

FALL 2024 | NEWSLETTER

MSU Department of Political Science

For Alumni & Friends





The Political Science Department held an Alumni Career Panel and networking event featuring Christine Mason Soneral and Steven Faulkner.

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WRITING, EDITING & PHOTOGRAPHY

The content of this newsletter was written and edited by Karessa Weir and Becky Jensen, and all photos except the Blanchard Forum by Jackie Belden Hawthorne.



With 2025 marking 150 years since that foundational moment for Political Science at MSU, we are taking the opportunity in PLS to reflect on our history, and to consider how we prepare our students, conduct our research, and fulfill our mission to the public as the original land-grant university.

- Jeff Conroy-Krutz

LETTER FROM CHAIR:

Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz



Dear Alumni and Friends,

1875 marked an important beginning for Political Science at MSU. On March 4 of that year, President Theophilus C. Abbot, third president of the Michigan State Agricultural College, gave a speech to the Michigan House of Representatives, in which he laid out his vision for an “Agricultural Education.” The College, still in its teenage years at that point, was already moving beyond a focus on scientific agriculture into other areas of a broader, interdisciplinary liberal arts education.

For Abbot, farmers could only maximize their lots if they were also educated in the affairs of government, and knew how to influence the types of public policies that were increasingly influencing their livelihoods and productivity. As Keith Widder describes in his history of the M.A.C., Abbot’s speech laid out a vision of the College as “a vital, forward-looking institution focused on preparing students to make a difference in the world.”

This mission required coursework in, among other things, literature, history, and political economy. The new Department of Political Economy would only exist for less than a decade, before it merged with History in 1883. Its work fulfilling Abbot’s call, however, would continue.

With 2025 marking 150 years since that foundational moment for Political Science at MSU, we are taking the opportunity in PLS to reflect on our history, and to consider how we prepare our students, conduct our research, and fulfill our mission to the public as the original land-grant university.

In doing so, we are planning some exciting events, conversations with alumni and other friends, and highlights of our shared history throughout the coming year. We hope that you’ll join us, online, on campus, and in the pages of these newsletters, for that sesquicentennial celebration.

In this issue of our newsletter, we share some of our latest news about our faculty’s exciting research, our students’ and graduates’ accomplishments, and new initiatives to prepare our students for a range of professions and forms of civic engagement.

As President Abbot put it in his 1875 speech, the graduate of the M.A.C. should be able to “speak and write with ease and vigor, that he may instruct and impress others, avert mischief, or inculcate truth.” A century and a half later, that continues to be our guiding mission in PLS.

#YesPLS! #PLS150

Jeff Conroy-Krutz





A Spartan fan since childhood, MSU PLS alumnus Jack Katosh endows four new scholarships for Political Science undergraduate students

Karessa Weir

John P. “Jack” Katosh was born in Chicago and moved to Michigan at the age of 13 when his father was hired by Ford Motor Co. He graduated from high school in 1965 and knew since the age of five or six that he wanted to be a Spartan.

“They were a championship football team in the early ‘50s, and, as such, many of their games were on TV (a rarity then), which I loved to watch,” Katosh said

When he was a senior in high school, he applied to both MSU and the University of Michigan. He was accepted by both but “everyone who really knew me knew I was going to go to Michigan State,” he said, since he had made his fandom of MSU football well known.

“I was the first person to go to college from either my mom’s or my dad’s families so the whole experience was very new,” he said. Katosh was not sure what he wanted to study when he went to MSU, so he started out as a “no preference” major for his first two years.

“I was thinking it would be math. I’ve always been really good at math,” he said. “But near the end of my sophomore year, I took a couple of Political Science classes, as I had always been interested in government. I liked the courses so at the end of my sophomore year, I declared for Political Science. And it was a great choice.”

This great choice, combined with work he did with the late Dr. Ada Finifter, set him up for a career in public opinion research and polling.

At that time, the Political Science Department had just moved into South Kedzie Hall, where it remains today. Katosh concentrated his classes in US politics.

Finifter, who taught at MSU from 1967-2008 and would go on to edit the prestigious American Political Science

Review, got him interested in research methods, and he later did an independent study with her.

It was with Finifter and her methodology courses that Katosh developed a strong interest in using survey research data to analyze voting and political behavior. This experience was a stepping stone to a lifetime career doing quantitative and qualitative research in social, political, and marketplace arenas.

While at MSU, Katosh was enrolled in the Army ROTC program. As part of that program, he received a two-year scholarship, was awarded the Chicago Silver Medal his junior year, and participated in the flight training program, earning a private pilot’s license.

After being commissioned, Katosh served four years active duty as a fixed-wing pilot, including seventeen months in Vietnam, and then as a logistics officer for an armored cavalry squadron at Ft. Meade, Maryland.

