AI use in the capstone project was not mandated, and McQueen found in her class survey that her students appreciated her open approach to AI use in the classroom and that they "recognize the limits of AI and are attuned to many of its ethical implications." She noted that her course of high-performing senior students was not representative of all undergraduate students, and a different pedagogical approach would be necessary for introductory courses.

On that note, MacVaugh urged instructors to approach AI with caution, recommending working with librarians to build foundational literacy and critical thinking skills for undergraduates before introducing AI tools into the research process. Students come to college with different research experiences and should be grounded in the principles of information literacy and learn the basics of information creation and the academic research process, so that they will be prepared and aware of the potential risks and weaknesses of AI research assistants. Most students and even faculty wish they did not have to struggle with messy, iterative attempts to locate and evaluate information for their research projects, yet, it is the process itself that hones information literacy skills and develops students into critical thinkers.

Track participants resonated with the papers on the panel, and they shared their own experiences with students who are unable or unwilling to diversify their news consumption. Another common struggle was the inherent tension between teaching these basic literacy skills and delivering their regular course content. The presenters were encouraged to pursue repeated or longitudinal studies of their pedagogical interventions in order to build evidence about student learning outcomes.

TEACHING TOOLS FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Our second panel included four papers suggesting pathways for skill development. Two of the most pressing and relevant skills we discussed center on critical thinking and information literacy. Katherine Knutson (Gustavus Adolphus College) and Rachel Flynn (Gustavus Adolphus College) propose a method for developing information literacy skills by teaching students to recognize how both writing genre and context should influence interpretations of text. The work is motivated by an incident in which a student commented that an op-ed –which is by definition supposed to advocate for a position– was "just so biased!" Kate realized the student was moved to allege bias because they had read the document as a newspaper article– that is, as part of a genre in which they believe the content should be neutral rather than advancing an argument. Kate partnered with Rachel to design learning activities that help students identify genre and context as they approach various forms of political writing. An underappreciated consequence of a largely digital world is that students consume mostly "flat" information, devoid of clues and cues that establish the appropriate lens through which to evaluate them. Knutson and Flynn contribute a helpful corrective.

Daniel Kirsch (Northern Virginia Community College) and Rong Zhu (Northern Virginia Community College) furthered our efforts to build critical thinking skills. They combine David Hubert's *Attenuated Democracy: A Critical Introduction to US Government and Politics* –a textbook that emphasizes structural inequality in society and calls for increased civic participation to counteract elite influence– and Packback –a digital learning company whose pedagogical approach prioritizes student autonomy – to create rich, inquiry-based learning experiences in which students receive real-time AI feedback on written comments. In prompting students to ask open-ended questions, Packback "encourages students to practice democracy in their own learning, exchanging ideas, debating viewpoints, and refining arguments through structured discourse." In an era in which traditional political norms and processes are being questioned and challenged, Kirsch and Zhu's innovative approach to teaching about American government is timely and relevant.

Debates over the appropriate scope and nature of AI in our courses and classrooms remain common within the political science discipline, along with virtually all others. Many instructors are understandably wary, yet, like Kirsch and Zhu, Leena Thacker-Kumar (University of Houston-Downtown), Christina Hughes (University of Houston-Downtown), and Clayton Cleveland (University of Houston-Downtown) show us how AI can be leveraged to our pedagogical advantage. After survey data revealed broad apprehension about AI skills among their students, Thacker-Kumar, Hughes, and Cleveland designed an assignment in which students contrast their own perspectives concerning what constitutes an ideal democracy with an AI-generated response to the same question. What did AI capture well? What did it miss? How could it be improved? Through this interrogation, students are able to not only reflect substantively on their own interpretations, but to evaluate the potential–and the limits–of AI to meaningfully contribute to political discussions.

Our final paper further advanced our conversation about information literacy, indeed extending it to focus on understanding *knowledge*, Megan Becker (University of Southern California) provides a model for teaching students to think both substantively and epistemologically about causality. Though process tracing is a powerful tool for understanding causal relationships–particularly in the qualitative domain–the method is not commonly included in research methods courses. Megan offers an excellent model for instructors wishing to do so. This approach prepares students to identify causal mechanisms, discern their observable implications, and effectively communicate their process and findings. Students are trained to focus not only on the specific variables and theories in front of them, but to think more broadly about how knowledge is accumulated. Though Megan's application centers on an undergraduate course on civil war, the method is widely applicable across a variety of political science courses.

EQUITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The third panel, on the theme of "Equity and Student Success" featured four interesting presentations on pedagogical interventions to improve student learning outcomes. In the first paper, "Teaching Political Science with Pop Culture," Marie Schenk (Lehigh University) described two case studies of lessons she taught to a first year seminar pairing politics and pop culture: a lesson on ethical AI and *Captain America: Winter Soldier* and a lesson on descriptive representation and *Barbie*. She found that analyzing fiction builds empathy, and pop culture is an on-ramp to talking about complex political concepts. Students entering undergraduate political science programs

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can find the empirical methods unfamiliar and intimidating, so she chose popular films as an analytical tool, hoping to lower the barrier to entry to interpreting academic articles. As Schenk notes in her paper, when "the topic and conclusions are familiar, students can focus on understanding how the argument is constructed and conveyed" (Schenk, 6). Schenk's students were able to understand complicated technical and ethical concepts in the context of the heightened stakes of a science fiction film (*Captain America*) and were more likely to grasp Maybridge (1999)'s theory of descriptive representation when they compared it to the public opinion discourse surrounding the film *Barbie*.

In her presentation "Assessing the Efficacy of CUREs in Political Science," Jenna Becker Kane (West Chester University) discussed revamping her syllabus with similar pedagogical aims of reducing student anxiety and strengthening student comprehension, in this case with an upper- level research methods course. Based on natural sciences education research affirming the value of high-impact teaching practices, she incorporated class-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs) into her West Chester University 300-level political science course on the Supreme Court. The class included scaffolded research design and implementation phases, including hypothesis testing and quantitative statistical analysis. A pre- and post- class survey revealed that students did experience statistically significant gains in confidence and comfort with the political science research process.

The second two presentations featured the incorporation of AI tools into student assignments— one as a test of equity in student learning outcomes, and one as a test of the social benefits possible from AI applications in policy problem solving. In the first, "The Impact of Equitable Access to AI in the Classroom: A Comparative Study," S.P Harish (College of William & Mary) assigned one of his class sections in Fall 2024 to use only Microsoft Copilot—an enterprise AI tool available to everyone at the college, and one of his sections was permitted to use any AI tool they wished to support their assignments, creating an "inequitable" learning environment depending on their choice to pay or not pay for AI tools. Throughout the semester, Harish conducted student surveys, and he found that the students in the Copilot group were more cautious and skeptical of the tool, using it mainly for brainstorming if at all. The "inequitable" group chose a wide variety of tools and students used them pragmatically; Grammarly and ChatGPT were frequently deployed. Harish could see a marked difference between the quality of output, with paid subscription tools outperforming free versions considerably. Harish noted that around 40% of his students refused to use AI in their work, citing concerns about plagiarism, the effort required to review the output, and the environmental footprint—they asserted the desires for creativity, integrity, self-expression, authenticity, and taking pride in their own work.

