

# North Hall News

*UW-Madison Department of Political Science*

*Fall 2025*



# From the Dean

As the leaves change colors and students return to classes, I'm reminded of what a vibrant community this College is. Every day, I have the opportunity to see the tremendous talent of our students, faculty, alumni and staff. They challenge themselves to do their best, tackle tough questions and do work that will have an impact on this state and the world.

It was inspiring to welcome the Class of 2029 on a stunning day in early September at Memorial Union. They have a bright future ahead of them. What makes a degree from the College of Letters & Science so special, is that we teach our students skills that will propel them in every part of their life. L&S students will enter the workforce knowing how to think critically, problem solve and communicate effectively. They learn what it takes to be in a room with people who think differently than themselves and they are equipped to lead. It is a complex world, but they're learning to adapt, grow and embrace its challenges. L&S is the heart of this great University. We remain committed to educational excellence and to ensuring that each student has the resources they need to thrive, even as our community continues to grow. That's why we're investing in top talent, state-of-the-art facilities, one-of-a-kind undergraduate research opportunities and programs dedicated to making sure everyone can succeed. It is a privilege to watch our students pay it forward after graduation, as they go on to become world-class researchers, entrepreneurs, thought leaders and humanitarians.

While we enjoy this changing of the seasons and the burst of new energy from our newest students, I'm filled with remarkable pride for this College and the many hearts and minds that are a part of it. So, thank you for continuing to stay connected and being a part of our community.

On, Wisconsin!



Eric M. Wilcots, Dean  
Mary C. Jacoby Professor of Astronomy  
UW-Madison College of Letters & Science



# Old Halls, New Beginnings

*Notes from the Chair*

Dear Friends,

It's been another exciting semester in our department. We have begun work to make North Hall a more central part of the student experience. If you happen to walk through North Hall, you may now find students enjoying dedicated space in our new central advising office or study space - a warm reminder of our core teaching mission and of our commitment to student success.

We experienced the entire professional life cycle of faculty members this semester. We welcomed six new faculty to the department in August. Jeffrey Church (Political Theory), Ana Oaxaca (American Politics), Matthew Pietryka (American Politics), Anton Strezhnev (Methods), Andrew Trexler (American Politics, Political Communication), and Andres Uribe (Comparative Politics) have been great additions in and out of the classroom. In December, we honored our colleague, Dave Weimer, who is retiring after twenty-five years of service at UW.

And, we are currently in the process of searching for a new colleague whose research and teaching focus on the empirical study of environmental sustainability. This search is part of the Chancellor's RISE-EARTH initiative (Research, Innovation, and Scholarly Excellence-Environment: Adaptation, Resilience, Technology, and Humanity), which seeks to hire 120-150 new faculty institution-wide over the next three to five years.

Despite these new and exciting developments, the semester was not without its challenges. We face significant budgetary headwinds as we implement budget cuts across every aspect of what we do. These have required us to make difficult choices as we focus on maintaining the excellence of our faculty and the highest standards of teaching and research. Yet, with the help of our supporters and alumni like you, we have weathered such storms in the past, and I remain optimistic that we will do so again.

On, Wisconsin!

Nadav Shelef  
Professor and Chair



# Undergraduate Studies

This fall has been an exciting semester for the Political Science undergraduate community, marked by new engagement opportunities, academic innovation, and program growth. We kicked off the year with a lively Welcome Back Mixer that brought students and faculty together over a nacho bar, raffle prizes, and informal conversation. It was a great opportunity for students to reconnect, meet new classmates, and build relationships with faculty outside the classroom. We also partnered with the La Follette School to host a Legislative Meet-And-Greet that drew more than 140 students interested in policy, public service, and the Wisconsin legislative process. In addition, our Wisconsin in Washington team offered successful drop-in advising hours in North Hall, allowing students to speak directly with the program's enrollment manager and a past participant, an effort that has already generated new interest and applications for future cohorts.



