Affecting the World: Political Science Education and Relevance

by Matthew Stein

Abstract: Since the establishment of the American Political Science Association (APSA), American political scientists have sought to bridge the gap between scholarly research and political action. Frank Goodnow, the first president of APSA argued in 1904 that the study of politics can, or plausibly must speak to the political world. Over 100 years later, former APSA president Jennifer Hochschild echoes this sentiment by arguing that increased relevance is one cause for optimism in a politically pessimistic time. Christina Greer recently followed this line of thought by arguing in APSA's 2018 Election Reflection Series that political scientists ought to focus on informing the public on relevant topics.

Political scientists continue to debate how we can best achieve relevance. However, one approach to becoming relevant which is often overlooked is a turn to focusing on classroom education. My argument counters the tendency to treat our educational responsibilities as a non-factor with regards to becoming a more relevant discipline. Although the desire to become more relevant is noble, success will require that we view teaching as a gateway to, rather than an obstacle to becoming relevant. Undergraduates who major in political science work in the very fields we wish to discuss and impact including government, law, and non-profit organizations. Therefore, if we wish to be a relevant field, political science academics ought to primarily focus on student education.

Political Science and the 115 Year Pursuit of Relevance

For at least the past 115 years – since the formation of the American Political Science Association (APSA) – political scientists have stated a desire for the field to be relevant. This goal has been stated by many political scientists who come from a variety of intellectual and methodological backgrounds but who all have expressed similar intentions for the discipline. Despite their differences in

focus and approach, political scientists generally wish to produce more externally relevant research as the way to increase political science's impact outside of academic circles. I argue that this desire for political science relevance is found in the writings and speeches of three groups of political scientists:[1] past APSA presidents and APSA contributors; methodologists and those who have contributed to the methodology literature in political science; and finally, political theorists.

The Desire for Political Science Relevance as Stated by Three Groups of Scholars: APSA, Political Methodology and Political Theory

Frank Goodnow, the first president of APSA stated that the organization may have been, at the time, the first of its kind to intentionally assemble a group of likeminded individuals whose interests centered around "the scientific study of the organization and functions of the State" (1904, pp. 36). John Gunnell summarizes Goodnow's rationale in his initial address by stating that for Goodnow, "The fundamental purpose of the Association and its 'work,' however, were to achieve the reciprocity between the closet philosopher and 'those engaged in the active walks of political life' and to exert influence on the 'world of action'" (2006, pp. 483). Robert Putnam paralleled Goodnow's argument that the study of politics can, or plausibly must speak to the political world in his respective APSA presidential address from 2003. Putnam argued that political science contains "professional responsibilities" to contribute to the "public understanding and to the vitality of democracy" (2003 pp. 249). Goodnow's and Putnam's sentiments about American political science being relevant continue to permeate discussion within APSA.

Over 100 years after Goodnow's initial APSA address, Jennifer Hochschild (2017), in her 2016 APSA presidential address, echoed Goodnow and Putnam by arguing that even in tumultuous political

[1] Although there is admittedly overlap among these groups, I acknowledge the scholars based on where their contributions to the debate occurred.

times, increasing levels of scholarly relevance should inspire optimism for political scientists. Even more recently, Christina Greer (2018) argued in APSA's "2018 Election Reflection Series" that political scientists are morally obligated to share their research beyond the academic community in order to lead political conversations and "inform modern day politics." For Greer, political scientists possess crucial knowledge that can help educate and direct the populace and thus we ought to pursue these potential avenues for instigating political change. These APSA presidents and contributors support the prioritization of relevant research and this viewpoint is additionally found in political science methodology texts.[2]

Some of the canonical methodological texts of political science advise students and scholars to undertake relevant research. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) argue that political science research ought to consider questions that are important "in the real world" and which are consequential. Stephen Van Evera similarly argues that "A good dissertation asks an important question. The answer should be relevant to real problems facing the real world" (1997, pp. 97). Gschwend and Schimmelfennig likewise begin their work *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach* by stating that political scientists must ask themselves, among other questions, "What is a relevant research problem?" (2007, pp. 1). Steven Rothman's advice article, "Comparatively Evaluating Potential Dissertation and Thesis Projects" neatly summarizes the aforementioned canonical advice as Rothman states "The student should reflect on what this dissertation project will mean to a larger audience" (2008, pp. 368). The push for relevance is also found in the less methodologically driven subfield of political theory with which I associate.

