

Structuring Inclusion into the Political Science Student Experience: From Recruitment to Completion, From Undergraduate to Graduate and Beyond

Introduction to Structuring Inclusion into Political Science Education

Bridgett A. King, *Auburn University, USA*
Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, *University of Essex, UK*

In 2019, the International Studies Association (ISA) called for panels on structuring inclusion for the 2020 ISA Conference. The call encouraged panels that “offer practical reforms and institutional mechanisms to advance inclusivity in ISA or at our home institutions, and those that provide support, encouragement, and strategies for coping with differential treatment in professional and academic settings” (International Studies Association 2019). We created a panel that included scholars from universities that have demonstrated a commitment to structuring diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their classrooms, academic programs, departments, and universities—scholars who also have advocated for and facilitated the adoption of structural changes to improve DEI. Although the conference was canceled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we remained committed to sharing how we were actively creating formal structures, strategies that we found to be successful, and challenges we encountered along the way.

We acknowledged the continued importance of making structural contributions to the ongoing discussion in the discipline and wanted to provide examples of successes from within political science. Therefore, we expanded our invitation to scholars from various academic ranks and institution types

across the Global North and Global South to consider submitting proposals for a symposium, explicitly focused on structuring DEI in the discipline. The result of this expanded call was two symposia. The first symposium focuses on structuring DEI into undergraduate and graduate student training, course curriculum, and graduate admissions to foster DEI. The second symposium focuses on faculty recruitment, retention, collaboration, and promotion. These symposia are not the first in political science to address DEI nor will they be the last. However, it is our hope that the pathways to inclusion that have been paved by our colleagues will provide meaningful insight on practical ways to foster inclusion in the profession.

STRUCTURING INCLUSION INTO POLITICAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

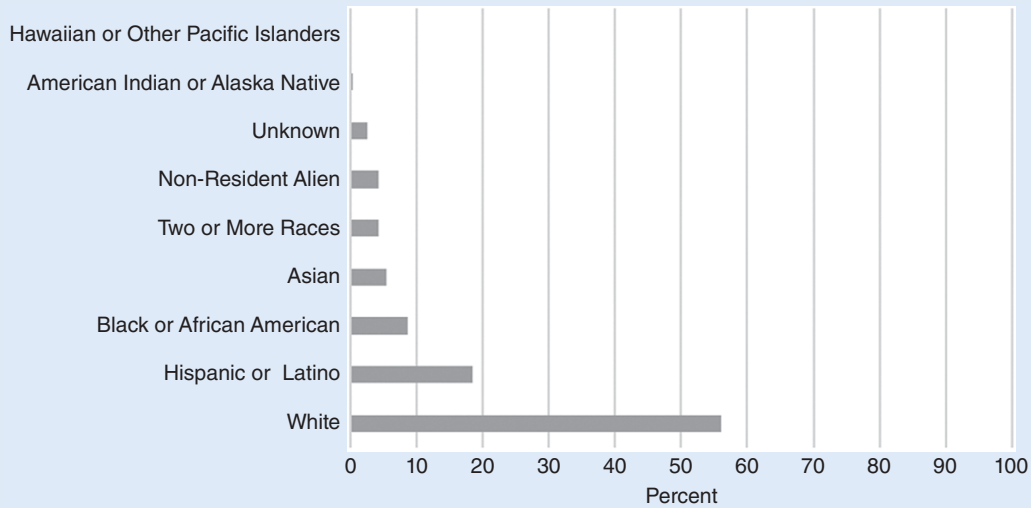
Many of us are aware that our departmental demographics and classrooms do not reflect the nations or the regions and communities where we teach. Review of educational statistics demonstrates the lack of diversity among students who receive bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees in the United States (figure 1). Data from the American Political Science Association (APSA) reflect a similar reality among those who comprise the political science discipline (figure 2).

