Drury students at Islamic Center of Rome.

Notes From the Chair

Hello from the newly regenerated, new-look third floor of Burnham Hall! It’s been an interesting, exciting time for our department, and we’ve only just begun! This year, we graduated a total of seven students in December and May. Many are going to law school, graduate school, and into the business world. Political Science graduates continue to do great things, and we are proud of all of them.

Third floor Burnham has a new feel. We cleaned out much of the old debris and replaced it with pictures of students and faculty. We also celebrated the fact that in a new survey in which law schools, graduate schools, and employers identify what they seek out most in new students or employees, political science students are well equipped to meet these qualifications. From critical thinking to using quantitative data, political science majors are getting jobs, getting accepted into some of the best and most competitive graduate schools and law schools in the country, and generally making positive contributions as global citizens.

As usual, this year has been one of exciting ventures by students and faculty alike. Drs. Paddock and Vaggalis led another successful trip to the Midwest Undergraduate Research Conference, with students presenting papers. Drs. Leineweaver and Vaggalis presented their work and thoughts at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting in Chicago in April. Dr. Ponder was at the American Political Science Association meeting in Washington, DC, where he served as a discussant on a panel on the polarized presidency. Dr. VanDenBerg finished up his stint as chair and did a sabbatical working on a variety of research projects.

A truly exciting opportunity has come our way. L.E. Meador (of Meador Park fame) was once a political scientist at Drury. Upon his retirement, an endowment was set up. This year, we have decided to use that endowment money to start the L.E. Meador Center for Politics and Citizenship. The center is set to focus on a variety of topics, but will primarily support an active intellectual agenda, supporting a speaker series, student and faculty research, and provide outreach to the community. Be watching for further developments. So it has been an exciting year, and we are poised for even more. Thank you for your support, and we look forward to seeing or hearing from you!

Study Abroad: Exploring the ‘Fault Lines’ of Islam and the West

When the distinguished political scientist Samuel Huntington published his article “The Clash of Civilizations?” in 1993, most scholars and policy makers rejected his argument that future conflict would be fought on the basis of civilizational identity. Then 9/11 happened, and Huntington’s thesis gained new currency. For some observers, the seemingly endless stream of violence and mutual hostility since 2001 confirms Huntington’s argument that western and Islamic civilizations are inherently conflictual. Others challenge the thesis, but virtually everyone agrees it is one of the defining issues of our generation.

As political scientists, our job is to test hypotheses. But how should we investigate such an imposingly large question as civilizational conflict? How do we move beyond the deluge of daily headlines—ISIS, Charlie Hebdo, Afghanistan—in order to meaningfully grapple with the fundamental forces at work? Since the question involves culture, values, and identity, one starting point is to experience these civilizations first hand, particularly those places where Islam and the West meet.

For twelve years, I have been co-leading (with History professor Shelley Wolbrink) Drury study abroad programs to the Mediterranean region. Teaching the course “Islam and the West” in Greece, Egypt, Italy, and Morocco has provided some perspectives on the complex and fluid nature of identity. With students, we have visited synagogues and churches in Egypt and Morocco. In Rome, our group spends a day at Europe’s largest mosque, learning about the diverse community of Muslims in Italy.

Our experiences call into question Huntington’s rigid civilizational fault lines. While there is no denying tensions over identity, the idea that civilizational values are static, bounded, and intrinsically hostile to one another doesn’t square with our studies in Europe and the Arab world.
Political Science Students Present Research at 24th Annual Conference

Four political science students – graduating seniors Jordan Butcher and Dakoda Trithara, junior Laddie Miller, and first-year student Jasmine Chuah – presented original research papers at the 24th annual Midwest Political Science Undergraduate Research Conference this past April. Sophomore Lexi Brewer attended as an observer-participant.

The conference, held this year at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, is run as a professional political science conference, with multiple concurrent sessions over two days. Undergraduate students from Midwest states are invited to submit proposals and abstracts of original research papers.

Faculty participants serve as panel chairs and discussants who review and critique the papers to guide students in their research skills. Dr. Elizabeth Paddock and Dr. Ted Vaggalis attended as faculty sponsors. Dr. Paddock participated as a faculty chair and discussant for one of the panels.

Next year’s 25th anniversary conference is scheduled for Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, where the first MWPSURC was held.

Students Get Hands-On Experience in Presidency Class

The analysis of decision making plays a very large part in the study of politics. My class on the American Presidency experienced that first hand on April 30, 2015, when they took part in a simulation on President Truman’s decision to desegregate the military. The simulation was through the White House Decision Center program at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum in Independence, MO.