Since the mid-twentieth century, some political theorists debated and questioned political theory's purpose and the relevance of the subfield. Alfred Cobban (1953) argues that political theory

[2] These scholars are not alone in calling for scholarly relevance. See, for additional examples, Beard (1993), Jacobs and Skocpol (2006), and Peters, Pierre and Stoker (2010).

needed to progress since conditions of social life necessarily change and political theory had failed to evolve alongside social realities. As such, political theory had become irrelevant because the major theories of the time failed to address important questions of democracy. Cobban notes that, in earlier times, political theory "was essentially practical. The political theorist, in this way, was a party man, and party men themselves used not to be afraid to season their practice with the sale of theory" (1953, pp. 330). Cobban was not alone in the mid-twentieth century in arguing that political theory should tend towards addressing relevant political concerns. David Easton claimed that there had been a 50-year poverty of political theory because scholars had shied away from "pondering about the actual direction of human affairs and of offering for the serious consideration of all men some ideas about the desirable course of events" (1951, pp. 37). Eric Voegelin likewise pleaded for political science to return to its roots by formulating principles which begin from the "historical situation of the age" and which consider "the full amplitude of our empirical knowledge" (1952/1987, pp. 3). This concern – that political theory must address relevant political concerns – is similarly expressed by contemporary political theorists.

Over forty years after Cobban expressed his concerns with political theory's irrelevance, Jeffrey Isaac (1995) bemoaned political theory for its lack of focus on the revolutions of 1989 which signaled the demise of the Soviet Union. Not only did Isaac argue that the revolutions were relevant to political theory, but he also noted that they were relevant to real world politics. Isaac expressed his shock that political theory ignored the revolutions and he stated that "This avoidance strikes me as a shocking indictment of academic political theory. How can it be? How can a form of inquiry that claims to be the heir of Plato, Machiavelli, Tocqueville, and Marx, thinkers profoundly caught up in the events of their day, be so oblivious to what is going on around it" (1995, pp. 637)?[3] Isaac was not the only theorist concerned with the subfield's irrelevance during the 1990s.

[3] I will later note some of Isaac's contemporary efforts in encouraging political science to become more relevant. His piece referenced in this section is quite noteworthy in spurring or contributing to two debates: around the 1989 revolutions, and about the role of relevance in political science.

Like Isaac only a few years prior, Richard Rorty argued that academic political theorists needed to refocus their scholarly attention towards relevant political issues. Rorty argued that the academic left focused on ideas and on cultural studies, rather than on tangible changes and had ignored the rise of economic inequality and insecurity in the United States, and across the globe that negatively impacted the majority of seemingly disparate peoples. The suggestion that Rorty offered was to take a pragmatist's approach to politics, and to abandon "futile attempts to philosophize one's way into political relevance" which occur as "[d]isengagement from practice produces theoretical hallucinations" (1998, 94). Rorty suggested getting back to pragmatic political quandaries, or what Dewey called "the problems of men." The former – philosophical quandaries beyond the immediate material conditions – Rorty saw as useless to political action. Instead, Rorty argued that the academic left ought to engage with nonacademics with the goal of forming political alliances. Rorty argued that academics needed to replace highfalutin and nonviable philosophy, with a philosophy of pragmatism that would resonate with nonacademics (especially union members) in order to avert the economic realities of the 1990s. Failure to engage nonacademics in political theorizing would lead to the academic and political left not having "any effect on the laws of the United States" (Rorty 1998, pp. 99). For Rorty, the purpose of abandoning metaphysics for pragmatic political thought was to enhance the relevance of the left in the United States, such that it could resonate on a grander scale and facilitate material changes in the political realm. Joseph Schwartz offers a similar argument to Isaac and Rorty in the early twenty-first century.

Schwartz begins *The Future of Democratic Equality* (2009) by directly referencing Isaac, and argues that in contemporary times, political theory has failed to address the real problem of rising economic inequality in the United States. He states, "Political theory, if it is to be political, must situate itself within the contemporary historical and political context. It cannot theorize in the abstract – as a normative critique can only have bite if it speaks to people's experience and if it discerns the possibilities

for democratic transformations within the social conflicts of contemporary society" (2009, pp. 4). What Schwartz emphasizes is the need to build social solidarity across racial, class, and gender lines without homogenizing the constituents of the movement. This project of constructing solidarity is one that Schwartz argues cannot be done through philosophical argument alone, but must occur through political relationships that are established between those with diverse but overlapping interests. Schwartz's proposed solution is one that is conscious of the destruction of the American social welfare state and that is aware of the declining support for these policies despite the realities of vast income inequality. It is also a call for social solidarity that acknowledges and affirms the value of difference within the universal norm that is citizenship. Schwartz explains that "Theoretical analysis can only help inform political practice; strategic questions will only be answered by those engaged in real world politics. But political and social theory, at its best, informs public intellectual debate and influences the moral fabric of the broader community" (2009, pp. 179). From Cobban to Schwartz, political theorists over the past half-century have argued for political theory to be a field that concerns itself with relevant political issues and concerns and that attempts to influence political trajectories.