Matthew Maguire (San José State University), on the other hand, incorporated an "AI for Social Good" (AI4SG) module in his undergraduate Business, Government & Society course for general management students (i.e., no technical background), and compared the student learning outcomes with a second course—Fundamentals of Management Information Systems—taught by and for individuals with a background in technology. The AI4SG module is a four-session "ideathon" where teams work together to experiment with AI tools, learn about organizational use of AI through case studies, and propose a novel, AI-based solution to a problem in their community. Maguire found that as a result of the AI4SG module, both technical and non-technical students report had more confidence in their understanding of AI and their ability to solve problems with AI, more trust in AI, more interest in working in the field of AI, and more knowledge of how AI can help address sustainability issues. Interestingly, only non- technical students in his course were more likely to think, as a result of the module, that AI will benefit humankind, that AI is both useful and an important subject for their major, and that it is fun and interesting to learn about AI.

TOOLS TO DEEPEN STUDENT LEARNING

Our last panel brought together three innovative papers that explore how political science education can be transformed through student-centered pedagogical strategies. They analyzed the function of social media as a critical space for learning about global justice, the role of AI as a tool for enhancing engagement in political science instruction, and a model for incorporating peer feedback and oral presentations in research methods courses. The papers address the same core challenge: how to make political science education more responsive, inclusive, and empowering for today's students. While each paper focuses on different tools (social media, artificial intelligence, and peer collaboration) they collectively emphasize the need for faculty to adapt to rapidly changing learning environments and embrace new modes of engagement.

Madeleine Le Bourdon (University of Leeds) explores in her paper "#Global Justice? Social Media, Pedagogy, and Activism" how young people in the UK engage with global justice issues through social media and how educators can use this engagement for critical learning. The paper discusses the context of structural inequalities and market-oriented education policies that often sideline global and justice-oriented content. Le Bourdon critiques how the current UK educational framework marginalizes discussions of race, colonial history, and systemic inequities, noting that social media fills a gap by offering young people access to lived experiences and grassroots perspectives that are often absent in formal curricula.

Through two stages of research (first with high school students and then with college students) Le Bourdon finds that social media acts as an informal learning space where young people engage with global challenges in deeply personal ways. Students value authenticity and are often using social platforms as a catalyst for deeper research and activism. They are, however, also on the alert about misinformation and express a need for better critical media literacy. College students would like to see the integration of social media into academic curricula and want guidance in navigating digital platforms critically and responsibly. The study concludes with a call for educators to embrace social media's pedagogical potential, equip students with the skills to critically engage online, and adapt teaching methods to meet the realities of an increasingly digital world.

In the paper "The AI-Enabled Instructor: Enhancing Political Science Learning," Sean Peters (United States Air Force Academy) explores how artificial intelligence can significantly improve the educational experience of political science courses. He highlights the growing role of AI tools in personalizing learning, enabling interactive instruction, and helping students engage more deeply with complex political concepts. Peters argues that AI technologies, such as intelligent tutoring systems and natural

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language processing tools, can adapt to students' individual learning needs, offer immediate feedback, and foster critical thinking. By integrating these tools into political science curricula, instructors can move beyond traditional lecture-based formats to more dynamic and student-centered teaching strategies.

Peters also discusses the challenges and ethical considerations that come with implementing AI in educational settings. He warns against overreliance on technology and stresses the importance of maintaining the instructor's role as a guide and critical thinker. Additionally, he emphasizes the need for transparency in how AI tools are used, particularly regarding data privacy and algorithmic bias. Ultimately, he concludes that when carefully applied, AI can serve as a powerful partner to educators, enriching political science education by making it more engaging and responsive to diverse learner needs.

In the paper, "A Case for Peer Feedback and Oral Presentations in Research Methods Courses" Andreea Maierean (Wilkes University) outlines a pedagogical model used to enhance student outcomes in political science research methods courses. It emphasizes the challenges faced by underprepared students and proposes a structured research module that progressively guides students from topic selection and literature review to data analysis, research paper writing, and ultimately, formal defense of their work. Oral presentations and peer feedback are embedded throughout the module to build confidence, improve communication, and support learning.

Peer feedback involves structured critique sessions, accountability partnerships, and small group evaluations, which not only aid in time management and stress reduction but also foster collaborative learning. Oral presentations, including mock sessions and final defenses, provide opportunities for students to articulate and defend their research, enhancing public speaking skills and subject mastery. Student survey data supports the approach: peer feedback received high evaluations for its role in identifying areas of improvement and enhancing learning. Students also reported increased confidence in offering constructive critique. The paper concludes that incorporating peer review and oral presentations significantly improves students' academic and skill development.

Together, these papers raised important questions about the future of political science education: How can we use technology without losing human connection? How do we ensure that digital tools enhance, rather than undermine, critical thinking and equity? And what kinds of classroom practices most effectively prepare students to be thoughtful, engaged citizens in a complex world? The Q&A touched on providing digital literacy across diverse student populations and on implementing these pedagogical strategies across different institutional contexts. A recurring theme was the importance of empowering students, not only as learners, but as co-creators of knowledge, whether through social media activism, AI-enabled personalization, or collaborative research practices.

CAREER PREPARATION IN THE POLITICAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM

CAMERON ARNZEN, BROWN UNIVERSITY
IVY ORR HAMERLY, BAYLOR UNIVERSITY
CHLOE O'NEILL, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
REBECCA GRACE TAN, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
JOSHUA WOOD, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA RIVERSIDE
WILLIAM O'BROCHTA, TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Students, parents, administrators, and community members, among others, are increasingly asking how political science programs lead to job opportunities. Our 2025 TLC track emphasized the role that political science must play in career preparation. Instead of only preparing students for a first job after graduation, the liberal arts curriculum and skills taught in most political science classrooms help students discern their career paths and develop them as engaged members of society. Furthermore, political science students are prepared for a range of career pathways and gain competency in skills that employers demand.

A focus on career preparation requires attention at all levels of the discipline. Our track's mix of papers provide insights and evidence across these levels. First, we need to better understand the career pathways our students choose and to identify the skills that we can further develop to best prepare students for these pathways. Second, we must consider the discipline's role in teaching basic career readiness, including engaging with relevant departments and programs on campus with a career focus and developing programming covering the hidden curriculum of college and professional skills that faculty often assume students know. Third, we have an obligation to begin our career preparation work where we are and in ways that are achievable. In doing so, we hope that classroom-based initiatives grow into curricular development and an APSA-wide focus to provide career and professional development guidance for our students.

We describe each of these themes below and conclude by calling on all in the political science community to consider how career preparation can complement and integrate with the discipline's existing strengths.

STUDENTS NEED CAREER SKILLS

Our track emphasized the importance of programs and faculty being aware of and engaged with relevant career opportunities and realistic market demands that students will face. The papers in the track underscore the importance of connecting with employers and alumni, understanding employment environments, identifying the unique characteristics of student bodies, and addressing the hidden curriculum that shapes career readiness.

One major theme across these works is the importance of bridging academic training with professional expectations. Holistic, reflective approaches to student professional development, such as those that integrate experiential learning and targeted internships, help to ensure students develop relevant skills for post-graduate employment. Pearl Matibe (George Mason University) focuses on capstone courses as an ideal opportunity to embed research-based pedagogy and experiential learning to enhance students' skills to cope with the high research demands of policy jobs. Focusing on skills students need to be successful after graduating, hers and other papers in the track emphasize the value of directly connecting with employers and alumni to stay atop of the evolving skill sets required in the workforce. Reflecting on our own profession, for example, Elizabeth O'Callaghan (Georgia State University), Holloway Sparks (Georgia State University), and Michael Evans (Georgia State University) urge institutions to take teaching more seriously in graduate training, as teaching is an essential skill for the profession.

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Focusing on student needs in career preparation requires taking stock of the employment landscape that students face. Institutions in urban areas often have greater access to government agencies, think tanks, and NGOs, while rural institutions might emphasize local governance or regional policy careers. Understanding these differences can help tailor career readiness programs. Joshua M. Wood's (University of California Riverside) work on undergraduate career readiness at a minority serving institution expands career preparation to consider campus and community needs.

