APSA | Education Politics and Policy

The Organized Section in Education Politics and Policy of the American Political Science Association

Newsletter

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From the President

Greetings!

Our virtual conference on March 14-15 was a huge success. We had six panels, and 17 papers presented. Thank you to all the presenters, discussants, and participants for your engagement, and thanks to the section leadership who helped with the logistics and planning. We were especially thrilled with the graduate student research presented at the conference, presenting cutting edge work studying the federal lobbying around HBCUs, university investments, the targeting of policies enforcing federal standards, the politics of "lost cause" investment in the US South, and the racial and gendered politics of educational accountability regimes. It was gratifying to see scholars of all career stages come together, and the spring conference remains an integral part of our section activities. We were especially appreciative of the colleagues from different time zones who made the effort to join us out of hours; it was great to have an opportunity to bring people together.

Looking forward to APSA in Philadelphia, we have a fantastic emerging line-up. One of our panels was elevated to a theme panel, and thus have we been able to host an additional panel this year. Our applicants were broadly split between American and comparative politics, and across career stages. We have panels covering school choice, diversity in the classroom, school board politics, social mobility and global reform agendas, among other topics, as well as an exciting set of poster presentations. We hope that you will join us at our section business meeting, and for happy hour at an offsite location near the convention center. Watch for more details! We also encourage people who would like to get involved in section leadership to touch base before the APSA meeting to discuss potential roles.

For those with ideas about activities that the section should support, please get in touch. We have been considering putting together a syllabus bank, more graduate student networking opportunities, and support for job market candidates. If these would be of interest to you, let us know as we plan future activities.

Finally, our prize committees are hard at work. Thank you to Thomas Gift, Ken Wong, Nalette Brodnax, Matthias Haslberger, Joan Ricard-Huguet, Katharina Sass, Roland Kappe, and Susanne Garritzmann for their hard work. We are looking forward to announcing the prizes later this summer.

Enjoy the newsletter. If you have suggestions for future issues, please reach out to Jason Giersch (jgiersch@charlotte.edu).

Sincerely,
Jane Gingrich
Professor of Comparative Social Policy at the University of Oxford
President and Chair, APSA Education Politics and Policy Section

Essay

By Matthew Nelson
Assistant Professor of Political Science
The University of Miami

Reimagining Civic Education

Education is a powerful political tool. From the Confederate Myth of Reconstruction to the ongoing debates over Critical Race Theory, K-12 social studies curricula frequently emerge within America's "culture wars." But are debates over content politically consequential or merely symbolic? Afterall, decades of scholarship suggests that the precise content of social studies courses has few, if any, discernable effects on political participation.

My recently published book, *The Color of Civics: Civic Education for a Multiracial Democracy*, argues that civic education content does, in fact, matter. However, in order to recognize the full potential of these courses, we must first reimagine what we mean by content and reconsider how we measure the success of civics courses.

Civic education advocates have long argued that social studies courses such as American government, U.S. history, and civics allow young people to develop democratic capacity—the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors deemed necessary to fully participate in public life. This work draws heavily from the Civic Voluntarism Model, which suggests that access to important resources, including education, is critical for understanding whether individuals participate in politics. The idea here is that schools can play a part in developing the knowledge that will allow young people to make informed decisions at the ballot box once they reach voting age and the literacy and public-speaking skills that will allow them to make their positions known in messages to elected officials and statements to their local city council. For this reason, social scientists, educational organizations, and school districts oftentimes gauge the success of social studies courses by employing key measures utilized by the Civic Voluntarism Model, including political knowledge, political efficacy, and intent to vote. My book argues that this approach takes the importance of these metrics as a given before assessing whether they adequately capture the complex political realities experienced by young people today.

For example, might young people, and especially racially marginalized youth, possess forms of political knowledge that social scientists overlook in survey measures such as the pervasiveness of police violence in Black neighborhoods? Might young people have valid reasons for not believing in the responsiveness of government? And what other participatory avenues beyond voting are available to those who either lack formal citizenship status, have yet to turn 18, or are forced to navigate local laws that make access to the ballot box difficult if not impossible?

