

I took a route that insulated myself from the gender and racial patterns in the field. I went to supportive spaces like the Race, Ethnicity, and Politics Section or the Women and Politics Section. There are people in these sections that obviously do work on representation and legislative studies. I was looking for an intellectual community that studied women of color and that did intersectional work, but I was also looking for support. I was looking for friendly faces. I was looking for people who could be that auntie figure, or that cheerleader, or that supportive kind of fictive kin throughout the discipline. That did not lead me to LSS business meetings or caucuses. I was intentionally looking for spaces to get both academic and personal affirmation.

4. In your view, what are the disadvantages women face for being part of a predominantly white male field? Do you think that these disadvantages are the same, different, or parallel as compared to women scholars who have other intersecting identities? For example, women of color, queer women, and trans women.

One of the challenges facing a scholar doing work on intersectional identities in this field is that I am often asked how is my research universal or how can you generalize from doing

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research on Black women? While these questions may have good analytical points, they can also be seen as gatekeeping questions because other scholars who do work that is posited to be identity free do not get asked those kinds of questions. Scholars who do not work on marginalized groups do not get as many questions about whether the research is generalizable or broad enough or has applications outside of one particular setting. It is also my impression that doing this narrow kind of identity politics work does not get you published in top journals—something I think I have internalized, unfortunately. So, that is a barrier. I would say this is universal for research on other intersecting identities too, not just Black women.

5. What strategies might be beneficial for the next generation of women scholars? In your experience, what strategies have helped you in the different stages of your academic journey?

Good mentorship matters, and I have been extremely fortunate to have two really exemplary mentors from my graduate-school days. Jane Junn and Alvin Tillery have consistently listened to me and helped me figure out the next best move for me. They give me advice based on what is best for me as a person, not just as a scholar. Jane and Al are a constant source of encouragement when I had (have) imposter syndrome. They give tough love when I am thinking about doing something outlandish. For the next generation, I think it is really important that young scholars know that they cannot do it on their own.

We all need to have these kinds of guides, these mentors that can help you develop. There are also a whole host of other scholars that make up my community and are important to have. Doing good scholarship is a community activity, and that means you have to be vulnerable and you have to be willing to seek community. But that also means you have to be a good community member yourself. So, it is reciprocal; you need to show up and be part of a community.

6. Is there anything you thought of when you were speaking that you wanted to say before we end our meeting? Or anything that comes to the forefront after having this conversation and thinking about your experience as a scholar?

I am pleasantly surprised for the invitation from LSS and I am energized by their awareness to do something to reach out to feminist scholars and women academics in particular. But I am also thinking about those that were not asked and those that are not here to tell their own stories. In my particular instance, I am thinking about other women of color. Were Native women asked? What are Latinas sharing? Queer scholars? How are Asian American women or first-gen women responding to these kinds of questions? It is not enough to be the token woman of color; you have to do something to make

space for others and really expand the table. There should be some stuff for you at the table but also for everyone. So, I am grateful to LSS for offering this opportunity for me to be in the *PS* spotlight. But I also want to highlight the gaps in the margins. What other constituencies are underrepresented? We need to include their scholarship and their voices. ■

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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I consider it one of the great fortunes of my professional life to have stumbled upon the legislative studies community. I did not enter graduate school planning to study Congress. Instead, I knew I was interested in quantitative approaches and had some nascent interests in political behavior. In fact, I did not really leave graduate school thinking of myself as a legislative studies scholar (at least not wholly). My dissertation—which later became my first book, *Issue Politics in Congress* (Sulkin 2005)—was motivated by a focus on agendas as a linkage between campaigns and governing and by a developing interest in representation and responsiveness. (On the job market, I applied

broadly in Congress and institutions as well as in behavior. My position at Illinois actually was advertised as “media and politics” and, at the time, was joint between political science and communication.)

However, in my first year as an assistant professor, I happened to attend the Legislative Studies Section (LSS) business meeting at APSA and was surprised to find that everyone was there, from the senior scholars whose work I greatly admired to the fellow junior faculty I was getting to know as we navigated our early years on the tenure track. It highlighted for me that the subfield was—perhaps more than some others—an actual community, bound by common interests and also a sense of common purpose. From that point on, I began to think of myself and my work as belonging to that group.