APSA presidents and contributors, methodologists, and political theorists may have dissimilar scholarly interests, but all three groups agree on the need for political science to be a relevant academic discipline. What is much less clear is to whom political science scholarship is to appeal. Much of the debate surrounding relevance and the relevance gap in political science informs readers that they ought to focus on producing relevant scholarship. In the next section, I turn my attention to two potential targets of scholarly relevance and consider the shortcomings of appealing to these external readers.

Relevant to Whom? Or, who is the Target of Academic Relevance in Political Science?

While relevance in political science appears to be a goal that stretches across time and across the discipline's subfields, it is not clear to whom political science ought to appeal. In other words, who is

the target of relevance? There are two logical answers to the prior question: either political elites (and their staffs) or the American general public. I will briefly explore both potential targets of political science scholarly relevance and I argue that appeals to either political elites or the general public fail to capture the understated goal of the pursuit of relevance which is to impact politics and policy in the United States. Finally, I will consider undergraduate students consider as an alternative target of relevance for political scientists. Rather than continuing to attempt to appeal to political elites or the general public in hopes of impacting politics, political scientists can turn their attention to undergraduate students who are a captive audience that are likely to enter the fields that political scientists seek to influence.

Political Science Relevance and Political Elites

One of the most obvious approaches to affecting political change would be directly targeting those who can institute such changes; political elites. Unfortunately, existing research on the influence of academia on political elite decision making has revealed disheartening information for those who champion this approach. Political elites rarely, if ever, consult academic scholarship and the influence of academia is, at best, mediated by mainstream news sources and therefore indirect. Academia's lack of direct influence on politicians will be detailed in brief at both the domestic and international levels.[4]

Paul Avey and Michael Desch (2014) surveyed current and former policymakers to help determine when and if they are informed by academic social science with regards to their national security decision making, Avey and Desch found that while policymakers claim to follow social scientific scholarship, policymakers find much contemporary scholarship "less-than-helpful." Policymakers tend to reject scholarship based on formal modeling, operations research, theoretical analysis and even

[4] Although some of the studies referenced are not necessarily of American political elites, the scopes of the studies are wide enough to assume some degree of external validity

qualitative studies. Instead, policymakers appreciate public opinion polling, case studies, and works that short and easy to understand. While policymaker desires may conflict with academic approaches to political science, they do not necessarily preclude academic influence on political elites. However, policymakers stated that classified information and newspaper articles were more influential sources of information than scholarly research. Unfortunately, this means that efforts to clarify scholarly research to political elites is out of the capable hands of the researchers themselves. Instead, journalists (for example) may not possess the empirical skills, contextual knowledge, or theoretical background that may be required to explicate the research to political elites. By leaving reporting on scholarship to nonacademics, they may unintentionally misrepresent the research on which they are reporting. This understanding of academic political science as being, at most, a mediated and informally influential source of information for policymakers is repeated in additional studies of European political elites.

Matthew Wood (2013) investigated the British civil service to understand the role that pluralistic political science research played in policymaking. Wood argues that "if political scientists are to make their research truly 'relevant' by maximizing their 'impact' in the policy sphere" they should consider what might be relevant both for the research community of academics and the policymaking community (Wood 2013, pp. 277). What Wood discovers is that there is a gap between the types of evidence that policymakers desire and the research that political scientists can provide. Qualitative scholars are particularly vulnerable as civil servants studied noted a preference for apparently objective data in the form of statistical models. Without appealing to the desires of policymakers, the role of political scientific knowledge remains somewhat opaque and limited with regards to the British civil service.

Colin and Carole Talbot (2014) found similar results in their survey of the British Senior Civil Service. The majority of those surveyed said that academics serve as informal or formal advisors, or information providers and the majority also claim to engage with academic sources of information. Yet a sizeable minority does not engage with academics at all, and even those who do engage with

academics only do so in a very limited manner. Furthermore, respondents report preferring briefings or reports, or periodical reporting on academic outputs to reading the original pieces of scholarship. Finally, political science was not listed as one of the major academic disciplines of interest to survey respondents who preferred public policy, economics, public administration, and business and management.

Contingent or infrequent use of scholarship was also found in Australia at both the state and federal level. Head et al. (2014) surveyed public officials in Australia and found that variations in organizational or institutional factors, such as valuing expertise and rigor, could contribute to an increased use of scholarship. Conversely, the time sensitive nature of politics, fiscal limitations and political priorities could hamper political referencing of scholarship.

