

Scholarship

Self Assessment

My research interests have consistently led me to East Africa, and I have been conducting field experiments in the region since 2012. More recently I have been investigating under what conditions gender norms change, particularly norms surrounding women's participation in politics. I have grown a particular interest in understanding how patterns of women's participation in politics may be affected by the social groups with which they associate.

To investigate the conditions under which these norms shift, I sought to understand how exposure to privately held opinions of others, especially across different social groups, can affect these norms and behaviors. For the centerpiece of my dissertation, I use a randomized experiment to vary the makeup and topic of focus groups in which the participants discuss issues of gender norms. In half of the cases, the subject participated in focus groups with members of her family, in the other half, only her friends. I conducted 348 of these focus groups in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, after which I measured attitudes with a survey, as well a behavioral outcome.

Fascinatingly, I find that while expressed attitudes largely remain unchanged from their fairly progressive baseline, the behavioral measure shows that the subjects refer more people to participate in a gender festival and a training for women running for office when they have discussed the issues with their friends. I found this effect mostly among subjects who spoke with their friends about these gender topics. I argue the gap that I and many others observe between attitudes and behavior can be bridged, at least in part, by a change in norms. Subjects who participated in focus groups with their friends were exposed to a new view of the norms, which freed them to adjust their behavior to be more congruent with their own attitudes. I presented this research at APSA 2020 in September.

More recently, I have made a greater focus on gender in politics generally, instead of focusing in Tanzania. I recently completed a survey experiment in Dar es Salaam focusing on how people react to female candidates vs male candidates. I also have been working with other faculty in my department, as well as student whom I have been mentoring on a survey experiment in Spain. That project also explores the affect of female politicians.

I also have a few ongoing projects with coauthors outside of the university which are not in my typical niche of gender politics but are related to research methods in East Africa more generally. While I do not believe I will make this a major feature of my research agenda, the projects have been intellectually enlarging and also helpful in building professional relationships across the discipline. In one project, we are preparing to submit for review a paper that explores how people in Kampala, Uganda respond to a request for help from people who are projecting different levels of wealth, gender, and race. We find that people are more likely to help foreigners (white people) than fellow Ugandans, perhaps because they are seen as more helpless than others.

In a similar research track, I am also working with my dissertation advisor and another co-author to finish a project on the effect of white researchers on data collected in Tanzania. In that

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experiment, we used myself as the treatment and observed how villagers responded differently to survey questions after I had been present (or absent) for a focus group in that village. We explored not only the direction of any bias in the data, but also the accuracy of the data (where possible).

Additionally, this project provided data for my own project that explores the qualitative information that was gained in the focus groups. This data fits well into my broader research agenda, as it explores the gendered effect of my presence. When I was present in the focus groups, the groups generally spoke longer and specifically they spoke longer about gendered topics than when I was not there. This provides more depth into my questions about role models and female representation. This project was a good example of how a single research design can answer more than one question when designed well. While I am happy to be working on the joint paper with my coauthors, I am also glad that I was able to gather data that was more specific to my research agenda, which increasingly focuses on women's political participation.

I have been so pleased to see how well BYU supports faculty, especially junior faculty in their research. It has been a relief to find that my research can be supported largely by internal grants. My two most recent projects have been funded by the "start-up" funds provided by my department. While dealing with the stresses of teaching for the first time and other responsibilities, it has been nice to have one less thing to worry about.

Overall, I am happy with the projects that I am working on and the amount of projects that are in my "pipeline" of research.

Goals

While I am happy with the projects that I am working on, I see some clear weaknesses in my research habits. One major challenge is that I struggle to get papers to the submission stage. I tend to continue to work on a paper or project somewhat indefinitely, always thinking of things that should be changed or tweaked before it is submitted. As I have talked to my mentor, we have discussed a more helpful mindset might be thinking of the review process as another round of comments, rather than a place to submit some perfected piece.

