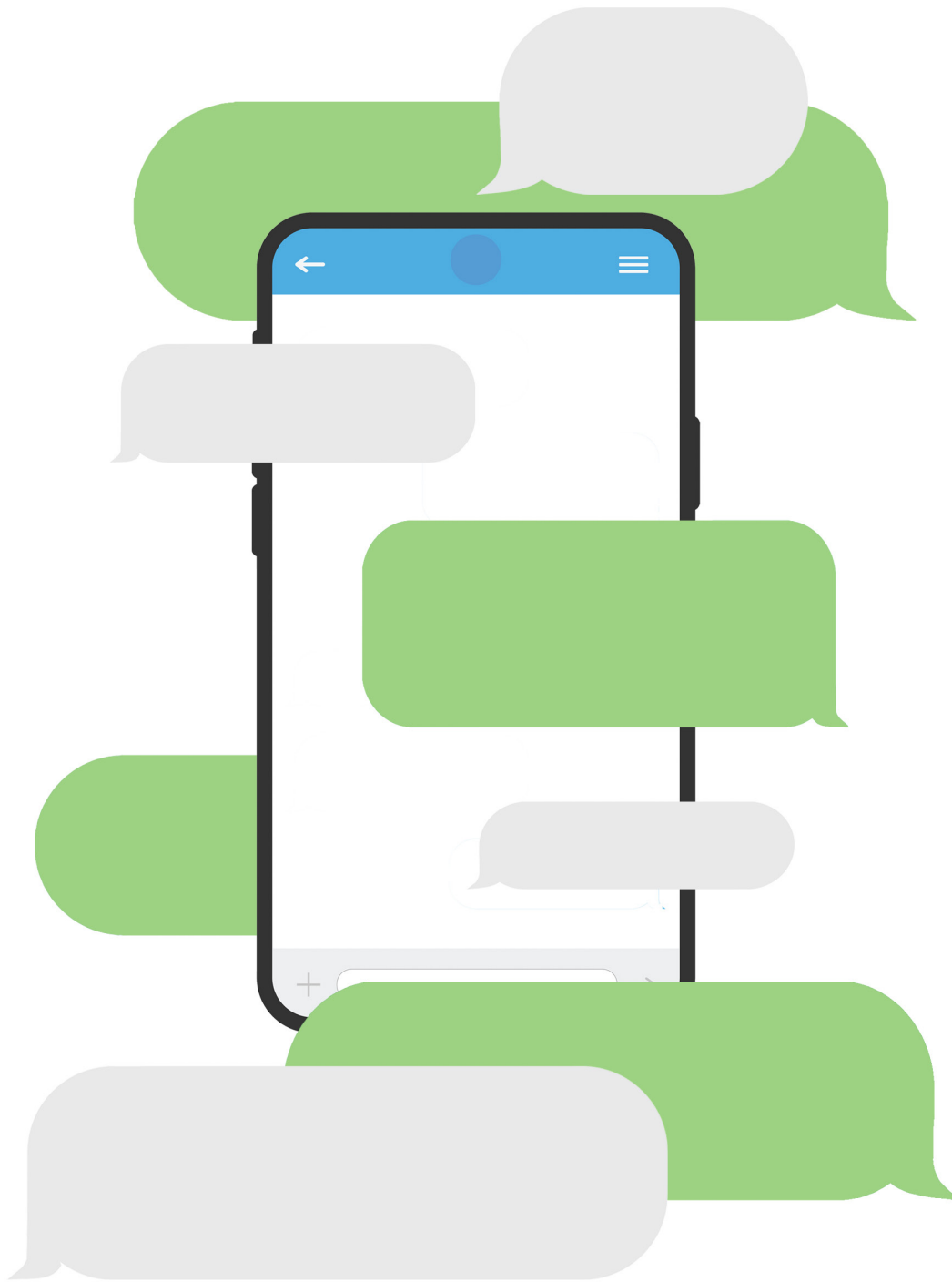


BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

# POLITICAL SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT MAGAZINE

WINTER 2024



**04** HOW AI CAN IMPROVE  
CONVERSATION QUALITY

**18** JUDGE GRIFFITH: 2024  
DURHAM LECTURE SPEAKER

**22** THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
TAYLOR SWIFT

**P**olitical news, both domestic and international, can often feel like an eternal, bleak loop. In a world where everything has become a political statement, the polarization and negativity in the news we read, watch, and listen to can be overwhelming. We might wonder how we as individuals can make a difference in our society and our world.

Given this question, in this issue, we have centered several hopeful messages about ways we can improve civic discourse in a variety of settings. Professors Lisa Argyle, Ethan Busby, and Josh Gubler conducted innovative research about the potential for AI to improve the quality of online conversations between parties with differing opinions. Remarks by both Judge Thomas Griffith, our distinguished 2024 Durham Lecture speaker, and Dr. Danielle Allen, a Professor at Harvard University and University Forum speaker, outline ways that we can better navigate differences in opinion and strengthen democracy. And while we may not always be able to change the world for good as quickly or as completely as we might desire, Professor Jessica Preece outlines the ways in which we can avoid cynicism and reclaim hope in her article titled “Faith, Hope, Charity, and Politics.”

Winter semester 2024 was busy and full for the BYU Political Science department in all the best ways. Approximately 4 dozen Political Science classes were taught—some for the very first time. Student clubs held numerous events, and the department celebrated the academic excellence of faculty publications and student research. We believe we are all a little better for our time spent together in the offices and classrooms of the Kimball Tower. At the end of every Winter semester, we have the distinct pleasure of sending over a hundred of the best and brightest into the world as newly minted BYU Political Science graduates. 2024 was no exception. We wish all our new graduates the absolute best that this world has to offer and feel confident they will each change the world in their own ways.

CARLEE GUENTHER DYNES, Managing Editor  
POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

WINTER 2024

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The BYU Political Science Department is turning 103! Our next issue is all about the history of the department, and we want to celebrate the heart of it—you!

We'd love to share your fond memories from your time as a student in the Political Science Department.

Submit any stories or questions by May 15, 2025 to [politicalscience@byu.edu](mailto:politicalscience@byu.edu).

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# HOW A.I. CAN IMPROVE ONLINE CONVERSATION QUALITY

## A Study Led By Researchers at BYU and Duke University

By Tyler Stahle

Check the comments section of many social media and digital news platforms, and you're likely to find a cesspool of insults, threats and even harassment. In fact, a Pew Research Center survey found that 41% of American adults have personally experienced online harassment, and one in five adults say they've been harassed online for their political views.

But researchers at BYU and Duke University say derisive online conversations don't have to be the norm. A joint paper between the two universities found that artificial intelligence can be used to improve conversation quality and promote civil dialogue in online interactions.

Using a specially developed online platform built by BYU undergraduate Vin Howe, the researchers conducted a distinctive experiment. They paired participants with opposing viewpoints in an online chat and asked them to discuss a highly polarizing topic in American politics: gun control. During the

conversation, one user would intermittently receive a prompt from an AI tool suggesting a rephrasing of their message to make it more polite or friendly but without altering its content. Participants had the freedom to adopt, modify or dismiss the AI tool's suggestion. When the chat concluded, participants were directed to a survey to assess the quality of the conversation.



Rather than alter the content of comments, AI-suggested messages provided options to the user to make a more polite statement. Courtesy: Vin Howe

## WHAT THEY FOUND

Over 1,500 individuals participated in the experiment, leading to a total of 2,742 AI-generated rephrasings being accepted by participants. The results revealed a promising transformation in the dynamics of online interactions. Chat partners of individuals who implemented one or more AI rephrasing suggestions reported significantly higher conversation quality and, remarkably, exhibited greater willingness to listen to the perspectives of their political opponent.

“We found the more often the rephrasings were used, the more likely participants were to feel like the conversation wasn’t divisive and that they felt heard and understood,” said BYU computer science professor David Wingate, a co-author on the study who is helping launch BYU’s degree in computer science with an emphasis in machine learning this fall.

## AI CAN FILL IN THE HUMAN GAP

Importantly, AI-assisted rephrasings didn’t alter the content of the conversations, nor did they change the viewpoints of the participants, said Wingate, who noted that AI chat assistance is vastly different from persuasive AI, which is dangerous and ethically fraught. “But helping people have productive and courteous conversations is one positive outcome of AI.”

The implications of the research are far-reaching, since it offers a scalable solution to combat the toxic online culture that has plagued the internet for years. Unlike traditional methods, such as professional training sessions led by expert moderators that are limited in scope and availability, AI intervention can be broadly implemented across various digital channels.

Howe says having the opportunity to co-author the study as an undergraduate student is a highlight of his BYU experience and he’s grateful for Wingate and fellow BYU [Political Science] professors Lisa Argyle, Ethan Busby and Josh Gubler who have mentored him. His work on this project has ignited a desire within him to continue to research how technology can have a positive impact on society.

“The more often the rephrasings were used, the more likely participants were to feel heard and understood.”



ARTWORK CREDIT: SMASHINGSTOCKS ON FLATICON

“Mentored research has been the best part of my experience at BYU,” says Howe. “I have met so many interesting and committed people through the mentored research opportunities I’ve had. I don’t know that I would have had an experience like this anywhere else.”

## MOVING FORWARD

By properly utilizing the power of AI, online platforms could be transformed into constructive forums where individuals from differing backgrounds and opinions come together to discuss current issues with empathy and respect. Ultimately, this research shows that AI technology, when thoughtfully integrated, can play a pivotal role in shaping a more positive online landscape.

“My hope is that we’ll continue to have more BYU students build pro-social applications like this and that BYU can become a leader in demonstrating ethical ways of using machine learning,” said Wingate. “In a world that is dominated by information, we need students who can go out and wrangle the world’s information in positive and socially productive ways.”

The study was recently published in the scientific journal PNAS by Wingate and BYU professors Lisa Argyle, Ethan Busby and Josh Gubler, as well as Professor Chris Bail from Duke University. Former BYU graduate students Chris Rytting and Taylor Sorensen also co-authored the study. [1]

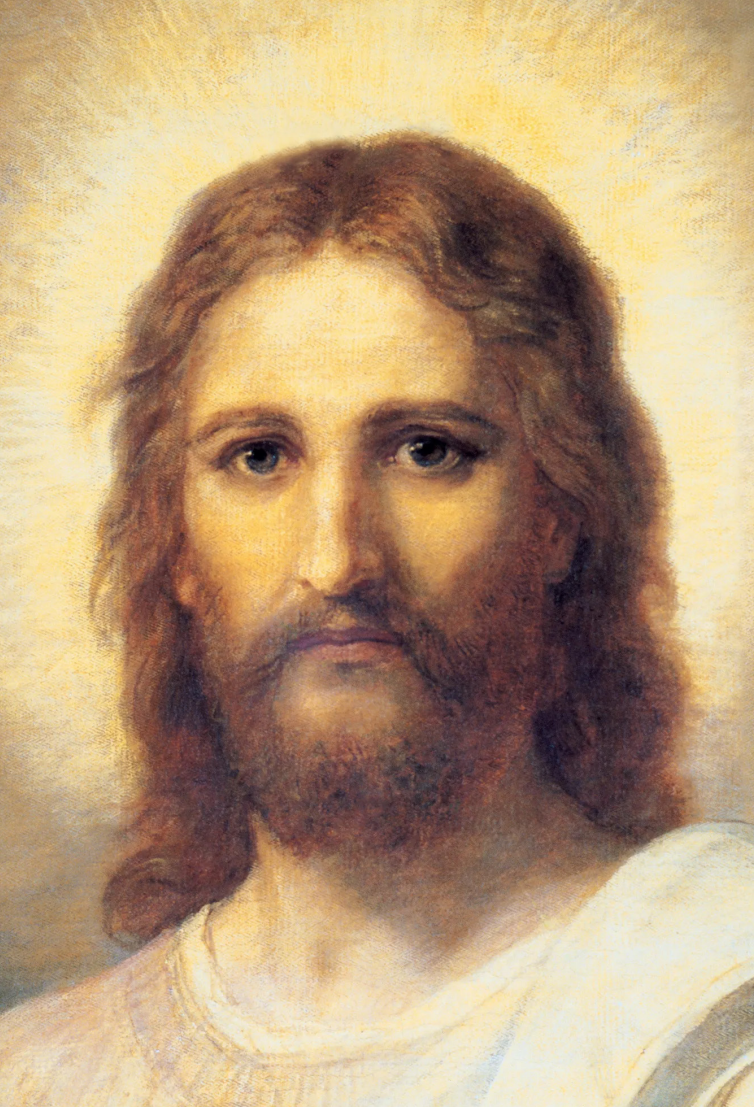
*The original article, titled “AI-powered chat assistance elevates online conversation quality, BYU study finds,” can be found at [news.byu.edu](https://news.byu.edu). Written by Tyler Stahle, October 03, 2023.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Argyle, Lisa P., Christopher A Bail, Ethan C Busby, Joshua R Gubler, Thomas Howe, Christopher Rytting, Taylor Sorensen, and David Wingate. “Leveraging AI for democratic discourse: Chat interventions can improve online political conversations at scale.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 41 (2023): e e2311627120.



