

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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How did you learn about APSA? When did you become a member of APSA, and what prompted you to join?

I started graduate school at Syracuse University in 2001. During my first few years there, several of my professors and mentors encouraged me to start attending conferences.

But I did not have the self-confidence, in the beginning, to think that anyone would be interested in hearing about my work.

So, it took me a while to start applying to conferences. I first attended the New England and NPSA meetings in 2004. Then, in Spring 2005, I went to MPSA. Before that, I had also sent a proposal to APSA 2005 to present some early findings from my dissertation research and it was accepted for a poster session! This is how my relationship with APSA began. It has now lasted for almost 20 years!



How have APSA membership and services been valuable to you at different stages of your career?

My involvement with APSA, both as a member as well as in leadership roles has been somewhat integral to my career. And I don't say this casually. When I first started attending APSA, I quickly became familiar with eJobs and I came to know that there were job interviews to be had at the annual meetings. These days, people tell me all the time that they don't know anyone who has ever landed a job after a preliminary interview at APSA. In response, I say to them that I, too, don't know anyone who has; anyone, that is, other than me!

Unreal as it may sound to at least some people who are reading this, I got my first tenure-track job (Wagner College) after an interview with Dr. Jeffrey Kraus at APSA

2011 in Seattle. Before this appointment, I had been bouncing around: I spent three consecutive academic years as VAP at three different places. But I should add here that I was also prepared for this because I had completed my graduate work in the middle of the financial crisis—in 2008!

APSA then became invaluable for me in the later stages of my career trajectory in other ways. When I first started attending APSA, here is what I did not know: I did not know what I was doing (absolutely no idea; none, at all!), and I didn't fully understand what other people were doing either. I was just bumbling along. I was raw.

I didn't know, for example, what the APSA divisions were about and what happened in them. I mean, I wasn't totally clueless. But I couldn't really tell you anything about them.

I didn't know they had business meetings. I didn't know they had their own governance structures and bylaws. And I didn't know they were intellectual communities and mini networks of scholars working in related areas. I thought in the beginning that they just existed as a way to manage and organize panels in different areas of scholarship (which, of course, is true; but they are also much more than just this) and I vaguely knew they had receptions!

Over the years, I have come to understand what these divisions are, what they do, how they are governed, and, in fact, found not just one but two intellectual communities for myself! First, and primarily, in Sexuality and Politics (S+P), and second, a bit more tangentially, in Migration and Citizenship. In both, I have come to develop friendships and found mentors who care deeply about the work I am producing and who help me do better work every day—via their feedback as well as their encouragement. I will be forever grateful for this! I should add that, over time, I also became quite seriously involved in the leadership and administration of S+P and the APSA LGBTQ Caucus. (More on this below.)

A few years ago, I also served on President Paula D. McClain's Task Force Examining Issues and Mechanisms of Systemic Inequality in the Discipline (on the Climate and Context working group). I remain extremely thankful to President McClain for this opportunity because I have benefited a great deal from this experience. Here, too, I came to know a lot of wonderful colleagues who are all—I can say with some confidence—wholeheartedly devoted to working on issues related to justice and equality. As part of this work, I also collaborated with others (most closely with Dr. Hongying Wang) and eventually published some of our findings in *PS: Political Science and Politics*.

**APSA
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since 2005**

SPOTLIGHTS

You've held leadership positions in both APSA Organized Sections and Related Groups. How have these groups played a role in expanding your networks within APSA?

I sort of fell into leadership roles not just at APSA but also at Wagner College, where I worked between 2012 and 2023 (these days I teach at Clark University). As it happened, just after getting tenure in 2018, I started a three-year rotation in leadership roles at Sexuality + Politics, where I started off as Program Chair-Elect, and then served as Program Chair, and eventually as Chair of the division. (I became department chair at Wagner around the same time.) Since then, I have also held the position of Chair of APSA's LGBTQ Caucus. And, like I said above, this kind of involvement has been immeasurably beneficial for me in the most intellectually nourishing ways. I have come to know some incredibly wonderful people working in the subfield and I have had the good fortune of becoming acquainted with quite a lot of fascinating scholarship in this area. People like me do quite a bit of work on public law and sexuality, but there are numerous others whose work draws on public opinion data, voter mobilization strategies, queer theory, American political development, REP...I could go on!

I should also mention here that the queer thing about this subfield, if you will excuse the pun, is that it is simultaneously marginalized and burgeoning. Consequently, it has been somewhat depressing in some ways and exciting at the same time to be a part of it and to be able to contribute in some small way toward shepherding its evolution.

In fact, a few of us who are involved in the work of the division have started offering undergraduate survey courses on S+P. We try to publicize our efforts as much as we can (most recently, we did a roundtable on this at NPSA 2024). And we share our syllabi with anyone who wants it!

Can you share about your experience with serving on the APSA Department Services Committee?

Because of my leadership role at Wagner College (I eventually served as department chair there for five years), I was invited to serve on the APSA Department Services Committee. I have learned a lot in this role as well and come to know several of my colleagues and heard from them about their experiences while

performing the functions associated with being department chair. I was chair of a very small political science department. But the committee has folks serving on it who chair many different kinds of departments: big, small, R1, two-year associate's degree-granting institutions, etc.

This makes for, I think, deeply enriching discussions not just among the members but also during the panels and webinars the committee regularly puts together. One important thing I have learned through this work is that while there are sometimes slightly different issues department chairs are dealing with (obviously, given that departments vary in size, ranking, scope, and so on), it is also the case that there are many, many things department chairs experience that are constant across size, structure, institutional prestige, etc. For this reason, we can all learn from each other's experiences. And I certainly did learn quite a lot from others when I served on this committee!

Can you tell us about your professional background and your research?

Before starting graduate school, I completed an undergraduate degree in political science and a master's degree in international relations from Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India. I then briefly worked for an English-language daily, *The Telegraph*. I then started graduate school with the intention of doing research in comparative nationalisms (US and India). But, one thing led to another, and I ended up specializing in US politics. My first book, *The Politics of the American Dream*, is a study of the American Dream as an ideological trope that subsumes the politics of identity and inequality and binds together an incredibly diverse group of people. I think the subsequent development of my scholarly trajectory has something to do with my biography. As a queer identified immigrant, I was always drawn to the politics of identity associated with sexual minorities and immigrants. Over time, I started to systematically study these two groups. These days my main area of work is in public law and sexuality and secondarily I specialize in the study of citizenship and immigration. Lately, I have also been involved in work on the interstices of the two. For example, I recently published a piece in the *Journal of Human Rights* interrogating current US policy on asylum for LGBTQ+ folks. ■

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