

SPRING 2024 | NEWSLETTER

MSU Department of Political Science

For Alumni & Friends





Family and friends celebrate the successes of the Political Science Scholars at their spring reception. Photo by Jackie Belden Hawthorne, College of Social Science.

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Inside, you will be able to read the stories of some of our amazing undergraduate students, get updates from our graduate and experiential learning programs, connect with some recent alumni, and learn more about our new faculty's research.

- Jeff Conroy-Krutz

LETTER FROM CHAIR:

Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz



Dear Alumni and Friends,

Greetings from the Department of Political Science at MSU! We're so happy to share this latest edition of our PLS newsletter, which serves as a testament to the thriving community of thousands of alumni and friends that we've built together over the years.

Inside, you will be able to read the stories of some of our amazing undergraduate students, get updates from our graduate and experiential learning programs, connect with some recent alumni, and learn more about our new faculty's research.

When we consider the challenges facing our state, country, and world, we're reminded of our role in promoting public service among our students and recent alumni. What you'll see in this issue is models of engaged Spartans. Our undergraduate majors stand at over 850 strong, an increase of almost 50% in the last decade. This is convincing evidence of Spartans' commitment to making positive change.

As a Department, we recognize that connecting our students with opportunities outside of the classroom is key to their professionalization development and knowledge about the world. Hundreds of our students have completed internships, through experiences organized with our Legal Internship, Public Service Internship, and Michigan Government Semester Programs, in Lansing and throughout Michigan. InnovateGov, soon entering its 9th summer, connects students with civic organizations, creating unique partnerships between MSU, civic organizations, and government agencies in Detroit.

Here in East Lansing, this year's Blanchard Forum featured a thought-provoking dialogue with Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. The Forum, now in its 9th year, continues to serve as a platform for engaging discussions on pressing issues, demonstrating our commitment to fostering informed and constructive political discourse.

As we reflect on the significance of Political Science in today's world, it's clear that our discipline plays a pivotal role in shaping the course of societies. In an era marked by complex global challenges, our faculty, students, and alumni are at the forefront of analyzing, understanding, and proposing solutions to navigate the intricacies of the political landscape. The skills and perspectives gained through a Political Science education are more critical than ever, and our department is proud to contribute to the development of informed, responsible citizens.

As a department, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated alumni and friends. Your continued support and engagement are instrumental in shaping the success and vibrancy of our department. I invite you to explore the exciting updates in this newsletter and encourage you to stay connected as we embark on the next chapter of our journey together.

#YesPLS!

Jeff Conroy-Krutz





ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

Malik Washington

PLS has thousands of alumni, working across Michigan, the US, and the world, in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to promote change. We will highlight the contributions of some of these PLS Spartan alumni, in this newsletter and on our website: polisci.msu.edu

Malik Washington currently serves as City Council Liaison for the City of Detroit Mayor’s Office. Prior to his current role, he worked for the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to support a variety of tasks related to statewide transit policy, travel trend analysis, and project development.

Malik earned a Master of Public Policy degree from MSU in 2020. He also has a bachelor’s degree in public policy at MSU.

“Malik approaches public policy from a true commitment to service. He has a gift for listening and being able to synthesize input and evidence from a wide range of sources into a plan or policy that reflects community and stakeholder needs. He connects people to government and government to people, which is a critical piece of policymaking that’s often overlooked,” said MPP Program Director Erika Rosebrook.

What aspects of your Political Science and MPP education prepared you best for your work in the mayor’s office?

The Political Science and MPP program placed a strong emphasis on critical thinking, networking, and effective communication. The required internships, capstone projects, and networking opportunities deepened my political understanding and honed my communication and relationship-building skills, crucial for my role in the mayor’s office.

What motivated you for a career in public service?

Coming from a family of educators and ministers, the values of empowering and uplifting others were instilled in me early on. My first exposure to public service was through volunteering with my family’s church, which opened my eyes to the needs of my community and sparked my interest in finding solutions. Growing up in Detroit, I’ve seen the city make significant progress, yet I realize there’s still much to be accomplished. For me, it’s important to give back to the city that raised me and to be a voice in the room, especially now, as Detroit continues to evolve and develop.

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

My fondest memories stem from my time in InnovateGov. InnovateGov is an internship program organized by the Political Science department that places students in various Detroit-based organizations to gain public service experience. Through the program, we were able to engage with local leaders and executives, take part in community service initiatives, and work on some of Detroit’s most pressing issues. I gained lifelong friendships and relationships through InnovateGov and will forever be grateful for my experience in the program.