Following his military service, Katosh attended graduate school at the University of Michigan, studying American Government and Political Behavior. In his third year, the professor who ran the Center for Political Studies gave him a job at the American National Election Studies.

“After that, I knew I didn’t want to go into academics, so after doing everything but my dissertation, I moved to Washington D.C. ” Katosh said. He started looking for jobs in surveys and polling and landed his first one in the Social Research department of a national trade association.

“We examined political and economic statistics,” he said. “I was the editor of a publication on the Baby Boom Generation and also wrote a chapter on the politics of that cohort.”

Katosh has remained in D.C. From his first job, he worked as the research director for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. After that, his former boss, who had formed his own research company, asked Katosh to join him. He eventually became Executive Vice President of the firm.

For 30 years, Katosh conducted qualitative and quantitative market research projects for membership groups, professional organizations, and financial services companies.

In 2000, he finally made the leap and formed his own company, which focused on market and opinion research, customer relationship management, program evaluation, outreach, quality management, and one-on-one interviews with executives and senior professionals.

“For reasons not entirely clear to me, I had a real knack for that,” Katosh said. “I never had any formal training in it but I worked with people who did and thought ‘I could do that.’ And I did.”

Following the 2008-9 recession, Katosh found himself on the job market again, eventually taking a position as a supervisor in the Department of Homeland Security. There, he worked with the e-Verify program to ensure applicants are eligible to work in the United States. Before long, he was back in research and surveys, working with

other government agencies who use the biometrics data collected by Homeland Security.

He remained with the federal government until his retirement in 2018. And with that came a desire to give back to his roots at Michigan State University.

“The seeds to my career were embedded in me at Michigan State,” Katosh said. “Now I’m in a position where I’ve had a good career, invested well and at a point in my life where I’m able to ‘give back’ in a hopefully meaningful way. Each of the scholarships is geared to mirror some aspect of my career.”

His experience with studying US politics, expertise in survey research, and participation in ROTC are reflected in the four awards he created for Political Science students, including:

- **The Jack Katosh Political Science American Government Award**, which will provide tuition assistance to undergraduate students pursuing a major in Political Science who have participated in research in American Government.
- **The Jack Katosh Undergraduate Research and Experiential Learning Award**, to assist undergraduate Political Science majors who have indicated an interest in survey research and/or interning for a research firm or political campaign.
- **The Jack Katosh Political Science ROTC Award**, to assist undergraduate Political Science majors who also participate in MSU’s Army Reserve Officer Training Corps program.
- **The Jack Katosh D.C. Study Away Scholarship**, which will help undergraduate Political Science majors who are participating in a Study Away program with internships in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

For all of these, Katosh’s goal is to assist students complete their undergraduate studies and launch their careers. “So many of our students are only able to attend MSU and participate in valuable experiences like internships because of the generous support of our alumni and other friends,” PLS Chair Jeff Conroy-Krutz said. “Jack’s gifts help ensure that future generations of Spartans will have these opportunities.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about these scholarships and how to fund one of your own, please contact:

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The seeds to my career were embedded in me at Michigan State, Now I’m in a position where I’ve had a good career, invested well and at a point in my life where I’m able to ‘give back’.

- Jack Katosh



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Matthew Kirwin

PLS alumnus Dr. Matthew Kirwin, Division Chief at the US State Department and Professional Lecturer at George Washington University, visited MSU this Spring and gave a lecture on “Terrorism and Colonial Legacies in the Sahel: Social Media, Conspiracies and the Decline of the French Influence.” Dr. Kirwin also had a career conversation about working in international development, politics, and security in a joint event with the African Studies Center, Asian Studies Center, and the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies.

In addition to his work in the State Department, Dr. Kirwin teaches at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. He started at State in 2010 and has covered the Sahel and Nigeria as an analyst. He was awarded the Superior Honor and Meritorious Honor Awards, and has authored multiple Presidential Daily Briefings and routinely briefed Assistant Secretaries on developments in Africa. He is an expert on public opinion analysis and has lectured on the topic at multiple universities.

Dr. Kirwin has a PhD in Political Science from MSU, a Masters in International Affairs from Ohio University, and Bachelors in International Studies from the Ohio State University. His research has been supported by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant, a West African Research Association pre-Dissertation Grant, and the American Political Science Association. He served in the Peace Corps in Niger and is fluent in Hausa and French.

During his visit to MSU, we caught up with Dr. Kirwin for an interview.

What motivated you for a career with the State Department?

A: I felt like I could use my knowledge of Political Science and Africa to make an impact on policy at State. Living in Washington DC was an added bonus.

What aspects of your Political Science education prepared you best to your current position?

A: The methods classes, for example statistics, delivered skills that I use almost every day. I was fortunate to be a research assistant with Afrobarometer and those duties line up almost perfectly with what I do today.