Recognizing students' social capital, background, and aspirations is essential, as many students lack intergenerational professional networks. Structured mentorship and tangible career pathways are two ways to build these networks. The strategic design of small-group, career- focused initiatives can mitigate disparities in access to policy careers. Schmitt articulates how intentional, structured career exploration allows students to develop career-relevant skills. Even after developing career-relevant skills, some students may need help articulating their readiness. Capstones and career readiness assessments can help students articulate their strengths and aspirations in a competitive job market.

These works collectively highlight the role of the hidden curriculum. Addressing this requires intentional programming that demystifies professional norms, promotes equitable access to opportunities, and fosters career confidence. By engaging students in structured career preparation and networking, political science programs can level the playing field and ensure all students have access to meaningful employment pathways.

THE DISCIPLINE'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING CAREER PREPARATION

Once institutions and faculty members have a better grasp of their students' needs, it is vital to consider how political science as a discipline can provide for those needs through existing practices and settings rather than having to reinvent the proverbial wheel.

Acquiring knowledge about politics and power through instruction in political science can itself be useful for career preparation. Cameron Arnzen (Brown University) and Chloe O'Neill (Columbia University) argue that incorporating the teaching of educational politics in political science allows students to be better prepared with "substantive interest and knowledge of education" to aid them in life after graduation. Amanda D. Clark (University of Texas Dallas) highlights that core disciplinary courses, such as introduction to public policy, can provide students with opportunities to learn about how public policy is enacted in real life by engaging with practitioners. This engagement provides students with a deeper appreciation of the policy topics being studied while also giving them insights into what career pathways might be available to them in the future. Beyond specific knowledge areas, Tan argues more broadly for the value of political science in introducing students to "wicked problems," such as climate change and inequality. Through the challenging process of grappling with these issues, students can develop emotional competencies that allow them to engage with similarly knotty problems in their career.

Political science is not merely useful for its ability to introduce students to discipline- specific knowledge which can aid in their career development, but through a skills-based focus. William O'Brochta's (Texas Lutheran University) paper proposes that as students engage in the self-assessment of their knowledge of political science through reviewing their class notes they can develop critical thinking skills vital for the workplace. Ivy Hamerly (Baylor University) presents a more explicitly career-centric approach in a discussion of a senior seminar for international studies students. This course offers opportunities for students to learn how to network through the use of alumni interviews.

Departments and faculty members in political science already have many career preparation opportunities through existing courses and content. However, these opportunities often need more intentional marketing so that students are aware of what the discipline can offer them. Michael T. Rogers (Arkansas Tech University) and Christopher E. Housenick (Arkansas Tech University) provide a useful template in showing how the political science department in Arkansas Tech University repositioned itself to appeal to students and their evolving needs, through marketing approaches such as website redesign and restructuring its curriculum into according to different career tracks.

CAREER PREPARATION EXEMPLARS

The track offered a range of practical strategies and advice for faculty interested in incorporating career preparation into their courses and programs. Here, we present several strategies in order of complexity and ease-of-implementation. Faculty in different departments, with different amounts of resources, and at different stages in their careers, may be able to implement a strategy to improve career preparation in their classroom and/or to undertake a major, cross-institution career preparation initiative.

Starting at the course level, Simone Paci (Stanford University) focuses on the format of the final student project in a seminar setting. The goal, in this case, is to provide options for and scaffolding to support classroom work which resembles real-world applications of political science and which will prepare them for work in related fields. Students are given the option to complete a traditional research paper, but the assignment is designed to accommodate applied formats such as long-form journalism, public policy white papers, and lobbying or campaign strategy memos.

William A. Schlickenmaier (Georgetown University) uses courses to build networks that extend beyond the classroom setting. He presents a strategy for developing credible networks in the classroom which focuses on building and sustaining a cohort of current students and soliciting participation from course alumni. The professional bonds these students form amongst themselves and the relationships they build with already well-positioned alumni give current students a leg up in their search for internships.

Douglas M. Cantor (Rutgers University-New Brunswick) and Stacey Greene (Rutgers University-New Brunswick), stressing the importance of experiential learning, modify their course on politics and law to include trips to courthouses at the state and federal level. Furthermore, though this is a traditional course, they modify assignments to incentivize student reflection on their first-hand observations of court proceedings. These real-world experiences then serve as a basis for students to make meaningful decisions about whether a career in the legal field is right for them.

Moving to the program and department level, Carrie Humphreys (University of Tennessee, Martin) and Adnan Rasool (University of Tennessee, Martin) introduce a significant curric-

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ular change in their undergraduate political science program to better prepare students for careers related to their studies. The program provides students with opportunities to participate in Model UN or the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature and, from there, encourages them to take internships related to their professional interests. The program culminates in a student-led conference where they present original research or reflections on their experiences in these hands-on environments.

Cocurricular experiential learning strategies can have major professional development benefits for students. Bobbi Gentry (Bridgewater College), Chapman Rackaway (Radford University), and Amanda Wintersieck (Virginia Commonwealth University) have organized and continue to facilitate the intercollegiate Virginia Government Simulation. It requires coordination across multiple faculty across distinct campuses, hundreds of interested students, staff, funding institutions, and government officials. Students, supported logistically in the background, convene at the Virginia state capital and craft their own legislation following official procedures. The challenges the students confront and the hands-on experience they gain has served these students well as they enter careers related to political science.

CALL TO ACTION

Individual faculty should consider weaving some career preparation activities into their courses using existing resources and assignments. Simple assessment methods like pre- and post-tests, reflective writing, and classroom polls can track student learning. Faculty should maintain connections with alumni, monitor their career paths, and invite them to speak with current students.

Departments must evaluate and enhance career preparation efforts while compensating faculty for the additional work that doing so entails. Using direct and indirect measures of career readiness, departments can evaluate the effectiveness of their career preparation strategies. High impact practices like internships, engaged learning, and capstone courses should include career preparation. Departments could plan alumni mixers and create online alumni groups. However, departments should compensate faculty for this additional work through course releases, stipends, or service positions.

As a discipline, we need to reimagine our responsibility as educators to include both teaching political science and preparing our students for careers. Many state legislatures are using performance-based funding that ties higher education funding to career readiness and workforce development. Administrators, parents, and students demand information about career paths that match our field. The political science community must communicate better about how we prepare our students for careers. While much of our teaching already does this, our track identified ways to sharpen career preparation in curricular and co-curricular forms.

We urge APSA to expand career development resources. APSA Educate should add a career preparation section, including syllabi for standalone courses. APSA should hold a symposium to gather resources for APSA Educate, focusing on career preparation. These resources could be categorized by institution type. Additionally, APSA should host virtual programs to highlight successful career paths for political science majors and organize a department chair mini-conference with a career preparation theme.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, JUSTICE, AND ACCESSIBILITY TRACK: BELONGING, BARRIERS, AND BALANCE: REIMAGINING DEI IN POLITICAL SCIENCE CLASSROOMS

KATELYN KELLY, BLACK HILLS STATE UNIVERSITY
SHEA MINTER, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
KRISTA NISLY, UNIVERSITY OF AKRON
MUGE UGUZ, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
KRISTINA FLORES VICTOR, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

At a moment when the goals of higher education are increasingly contested, this year's "Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility" (DEIJA) track asked us to pause and consider: what do students need to not just succeed, but to belong? Through four panels and more than a dozen papers, contributors reflected on how we navigate institutional barriers to equity while reshaping our understanding of DEI in higher education. Two central themes emerged: first, the challenge of overcoming institutional barriers to DEI; and second, the need to reclaim the "B" for Belonging in our classrooms, pedagogy, and curriculum.