From top: BYU Assistant Political Science Professors Lisa Argyle and Ethan Busby, and Associate Political Science Professor Josh Gubler.



ARTWORK CREDIT: HEINRICH HOFMANN

## Engaging in Politics as Latter-Day Saints

*“Voting in government elections and performing other civic duties when we have the opportunity is a sacred responsibility, a God-given blessing, and a duty to be carried out with honor and trust.”*

- Michael A. Neider, “The Voice of the People,” *Ensign Magazine*, October 2012

# Faith, Hope, Charity, and Politics

By Jessica Preece

Each semester I do an activity with my political-science students. I ask them for synonyms of faith—belief, conviction, trust, fidelity; hope—optimism, expectancy, anticipation, confidence; and charity—love, kindness, generosity, selflessness. We talk about how faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ leads to hope in God’s love and confidence that He will help us heal from everything that limits, hurts, or harms us. These feelings open space in our hearts for charity because the risks associated with kindness, trust, and generosity are lowered.

Then I ask my students for antonyms of faith—fear, disbelief, distrust, doubt; hope—despair, pessimism, gloom, discouragement; charity—selfishness, hate, apathy, enmity. We talk about how fear makes us insecure, leading to anxiety and pessimism. Ultimately, we turn to selfishness, apathy, or hatred as defense mechanisms. There is so little room for charity when we feel like we are all on our own.

What does this have to do with politics? While we easily affirm the value of acting in faith, hope, and charity in our families, friendships, and neighborhoods, when it comes to politics, we often walk the pathway of fear, insecurity, and hostility. We call it “being realistic” or “not being naïve.” We believe that everyone in politics acts in self-interest. Perhaps we see that politics can be messy, contentious, slow, and disappointing.

Such cynicism believes it is foolish to hope for a better world and especially foolish to act on that hope. What is most seductive about cynicism is that it allows cynics to feel superior while also excusing them from actually doing anything. If politics is a lost cause, then one might as well just check out. Cynicism is one of the chief impediments to engaging with politics (or any other tool of change) in a faithful, hopeful, charitable, and sustainable way. The end of this road is apathy, an antonym of charity.

How do we fight cynicism and reclaim hope? I use two strategies: First, I try to remember that I have covenanted to be a person of faith, hope, and charity and school my thoughts—and behavior—accordingly. That doesn't mean putting my head in the sand. I can see the bad very clearly and still approach it as a challenge to address rather than a foregone conclusion.

Second, I try to remember that cynicism is a defense mechanism: when we try, failure is a possible outcome, and failure is painful. The only antidote I have found is to acknowledge my fear and try to remember that God will take care of me.

We read that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). I have come to understand the scripture this way: true faith leads to substantial action in the direction of the good things we hope for. As we act we make the things we hope for much more likely to appear. Occasionally this happens through reason-defying miracles, but more often it happens through hard work that is inspired, magnified, and sanctified by God.

How do I fight the urge to opt out amid the ugliness of the world? I remember my faith in God's perfect love—and its perfect manifestation, the Atonement—and lean into the hope that comes from this. Once recentered on this foundation, I find more space in my soul to take the risk of trying to make beauty out of ashes through patience, sincerity, and love.

*“I try to remember that I have covenanted to be a person of faith, hope, and charity, and school my thoughts—and behavior—accordingly.”*



### **Jessica Preece**

Jessica Preece is an Associate Professor of Political Science at BYU. This article is adapted from the essay “On Being a Disciple of Hope” (BYU Studies, vol. 61, no. 1, p. 270). The full text is available online at [byustudies.byu.edu](http://byustudies.byu.edu).

# 台灣真的是中國的台灣嗎？

## A CONVERSATION WITH BRENT CHRISTENSEN

By Katelyn Gale

**O**n January 13th, 2024, Taiwan elected Lai Ching-te, the former Vice President of Taiwan, as President of Taiwan. This election was historic, as it solidified the dominance the DPP, the Democratic Progressive Party, has had over the KMT, the Kuomintang, since 2016 [1]. Even so, Lai Ching-te only won roughly 40% of the vote, with the KMT candidate, Hou Yu-ih, winning 33.5% of the vote and the TPP (Taiwan People's Party) candidate, Ko Wen-je, winning a surprising 26.5% of the vote [2].

While this election in part represents the positive power of Taiwan's hard-fought democracy, on a broader scale, it is more so indicative of Taiwan's ongoing struggle for sovereignty. Chinese officials have released many statements leading up to and following Taiwan's election, emphasizing President Xi Jinping's ultimate goal of reunifying China and Taiwan and how unfit for the Taiwanese presidency China deems Lai Ching-te to be [3][4]. Furthermore, following the election, Oceanic country Nauru, one of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies, announced plans to cut ties with Taiwan, and instead establish diplomatic ties with China [5]. Despite the strides Taiwan has taken in the last 30 years to build up its government and identity as separate from China, China's influence nevertheless remains a shadow on Taiwan's accomplishments.

To learn more about the implications of Taiwan's election, I sat down with Dr. Brent Christensen, former US Foreign Service Officer and former director of the American Institute in Taiwan.

---

**Q:** Why does China care so much about Taiwan? How might an invasion of Taiwan help mitigate the lingering effects of China's "Century of humiliation?"

**A:** It's a good question. I think that Taiwan is sort of the last piece of the puzzle, as it were, [for the PRC] to regain territory lost during what it regards as the "Century of humiliation." It has become an article of faith in the PRC that Taiwan must be regained for the PRC to finish addressing the territorial losses that occurred during that century, when the PRC was weak and had to cede all these territories and [make] all these concessions to foreign powers. And although this has been a long-standing demand, [...] Xi Jinping has almost personalized it as something that is essential for his [...] dream for the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." There are a lot of people who are suggesting that now that China has become so powerful, they will take action sooner rather than later to force the issue. But in my view, that is not the PRC's inclination; peaceful reunification remains their priority. But Taiwan also remains a critical issue in the

U.S.-China relationship. It is worth noting that the one most important issue when Kissinger was negotiating the terms for normalizing relations with the PRC [in 1972] was the status of Taiwan. I thought the way the [1972 Shanghai] communique was drafted and interpreted was a very elegant way of finessing that issue on which there was obviously no good way to completely resolve that issue. They just sort of agreed to disagree.

**Q: Moving to the US side of this conflict, what are the US's primary interests in Taiwan?**

**A:** There are several factors that make Taiwan important to the United States. One of course is Taiwan's success as a democracy; it scores number 1 in Asia on the Global Democracy Index, and number 10 worldwide. So that's a pretty impressive achievement, considering they didn't have their first direct election for president until 1996. Secondly, I think that policymakers recognize that Taiwan is an important security partner in the region. We have an explicit commitment in the Taiwan Relations Act [of 1979] that we will support Taiwan's self-defense. It is a legal requirement spelled out in the Taiwan Relations Act that the U.S. will provide necessary support for Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. And I think there is a realization that if the US did not support Taiwan's self-defense, it would call into question our [support for our] other allies in the region. There is also an important economic factor — Taiwan's economic value to the U.S. and to the global economy was clearly underscored by the computer chip shortage that occurred a couple of years ago.

Indeed, there is now a broad awareness that Taiwan is an indispensable source of the most sophisticated semiconductors in the world.

And it is the TSMC [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company] that makes 90% of the chips that the world needs for everything from cars to computers to cell phones. I would point out that NVIDIA, which designs the majority of the chips that fuel the AI industry, has them all made by TSMC.

**Q: It is well-established that Taiwan is an essential factor in the global economy, despite it being such a small, young island. How did this happen?**

**A:** To some degree, this is due to the impressive success of Taiwan's industrial policy. Economic Strategist Kwoh-Ting Li is the one who first conceived of the idea of setting up Taiwan's science parks. And he was the one who invited Morris Chang, the founder of TSMC, to come to Taiwan and set up this company. But this could only have been done in the right sort of environment where there was already a lot of technical talent in Taiwan. The New York Times' Tom Friedman wrote a column a few years ago where he said that Taiwan was fortunate not to have any natural resources except its people. [...] So Taiwan had to focus all of its attention on honing the skills of its people. There is a broad recognition that Taiwan has a lot of really impressively capable engineers and technical experts who were able to support these industrial goals. [...] After all, it is the semiconductors and all [the other tech products] that Taiwan produces that really makes the world's high-tech industry work.

**Q: Shifting back to China, I want to talk about China's current economy. In the last few years, we have seen numerous reports on China's declining birth rates, aging population, and difficulties with its housing market. How might these difficulties**

change China’s strategy with an invasion of Taiwan?

A: Actually, China’s economy needs Taiwan’s high-tech inputs. This has been described as a “silicon shield,” in that this critical need would perhaps prevent or delay a Chinese attack. Taiwan produces all of these high-end components that China’s high-tech industry needs. So, China may impose export controls or bans on certain kinds of Taiwan exports, such as pineapples or wax apples. But they will never do that for the things they really need from Taiwan. They can make some of these components themselves, but they don’t make them as well. [...] For example, all of the



Brent Christensen is a United States diplomat who served as the Director of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the de facto embassy of the U.S. in Taiwan, from 2018 to 2021. Christensen is a native of Provo, Utah. He earned a BA in Chinese language and literature from Brigham Young University,

an MA in East Asian studies from George Washington University, and a DMD (Doctor of Dental Medicine) from the Oregon Health and Science University. In January 2024, after 35 years in the Foreign Service, Christensen became an adjunct professor in the Political Science department. His class, POLI 379R, focused on in-depth exploration of Taiwan’s political dynamics, as well as U.S-Taiwan and PRC-Taiwan relationships.



Katelyn Gale is a BYU sophomore majoring in International Relations and minoring in Chinese Studies. She is a diehard David Tennant fan and an extreme classical music, bagpipes, and economics enthusiast.

important parts of an iPhone – the lenses, the chips, the speakers, and the other things that make an iPhone work – all come from Taiwan. So [...] any actual military conflict would interrupt those supply chains or those exports in a way that would make a lot of these industries just collapse.

I look forward to the next few months and the next few years, where the China-Taiwan conflict will undoubtedly step further onto the global stage, drawing support, censure, and action from all sides. In the end, however, I can only hope that we can all live to say “No, Taiwan is really not China’s Taiwan.”

*This article was originally published in the October 2023 edition of the Political Review, a student-run magazine published six times a year. Scan the QR code to read the original article and more by the Political Review.*



#### ENDNOTES

1. Tessa Wong, “Taiwan elects William Lai president in historic election, angering China,” *BBC* (13 January 2024) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-67920532>
2. Brian Hart et al, “Taiwan’s 2024 Elections: Results and Implications,” *CSIS*, (13 January 2024) <https://www.csis.org/analysis/taiwans-2024-elections-results-and-implications>
3. Zhang Xinran, “Taiwan Affairs Office Spokesperson Comments on Taiwan Election Results,” *Xinhuanet* (13 January 2024) <http://www.news.cn/tw/20240113/de4b608e529742d6bb428d5993c66c41/c.html>
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5. Kirsty Needham, Yimou Lee, “Taiwan loses ally Nauru, accuses China of post-election ploy,” *Reuters*, (15 January 2024) <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-loses-first-ally-post-election-nauru-goes-over-china-2024-01-15/>



PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTI NORRIS/BYU

# Confident Pluralism: What It Is and How to Adopt It

Danielle Allen's Forum Address, March 26, 2024

By Seraphina Johnstun

Politics, especially in election years, can be intense and divisive. How can we navigate our political differences and collaborate with others while still feeling heard? Harvard professor Danielle Allen answered that very question in her forum address on March 26, 2024, by exhorting her audience to become “confident pluralists.”

A “confident pluralist” reflects deeply on personal moral values, and finds confidence in them. They also embrace that others have the very same right to form their own belief foundation. “That can seem counterintuitive,” Allen said, “but it means that one wants others also to be on their own journey about understanding what matters to them.”

Allen is no stranger to civics and political discourse—in fact, it runs in the family.

Her grandfather founded an NAACP chapter in Florida and her great-grandparents championed women’s suffrage. Her father was a Reagan Republican, and her aunt was a Peace and Freedom Party member. Both of them ran for office at the same time. Allen said those family dynamics influenced her passion for championing the idea of confident pluralism.

Allen then outlined five steps to becoming a confident pluralist.

Confident pluralists do the hard work of

***Build a foundation of personal values.***

determining what they care about. Allen emphasized that reflection on our values and how we should live needs to be a part of our

# FIVE STEPS TO BECOMING A CONFIDENT PLURALIST

---

- 1 Build a foundation of personal values.
- 2 Negotiate through institutions, not violence or disorder.
- 3 Embrace compromise.
- 4 Listen to others and repeat their viewpoints back to them.
- 5 Always protect human dignity, even in disagreement.

daily life, in order for us to engage with others to the best of our ability.