Jenny van der Arend (2014) also investigated the gap between academia and policymaking in Australia. She found that there were several factors that increased the use of academic research including how highly elected officials value such research, the successful track record of the researcher and the researcher's reputation within policy circles. Several barriers to bridging the gap between political elites and academics were noted including limitations within the actual policymaking process, a relevance gap between academics and policymakers, and a lack of adequate social networks linking academia and policymakers.[5]

Anecdotally, my experiences working with current and former elected officials and their respective staffs has made me skeptical that appealing to political elites will be a useful approach for political scientists. In 2016, I worked for a New York City Council member and conducted legislative research geared towards reforming New York City's campaign finance system (which is currently a

[5] Unfortunately, I am not sure how we can best bridge this gap in social networking. I have spent some time working in local politics in two large cities in the United States, but this may not be common for most political scientists. Academics and politicians do not often fraternize with the same social circles. Bridging this gap and forging solid social networks between academics and politicians will have to be an intentional effort for both groups.

matching funds system). In my research, I spoke with several political scientists whose expertise is in campaign finance systems across various states and localities in the United States. When I presented my research to the legislative director, he staunchly disagreed with the scholars and proclaimed that academics did not know what these campaign finance systems were "actually like" because the scholars, on aggregate, were not campaign operatives.[6] While all the scholars I spoke with recommended maintaining a matching funds system, the legislative director categorically denied that the existing matching funds system was successful, and he was steadfast in his desires to move towards full public funding of New York City electoral campaigns despite academic evidence to the contrary.

I experienced similar disparagement of academia during my semesters as a teaching assistant for a former Mayor of one of the largest cities in the United States. The Mayor, now retired from public service, frequently berated political scientists for lacking experience working in politics. In our private discussions, the Mayor often encouraged me to work either as a campaign operative, or in government as a legislative aid. The Mayor, like the previous example of the legislative director, stated that academics did not understand what politics was "really like" since they lacked experience working within government offices. This sentiment of scholarly cynicism was also expressed to the classrooms of students for whom I was their teaching assistant.

While it would be unreasonable to suggest that these two cases are typical, my anecdotal experiences support the previous arguments that elected officials are less than interested in academic scholarship. Political elites may appreciate academia when they receive supportive information through mediated media such as periodicals, or through unmediated, but non-peer-reviewed sources such as The Monkey Cage, or op-eds.[7] Even if high-level, federally elected political elites do directly access

[6] The legislative director had served as a campaign manager for the Councilman for whom I was working, and he previously was a candidate for a New York City Council position.

[7] This is the suggestion made by Hochschild (2017) and Greer (2018) but I'm not positive that scholarly research has been completed to determine if political elites (or their staffs) are influenced by these sources, let alone reading these sources for the purposes of informing their policy decisions.

political scientific information (and one may reasonably doubt such a claim), state and local government is much less likely to have access to academic publishing. I have worked in City Councils in both New York City and Philadelphia – two of the most highly organized and most professional city councils in the United States – and neither had access to the scholarly journals that publish academic research.[8] If neither the elected officials in New York City nor Philadelphia can access the bulk of academic research, it is highly unlikely that the over 80,000 other local governments in the United States are informed by political science scholarship.

Political Science Relevance and the General Public

A second potential target for political scientists to reach is the general population of the United States. As with the prior example of political elites, there are reasons to suspect that attempting to appeal to the general public will not produce significant political effects. The general public does not have access to much of the work that researchers publish at it is hidden behind paywalls. While the general public does occasionally find value in some political science research, one may be skeptical of the political leanings or solutions posed by these works. At most, the general public learns about political science research through mediated sources of information such as mainstream news media outlets, or through scholars' contributions to non-scholarly sources.[9] In both cases, the quality of the information being communicated is potentially limited, misstated or less rigorous than our journalistic

[8] Political elites may lack information as to which journals would be informative and the increasingly expensive paywalls that would allow them to access scholarly journals may functionally prohibit nonacademic access to scholarly research. While I would love to suggest that political staffs pay for journal access, I don't believe that most politicians would feel that the benefits to obtaining journal access would outweigh the costs.

[9] For example, the *New York Times* interviewed political scientists Michael Tesler and Lynn Vavreck, and mentioned "a book" co-authored by Tesler, Vavreck and John Sides on white anxiety and Donald Trump (Badger and Cohn 2019), and political scientists Joshua Kalla and Ethan Porter co-authored a *New York Times* op-ed explaining that their research has found that – as per the title of the op-ed – politicians do not care what voters want (Kalla and Porter 2019). *Inside Higher Ed* also has published on academic debates and referenced scholars and pieces of academic scholarship. One recent example is Colleen Flaherty's (2019) article on the scholarly debate surrounding trans-inclusion which references scholars and published works in academic journals.

publications. Appealing to the general public may be an appealing approach to impacting political outcomes, but it is not without potential drawbacks.