At the heart of these discussions was a key tension identified by Katelyn Kelly (Black Hills State University) and Renee B. Van Vechten (University of Redlands): the competing visions of higher education as either transactional (focused on job training, career readiness, and return on investment) or transformational (centered on intellectual growth, identity development, and social change). These modes are not mutually exclusive, but they do pull in different directions, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, which deepened financial pressures and heightened student anxieties about the "value" of a degree. Kelly and Van Vechten invited us to consider how this tension complicates efforts toward equity, inclusion, and justice in the classroom, and how DEI efforts must evolve to meet this challenge.

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS: LIMITS AND LEVERAGE POINTS

Panelists widely recognized that structural constraints, from curricula to advising systems to training for teaching assistants, often limit how well we can serve students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Yet they also offered concrete interventions, creative workarounds, and insights into where institutional change might begin.

Matthew T. Harrigan (Santa Clara University) shared a department-wide effort to redesign core political science courses around themes of power and identity. The initiative was sparked by a student satisfaction survey, which revealed that those most dissatisfied, often women and students of color, were also those least likely to feel represented in course content. In response, faculty formed a committee to embed critical themes into student learning outcomes across subfields. The process emphasized collaboration and student input, with the goal of building an integrated curriculum that addresses both disciplinary knowledge and lived realities.

Kelly Bauer (George Washington University) tackled the less-visible institutional barriers students face outside the classroom. Drawing on a survey of over 100 students, she explored how advising, mentoring, study abroad, and internships intersect with students' self-understanding of political science as a discipline and career pathway. Bauer found that while students

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were generally engaged with electronic resources (emails, websites), they were less connected to High Impact Practices (HIPs) like internships or research. Strikingly, many students relied on peers for essential program information, underscoring both a gap in institutional communication and a potential leverage point: improving access through peer networks and more personalized advising.

Teaching assistants emerged as another crucial but under-supported element of the academic ecosystem. Akshita Aggrawal, Anna Lee Hirschi, Cameron Murdock, Bedirhan Erdem Mutlu (all George Washington University) argued that graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) play a vital role in creating inclusive learning environments, particularly for marginalized students. Yet institutional structures rarely acknowledge their pedagogical labor, much less equip them with the training or mentorship they need. Their work highlighted not only how GTAs serve as bridges between students and faculty, but also how they bring in diverse perspectives that enrich classroom dialogue, when they are empowered to do so.

Muge Uguz (George Washington University) extended this argument by framing GTAs as both educators and learners. Through interviews with 12 teaching assistants across the DC- Maryland-Virginia area, she examined how GTAs adapt their teaching from their own student experiences, selecting or discarding techniques based on what they found effective. Her findings underscored the need for sustained mentorship and a reimagining of GTA preparation, not simply as a rite of passage, but as a foundation for inclusive pedagogy.

Finally, Janet L. Donavan (University of Colorado, Boulder) turned our attention to curriculum content in her call to reimagine introductory US Politics courses. She noted that while the discipline often critiques the exclusivity and normativity of US politics, these insights don't always make it into foundational courses. By starting not with the American Revolution but with English colonization, Donavan proposed a narrative-driven, historically grounded approach that foregrounds race, ethnicity, and the complexity of building a multiracial democracy. Such reframing not only diversifies content but invites students into a deeper, more critical engagement with political science itself.

RECLAIMING THE "B" IN DEI: BELONGING IN WHAT AND HOW WE TEACH

If the first set of papers asked us to identify and remove obstacles, the second asked us to build spaces of belonging. What does it mean to feel seen, respected, and supported in the classroom? And how do we design courses that foster not just diversity or inclusion, but a genuine sense of community?

Here, practice met theory in a series of classroom interventions, Kristina Flores Victor (California State University, Sacramento) presented a course project where students designed board games to explore complex immigration policies. Over time, students became experts in their topic and transformed from knowledge consumers into knowledge creators. Flores Victor invited students to incorporate their lived experiences, which allowed them to connect with both content and classmates in new ways. The game design process, which was collaborative, iterative, and open-ended, also modeled the kind of intellectual play and exploration that transforms transactional learning into something more meaningful.

Krista Nisly (University of Akron) similarly focused on cultivating belonging through civic engagement. Her courses encouraged students to develop action plans to combat political violence, drawing from their own communities and commitments. This blend of service learning and hope-centered pedagogy helped students see themselves as capable agents of change. Eric K. Leonard (Shenandoah University) echoed this theme by introducing reflective grading practices, which gave students more autonomy in the assessment process. In doing so, Leonard modeled the trust and reciprocity at the heart of inclusive pedagogy.

Reinforcing these examples were additional insights from Aggrawal, Hirschi, Murdock, and Mutlu, who emphasized that GTA mentorship and identity development are central to belonging, for both undergraduates and graduate educators. They urged PhD programs to reframe teaching not as an afterthought to research, but as a professional skill worthy of attention and investment.

Uguz's work, revisited in this context, made clear that inclusive pedagogy is not one-size-fits-all. GTAs and faculty alike bring personal histories, cultural frameworks, and pedagogical instincts to their teaching. By recognizing and supporting this diversity, institutions can expand their vision of what teaching excellence looks like, and who gets to embody it.

Finally, several contributors addressed belonging at the curricular level. Liza William (Tufts University) and Leah Merrill's (Phillips Exeter Academy) paper on genocide education argued that theoretical rigor and historical sensitivity are not in conflict with inclusive teaching; on the contrary, case selection and framing can either alienate or invite students in. Another discussed how methods courses, often perceived as dry or detached, can be redesigned to include questions of race, identity, and power. Belonging, in other words, isn't just about classroom tone or participation, it is about content, framing, and who gets to define the questions.

CONCLUSION: BELONGING AS BOTH MEANS AND END

Across panels, disciplines, and institutions, the DEIJA track offered a clear message: belonging is not a side effect of good teaching—it is its foundation. While institutional barriers remain formidable, this year's papers showed that change is possible: through creative curriculum design, peer mentorship, inclusive pedagogy, and critical self-reflection. As transactional pressures continue to shape the landscape of higher education, we must insist that transformation is still within reach.

By reclaiming the "B" in DEI, we affirm that belonging is not just what students want. It's what they deserve.

HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES TRACK SUMMARY

JUSTIN CROFOOT, PENN STATE UNIVERSITY
REBECCA FLAVIN, BAYLOR UNIVERSITY
ROLFE PETERSON, SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY

The theme of the 2025 APSA Teaching & Learning Conference, "Why Teaching Political Science Matters," invited participants to envision how we can advance pedagogy in the discipline with a view to fostering both civic engagement and students' career readiness. Building on the work of George Kuh (2008) and as described by the AAC&U, high-impact practices (HIPs) are a broad range of teaching and learning practices, including (though not limited to) internships, project-based learning, capstone experiences, undergraduate research, and active learning. This year's HIPs track at TLC, led by Natasha Duncan,

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captured the diversity and variety of HIPs available to Political Science educators as we prepare students to be participatory democratic citizens. The work presented in the HIP track sessions centered on active learning, assessment, co-curricular community and project-based learning, extra-curricular experiences, and research. Each of these areas provides students with opportunities to deepen their learning in political science classes by enhancing student engagement with the material.