Our bridge programs and career-focused initiatives also continue to expand. We awarded scholarships to support Political Science students participating in the Wisconsin in Washington program during the Fall 2025 semester and recently announced funding for students heading to D.C. in Spring 2026. Meanwhile, our peer mentor team is growing in both size and scope. They have hosted themed drop-in advising events (including welcome-back bagels and Halloween candy), staffed major and certificate information tables at campus fairs, and met one-on-one with students to offer peer-to-peer support. Looking ahead, they are preparing to lead professional development workshops on résumé building and LinkedIn/Headshot preparation.

Academically, students have access to an expanding portfolio of dynamic course offerings from new and current faculty. Topics this semester include Media and Politics, Threats to Democracy, Left, Right, and Center, Social Influence in Political Behavior, Urban Politics and Power, Political Violence, and Political Communication—reflecting the breadth and interdisciplinary strength of our department. Finally, we continue to connect the Badger political science community to real-world perspectives through our weekly “1050 Bascom” podcast episodes featuring faculty and alumni discussing current political developments, global affairs, and career pathways.

On, Wisconsin!

Amy Gangl  
Director of Undergraduate Studies

# Notable Undergrads

## Miranda Garcia-Dove

Miranda Garcia-Dove, a junior majoring in political science and information sciences, has been doing excellent work to bridge political divides. Last year, she co-founded the UW-Madison chapter of BridgeUSA - a student organization that brings students together to engage in civil discourse and break down contentious political walls. This semester, they held events that brought together state representatives and student organizations from across party lines to hold civil discussions.

[Learn more about BridgeUSA here.](#)



## Madeline Hutnik

Graduating this winter with a degree in political science and certificates in public policy and educational policy studies, Madeline Hutnik has carved her own unique path as a student. Despite graduating early, she's wasted no time making the most of the opportunities she had at UW. She has also been putting in work to break down political barriers through Bridging the Divide, a program from the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership, designed to bring students together to talk through difficult political issues.

[Read more about Madeline's work in UW News.](#)



## Zoe Kukla

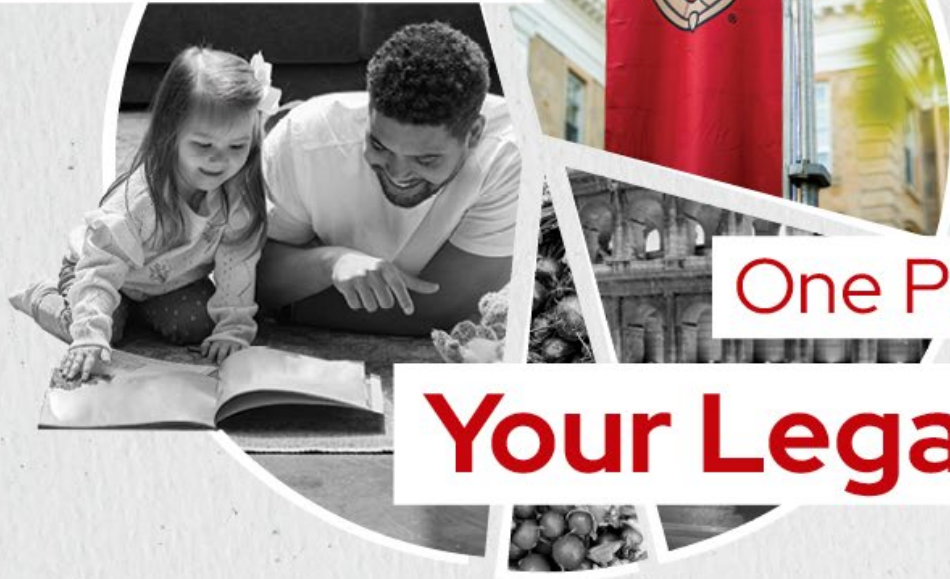
Zoe Kukla, a senior double majoring political science and history, with honors in liberal arts and certificates in public policy and African American studies, is no stranger to award-winning scholarship, putting together an impressive track record over her first three years at UW. Her senior year has been no exception. First, she was awarded the department's Elaine C. Davis Prize for outstanding academic achievement. Even more impressively, Zoe was named a finalist for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship.

