

# Interviews, Reflections, and Advice from Women in Legislative Studies

## A MESSAGE FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

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The articles in this spotlight of “From the Sections” are drawn from the recent issue of the Legislative Studies Section (LSS) newsletter, *The Legislative Scholar*. As coeditors for the past three years, we have revamped the newsletter to focus on using it to provide opportunities for mentoring and community building, as well as a venue to highlight research in this area.

In the three years since we took over in 2016, we have published newsletters on the past, present, and future of the LSS; teaching, mentoring, and training graduate and undergraduate students; advice on sabbaticals, grants, and research opportunities; a retrospective on the contributions of Keith Poole; and insights on legislative gridlock. We also highlighted the visions of legislative scholars on contemporary political events and multiple datasets developed by scholars in our field.

We are grateful to all of the LSS members who helped us in this process. Members of the two editorial boards were always ready to provide feedback on ideas or to make suggestions for article writers. The 114 contributors to the six issues in these three years were amazing—graciously agreeing to contribute to the newsletter and meeting the deadlines. The contributors included faculty and graduate students as well as several who generously wrote for multiple issues. We are especially grateful to Collin Paschall, who was a graduate student when we started with the newsletter; now, with his PhD in hand, he is an APSA Congressional Fellow. Collin did much of the behind-the-scenes work and made our work easier and more pleasant.

Our final issue of the newsletter and the material included herein focuses on women in the LSS. It is not news that women are underrepresented in the field. In an article reporting the percentage of women in the 43 different APSA sections, LSS was the third lowest (22%), above only Political Methodology (21%) and Presidents and Executive Politics (22%) (Roberts 2018). This gender breakdown also was evident at the last LSS business meeting, when only about 15 were women of the approximate 60 people present. There also are gender gaps in publication in *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (*LSQ*) (as in most of the top journals); however, we have no evidence that this gap is any different in publications than in submissions. In fact, after publication of this issue of the newsletter, *LSQ* Executive Editor Brian Crisp undertook an analysis of submissions since 2016 (Crisp, forthcoming). He reports that in the past three years, 26% of all authors who submitted to the journal and 27% of those whose work was accepted for publication were women. Among solo-authored papers, women submitted 28% of manuscripts

and received acceptances 10% of the time. This acceptance rate is similar to male single-authored papers (11%). Crisp also emphasizes that the editorial board of the journal is near parity on gender and that two of the three current coeditors are women. For 2018, Crisp also provides the gender breakdown of reviewers, which indicates that female scholars comprise 25% of *LSQ*'s reviewer pool.

Recognizing that there likely are many reasons for this gender breakdown—in both the pipeline leading scholars to various fields and the climate and opportunities within a section—we were encouraged by Section President Wendy Schiller to raise these issues in the newsletter. This spotlight is the result of our efforts to seek insight from senior women in the field. We asked them to reflect on challenges that they may have encountered and how the field has changed over time and to offer advice for junior women navigating the field.

We are incredibly grateful for the contributions to this spotlight. It is an opportunity for the LSS to take notice of the gender disparity, why it may exist, and how it may affect the career paths of junior women. It also provides an opportunity to explore suggestions for ways to improve both the pipeline and the climate. We emphasize that the perspectives included in these articles capture only a range of the experiences and views held by women in this field, and we recognize that readers will agree with some more than others.

It is clear from our contributors that there is no single reason for the low proportion of women in the LSS. One possibility is that the section is losing younger scholars in general—and because younger cohorts are more evenly balanced on gender, it loses women this way (Powell). A second possibility is that the LSS is losing junior women more often than junior men and that women who identify as “legislatures plus something else” have opted to align with the “something-else” section (Powell). A third is that the problem begins in the pipeline as graduate students select fields and find advisers (Fowler; Sulkin). A fourth possibility is potential differences in male and female employment in liberal arts versus R1 institutions, which may affect the likelihood of regular conference attendance (Fowler). We encourage the LSS leadership to continue researching these explanations, perhaps using a survey of section members and those doing work in related fields. Much more can be done to consider other underrepresented groups, including racial and ethnic minorities.

In terms of suggestions, the contributors emphasize several actions that women can take. They include the importance of promoting one's own work—whether by self-citation or by proposing an “author-meets-critics” panel (we note that this may be easier at MPSA than at APSA) (Mershon and Moyer). Women also should seek opportunities to be seen and to network by attending conference panels other than their own (and introducing themselves to other scholars) or LSS business meetings (Hurley). Furthermore, women can do

more to build mentoring relationships by taking advantage of increasing mentoring opportunities through APSA and other organizations (Mershon and Moyer) or by strategically seeking both vertical (i.e., senior) and horizontal (i.e., peer) mentorships (O'Brien).