What are your fondest memories of your time as an MSU PLS student?

A: Making it through challenging classes with my cohort. It was also an exciting day when I learned I was awarded a Fulbright to conduct my dissertation research in Burkina Faso.

What experiences would you say are important for current students to take advantage of if they want a job in the State Department?

A: Look for internships that give you valuable experience. Internships require security clearances and having a clearance can be an advantage in the hiring process.

What is something that you know now that you wish you knew back in your MSU days?

A: That opportunities for serious social science research, such as the work I do at State, are available beyond academia.

What do you think are the biggest challenges for someone who wants to work in your field? And what are the biggest benefits?

A: The biggest challenge is getting one's foot in the door. The biggest benefits are impacting foreign policy formulation and working with talented, motivated people.

PLS alums inspire and advise undergrads

“The world is a huge place. You will find your path.”

Christine Mason Soneral, Political Science alum and executive board member of the College of Social Science Women's Leadership Institute, assured a roomful of Political Science undergraduates that all the decisions they make in college and beyond will lead them toward many future possibilities but with support, they will navigate to the right one for them.

“You aren't trapped. Your mind is the trap. You are never locked in,” she said. “There is no right answer, no wrong answer. Only a decision – one of hundreds you will make throughout your career.”

Mason Soneral, senior vice president and general counsel for ITC Holdings, joined together with fellow PLS alum Steve Faulkner, Managing Director and head of Private Business Advisory in J.P. Morgan Private Bank's Advice Lab, for a networking event in Political Science's Careers in PLS Series.

“We have tens of thousands of alumni working all over the world in a lot of different areas, and it's great to give students a chance to connect with them,” said PLS Chair Jeff Conroy-Krutz. “These alumni here today are really great friends of MSU and the College of Social Science

and are great examples of when you are a Spartan, you are a Spartan for life.”

Dr. Conroy-Krutz said the alumni career panel is the first of many upcoming opportunities the department is offering to students to learn about the many career paths available to PLS degree holders. He announced that the department is offering a new course in Fall 2024—Careers in PLS (PLS 422), with alum Chayse Hurley—that allows students to explore different career paths with visiting alumni and work on professional development.

Mason Soneral received her PLS degree in 1995 and went straight to Indiana University Law School. She had planned to work as a defense attorney but “I couldn't turn off my emotions,” she said. She has worked in the energy industry for 10 years and has been vice president in charge of the legal department, as well as chief legal officer since 2015.

One bit of the advice she gave the students is to make sure to reach out to alumni and mentors – an opportunity she was too shy to take advantage of – and not to neglect their peer networks as well.

“You want to look for the helping hands,” Mason Soneral said. “You will have hardships in life. These are the people who will help you move through those.”

Faulkner also focused on the importance of networking and staying in touch with people throughout your career.

“The ugly truth is a lot of positions are filled before they become public. If you can find out earlier, that is when your collaborative network can really help,” he said.

The thing that Faulker, a 1986 alum, wishes he had known as an

undergraduate is that you can take your Political Science degree into success in many career paths.

“You come into these programs thinking where we know where we will be going – in a linear way,” he said. “The truth is you can take this degree in so many directions.”

He also urged the students to keep all their options open.

“You will make mistakes. When you discover [a particular job or career] is not for you, the real mistake is staying. When you realize it isn't the right fit, that is the time to make a change,” Faulkner said.

The PLS students had many questions for the alumni, including PLS Scholar Meera Kanade, who asked about the differences between working in the public sector versus the private sector.



“I am grateful for my Political Science degree because politics affects every aspect of life. You have to understand the institution of government, the evolution and how you can influence them,” said Mason Soneral. “I touch government every day. It's very, very valuable.”

Photographs by Jackie Belden Hawthorne, College of Social Science.

MSU Men's Basketball Coach Tom Izzo shares insights on leadership, hard work and remembering your roots at this year's Blanchard Forum on Public Service

Karessa Weir

"Tom Izzo is our lighthouse."

This is how former Michigan Gov. Jim Blanchard described the MSU Men's Basketball Coach in his introductory words at the 10th annual Blanchard Forum for Public Service on Tuesday, Sept. 24 at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts.

Gov. Blanchard was introduced by University President Kevin Guskiewicz, who was preceded in speaking by MSU Political Science Pre-Law senior Jerome Hamilton Jr and PLS Chair Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz.

Izzo, who has been enshrined in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and is starting his thirtieth year as head coach for men's basketball, said that the Spartan Statesmanship Award for Distinguished Public Service, which was presented to him at the event, meant so much to him.

"It is a privilege to think that I have something to say that is inspiring," Izzo said. "You have to understand how important this is to me. Being a diverse person is very, very important. This institution means the world to me. The academic side means a lot to me. ... I'm putting this trophy in front of all my basketball ones."