The APSA Project on Women and Minorities (P-WAM) provided additional insight (APSA Nd). The P-WAM, which relies on data from 21 of the largest MA- and PhD-granting institutions, reported that in 2018–2019, 75.39% of all faculty (i.e., tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track) were white. Furthermore, the P-WAM underscored the reality that incoming PhD students and PhD recipients reflect historical and current faculty demographics. Whites comprise 66.39% of PhD recipients and 56.36% of incoming PhD students.

Many in the field understand the disparities in enrollment, participation in high-impact practices, degrees conferred, and faculty ranks. Yet, the discussions highlighting these issues often do not provide concrete strategies to address the disparities. We seek examples of actions that have been successful and can serve as models for adoption, modification,

Figure 1

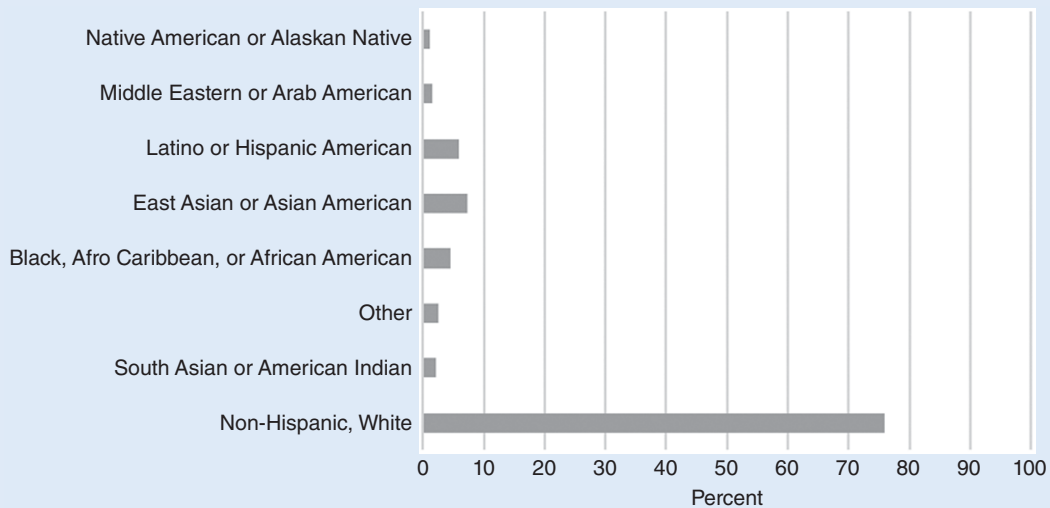
Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral Degrees Conferred, 2020



The proportion of American Indian and Alaska Natives is less than 1%. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Degrees Conferred, 2019–2020. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2021menu_tables.asp.

Figure 2

Racial/Ethnic Composition of APSA Members



These data reflect the demographics of APSA membership and therefore may include undergraduate and graduate students, practitioners, and retirees. The proportion of Native American or Alaskan Natives members is less than 1%. Source: American Political Science Association (2020).

and application across departments of political science, government, and related fields.

Although there is a normative value to DEI in the discipline, political science has a unique responsibility to society that extends beyond academia. During the October 2021 APSA webinar, “Building an Inclusive Syllabus,” Todd Shaw noted: “Political science courses are bridges students cross to civil, economic, and political society. They will either leave with the

capacity to understand and act as political citizens, or they will be inactive. Instructors are an extension of that institutional bridge” (Shaw 2021).

This symposium presents a subset of recommendations, approaches, and programs that our colleagues have found helpful. The articles focus on the student experience and how to more inclusively teach and mentor students to diversify the pipeline of future scholars, public managers, analysts, and

policy makers. Not all of these examples have yielded dramatic changes, but each has been successful in refining our thinking about how to improve gaps in opportunity for students from underrepresented groups in political science education.