Rogers Smith (2015) notes that few academic works of political science have generated significant mainstream readership and those works that have successfully entered the public milieu do not challenge overarching social or political norms. Smith cites Robert Putnam's neo-Tocquevillian book *Bowling Alone* as one which had ideas, including its title concept, enter mainstream discourse on American politics. In all, Smith argues that the works of political science which have been read by the general population have a conservative "political tilt that is understandable but disturbing" as the works "tend to celebrate many traditional American values and institutions" rather than challenge dominant norms and ideas (2015, pp. 369). Given his discontent with published academic literature, Smith considers, but ultimately does not endorse alternative approaches to pursuing mainstream appeal such as the "blogosphere" and mainstream media. Other scholars in the field argue that these approaches can yield greater prominence for political science through a wider appeal to the general public.

Jennifer Hochschild argues against what she finds to be a disturbing pessimism among left-leaning political scientists. One of Hochschild's retorts to the left-pessimists is that political science has recently increased its public visibility through "blogs such as the Monkey Cage or Crooked Timber" (2017, pp. 17). Christina Greer (2018) similarly argues that there are outlets that need the voices of activist-minded political scientists and, like Hochschild, namedrops The Monkey Cage and adds local newspapers and publications with large ethnic readerships that desire short op-eds written by scholars. This newfound publicity by political scientists who write blog posts and op-eds comes with a trade-off in the tug-of-war balance between rigor and relevance that inspired Rogers Smith's article. Blog posts and newspaper articles will not be as academically rigorous and will not be subject to the double-blind, peer review process that helps to define academic scholarship. Although it is possible that these sources can point readers towards academic works, more research needs to be done in order to draw such an

optimistic conclusion that this is not only occurring, but that readers are then acquiring these academic articles or books.

Jefferey Isaac hoped to find a middle ground between political science being rigidly academic and thus insulated from public life, and political science appearing in blogs and op-eds and thus lacking the peer-review rigor that makes for credible scholarship. Isaac (2013), as the editor of *Perspectives on Politics,* sought for the journal to toe the line between rigor and relevance while sacrificing neither. On the one hand, Isaac argued that *Perspectives* is not a "public intellectual" nor "policy intellectual" journal, nor is *Perspectives* a journal or magazine of opinion. In this way, Isaac implied that *Perspectives* takes seriously considerations of scholarly rigor through its peer review process. On the other hand, Isaac was not willing to sacrifice the potential relevance of the articles in the journal for pedantic focuses or debates about seemingly trivial niche topics or methodological intricacies best suited for other publications. Instead, Isaac wanted the journal to be accessible, relevant and interesting to "broader reading publics" (2013, pp. 205). Unfortunately, it's not clear that Isaac's goal was met, even though he celebrates it as thought it was accomplished.

Isaac tells a story about creating a tenth anniversary issue of *Perspectives* which was dedicated to Post-Katrina New Orleans. The issue was scheduled to release right before APSA's 2012 conference in New Orleans and was intended to "demonstrate and *publicize,* to the political science community and to the 'broader public', that political science is a rich and diverse discipline" which was methodologically pluralistic and which could address general and interesting political themes and issues (Isaac 2013, pp. 206). Unfortunately, Hurricane Isaac struck the New Orleans area and the 2012 APSA conference was canceled. Isaac celebrates that he worked alongside Cambridge University Press to un-gate the issue and to disseminate press releases to potentially interested media parties. Information from the article was then covered in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and was covered by Melissa Harris-Perry on her MSNBC TV show and website. Yet if the hurricane had not canceled the 2012 APSA conference, none of

this great public access would have likely occurred since the issue would have remained behind Cambridge University Press' paywall.

The general public rarely engages with political science scholarship and Isaac's attempt to alter this narrative reinforces the notion; only when the issue of *Perspectives* became both free and mediated through the media did it reach the general population. In most cases, academic journal publications remain paywalled, and thus inaccessible and unread by the general public. Smith reminds us that when the American public does latch on to a piece of political science research, it often is conservative in leaning or, at a minimum, reinforces rather than challenges the status quo. While Hochschild and Greer are optimistic about the potential for non-journalistic sources of academic outreach, they come at a cost to scholarly rigor and suggesting that blog posts or op-eds are equivalent to scholarship would be overstating the quality of these outputs (or understating the quality of academic work). It is not entirely clear that targeting the public is successful and the few times that directly reaching the public occurs, there are reasons to question the quality of the materials being read.