Izzo emphasized that his job as a coach, much like other university leaders, is to help make students' lives better.



I've lived my dream. I am living mine. But I also get the chance to help college kids live their dreams. It's all of our job to make a better world. We are here to make other people better. My job is to make players' lives better.

- Tom Izzo

He also talked about his role models, including boxer Mohammed Ali and coach Vincent Lombardi. Coaching, to him, is less about the game and more about being a leader.

"For coaches, the 'xs and os' are the smallest part of it. It's how to get through to people. If you can lead, you can lead in a lot of venues," he said.

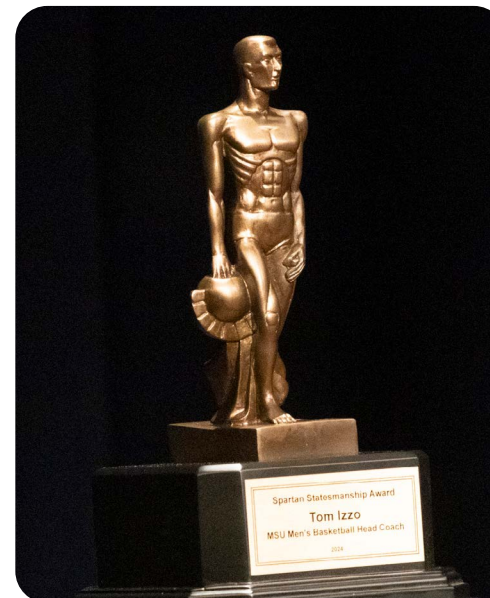
Izzo talked about growing up in the Upper Peninsula and the importance of remaining connected to your roots. A native of Iron Mountain, Izzo graduated from Northern Michigan University with an undergraduate degree in education. But at that time, he didn't consider being a coach – he thought he wanted to be a teacher.

"The hardest time in your life is when you graduate college. There's a big world out there. How do you know where to start?" he told the students in the audience.

Izzo decided to remain at Northern and work toward a master's degree while helping out with the basketball team. His first job was with former MSU basketball coach Jud Heathcote, who hired Izzo at age twenty-six. Aside from a few weeks at the University of Tulsa, Izzo has never left MSU.

"I wouldn't have left here for the world," Izzo said. "MSU is a cozy, homey place and I get to stay here and that's pretty cool."

The Governor Jim Blanchard Public Service Forum is housed in the Department of Political Science, within the College of Social Science at Michigan State University. Photos by Gary Shrewsbury for Blanchard Public Service Forum.



PLS Awards and Honors



Melinda Gann Hall earns lifetime achievement award

Political Science Professor Melinda Gann Hall received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Law and Courts Section of the American Political Science Association this fall, on the heels of attaining Professor Emerita status at Michigan State University.

She also is among the select group of faculty at MSU who have received the Distinguished Faculty Award and is the recipient of the 2016 Career Achievement Award from the State Politics and Policy Section of the American Political Science Association.

Hall is a nationally recognized authority on judicial politics and state politics, with particular interests in state supreme courts and judicial elections. Among numerous other awards for her research, Hall's book, *Attacking Judges: How Campaign Advertising Influences State Supreme Court Elections*, won the 2015 C. Herman Pritchett Award for best book from the Law and Courts Section of the APSA. She also has received several major grants from the National Science Foundation and earned a highly coveted Fulbright Distinguished Chair (the Fulbright Scotland Visiting Professorship) in 2017.

"We're so excited that Melinda's unmatched contributions to the field have been recognized with this well-deserved award. She is a key reason why MSU Political Science has had—and will continue to have—such a strong reputation as a top program for research on and teaching about Public Law," said PLS Chair Dr. Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz.

Hall joined the faculty at MSU in 1996 and served in many capacities, including Director of Graduate Studies and mentor for the Political Science Scholars program. She was also founder and first coordinator of the Pre-Law Mentoring Program, sponsored by the College of Law and the College of Social Science. This program began at the college level in 2015 but was expanded to the entire university in 2018. She retired at the end of Spring Semester 2024.

Afrobarometer celebrates 25 years at Michigan State University

Karessa Weir

In 1999, MSU Political Science Professor Michael Bratton worked with Robert Mattes and E. Gyimah-Boadi to merge three independent survey research projects to form the Afrobarometer, a survey program designed to give a voice to "ordinary African citizens."

MSU, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, and the Center for Democratic Development of Ghana were core partners. Bratton served as executive director, and their first surveys covered twelve African countries.

Today, twenty-five years later, Afrobarometer has conducted surveys in forty-two of Africa's fifty-four countries. It started its tenth round of surveys in 2025. Afrobarometer is now the largest pan-African research network and organization studying public opinion on the continent. Since 1999, it has conducted over 330,000 interviews.