TRACK RECAP

In the active learning session, the papers focused on HIP classroom procedures and projects that can improve learning outcomes. Fanny Lauby's (Montclair State University) paper discussed Challenge Based Learning (CBL), a framework that utilizes connecting actionable outcomes to real-world challenges in an advanced public policy course. Using CBL, students developed white papers for two local municipalities proposing solutions for local problems posed by the community partners. Lauby found that the students grew in both their ability to apply course concepts to real-world problems and developed practical skills that prepared them for internships and employment. Yujin Julia Jung (Mount St. Mary's University) presented a dynamic classroom approach to teaching about populism in the current polarized landscape.

Jung's project endeavored to encourage deep engagement and reduce ideological bias through bingo-style games and activities designed to help students identify elements of populist speech and learn how to code these like a researcher. Using 360 video technology, Christina Sciabarra (Bellevue College) provided an immersive classroom experience intended to increase engagement and understanding of global politics. The near virtual reality experience exposed students to life in the Sidra refugee camp in a Middle East politics class, helping them to envision subjects studied in class. Finally, Gloria Cox (University of North Texas) discussed the need for a best practices guide in political science internships. Cox stressed the importance of what experiences should count as a political science internship, how to manage student expectations, and academic assignments that could accompany internships. Together, these projects illustrate the diversity of engaging and dynamic activities and assignments in political science courses and provided attendees with multiple tools for incorporating HIPs in their own classrooms.

The assessment session focused broadly on the effectiveness of active learning and other HIPs as well as opportunities for further research in the field. Christopher Way (Cornell University) and Emily Dunlop (Cornell University) provided a comprehensive meta-analysis on the active learning literature, exploring the expansion of use in the discipline and the tangible learning benefits. Way and Dunlop call attention to the rapid growth of active learning in education and that this work is predominantly on simulations. However, when taking into account research design rigor, their analysis finds markedly mixed results on the benefits of learning; many of the studies in the meta-analysis show few measurable learning gains from active learning activities. Way and Dunlop also presented a second paper on active learning in political science, specifically, the place for active learning in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) and the future of active learning in the classroom. They highlighted the dynamic nature of active learning techniques and the need to integrate the use of AI and to see it as a "tool" rather than a "threat". The other papers in the session addressed assessment of HIPs employed in the presenters' classrooms. Sue Ann Skipworth's (University of Mississippi) paper discussed two different iterations of a state legislative simulation that guides students through research, mock committee sessions, and floor debates. Skipworth modeled how to incorporate student feedback to improve the simulation, and reported high levels of student engagement, positive feedback, and achievement of course learning goals. Similarly, Jyl J. Josephson's (Rutgers University-Newark) work reinforces the pedagogical benefits of engaged learning through a longitudinal study of an ongoing community-based project in which students collaborate with community partners to provide lead-free water fountains in Newark-area schools. Josephson's paper, like Way's and Dunlop's papers, drew attention to gaps in the literature on community-based learning and its potential for fostering gains in students' short-term and long-term civic engagement.

The five papers presented in the third session highlighted co- and extra-curricular learning experiences that provide students with opportunities to develop civic engagement skills outside the classroom. Elizabeth Frasier Vann (Rice University) discussed the Social Policy Analysis (SOPA) Capstone program that integrates undergraduate research and community- based learning. This year-long, civically engaged project with community partners not only contains multiple HIPs, but it also democratizes learning by drawing upon the expertise of community partners with whom students collaborate on research. Jordan Smith-Porter's (University of Tennessee) and Jonathon Ring's (University of Tennessee) study utilized pre- and post-program surveys to measure students' gains in political efficacy across a semester-long fellowship program in which students confronted state and local problems. In a related project, Jennifer Ostojski (Colgate University) and Carl Cilke (Northeastern University) sought to increase student engagement with world politics through four "participatory acts" dispersed across the course of the semester in a global politics course. While the acts included tasks as basic as writing a letter, Ostojski and Cilke found that their students demonstrated positive growth in their global civic efficacy over the term, with students reporting that they no longer reduced global engagement to simply reading the news. Two other papers on this panel addressed macro-level approaches for promoting student success for underserved populations, in particular. Christine Cahill (Rutgers University-Newark) implemented Get Out to Vote (GOTV) mobilization strategies to encourage students to access on-campus mental health and food security resources. Cahill's work illuminated the possibilities for applying political science research practices on campus in academic settings such as providing support services in courses with high failure rates as well as student life programs where resources are underutilized either because students are unaware or hesitant to use them due to stigma. Josue Alejandro Franco (Cuyamaca College) discussed a project that connects community colleges to four-year universities via a "Peer to Peer Pedagogical Partnership" (P4) that closes information gaps for community college students wishing to study political science at a four-year university.

Moreover, Franco's work highlighted avenues for the political science discipline as a whole to better recruit, support, and retain students in the field. Together, the HIPs presented in this panel highlighted innovative assignments, community projects,

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and university initiatives that can be implemented in diverse communities and on campuses.

The final panel session on research affirmed myriad avenues for employing this HIP both within and beyond the classroom. Justin Keith Crofoot (Pennsylvania State University) and Rolfe Daus Peterson (Susquehanna University) discussed their work conducting an exit poll with universities across Pennsylvania during the 2024 presidential election. This provided students with the opportunity to engage in survey design, data collection, and data analysis. Additionally, they stressed the acquisition of "soft skills" such as communication by conducting the exit poll. From surveys of participating students, Crofoot and Peterson found evidence of increased political efficacy and interest in politics amongst participants. Timothy Adam Bynion (George Mason University) and Jennifer Nicoll Victor (George Mason University) integrated Residential Learning Communities (RLC) with their university's Democracy Lab to afford students the opportunity to learn research methods and engage in research projects. They highlighted the difficulties students tend to face when confronting research methods, and their project used a pre-post treatment design to explore how the RLC meetings aided in methods learning. Daniel Roberts (Harvard University) presented his innovative course design that integrated political theory and quantitative political science in introductory coursework and seminars. Roberts' work was animated by the concern that political science students are directed to choose between theory and quantitative approaches in the field before they have the opportunity to identify their interests. Thus, the papers in the session spotlighted diverse methods for fostering civic engagement and student professionalization through undergraduate research opportunities.

CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION

The 2025 TLC Conference charged attendees to consider, "Why Political Science Matters," and in the concluding session of the HIP track, participants identified three reoccurring themes that emerged from the weekend's panels: the potential for HIPs to promote student belonging both on campus and in the community, the advantages of HIPS for facilitating students' acquisition of the soft skills essential for career success, and the untapped opportunities for future research in political science. Whether through internships and community-based learning or simulations and active learning experiences, the papers in the HIPs track explored a variety of evidence-based approaches to innovative pedagogy.

The AAC&U High Impact Practices are studied with a view to student retention, generally, and the pedagogical benefits for vulnerable student populations, specifically. One pattern noted across several papers in the HIP track was that sharing in experiential learning, whether it was in the classroom, in residence halls, or in the community beyond the university, yielded increased student engagement. Increased student engagement is positively correlated with both student retention and improved learning outcomes. Moreover, political science instructors who incorporate HIPs in their classroom are also showing that the discipline matters for promoting student belonging and civic engagement.

Second, track participants identified ways using HIPs in political science classes assist students' acquisition of soft skills, which are long-lasting, have deep impact, and are transferable to other courses, to professional contexts, and to civic engagement in the community. HIPs not only facilitate content transfer, but they also enrich the content taught in our courses by imbuing it with practical applications. In particular, HIPs afford students space to take agency in their education, and when instructors come alongside students in this process, by offering frequent, constructive feedback, the gains are especially notable. Relatedly, HIPs underscore the importance of mentorship and networking for students and provide forums to practice these skills that are essential for career readiness as well as participatory democracy. HIPs help students to be better colleagues and better citizens, and they remind us that it is okay for academic work to be fun and enjoyable.