The Color of Civics instead centers political empowerment—one's sense that that they have the agency and capacity to participate in political processes and advocate for their own community. In this sense, empowerment is non-hierarchical; while teachers cannot simply "empower" their students, they can create spaces and learning experiences that allow students to explore their own identity, agency, and history, which, in turn, may foster empowerment at the individual level. Political empowerment is substantively distinct from other commonly assessed attitudes, including political efficacy. Political efficacy, in part, accounts for whether individuals believe in the responsiveness of political institutions. Contrastingly, political empowerment allows for both individual and collective agency within contexts where there is a widespread belief that government is unwilling or incapable of responding to their concerns.

In the book, I identify two pedagogical techniques that help foster feelings of empowerment: critical content that highlights the agency and collective action of marginalized groups and historically grounded conversations about politics. Drawing from a lab-in-the-field experiment conducted in Chicago-area schools, focus groups with high schoolers, and participant observations of social studies classrooms, I demonstrate that these pedagogical techniques are associated with greater feelings of empowerment and increased intended political participation among Asian, Black, and Latinx youth. White youth also benefit from civic learning experiences of this kind, expressing greater appreciation for the political contributions of other racial and ethnic groups.

Teachers and neighborhoods also emerge as central actors within the processes of political socialization that occur within civics courses. Drawing from an original survey of high school social studies teachers in Chicago and dozens of in-depth interviews with educators, I show that teachers' own lived experiences, educational training, and their connections to neighborhood organizations all shape their attitudes towards racial equality, authority, and the communities where they teach. I show that these attitudes are strongly associated with the pedagogical techniques that teachers employ within their classrooms. For example, teachers who express stronger commitments to racial equality are significantly more likely to prefer content that is more inclusive of marginalized groups and are more likely to maintain open classroom environments where students are encouraged to talk about politics.

In these dark political times, *The Color of Civics* argues that investing in civic education means reinvesting in American democracy. The civic learning experiences I advocate for in the book are not new but reflect the work of generations of Americans who fought to ensure that the United States lives up to its most deeply cherished democratic aspirations. Some may question whether such an approach to civic learning will deepen partisan polarization. However, my research suggests that a more inclusive approach to civic learning may be a source of empowerment, empathy, and equity—essential ingredients to achieve a fully realized multiracial democracy in the United States.

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Essay

By Akshay Mangla
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University of Oxford

Bureaucracy and Inclusive Development: The Challenge of Implementing Universal Primary Education

When and how do states effectively implement primary education, particularly for the least advantaged? Countries across the world have laws making primary education universal, free, and compulsory. Many declare primary education a fundamental right. Yet, the implementation of education services is highly uneven and poorly understood. I address these issues in my book, *Making Bureaucracy Work: Norms, Education and Public Service Delivery in Rural India* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Studies in the Comparative Politics of Education, 2022). In this essay, I share some findings from my book and reflect on their implications for comparative politics research on education.

The challenges of implementing education are evident in developing countries such as India. Public bureaucracies in these countries often depart widely from the Weberian ideal of a strong, autonomous state. Many suffer from chronically weak state capacity. Meanwhile, marginalized citizens struggle to obtain quality services. This is particularly so for "street-level bureaucracies" in charge of local services like primary education. Even under these conditions, however, while some public agencies perform poorly, others achieve notable results. My study is motivated by the puzzling variation in primary education delivery in the Hindi belt of north India, a region where existing theories overwhelmingly expect programmatic public services to fail. Despite similar legal institutions, administrative structures, and national policies for primary education, Indian states vary dramatically in how well they implement education.