[Read more about Zoe's achievements here.](#)



One Piece of

**Your Past**



One Piece of

**Your Legacy**

Your UW–Madison education played an important part in who you are today – but it’s just one part of you. There are so many things you’ll want to care for as you plan your legacy: your loved ones, your values, your hopes for future generations. With the right team on your side, you can do it all.

When you’re ready to make your estate plan, our Office of Gift Planning is here to talk with you about your goals and options.



**Katie Rather | 608-572-2009**

**[katie.rather@supportuw.org](mailto:katie.rather@supportuw.org)**

[planmygift.supportuw.org](http://planmygift.supportuw.org)

## 2025 Planned Gifts

*We gratefully recognize the following individuals who recently shared their intentions to include the Department of Political Science in their estate plans. Their vision and generosity will keep the department strong. Future generations of students will benefit from their enduring commitment.*

**David & Sarah Canon**

*in support of graduate student education*

**Donald Cleasby '82 & Kevin Sweeney**

*in support of graduate student education*

**Robert Trice Ph.D. '74 & Susan Trice**

*in support of faculty research and teaching*

**Doris Weisberg '58 & Bob Weisberg**

*in support of faculty research and teaching, graduate student education and programs*



# Graduate Studies

This fall we had an incoming cohort of 8 students - 2 each in AP and CP, and 4 in IR. This is a bit smaller than previous years, which reflects an effort to balance out a very large class the prior year (Our 3-year rolling average class size is 12). Many aspects of this past year's admission process speak to the high quality of our students and our program. For example, we had a record 441 applications, the highest we've had in our recorded data (which goes back to 2002). Our acceptance rate was 7% (which was the lowest it's ever been), and 75% of the incoming class are women and 75% are first-gen. The great admissions season we had last year is also a reflection of the prominence of the department overall. It is now ranked 15th by US News & World Report.



Over the past year, our students have won an impressive array of outside awards, granted by funders and professional associations. For funding research, Natalie Jones-Kerwin and Jeremie Langlois won APSA/NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants (these are extremely competitive: only about 20 are given in the entire country, which suggests that UW students received about 10% of all of the awards available), Ethan vanderWilden won a National Institute of Social Science Dissertation grant, and Natalie Jones-Kerwin was awarded an APSA Advancing Research Grant for Indigenous Politics. For excellence in research, Tal Tzur received the Fujimura Prize from UW's Holz Center, Hohyun Yoon was awarded the Kenneth N. Waltz Dissertation Award from APSA's International Security Section, and Tatiana Cruz won an APSA Religion and Politics grant for her project "Sacred Votes: How Evangelical Churches Influence Electoral Outcomes in Brazil." For teaching, Lisa de Sousa Dias received a campus-wide Advanced Achievement in Teaching Award. These are competitive awards: only 8 are awarded each year (our university has over 2,300 TAs). Overall, our students are top instructors, and we routinely have a student receive this award each year.

Despite the flagging market, our program has continued to do quite well in placement and we are optimistic that this will continue. UW-Madison was recently listed as one of the top 20 departments in Political Science that account for 2/3s of all tenure-track placements in the discipline. Last year, we had 6 tenure track placements: University of Toronto, Tulane University, Boston College, Cornell University (x2), Middlebury College, and 5 postdocs: Center for Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Brown University), Stanford Center for International Security and Arms Control, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs (Harvard University), PIMLab, University Carlos III Madrid, UT-Austin.

On, Wisconsin!

Jonathan Renshon  
Associate Chair  
Director of Graduate Studies

# Go Your Own Way:

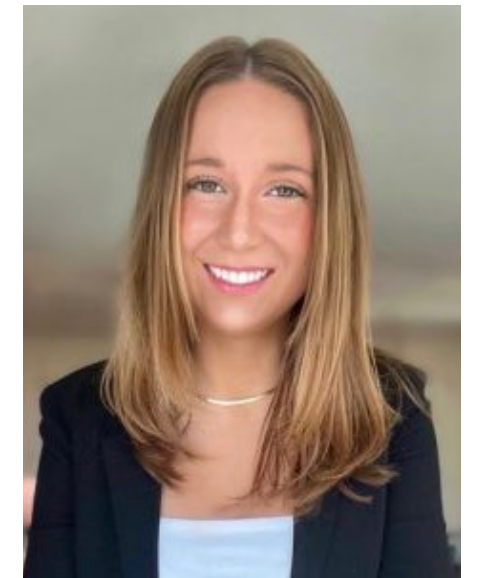
## The importance of following your own path

*Natalie Smith is a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in American politics whose research interests lie in regulation, bureaucratic politics, and the U.S. policymaking process. She came to UW after completing her undergraduate degree at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. She kindly took some time with us to discuss her journey as a graduate student.*

Can you tell us a little bit about your dissertation?