MSU is now an official support unit for the organization, which is a legal entity headquartered in Accra, Ghana, with a new CEO, Dr. Joseph Asunka. As Bratton, now a University Distinguished Emeritus Professor, put it, Afrobarometer has fulfilled its original goal of being "African based and African lead."

On Dec. 4, the founders, supporters, and current heads of Afrobarometer gathered at MSU's International Center to remember their past, celebrate their success, and look to the future of the program.

"One of the aspects of our strength is the people and the way we've engaged over the years," said Dr. Carolyn Logan, PLS Professor and Afrobarometer's Director of Analysis and Capacity Building. "We've done more than 280 surveys. We've talked to a lot of people across 40 countries. We've trained thousands of fieldworkers and set a really strong foundation."

Dr. Boniface Dulani is one of those people. Dulani first started with Afrobarometer as a research assistant when he was an MSU PLS PhD student. Today, more than a decade after earning his doctorate, he is now Afrobarometer's Director of Surveys.

"We started off in 1999 to give voice to African citizens because a lot of people were talking about Africa but not talking to the people of Africa. We've grown across the continent to give ordinary Africans a voice in politics," Dulani said.



The group relies primarily on face-to-face interviews, employing translators so surveys can be conducted in the language of the participant's choice. By using many of the same questions across survey rounds, they are able to compare the results across the countries and over time, Dulani said. The surveys now cover 80 percent of the African continent, with a goal of eventually covering all countries.

The surveys ask questions about citizens' perceptions on topics such as democracy, economics, elections, and trust in government. While the majority of questions remain the same, the survey has evolved to add other topics, such as the impact of COVID-19, child welfare, climate change, and migration. The next round will also include questions relating to sexual and reproductive health, access to justice, poverty, youth economic engagement, and globalism, said Deputy Director of Surveys, Anyway Chingwete.

"We need to remain relevant to Africa," Chingwete said.

Once the research is analyzed and reports are written, the second part of their mission comes into play.

"The goal remains to disseminate and apply survey results to the decision makers, policy advocates, civic educators, journalists, researchers and ordinary Africans," said Dulani. "We spend a lot of time to take the findings to the people who can use it."

Afrobarometer is now very well-known throughout the continent and cited regularly by researchers and journalists, across Africa and globally.

"Our rigorous methodology is recognized as the gold standard for survey research in Africa," Dulani said. "The data is free to use by all. The fact that we are African-owned and -managed is important to us, as well as the diverse and long-lasting partnerships we have."

Another part of the Afrobarometer mission is education, including summer schools, emerging scholars programs, workshops, mentorships, and university outreach.

Many MSU PLS students have studied with Afrobarometer. Dulani is one of thirty-six MSU PLS graduate students who have spent time working with Afrobarometer in the last twenty-five years. Faculty and students alike have published books using Afrobarometer data.

The directors of Afrobarometer are incredibly proud of what they have achieved in 25 years and are looking forward to their future as a African powerhouse of data, research, and education.

"We've transitioned from our founding leadership to the second generation in the 2020s," Logan said. "Many functions once managed by MSU are now managed by African partners. More than 70 partner institutions and their staffs have been trained in survey research methods, analysis, communications and management."

A panel including Bratton, Logan, PLS Chair Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz, African Studies Center Director Leo Zulu, and Titus Awoke, Professor and Associate Dean, International Studies and Programs for the College of Agriculture, Food and Resource Economics discussed Afrobarometer's origins, as well as its future.



"MSU was Afrobarometer from the very beginning and provided key resources to help us start, and to keep us going," Bratton said. "At the same time, MSU has been very supportive by running graduate programs that make use of Afrobarometer data."

Conroy-Krutz, who joined MSU in 2009, is a core faculty member in the African Studies Center and studies media and information, ethnicity, clientelism, and other topics in Africa. He was coming up in the field at the same time as the Afrobarometer was becoming more well known. It also drew him to MSU.

"You need partners who can help you. When AB was just starting, MSU opened a lot of doors for them. But as AB became more established, now it opens doors for MSU and scholars like me," Conroy-Krutz said.

"We are an Afrobarometer family, and MSU is a big node of that."

Zulu, a professor in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences, has been teaching the geography of Africa since coming to MSU in 2006, with the goals of dispelling misconceptions about Africa, its land, physical economies, and governments.

"Afrobarometer and MSU have created a model of building equitable partnerships," Zulu said. "As we are moving forward, it is important to revisit and make visible again that everyone around the world recognizes this work. MSU's footprint on Africa includes the huge impact of Afrobarometer. It has been an ecosystem for international involvement with MSU."

New course on Careers in PLS

A new course this Fall – Careers in PLS (PLS 392) – gave undergraduate students new opportunities to prepare to take on law school, graduate school, the business world, or just “real life” after college.