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

I would encourage students to take their internships and networking seriously. It’s not who you know, but who knows you that matters. Networking and internships aren’t just about building your resume and making contacts; it’s about building relationships that can provide guidance and open doors throughout your career.

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

Reflecting back, it’s not so much about what I wish I knew, but more about what I wish I had embraced – the grace to grow. Many of us are very passionate and ambitious, and that can sometimes result in us being our own harshest critic. I want students to know that it’s perfectly normal not to have your entire career path figured out before graduation. Life is a journey of continuous discovery, and it’s completely fine to adjust your path as you gather new insights and experiences. Every effort you put in contributes to your growth. Hard work will always yield a return.

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

The ever-changing political and social landscape requires a high level of adaptability and open-mindedness. People’s needs constantly change, which can make the work very challenging. Yet, being able to make a meaningful impact that can last for generations makes the challenges that come with it truly worthwhile.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. John Kuk

John Kuk joined the MSU Political Science Department in Fall 2023 as one of seven new 1855 Professors. The 1855 Professorships is an initiative of the Office of the Provost, designed to enhance student success and promote rigorous academic research. Dr. Kuk is part of the inaugural cohort of the program.

Dr. Kuk’s research focuses on housing inequality and segregation. He is currently studying how online housing searches perpetuate segregated neighborhoods in the United States. With four years of data from online rental ads, he has found that the language used to describe a home carries important signals about neighborhood composition, in terms of socioeconomic and racial makeup, even when no specific geographic information is provided.

“Reading ads from a specific neighborhood can shape the perception of that neighborhood,” Dr. Kuk said. For example, bilingual ads featuring Spanish made non-Hispanic renters view the neighborhood as less desirable, he found.

Dr. Kuk’s findings suggest that the very language in housing ads can contribute to socioeconomic and racial segregation in urban areas across the US. His work can therefore influence public policy and provide information to allow housing authorities to assist renters.

Dr. Kuk also works in the areas of voter identification policies, as well as how class and race shape voters’ political choices.

“Minority voters are more likely to be economic voters - to vote with their pocketbook,” he said. “Well-being and class identity affects how they vote and their public opinions more so than white voters.”

Since arriving at MSU, Dr. Kuk has enjoyed teaching minority politics to undergraduates and public policy doctoral students. He appreciates having a vibrant department of researchers as well as a community of scholars with the other 1855 Professors from across the University.

“Having a Minority Politics community is huge - very special compared to other universities,” Dr. Kuk said. “Becoming a part of this community has been great. I am very grateful to be here.”



Gov. Jim Blanchard Forum welcomes U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg



The Governor Jim Blanchard Public Service Forum welcomed U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, who sat down with Gov. Blanchard for a discussion on politics, service and the future of transportation. Before the forum, Secretary Buttigieg met with Political Science Scholars and MSU Interim President Teresa Woodruff. Photos by Gary Shrewsbury for the Blanchard Public Service Forum.





STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

Malcom Charles

Picnicking with the President, drafting Congressional press releases and sitting in on interviews with CNN - it was all in a day's work for Malcom Charles during his summer in Washington D.C.

Malcom, a Political Science senior, worked as an intern with U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin, whose district encompasses MSU's East Lansing campus. There, Malcom got a full taste of what work life is like in the nation's capital.

"I got to do so much. It really opened my world and my eyes to the day-to-day operations of D.C.," Malcom said. "I drafted and assisted with press releases. I presented co-sponsor recommendations. I really got to see the impact of the work that is done every day."

He also attended the White House Congressional Picnic, where he met President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Secretary of Transportation (and 2023 Blanchard Forum Speaker) Pete Buttigieg.

"That was just a really cool experience. You see these people on TV and they don't always seem real but they are so kind in person," he said. "The Vice President was open to giving me advice and asking me about the things I like to do."

The internship may have ended in the fall of 2022 but it is just the start of Malcom's career. Since interning, he has continued to work for Rep. Slotkin in her Michigan office and has accepted a full-time position with her U.S. Senate campaign that will begin when he graduates this spring.

"I do believe the internship led directly to my job. They were able to see my work ethic and what I am truly passionate about and how I go about things. I believe that is a large reason why I am able to stay on with them," he said.

As a first-generation college student, it was difficult for Malcom to imagine himself working and living in Washington D.C. But now he strongly recommends interning for anyone interested in politics, communications or any other career in public service.