Finally, the HIP track papers revealed numerous avenues for future research agendas in political science pedagogy. While simulations are both often used and often analyzed in the literature on political science teaching, other HIPs are less well studied. Indeed, several authors in the track noted that much of their literature review drew from work in disciplines other than political science. Another area where research is not as prolific is in community-based learning. Because these HIPs involve collaboration with community partners, there are both immense challenges and rewards associated with these approaches. Track participants were keen to emphasize the importance of developing community partnerships that are mutually beneficial and the opportunities for the democratization of knowledge-exchange that can occur in these contexts where community partners' expertise is respected and valued. Above all, the HIP track provided a space where colleagues could share best practices with one another to enrich their research agendas and applications in their classrooms and campuses as we labor together to train the next generation of citizens and scholars.

INTERNATIONALIZING AND DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

KERRI RYER, FOOTHILLS COLLEGE
JOSEPH W. ROBERTS, ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
ROSE GANN, NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

RESISTING THE URGE TO BUILD AND CONTROL I.E. OUR COLONIAL PAST AND PRESENT

This year marks a major shift from internationalizing to decolonizing the curriculum. Whereas past conversations on internationalizing the curriculum focused on including more voices and decentering the "canon," decolonizing the curriculum engages with the practice of deconstruction, whilst recognizing, and holding on to, shared and common ground, both locally and globally. The track engaged with theoretical approaches to internationalizing and decolonizing the curriculum, examined global south perspectives, and scrutinized teaching in the discipline from a decolonial lens and ways in which we might incorporate active learning strategies. Together, we collectively grappled with the questions: how does one go about decolonizing the political science curriculum? And how might colonialism continue to show up in our work? Key themes that emerged across our conversations included ways in which we might resist the colonial desire to arrive at an answer but instead find ways to ask more questions and embrace non-closure. In other words, how might we grapple with the iterative and endless process of decolonizing our field? As Nandini Deo (Lehigh University) and Dean Caivano (Lehigh University) so eloquently put it, "decolonizing political science teaching

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requires more than revisiting and diversifying reading lists; it demands a fundamental rethinking of the discipline's epistemological foundations, pedagogical approaches, and engagement strategies" (p.30).

Our opening papers engaged in theoretical approaches to decolonizing political science teaching. Deo and Caivano (2024) presented a set of case studies that collectively demonstrated the need to contextualize our teaching practices, including reevaluating assessments and making teaching personal. One key thread across the theoretical approaches was a recognition that there is no single decolonial methodology. For example, Rafael Alexandre Mello (Bates College) examined contradictions within meta-theoretical pluralism in what he termed the "unresolved levels of analysis problem." According to Mello, "if the theoretical level is considered in decolonizing, but the epistemological and methodological ignored, the positivist mode of thinking will continue to superimpose itself, critically, onto the added non-Western perspectives." Similarly, Rose Gann (Nottingham Trent University) discussed the ways in which feminist theory, and specifically feminist pedagogy, may provide a fruitful path toward deconstructing colonial hierarchies in politics and international relations courses. Together, each of these works grounded our discussions in a deep critical engagement with the theoretical and methodological foundations of political science.

How might global south perspectives be, not just added, but fully valued and integrated into the political science curriculum? Spyridon Kotsovilis (University of Toronto Mississauga) presented a "How-To Indigenizing Guide," arguing that indigenizing the curriculum, pedagogy, research, and professional development in political science may be another fruitful starting place. Then two meta-analyses were presented. Joseph Roberts (Roger Williams University) discussed the ways in which expanding the scope and reach of the curriculum is a process of acknowledging and challenging the ways that an American- and Euro-centric knowledgebase has shaped teaching and learning about politics and international relations at the expense of more diverse views, particularly from the Global South. He has proposed a large-N survey of political science faculty to determine what is meant by internationalizing and decolonizing the curriculum and how faculty are pursuing this goal. Christopher Graham (Boston University) argued that we must rethink the cannon of political science from wicked problems to political resilience and incorporate global south political systems and ways of knowing into our work.

Coloniality shows up in multifaceted ways in the classroom, both consciously and within our blind spots. Grappling with this tension, our conversations oscillated between deep theoretical engagement and practical in-classroom applications. In our mid-day panel, Richard Ashcroft (University of California, Berkeley) presented the ways in which he has attempted to engage a multi-interdisciplinary approach to teaching political economy. His account brought our conversation into direct confrontation with the difference between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. Titus Alexander (Democracy Matters) then challenged us to think critically about the ways in which we might teach about global inequality constructively. Our final evening panel provided two examples of the ways in which we might integrate active learning strategies into decolonial approaches. Helen Chang (City College of New York-Hostos Community College) presented her COIL course, a virtual exchange, in which she collaborated to co-develop a module that was then co-taught with a colleague at a 4-year university in Palestine. Chang found the experience positive and promising, according to student survey feedback. Using a problem-based learning approach, Zachary Houser (Boise State University) shared an activity from his international relations course, in which he demonstrates the challenges to reform the United Nations Security Council. This sparked a conversation about the time, energy, and resources needed to engage in decolonial work in the classroom.

As we came to conclude, "there is no singular decolonial methodology" (Deo & Caivano, p.5). Across our discussion, we had as many questions as answers. Are we internationalizing, decolonizing, or perhaps, indigenizing the curriculum? Do we have an endpoint in mind? How far do we need to go to have the work be effective and enough? Ultimately, the reason we are seeking to broaden our perspectives is to better understand our world and our place within it.

This work is context specific, requires intentionality, and may never be fully realized. There are also threats to the goals of the project from outside the academy. In some places, using the language of "decolonizing" will incur the wrath of politicians. We should make the case that by expanding the curriculum to be broader, encompassing literature from diverse perspectives, we will have better, more complete analysis.

Perhaps, the work even requires a blurring of the line between political science and other disciplines. As one participant asked, if our work aims to deconstruct the field, what will we reconstruct upon the ashes? Perhaps our desire to construct itself is a remnant of the colonial project. Perhaps, while we shifted from internationalization to decolonizing—even this shift perpetuates a centering of colonialism.

The conversation must continue, and we must collectively grapple with our desire for answers. We may be in a moment of crisis; we may also be in a moment of opportunity. Either way, the fact that we came together to continue to have these conversations is signifying something, and there remains much work to be done.

SIMULATIONS, GAMES, AND ACTIVE LEARNING

ZACHARY MORRIS, KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
SALLY BONSALL, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA OMAHA

The Simulations and Games Track papers focused on different designs, implementations, and challenges for using simulations and games as pedagogical tools to improve student learning. This track highlighted a wide range of presentations of games or simulations that showed how these unique classroom activities can improve student learning outcomes. A fundamental strength of the APSA Teaching and Learning Conference is the diversity of the presenters' backgrounds, who educated us on their experiences using games in the classroom.

EVIDENCE AND INNOVATION

Robert Oldham (Princeton University), Alison Craig (University of Texas at Austin), Ryan Dennehy (University of South Carolina), Francis E. Lee (Princeton University), Joshua Meyer-Gutbrod (University of South Carolina), & Samuel Simon's (Princeton University) presentation "The Senate Sandbox: Teaching Legislative Politics Through Open-Ended, Multi-Week Simulations" discusses their creation of a sandbox-style simula-

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tion tasking students with the role of being a US Senator. Robert Oldham, who presented for the group, described how this open-ended role-playing exercise gave students the agency to collaborate and develop their critical thinking capabilities. A fundamental objective of this simulation, defined by Oldham et al., was to have students gain, as close as possible, a real-world experience of being a lawmaker by tasking students to be effective policymakers in the confines of the archaic rules of the United States Senate.