The creation of Careers in PLS began when Chayse Hurley, an academic specialist in the department, and Department Chair Jeff Conroy-Krutz brainstormed ways to provide students with a broader sense of the variety of paths that a Political Science degree opens.

A big feature of the course was the opportunity to learn from and connect with PLS majors in various careers. Hurley invited MSU PLS alumni from a wide variety of professions to speak to the class about how to break into a field.

Political Science Pre-Law senior Ava McCoy is planning to get a master’s degree in International Relations and loved hearing from an alumni now at Boston Scientific as they talked about their journey into international affairs, specifically in health care.

“Chayse made it very personal, like no matter what our goal is, she found someone to talk about it,” McCoy said. “All the speakers were great. All PLS grads – some are lawyers, some are not. It really took a lot of weight off our chests.”



Hannah Raymond, Criminal Justice senior, most enjoyed the visit from Anna Cumming, Washtenaw County Friend of the Court, because she hopes to be a public defender. But Raymond felt the true value of the course was how it prepared her to apply to law school.

“I’ve never taken a class like this that prepares me for the future. It forced me to not put some things off, like creating a resume and a LinkedIn profile,” Raymond said. “This class is exactly what I needed right now.”

Riley Jones, a Political Science Pre-Law junior, said the course “demystified” the business world, where she hopes to work someday but had no idea how to navigate.

“All the speakers were helpful and gave me job ideas that I never thought of,” Jones said. “Chayse is an amazing professor. She taught us how to be professionals.”

Hurley was also praised for her patience and ability to work individually with the twenty-four students in her class. PLS junior Noah

Brasseur, who hopes to work in international affairs at an embassy, appreciated the guest speakers and the time Hurley put into their future.

“Chayse helped me get everything in order. The future seemed so nebulous but she explained all the ins and out of what you need to do. It was really helpful,” Brasseur said. “I’m really grateful for this, especially all the networking we were able to do.”

Hurley also works with students on “people skills,” said PLS-Pre Law junior Christina Pilch.

“I loved the class. We went over real world jobs that we could get with a Political Science degree,” Pilch said. “And the really best part was all the networking we did.”

The experimental course wouldn’t have worked if so many alumni had not been willing to come to campus and work with students, Hurley said.

“Honestly, this year was the result of many people who care about our students coming together. The rich outpouring and honesty our alumni offered to students pushed the class in ways that no single teacher could. The students were also incredible at engaging in a manner that allowed them to make a draw on the alumni. I simply had the opportunity to facilitate this communication and provide space for students to prioritize those practical items that they need to successfully make the transition from college into the professional world,” Hurley said.

Based on this year’s success, the Department hopes to make the course an annual Fall offering.

said. “We found that they tend to be harsher on elected officials in corruption cases, which was very much the narrative of the media. It really came down to the judge’s personal beliefs on the length of the sentence.”

Morucci was previously a faculty fellow at New York University’s Center for Data Science. He came to MSU because he was familiar with some of the faculty and heard good things from others.

“I was attracted to the people in the department. I already knew some of the people, and others also told me that this department is welcoming, friendly and understanding,” Morocco said. “This is really, really valuable as a tenure-track faculty.”

PLS students earn prestigious nominations to Marshall, Rhodes scholarships

Three Department of Political Science undergraduate students were nominated for two esteemed scholarships this Fall.

Jerome Hamilton Jr., Belma Hodžić, and Abigail Rodriguez were all nominated for the Marshall Scholarship. The Marshall Scholarship provides support to approximately fifty of the most outstanding undergraduates in the country to study at any university in the United Kingdom. MSU has produced twenty Marshall Scholars to date.

A month later, the same three PLS students were also nominated as Rhodes Scholars. The U.S. Rhodes Scholarship is the oldest international scholarship program in existence, enabling outstanding young people from around the world to study at the University of Oxford. The U.S. Rhodes Scholarship awards thirty-two scholarships. MSU has produced twenty Rhodes Scholars.



Hamilton Jr. was a finalist for the Harry S Truman Scholarship and a Udall Scholarship in Spring 2024. From Baltimore, Maryland, he is a Pre-Law major, with a minor in Environmental Social Science.



Hodžić is majoring in World Politics, as well as in Comparative Cultures and Politics in James Madison College.



Rodriguez is a Pre-Law major, in addition to Art and Humanities in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities. She is also a PLS Scholar who is minoring in Chicano/Latino Studies. Rodriguez was also nominated in Spring 2024 for the Beinecke Scholarship Program, which provides graduate school funding for third-

year students intending to pursue a research-focused graduate program in the arts, humanities or social sciences.

Hamilton, Hodžić, and Rodriguez are all seniors, who are also members of the Honors College.