Shifting the Target of Relevance: Political Science Relevance and Undergraduate Students

The students we teach in our political science classes can take the education that they receive and may use it in the very fields that we study and seek to impact through relevant scholarship. APSA has a section of its website dedicated to information on careers for those who study political science at all levels and APSA's website specifically mentions 11 potential career paths for undergraduates who major in political science: law, consulting, research, business and finance, state, local, and federal government, elected office and campaign management, journalism, media, and communications, community service, advocacy, non-governmental and non-profit organizations, and teaching (Political Science: An Ideal Liberal Arts Major). These 11 areas of potential employment are, to various degrees, areas of the social, economic and political realms that political scientists study and may wish to impact.

Unfortunately, the relevance debate has largely overlooked teaching as a path to impacting the political realm, or in some cases, has portrayed teaching as a barrier or hindrance to achieving relevance and being an impactful scholar.

Christina Greer, in her aforementioned article on APSA's website, states that, at the point late in the semester in which her article was published, "most academics are treading water … between committees, job talks, teaching, grading, and so much more" (Greer 2018). Unfortunately, Greer falls victim to one major flaw of the "relevance" debate in political science as she shuns the classroom as the very site where political scientists can achieve relevance and create an impact in the political sphere. Neither political elites nor the general public are greatly informed by academic publications of political science. While Greer, like Hochschild (2017) sees benefits in writing on The Monkey Cage in the *Washington Post,* or posting on blogs or Twitter, Greer presents the classroom as a potential obstacle to achieving political relevance. The classroom, however, can be a formative site for fostering impact through relevant teaching.

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that scholars can participate in intellectual activism which she defines as "the myriad ways that people place the power of their ideas in service to social justice" (2013, pp. ix). Collins explains that engaging in intellectual activism in the classroom requires an understanding and intentional usage of Paulo Freire's idea of critical pedagogy. Freire's (1970/2014) approach to teaching students was for the purposes of self-empowerment as it encourages students to learn about, and to act towards ensuring social justice. While political scientists can foster classrooms based on critical pedagogical approaches to learning, I am skeptical that critical pedagogy will find its way into college and university political science classes because of the lack of pedagogical training that graduate students of political science receive. In the next section, I present preliminary research on the pedagogical training of doctoral students in political science and I argue that political science, as a field

of study, is not seriously concerned with producing Ph.D.s who are well informed in matters of pedagogy.

The Lack of Pedagogical Training in Political Science Graduate Education

Whitney Manzo and Kristina Mitchell explain, in a piece on *Inside Higher Ed,* that only 4 percent of colleges and universities are designated as R1 institutions and collectively, only 11 percent of colleges and universities have any research designation (R1, R2 and R3) (Manzo and Mitchell 2018). What these statistics imply to the authors is that doctoral programs need to refocus their energies; while graduate programs dedicate a disproportionate amount of time on preparing doctoral students to conduct academic research, "the vast majority of jobs for faculty members go to those whose main job will be to teach" (ibid). The Council of Graduate Schools and the Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted research in the early 2000s and created a guide for change entitled *Preparing Future Faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Gaff et al. 2003). Although the guide is now 16 years old, a major concern expressed in the work's introduction remains true today:

> Although a significant fraction of graduate students have teaching assignments sometime during their doctoral program, too often these are not structured experiences that prepare graduates to deal with the assessment and different types of student learning, the pedagogy of the discipline, curricular innovations, the impact of technology on education, or the variety of teaching styles that may be helpful with students from different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. (2003, pp. 3).

Prioritizing classrooms where students can take the knowledge that they gain and use it to reform their socioeconomic and political environments may be more impactful than repeated attempts at appealing to political elites or the general, American population. While political elites and the general population do not frequently concern themselves with academia, our students are a captive audience that we can help guide towards critical thinking and to whom we can encourage formative change. Teaching, however, is not something that is innate to academics, but rather a skillset that requires knowledge,

training and fine tuning. My preliminary research on political science graduate student training will exhibit that the field is not preparing doctoral students for classroom teaching.