Of course, I only had to look around the room at that meeting to see that the community did not include many people like me.¹ Did this matter for my career? Yes and no. There were times in the beginning that it felt somewhat intimidating to be the only woman on a panel or at a talk or at the dinner table. Importantly, though, I have never perceived that I was at a disadvantage in the treatment I received or in the opportunities that came my way. In part, I think this is because this is a subfield that is very focused on the work and where no one gets a free pass. As a result, there is a high bar for everyone. I was lucky to find mentors early on who championed my work and pushed me to make it better.

However, I also owe a debt of gratitude to the women who came before me, some of whom are included in this spotlight and some, perhaps most notably Barbara Sinclair, who are no longer with us. I know that, at least at times, their experiences were quite different than mine have been. They blazed a trail, and the opportunities for women of my generation are due in no small part to their efforts.

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One of the questions we were asked to consider for this spotlight was how being a part of a field that is predominantly male has affected our work. Although it is impossible to assess the counterfactual, I do think that one effect is that it has led me to be bolder in my theoretical and empirical claims and to write and present more authoritatively. (However, I admit that I sometimes struggle with giving this advice to women graduate students and junior faculty that I mentor. For example, are claims with fewer qualifications objectively “better” or do we just think they are because that has been the approach that has felt natural to the majority of the field² across time? My sense is that it is probably some of both.) Second, I quickly learned to develop a thicker skin (we can be a tough crowd, especially behind the shield of anonymity!) and to get my work out there. At the same time, I have appreciated the efforts of the current and previous editors of *Legislative Studies Quarterly* to promote a culture of constructive criticism and feedback, and I aim to continue that approach during my own term as Congress editor.

We also were asked to identify any differences that have occurred in the field during our career. I think perhaps the most significant change in my time is that it has become more geographically diffuse. In the late 1990s, when I started graduate school, most young legislative studies scholars were coming out of a few “Congress shops,” but that is no longer the case. This is the result of various factors—for example, it is likely a combination of a few moves by senior scholars; the fact that we no longer need to be down the hall from collaborators to easily communicate with them on a regular basis; more homogeneity in the level of methods training across graduate programs in general; and the broader availability of data and ease in sharing it. This has some downsides, as I know that there is the perception of less cohesiveness and momentum in our research agenda and subfield now than in the recent past. Overall, however, I think it has been a net positive because it has opened up the field to a more heterogeneous set of questions and group of scholars.

Where, then, do we go from here? If, as a field, we are interested in increasing the number of women who specialize in legislative studies and their integration into the community, there are a few areas we could target.

First, we might ask why so few women enter graduate school with interests in Congress in particular and institutions in general. When I was director of graduate studies at Illinois in the early 2010s, I do not think we had a single female prospective student apply with an intent to study legislative politics (even though, for much of that time, we had three women faculty in the department who studied Congress). As a result, none of my four women PhD advisees who wrote dissertations about Congress had interests in the area before they came to the department. From talking to colleagues at other institutions, this seems to be a general pattern.

The exceptions I know in the field all have something in common—they worked as undergraduates with scholars who involved them in research and data collection, and who explicitly encouraged them to consider pursuing a research career in legislative politics. Research on paths to academic careers suggests that this is generally true of all students, regardless of gender, race, or other characteristics. However, that type of mentoring is likely to be particularly important for female students and students of color.

Second, it is useful to consider the dynamics of coauthorship, including how coauthor relationships arise and how we advise graduate students and junior faculty about these collaborations. One advantage of the subfield for scholars at all ranks is that both books and articles are seen as equally legitimate paths to tenure, promotion, and influence in the field. Based on purely anecdotal evidence, for the women of my generation, reputations have largely been built around solo-authored books. However, there seems to be more variation in men’s paths, with some taking this route but others disseminating their work via articles—often as

part of small teams of coauthors. Throughout the discipline, coauthorship has become more of a standard path and now enjoys (close to) full acceptance as a venue for developing one's scholarly reputation. Accordingly, it is important to ensure that men and women have equal opportunity to access networks that lead to coauthorship relationships (especially those that extend beyond adviser–advisee collaborations) and to mentoring about the place of coauthored work.

