

Conclusion: Recent Steps and the Road Ahead in the Enduring Quest for Equity in Political Science

Carol Mershon, *University of Virginia, USA*

As emphasized in this symposium, political scientists have long decried systemic inequality and inequity in the profession. Despite an abundant literature addressing these profound problems, they persist. What can bring genuine change to the discipline?

This symposium offers a fresh perspective on the stubborn barriers to creating a positive climate for women, scholars of color, LGBTQ+ identified, and other underrepresented individuals in political science. We analyze micro-aggression, bullying, and implicit bias (Ghosh and Wang 2022) as well as exclusion and disproportionate service burdens (Simien and Wallace 2022). Stressing that past attempts to surmount the obstacles have not resolved them, we discuss what can overcome the problems. We identify best practices at both the departmental and university levels (Michelson and Wilkinson 2022). Furthermore, we recommend policies, initiatives, and strategies that the American Political Science Association (APSA) can pursue (Ackerly and Franklin 2022).

In this conclusion to the symposium, however, I do not recapitulate the introduction or the articles that comprise its main narrative. Rather, I track recent progress and discuss how we can effect structural transformation to better combat systemic inequity and inequality in political science.

PROGRESS TOWARD GREATER EQUITY

In the past 20 years, political science has witnessed steps toward greater equality and equity in the profession. Moreover, the pace of change recently has accelerated. For instance, given strategic action on the part of the Women's Caucus in Political Science, the APSA Executive Council in 2001 passed a nonbinding resolution that presidents-elect of the association are not to be of the same gender for more than two consecutive years. Founded in 1903, APSA had its first woman president in 1989, with the second in 1996. As a result of the 2001 resolution, a total of 10 women presidents served from 2002 to 2022; an 11th currently is president-elect (APSA 2022b; Monroe 2002). Also illustrating the increasing change, APSA selected a scholar of color as president for the first time in 1953, a second time in 1992, and five times since 1998 (APSA 2022b). The emerging norm was that leaders on the Executive Council should embody multiple dimensions of diversity. The 2016 update to APSA bylaws incorporated the rule.

In 2002, the APSA Executive Council created a Task Force on Mentoring, which led to the 2005 founding of the Mentoring Program (APSA 2022a; Mealy 2022; Monroe 2002). In addition, the first woman of color to serve as APSA President, Dianne Pinderhughes (2007–2008), created the Task Force on Political Science in the Twenty-First Century. That task force, among other accomplishments, retraced the composition of the US political science professoriate by gender, race, and ethnicity from 1980 to 2010; the overall pattern was that “progress is apparent but small” (Fraga, Givens, and Pinderhughes 2011, 42). For example, as a share of US faculty, African American women increased from 4.6% in 1980 to 7.0% in 2010 (Fraga, Givens, and Pinderhughes 2011, 42; see also Mealy 2020).

APSA also has expanded the array of its status committees, which represent the interests of diverse categories of colleagues. In 2015, the APSA Executive Council approved the Committees on the Status of First-Generation Scholars in the Profession, the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, and the Status of Community Colleges in the Profession (APSA 2022c; Mealy 2022). In 2016, the APSA Executive Council approved the Committee on the Status of Contingent Faculty in the Profession (APSA 2022c).

As discussed in the symposium introduction (Mershon 2022), APSA commissioned a 2017 survey disclosing pervasive harassment at the association's annual meetings (Sapiro and Campbell 2018). The response was swift, proactive, and multifold: APSA revamped its Code of Conduct, adopted its new Anti-Harassment Policy, and instituted its Annual Meeting Ombuds Program.

APSA President Kathleen Thelen (2017–2018) established the Presidential Task Force on Women's Advancement in Political Science, which organized a day-long Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Hackathon at the 2018 APSA Annual Meeting. At the Hackathon, “teams developed strategies to address key challenges facing the profession, build partnerships, and [make] plans to move forward” (APSA 2018). The Hackathon yielded 11 sets of products (e.g., guidelines for teaching about intersectionality and resources for improving graduate student experiences), all available online. In continuing collaboration, the Hackathon's follow-up publications address, for example, ways that men can promote women's equity in political science (Mallinson and Gill 2021).