I utilized the *U.S. News & World Report* 2017 ranking of the "Best Political Science Schools" in the United States.[10] I chose to consider only the 101 departments which were ranked in the report and I omitted the 19 departments that were listed but not ranked. I visited the political science department's website for each of the 101 schools to investigate whether each program required their doctoral candidates to receive pedagogical training. Admittedly, this preliminary research requires a measure of further investigation as several departments were not clear as to whether graduate student participation in pedagogical training was required or suggested. For example, some departments noted the existence of training workshops or courses, but it was not stated whether student attendance was mandated.[11] Other department websites noted general, required courses that may include some discussion about teaching, but it is not clear that pedagogical training is a focus of the course.[12] A more thorough investigation could lead to greater clarity on these matters. A future study would likely require a researcher to directly contact representatives of departments where requirements about pedagogical training were opaque. However, while the current study may be imperfect, the preliminary results – even by my most generous estimates – ought to be considered disappointing to those of us who take our teaching seriously.

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[10] The rankings are part of the larger "Best Social Science and Humanities Schools" which is itself part of the larger "Best Grad Schools" rankings. See the report for rankings and other information on programs: https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-humanities-schools/political-science-rankings

[11] There are several cases of this lack of clarity and the following are two examples: Ohio State University's website states "in order to prepare students for teaching, there is a teaching workshop offered in both the summer and the first semester of the third year" but does not state if students are required to attend the workshop and similarly, University of California Davis lists POL 390 (The Teaching of Political Science) and POL 396 (Teaching Assistant Training Practicum) in their course catalog, but does not state if these courses are required or even regularly offered.

[12] University of Minnesota Twin Cities notes that teaching will be discussed in the required POL 8105 (Professional Development II) course. University of Nebraska Lincoln similarly requires students to enroll in POLS 802 (Professional Development in Political Science) wherein "teaching methods" is listed as one of the topics that will be covered by the instructor. In both cases, it is unclear how much of the course is to be devoted to the issues of teaching and pedagogy.

In order to preliminarily determine the number and percentage of Ph.D. granting departments which require pedagogical training of their graduate students, I first organized the department approaches into three primary categories: the first includes departments which explicitly mention a teaching training requirement; the second includes departments which mention teaching training but are unclear about whether training is required or suggested, including departments which require courses that (as per their course descriptions) may include discussions about teaching; the third includes departments which either do not mention teaching training whatsoever or which mention that training is available but not required (see Table 1). Next, I created a "generous" and "less generous" calculation of how many departments require teaching training. The generous calculation includes both the departments whose websites explicitly mention a requirement for graduate student teaching training, as well as the departments which were unclear (those which mentioned teaching training but were not explicit about it being a requirement). The generous calculation was 27 out of 101 departments, or 26.73 percent of Ph.D. granting political science departments. The less generous calculation omitted the departments which mentioned some degree of pedagogical training, but which were not explicit about whether training was mandatory or suggested, or where teaching was mentioned as a small part of a more generally substantive, required course. The less generous calculation was 18 out of 101 departments, or 17.82 percent of departments. While these numbers are already disappointing, further qualitative investigation of the most generous calculation provides additional reasons to be skeptical about the quality and seriousness of the teaching training that is being offered.

Mandatory teaching training, while likely better than no pedagogical training at all, remains limited in scope. Harvard's Teaching and Communicating Political Science course meets only five times while Temple's Teaching Methods course is a one credit, four-week requirement and is not focused on political science but instead includes students from across the university's College of Liberal Arts. University of South Carolina's Teaching Assistant Development course is a zero-credit, pass-fail course.

University of Alabama requires its students to enroll in both PSC 500 and 501 (Professional Socialization I and II) but the courses are respectively one-half credit each and require meetings only once per month. Purdue requires students to attend a mandatory Teaching Assistant Orientation which is less than a full course's worth of pedagogical information. University of Colorado Boulder requires a Teaching Political Science seminar while University of Buffalo similarly requires students to attend a Summer Teaching Assistantship Workshop but not a dedicated pedagogical training course. In short, even in departments where pedagogical training is required, the amount of training and information that one receives is limited.

My preliminary research has exhibited that teaching training for graduate students in political science is limited to, at most, approximately one-quarter of Ph.D. granting departments. In departments where teaching training is required, these requirements are not particularly demanding on students. While political scientists have the potential to achieve the goal of "relevance" in the classroom, the lack of seriousness afforded to preparing doctoral students to teach remains a major hurdle to achieving this goal. Political scientists have a captive audience in their classrooms and yet are barely trained, if they are trained at all, on how to best use this time to influence their students to impact the political realm.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

Canadian social psychologist Nathan C. Hall asked on Twitter, "If you could go back and tell your younger academic self one thing you've learned about academia, what would you say?" (2018). British political scientist Simon Hix responded to the question by stating "You'll end up having a bigger impact on the world through your teaching than your research. Take teaching seriously, and be good to your students. It will pay you back in the end" (2018). The Twitter exchange between Hall and Hix epitomizes my argument as Hix seemingly understands the limitations of the scope of reach that most academic

work has while, at the same time, acknowledging the capacity for impact that professors can make as educators. However, for this impact to be as extensive as possible, political scientists need to take their teaching seriously and political science programs need to take pedagogical training seriously. Improved pedagogical training and political science teaching do not guarantee the political impact that those wishing to bridge the relevance gap desire. Even if our students do not necessarily take the knowledge that they acquire in our classrooms and use it to inform their careers, our efforts will have minimally enhanced our own pedagogy and hopefully inspired our students through an improved classroom experience.