To explain this puzzle, I advance a theory of bureaucratic norms, the unwritten rules that guide how public officials understand their duties and relate with citizens on the ground. Even where formal bureaucratic institutions appear weak, I argue, implementation can vary depending on the informal norms that guide bureaucratic behavior. I conceptualize policy implementation according to the complexity of tasks involved in administering education. I distinguish less complex, "codifiable" tasks (e.g., school construction) from more complex tasks (e.g., school monitoring and teacher support) that require intensive coordination between state and societal actors. This approach recognizes that primary education (like many other public services) is not simply provided by states but co-produced with citizens and groups in society.

Next, I develop an analytical typology, of "legalistic" and "deliberative" bureaucratic norms and describe how they drive policy implementation. Bureaucratic norms influence how officials interpret and make practical sense of their policy mandates, encouraging certain behaviors, while discouraging others. They also have downstream effects on citizens and societal collective

action around primary education. Through the mechanisms of bureaucratic action and societal feedback, bureaucratic norms impact the delivery of education services and associated outcomes. I ground this argument historically, describing the state-building processes and political relationships that give rise to bureaucratic norms and their persistence across time.

To build and test this theory, I conducted a multi-level comparative analysis of implementation in four north Indian states: Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. The careful selection of states, local districts and villages helped to identify causal mechanisms while accounting for alternative explanations (e.g., level of economic development and colonial land institutions). I carried out twenty-eight months of qualitative field research, tracing the implementation process from state capitals down to local districts and village primary schools. Qualitative data was amassed from a wide array of sources—more than 800 interviews of politicians, civil servants, local bureaucrats, and schoolteachers; 103 focus group discussions with parents and village residents; participant observation inside local education bureaucracies; village ethnographies.

My empirical study finds that legalistic bureaucracies encourage compliance with policy rules, leading to improvements in school infrastructure and enrollments. They perform poorly, however, on complex tasks requiring societal input. Worse, they tend to impose administrative burdens on marginalized citizens, undermining their engagement in school governance. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, for example, I show how legalistic enforcement of administrative rules for the Midday Meal Program – this is the Indian government's flagship school lunch program and the world's largest child nutrition scheme – leads to the marginalization of lower caste women, weakening their participation in school monitoring.

By contrast, I find that deliberative bureaucracies facilitate flexible problem-solving by state officials. Through the practice of deliberation, officials learn about local needs and identify ways to adapt policies to meet those needs, enhancing societal coproduction of services. In Himachal Pradesh, for example, I show how problem-oriented officials in the education bureaucracy made inroads with local women's groups (mahila mandals) in the process of expanding primary schooling. Collectively, they found ways to make schooling services more accessible and resilient to the mountainous geography and climate, improving outcomes for rural children.

One may ask whether these varied results owe to the relative beneficence of bureaucrats in some places. Even where bureaucracy was legalistic, I observed countless examples of individual officials and teachers going beyond the call of duty. These officials received little recognition; some even risked being punished. Over time, legalistic norms dampened their motivation to continue such initiatives. I consider other plausible explanations as well, such as the strength of village social capital and local clientelistic politics. In Almora district of Uttarakhand, for example, I observed multiple forms of social capital, including forest councils (van panchayats) and women's associations. Village residents engaged in collective action for their children, evidenced by the establishment of informal pre-primary schools (balwadis). But when it came to seeking support for government schools, they found the local education

bureaucracy's administration of rules incredibly burdensome. Consequently, several households who could afford it exited for private schooling options.

My study aims to advance our thinking about bureaucracy, education, and the politics of inclusive development. Whereas existing work has focused largely on formal bureaucratic structures, the informal norms and culture of bureaucracy receive far less attention. Contrary to prior research, I show that bureaucracy in India is not a monolith, but varies in its capacity to deliver education services, depending on the complexity of the task at hand and the norms guiding bureaucratic behavior. The book also advances theoretical debates on how developing country governments can deliver education to the least advantaged citizens, thereby promoting inclusive development. When backed by deliberative norms, agencies can undertake highly complex education tasks (even under resource constraints), while building societal engagement in school governance. Future work may investigate the linkages (and breaking points) between state and societal action in the education implementation process.