The following two presentations mainly described innovative approaches to engaging students with various simulations or games. Beginning with Pavel Bačovský's (University of Rhode Island) "Playful and Gameful: Choose Your Own Adventure Method to Teach Political Science," which demonstrated how innovative simulations are crucial to students' continuing educational success. Pavel's presentation detailed how implementing 'gamified learning' into the classroom helped ease students ' concerns about learning. Pavel's presentation with Dave Bridge (Baylor University) and Clay Parham's (Baylor University) "Teaching Methods with Off-the-Shelf Board Games" provided evidence of games' positive inventive features in the classroom. Their presentations gave an overview of the clever implementation of games in the classroom that can disarm student concerns about learning complex material. In addition, Pavel, Bridge, and Parham synthesized how to use games like Charty Party or video games to deconstruct negative stereotypes regarding class lectures while reaching students of all learning styles.

The penultimate and final presentations were primarily dedicated to showcasing the evidence for why games or simulations are effective tools to help student achievement. Amanda Rosen's (Naval War College) presentation, "The State of the Field: Establishing a PS Simulations & Games Canon and Database," describes a forthcoming book project dedicated to providing a much-needed meta-analysis of the academic literature on simulations and games. The purpose of the presentation was to push back on the skepticism surrounding the utility of games and simulations to encourage student learning. The final presentation by Colin Brown (Northeastern University) and Jennifer Ostojski (Colgate University), "To Brief or Not to Brief: Using the Same Simulation for Different Learning Goals," studies a key discussion surrounding the debriefing process, which Rosen's presentation highlighted. Brown and Ostojski's primary goal was to cross-examine the student learning outcomes from two different schools to determine whether the information from instructor-led debriefings influences learning outcomes or whether the mere presence of the debriefing process is the actual causal factor in swaying student learning outcomes. Brown and Ostojski's in-depth presentation provided the foundation for their ambitious research agenda, seeking to answer this question that the prior literature on the usefulness of debriefing has yet to address. Overall, the first section of presentations for the Games and Simulation Track provided the foundation to justify and improve the use of games or simulations in the classroom setting.

IR AND COMPARATIVE SIMULATIONS AND GAMES

The second day of the track was built on the solid foundation laid by the first round of papers, which showed how simulations and games can be used across different disciplines to teach theories on international relations. It began with "All's Well That Sims Well: Incorporating the Community of Inquiry Framework in an Asynchronous Graduate Level Security Studies Simulation," by Craig Albert (Augusta University) and Heidi Blair (Augusta University), which demonstrated how simulations can help students replicate the actions of National Security Council members in a mock world crisis. Victor Asal (State University of New York at Albany), Nina Kollars (Naval War College), Amanda Rosen, and Simon Usherwood's (Open University) presentation "Playing Poker with Hobbes, Kant, and Anderson," also showed how using card games is a valuable tool in teaching Realism and International Relations to students. Both presentations unintentionally spoke to each other by describing how simulations cleverly force students to engage with the core principles of International Relations theories in real-time. Andrea Quirino Steiner (Federal University of Pernambuco) and Elia Alves' (Federal University of Pernambuco) presentation, "Teaching about the Policy-Environment Interface: Lessons from Brazil," analyzed results from students' responses to field classes, which had students directly interacting with policymakers dealing with environmental issues. While not a true simulation, their presentation outlined a unique opportunity to have students engage with policymakers, the environment, and threatened ecosystems while having them grapple with their personal experiences following the end of the field classes. Through their practical designs, which allowed students to immerse themselves in real-world situations, these demonstrations showed why games or simulations are essential in teaching political science.

PUBLIC POLICY, LAWMAKING, AND REPRESENTATION

In the session "Public Policy, Lawmaking, and Representation," Stephen Phillips (Clemson University) and Tara Elizabeth Trask (Clemson University) presented a fun way of highlighting the importance of bureaucracy to students, in "Bracket Chats: Promoting Bureaucratic Knowledge through Tournament Brackets." The section participants completed an example together, where different bureaucratic branches of the government were pitted against one another in different scenarios, such as "which bureaucratic branch do you think is most effective?" and "which bureaucratic branch would be the most ominous to get an emergency alert from?" Next, Stephen Matthew Joyce (Radford University) demonstrated his paper, "Simulating the Constitutional Convention: Tariffs, Representation, and Congress," by dividing the audience into one of the twelve states at the US Constitutional Convention. In this task, students must negotiate to form the country, especially along the three main decisions from the Convention e.g. tariffs, the nature of the national legislature, and representation in the slave states.

The next three presentations in the session focused on policy making. Jennifer Jacobson (Kutztown University), in "The Student as Policy Advisor: Role Playing in Public Policy Classes," highlighted the value of role playing real life scenarios in policy processes, in both in-person and online asynchronous classes. As a result, students reported becoming more aware of the policy needs of the US (such as in environmental law), and helped them to bridge the gap between theory and practice. In a similar vein, in "Virtual Interprofessional Policy Simulation (VIPS) Approach to Health Policy Education," Robert C. Coghlan (University of Texas at Houston), Jessica Nicole Wise (University of Texas at Houston), and Angela P. Gomez (University of Texas at Houston) presented VIPS as a way to offer health professional students an opportunity to work through policy concerns and

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solutions. Each simulation lasts for six hours, where students are assigned different roles (e.g. political party representatives, patient advocates, or lobbyists). Drawing on an impressive wealth of data collected from these simulations, students (from medicine, nursing, dentistry and more) reported enhanced knowledge of health policymaking and its influence on healthcare access. Finally, Michael Sacco (Kent State University) presented a simulation, "Who Are Our Legislators? A Simulation about National Legislative Party Politics," where students are told they are members of the same political party, elected to the legislature. The class is divided into ten different policy areas, whereby the classroom acts as a caucus room, where students suggest and debate policy ideas.

SIMULATIONS ABOUT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND JUDICIAL PROCESSES

In the final session, "Simulations about Social Movements and Judicial Processes," Shamira Gelbman (Wabash College) began by presenting a longer simulation over the course of eight classes, where students were assigned historical figures that participated at a "State of the Race" conference in 1965. In "Caught Up in a Crisis of Victory: A Civil Rights Movement Simulation," over the course of the semester, students took part in sessions in their assigned roles and negotiated a strategy for the movement. Going beyond this – "from classroom to community" – students prepared a small exhibit each about the person they role-played throughout the exercise, presented at a community event. Also focusing on issues related to social justice, John Louis Recchiuti's (University of Mount Union) simulation "Conceiving Poverty and Child Labor in Turn of the 20th Century New York City" drew attention to the "undeserving poor" at that time in history. In this simulation, students were assigned to role play as one of the six perspectives toward poverty and child labor in NYC. Using the profiles of different people involved in advocating for better rights, teams of students had to explain their positions to the class and debate the issues at hand.

In "Federal Judicial Nomination Simulations in the Political Science Classroom," Nancy Bays Arrington (California Polytechnic State University), Matthew Baker (Emory University), and Adam G. Rutkowski (Troy University), pointed to the fact that judicial politics tends to be underrepresented in the scholarship on games and simulations. They provided a multi-step simulation over the course of a couple of days, where students were organized into small groups to take on different roles such as nominee, majority senator, and minority senator. In one period, the simulation involved role playing as a Republican majority, and in another, as a Democratic majority. They noted how students' views and knowledge of judicial appointments changed over the process. Finally, Victor Asal, Charmaine N. Willis (Skidmore College), and Nakissa Jahanbahi (United States Military Academy), in "Get Up, Stand Up: Teaching Students about the Challenges of Mobilization," asked the audience questions such as "why would you protest?" and "what are your incentives and disincentives?" As students, the audience discussed issues that were most important to ourselves, and what might motivate or hinder us from joining a protest. It was then illustrated how this simulation can be used to discuss theories of rationality, structure, and culture in explaining why social movements arise, and the viability of their success.