The working title is "When Congress Speaks, Does the Bureaucracy Listen? Federal Agency Responsiveness to Congressional Delegations of Rulemaking Authority"

Most Americans understand that Congress is the legislative body responsible for making laws. Few, however, appreciate that Congress often relies on the bureaucracy to issue legally binding regulations that fill in the details of those laws. Scholars have long recognized that Congress' decision to delegate rulemaking authority is necessary in order to ensure effective implementation of its policies and programs. But despite the regularity with which Congress vests policymaking authority in federal agencies, we know surprisingly little about whether, when, and how agencies respond to those delegations. Understanding the bureaucracy's responsiveness to rulemaking delegations is essential for evaluating the degree to which Congress prospectively controls agency policymaking and, at the same time, how agencies may strategically engage in the regulatory process to maximize their policy influence. My project addresses this gap in the literature by answering the critical question, under what conditions do federal agencies respond to Congressional delegations of rulemaking authority?



How did you find your way to your research interests?

It took me a little while to figure out what I wanted to study, and it definitely wasn't a linear process. My very first semester at UW, I was in a class at LFS (La Follette School of Public Affairs) about the policy-making process. This class sparked my interest in policy creation and implementation, which led me in subsequent semesters to do one-on-one courses with faculty at the La Follette School (I did several with Manny Teodoro and, separately, Susan Yackee). In these independent studies, we were able to deep dive into the public policy and public administration literatures. The one-on-one setting allowed us to have very thorough and

meaningful discussions, and it also gave me the opportunity to ask lots of questions. It was through these “classes” that I discovered I wanted to study bureaucracy and regulation.

Because of these one-on-one courses with Manny and Susan, I got to know them very well and began working on coauthored research projects with each of them early on. Susan and I have written about bureaucratic discretion and public trust in the regulatory process, and Manny and I have written on the career paths and performance of public administrators. Working with each of them has given me valuable insights into what it’s like to conduct research about policymaking and bureaucracy, which has played an immeasurable role in shaping the kinds of questions I am answering in my own research.

*What are some challenges you’ve faced while conducting your research?*

One of the greatest challenges I’ve confronted in conducting my dissertation research has been navigating the data collection process. In order to analyze what causes federal agencies to write rules in response to Congressional delegations, there are two key phenomena I need to observe: (1) the rulemaking delegations that appear in the law and (2) whether agencies write



*Natalie at a Main Street Agenda Community Conversation event in Pewaukee, WI*

regulations in response to those delegations. Doing so requires me to bring together information that is not already present in existing datasets.

I first had to analyze every law passed by Congress over the last 25 years to identify each time Congress delegates rulemaking authority to the bureaucracy. Next, I have to determine whether an agency acts on that authority by searching through each of the regulations published in the Federal Register and matching those rules back to the delegation from which the agency received its authority. Building a dataset that accurately and comprehensively links Congressional instructions to agency action (or inaction) has been a very-time intensive and methodologically demanding process, but it is essential for me to build this dataset in order to understand how laws are translated into policy.

*Has your research gone in any unexpected directions?*

Yes! In the Fall of 2024, the La Follette School carried out our statewide Main Street Agenda Community Conversations project. The aim of this project was to bring together Wisconsinites from across the partisan aisle to discuss the issues that matter to them and find common ground in advance of the 2024 presidential election. This project included 4 dinner conversation events across the state, where, over dinner, tables of seven to ten people with diverse political viewpoints discussed K-12 education in semi-structured conversations guided by a moderator. I was a part of our LFS team that planned and hosted these dinner events, and I served as a moderator at each event.