There are implications for the comparative politics of education as well. Research in this field has focused largely on cross-national variation in public education spending, as well as the design of education programs and policies. Despite many valuable insights, this scholarship tends to gloss over issues of implementation. Meanwhile, studies in public administration have shown that local-level service delivery departs substantially from policy dictates. High levels of enrollment at the aggregate mask very different experiences of schooling by different groups in society. And while public spending surely matters, it is insufficient for ensuring quality services. As the economics of education literature reveals, school spending is often weakly correlated with outcomes, including student learning and achievement. Much depends on the mundane details of how education is administered, how public bureaucracies utilize resources, how schoolteachers understand their roles, and how they and other street-level bureaucrats interpret their mandates and relationship to citizens.

Looking ahead, there may be opportunities to bring perspectives from different political science subfields together. This would be a worthwhile endeavor. My book offers insights from India, but far more comparative work needs to be done to understand the politics of implementing education. In developing countries, various reforms to improve education quality and student learning are underway. These policy reforms raise important political questions, not least of all: who decides what quality education is in the first place?

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Interview with Deondra Rose

Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

JASON: Congratulations on your new book analyzing the history of HBCUs and their relationship with American politics. Let's start with how HBCUs affected the distribution of political power in the US. Could you tell us a little about that? And how about the other causal direction? How did US politics affect HBCUs?

DEONDRA: Thank you so much for the kind congratulations, Jason! I am beyond excited that my new book, *The Power of Black Excellence: HBCUs and the Fight for American Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2024), is set for release in August. As a political scientist studying higher education, public policy, and democracy, exploring the role that historically Black colleges and universities have played in shaping the racial dynamics of U.S. political engagement since the 19th century and how government policies have shaped HBCUs has been one of the most exciting endeavors of my career.

When I was working on my first book, *Citizens by Degree: U.S. Higher Education Policy and the Changing Gender Dynamics of American Citizenship*, I studied the feedback effects of landmark policies like Title IX and the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 for women's political engagement. In my research on the HEA, I was fascinated to see a number of references to HBCUs in the statute, including a section of the legislation that provided funding to HBCUs and 'developing institutions' like community colleges and other minority serving institutions. In my archival research, I was struck by the number of statements I came across from lawmakers in the 1960s and subsequent decades noting the tremendous impact that HBCUs have had and how much they appreciate them. Yet, I also noticed that these effusive statements of esteem for HBCUs did not seem to be backed by substantial financial support from the government. Historical data show that HBCUs have been chronically underfunded when compared to their PWI (predominantly White institution) counterparts. This is especially striking given the impact that HBCUs have had on American higher education. From the establishment of the Institute for Colored Youth (which later became Cheyney University), the nation's first Black college, in 1837, HBCUs educated as many as 90 percent of Black college students in the United States. Today there are 101 HBCUs, and they educate about 9 percent of Black college students. Particularly interesting is the impact that HBCUs have had on the American democratic landscape, given that they have educated a remarkable number of American political leaders including a disproportionate number of Black members of Congress, judges, and lawyers.

My book seeks to challenge the received wisdom that the federal government was largely absent from education before the late 20th century. The political history of HBCUs illustrates that the government has acted as both friend and foe to Black students and the colleges that fought to empower them through higher education. After the Civil War, Black colleges provided crucial education for free and newly emancipated Black citizens. This was largely due to the emergence of newly enfranchised Black citizens and the election of Black policymakers as

powerful political changes that occurred during the Reconstruction era. Support from the Freedmen's Bureau and land grant legislation helped to create Black colleges that, in turn, helped to reshape the dynamics of American education. HBCUs produced Black teachers who engaged in the highly political work of not only teaching Black students but also exemplifying and cultivating Black intelligence and Black excellence. Black intellectual achievement stood in stark contrast to images of ignorance, fecklessness, and ineptitude that had been long used to justify the subjugation of Black people in the United States (and the colonies). One hundred years later, during the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century, HBCUs were crucial organizing hubs in the fight for Black freedom. In sharp contrast to the ivory tower image of higher educational institutions that exist separately and away from the messy dynamics of American politics and social life, HBCUs are inherently political institutions, established with the purpose of empowering citizens who historically have been relegated to the margins of American social, economic, and political life. I hope that this book helps to bring into greater focus our understanding of the relationship between education policy, politics, and democracy and that it provides lessons that we can draw on as we seek to use education to strengthen democracy in the 21st century and beyond.