The contributions to this symposium provide new insight into how political science faculty can proactively create inclu-

The articles focus on the student experience and how to more inclusively teach and mentor students to diversify the pipeline of future scholars, public managers, analysts, and policy makers.

sive classrooms and assignments, enhance the accessibility of research norms and practices, engage in holistic admission practices for graduate programs, and demonstrate how student coauthorship can contribute to DEI in the profession. Each contribution relies, in part, on the experiences of the authors in their universities, departments, and programs. This personal experience is bolstered by scholarship that connects to a broader understanding of approaches to DEI that are not specific to our field. Together, the contributions provide pathways and examples that can be followed and modified to address structural barriers that affect DEI in undergraduate and graduate political science instruction and training.

Elaine K. Denny and her coauthors—all of whom are undergraduate students—demonstrate how research can be used to foster inclusive education and be grounded in best practices for first-generation students. Using a semester-long research project, they outline how aligning the classroom structure and related assignments can meet the needs of first-generation students and improve their confidence, knowledge, and growth. The inclusion of students who participated in the class as coauthors of the article also speaks to opportunities to address DEI beyond the classroom.

The ability of high-impact practices to foster DEI also is addressed by Brittany Perry. She discusses the Data Lab, a program that explicitly addresses the diversity gap in political methodology and advances career opportunities in data science for students from underrepresented minority groups. The Data Lab is a two-day workshop that focuses on the basic principles of quantitative statistical analysis. In addition to enhancing students' exposure to research methodologies, survey results suggest that participation in the Data Lab increases the likelihood that students from underrepresented groups will consider pursuing a PhD or a career that uses quantitative methods. The discussion of the Data Lab's application process also demonstrates how program applications can be structured to reduce barriers for underrepresented students.

The decisions made by doctoral program admissions committees directly affect the demographics of academic candidate pools. The application and evaluation processes that are used to determine who is accepted into graduate programs historically have relied on grade point average and graduate record exam (GRE) scores to determine which candidates have the foundational knowledge to be successful. However, as conversations about graduate program diversity and questions about

the appropriateness of GRE (and other standardized tests) scores as predictors of success in graduate school have emerged—particularly for underrepresented populations—many programs have transitioned to a holistic-review process.

A holistic review is “a process by which programs consider a broad range of characteristics including both cognitive and

noncognitive abilities when reviewing applicant's files” (Michel, Belur, Naemi, and Kell 2019, 5). Whereas many programs may want to transition to a holistic review, determining how to make such a transition can be challenging. Heather Stoll and Bruce Bimber provide one example based on their department's transition to a holistic review. They describe the change as having one short-term goal and one long-term goal. The short-term goal was to reduce the undergraduate-to-graduate leaky pipeline for the Fall 2021 incoming class. The long-term goal is to have a graduate student body that resembles the undergraduate student body. Their article focuses on the rationale, process, challenges, and outcomes of their transition. Although their discussion concentrates on only one round of holistic review, they found that the diversity of the final candidates for admission far exceeded their current graduate student population, thus meeting their short-term goal.

Finally, this symposium addresses DEI in graduate training through coauthorship. Reyna L. Reyes-Nunez and her coauthors—a combination of faculty members and graduate students—address how actively engaging graduate students with coauthorship opportunities can help them learn the hidden curriculum of the profession, further their professional development, and improve the academic job prospects of those from underrepresented groups. They provide a series of inclusive practices and scholarly insights that faculty members can adopt to promote DEI in graduate student coauthorship.

As stated by Sinclair-Chapman (2017, 454):

[T]he heightened attention to institutional diversity across academia presents an opportunity that political scientists should seize by presenting themselves as credible stakeholders who are well equipped to steward institutions' newly available resources, run innovative pilot programs, and produce returns on institutional diversity investments for both students and faculty.