In addition to the Pinderhughes and Thelen task forces, APSA's Senior Director of D&I Programs, Dr. Kimberly Mealy, cites three other task forces that mark "important achievements...[in] addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and systemic inequality:" (1) The Double Bind: The Politics of Racial and Class Inequalities in the Americas (2016), directed by 2014–2015 President Rodney Hero; (2) New Partnerships (2019), directed by 2018–2019 President Rogers Smith; and (3) Systemic Inequality in the Discipline (2022), directed by 2019–2020 APSA President Paula McClain (Mealy 2022).¹

The initiatives of the Women's Advancement Task Force included a 2017 APSA roundtable featuring the editors of five journals who had conducted comparable internal audits on gender bias. Clear evidence of underrepresentation of women in political science journals emerged; however, "no clear evidence of gender bias [appeared, so that] other factors may impact why women are underrepresented" (Brown and Samuels 2018b, 847). A series of scholarly exchanges ensued on gendered patterns in citations as well as publications and submissions to journals (Brown and Samuels 2018a, 2018b; Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018; Samuels and Teele 2021; Teele and Thelen 2017). Observing the disparity between women and men in submitting manuscripts to what the discipline regards as top journals, Teele and Thelen (2017, 443) invoked and rephrased the well-known "second face of power" (Gaventa 1982) to identify a "second face of bias" [that] may be at work in the patterns we observe—as female scholars rationally decline to send their work to journals that are not seen as hospitable."

These perceptions of bias likely reflect the everyday environments in which women and other underrepresented individuals in political science work—their home department, college, and university—that have witnessed uneven reform (Michelson and Wilkinson 2022). I next discuss what might lead marginalized individuals across political science toward shared local climates and contexts that are equitable.

NAVIGATING THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2018, the Women's Caucus in Political Science convened an APSA short course entitled "Addressing Gender Discrimination in Political Science." It sparked multiple publications (Brown 2019, 2020; Clair et al. 2019) and secured National Science Foundation ADVANCE funding. With their ADVANCE award, the Co-Principal Investigators (PIs) of #MeTooPoliSci sought to effect "radical and transformative change that requires that disciplines and universities remove the structural barriers that create underclasses of individuals who are less powerful than others" (Brown, 123, in Clair et al. 2019). The Co-PIs are developing a "climate toolkit" designed to equip home departments to conduct climate studies and bystander trainings and to promote dialogue on inclusiveness. Exploiting the toolkit and, in partnership with APSA, the Co-PIs will disseminate findings and policy proposals across the social sciences (#MeTooPoliSci ADVANCE 2022). #MeTooPoliSci will guide related interventions to advance equity. A meta-analysis of interventions designed to enhance women's advancement in political science uncovered preliminary

evidence showing that the most effective interventions are mentoring and networking (Argyle and Mendelberg 2020).

The #MeTooPoliSci department-level climate toolkits resemble but do not duplicate the "shovel-ready toolkits" proposed in Michelson and Wilkinson's (2022) article about best practices. By digging into the concept, an ad hoc committee operating within APSA could prepare these toolkits to assist departments in recruiting and retaining minoritized faculty and graduate students. The toolkits could be tailored and disseminated to multiple audiences in political science, including faculty in community colleges, institutions with thus far weak links to APSA, and leaders of APSA organized sections. The toolkits that Michelson and Wilkinson (2022) propose could allow a wide array of political scientists to navigate the road toward greater equity.

Queried on key steps toward attaining greater equity in the profession, APSA's Senior Director of D&I Programs celebrated the fact that "in 2021, the APSA Bunche Fund [reached its] development goal of \$2.5 million" (Mealy 2022). This achievement has immediate and continuing effects: "The Fund will support the sustainability of the current APSA Ralph Bunche Summer Institute...[and] the long-term expansion of the types of programs offered by the Bunche program, including increased collaborations and engagement with faculty and graduate students" (Mealy 2022). Moreover, Dr. Mealy underscored that reports from the five task forces mentioned previously generated "research...findings, and recommendations that the association has incorporated into the strategic plan and in some cases implemented in...day-to-day programming; [for example]...the creation of a data and research department.... Recommendations from the [2022] Task Force on Systemic Inequality are currently being used to inform...a whole-of-association strategic plan...to address systemic racism in the profession" (Mealy 2022).