***Negotiate through institutions, not violence or disorder.***

Allen emphasized that nonviolence is critical in order to foster unity, noting that many violent protests across the country “[forget] that the project of free self-government requires seeing that institutions are the instruments that we use for negotiating our conflicts and differences.”

***Embrace compromise.***

Compromise is not relinquishing core principles. Judge Griffith’s remarks at the Durham Lecture reflect Allen’s sentiments: “The American Constitution is intended to create common ground.” The Founding Fathers compromised to create the ultimate national document for our new nation. But compromise is not relinquishing core principles—it is reaching common ground within those limits in order to foster unity and implement critical changes in our society. Allen went one step further, adding, “When making those compromises, a confident pluralist wants to make sure that everybody who might be affected by the decision has a voice in the process.”

***Listen to others and repeat their viewpoints back to them.***

A confident pluralist is an active listener and fair conversationalist. Before starting a discussion, ask the other person’s perspective, repeat back what they said, and ask if they feel like you understood. “The debate really shouldn’t get started,” Allen says, “until both sides can tell each other what they think each other thinks and have each side agree that, yes, you understood me correctly.” Understanding where the other person is coming from is essential to having an effective discussion.

---

## ***Always protect human dignity, even in disagreement.***

Allen recalls her father and aunt, and the year they ran against each other in an election. They had frequent debates at the dinner table in the months leading up to it, her father supporting right-wing politics, her aunt the left. Allen observed that despite their heated arguments, both of them had common ground: supporting and uplifting individuals, families, and communities. And never once did they ever make it about each other. “It was the ideas they were going at, not each other as human beings,” she said. “It was clear that they always had each other’s back, that they never broke the bonds of love. They held sacred the dignity of the human being in front of them.”

Allen also gave an example in her own professorial experience, receiving negative and offensive messages about her views from strangers. Instead of fighting fire with fire, Allen instead chooses to engage with them cordially. That decision yielded surprising but welcome results: “When I started responding to people that way, nine times out of 10 they turned back into their best selves.”

Allen’s message is clear: confident pluralism offers a middle ground emphasizing the right to fair and destigmatized discussion and, above all, the dignity of humanity. In a time of rampant disunity and discordant politics, its principles are more necessary now than ever.



PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTI NORRIS/BYU

### ***Danielle Allen***

Danielle Allen is the James Bran Conant University Professor at Harvard University in the Department of Government and Director of the Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation at Harvard Kennedy School’s Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. She studies political philosophy, ethics, and public policy, and is a seasoned nonprofit leader, democracy advocate, tech ethicist, distinguished author, and mother.

# DEPARTMENT STATS

# 2023

## Faculty Publications



- 36** articles published
- 2** books published
- 5** book chapters published

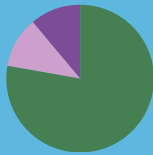
## New Political Science Professors

**3** new professors hired to the department



## Faculty and Student Presentations

**9** students presented at conferences outside of Provo, UT



- 7** at Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, IL
- 1** at Southern Political Science Association in St. Pete Beach, Florida
- 1** at Student Research Conference on the European Union in Los Angeles, CA

**103** students presented at BYU's Fulton Mentored Student Research Conference

## Visiting Scholars to the Department



**8** presented at Weekly Thursday Group Research Workshop

**37** attended CES conference sponsored by CSED and CES

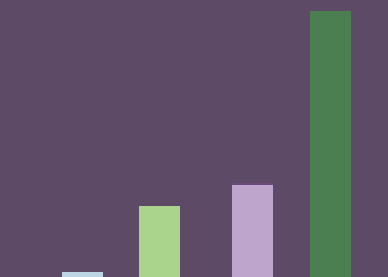
## Department Clubs

**TOCQUEVILLE SOCIETY:**  
**20** active members

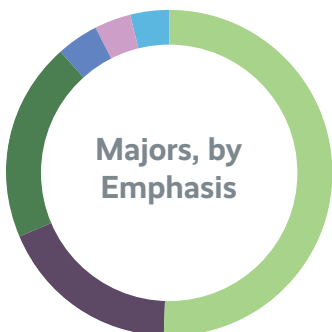
**COLLEGE REPUBLICANS:**  
**191** active members

**COLLEGE DEMOCRATS:**  
**250** active members

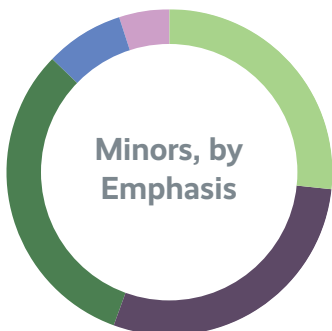
**POLITICAL AFFAIRS SOCIETY:**  
**701** active members



## Teaching



- 249 Political Science (no emphasis)
- 88 International Strategy & Diplomacy
- 97 Legal Studies
- 20 Political Strategy
- 17 Research & Analysis
- 19 Global Development

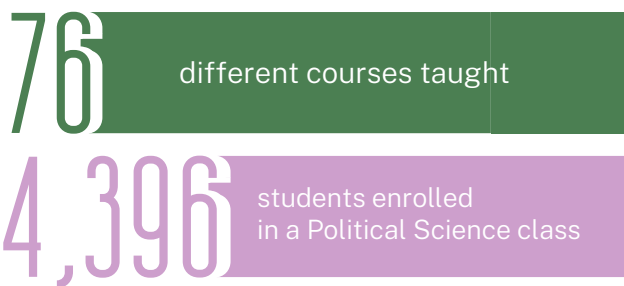


- 38 Political Science (no emphasis)
- 41 International Strategy & Diplomacy
- 45 Legal Studies
- 11 Political Strategy
- 7 Research & Analysis

### Faculty Breakdown



- 30 tenure track professors
- 6 adjunct professors
- 2 visiting professors



## Student Employment



152 research assistants



104 teaching assistants

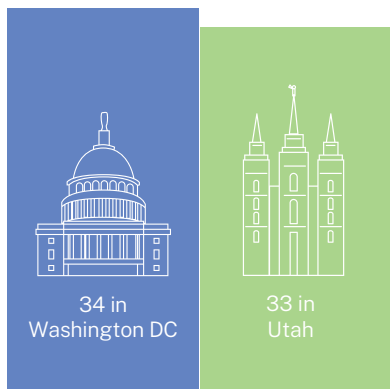


35 student assistants

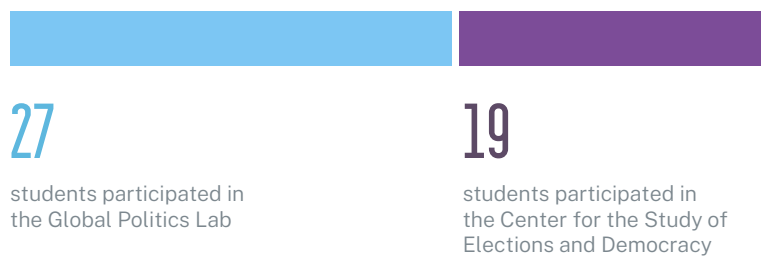


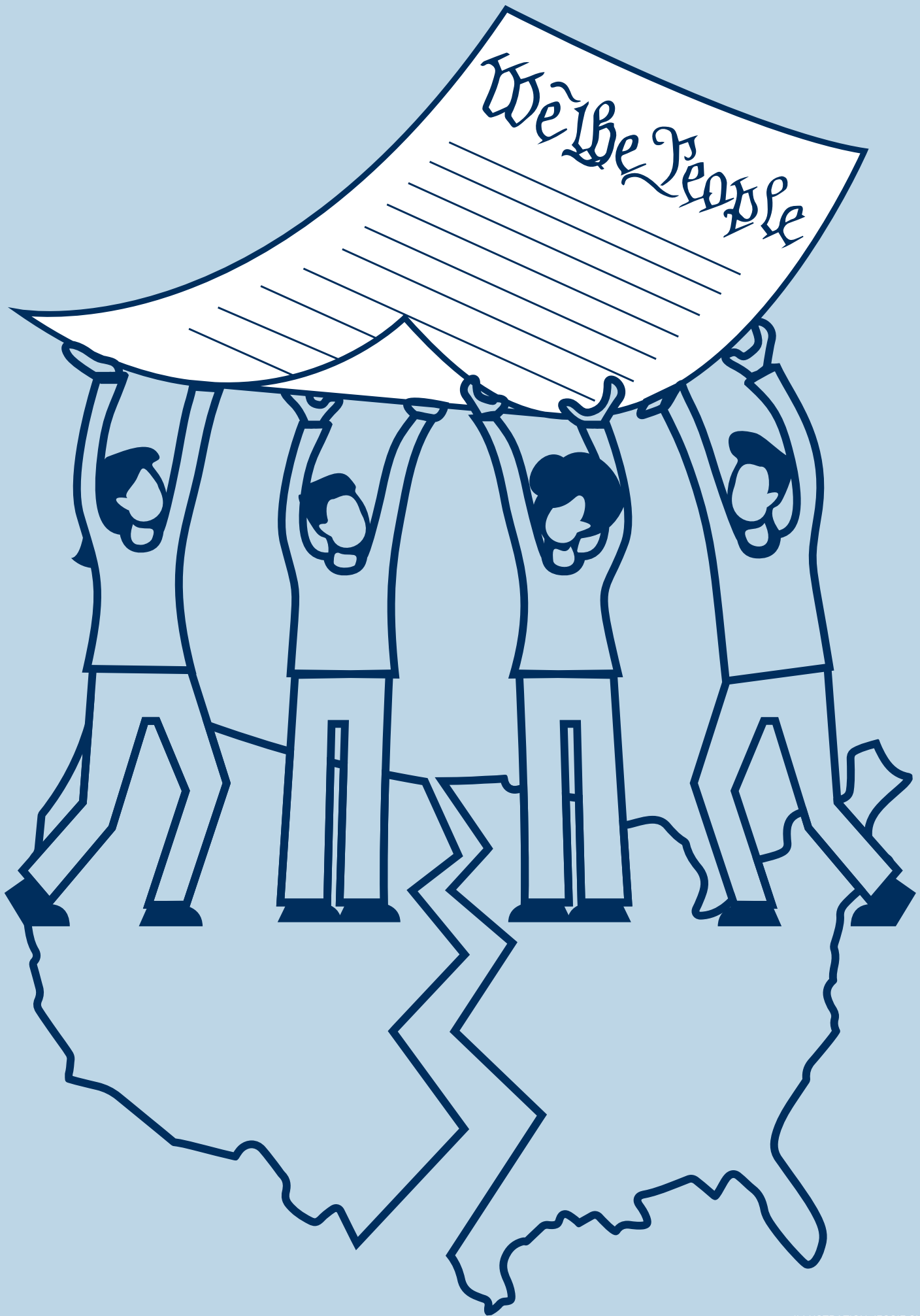
16 other employees

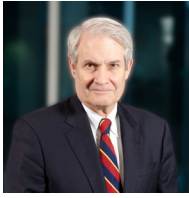
## Internships



## Students in Mentored Research Labs







### **Judge Thomas B. Griffith, speaker**

Thomas B. Griffith was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit by President George W. Bush in 2005. He retired from the D.C. Circuit in 2020 and is currently Special Counsel at the law firm of Hunton Andrews Kurth and a Fellow at the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University. In 2021 President Joe Biden appointed him to the Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court. He remains special counsel at the law firm of Hunton, Andrews, and Kurth, and a fellow at the Wheatley institution of Brigham Young University. Judge Griffith and his wife, Susan, are natives of the Washington, D.C., area.