Our Main Street Agenda project included a major research component. Many civil society groups believe that cross-partisan conversations – much like the events

we hosted – are an effective remedy for reducing affective polarization. We wanted to test this idea by assessing whether our dinner conversations were in fact effective in improving how individuals feel towards members of the opposite political party. This ongoing research project has been an unexpected yet exciting departure from my primary research agenda, and it has given me a unique opportunity to work on a collaborative project with a very meaningful outreach component. Being able to pair careful research with real community engagement has been one of the most informative and rewarding experiences throughout my time at UW.

*What are some of the most valuable lessons you’ve learned at UW, poli sci or otherwise?*

By far, the most valuable lesson I’ve learned during my time at UW is how important it is to follow your own path, even if that means stepping outside of the “standard” channels when you find something that genuinely excites you. The way that my research has developed over time has led me to spend much of my time working at the La Follette School, and that time has been incredibly formative. LFS is where I’ve been able to confidently pursue my research interests, work closely with faculty, and collaborate on projects that connect rigorous scholarship with real-world policy questions. Finding an academic home that is aligned with my substantive interests and filled with people who support me in pursuing those interests has taught me how important it is to seek out the spaces where you are best able to grow and thrive.



*Natalie presents her findings from the Main Street Agenda project to the Women’s Philanthropy Council, whose grant made the project possible. Photo courtesy of WFAA*

# “For the Long Run, Have Fun”

*After 25 years in the department, Professor Dave Weimer has retired. We sat down to take a look back at his remarkable 50 year career in academia.*

Dave’s career began like many college freshmen unsure of which direction to steer their life, which is sticking with what you know. With a penchant for the natural sciences, having won science medals from the University of Rochester and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, he decided Engineering and Applied Science would be a logical route - a far cry from where he would end up. Unbeknownst to him at the time, this pivot would become something of a theme throughout his career.



Between Rensselaer and Rochester, Dave picked the closer of the two - Rochester - which also happened to have a great engineering program. He enjoyed his engineering courses, and had the privilege of working in an engineering lab, but soon found that it wasn’t something he could see himself doing for his career. Thus came his first major pivot. Having found an interest in urban planning, he decided to stay in school for an extra year, taking courses in urban politics, economics, and sociology. Here, Dave began to flourish. He considered studying city planning after undergrad, but some of his professors steered him toward “this new field called ‘public policy.’” At the time, UC-Berkeley had the premiere public policy Ph.D. program, so naturally, that’s where Dave found himself next, earning an M.P.P. in Public Policy in 1975, an M.A. in Statistics in 1976, and finally, his Ph.D. in Public Policy in 1978.

Around this time is when Public Policy really started to gain traction as an academic field. Rochester was looking to start a public policy program of their own, so they recruited Dave back for his first professorship, teaching courses in public policy and economics, which he jokingly describes as a “23-year postdoc in political science,” at what was one of the most influential political science departments in the country at the time.

Dave’s first foray into UW-Madison came during a leave from Rochester in 1989-90. He was interested in the work of professor William Gormley (Eventually, the two would co-author *Organizational Report Cards*, an analysis of the tools used to assess the quality and performance of various organizations), and he greatly enjoyed his time here. When Dave and his wife decided it was time to leave Rochester in the late 1990’s, Madison was a very attractive option for them. For one, it was one of a few institutions that was interested in hiring the both of them. Additionally, he appreciated the opportunity to work in both political science and public affairs (through the La Follette School). Most importantly, he noted that both departments, “like the old Rochester department, were very communal. So people here were very supportive of each other and open to different sorts of research.” With all this in mind, their sights were set. UW-Madison was the preferred destination, and in the year 2000, in the middle of a hiring freeze (subverted by the deft hand of Dennis Dresang, Department

Chair at the time, and expert in public administration), Dave became one of seven new faculty in the Department of Political Science. Here he has remained for the last 25 years, witnessing the department grow to be on the cutting edge across the board, and seeing the La Follette School expand considerably.