The contributions to this symposium invite reflection on other steps toward greater equity in our scholarly community. Ackerly and Franklin's (2022) article, which offers recommendations for APSA, identifies variation across APSA organized sections in such traits as their commitment to an inclusive environment and a pledge to address climate. The organized sections and the subfields associated with them differ in other ways. Some subfield journals publish statements that go beyond these commitments in that they transparently and unmistakably disseminate to colleagues the significance of diversity, inclusion, and equity (DEI). For example, the journal in the public administration subfield includes a diversity statement on its homepage, and the homepage publicizes a recently established mentorship program for early-career scholars and those from countries underrepresented in the journal (*Public Administration* 2022). Moreover, marginalized members in some subfields are mounting creative efforts to address inequity. One team of scholars seeks to increase the presence of women in the legislative studies subfield through efforts of Women in Legislative Studies (2022), an organization that sponsors monthly online research seminars, professional-development seminars, and a writing group; they also are planning an annual conference. The two initiatives WomenAlsoKnowStuff (2022) and PeopleOfColorAlsoKnowStuff

(2022) have justly earned renown for their impact on diversifying conferences, speaker series, syllabi, and more.

These recommendations for APSA inspire other measures that the association might take to advance equity across the social sciences. For example, APSA could leverage its membership in the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), which holds annual Social Science Advocacy Days that allow social scientists to engage with policy makers. APSA could promote an Advocacy Day devoted to the theme

Today it is more urgent than ever that we engender structural transformations capable of mitigating—and removing—systemic inequities and inequalities in academe.

of the importance and benefits of inclusion and equity in the social sciences. APSA could partner with the regional political science associations (i.e., Midwest and Southern) that also are members of COSSA, requesting more powerful advocacy. Similarly, APSA could enlist the 40-plus colleges and universities that are COSSA members in the effort to hold an Advocacy Day centered on the importance and benefits of inclusion and equity.

Navigating the road toward greater equity in the discipline also should entail investigating areas that the symposium could have chosen to incorporate. For example, our articles could have delved further into the import of class and first-generation status. One contribution mentions tribal colleges; however, indigenous scholars face other challenges outside of this setting. We also could consider political scientists who work in rural colleges and universities, hold positions that classify them as contingent faculty, or are located outside of academe. Not only the contributors to this symposium but also colleagues across political science should be mindful of such axes of difference as we travel the road toward greater equity.

It is understood that implementing these proposals requires funding and personnel. One of the symposium contributions calls for increased resources within APSA dedicated to DEI programs (Ackerly and Franklin 2022). Fulfilling this goal might involve a special fundraising drive, spearheaded—for example—by an ad hoc APSA committee. We also should consider as a thought experiment an ongoing, automatically replenished source of DEI funding. When APSA members renew their membership, what if they automatically were asked to contribute a small fee (e.g., \$5 or a small percentage of their income) to DEI programs? Members renewing their membership in this thought experiment would be asked to specifically *opt out* of the DEI contribution to avoid making it. The distinction with current practice merits emphasis. Extant section memberships and donations to APSA-administered funds involve an *opt-in*. This proposal requires an *opt-out*.

This conclusion to the symposium has good and bad news. The bad news is familiar: today it is more urgent than ever that we engender structural transformations capable of

mitigating—and removing—systemic inequities and inequalities in academe. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement foregrounded systemic inequities and inequalities. This moment highlights the challenges and importance of Black people in academe. To illustrate, in responding to BLM, administrators in institutions of higher education have asked political scientists of color to take on greater service responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased caregiving burdens, especially for women, as they have tried to balance

professional commitments with homeschooling their children. Women political scientists have seen their research productivity decline as a result (Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff 2021; Simien and Wallace 2022).