"In D.C., being in that environment, working around successful people who are actively trying to make a change in the world, that was a big deal to me," Malcom said. "They were willing to take me in, and I was willing to work for it, and I really got to see what the inner workings were. So yeah, I would definitely recommend it."

Political Science senior Malcom Charles spent his summer 2022 interning in Washington D.C. with U.S. Representative Elissa Slotkin. While there, he met President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Photos courtesy of Malcom Charles.



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- Malcom Charles

Washington D.C. Semester Program

MSU PLS partners with The Washington Center for a Capitol experience

Each spring, The Washington Center opens its doors to MSU Political Science students eager to experience politics, policy and governance in the beauty and history of the nation's capital.

The program offers internship placements in the U.S. House and Senate, executive agencies, nonprofit and advocacy groups, communications and journalism outlets, criminal justice and law enforcement sites and international relations organizations.

"D.C. internships provide hands-on real-world training and allow students to expand their professional networks to a national level. These internships both expand a student's skill set and

open new and exciting career pathways," said program coordinator Dr. Ian Ostrander, Political Science Associate Professor and former congressional fellow.

"The only way to really learn how the federal government operates is by going to D.C. and participating in it directly. When you have this experience, you find answers to questions that you would not have known to ask otherwise."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit The Washington Center's website at twc.edu



InnovateGov Detroit Program

Each summer, a talented and dedicated group of MSU students arrive in Detroit ready to do real, impactful and equitable work across the city as part of MSU Political Science's InnovateGov program.

Since the program launched in Summer 2015, some 180 InnovateGov Fellows have participated. The Department has partnered with 44 distinct Detroit civic organizations including Brilliant Detroit, Bridge Detroit, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History and the Wayne County Treasurer's Office. Our students work alongside key decision makers to move the city forward and build a thriving future for all Detroit residents.

For 10 weeks each summer, around 20 students work during the day in government or non-profit organizations and gather in the evening to attend a class on government and public policy. They also get a chance to explore the rich cultural heritage of Detroit with field trips and recreational outings throughout the city.

"Not only are students getting exposure to real life internships where they're getting hands-on experience with a variety of community partners, but they're having this wonderful experience where they're in the city, getting to live, go on field trips and get course credit too," said Chayse Hurley, InnovateGov Program Coordinator. "This program overwhelmingly changes lives."

Hurley joined InnovateGov in the coordinating role in Fall 2022, and oversaw the program's successful relaunch, after a pandemic-induced hiatus,

in Summer 2023, with 18 students participating. She is herself an alumna not only of InnovateGov, but also of PLS's Pre-Law major (where she was also a PLS Scholar), and its Masters of PP. In Fall 2023, she was awarded the College of Social Science's Young Alumni Award, in recognition of her service, volunteering, and mentorship.

Mackenzie Schick is a public policy major in PLS who interned at Brilliant Detroit, which was right in line with her goal of going into education policy.

"Being at Brilliant Detroit helps me learn about education, work directly with kids and understand how our teachers work," Mackenzie said. "Getting to work with teachers who have been in the classroom is very beneficial, especially when I can pick their brains about education."

InnovateGov Fellows have a strong commitment to Detroit, with over two thirds of participants being from the Metro area, and 70% saying in entrance surveys that they plan to work in the area. To date, more than 20 alumni of the program have taken jobs with partners after graduation.

The Department's continued ability to operate InnovateGov lies with the support it has received from generous donors over the years. To make sure that the program remains as accessible as possible, Fellows received financial support to cover tuition, fees, and housing in Detroit.

InnovateGov will undertake its ninth year of placing interns in Detroit this summer.

InnovateGov Coordinator Chayse Hurley teaches her students about public policy, government and service during the class periods of the summer internship program. Photo by Jackie Belden Hawthorne, College of Social Science.



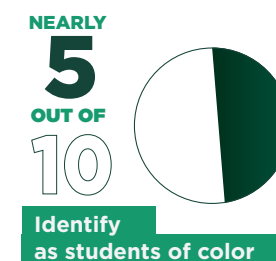
Led by Political Science Professor Marty Jordan, Michigan Government Semester Program students participate in a mock trial in a hearing room of the Michigan Senate. Photo by Jackie Belden Hawthorne, College of Social Science.