Although there is much that we can learn from other disciplines that have experienced success when addressing pipeline and leaky-pipeline challenges, the articles in this symposium demonstrate that expertise in our discipline can be leveraged to address DEI. These articles demonstrate that with commitment, innovation, and a willingness to try, the current structural status quo in teaching, research, and collaboration in undergraduate and graduate political

Teacher Symposium: Structuring Inclusion into Political Science

science can be changed to create new opportunities for DEI in the profession. The contributors to this symposium hope to encourage and inspire all scholars to consider how their teaching, research, and expertise might be positioned to directly address structural conditions that limit DEI efforts.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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

REFERENCES

American Political Science Association. 2020. "All Membership Demographic Profile: Race/Ethnicity." <https://apsanet.org/resources/data-on-the-profession/dashboard/membership>.

American Political Science Association. Nd. "Project on Women and Minorities: Demographics over Time." <https://apsanet.org/resources/data-on-the-profession/dashboards/p-wam>.

International Studies Association. 2019. "Structuring Inclusion Panels." www.isanet.org/Conferences/Special-Convention-Programs/Structuring-Inclusion.

Michel, Rochelle S., Vinetha Belur, Bobby Naemi, and Harrison J. Kell. 2019. "Graduate Admissions Practices: A Targeted Review of the Literature." *ETS Research Report Series* 2019: 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12271>.


Shaw, Todd. 2021. "Building an Inclusive Syllabus: An APSA Teaching & Learning Webinar." American Political Science Association online webinar, October 20. <https://politicalsciencenow.com/building-an-inclusive-syllabus-an-apsa-teaching-learning-webinar>.

Sinclair-Chapman, Valeria. 2017. "Leveraging Diversity in Political Science for Institutional and Disciplinary Change." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 48 (3): 454–58.


SYMPOSIUM CONTRIBUTORS


Selma Corral Acosta is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at scorralacosta@ucmerced.edu.


Bianca Amechi is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at bamechi@ucmerced.edu.

Jodi Benenson  is assistant professor of public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her primary research interests include social policy, nonprofit organizations, civic engagement, and social equity. She can be reached at jbenson@unomaha.edu.

Bruce Bimber is professor of political science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His research interests are in political communication, digital media, and political behavior. He can be reached at bimber@ucsb.edu.

Felipe Blanco  is a PhD candidate in public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His research interests are race and ethnicity in public administration and public policy, social equity and ethnoracial inequalities, comparative public administration, and comparative public policy. He can be reached at fblancosanchez@unomaha.edu.

Juve J. Cortés-Rivera  is a visiting scholar at Pablo de Olavide University. His research examines the political participation of minorities in the United States, immigration, direct democracy, secession, communications, and Latin American politics. He can be reached at jcortes310@berkeley.edu.


Elaine K. Denny  is assistant professor of political science at the University of California, Merced. At a macro level, Dr. Denny studies how insecurity and resilience affect political behavior. At a micro level, she explores the psychological links among stressors, cognitive load, and political decisions, as well as the conditions affecting political persuasion and susceptibility to misinformation. Her current work explores these themes particularly in relation to the coronavirus pandemic and insecurity related to migration from (and deportation to) Central America.


Dr. Denny has consulted for organizations including UNICEF, UK Aid/DfID, The World Bank, and USAID in the design and evaluation of social norms, gender equity, and migrant welfare initiatives. She is passionate about UC Merced's role in expanding access to higher education for all, and she is a committed mentor to both undergraduate and graduate students. She can be reached at edenny@ucmerced.edu.

Gabriel De Pina is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. Gabriel can be reached at jdepina@ucmerced.edu.

Jessica Frausto is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at jfrausto@ucmerced.edu.

Barbara Gomez-Aguinaga is assistant professor of public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research examines the intersection of the public policy-making process and the politics of minority groups, and the ways in which public policies have different impacts on ethnoracial minorities. She can be reached at bgomez@unomaha.edu.

Nuri Heckler  is assistant professor of public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His research focuses on whiteness and masculinity in public organizations, including nonprofits, social enterprise, and government. He can be reached at nheckler@unomaha.edu.