# Supporting and Defending the Constitution in a Divided Nation



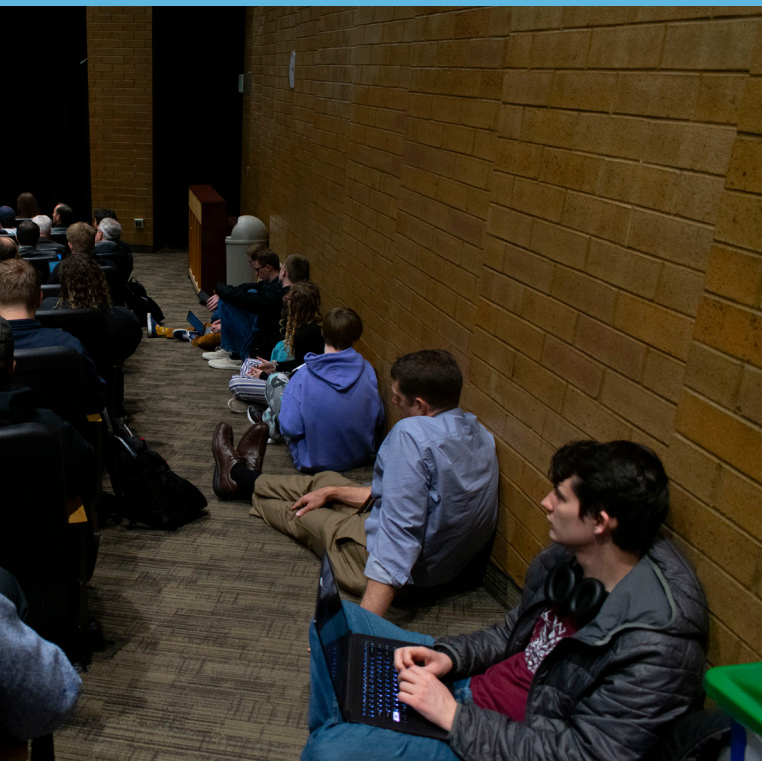
By Carlee Guenther Dynes and Seraphina Johnstun

**D**espite the serious topic of his lecture, “How to Support and Defend the Constitution in a Divided Nation,” Judge Thomas B. Griffith, the 2024 Durham Lecture Speaker, wore a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes as he addressed the packed auditorium in the Kimball Tower. Griffith, a former U.S. circuit judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and current lecturer at Harvard Law School, who has dedicated his professional life to political justice, spoke both firmly and passionately on the topic of civic dialogue. He argued that while there are many internal and external threats to the United States, including diplomatic relations with China and Russia, and attacks on freedom of speech, the most serious threat to the United States currently is “the toxicity of political divide.” Decreasing the existing toxic polarization and

paving the way for a more robust democracy is achievable, he believes by building trust in our democracy. We can do this if we focus on several key actions.

First, we can build trust in our democracy by pushing back “against the baseless claims that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. It was not [stolen], it was lost.” Judge Griffith did not speak long on this point. However, he, along with a group of other conservative judges, wrote an article titled “Lost, not stolen: the Conservative case that Biden won and Trump lost the 2020 election.”

Second, Griffith calls on us to exercise civic charity, which he defines as working together and compromising where necessary. “We support and defend the Constitution today when we exercise amity, mutual deference,



The turnout for Judge Griffith's lecture far exceeded expectations. Students filled every seat, wall, and aisle of the auditorium to hear his message. Photos: Seraphina Johnstun

concession, and yes, compromise for the sake of unity. ... The American Constitution is intended to create common ground.” Civic charity was necessary to create the constitution by those at the Philadelphia Convention in 1787, and it is needed now as much as ever to support and defend the constitution. We can exercise civic charity when we reach out in friendship to others who we may disagree with and work together to find compromise to achieve a common purpose.

**“As members of the church, we can make a difference in reducing affective polarization, and it is our duty and privilege to do so.”**

Third, Griffith calls on us to be disciples of Jesus Christ by lifting, building, encouraging, persuading, and inspiring others, especially through mutual respect and dignified dialogue. President Nelson said, “Brothers and sisters, we can literally change the world one person at a time and one interaction at a time by modeling how to manage honest differences of opinion with mutual respect and dignified dialogue.”

Echoing President Nelson, Judge Griffith calls us to be peacemakers. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are both uniquely positioned and uniquely called to participate in this work. Our baptismal covenants to “bear one another’s burdens” bind us to each other and give us a spiritual foundation for building strong communities. Fostering relationships where respectful civic conversations can thrive to bridge the toxic political divide is a natural extension of fulfilling our covenants to each other and to God. We can be a beacon of light as we model peaceful resolutions to complex issues by seeking to “moderate and to unify.”

Judge Griffith ends his prepared remarks by inviting us to get involved with organizations that are working to build bridges of understanding, like Braver Angels, and organization which Professor Kirk Hawkins works closely with, Interfaith America, or the Dignity Index. Other organization that are focused on building

bridges and improving civic discourse include Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG), and Living Room Conversations, both organizations with ties to Professor Lisa Argyle and several others in the Political Science department.



Photo by Seraphina Johnstun

Our work to improve civic dialogue will not be easy, but in the words of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, “few will have the greatness to bend history, but each of us can work to change a

## JUDGE GRIFFITH’S IMPACT

small portion of the events. ... It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and... those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Judge Griffith echoes this call, adding that as children of the same Heavenly Parents we can be united in our goal to help “all of their children be at one with them and at one with each other.” As he says, we should “make peace the driving force of [our] discipleship.”

Those who attended Griffith’s lecture connected with his call to church members. “I think [LDS church members] access to scripture and prophetic guidance [makes] us uniquely informed and obligated to address the division where we can,” Samuel Harvey, a junior majoring in Political Science from Sandy UT, said of Judge Griffith’s message. Although toxic polarization is the norm in politics, Samuel says “I’ve seen this done really well in my classes here at BYU. The nature of the political science major involves discussing ideologies, philosophies, and theories that are deeply controversial. Some of my professors have been really good at looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the material and without criticizing or promoting it beyond what is appropriate. This creates a climate where those in the class can disagree without feeling polarized.”

Judge Griffith calls on us to extend this climate outside of BYU classrooms by offering practical advice on how to do so. Emily de Schweinitz Taylor, currently a PhD student in the Psychology Department at BYU, was also heartened by Griffith’s emphasis on foundational skills of civic dialogue and having open conversations about difficult topics. Prior to starting her PhD, Emily worked both as a professional mediator and former assistant director of BYU Law’s Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution. “As someone who has dedicated her profession to teaching these skills, I appreciate him focusing on grassroots efforts to strengthen our democracy.”

Who most needs to hear Judge Griffith’s message? “Everyone,” said Lincoln Cothran, a junior majoring in English from American Fork, UT. “Everyone needs to understand that without critical thinking, without productive disagreements, without open-mindedness, not only will the Constitution fail, but humanity fails as well.” Melissa Inouye, quoted by Judge Griffith, writes, “We contain within our covenant community the power and tools to heal the whole world, if we only put our shoulders to the wheel.” As members of the Church, we can make a difference in reducing affective polarization, and it is our duty and privilege to do so.



Scan the QR code to read a full transcript of Judge Griffith’s remarks.



Taylor Swift, left, and Professor of Political Science Ryan Davis, below. Credit, from left: Paolo Villanueva and Bryan Barba Salazar.



# ENCHANTED TO TEACH YOU:

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF TAYLOR SWIFT

*by Abby Meyers, Seraphina Johnstun, and Carlee Guenther Dynes*

Taylor Swift has it all: perfect revenge songs for the scorned lover, indie tracks with soft lyrics for any rainy day, one of the most successful music tours of all time, and now, thanks to one professor at BYU, a philosophy class.

Ryan Davis, an avid Swiftie and Associate Professor of Political Science at BYU, decided to combine his love for both Taylor Swift and philosophy to create POLI 360: Ms. Americana: Taylor Swift, Ethics, and Political Society. 30 lucky students participated in the class this past semester.

Surprisingly, not all the participants were Swift fanatics. According to Julia Chatterley, a Political Science major from Colorado Springs, CO, the students in POLI 360 were divided into three groups: students who love Taylor Swift but are new to philosophy; students interested in political philosophy but who are not fans of Taylor

Swift; and a third group, the “philoswifties,” who are avid fans of Taylor Swift and find her work philosophically interesting. Julia, like Professor Ryan Davis, is part of the last group.

In April, Ryan Davis accompanied three students—coincidentally, one student from each of the three class factions—to present their class projects to a sister class at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. Julia represented the “philoswifties.” Emma Fox, a BYU English major, represented the Swiftie fans who are not students of philosophy. And Jake Andersen, a senior majoring in Political Science, represented the group of philosophy students with little interest in Taylor Swift. Jake reports that through this experience he was “enriched by the opportunity to engage with arguments” and further develop skills required to “present [an] argument and practice philosophical rhetoric and philosophical integrity.”

While Julia, Emma, and Jake had the unique opportunity to travel and present original research, all the students in Davis's class were given the chance to practice their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills throughout the semester. During a typical class, Professor Davis would present a few background ideas and lead the students through a discussion about how various philosophical ideas from classic texts apply to Swift's lyrics. Although the students varied widely in their exposure to both Taylor Swift and Philosophy, class discussions were lively and often involved passionate debates between the students and with Professor Davis.

Professor Davis's passion for philosophy extends beyond POLI 360. "He cares so much about what he's teaching and his students, he's so smart," Liesel Hansen, a senior in Political Science from Orem, Utah, said. "On a [Swiftie] scale of one to ten, I rate him a ten. He knows it all and he cares so much, the way he thinks about Taylor Swift songs is different from anyone else because of his background in philosophy. He just lights up." Davis's passion for Taylor Swift, her music, and philosophy is infectious. "Who doesn't love to hear someone talk about something they're passionate about? How can you come to this class and not just think that it's awesome because ... you can tell that he loves everything he's doing."

For students like Luz del Alba Rodriguez (Roddy), a junior from Herrera Dominican Republic, Davis's class has been a gateway to studying philosophy. Roddy, who is majoring in Psychology and minoring in Women's Studies, enrolled in the class with a love of Swift's music and without any previous exposure to philosophy. Roddy sees herself taking more philosophy classes in the future. Her experiences in Davis's Swift class have also stretched her intellectually, requiring her to further develop reading, writing, and critical thinking skills and making her a stronger student. Don't let the fun fool you, though – "This

was my hardest class this semester!" claims Liesel, "even though my mom thought it wasn't." Liesel, who doesn't consider herself a Swiftie, feels connecting political philosophy concepts to Swift's songs has made them more applicable to her life as a college student in her 20s.

Davis's class is an exceptional example of adapting traditional academic topics to reflect the expertise and interests of both our faculty and student population. Like most college campuses, BYU is full of Swifties. Julia Chatterley, in her role as Co-President for the BYU Political Affairs Society (PAS), helped organize the "Politics and Taylor Swift" night in February of this year. This year's event was attended by

approximately 60 students, and featured presentations from students, Professor Ryan Davis, Professor Gladriel Shobe from the J. Reuben Clark Law School, and Professor Lindsay Brainard from the University of Alabama, Birmingham. The annual "Politics and Taylor Swift" event is one of the best attended PAS events of the year. And while we may not immediately think of Taylor Swift as political, an Instagram Stories post by Swift in September 2023 led to the registration of 35,000 new voters.

Professor Davis hopes to continue teaching POLI 360: Ms. Americana: Taylor Swift, Ethics, and Political Society, introducing students to his unique approach of blending classic readings in philosophy with his love for Taylor Swift, making philosophy more accessible to BYU students like Emma, Roddy, and Liesel.



### POLITICS AND TAYLOR SWIFT ARE YOU READY FOR IT?

THRU 151 | FEBRUARY 15TH | 7 PM  
SPEAKERS: RYAN DAVIS AND LINDSAY BRAINARD  
COME FOR FOOD, GAMES, AND TO BE CROWNED BYU'S SWIFTIE!



*The annual "Politics and Taylor Swift" night is one of the best-attended PAS events of the year.*

MARY LOU FULTON

# Mentored Student Research Conference

Each Fall and Winter semester, hundreds of students in the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences collaborate with faculty and other students to research important topics. And each semester, they present their findings in the Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference. This conference displays their efforts to pursue truth as they work to solve complicated global issues [1].

Students learn collaboration skills by working with other students and faculty, and learn the hands-on process of research and presentation. This conference is an effective way for students to experience the research process and build the foundation for a meaningful career. Students can also receive cash prizes and grant funding to cover the cost of graduate school applications.

Nearly 300 students from various majors participated in this program in the Fall 2023 semester, competing in categories such as History; Belonging and Diversity; the School of Family Life; Sociology; Anthropology; and more [2]. Over a hundred Political Science students participated in this semester's conference.

The Political Science category saw some incredible submissions, listed on the right. The Political Science department is extremely proud of its students and the dedication they have to thoughtful research and changing the world. 🌍

## ENDNOTES

1. "Attending the Conference," *BYU College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences*. <https://fultonconference.byu.edu/attending-the-conference>
2. Britney Heimuli, "December 2023 Mary Lou Fulton Contest Winners," *BYU College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences*. <https://socialsciences.byu.edu/articles/december-2023-mary-lou-fulton-contest-winners>

To see more information about the Mary Lou Fulton Conference, visit the website of the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences at [socialsciences.byu.edu](https://socialsciences.byu.edu).

## FALL 2023 POLITICAL SCIENCE POSTER WINNERS

### 1ST PLACE

**Julia Chatterley, mentored by Jay Goodliffe**

*Civilian Violence and Support for Democracy*

### 2ND PLACE

**Grace Burns and Anna Nakaya, mentored by Adam Dynes**

*A Leaky Pipeline? Expressed vs Behavioral Progressive Ambition Among Local Officials*

### 3RD PLACE

**Elijah Swolgaard and Mark Ahrens, mentored by Quin Monson**

*Counsel or Commandment?: How the Church Influences Members' Voting Behavior in a Natural Experiment*

### 4TH PLACE

**Vanessa Tuttle, mentored by Doug Atkinson**

*When the Boys Leave: The Effects of Mass Conscription on Women's Political Participation*



Julia Chatterley won first place in the Political Science category with her presentation, "Civilian Violence and Support for Democracy." Featured, from left: BYU President Shane Reese, Julia Chatterley, Jay Goodliffe, and Dean Laura Padilla-Walker.