JASON: Nearly all HBCUs are located in the southeastern United States. Are students, faculty, and communities in other parts of the country missing out? Couldn't HBCUs serve important purposes in other states?

DEONDRA: The geographical distribution of Black colleges offers powerful insight into the politics of space. While many know that the southeastern United States is home to a disproportionate share of HBCUs, many are surprised to learn the role that public policy played in shaping this trend. In 1862, Congress passed the first Morrill Land-Grant Act, which provided for the creation of land-grant colleges in each state. In the South, where racial segregation was the prevailing social, economic, and political order, lawmakers at the time used the allocated land to establish state colleges. However, those colleges refused to admit Black students—despite the fact that these public higher educational institutions were created using tax dollars, which included the contributions of all citizens, without regard to race.

In the years after the passage of the 1862 Morrill Land-Grant Act, the colleges that it created were desperate for additional funding; and in 1890 lawmakers passed a second Morrill Land-Grant Act, which would provide regular financial support to the colleges. As lawmakers debated whether to pass additional support for land-grant colleges in the years leading up to 1890, Black lawmakers who had been elected during Reconstruction and other policymakers interested in catering to Black voters insisted that any follow-up legislation address the exclusion of Black students from the benefits of the first act, which had resulted from racial segregation in the land-grant colleges. When faced with the question of how to ensure that Black students would be included in the benefits of the second Morrill Land-Grant Act, rather than requiring existing land-grant colleges and universities to admit Black students, policymakers crafted a legislative compromise that provided that states were responsible for

ensuring that Black students could benefit from the land-grant resources for pursuing higher education, but they also allowed states to do this by establishing 'separate but equal' colleges and universities for Black students. As a result, the 1890 Morrill Land-Grant Act fostered the establishment of a number of Black colleges in southern states. It also institutionalized the principle of separate but equal in American public institutions six years before the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. The geographical distribution of HBCUs is a powerful reminder of how these institutions were established in response to our nation's history of racial discrimination in politics, public policy, and education.

JASON: A lot of the readers of this newsletter – I'll count myself among them – have a default position of being wary of institutions that tend to separate one group of students from another. You make a strong case for colleges and universities with missions to serve Black students, but would the same argument apply to K-12 schools?

DEONDRA: One of the most consequential impacts that HBCUs have had on the American social and political landscape, I believe, is the way that they have helped to shape how we think about race and questions of equal opportunity and justice. Our recognition that segregated/'separate but equal' approaches to education are problematic reaches back to the pioneering work of Black intellectuals who attended and served as faculty at HBCUs during the 19th and 20th centuries. They actively pushed back against received wisdom that cast Black people as intellectually inferior or that tried to justify White superiority.

Moreover, from the very beginning, HBCUs rejected the type of racial separation and segregation that was the norm at PWIs. They welcomed—and continue to welcome—students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. (It is also interesting to note that HBCUs were co-educational when most American colleges and universities discriminated against women.) During the 19th century, one southern state actually forced a Black college to stop admitting White students because they felt that the school's racial integration was an affront to the region's racial order. Other states provided scholarships to send Black students seeking graduate degrees to northern states so that they would not attempt to desegregate state institutions. So, it is important to note that inclusion is part and parcel of how HBCUs have approached education from the very beginning and that providing empowering intellectual homes and welcoming campus communities for all students was part of their tradition long before that doing so became the norm for other colleges and universities in the United States.