“Political Science is so proud of Abigail, Belma, and Jerome. We’re also so excited that half of this year’s seniors nominated for the Marshall from MSU are majors from our department!” said Political Science Chair Dr. Jeff Conroy-Krutz.

Dr. Angie Torres-Beltran joins the PLS this Fall as its newest Dean’s Research Associate



Dr. Angie Torres-Beltran joined the Department of Political Science this Fall as its newest Dean’s Research Associate.

“It is an absolute pleasure to be welcoming a fourth cohort of Dean’s Research Associates to the College of Social Science,” said Nwando Achebe, Associate Dean for Access, Faculty Development, and Strategic Implementation.

“We very much look forward to having these emerging scholars enrich our community as we provide support to empower their excellence and success for years to come.”

Angie Torres-Beltran is the fourth such scholar with Political Science. She earned her PhD in the Department of Government at Cornell University and was a Predoctoral Fellow with the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego; a Research Fellow in the Women and Public Policy Program at the Harvard Kennedy School; and a United States Institute of Peace Scholar. She is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow and a Research Affiliate with the Gender and Security Sector Lab and the Eliminating Violence Against Women Lab.

Torres-Beltran’s research examines the political causes and consequences of gender-based violence, with an emphasis on political behavior and institutions in conflict-affected countries. She also studies the role of domestic and international actors on violence and the intersection of gender, public opinion, and civic engagement.

“I applied to the Dean’s Research Associate Program at Michigan State University because I wanted to join world-class researchers, teachers, and mentors who have demonstrated a steady commitment to promoting diversity in academia. This program is one-of-a-kind and offers early-career scholars the necessary time and resources to succeed as a future faculty member at MSU. I also look forward to learning from those committed to training and supporting scholars from diverse backgrounds. Overall, I am excited to become a part of this scholarly community and look forward to contributing to the advancement of diversity in the academy,” she said.

“PLS is so excited that Angie has joined us as a Dean’s Research Associate. Her research on gender, violence, and state-building in Latin America is bringing academic scholarship on all of those topics in very different directions, and she has a remarkable research and publication pipeline,” said PLS Chair Dr. Jeff Conroy-Krutz.

PLS welcomes Dr. Marco Morucci to our faculty



Dr. Marco Morucci joined MSU PLS this Fall, as the newest faculty member focusing on computational social science.

Morucci is mainly a methodologist, with backgrounds in statistics and computer science. “In practice,” he says, this “is a lot of re-analyzing data and writing code.”

“I research methods for empirical political science in settings in which data is scarce and causal inference is hard. I address problems in this setting by combining machine learning and causal inference methodology,” Morucci explains.

He also does applied research on legal trials regarding corruption in Brazil.

“We study whether judges favor or not politicians during sentencing,” Morucci

Program Updates



Legal Internship Program

The PLS Legal Internship Program is entering into its tenth year in 2025. The Program, which occurs every summer, places students who are interested in legal careers with opportunities to work with licensed lawyers, on actual cases, before they apply to law school.

During its decade-long history, the Program has worked with dozens of partners. In 2024, it added two new partners, including a private firm and a Court of Appeals judge.

Before participating in the Program, students take one semester of PLS 392, which focuses on preparation for a legal field placement. Those who have completed the course and the Summer internship report feeling much better prepared for law school, and more knowledgeable about what a legal career might look like.

Alumni from the Legal Internship Program have gone on to a variety of law schools, including Notre Dame, Georgetown, Minnesota, Vanderbilt, and Michigan State University, among others, and on to jobs with large law firms, government work, legal aide, and clerkships. Many credit their internship experience with helping them achieve their success.

The Program is always looking to continue to expand its offerings with new partnerships, especially with MSU alumni. For more on the Program, visit polisci.msu.edu/undergraduate/internships/legal-internship.html.

– Assistant Professor Melissa O’Shea,
Legal Internship Program Coordinator

PLS Scholars

In April, the Department welcomed its 12th class of PLS Scholars, with twenty-four Political Science majors accepted into the program – the largest cohort yet. These students have a wide range of interests and career goals, including attending law school, conducting research with PLS faculty, and pursuing careers in state and local government. A Welcome Back event was held in early September as a way to usher the newest class of PLS Scholars into the program and give them a chance to connect and get to know each other outside of the classroom. We are excited for our newest PLS Scholars class!

The Department also celebrated the accomplishments and graduation of twenty-two PLS Scholars in April. At our graduation event, two PLS Scholars were also presented with awards for their incredible achievements while at MSU. Megan Smejkal was awarded the Political Science Public Service Award, and Malcom Charles was selected as the

Outstanding Senior for the department. Congratulations to our graduating PLS Scholars!