Each semester, the Wilkinson Center Ballroom is converted to a space celebrating student research and learning.  
Photo credit: BYU F&S Creative Computing Services

# CSED Highlight

By Carlee Guenther Dynes

**W**hat do thousands of political science research articles studying the U.S. have in common? All use data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES), the largest ongoing public opinion survey in America. The CES represents the collaborative efforts between more than 60 university teams and collects data from approximately 60,000 survey respondents each year.

After 20 years, founder Dr. Stephen Ansolabehere, Frank G. Thompson Professor of Government at Harvard University, and other members from Tufts University and YouGov, expanded the leadership team to include three BYU Political Science faculty members as well as one additional member from Yale University. All three BYU faculty members—Jeremy Pope, the new CES co-Principal Investigator; and Michael Barber and Lisa Argyle, both new associate Co-Principal Investigators for CES—are part of BYU's Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED).

CSED, founded in 1998, is a non-partisan academic research center focused on publishing high quality academic research on American democracy. Since 2009, CSED and CES have co-hosted a bi-annual

post-survey conference held at Sundance, which brings together between 30 and 40 top scholars studying American politics.

While BYU has been an important part of the CES for over a decade, accepting leadership roles in the CES provides faculty and students a unique opportunity to contribute to a large and influential project. As Co-Principal Investigators, Professors Argyle, Barber, and Pope are responsible for planning the survey each year, managing the 60+ participating university and government research teams, and maintaining hundreds of thousands of collected survey responses.

In keeping with BYU's focus on undergraduate teaching and learning experiences, exposing students to the entirety of the research process is a priority, and our increased involvement with the CES allows even greater student access than in the past. Unlike most other universities, our department does not have a graduate program, so BYU undergraduate students have the unique opportunity to work closely with the CES.

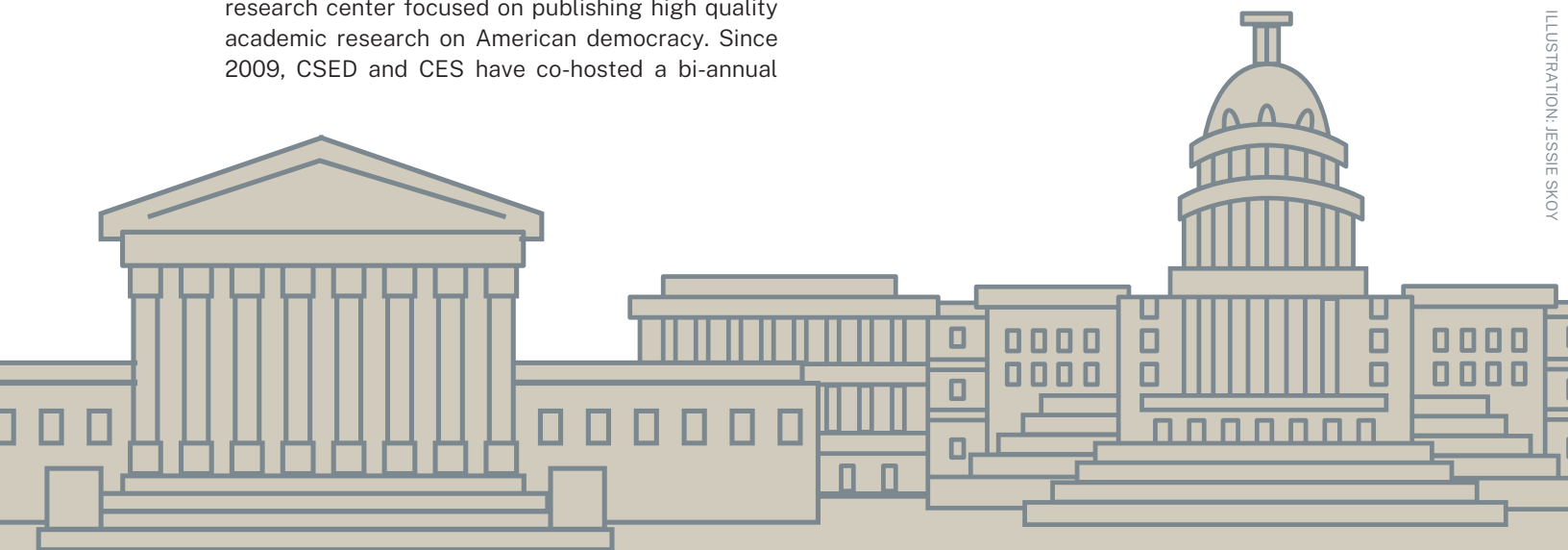


ILLUSTRATION: JESSIE SKOY

## Student Involvement

Student involvement in CES takes several forms. First and foremost, students can participate as research assistants to CES Co-Principle Investigators Argyle, Barber, and Pope. In addition to CSED's involvement with the CES, faculty are involved with other major survey projects. These include the American Family Survey since 2015, with Professors Christopher Karpowitz and Jeremy Pope as Principal Investigators, and the American Municipal Officials Survey since 2016 with Professor Adam Dynes as director. Student research assistants perform a variety of tasks, sometimes leading to co-authorship.

In addition to paid research with professors, students engage in mentored research through the CSED lab. Instituted in 2005 to further engage and train students in research, every academic year, approximately a dozen of our top political science majors work in teams conducting original, high-caliber research to be presented to faculty and peers.

Undergraduate CSED fellows, like Ashlan Gruwell (Political Science BA 2023), have presented their research at every Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Student Research Conference hosted by the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences and regularly present at the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) or other major conferences. After graduation, many former CSED student fellows have entered prestigious graduate programs or work for major survey and public policy organizations, and their involvement with CSED has well prepared them to be successful.

For Kaleigh Fox (Political Science BA 2016), "CSED was one of the greatest honors I had during my college career. I loved being able to be a part of the process helping professors and students alike in crafting better research."

## Other CSED Benefits

Becoming a skilled researcher is about more than just writing papers, and in CSED, students are given front-row seats to the entire research process, including how to accept and incorporate feedback to strengthen their projects. David Lassen (Political Science BA 2010), who complete a PhD in American Politics at University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2019, found that "in a variety of ways, CSED offers a unique opportunity to go beyond coursework and see what graduate work and life are like."

Training students to conduct high quality research is certainly one central aim of CSED. However, it is not the only positive outcome. Working closely with their mentors allows students to build deep relationships with CSED faculty and with each other. Reflecting on his experiences as a CSED fellow, Matthew Frei (Political Science BA 2012) considers "the CSED students and faculty some of my closest friends from BYU" and believes he "will enjoy staying in contact with them as their lives and careers move forward."

For faculty, building relationships with students is also a strength of CSED. Professor Michael Barber, CSED Director, believes "as a faculty member, CSED is a great opportunity to work closely with some of our best students. We have the unique opportunity to work together in a way that promotes true collaboration and fosters friendships and relationships that last well beyond graduation."





# Scholarships and Awards

Students' achievements are a celebration of hard work, dedication, and persuasive writing. Many Political Science students received awards this year, varying from the Kevin G. Jones Writing Award, where students publish their work in Sigma magazine, to scholarship awards that help fund their work, such as the Noel and Sydney Reynolds Scholarship. Students can also graduate with departmental distinction, where the college acknowledges outstanding academic records and participation in Political Science programs and opportunities.



Read the winning Sigma Award articles and others here.

## STAN TAYLOR ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

- |                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Rebecca Bankhead | 4. Emma Conde   |
| 2. Joshua Bishop    | 5. Shari Franke |
| 3. Dallin Bundy     | 6. Mary Singer  |

## G. KEVIN JONES SCHOLARSHIP

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 7. Shayla Hendricks   | 11. Parker Davis   |
| 8. Elizabeth Mitchell | 12. Anne Rasband   |
| 9. Abby Child         | 13. Tyler Thornton |
| 10. Emily Houtz       |                    |

## NOEL AND SYDNEY REYNOLDS SCHOLARSHIP

- |                   |                        |                    |
|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 14. Arturo Aguero | 18. Samuel Harvey      | 22. Rozlynn NeVile |
| 15. Esme Bolander | 19. James Haymore      | 23. Mark Norton    |
| 16. Garrett Brown | 20. Grant (David) Lyon | 24. Joe Peterson   |
| 17. Andrea Clark  | 21. Owen McKay         | 25. Braden Thomas  |

## GRADUATING WITH DEPARTMENTAL DISTINCTION

For students who excelled in academic, extracurricular, or other departmental pursuits.

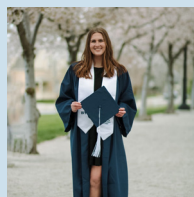
- |                     |                    |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 26. Jake Andersen   | 31. Eliana Harmer  | 36. Jenny Portillo |
| 27. Tannah Carter   | 32. Marshall Job   | 37. Caleb Rigger   |
| 28. Ali Critchfield | 33. Brinley Koenig | 38. Bryson Taylor  |
| 29. Isabella Felin  | 34. Abigail McEuen | 39. Lorin Utsch    |
| 30. John Hall       | 35. Mariah Nuttall |                    |

## SIGMA WRITING AWARDS

All winning papers, along with several others, are published in the 2024 Edition of Sigma. Scan the QR Code at the bottom of the page to read these and other student research articles.

### RECIPIENTS

40. First Place: Grace Burns, "Experiment Evidence on Leadership Experience and Women's Political Participants in Malaysia"
41. Second Place: Mikayla Cheng, "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Chinese Digital Yuan"
42. Third Place: Tannah Carter, "The United Kingdom and Brexit: A Case Study in Affective Polarization"



Photos, from left to right: Grace Burns, Mikayla Chenn, Tannah Carter.

# ACADEMIC HONORS



## Valedictorian

**Julia Chatterley**

Political Science Major



Often, we can see changes in cultures in the common themes of our movies and media. Our post-Covid preoccupation with the multi-verse and trying to evaluate a world in which we have seemingly too much agency and too many consequences, is in fact, the fundamental theory of causal inference. As we cannot see the world and life we would have led if one thing were changed and all other decisions were held constant, we struggle to see how the timeline we are on led to the outcome we are living. And if being a political science major has taught me one thing, it is how to try to deal with the fundamental problem of causal inference.

So, in trying to figure out how the political science department has impacted my life, I did what any good political science student would do. I attempted to process trace my BYU experience, looking for some critical juncture in which my path was fundamentally altered. I looked for possible random instrumental variables that only reflected the outcome of my life through the independent variables like random roommate assignment or POLI 328 lab enrollment. I also considered the fact that I have a twin which makes me ideal for some experimentalists to determine causality. What is the size, direction, and significance of the effect of my political science career at BYU? What is the key mechanism that explains this relationship?

Well, the thing I found most consistent in my reflection on my time at BYU and in the political science department is the extraordinary guidance, persistence, and aid from the people involved in the program. I've been so blessed to have gone on study abroad with Doctors Hawkins, Gubler, Romney, and McGuire and to do research with Doctors Goodliffe and Magleby. Beyond that, what I have been most grateful for and found to be most life-altering is the confidence and identity I gained through the close of community in the political science department. In ranking my greatest accomplishments in the department, at number one might be my Harry Potter debate victory over Doctor Davis (or at least I say it was a victory) followed by Doctor McGuire telling me that I was really good at cutting pumpkin pie evenly. It's small moments like these

where I felt encouraged to not only pursue research passions and discover who I wanted to become but also build a community with peers and faculty in which I felt safe enough to be a little bit more outlandish and laugh a little more loudly.

I can't control most of the events that happen in my life. The only thing I can control is the story I choose to tell by looking at these sequences of events. And I am who I am not because I chose one branch in the timeline over the other but rather because of my interactions during my time here. As a political science major, the thing I feel like I am constantly getting taught is that as a social science, we care about how people behave. But not just how people behave individually but how they build institutions, systems, parties, and group consciousness. We are who we are because of the societies and communities we've built.

As I reach graduation and, like our broader political society, worry about the life I could be leading instead, the message of both the multi-verse themed movies and media we consume, and causal inference is that what really matters are relationships and community. Beyond that, the decisions often wash out in the end, and the thing I am left with is not any individual grade, paper, or achievement, but the people students are allowed to become together through this carefully catered environment.

I've had the time of my life finding insignificant effects with all of you. But there has really been nothing insignificant about my time here.