In discussing his perspectives, Dave emphasized the importance of pursuing research that interests the academic in question. Over a few laughs, Dave remarked, “The advice [young academics] get is ‘concentrate on one thing.’ [That’s good advice], but boy, if you want to have fun... It’s much more fun to study what catches your interest. So if I were to advise young scholars, I would be torn between the conventional advice about ‘make a mark in one area,’ vs ‘for the long run, have fun.’”

This philosophy of having fun is one that Dave has truly embodied throughout his career, having published on a wide variety of subjects that piqued his interest, pivoting from energy policy, to the implementation of the affordable care act, to the politics of the organ transplant system, to, what was perhaps his most favorite, his latest book [Dog Economics](#), an analysis of the relationships between dogs and their owners from a public policy point of view.

In summarizing the most valuable life lesson that he’s learned over the years, Dave simply said, “it’s a great opportunity to be an academic. Make the most of it. Enjoy the opportunity to look in-depth at the things that interest you.”

What awaits Dave after retirement is finishing his forthcoming book, titled *Negotiating Values: Implementing Change in the Allocation of Transplant Organs* (his second book on the organ transplant system), wrapping up various research projects in the spring, spending lots of time relaxing with his wife and dog, and playing Go. We wish him the very best in the next chapter of his life, and sincerely thank him for his work with the department over the last 25 years.



*Dave delivering his final lecture on December 10, 2025*

# Obituaries

The Department of Political Science mourned the loss of three beloved members of our community this fall.

## Robert Barnett (1946 - 2025)

Robert Barnett, dear friend of, and fierce advocate for the department passed away on September 26, 2025. Together with his wife Rita Braver, Bob worked hard on our Board of Visitors and gave generously to improve the experience of our students.

[You can read his obituary from the Wisconsin Alumni Association here.](#)



## Claire Fulenwider (1942 - 2025)

Claire Fulenwider, who received her Ph.D. from the Department of Political Science in the late 1970's passed away on October 11, 2025. She then went on to teach Women's Studies, Public Policy, and Political Science for five years.

[You can find her obituary here.](#)



## David Tarr (1931 - 2025)

Professor Emeritus David Tarr passed away on August 3, 2025. David joined worked for the department from 1963 until his retirement in 1995. He also served as department chair from 1972-1975.

[His obituary can be found here.](#)



# Get Involved!

## Alumni Mentor Program

If the Department of Political Science made a difference for you during your college career, you can help make a difference in the lives of our students as well. If you would like to volunteer your time for the benefit of our students, consider joining our alumni mentor program, where you'll have the opportunity to chat with students and impart valuable career and life advice. If this sounds like something you're interested in, reach out to Director of Undergraduate Studies Amy Gangl at [agangl@wisc.edu](mailto:agangl@wisc.edu).

## Recent Grads:

Please consider taking the time to complete this L&S First Destinations survey. The First Destinations Survey helps L&S learn about the post-graduation plans of our bachelor's degree recipients, and understand how their UW experiences prepared them for their next steps. When students apply for graduation they receive an email invitation to complete the survey: [go.wisc.edu/gradplans](https://go.wisc.edu/gradplans)

## Help us stay in touch

If you know other friends or alumni of the department, tell them about the newsletter! We would love to know what our alumni are up to and feature them whenever possible. If you have stories or would like to help someone subscribe to the newsletter, reach out to us at [supporters@polisci.wisc.edu](mailto:supporters@polisci.wisc.edu)

## Give a gift

Our sincere thanks to the many alumni and friends who have generously supported the University of Wisconsin's Political Science Department. Private gifts are increasingly critical to ensure that the Department maintains its stature as one of the nation's premier political science programs. Your donations help us to assist promising undergraduate majors and provide them with a range of extracurricular and leadership opportunities, host a stimulating series of talks and other scholarly activities, and attract and support the research and teaching of top faculty and graduate students. Gifts of any size are most welcome and gratefully received.

<https://www.supportuw.org/giveto/polisci>



*Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs (and Professor of Political Science!) John Zumbrunnen delivers remarks at the Winter 2025 Commencement ceremony. Photo by Althea Dotzour/UW-Madison*

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