DISCUSSIONS, THEMES, CONCLUSIONS

In brief, the TLC APSA Games and Simulation track (2025) highlighted several important themes. One major point of discussion was the variety of formats that games and simulations can be utilized. For example, the participants presented a wide variety of methods, both online and in-person, prepared for anywhere from ten to hundreds of students, and ranging from activities that take ten minutes to whole semester-long projects. A second theme was the adaptability and flexibility of games and simulations: whilst some may be limited to certain topics, the majority of activities presented could be applied to many different subjects. All major branches of political science were represented, and even beyond the discipline (such as healthcare and environmental studies). Therefore, games and simulations can be used to promote a valuable interdisciplinary approach in political science. Finally, participants discussed how these activities can be fun for students and teachers alike. Whilst games and simulations are pedagogically useful, they also allow students and teachers to enjoy themselves. These tools are especially important in an era of increasing political polarization, encouraging students to talk to one another about topics they might otherwise be uncomfortable discussing.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TRACK SUMMARY

PATRICK MCSWEENEY, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
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The APSA Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) Civic Engagement track wove together papers that explored several themes, including the foundational values of civic engagement, strategies for civic education and assessment, the obstacles to civic engagement work, and the massive impact students have when they are empowered to engage in their communities. In a challenging time for civic engagement, our discussions left us optimistic about the difference we make.

Early track sessions framed the subsequent discussions. They focused on exploring how civic engagement connects to foundational values and political theory. Summoning the call to action from the APSA Presidential Task Force Report: *Rethinking Political Science Education*, Loan Le (San Francisco State University), and Fletcher McClellan (Elizabethtown College), explored how empirical political science research and political theory informs the type of civic engagement we should foster during a global rise in democratic backsliding. Le and McClellan called for political science to prepare students to understand the values and principles needed for a society to succeed, arguing "students should be able to recognize and discuss the values, value conflicts, and ethical dilemmas at stake when they are civically engaged." Zach Richer (University of Toronto), provided an interdisciplinary approach to this question, bringing in theories connected to political science and sociology, including Habermas, Adut, and Arendt. In a communication ecosystem that has drastically changed, reaching consensus need not be the final goal. Instead, students should be prepared to be challenged by new ideas. By returning to the foundations and theory of civic engagement, these papers served as a reminder of why civic engagement is a vital yet challenging ideal.

As our society becomes increasingly polarized, track presenters agreed that fostering deliberative dialogue in their political science classrooms is an essential competency for civic engagement.

The need for civil dialogue skills is imperative, as it has be-

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come more difficult and less welcoming for many people to be engaged. Given the division in our politics, these are skills that prepare our students to both stand up for what they believe in and listen to others. Papers identified strategies for implementing programs and provided evidence that demonstrated the effectiveness of specific lessons. David Price (Santa Fe College) proposed a lesson that split students into ideologically diverse groups to discuss political issues and attempt to reach a consensus. Leslie Caughell (Virginia Wesleyan University) and Kellie Holzer (Virginia Wesleyan University) used political debates as a tool, requiring preparation as students developed research and arguments to use in debates. Several outside organizations engage in this type of work on campuses. Nadine Gibson (University of North Carolina Wilmington) and Ann Rotchford (University of North Carolina Wilmington) demonstrated the success of Braver Angels, an organization that exposes students to different topics in a well-structured session that limits the types of personal attacks that emerge during debates. Through this program, students received opportunities outside the classroom for engaging in deep discussions of complicated issues.

Students need tools, such as social-emotional learning (SEL) and empathy, to prepare them for the difficult tasks associated with civic engagement. Diana Owen (Georgetown University) and Donna Phillips (Center for Civic Education) presented work on integrating social-emotional learning standards into K-12 civic education, providing skills beyond content knowledge to help students succeed. SEL standards are commonly used across the curriculum in schools, but should be specifically adapted to civics as they have a direct correspondence to civic engagement skills. Chelsea Kaufman (Wingate University) and Colin Brown (Northeastern University) used surveys of multiple cohorts of students to consider the development of empathy, a trait that helps people understand and identify with others. However, there is also concern that empathy could have negative effects that increase division. Initial results from their survey show that political science classes can increase empathy in students. These skills prepare students to be stronger citizens, prepared to engage with others and understand their own strengths.

With the development of civic skills, such as dialogue and empathy, assessment is vital for measuring growth in the short and long term. Jeremy Bowling (University of Nevada Las Vegas) and Matthew Stein (College of Southern Nevada) discussed a longitudinal survey to observe the civic engagement of students beyond their time on campus. While we frequently track growth over a semester, this survey would test whether exposure to civic engagement in college results in greater participation after graduation. Similarly, Chapman Rackaway (Radford University) discussed the development of a campus-wide initiative at Radford University to track civic knowledge, civic dispositions, civic efficacy, and community engagement of students. This longitudinal survey identifies their starting point and growth during their time at the institution. Studies like these provide important contributions to the field and create a foundation for other schools to develop assessments. These surveys are an opportunity for collaboration to build our understanding of what our students know and the effectiveness of our interventions.

It is a challenging time for civic engagement pedagogy as politics and institutional restrictions have created uncertainty around this work. States have placed limits on work that might be considered DEI, with funding and employment at risk. Political tensions throughout the country have also increased the scrutiny that professors are receiving from their communities. Track participants shared diverse experiences prompting engaging discussion of the obstacles scholars face implementing civic engagement programs and pedagogy at their universities. There are macro-elements related to what students need and Dax D'Orazio (Queen's University) presented work from Canada that demonstrates how students perceive their campus's environment for free expression. Using surveys and focus groups, he found that some students do not feel comfortable sharing their political views. These results suggest there is work to be done as we continue to build inclusive environments for students. Other institutional constraints come from state politics threatening existing programs and funding. Kelly Shaw (Iowa State University) and Karen Kedrwoski (Iowa State University) discussed how their state has shaped their civics work. Iowa has limited DEI but is prioritizing civic education and free speech. To address these demands Iowa State University has developed Cyclone Civics, an initiative designed to address civic literacy, skills and disposition through research, teaching, public programming, and extension collaboration. Brian King (Muskingum University) also highlighted the challenges he experienced in the implementation of a new program. Both papers highlighted the vital need for civic education and for political scientists to build the programs our students need.

Despite the challenges, we were constantly reminded that our students can be powerful voices and actors for change. Alison McCartney (Towson University) and Michele Calderon (Towson University) along with Towson undergraduates Jess Jordan and Lillian Imhoff, demonstrated the impact their Model UN program had on the Baltimore community and the

Towson students that participated. Their results showed that a well-designed program allows for leadership changes and new voices. Kevin Lorentz (Saginaw Valley State University) considered the role students play as poll workers, supporting our basic democratic power, the right to vote. By getting students involved in the civic process, they gain valuable skills and a stronger understanding of the integrity of American elections. During the final session, the Towson students in attendance reminded us that providing opportunities for students to engage in their community opens doors that can be life changing.

The conference concluded with a sense of hope, strengthened by the community fostered by APSA TLC. We left with new ideas to enhance civic engagement on our campuses and in our communities. By continuing to study and share the outcomes of these initiatives, we aim to demonstrate the enduring value of civic education. Together, we can prepare students to be thoughtful, engaged citizens, ready to make a meaningful difference. ■

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