For the past 115 years, political scientists have largely desired to impact the political world and have argued that this could be done by conducting relevant research. Yet over the past 115 years political scientists have, on aggregate, failed to achieve this goal. While the debate of how to best dam up the relevance gap continues, neither political elites nor the general public frequently access academic research. There is, however, another possibility for increasing the relevance of political science in the areas we wish to impact; we must take our teaching seriously which will require that we take our pedagogical training seriously.

Political scientists can take Patricia Hill Collins's approach to intellectual activism and see the classroom as a potential locus for presenting relevant social, economic and political information in a manner that can inspire reform and activism among our undergraduates. We can follow Collins's vision by teaching students to unpack critical issues surrounding race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression. We can then help our students – now armed with some crucial information about issues surrounding social injustices – to forge their own paths towards reforming institutions that enforce these instantiations of injustice. Our undergraduate students are likely to work in the very fields that we study and that we wish to impact including business, government, law, economics, media and non-governmental organizations. Rather than viewing teaching as something that academics must do in

order to also be able to create impactful scholarship, we ought to think of teaching as a part of our job through which we can generate an exponential impact by inspiring our students. This will require a serious shift in how we think about what we do and a shift in how we train future generations of political scientists.

Table 1: Categorizing Political Science Doctoral Programs Based on Pedagogical Training		
Not Required or Nothing Mentioned	Unclear (courses offered but not sure if required, or may be part of larger, general course)	Some Training Required
American University	Colorado State University	Emory University
Arizona State University	Louisiana State University--Baton Rouge	Florida State University
Binghamton University--SUNY	Ohio State University	Harvard University
Boston College	Stony Brook University--SUNY	Purdue University--West Lafayette
Boston University	Tulane University	Temple University
Brandeis University	University of California--Davis	Texas Tech University
Brown University	University of California--Riverside	University at Buffalo--SUNY
Claremont Graduate University	University of Illinois--Chicago	University of Alabama
Columbia University	University of Minnesota--Twin Cities	University of California--Santa Cruz
Cornell University	University of Nebraska--Lincoln	University of Colorado--Boulder
CUNY Graduate School and University Center		University of Michigan--Ann Arbor
Duke University		University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill
George Mason University		University of Oregon
George Washington University		University of Pennsylvania
Georgetown University		University of South Carolina
Georgia State University		University of Southern California
Indiana University--Bloomington		University of Utah
Johns Hopkins University		West Virginia University
Loyola University Chicago		
Massachusetts Institute of Technology		
Michigan State University		
New School		
New York University		
Northeastern University		
Northwestern University		
Pennsylvania State University -- University Park		
Princeton University		
Rice University		
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey--New Brunswick		
Stanford University		
Syracuse University		

Texas A&M University--College Station		
University at Albany--SUNY		
University of Arizona		
University of California--Berkeley		
University of California--Irvine		
University of California--Los Angeles		
University of California--San Diego		
University of California--Santa Barbara		
University of Chicago		
University of Cincinnati		
University of Connecticut		
University of Delaware		
University of Florida		
University of Georgia		
University of Hawaii--Manoa		
University of Houston		
University of Illinois--Urbana-Champaign		
University of Iowa		
University of Kansas		
University of Kentucky		
University of Maryland--College Park		
University of Massachusetts--Amherst		
University of Mississippi		
University of Missouri		
University of New Mexico		
University of North Texas		
University of Notre Dame		
University of Oklahoma		
University of Pittsburgh		
University of Rochester		
University of Tennessee--Knoxville		
University of Texas--Austin		
University of Texas--Dallas		
University of Virginia		
University of Washington		
University of Wisconsin--Madison		

University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee		
Vanderbilt University		
Washington State University		
Washington University in St. Louis		
Wayne State University		
Yale University		

All information from Table 1 obtained by each college or university's political science department website. Information may be obtained by searching through the entirety of the department website including, but not limited to pages listing requirements for Ph.D. students in the department, and student handguides. I have not listed each department's website in the reference section of this paper. Each site was accessed between June and August 2019.

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