Regardless of their racial compositions (which vary greatly as HBCUs continue to educate increasingly diverse student bodies), HBCUs are united by a legacy of celebrating Black excellence and creating educational environments that are made with Black students in mind. This is manifested in many ways, such as in teaching history in a way that treats the experiences and contributions of Black Americans with much more nuance than we typically see in American K-12 institutions and other colleges and universities. HBCUs also provide educational communities where Black students frequently report being able to learn without the weight of microaggressions, isolation, or being reduced to their racial identity. In conducting my research

for The Power of Black Excellence, I conducted a national survey that asked about Black Americans' higher educational experiences, and diversity emerged as a feature that stood out among the things that people most valued. While I had expected that this would be the case for Black respondents who attended PWIs, I was fascinated to learn that Black students who had attended HBCUs also reported that diversity was an important part of their college experience. For these respondents, learning in a place that recognized that not all Black people are the same and that constantly demonstrated an appreciation for the complex diversity of Blackness was a welcome change from K-12 experiences where they often felt stereotyped by their racial identity.

This insight provides a valuable lesson as we think seriously about how to ensure that K-12 education is effective in providing the knowledge, skills, and experiences that young people need to fully engage as democratic citizens. We must ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn in educational communities that celebrate their identities and lived experiences and where they are free from isolation, microaggressions, and discrimination.

JASON: HBCUs have been around for nearly two hundred years. What does your crystal ball tell you they'll be like 200 years in the future?

DEONDRA: I must admit, I'm nervous about what education will look like in 200 years! With the emergence of so many technical changes in the last few years—from AI, to extremely sophisticated telecommunications technologies, and so much more—I doubt that we can fathom what the educational landscape will look like so far into the future. It very well could be that residential colleges and the standard 2-year and 4-year college experiences that have long been the norm in the United States will be things of the past as we move toward more remote educational delivery and lifelong learning. The big question, I think, is about what role educational institutions will play in the future. Will we still think in terms of the Howards, Bennetts, UNC-Charlottes, Dukes, and other colleges and universities?

Given the ongoing presence of racial inequality and other forms of inequality in the United States, I (sadly) have less difficulty imagining that we will still be working toward having a truly inclusive democracy in 200 years. While I am not sure of what HBCUs will look like that far into the future, I hope that their legacy—particularly the model that they have provided for how to educate with democracy and the empowerment of citizens in mind—will continue to shape our educational landscape and our society more broadly.

JASON: A few years back you came to my institution to give a presentation about Title IX, a topic in your previous book. Have you continued that line of research, and if so, what are you investigating?

DEONDRA: That was such a wonderful visit, and I think of it often—thank you again for the chance to spend time with you and your wonderful students and colleagues! I've definitely continued thinking about policy feedback and how different types of policy can shape democracy. Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments offers a powerful example of how

lawmakers have used regulatory policy to correct institutional behaviors that have fallen short of providing equal opportunity.

One of the most powerful themes that unites my research is the recognition that in order to truly understand education policy, we must take politics seriously. For Title IX, changes in who had access to political power, the experiences that shaped their policy priorities, and the political dynamics that influenced their legislative efforts—and how those efforts fared in government institutions—made it possible for so many women and girls to gain access to college degrees, scholarships, athletic opportunities, and other resources that institutions had once limited to men and boys. In a chapter in the forthcoming AERA Handbook of Education Policy Research, my co-authors and I consider Title IX's efficacy for promoting equal educational opportunity as students, parents, school systems, and lawmakers continue to negotiate the regulation's meaning for issues beyond college admissions and program access for women, including whether and to what extent Title IX protects against sexual harassment and sexual assault and supports transgender athletes. Title IX has played a powerful role in helping to combat sex discrimination in college access and access to the broad range of educational opportunities, and it has provided legal recourse for those who have experienced sexual harassment and sexual violence. As colleges and universities continue to work toward being truly diverse and inclusive educational environments, Title IX is likely to remain one of the most powerful tools for those seeking to push back against gender-based discrimination.