Nevertheless, there is reason for cautious optimism. Political science defines its core areas of inquiry as those that are central to the effort to transform the discipline: power, inequality, (in)justice, and institutions (Mershon and Walsh 2016). Thus, we have the knowledge to bring about a sea change in the profession. Do we have the commitment to act to implement what we know? As political scientists also comprehend, relations of power confer certain people with privilege, and those in power can minimize or ignore the experience of marginalized people. The powerful have the responsibility to ally with diverse colleagues to build equity and inclusion in the discipline. As this symposium indicates, momentum is gathering for a sea change, for some leaders in the profession have worked and continue to work to implement far-reaching reform.

The benefits of fundamental reform are clear. “Group think” in diverse, equitable scholarly teams does not discourage innovation. Far from it: according to available scholarship, relatively equitable, inclusive, and diverse groups of colleagues generate relatively effective problem solving and relatively great creativity and productivity (Henderson and Herring 2013; Page 2007; 2019). Therefore, marginalized colleagues and all members of the discipline gain when we register advances in the quest for equity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks Sally Bonsall, Hayley Elszasz, and Shiran Ren for their commentary and research assistance.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTE

1. This symposium is based on all of the authors' contributions to the APSA Presidential Task Force appointed by President Paula McClain on “Systemic Inequalities in the Discipline.”

REFERENCES

- Ackerly, Brooke, and Sekou Franklin. 2022. "Climate and APSA." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096522001160.
- American Political Science Association. 2018. "Diversity and Inclusion Hackathon." <https://connect.apsanet.org/hackathon>.
- American Political Science Association. 2022a. "APSA Mentoring Program." www.apsanet.org/mentor.
- American Political Science Association. 2022b. "Presidents and Presidential Addresses." www.apsanet.org/ABOUT/Leadership-Governance/APSA-Presidents-1903-to-Present.
- American Political Science Association. 2022c. "Status Committees." www.apsanet.org/status-committees.
- Argyle, Lisa P., and Tali Mendelberg. 2020. "Improving Women's Advancement in Political Science: What We Know About What Works." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53 (4): 718–22.
- Brown, Nadia E. 2019. "Me Too Political Science: An Introduction." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 40 (1): 1–6.
- Brown, Nadia E. (ed.). 2020. *Me Too Political Science*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Brown, Nadia E., and David Samuels. 2018a. "Beyond the Gender Citation Gap: Comments on Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell." *Political Analysis* 26 (3): 328–30.
- Brown, Nadia E., and David Samuels. 2018b. "Introduction to Gender in the Journals, Continued: Evidence from Five Political Science Journals." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51 (4): 847–48.
- Clair, Robin Patric, Nadia E. Brown, Debbie S. Dougherty, Hannah K. Delemeester, Patricia Geist-Martin, William I. Gorden, Tyler Sorg, and Paaige K. Turner. 2019. "#MeToo, Sexual Harassment: An Article, a Forum, and a Dream for the Future." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 47 (2): 111–29.
- Dion, Michelle L., Jane Lawrence Sumner, and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell. 2018. "Gendered Citation Patterns across Political Science and Social Science Methodology Fields." *Political Analysis* 26 (3): 312–27.
- Fraga, Luis Ricardo, Terri E. Givens, and Dianne M. Pinderhughes. 2011. "Political Science in the 21st Century: Report of the Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century." www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Task%20Force%20Reports/TF_21st%20Century_AllPgs_webres90.pdf.
- Gaventa, John. 1982. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Ghosh, Cyril, and Hongying Wang. 2022. "Microaggression, Bullying, and Implicit Bias." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096522001159.
- Henderson, Loren, and Cedric Herring. 2013. "Does Critical Diversity Pay in Higher Education?" *Politics, Groups & Identities* 1 (3): 229–310.
- Mallinson, Daniel J., and Rebecca D. Gill. 2021. "Introduction: Strategies for How Men Can Advance Gender Equity in Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54 (2): 1–2.
- Mealy, Kimberly. 2020. "APSA Diversity and Inclusion Update." www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/diversity%20and%20inclusion%20prgrms/DIV%20reports/APSA%20Dashboard%20Data%20report%20-%202020%20.pdf?ver=2020-07-13-002957-530.
- Mealy, Kimberly. 2022. Email interviews with Carol Mershon, January 25 and February 1.
- Mershon, Carol. 2022. "Introduction: The Import of Equity and Equality for All Political Scientists." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096522000889.
- Mershon, Carol, and Denise Walsh. 2016. "Diversity in Political Science: Why It Matters and How to Get It." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4 (3): 462–66.
- #MeTooPoliSci ADVANCE. 2022. <http://metoopolisoci.org>.
- Michelson, Melissa R., and Betina Cutaia Wilkinson. 2022. "Best Practices in Diversifying Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096522000804.
- Monroe, Kristen. 2002. "Cracking the Glass Ceiling—Keeping It Broken." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35 (2): 237–42.
- Page, Scott E. 2007. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Page, Scott E. 2019. *The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- People of Color Also Know. 2022. <https://sites.google.com/view/pocexperts/home>.
- Public Administration. 2022. Journal homepage. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14679299/homepage/diversity-statement.html>.
- Samuels, David J., and Dawn Langan Teele. 2021. "New Medium, Same Story? Gender Gaps in Book Publishing." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54 (1): 131–40.
- Sapiro, Virginia, and David Campbell. 2018. "Report on the 2017 APSA Survey on Sexual Harassment at Annual Meetings." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51 (1): 197–206.
- Shalaby, Marwa, Nermin Allam, and Gail J. Buttorff. 2021. "Leveling the Field: Gender Inequity in Academia During COVID-19." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54 (4): 1–7.
- Simien, Evelyn, and Sophia Jordán Wallace. 2022. "Exclusion and Disproportionate Service: Considering the Impacts for Women Academics and Faculty of Color in Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. DOI: 10.1017/S104909652200110X.
- Teele, Dawn Langan, and Kathleen Thelen. 2017. "Gender in the Journals: Publication Patterns in Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (2): 433–47.
- WomenAlsoKnowStuff. 2022. www.womenalsoknowstuff.com.
- Women in Legislative Studies. 2022. www.womeninlegislativestudies.org.