Thomas Jamieson  is assistant professor of public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He studies how information and public opinion affect policy making, especially during periods of crisis. He can be reached at tjamieson@unomaha.edu.


Bridgett A. King  is associate professor of political science and director of the Master of Public Administration Program at Auburn University. She currently serves on the Electoral Integrity Project International Academic Advisory Board and is a track leader with the Election and Voting Information Center; a research partner with the Democracy, Power, and Innovation Fund; and a research partner

with the University of Rhode Island Voter Operations and Election Systems. Themes in King's research include the administrative structure of felony disenfranchisement and its effect on participation and representation, citizen confidence in electoral outcomes, consequences of administrative discretion on voter experiences, and democratic representation. She can be reached at bakoo20@auburn.edu.

Jackeline Meza is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at jmeza36@ucmerced.edu.


Iven Morales is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. He can be reached at imorales23@ucmerced.edu.


Ana Murillo is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at amurillo33@ucmerced.edu.

Njoki Mwarumba  is assistant professor of public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her scholarship, pedagogy, research, volunteerism, and community engagement lie at the intersection of global public health disasters, social vulnerability, and asset-based approaches toward enhancing resilience and advocating for disaster justice. She can be reached at nmwarumba@unomaha.edu.


Beatrice Mae Ngo is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at bngo10@ucmerced.edu.

Jocelyn Ngo is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at jngo32@ucmerced.edu.

Brittany N. Perry  has a PhD in political science and serves as academic director of the Council for International Educational Exchange in Copenhagen, Denmark. She previously was an associate professor at Texas A&M University. She can be reached at bperry@ciee.org.

Gina Yannitell Reinhardt  is professor of government at the University of Essex. She studies the political economy of disasters, international

development, political trust, and decision making. In her commitment to increasing inclusion in the profession, she founded the Global South Academic Network (GSAN) (<https://gsan.essex.ac.uk>) to create space to find collaborators across the globe. GSAN members practice multiple principles of equity in scholarship, including a commitment to North–South and South–South grant pursuit and management, research agenda setting, authorship, training, and professional development. Reinhardt sits on the Advisory Board of the Transitions and Transformations: The Black Researcher’s Journey project and the Widening Participation in Postgraduate Research Working Group of the National Education Opportunities Network in the UK. She can be reached at gina.reinhardt@essex.ac.uk.


Reyna L. Reyes-Núñez  is a PhD candidate in public administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests include international policy, human security, international governmental organizations, international cooperation, and migration. She can be reached at reyesnunez@unomaha.edu.

Karen Rodriguez is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at rodriguezek51@gmail.com.

Annamey Saechao is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at annamey.saechao1999@gmail.com.

Alejandra Barajas Sanchez is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at abarajassanchez2@ucmerced.edu.

Jacquelyn Sanchez is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at jsanchez339@ucmerced.edu.

Heather Stoll  is associate professor of political science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests are in comparative politics: political institutions, electoral systems, party systems, and political representation. She also has been involved in several diversity initiatives at UCSB. She can be reached at hstoll@ucsb.edu.


Fernando Tormos-Aponte is assistant professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and a Kendall Fellow at the Union of Concerned Scientists. He specializes in environmental and racial justice, intersectional solidarity, identity politics, social policy, and transnational politics. He can be reached at ft@umbc.edu.

Elizabeth Meza Torres is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at emeza7@ucmerced.edu.

Jacqueline Valdez is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced with a BA in history. She can be reached at jvaldez36@gmail.com.

Alexa Valencia is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at avalencia45@ucmerced.edu.

Ashley Tulle Varela is a recent undergraduate-degree recipient from the University of California, Merced. She can be reached at atullevara@ucmerced.edu.

Samantha Zuhlke  is assistant professor of planning and public affairs at the University of Iowa. She applies novel methods of spatial analysis to investigate important problems in public policy, public administration, and environmental politics. She can be reached at samantha-zuhlke@uiowa.edu.