*Julia Chatterley, our 2024 Valedictorian, graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in political science and minors in legal studies and statistics. At BYU Julia was 2023-2024 co-president of the Political Affairs Society, Students for International Development President, publisher of the Political Review, editor for Sigma, and a student fellow for the Global Politics Lab. After graduation, Julia plans to pursue graduate work in comparative politics.*



## Anna Nakaya

Political Science Major

In 2019 I became a Political Science major and ever since I have hoped for an opportunity to express my thoughts on Political Science and especially Political Science at BYU. Unlike when I was originally a communications major, as a Political Science major,

there are two questions you prepare to answer any time anyone asks you what your major is. The first question is “what even is Political Science?” and the second is “what are you going to DO with that?” I’d like to answer these two questions in the truest way I can.

### 1. What even is Political Science?

Many automatically assume Political Science is “having and expressing opinions about the American political climate.” The truth is people think the operative word in Political Science is political, when really the operative word is science. Political Science is the scientific study of politics, which refers to systems of governance, and power. The BYU undergraduate catalogue introduces the major this way: “Political Science involves a wide range of theoretical, empirical, and moral inquiry into the fundamentals of governance, with diverse perspectives about the nature, uses, and abuses of power... Politics and government are central to the human condition, involving fundamental collective choices about our local, national, and global communities.”

Political Science is not the expression of political opinion, it is the scientific study of power and governance in the human experience. Political Science differs from other important social sciences because it specializes in power and power dynamics. The important and distinguishing factor of Political Science is that it always seeks to understand the economy of power. Political Science is an important social science because, as the catalogue outlines, politics lays out our highest aspirations and basest impulses as humans within communities at all levels. Understanding these patterns and recognizing abuses in power allows us to better understand, and hopefully improve, the human experience of current and future generations.

This definition of what Political Science is valuable to understand when seeking to answer the second, arguably more common and more frustrating question:

### 2. “What are you going to do with that?”

People love to ask this question because, unlike Nursing or Cyber Security, there isn’t an obvious career path when you tell them you study Political Science. They take this to mean there is no career path in which Political Science majors can be successful. On the contrary, Political Science majors, especially those coming out of BYU, are uniquely equipped to be successful in basically any career path in which they may be interested. The Political Science curriculum at BYU is wide reaching in its ability to help students develop high levels of critical thinking and data literacy, not to mention become experts in writing. This makes Political Science students appealing candidates in a wide range of career paths, including those directly involved with politics or even in paths that may not seem political at all. Political Science students become politicians, lawyers, and professors, it’s true, but they also become data scientists, analysts, managers, parents, journalists, and more.

Perhaps more important than what path they may choose though, Political Science students are uniquely equipped to recognize, analyze, and in many cases alter systems of power abuse that they encounter in all walks of life, whether that’s family, career, religion, or other community. This makes Political Science majors a valuable asset to any organization or community of which they may be a part. They analyze situations and make real change happen; we are a powerful force. When people ask what you are going to do with your Political Science degree, the real answer is “be a change maker.”

To the professors, donors, and other faculty that make this department thrive, thank you for your work. This major is important and the work you do is so valuable. I want to especially call out Krista Mortensen for making the department run so smoothly. I would also love to thank the professors who have taken time to be mentors to me and help me realize that my full potential by name, but it would take a long time, as most of them are here in this room. I want to thank my friends. I am so grateful for the lasting relationships I’ve made in this major.

To continuing students in Political Science, recognize that this is a major to be proud of, and take advantage of the amazing resources at your disposal here. To the students who are graduating, go be changemakers! We have the skills, and hopefully, we won’t have to answer questions like “what’s your major?” anymore.

*Anna Nakaya, who is from the Dallas/Fort Worth area of TX, will graduate in August with a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and a minor in philosophy. While at BYU, Anna was a student fellow in both the Global Politics Lab and the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, and lead editor for Sigma. After graduation, Anna hopes to pursue graduate work in Political Science.*

# SALUTATORIAN



## Megan Baird

Political Science Major

Growing up in the DC area made me realize at a young age that I was interested in politics, so the first BYU class I signed up for was comparative politics. I took that class with Wade Jacoby. His class converted me to this subject. Even in a massive lecture hall,

Professor Jacoby made me feel seen and important. I am so grateful for the impact he had on me.

Although I haven't taken classes from every professor, I've had the opportunity to get to know many of you through the clubs I've been part of. I'm not sure that as professors you realize the profound impact you have on your students. Yes, we're grateful for the things we learned, but you give us more than just an education: you give us passion. In my experience, passion is an incredibly underrated feeling. It's the big "WHY" that underwrites our decisions in life, it's instrumental to our goals.

*Megan Baird grew up in the DC area. She graduated Cum Laude, with a bachelor's degree in political science, with an emphasis in global development. Megan also minored in both global women's studies and art history & cultural studies. While at BYU Megan was co-president of the Political Affairs Society, publisher and editor of Political Review, president of the Women in Politics club, and a student fellow for the Global Politics Lab. After graduation, Megan plans to work in the field of international development.*

Passion drives our purpose. It's probably the most sustainable gift there is, because each of you have imparted a share of your passion for political science to me and to each student you have taught.

I am the sum of many parts from each of you - Dr. McGuire and Dr. Preece's passion for gender studies, Dr. Gubler's for political psychology, Darren Hawkin's for democracy and against acai bowls, and of course, Dr. Davis's for Taylor Swift.

Of all the moments in my political science career, it's the community that remains the most constant theme through all of it. The greatest political science lesson I have learned is that collective action will always beat out self-interest. To me, the most meaningful moments of my last four and a half (but technically five years) are not just lessons from class. It's the moments I've shared with many of you. Although it's painful, my personal favorite philosopher reminds me that there's good in goodbye. As I go off into the world, please know I look back longingly at the moments we shared.

# SALUTATORIAN



## Amon O'Connell

Political Science Major

As a recent graduate I have been thinking a lot about what I've learned during my time at BYU as a political science major. Political Science has helped me acquire what Professor Stiles likes to call "human skills." In no particular order, here

is a list of a few of those skills: emotional intelligence; how to be a good human; research skills; how to work in a group; persuasive writing; critical thinking; how to help other students be successful, as learned in my TA work for professors Adam Dynes and Ryan Davis; how to think for myself in research.

*Amon O'Connell grew up in the Midwest and recently graduated Summa Cum Laude from BYU with a bachelor's degree in political science, legal studies emphasis. He will be attending the University of Minnesota law school in Fall 2024.*

As a Political Science student at BYU, I had many opportunities to develop these skills, including researching with Professors Adam Dynes and Ryan Davis, presenting twice at the Fulton Conference, and participating in Washington Seminar as an intern with the Office of Congressman John Curtis. Outside of the college classroom, for example in my work as an immigration consultant for a local English Language school helping Venezuelan immigrants seeking asylum status, I had experiences that reenforced the skills I acquired while studying. What I've learned from BYU will benefit me as I continue my education at the University of Minnesota law school, in my future legal career, and in my personal life.

Women in Politics Women in Politics

# GALENTINE'S



**20 FEBRUARY B003 JFSB 6:30-7:30PM**

Popcorn, movies, blankets, and bachelorette parties. What's not to love?

HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CAREER TRAJECTORY? NEED INSPIRATION? JOIN US!

## Women in Politics Panel

### Academics, Attorneys, & Staffers

APRIL 2ND  
B003 JFSB  
6:30-7:30PM

## OUR PANELISTS



**Kathryn Dallin**  
Former Staffer & Current Candidate for Utah's 3rd Congressional District

**Dr. Lisa Argyle**  
Professor of American Politics at BYU

**Aspen Jensen, JD**  
Attorney and Chairwoman of the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake

APRIL 2 | B003 JFSB | 6:30-7:30 PM

# WOMEN IN POLITICS

## WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

Come learn about women in politics and Vanessa Tuttle's field study in Malaysia! Pizza and Odneh-Odneh will be provided.

6-7:30 pm | January 31, 2024

B003 JFSB



BYU Women in Politics

The Women in Politics club is a nonpartisan place for women interested in politics and government.[1] The club aims to not only connect with other students, but with professors, alumni, and political professionals. WIP President McKenna Matheson explains:

"Last Winter, the Women in Politics club hosted a panel discussion and networking night, where we invited Kathryn Dahlin (candidate for Congress), Dr. Lisa Argyle (BYU Political Science Professor), and Aspen Jensen (attorney) to answer questions that our club members had about deciding on a career and navigating gender bias within the political sphere. We celebrated Galentine's day with good food and the Taylor Swift Eras Tour movie. Our goal is to help female students in political science expand their social network, learn about different career opportunities, and navigate gender bias in politics."

President: McKenna Matheson (kendie25@byu.edu)  
Faculty Advisors: Liz McGuire (liz\_mcguire@byu.edu) and Ryan Davis (rwdavis@byu.edu)

ENDNOTES

1. <https://politicalscience.byu.edu/women-in-politics>

# KELLY PATTERSON

## PROFESSOR OF THE YEAR 2023-24



By Carlee Guenther Dynes

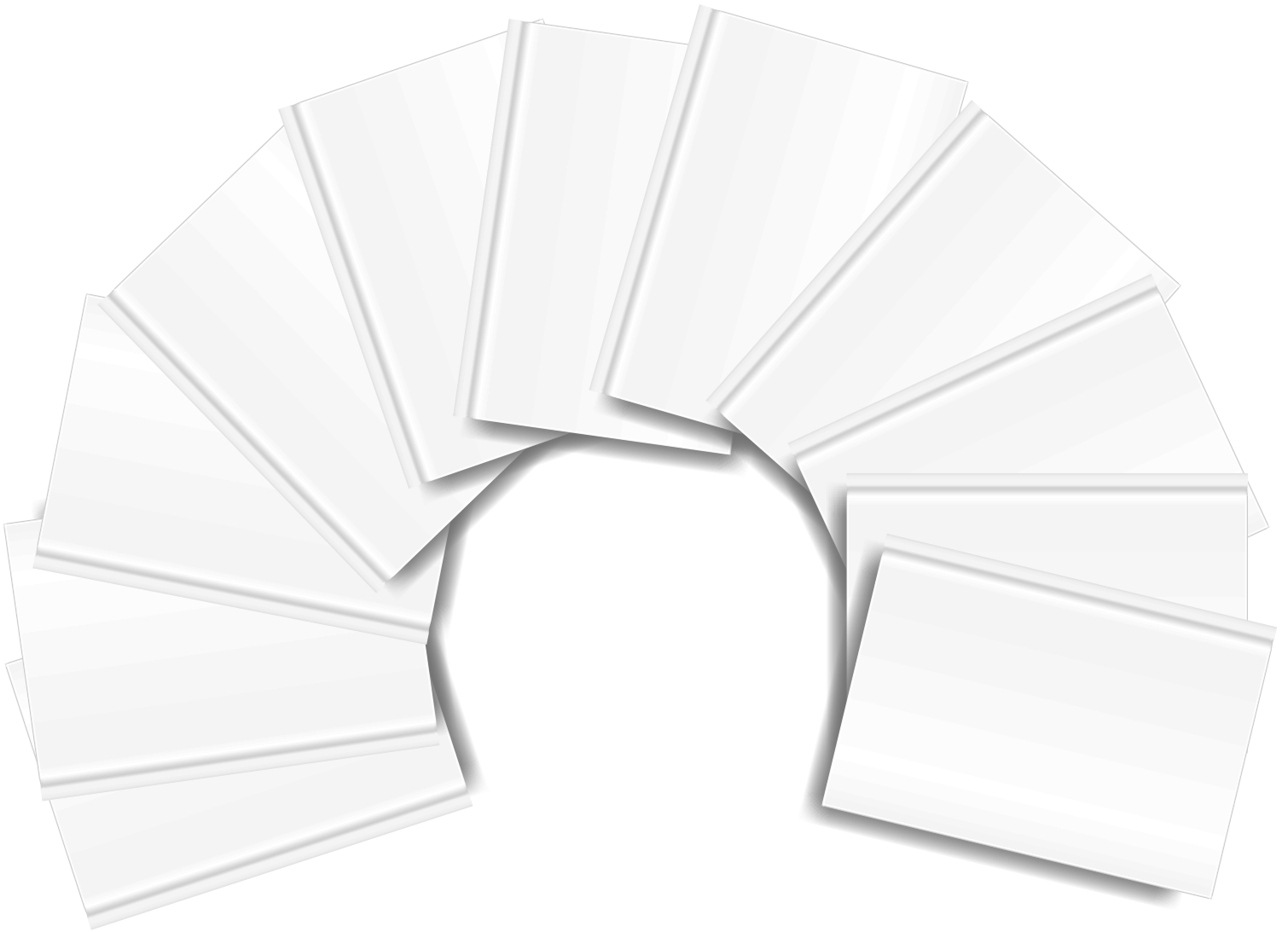
Every year Political Science students cast a vote for Professor of the Year, and this year's winner is Professor Kelly Patterson. Professor Patterson, who has worked at in the Department of Political Science at BYU since 1993, teaches several courses on American politics, including POLI 210: Principles of American Politics and POLI 461: The Federalist Papers. In addition, Dr. Patterson teaches POLI 465: Philosophy of Social Science. Many students outside the department are also fortunate to take American Heritage classes from Professor Patterson, where he team teaches with Professor Karpowitz. Professor Patterson has served as the Political Science department chair, associate dean for the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences, and director for the BYU Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED).