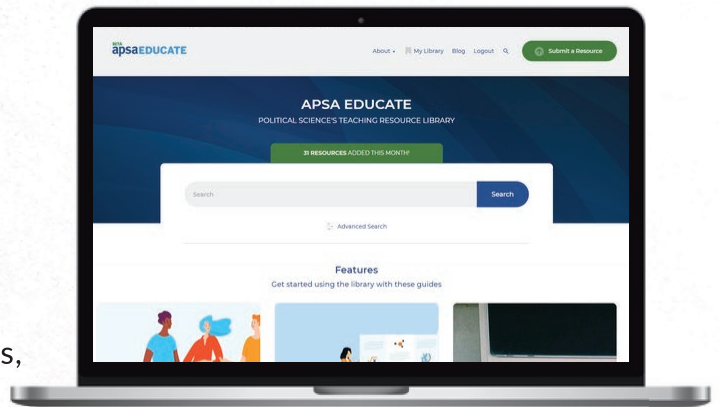
Introducing APSA Educate – A Library for Political Science Teaching and Learning Resources

APSA Educate provides a centralized space to share and access teaching materials from syllabi to simulations.

The website is **free to access** and features a strong search function and easy submission form. Contributing a resource takes less than ten minutes!

PLATFORM BENEFITS

- **Access a broad range of high-quality political science teaching and learning materials** including syllabi, in-class activities, simulations, writing assignments, civic engagement tools, and more!
- **Share your teaching materials** and innovations with colleagues.
- **Save** favorite resources to your personal teaching resource library.
- **Ask questions, discuss modifications** to and experience with resources via comments.
- **Learn from and share with colleagues** through our Faculty Café Blog – featuring member-driven conversations around innovations, challenges, and best practices in political science education.



Learn more about APSA Educate, please visit educate.apsanet.org.