JASON: I saw you have a chapter coming out soon about for-profit colleges and how they attempt to serve both capitalism and democracy. Without giving too much away, can for-profit colleges succeed at doing both well?

DEONDRA: For-profit colleges are a fascinating part of the higher education landscape. In 2021, there were about 2,300 private for-profit colleges, and they served 5 precent of American college students. Given the tight correlation between educational attainment and political engagement, one would imagine that any institution that provides knowledge, skills, and experiences that can translate into political and civic participation would be worthy of support.

In theory, the idea that for-profit colleges extend the reach of higher education using a business model that is driven by capitalist principles is intriguing. The benefits of competition and the desire to attract students as an incentive for institutions to offer the best possible 'product' (education), to seek efficiency in operations, to recruit the best and brightest talent in terms of students, faculty, and staff, and so on intuitively make sense.

However, in practice, capitalist incentives such as the desire to maximize profits by minimizing investment in the educational product, which may include shortchanging students by cutting corners or offering subpar curriculum, creates real problems. This is what we see all too often in the actual for-profit education landscape, as these institutions have come under scrutiny for a range of problems including predatory recruitment techniques, steep tuition rates, high student attrition rates, and saddling students with mounds of debt. I argue that cracking down

on for-profit colleges and addressing these chronic problems is a democratic imperative and that politics helps to explain the federal government's reluctance to do so.

JASON: You're involved in a few organizations outside of your post at Duke. Would you mind telling us about one of them that our readers might find particularly interesting?

DEONDRA: The Scholars Strategy Network (SSN) is one of my favorite organizations, and I think that any scholar who is even remotely interested in using research to make the world a better place should check it out! SSN is a membership organization that connects researchers to policymakers, journalists, issue advocates, and other civic leaders with the goal of improving policy and strengthening democracy by ensuring that research and expertise are represented in policy discussions. I have been a member of SSN since 2014 and have had the privilege of serving as co-director of the SSN-North Carolina chapter since 2016. The network has helped me to connect with titans in my field and other fields who share my commitment to using our scholarly work to contribute to democracy and the production of evidence-based policy.

JASON: As a fellow North Carolinian, I want to ask about what it's like to be so close to one of the greatest sports rivalries ever. When the Blue Devils play the Tarheels, do you get caught up in the excitement, or do you try to stay out of the fray?

DEONDRA: While I've been fortunate enough to attend and work at schools with amazing athletic teams (e.g., University of Georgia—go Dawgs!; Notre Dame—go Irish!; and Duke—go Blue Devils!), I don't think I fully appreciated athletics until the end of my first year as a faculty member at Duke. That year, my dean gave me a pair of Duke men's basketball tickets, and seeing Coach K and the team in action left me feeling a deep sense of appreciation for the enterprise—the teamwork, the coaching, the support from students, faculty, alumni, and our broad community, the bonding experience the game provided for our intellectual community.

As a scholar of institutions, understanding the impact that educational programs can have in fostering a sense of community, collective engagement, and longstanding connection is something that I think a lot about. I'm fascinated by the rivalries because they share some of the dynamics that we study in politics. Having had the chance to teach a number of Duke athletes over the years and to see how hard they work inside and outside of the classroom, I have become a true fan of the Duke Blue Devils, and I always want our teams to win. At the same time, I have so much respect for all of the students who participate in these programs—they work so hard. When they're not playing Duke, I root for the Tar Heels, too! 😊

Deondra Rose is Duke University's Kevin D. Gorter Associate Professor of Public Policy, Political Science, and History; a 2023-24 Duke University Presidential Fellow; Director of Polis: Center for Politics; and Co-director of the North Carolina Scholars Strategy Network. Her website is www.deondrarose.com.

Jason Giersch is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Administration and Associate Director of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

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Recent Awards in the Section

Melissa Arnold Lyon (Mimi) was honored to be awarded Outstanding Reviewer at Educational Researcher and to be a semi-finalist for the Spencer postdoctoral fellowship (think good thoughts-awards are announced in May!).