Third, we might make an effort to broaden the scope of what is considered “legislative studies” or, at least, in greater outreach to those in cognate areas. For faculty and graduate students doing fairly mainstream work about Congress, the fit between their research and the section generally appears obvious. However, there also are many political scientists doing work about legislatures or representation who consider themselves—first and foremost—scholars of state politics, public policy, women and politics, or racial and ethnic politics. That self-identification shapes the APSA sections to which they belong, the journals in which they publish, and the networks that they build. As such, a bigger umbrella can potentially diversify the section on several different fronts.

My association with legislative studies has been a productive and positive one, and I owe much to my mentors and friends, both men and women, who have made it such. I look forward to seeing the direction that our subfield takes and to being a part of it for many years to come. ■

NOTES

1. The evidence indicates that this has not changed greatly in the intervening 17 years. As part of the invitation to write this piece, Gisela Sin and Laurel Harbridge-Yong shared some statistics, including that about 25% of the attendees at the 2018 business meeting were women, which is largely in line with their percentage in the section overall (i.e., 22%). This ties LSS with the Presidents and Executive Politics section (i.e., also 22%) and slightly ahead of Political Methodology (i.e., the lowest percentage of women in all of APSA's sections: 21%).
2. I do not see these stylistic differences as determined by gender; simply that they seem to be unevenly distributed among men and women.

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NAVIGATING POLITICAL SCIENCE AS A WOMAN

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How do you succeed in academia? Since taking a faculty position, I have thought a lot about this question. Since earning tenure, I have had the opportunity to participate in workshops and discussions with women graduate students that focus on the unique experiences of women political scientists. To prepare for these workshops, I collected advice based on both research and insights from successful women academics. This article summarizes some of the best advice on building support structures, producing research, and navigating service obligations. A complete and evolving list of suggestions on these issues and related topics—including teaching, mental health concerns, and confronting harassment—is on my website (<https://sites.google.com/view/dianazobrien/women-in-the-academy?authuser=0>).

Building a Support Structure

My first and most important piece of advice is to be compassionate with others and with yourself. This is a rewarding job but not always an easy one. The ability to evaluate work critically is integral to our profession. However, it often is tempting to focus that critical eye too much on ourselves.

Academia can be isolating, and there is a great deal of readily available advice on building friendships and finding support structures in your personal life to aid with loneliness. However, it also is important to build a support structure within the discipline. Strong networks contribute to professional success. They lead to invitations to give talks, contribute to special issues, and other related opportunities. Perhaps more important, having friends in the discipline makes this job much more fun.

Networks matter and do not appear out of thin air. You have to build and tend to them. Ideally, you should build your networks vertically (with senior scholars) and horizontally (with peers). Social media, particularly Twitter, is a good way to start building networks. You also should try to meet one new person at every conference. Reach out to scholars (both men and women) whom you admire for their particular strengths and request a meeting in which you can ask specific questions. Senior colleagues often are happy to meet with you, but be sure to respect their time. Keep the first meeting brief and have a clear agenda. Furthermore, whereas more experienced scholars are important for your professional advancement, remember that in difficult times, support from peers may be at least as valuable as support from senior allies.

As you build your network, keep an eye out for mentors. Mentorship matters in all career stages, and you should seek advocates both within and outside of your department. You do not have to rely on a single mentor; instead, have several who help you with different parts of the job.

Just as it is important to seek out mentorship in all career stages, it also is important to provide support to others. You are never too young to be a mentor and, in all career stages, you should reach out to more junior women. In your research, read and cite women's work. In the classroom, teach the work of women scholars. Encourage others (men and women) to read, cite, and teach women. More generally, advocate for women in the academy, especially women from less privileged backgrounds or in less privileged positions. It is especially important to be an ally to women of color, who face a unique set of challenges related to race (and the intersection of race and gender).

Finally, mentoring others is not simply an obligation. Instead, it is an opportunity to make friends with other women in political science (and in academia more generally). Helping others brings intrinsic joy. My job—and my life—have been enriched by my female friends in political science.

Research

A key reason to build a support structure is to position yourself to have the skills, resources, and confidence necessary to publish research that makes you proud. If possible, give yourself time to work on ambitious projects and submit to top journals. Women in political science are less likely to submit to the “Top 3” outlets (Djupe, Smith, and Sokhey 2019; Koenig et al. 2018). Of course, there are other venues for important and ambitious work, but the gender gap in submissions suggests systemic issues affecting women in the discipline. There are at least two factors that likely contribute to this gap: first, women's confidence in their work; and, second, women's greater time constraints.