

# Building, Sustaining, and Supporting the Race, Ethnicity, and Politics Community

## INTRODUCTION: BUILDING, SUSTAINING, AND SUPPORTING THE RACE, ETHNICITY, AND POLITICS COMMUNITY

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Racial and ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented in political science. APSA's most recent Diversity and Inclusion Report (2018) indicates that only 3.2% of members are Black Afro-Caribbean or African American, 6.9% are East Asian or Asian American, 4.5% are Latino or Hispanic American, 0.2% are Native American, 1.1% are Middle Eastern, 1.6% are South Asian or Indian American, and 3.2% are other.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these individuals are concentrated primarily in some fields and informally excluded from others. For instance, the same APSA report found that membership of scholars of color is overrepresented in the Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (REP) organized section: 22.2% are Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American; 8.47% are East Asian or Asian American; 13.7% are Latino or Hispanic American; and only 38.14% are Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American. Comparatively, their membership in the Methodology organized section is staggeringly low: 80.72% of members are Non-Hispanic White but only 4.37% are Latino or Hispanic American, 4.88% are East Asian or Asian American, and 1.29% are Black or African American.<sup>2</sup>

Given this underrepresentation in the discipline and overrepresentation in the REP section, we sought to systematically provide the perspectives of scholars who are actively challenging the norms of political science and advancing the goals of the section. Because this work often is seen as ancillary and not of general interest, REP scholars have created new outlets and used organic networks to promote their research while building community. These efforts often are supported by individual scholars without institutional and financial support. This spotlight highlights the varied ways that scholars have worked to develop communities that are largely unrewarded and ignored in mainstream political science. These efforts should be valorized and, as such, we spotlight the ways that others can support marginalized communities as a way to diversify the discipline. We are wholly committed to responding to the 2011 Pinderhughes APSA Presidential Task Force Report in which the contributors admonished the discipline for largely failing to give significant and meaningful attention to issues of race and ethnicity in political science. In doing so, we also highlight the intersectional ways that key actors within REP communities are committed to advancing scholarship by groups that often undertheorized within race- or ethnicity-only scholarship.

What are some of the ways that support for REP scholars and REP scholarship fostered? This spotlight highlights contributors

whose service to the REP section subfield continues to build, sustain, and support community in myriad ways. The articles range substantially but together provide a glimpse into some of the methods that scholars are using to build the field. The spotlight covers a diverse array of topics, ranging from an editorial from one of the subfield's premier journals, showcasing how undergraduate research opportunities help to build the pipeline, highlighting the inclusiveness of the subfield's conferences and workshops, introducing the "People of Color Also Know Stuff" social media presence, discussing the importance of informal mentorship, and demonstrating immense and communal data-collection efforts. Importantly, it is inclusive of voices of scholars in all areas of the discipline, from graduate students to postdocs, to assistant, associate, and full professors. In summary, this collection of articles also provides best practices and suggestions for how the discipline and its subfields can follow the practices of the REP section to be more inclusive and diverse.

We know anecdotally that colleagues are making multiple efforts to build, sustain, and support the community, and these contributors are writing about the ways in which they have directed their efforts. Their efforts, of course, are targeted at community members in all stages—mentoring undergrads (formally and informally), graduate students, postdocs, assistant professors, and senior faculty—and we believe that these articles capture many of these strategies. Moving beyond anecdotal evidence, this spotlight uses the efforts of these key stakeholders in the REP field to advance our scholarly understanding of how and why diverse communities matter in political science. ■

## NOTES

1. APSA Diversity and Inclusion Report (2018), Table 2. Available at [www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/diversity%20and%20inclusion%20prgrms/DIV%20reports/Diversity%20Report%20Executive%20-%20Final%20Draft%20-%20Web%20version.pdf?ver=2018-03-29-134427-467](http://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/diversity%20and%20inclusion%20prgrms/DIV%20reports/Diversity%20Report%20Executive%20-%20Final%20Draft%20-%20Web%20version.pdf?ver=2018-03-29-134427-467).
2. APSA Diversity and Inclusion Report (2018), Figure 4. Available at [www.cambridge.org/core/membership/services/aop-file-manager/file/5a7065fec871636539c5c70a/diversity-report-SPM.pdf](http://www.cambridge.org/core/membership/services/aop-file-manager/file/5a7065fec871636539c5c70a/diversity-report-SPM.pdf).

## THE SUMMER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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The Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) is an intensive summer-research experience for undergraduate

students who are interested in attending graduate school. SROP has been a program at Big Ten Academic Alliance universities for more than 30 years. It counts 610 of its more than 16,000 alumni as PhD recipients, with more than 3,000 others pursuing nonacademic careers after receiving another type of graduate training (B1G Academic Alliance 2018, 4). SROP is purposefully geared toward increasing the number of *prepared* underrepresented students in graduate programs, including first-generation college students and low-income undergraduates. Students are placed with faculty research mentors for 8 to 10 weeks during the summer and they receive extensive training separately through SROP workshops. One-on-one research-mentoring and group-oriented workshops provide participants with a preview of graduate school *before* they apply. Not only does the experience prepare many students for graduate school, it also helps others decide whether graduate school is the right choice. Spending a summer on campus often creates a relationship between the student and the program that helps faculty mentors compete for the best students later. SROP is one of the most transformative graduate partnerships in our department's history.

#### Jamil's Narrative

From my own experience, I can speak to the impact of conducting research as an undergraduate student on the pursuit of graduate education. In the summer of 2012, I participated in the Michigan State University (MSU) SROP. That summer was important not only because I was able to engage in a research project that I found interesting, but also because it laid the foundation for establishing a community at MSU. As a first-generation black college student, community was extremely important for my journey through graduate school, and it was integral to my decision to attend MSU for my doctoral degree.