One benefit that comes with being a member of the PLS Scholars program is the opportunity to be an Undergraduate Learning Assistant (ULA) in a classroom with a PLS faculty member. Students selected as ULAs work with classmates on mastering course material, and assist the faculty member in the administration of the class. In the Fall 2024 semester, twenty-one PLS Scholars worked in ULA positions, spread through PLS 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses.

For more information, and to meet our newest cohort of Scholars, visit polisci.msu.edu/undergraduate/political-science-scholars.html.

– Lead Academic Advisor Krista Zeig &
Associate Professor Erica Frantz, Director
of Undergraduate Studies

Michigan Government Semester Program

The Michigan Government Semester Program (MGSP) returns this Spring 2025, continuing its mission as a premier pipeline program for developing future public servants. Leveraging MSU’s proximity to Michigan’s Capitol in Lansing, MGSP connects students to internships with state legislators, governors, judges, lobbying firms, local officials, and civic

institutions. Participants deepen their knowledge of state and city governments, acquire applied skills, and expand their professional networks. They meet with dozens of officials working within and around government, ranging from governors, state legislators, and Michigan Supreme Court justices to policy experts, lobbyists, and civil servants. Students also engage in meaningful work impacting communities, all while fostering a deeper commitment to civility and public service. Indeed, MGSP alumni have advanced to impactful careers, including positions in the White House, recognition as Mitchell Scholars and Truman Scholarship finalists, elected office, and leadership roles across federal, state, and local governments.

The Spring 2025 cohort reflects both academic excellence and diversity. With an average GPA of 3.75, the group includes Democrats, Republicans, and independents, representing Michigan, other states, and countries like Korea, Georgia, and Germany. Half the cohort is women and half are people of color. Students’ internships span a wide range of organizations, including law firms, advocacy groups, government agencies, and community associations such as the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons, and Michigan state legislative offices.

For more on MGSP, visit polisci.msu.edu/undergraduate/internships/mgsp/index.html.

– Assistant Professor Marty Jordan,
MGSP Coordinator

Master of Public Policy

Fall is always an exciting time in the MPP program. Our incoming students are hard at work in the core courses of the program, learning microeconomics, quantitative methods, and the policy process. At the same time, our returning students are choosing capstone topics and planning for the future. Students are hard at work researching policy solutions for topics including:

- Brain drain and out-migration in Ghana
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) administration and access
- School district use of ESSER funds in Michigan
- Surveillance Technology in Law Enforcement
- Civic engagement among Michigan youth
- Social safety net administration
- Loneliness and its impact on health and civic engagement
- Implementation of baby bonds in Michigan
- Use of special assessments by Michigan local governments
- Terms and conditions, privacy, and regulation of technology
- Congestion pricing implementation in Chicago
- Early childhood education in Michigan
- Youth mental health services in Michigan
- Closing the racial wealth gap in Michigan

Keep your eye out for their policy briefs in the Spring, and if you’re willing to share your expertise on any of these topics, we’d be happy to connect you to a student!

The MPP program is saddened by the loss this Fall of Economics Professor Ron Fisher, who for many years taught State and Local Public Finance. In honor of his significant contributions to the field of public policy, Dr. Fisher was awarded the Steven D. Gold Award from the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM), and we were fortunate to have him as part of the program.

Our 2024 graduates are already making their mark, and we’re pleased to share that our placements included: Challenge Detroit Fellow (working with the Joe Louis Greenway Partnership), Michigan Healthy Climate Corps Member (at EGLE), the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), Education Trust-Midwest, Senator Curtis Hertel’s Office, and the US House, among others. Our 2025 graduates are getting a head start on their careers with full-time placements at Michigan League for Public Policy and the Greater Lansing Association of Realtors.

The 2024 Ira Polley Memorial Scholarship has been awarded to Abigail Bies and Nicholas Hess. The scholarship awards are high honors for MPP students, established in the memory of MSU Political Science Professor Emeritus Dr. Ira Polley, whose fifty-year career was dedicated to education and public service. Dr. Polley also served as State Controller, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Executive Director of the Council of State College Presidents and Secretary to the Constitutional Convention Planning Commission. Dr. Polley passed away in 2005. Abigail and Nicholas have achieved perfect 4.0 GPAs in all coursework in the MPP program and they’re each engaged, curious, and thoughtful students of public policy.

Want to stay up-to-date with the MPP program? Connect with us on LinkedIn! We love to see updates from our alumni and share updates from campus with you.

– Assistant Professor Erika Rosebrook,
MPP Director



Our mission and how to give

We seek to evaluate, innovate, and invigorate political processes/institutions across our research, teaching, and service.

GIVING INFORMATION

For more information on how to support students and programs at MSU Political Science, please contact:

Alex Tripp

Senior Director of Development,
College of Social Science
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OUR SCIENCE **TRANSFORMS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**
AND INSPIRES LEADERS