Michigan Government Semester Program

Update on the Michigan Government Semester Program by director Dr. Marty Jordan:

We started the Michigan Government Semester Program over a decade ago with an audacious goal: to make public service at the state and local levels attractive and accessible to all. Public service is a noble calling. But today, government is often seen as a place of dysfunction and distrust. Many individuals lament the incivility and their limited voice in government. As a result, less than 6% of students plan to work in the public sector upon graduating. Even fewer students are drawn to public service at the state and local levels. Yet many of society's most pressing challenges---economic development, civil rights, education, and the environment---can be addressed by our cities and states.

MGSP leverages MSU's proximity to Michigan's Capitol to partner students with state legislators, governors, judges, lobbying firms, local officials, and civic institutions. Students enhance their substantive knowledge of state and city governments, gain applied skills, and expand their professional networks. They meet with dozens of officials working within and around government, ranging from governors, state legislators, and 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.



IMPACT

In the past decade, more than 230 political science students have provided 66,000 hours of public service for over 140 civic and governmental partners.

2013 - 2023

230+

MSU STUDENTS

66k

HOURS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

140+

CIVIC AND GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERS

59%

MGSP ALUMS WORK IN GOVERNMENT OR THE LEGAL ARENA

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

Mikaylah Heffernan



MSU PLS graduate Mikaylah Heffernan is the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's legislative liaison. Heffernan previously worked as a House Democratic Policy Advisor for the Michigan House of Representatives, focusing on agriculture and natural resources.

She holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a master's degree in Public Policy, both from Michigan State University.

"Mikaylah is not only an accomplished analyst and administrator, she's a natural connector, and she regularly supports and mentors other PLS and MPP students," said Program Coordinator Erika Rosebrook. "Though it's been several years since she was on campus, I still hear about her often from current students - they always have a story about how she's helped them get settled or navigate a difficult situation or offered good advice. She's committed to an inclusive, kind, and transparent public sector, and she continually demonstrates that through her words and actions."

MSU PLS caught up with Heffernan shortly after she began her new position this spring and asked her to reflect back on her career so far and her time at MSU:

What motivated you for a career in public service?

A career in public service just always made sense. My parents raised me to care about others in everything I do. They, especially my father, taught me respect for our natural world and supported my love for all things outdoors. My career choices have let me serve my community and my environment while paying homage to my roots since day one.

What aspects of your Political Science and MPP education prepared you best for your work as a legislative liaison?

The research skills that I learned during my PLS days and then improved during my MPP days. If you know how to find quality, unbiased data, you're already two steps ahead of everyone else. You can learn what you need to know to succeed so long as you know where to look or who to ask.

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

Bonding with other students that were also fascinated by politics and policy. It's a powerful experience when you find your people for the first time. I went from being a lone political nerd to being surrounded by other political nerds!

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

Any experience that gets you time in the "real world." Internships are fantastic, but you can learn so much from simply taking a day to go down to the Capitol and watching committees or legislative sessions. If you have the opportunity, try to shadow someone for a day or two, even if you're not sure that you'll want to go into that field. Build your soft skills and teach yourself how to talk with and learn from people that aren't like you.

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

Being unapologetically yourself and sticking to your values won't endear you to everyone—and that's okay. You'll be able to find a solution some other way.

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

The biggest challenge is honestly just being able to combat misinformation and distrust in the government. Most people who work in public service are here to serve the public. We have good data and good research but making sure that information gets out to the community, can be a struggle.

That said, the biggest challenge goes hand in hand with the biggest benefit. Being able to get the right information out to the community and make a difference is incredibly rewarding. You get to see the impact you have on your family, friends, and neighbors in real time.



If you have the opportunity, try to shadow someone for a day or two, even if you're not sure that you'll want to go into that field. Build your soft skills and teach yourself how to talk with and learn from people that aren't like you.

- Mikaylah Heffernan

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. Jennifer Wolak

MSU PLS Professor Jennifer Wolak is passionate about trying to understand how people think and feel about politics.

"People are so much more engaged in politics now than in decades past - turnout in the 2020 presidential election was record-breaking. But at the same time, people really don't like the government. They distrust politicians and disapprove of Congress. This push and pull - that people care about politics so much even as they hate politics - is so fascinating," she said.

Dr. Wolak's most recent paper considers whether people are biased against electing women politicians. Most Americans believe that women candidates are disadvantaged in elections, but studies by political scientists show that women are just as likely to win elections as men. What she found is that people's partisan biases determine whether or not people voice negative views of female politicians.