The emphasis on the learning community, meaningful exchanges of ideas, and social support was essential to my experience in SROP. It was because I had this structure as an undergraduate student that I could see the value of continuing my education at the institution. Furthermore, the SROP experience informed how I continued to be socialized as a graduate student at MSU because I was able to build meaningful relationships with faculty and peers before I started at the institution. This community sustained me through the completion of my graduate degree.

#### Kesicia's Narrative

My path to graduate school is a testament to the importance of undergraduate research experiences. I participated in SROP at MSU during the summer of 2016. Like many first-generation students of color, I was concerned that I did not have the right background to do well in graduate school; SROP was the ultimate test for my future. Working to meet deadlines was initially a challenge; however, deadlines and the heavy workload forced me to develop effective time- and self-management skills.

During SROP, we frequently participated in activities with graduate students of color. These encounters exposed me to the importance of a learning community and gave me the opportunity to foster relationships that have continued to support me as a graduate student.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of SROP was the help I received on graduate-school application materials. Faculty and program facilitators edited my personal and research statements. They also shared tips on how to obtain good letters of recommendation. When it was time to apply to graduate programs, I was confident and excited rather than nervous and doubtful.

Undergraduate research experiences increase the likelihood of students' acceptance into graduate school (Crawford et al. 1996). By the end of the summer, I had received GRE test prep, writing-sample revisions, and tips for approaching faculty with whom I was interested in working. I also had established a community of support. SROP fully prepared me for graduate education and equipped me with skills to build networks with scholars across the discipline. I have completed two years of graduate study and will take my comprehensive exams in the summer of 2019. I will graduate with my PhD in 2022.

#### How Can Departments Take Advantage of These Programs?

Undergraduate research experiences can transform the discipline's demographics and create opportunities for students to be actively engaged in the learning process. However, there must be structure to the experience and institutional backing that creates a thriving learning community. Programs such as SROP not only provide a research experience, they also offer specific workshops geared toward preparing for graduate school and success in the field (Hurtado et al. 2009). Students gain not only disciplinary knowledge and skill development but also GRE preparation, opportunities to present research, and professionalization training. The essential features of an undergraduate research experience include mentoring and learning-community support, designing and conducting independent research, and the opportunity to communicate research findings in a professional setting (Lopatto 2003).

Undergraduate research programs require an active commitment on behalf of a hosting department. Faculty must meaningfully engage students in research and commit to considering those who come through these programs as viable applicants. Moreover, providing incentives such as resources and recognition for faculty who engage in research-mentoring relationships with students also is crucial. Although students can and do create their own community, having a structured program that provides social support and financial resources can make all the difference for student-mentor experiences at an institution.

SROP is transforming the political science department at MSU. However, this type of program cannot be successful without dedicated faculty and a university willing to provide the institutional support needed to help students flourish once they are on campus. ■

#### REFERENCES

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## THE ROLE OF PRIEC IN BUILDING COMMUNITY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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The Politics of Race, Immigration, and Ethnicity Consortium (PRIEC) is an academic forum for scholars of race and ethnicity politics (REP) and REP scholarship. As an ongoing series of meetings, PRIEC convenes REP scholars to present works-in-progress and serves as a welcoming forum for graduate-student mentoring, as well as junior-faculty socialization

and addressing pipeline challenges. The aim of these five features is to facilitate community building and encourage networking in a collegial atmosphere, which counters the deficit in social assets that many first-generation, minority, women, and other underrepresented scholars face as an obstacle to their long-term career success. Collectively, these features distinguish PRIEC as an outlet in which scholars from the full range of research and teaching institutions exchange ideas and advance science.

The inaugural PRIEC in 2005 was hosted by Shaun Bowler and Karthick Ramakrishnan, faculty from the University of California, Riverside. Since then, PRIEC meetings have continued quarterly, organized and attended mostly by scholars in Southern California.

Under Francisco Pedraza's leadership, PRIEC has expanded in a number of important ways. First, despite operating on a "shoestring" budget, PRIEC now boasts a web presence ([www.priec.org](http://www.priec.org)) and an active social media profile (Twitter: @WeArePRIEC), which are used to archive meeting programs, announce future meetings, and promote the work of scholars

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and advancement. PRIEC welcomes contributions from various perspectives, disciplines, and methods, with the only requirement that the work be related to politics and race or ethnicity.

Five features of PRIEC distinguish it from other conference platforms. First, PRIEC does not require a completed paper—only a proposal—which encourages scholars to present work at any stage in the research process. Second, PRIEC strongly encourages, facilitates, and prioritizes graduate-student participation as presenters. Third, PRIEC distributes the costs and service burden of hosting meetings by rotating among different institutions. Fourth, PRIEC does not charge a registration or membership fee to attend, which is crucial to scholars whose institutional support falls short of the rising costs to fully participate in the major regional and national political science conferences. Fifth, PRIEC traditionally meets on Friday and ends with an informal dinner reception at the home of a senior-faculty colleague from the hosting institution.

These five features reflect broader commitments that PRIEC members share with respect to mentoring, inclusion, networking,

whose research addresses the politics of race, immigration, and ethnicity. The website also lists job candidates in the sub-field, which can serve as a crucial information cue for members of search committees.

Second, PRIEC now integrates pre-PRIEC methodology workshops, such as a hands-on mini-course on how to create survey weights led by Matt Barreto and another taught by Melissa Michelson on the fundamentals of survey experiments. Third, Pedraza, along with Gabe Sanchez, coordinated the first themed PRIEC at the University of New Mexico,

Figure 1

Photograph of Many of the Participants at MSU PRIEC; April 20, 2018.