While his leadership roles in the department and college have benefited the students indirectly, the year, students nominated Professor Patterson because he is “engaging,” “energetic,” and

“passionate about the subjects he teaches.” Although he teaches classes covering complex subject matter, one student identified him as “the master of teaching engaging lectures and has a great balance of difficulty and understanding.”

In addition to his skill as a lecturer and teacher, students praise him because he is “kind,” “caring,” and “gives individual attention to his students [and] wants what is best for them.” Professor Patterson “always uplifts his students and the students he employs. You can tell he wants you to succeed, and he will always help you reach those goals!”

While it may be hard to summarize all the qualities that make Professor Patterson the students' choice for “Professor of the Year,” one student did it well by saying that “he is the G.O.A.T. (greatest of all time).” We could not agree more! Congratulations Professor Kelly Patterson on receiving the 2023-2024 Political Science Professor of the Year.



# **Faculty Publications**

**JULY-DECEMBER 2023**

Can AI make online political discussions more productive? Political discussions are crucial for democracy, and when people disagree or argue, it can be difficult for different groups to work together to solve important issues. Many of these discussions happen online and this has increased misunderstanding and conflict between individuals with differing ideas. Experts and community organizations promote strategies that make these discussions more positive, but their impact is limited, especially for online interactions. The study shows how large language models can improve online debates about tough topics. Using AI, they can give helpful evidence-based suggestions in real-time to make people feel more understood, improving the quality and tone of the conversations. They show that using AI can encourage conversations about divisive topics without changing the content of the conversations or people's policy attitudes.

### Leveraging AI for Democratic Discourse: Chat Interventions Can Improve Online Political Conversations at Scale

**Lisa Argyle**, Christopher Bail, **Ethan Busby**, **Joshua Gubler**, Thomas Howe, Christopher Rytting, Taylor Sorensen, and David Wingate

*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), 2023*

### Perceived Gender and Political Persuasion: A Social Media Field Experiment During the 2020 US Democratic Presidential Primary Election

Aidan Combs, Graham Tierney, Fatima Alqabandi, **Lisa Argyle**, et al.

*Scientific Reports, 2023*

Women have less influence than men in a variety of settings. Does this result from stereotypes that depict women as less capable, or biased interpretations of gender differences in behavior? To investigate this, Dr. Argyle and her colleagues carried out an experiment where the gender of avatars on a social media platform discussing the 2020 Primary Election was manipulated without participants knowing. They discovered that if a man was mistaken for a woman, it decreased his influence. However, if a woman was mistaken for a man, it didn't increase her influence. The study suggests that men are more resistant to influence, and the type of words associated with each gender also plays a role in these results. These findings challenge the idea that women must act more like men to combat gender bias. Instead, it highlights the need to focus on the behaviors of both men and women to bridge the influence gap.

How well do secrecy and covertness function as signals in foreign policy? At the international level, covert operations are employed to achieve strategic objectives without risking escalation or openly violating international law. Domestically, secrecy is seen as a way to pacify domestic audiences, which are typically viewed as obstacles to the conduct of covert foreign policy. By analyzing archival material from the Eisenhower Administration's 1954 intervention in Guatemala (codenamed Operation PBSUCCESS), Dr. Atkinson and co-authors highlight the role of "selective disclosures" of information regarding covert operations. He finds that instead of maintaining complete secrecy, the executive branch used selective disclosures to pacify hawkish domestic constituencies that might otherwise have hindered the covert operation. This article makes two key contributions. Theoretically, it underscores the importance of selective disclosures in the conduct of covert foreign policy. Empirically, it analyzes the contacts and communication between the Executive branch and Congress in the lead-up to the intervention in Guatemala.

### Secrecy and the Politics of Selective Disclosures: The US Government's Intervention in Guatemala

Luca Trenta, Kevin T. Fahey, **Douglas B. Atkinson**

*Intelligence and National Security, 2023*

## Does Issue Importance Attenuate Partisan Cue-Taking?

Michael Barber, Jeremy C. Pope

*Political Science and Research Methods, 2023*

How much influence do political parties through the cues and signals of party leaders have on their supporters? Recent research suggests that these cues can be powerful given the strong group identity associated with party affiliation; however, this study tests the limits of such partisan cues. Utilizing a unique two-wave panel survey, Dr. Barber and Dr. Pope find that the effect of party cues is moderated by how important an individual deems a particular issue - the more important they consider an issue, the less likely party cues are to shift their position, especially when the cue contradicts ideological norms typically aligned with their party. The results demonstrate that while party loyalty holds sway, individuals' own strongly held positions on issues they prioritize can prove resilient against partisan cues that conflict with those stances. Thus, party influence has boundaries when it comes to deeply important issues for voters.

In his book "Why It's OK to Own a Gun" Dr. Davis explores the right to self-defense, and delves deeper into the fundamental meaning of gun ownership as an individual right in American life. He discusses the grounds of political rights of gun ownership and connects the debate over guns with the sociology of gun ownership. For readers unfamiliar with gun ownership, Dr. Davis describes its worthwhile features. The empirical and normative aspects of the gun debate are considered in context of state power.

## Why It's OK to Own a Gun

Ryan W. Davis

*Taylor and Francis, 2023*

## Tastiness of Meat and Plant Protein Foods Are Associated with Political Partisanship and May Be Influenced by Partisan Messaging

Jonathan C. Kershaw, Alissa A. Nolden, Adam R. Brown, Tara Hites, Laura K. Jefferies

*Food Quality and Preference, 2023*

Does your political party affiliation have an impact on your preference for meat or plant-based diets? Dr. Brown and his colleagues think so. Taste preferences are often cited as a barrier to adopting plant-based diets. Many personal factors influencing plant-based food acceptance are linked to political ideologies, though the role of political affiliation is understudied. To test how political ideology impacts acceptance of plant-based foods, they designed two consumer studies that assess differences in meat and plant-based food liking and intentions between political parties and test the effect of partisan endorsements of plant-based recommendations on expected and experienced taste. Democrats reported higher liking and intended consumption of plant proteins, while Republicans favored meat more. Partisan endorsements had limited impact on taste perceptions, but decreased liking of meat when matching one's affiliation. Factors like moral values, meat attachment, and norms differed across parties and correlated with taste evaluations.

How much influence does Russia have on areas that are highly dependent on their trade goods? The “commercial peace” hypothesis suggests trade deters war by increasing its costs, but studies often assume states have unified trade interests. However, trade creates economic winners and losers within countries. Examining Ukrainian public opinion during the 2014-2015 Russia conflict, Dr. Beesley and Dr. Cooper find citizens in provinces highly dependent on exports to Russia were less likely to support fighting Russia and more willing to accept costly compromises to end hostilities. Across two separate surveys, greater regional reliance on Russian export markets corresponds with less appetite for escalating the conflict, demonstrating how perceived trade costs can shape subnational attitudes toward war.

### Micro-Foundations of the Commercial Peace: The Effect of Net Exports on Ukrainian Attitudes Towards War with Russia

Celeste Beesley, Scott Cooper

*Journal of Peace Research, 2023*

### Gaslighting Citizens

Ryan W. Davis, Eric Beerholm

*American Journal of Political Science, 2023*

Gaslighting manipulates victims into doubting their own perception of reality and evidence. Dr. Davis argues in this article that political gaslighting, which leads citizens to hold beliefs disconnected from available evidence, threatens democratic politics. However, holding “audacious beliefs” that go beyond current evidence can drive democratic movements for social change. This creates a dilemma for citizens -being open to bold ideas that initially lack full evidence but are needed to mobilize democratic causes, while guarding against gaslighting attempts to distort reality. Citizens must remain receptive to the passionate advocacy central to democratic politics, but also vigilant against efforts to undermine their grasp on truth and evidence.

When do negotiations occur in civil war and how does military intervention alter this process? The existing literature on how negotiation begin during conflicts overlooks the role of third-party state interventions prior to negotiations. Dr. Dudley argues that military intervention impacts negotiation onset by adjusting barriers through three pathways: likelihood of military victory, risk of appearing weak through negotiations, and presence of additional veto players. Examining African civil wars using statistical models, Dr. Dudley finds interventions supporting rebels, those driven by independent interests, and asymmetric interventions increase the likelihood of negotiations occurring. In addition, the expectation of potential intervention alone can shape conflict parties’ behavior and motivation to negotiate by altering perceived barriers. Both actual interventions and expectations of intervention impact the calculations regarding prospects for victory, political risks, and additional parties involved.

### Turning the Tables: Military Intervention and the Onset of Negotiations in Civil War

Rebecca Dudley

*Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2023*

## The Moral Status of Beneficence

Ryan W. Davis

*Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy, 2023*

What do we owe distant strangers? Effective altruists, as well as philosophers, have offered differing views. One demanding view holds that we have strong moral requirements to provide aid, even if fulfilling these requirements undermines other values in living our own lives. A more moderate perspective argues that we have a duty to provide aid, but this obligation is limited to allow pursuing our own values and life goals. Dr. Davis proposes a third, minimalist answer – that we have no non-voluntary obligations to contribute to aid efforts. He argues that the minimalist view warrants greater consideration and may align with certain descriptions of effective altruism.

Why do some countries have more protected land than others? The protection of a portion of a country's land is vital for sustainable economic growth and biodiversity, though it also costly to do so. Dr. Hawkins and Dr. Goodliffe argue that states exist internationally in dependent trade networks with each other and that those networks influence a state's environmental choices. They find strong evidence that increases in protected lands among trade partners and international organization partners increase a given state's protected lands. These effects are larger than other domestic variables like democracy. Their work adds to our understanding of how international relationships can impact domestic environmental policies.

## “Leave It as It Is”: International Network Effects on Protected Lands

Darren Hawkins, Jay Goodliffe

*International Interactions, 2023*

## Personality Traits and Approaches to Political Representation and Responsiveness: An Experiment in Local Government

Adam M. Dynes, Hans J.G. Hassell, Matthew R. Miles

*Political Behavior, 2023*

Understanding how elected officials represent their constituents and what factors influence their representational style is central to understanding democracy. In this paper, Dr. Dynes and his co-authors focus specifically on whether politicians' personality traits correlate with their approach to representation. To do so, they surveyed a sample of US municipal officials to measure their scores on the so-called Big Five personality traits, which are openness to experiences, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. They find that public officials who are more open to experiences are more likely to value their own policy preferences over those of the public while also being more likely to engage with constituents on issues. In contrast, public officials with higher levels of agreeableness are more likely to believe representatives should follow constituent guidance. To avoid disharmony, public officials with higher levels of agreeableness are also less likely to email back constituents who disagree with them and avoid conflict in their responses. Overall, some of the Big Five personality traits predict municipal officials' views on representation and related behaviors in office.

This handbook offers a collection of essays by international scholars and practitioners on all aspects of strategic culture. Strategic culture refers to the beliefs, values, and behaviors shaping how nations or groups approach strategy and conflict. The book tackles analytical challenges in defining, scoping, and applying insights about strategic cultures across different levels like civilizations, regions, nations, and organizations. Part I assesses theoretical strengths and weaknesses, Part II covers foundations like sources and components, Part III profiles national strategic cultures based on contemporary research. Part IV explores applied uses of strategic culture analysis, while Part V summarizes key insights from contributors. Overall, it serves as a comprehensive guide for students and practitioners in strategic studies, security, and related fields. Kerry Kartchner, BYU Political Science Adjunct Professor, co-authored this publication.

## Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture

**Kerry M. Kartchner**, Briana D. Bowen, Jeannie L. Johnson, eds.

*Taylor & Francis, 2023*

## Conceptualising and Measuring Support for Democracy: A New Approach

Christopher Claassen, **Darren Hawkins**, Kathrin Ackermann, Eri Bert-sou, Lucas Borba, Amnon Cavari, **Darin Self**, et al.

*International Journal of Exercise Science: Conference Proceedings, 2023*

What is the best way to measure support for democracy? Dr. Hawkins and Dr. Self along with others researchers propose a new approach using 17 survey questions that ask respondents across 19 countries to evaluate the specific rights and institutions that make up liberal democracy. While there was variation in how these items cohered across countries, they identified a core set of 7 items that provide a reliable and valid measure of public support for liberal democracy across 19 different national samples. This approach allows for a more nuanced assessment of public attitudes toward democratic principles compared to treating “democracy” as a single concept.