In "Partisan bias and evaluations of women in Congress" published in *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, Dr. Wolak found that "among constituents represented by a lawmaker from the opposing party, women legislators are penalized, earning lower evaluations than men."

However, she also found that "among those who share the same party loyalties as their member of Congress, those represented by a woman express greater job approval than those represented by a man, all else equal. It might look like men and women in Congress are evaluated the same, but in reality, people's views of women in Congress are polarized by partisanship."

Dr. Wolak joined the department in 2021. In addition to her research, she teaches courses on public opinion and political psychology and serves as placement director for MSU PLS. Her next research project is studying emotions in politics and the role of political embarrassment.

"People voice a lot of strong emotions about politics. Their anger can propel them to vote, and their anxieties can lead them to pay more attention to politics. But many people also feel some embarrassment about the state of the country. I'm asking them what makes them embarrassed about politics - and I find that feelings of embarrassment lead people to demand more compromise and cooperation from politicians," she said. "It may even decrease levels of partisan vitriol."



It might look like men and women in Congress are evaluated the same, but in reality, people's views of women in Congress are polarized by partisanship.

- Dr. Jennifer Wolak





Master of Public Policy Program



Erika Rosebrook, MPP Program Director

If you see a major policy initiative in Michigan lately, chances are an MSU MPP alum has been involved. MSU's MPP alumni are making a difference, working on public policy in fiscal agencies, budget offices, Governor's and legislative staffs, mayor's offices, government relations, and local, private, and non-profit organizations all over the state.

The MPP Program continues to give students the analytic and practical tools to be leaders in their policy careers, offering high-quality graduate-level instruction in quantitative analysis, policy feasibility, program development, policy implementation, public finance, and policy evaluation.

According to Program Director Erika Rosebrook, "One of the best parts of the MPP program is to see students enter as people who want to build better communities and systems and leave with the tools to immediately start making an impact. Our alumni are not just leaders, they're connectors, and they bring others along with them. It's wonderful to be a part of a group of students, faculty, and graduates with that kind of commitment to public service." Rosebrook started in 2019 as director, and is herself an MSU alum (PhD).

MPP at a Glance:

94%

EMPLOYED WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF GRADUATING

94 percent of our graduates are employed and making an impact in the policy world within six months of graduating from the program.

40%

APPROXIMATE STUDENTS OF COLOR EACH YEAR

Students of color comprise 30-50 percent of our cohorts each year. Each cohort typically includes several international students, as well as students who are mid-career professionals.

RECENT JOB PLACEMENTS

- Michigan House and Senate Fiscal Agencies
- Citizens Research Council
- Michigan Campaign Finance Network
- Mathematica Policy Research
- Michigan League for Public Policy
- Michigan Public Health Institute
- Several state departments

Political Science Scholars Program

This year marks the 11th year of the PLS Scholars program, which recognizes the achievements and potential of a small number of our best students. Each year, the Department selects 20-25 students as Scholars, who receive opportunities to enhance their undergraduate education. Benefits of the PLS Scholars program include:

Students are assigned a faculty mentor in their area of interest to provide expert advice on courses and the discipline of political science. In addition, mentors assist in matching coursework with long-term goals, opportunities for post-graduate studies in political science and law, and possible job opportunities available to talented undergraduate students.

These students are also given opportunities for paid positions in research and learning projects, access to funding support, and networking opportunities with distinguished alums through the Governor Jim Blanchard Public Service Forum.

"The most important is my time as an undergraduate learning assistant (ULA), which I successfully applied for as a PLS Scholar," said Scholar Jerome Hamilton Jr., a Political Science junior.

"In Fall 2023, I was able to be a ULA for one of my favorite classes, PLS 302 [Urban Politics]. With the help of the professor, Dr. Sarah Reckhow, I was able to positively affect the student experience in the class, which included giving feedback on quizzes and assisting in-class with projects and assignments. I also learned a lot about myself as an assistant, with grading and attendance responsibilities," Jerome said.

"Overall, what I enjoy the most about being a PLS Scholar is meeting other like-minded students that I can form connections with. There are a couple of friendships that were created through PLS Scholars events that I have maintained. As more events are held, I anticipate being able to establish more relationships like these with other Political Science students."

In the coming semesters, the Department will seek to expand, by providing enhanced opportunities for Scholars to connect with alumni mentors in Michigan, Washington DC, and beyond.



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- Jerome Hamilton Jr.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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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:

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OUR SCIENCE **TRANSFORMS THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**
AND INSPIRES LEADERS