However, addressing the challenges that come with being in an underrepresented group extends also to advisers and colleagues. This includes greater awareness about the challenges that women may face in a male-dominated field, whether in opportunities for

community within the LSS. We also thank Phillip Ardoin and PS reviewers for the opportunity to share the LSS newsletter with the broader political science community. ■

#### REFERENCES

- Crisp, Brian F. Forthcoming. "Editor's Introduction: Gender and Editorial Outcomes at *Legislative Studies Quarterly*." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- Roberts, Margaret E. 2018. "What Is Political Methodology?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51 (3): 597–601.

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informal mentoring or double burdens (Mershon and Moyer). Like women in other male-dominated fields, female legislative scholars may face challenges to "prove it again," "walk a tightrope" between femininity and masculinity, and "address the maternal wall" (Mügge and van Oosten). Alert colleagues can lessen these challenges and help female scholars navigate the field when they arise. We as a field can do more to help our advisees and colleagues identify good mentors (which is true for both men and women). Junior scholars may not know how to identify characteristics of a good mentor (Lee and Wyckoff) or how to think strategically about coauthorship networks (Schiller). Using resources such as Women Also Know Stuff and People of Color Also Know Stuff can help all of us to increase the diversity of our speaker series and syllabi. Designing our syllabi to be more representative is a small step toward making the field (and each of us as advisers and mentors) approachable for both men and women (Lee and Wyckoff).

Finally, there may be actions the LSS can take to foster greater community for both women and men, including recruitment, mentoring, and fostering a wider range of "legislative" research questions (Swers). Although the Congress and History Conference has been an avenue to bring together a subset of congressional legislative scholars, it does not include state or comparative legislative scholars, and there is no legislatures-wide annual conference with an open call for papers (which other subfields such as state politics have) (Powell). More broadly, the field may be able to foster greater inclusion of research on state and comparative legislatures, where there may be more women and where new research questions may arise (Powell; Rosenthal); research linking legislatures and representation (Sulkin); and research at the intersection of legislatures and gender or race (Mügge; Caballero, Jackson, and Brown; Rosenthal; Schiller). The field also may benefit from greater openness to new questions and approaches, even if they oppose established approaches (Fowler). One possibility may be to consider more cosponsored panels about race, ethnicity, and politics or about women and politics. Whereas panels sponsored by the LSS tend to be male dominated, those sponsored by the Women and Politics Section tend to be female dominated (Swers). Greater integration would improve the currently gendered networks and also provide cross-fertilization of research agendas.

We thank the contributors to this spotlight for their thoughtful reflections and efforts to promote greater inclusiveness and

#### CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROL MERSHON

Dana Moyer, *University of Virginia*

Carol Mershon, *University of Virginia*

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#### Changes in the Field

Dana Moyer (DM): How has the study of legislatures changed since you entered the field?

Carol Mershon (CM): I have seen multiple changes in the field since I started as an assistant professor in the mid-1980s. Rational-choice scholarship now more thoroughly dominates the field and theoretical arguments have acquired greater rigor, in part through wider use of formal theory. The methods we use have become more diverse. For instance, legislative scholars now incorporate experiments into their research (e.g., Harbridge, Malhotra, and Harrison 2014; McClendon 2016). Moreover, our research questions have become more varied. For example, we now have abundant research on how members of underrepresented groups win legislative representation and how they exercise power once in office (Baldez 2004; Barnes 2016; Htun 2004; Kanthak and Krause 2012; Krook 2010; Lawless 2015; Orey et al. 2007; Smooth 2011). Finally, the study of legislatures beyond the United States has blossomed. As a result, scholars probe the impact of elected legislatures (Gandhi 2008) and increased legislative transparency under authoritarianism (Malesky, Schuler, and Tran 2012). In addition, we are more aware of the importance for legislative politics of variation in, for example, the number of parties represented, the dimensionality of the policy space, the electoral system, and the executive's legislative prerogatives. With the accumulated comparative work, we can better appreciate commonalities across legislatures in presidential and parliamentary democracies (e.g., Cox 2006) and distinctions within the set of presidential systems (e.g., Palanza and Sin 2014). All told, given the field's evolution, we have enhanced understanding of legislative politics since the mid-1980s.

#### Experience Entering a Male-Dominated Field

DM: What was your experience as a junior scholar in a male-dominated field?