Men and women differ in their political behavior and attitudes. Dr. Krewson and his colleague test whether gender-based variation in political attitudes extends to perceptions of US Supreme Court legitimacy. Using data from 2012–2017, they find that and individual’s gender predicts their diffuse support for the Court. In particular, women almost always extend less legitimacy to the Court than men do. This is true for both Republicans and Democrats, and the gender gap holds when accounting for partisanship, ideology, race, age, education, income, and Supreme Court approval. Additionally, they explore why this gender gap in perceived legitimacy exists and find that differences in how individuals perceive the Court’s representation of women, and its fairness are the drive the gender gap in legitimacy.

## The Gender Gap in Supreme Court Legitimacy

**Christopher N. Krewson**, Jean R. Schroedel

*American Politics Research, 2023*

## Sex and World Peace, 2nd Edition

Valerie Hudson, Mary Caprioli,  
**Donna Lee Bowen**, Rose  
McDermott

Sex and World Peace presents groundbreaking research showing the security and treatment of women significantly impacts the occurrence of conflict and war across societies. Analyzing immense data, Dr. Donna Lee Bowen, Emeritus Professor of Political Science from BYU, along with her colleagues, link micro-level violence against women to macro-level state peacefulness globally. They highlight how gender inequities like skewed sex ratios, polygamy, and lax laws protecting women adversely affect state security. The research challenges conventional understandings of security, democracy, and causes of major world events. The book explores top-down and bottom-up approaches to remedy injustices against women and lack of sex parity in decision-making. It advocates governments have a responsibility to protect women, as systemic insecurity of women threatens the security of all.

Do policies that exclude minority groups encourage increased political participation? Dr. Romney and his colleagues theorized that policies threatening minority groups can actually mobilize and increase their political participation by creating grievances. To test this, they examined Donald Trump's peace plan announcement that threatened the citizenship status of Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Triangle area near the West Bank. Analyzing over 170,000 Facebook posts showed this announcement was more salient for Triangle residents. Using election data and records of citizens joining a Jewish-Arab movement they find the citizenship threat increased political mobilization in the Triangle area. Their data from three distinct sources suggest threats of exclusionary policies can motivate minority groups to increase their political action.

## How Threats of Exclusion Mobilize Palestinian Political Participation

Chagai M Weiss, Alexandra A.  
Siegel, **David Romney**

*American Journal of Political Science,*  
2023



Photo Credit: Nate Edwards/BYU Photo



# PAS State Capitol Trip

January 2024

The 50 students, their professors, and mentors Mike Mowers and Thom Carter pose at the Utah State Capitol.

Written by Carlee Guenther Dynes

Political Science majors across campus are often asked the question, “Do you want to run for political office?” While for some of our students the answer is a resounding “Yes!”, not all our students share that political ambition. So, what does a Political Science major become if not a politician?

That’s a question the Utah State Capitol trip can help answer. Organized every January by the student chapter of the Political Affairs Society (PAS), the trip, in Professor Liz McGuire’s words, is “a way for students to know there are lots of ways to get involved in state and local

government besides just running for office.”

This year, 50 students, including the PAS student officers, piled up in rented BYU vans along with faculty advisors Professor Liz McGuire and Professor Ryan Davis to drive from BYU campus to Capitol Hill in Salt Lake City. Following a guided tour of the beautiful Capitol Building, Mike Mowers, senior advisor to Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, BYU Political Science alum, and current president of the Salt Lake City PAS chapter, hosted a speed networking event.

For students with little exposure to how politics work in practice, getting a behind-the-scenes view is valuable experiential learning. Mike credits his wife Elizabeth for coming up with the idea for speed mentoring eight years ago. “Our goal was to give Poli Sci students who don’t have the chance to do internships at the Capitol a feel for what takes place during the legislative session and who helps drive a lot of what transpires.”

This year’s networking event included a small group of legislators, cabinet members and Governor’s Senior Advisors, lobbyists, lawyers, community advocates, the State Auditor and Treasurer and a Member of Congress. Students moved between each professional every 10 minutes to learn more about possible careers opportunities now and in the future. Though the time students spent with each professional was brief, the impact was significant. For Kendra Pinegar, a senior from Tucson, AZ and a student PAS officer, “Getting to talk with someone currently in a [professional] position gives you a general understanding of how they got there, what they do, how your interests might overlap and if it’s a possibility for you in the future.”

Ella Paligo, from Goodlettsville, Tennessee, attended the Utah State Capitol trip for the first time this year. As a freshman, she’s navigating what she wants to do with her Political Science degree, “so meeting with people who are already in the field was really meaningful.” In addition to helping her solidify future plans, Ella received an Attorney General campaign internship. She also found a mentor with a similar passion to her: “I met someone who works with the Salt Lake Community College teaching classes to inmates, and we talked about how we can bring a program like that to BYU.”

Mentors like Thom Carter, former Energy Advisor to Governor Spencer Cox and current Director of Government Affairs at PacifiCorp, also find value in participating with the Utah State Capitol Trip speed networking event. Thom Carter has participated as a mentor for the past five years and does so for several reasons. First, Thom has had great mentors throughout his career, and still seeks them out even 25 years after graduating from BYU. He said, “I believe that I owe much of my success to these mentors – thus if I can do the same for others, I want to return the favor.” Second, Thom loves BYU and wants to help BYU students find

their place. “BYU students are highly motivated, high achievers, and want to succeed. They ask good questions and are curious. These [attributes] are the recipe, along with hard work, to finding your place in the professional world.” Third, as someone who has had a unique path, Thom hopes “to convey to these students that everyone’s path is theirs and much of the political/government world is learned by doing.”

***“BYU students are highly motivated, high achievers, and want to succeed. They ask good questions and are curious. These [attributes] are the recipe, along with hard work, to finding your place in the professional world.”***

In addition to making vertical mentoring connections with professionals, the Utah State Capitol trip strengthens lateral connections between students. For Professor McGuire, what happens on the drive up to the Capitol is an important part of the experience and gives students an opportunity to get to know each other better and discover common interests. As a returning junior who knew many of the students attending this year’s event, Kendra Pinegar enjoyed the opportunity to connect with other students. It gave her clarity on how many varied paths are available, even to students with similar interests. She said, “You are able to trade ideas and give insights into what you are doing and what they are doing. It’s a way to build each other up in a field that can feel competitive sometimes.” Joining student organizations like PAS, Women in Politics, the College Democrats, or the College Republicans, and attending campus events hosted by these organizations is an excellent way for students to find community and belonging at BYU and in the Political Science department.



# Identity and Gender in Southeast Asia

## Malaysia Study Abroad

by Seraphina Johnstun

*Twenty students. Two mentors. One megadiverse island country. One unforgettable experience.*

Identity and gender is a hot-topic debate in the United States. But what does it look like abroad?

Last summer, twenty students from various BYU majors spent an unforgettable 7 weeks in Malaysia, experiencing the life and culture of the Malay people and conducting original research under the guidance of Dr. Liz McGuire and Dr. David Romney.

While students gain much by learning in the classrooms of the Kimball Tower (KMBL) and Martin Building (MARB), the strength of the study abroad model is that students are able to actually experience what

their professors are teaching them about. Instead of simply reading about how Malay identity is a complex web of Islamic and cultural influence, Braeden Jensen recalls they “visited Mosques, Hindu shrines, and Buddhist temples, became familiar with Hokkien Chinese culture on Penang, Iban culture on Borneo, and participated in indigenous Malay religious ceremonies.”

Julia Chatterley, a senior and political science major also from Colorado Springs, described her experience as follows: “We met amazing people who had very different views on politics and parties than we did. This included candidates for



Vanessa Tuttle on the study abroad.

parliament as well as taxi drivers who were excited to share how politics had affected them. By being able to talk to people, we were better able to create a survey to help understand these interactions and measure the effect of ethnic threat on collaboration between parties.”

Besides experiencing one of the most ethnically diverse countries on the planet, the students also learned technical skills such as how to code in R, construct and test a field experiment, run statistical analysis, and write a research paper. One of the papers from data collected during the Malaysia study abroad by Grace Burns, a senior from New Richmond, WI, won the 2024 Kevin G. Jones Sigma writing award.

One of the lessons that resonated with multiple students is that we as human beings are more connected than we think, as are our struggles. Alyse Erekson, a senior in International Relations, recalls an experience she had during the Mak Yong, a dance-drama performance unique to the Malay region that was declared a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO in 2005, and banned by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic party. “I was extremely fortunate to... sit by and interact with Mek Ti, a former Mak Yong performer who is now in her 80s, throughout the ritual. I learned about her experiences dealing with various forms of religious censorship and her perspective on her Islamic and Malay heritage. My interaction with Mek Ti made me more keenly aware of the intersectionality frameworks many people experience, [and] the intertwining effects of religion, gender, and ethnicity in their lives.”

Austin DeMaso, another International Relations senior, was also impacted by the culture of Malaysia. He had the opportunity to observe a Mudan ceremony in the Batu Caves Hindu temple. This ritual involves cutting a baby’s first head of hair, and is thought to free the child from their past life’s negativity and bless them with a long life and good health. Austin said of the experience, “I found that what was most valuable was seeing the similarities between my own religion and the one I was observing. It is fascinating on a human level that two religions that originated on opposite ends of the world emphasize similar concepts, such as a rebirth, enlightenment, and gaining knowledge applicable in one’s spiritual journey. Seeing the similarities in these religions made me realize that the human experience and our search for meaning is something that is very universal despite our environmental differences.”

**“The human experience and our search for meaning is something that is very universal despite our environmental differences.”**



Photo credit: Julia Chatterley

## MALAYSIA

Capitol: Kuala Lumpur

Population: 34 Million

Official Language: Malay

Area: 127,547 Square Miles



Interested in taking your own study abroad trip? Contact [travel@byu.edu](mailto:travel@byu.edu) to learn what opportunities are available.

# Alumni Spotlights



# '13

As a Political Science major from Heber, Utah, **KELSEY BERG (BS 2013)** didn't know how her career path would unfold. Choosing Political Science because she enjoyed learning about politics, Kelsey recalls she "had no idea what I would do it post-graduation, but my career has been a dream." From working for incredible public servants to her current job at Larry H. Miller as their Vice President of Government Relations, she has met amazing people and served the state and country she loves all with her Political Science degree from BYU. In fact, everything about her career path has been a surprise and an absolute blessing.

Her advice for current BYU political science majors is to "take advantage of all the opportunities for internships. There are so many different lanes in politics – policy, campaigns, research, advocacy, domestic vs. international affairs, and the only way to know what path the right one is to spend time doing them all."

As an BYU political science alumni, Kelsey counts herself blessed that she was able to attend such a special and unique place where spiritual and temporal education are mixed, providing a strong foundation for life. Kelsey loves BYU and is true blue through and through. When Kelsey isn't working, she loves the outdoors, making time for hunting, camping, riding horses, and fishing. An explorer by nature, she also loves traveling.



# ‘09

**BRAD JONES (BA 2009)** can summarize the past two decades of his life in one sentence: “If you can call whatever I’ve had a ‘career path,’ it has been entirely composed of surprises.”

Brad admits that he was a poor high school student and had no clear expectations for a career. After spending a few years in the Marine reserves and serving in the Venture, California mission, he met his wife, Jenny, in Colorado. She was on summer leave from BYU, and he determined that he wanted to follow her. He moved to Provo in the hopes that BYU would accept him, and, after

a semester of academic probation due to his high school grades, it did.

He initially thought he might become a law student, but soon determined it wasn’t for him. Instead, he joined CSED, working with Dave Magleby, Quin Monson, Kelly Patterson, and others. Joining the organization gave him “invaluable experience working on academic research projects and introduced to me the idea of pursuing graduate school.” He still keeps in touch with some of his Political Science cohort. He is also grateful to the academic advisor that took a chance on him and gave him the opportunity to attend BYU.

After graduating from BYU in 2009, Brad attended the University of Wisconsin (Madison) for his graduate program. Since then, he has worked at the Pew Research Center, Meta, and YouGov. He says that his Political Science degree has given him “a good foundation to think through social science problems,” as well as “an introduction to quantitative analysis” he’s used throughout his career. Brad’s advice to Political Science students is to “take advantage of the opportunity to work for and collaborate with your professors!” BYU extends opportunities to undergraduate students to be directly involved with research in scholarship, so “even if you don’t plan on graduate work, these experiences are invaluable.”

Brad married Jenny in 2005, and they have two foster children. Outside of work and family commitments, when he has a spare moment, he enjoys reading and spending time outside. He also loves designer board games, but lacks the extra players, which has not kept him from acquiring more of them.

*Want to be featured in future editions? Know a Political Science alum that deserves a spotlight? Contact [politicalscience@byu.edu](mailto:politicalscience@byu.edu) to submit a biography or ask about submissions requirements.*

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*We support and defend the  
Constitution today when we  
exercise amity, mutual deference,  
concession, and yes, compromise  
for the sake of unity.*

...

**The American  
Constitution is  
intended to  
create common  
ground.**

”

*Judge Thomas B. Griffith, pg. 18*

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