The students chose the part of one of the major players in the White House who had direct input into Truman’s decision. The role of Harry Truman and his advisers were played by class members, and they were given access to actual documents that only Truman and his advisers had. They met for a brief orientation, then dispersed to various “situation rooms” to absorb the information in the documents.

The simulation was very much a hands-on experience, and the students took their roles seriously and absorbed firsthand how difficult balancing politics and policy can be. Ben James had this to say: “I think the best part was how I was able to read and analyze the primary documents with the mindset of the original reader, even more so than normal, because my peers in the situation room relied on the information I had gathered.” Sheri Walsh, who played the part of President Truman, said, “Visiting the Library was an awesome supplement to Dr. Ponder’s class. The exhibits brought to life the powerful responsibility of the oval office. The weight of that responsibility was tangible when my class and I stepped into the role of President Truman and his advisers. We looked at the same documents they had available to them... (as they) changed the course of American history. The whole experience really showed the humanity of the American presidency.”
“Pizza and Politics” Evokes Spirited Discussion

The 2014 – 2015 school year has marked the third year of the Political Science Department’s Pizza and Politics lunches. The wide involvement of students and faculty from across the university has made these events a fun and multi-disciplinary exploration of all things current events. I have continuously enjoyed watching our conversations start with the day’s headlines but end up as explorations of much broader and more important topics. For example, discussions of the upcoming presidential primaries led to talks about the character of presidential candidates and the ethics of voting. I can’t wait to see what next year brings to our lunches.

This semester we had to say goodbye to Dr. Sean Terry, Professor of Geography, who has retired after seventeen years at Drury! We thank him for his contributions to Drury, the CORE, the Environmental Studies Program, and countless other good deeds. We wish him well!

Dr. Justin Leineweaver, an expert in public environmental policy and international relations, wrote and presented “Greener Governments: Partisan ideologies, institutions and environmental policies” at the Midwest Political Science Association meeting in Chicago.

Dr. Ted Vaggalis, a political theorist, also attended the Midwest Political Science Association meeting and participated on a roundtable on being a professor at a Liberal Arts college. He waxed philosophic alongside colleagues at colleges such as Marquette, Bucknell, and Rhodes. Dr. Vaggalis was also tapped to provide feedback to professors and graduate students by critiquing their posters focusing on political theory.

Dr. Erin Kenny presented her research to the Society for Economic Anthropology, held at the University of Kentucky. She presented “‘Phones Mean Lies!’ Secrets, which is based on work she did as a Fulbright Scholar. She will also spend four weeks at an intensive workshop sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities at Michigan State University on Development Ethics and Global Justice. She was also named Drury’s inaugural Director of the Teaching and Learning Center.

Dr. Elizabeth Paddock once again was instrumental in organizing and overseeing the many students who went to the Midwest Undergraduate Political Science Conference (see article above). She is also finishing her political novel!

Dr. Jeff VanDenBerg was on sabbatical in the Spring 2015 semester. His research addressed Tunisian democratization and how it has been influenced by the events in the broader Middle East regional system. While engaged in this research, he interviewed several important Tunisian players, including the former Foreign Minister. He also initiated and organized the first Undergraduate Research Workshop for the Middle East Studies Association. He will once again become chair of the department in the Fall 2015 semester.

Dr. Dan Ponder had an article published in the journal American Politics Research. Co-authored with colleagues at Loyola University Chicago and the University of Utah, the article is entitled “Public Opinion and Democratic Party Ownership of Prosperity: The Political Legacy of the Great Depression, 1955-2013.” He has also been working on two other research projects (his so-called “never-ending project on Presidential Leverage, and a chapter on economic policy for an edited book on the Obama presidency). In June, he will become the inaugural Director of the Meador Center for Politics and Citizenship.

Visit us on the web at: www.drury.edu/politicalscience

Keep in touch with Political Science at Drury. Like us on Facebook at “DruryUniversityPoliticalScienceandGeography”
Student Accolades and Celebrations

Most Outstanding Graduating Senior: Dakoda Trithara

Most Outstanding New Students: Christina Faoro and Jasmine Chuah

Best Senior Seminar Research Paper: Dakoda Trithara

Ruth Bamberger Scholarship: Kaitlyn Box

Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honorary Inductees: Hadeel Abdelraouf, Max Accardi, Kaitlyn Box, Alexandria Brewer, Megan Ortmeyer, Elena Sharp and Tessa Tilton.


Congratulations to all of the honorees!

Check out the Development & Alumni Relation’s New Webpage!

https://alumni.drury.edu/panthertracks

Now that you know what’s going on in the Department of Political Science & Geography, check out the Development & Alumni Relation’s new Panther Tracks webpage. You can view updated alumni class notes and photos and even submit your own update and photo!