As a result, my goal is to submit at least one new paper for review every semester, as well as continuing to resubmit older projects in the case that they are rejected at other journals. I would also like to submit a total of three papers every calendar year, meaning that I will need to keep up with the submission process in the summer months. This steady pace will hopefully keep the process at the forefront of my mind and also make getting that feedback less intimidating.

This year I have also hired several RAs to help with ongoing projects. This has been such a joy. Not only does it help speed along the research process, but I have been so impressed with the work that these students do. My impression is that I could actually begin to trust them more and give them higher-order tasks, even to the extent that some may end up as co-authors on the paper. This is especially true of those RAs who are preparing for graduate school. For the sake of

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having a specific goal, I would like to perpetually have at least one project that is co-authored by a student.

Another weakness in my research path comes from my position in my department. While I have been so pleased with the support that I have received in my department, I also am aware that I am the only person in my department that specifically focuses on the African continent. There are several great scholars who do work on gender politics, but their research is based in the US. Again, while everyone in the department has been very supportive, this means that I need to make more efforts to build my network outside of the department and the university. One way that I have already been engaging with this challenge is that I am an affiliated faculty with the Africana studies program. This allows me to connect with others in university who have interests in the same region, if not the same topic. To expand my network outside of the university, I need to be attending more conferences that are specific to my subfield. I would like to attend at least one conference each year that is specific to some specialty subfield, whether that be experiments, African politics, gender politics, or some other area of particular interest to me.

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Citizenship
Self Assessment

In my formal citizenship role, I have very much enjoyed working with the FHSS DCI committee. There is a great free exchange on ideas on the committee and everyone is dedicated to the work.

Additionally, I have been working with the BYU PAS council to help them coordinate their activities. [REDACTED] has been a great guide as a co-advisor to that group. The students on the committee are a remarkable driving force. They have lots of ideas on how events and how to help the Political Science majors. My role as an advisor has mostly been to direct that energy and help focus it on the most relevant tasks. They occasionally need encouragement to move forward quickly with plans, but for the most part, working with those students every week is a real pleasure. Their work ethic is remarkable.

I have also become affiliated faculty with two other programs in the university, Africana Studies and Women and Gender Studies. The hope is that this will not only increase my professional network within BYU but will also broaden the area of expertise in those programs.

In a more informal way, I have been able to help the International Affairs office host a few guests last semester on campus. A delegation from South Sudan, including the ambassador, visited campus and I was very glad to have him speak in my African Politics class. The students were able to ask intelligent questions and engage in a meaningful way with the ambassador. The ambassador remarked more than once how impressive the students were and how informed their questions were. I also had a delegation from Somaliland visit my International Political Economy of Women class. That delegation included Edna Adan, who has been a champion of women's rights in Somaliland. I was again so pleased to find that the students were well prepared to ask substantive questions of the guests. For both delegations, I also attended a luncheon which helped the guests understand the breadth and depth of the expertise at BYU.

The most fun part of my job has been in mentoring students. I have worked with several students this last year, including a group who were traveling for mentored research abroad and also with a student in our department's Global Politics Lab. These projects are intended to be closer to professional quality and it has been rewarding to work with students on projects that last longer than a semester.

Goals

I received exceptional mentorship as a student at BYU. I certainly would not have gone to graduate school, let alone be teaching here at BYU if it were not for the guidance and encouragement of some great mentors and friend on the political science faculty. My primary goal for mentoring is to pay that forward. Working with the PAS has helped me get to know students in the department who are eager to be engaged. I am also glad to be working with them.

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Because the courses that I am currently teaching are both upper division courses, one way that I have been able to find more mentoring opportunities is by making a habit of talking to students about their plans after graduation. This can be a very stressful conversation for some, but often this is because they do not have a lot of resources. As part of my course requirements, I require students to meet with me to discuss their project ideas. I make a habit of asking them about goals and plans at the end of those meetings. That has opened a lot of opportunities for students to express fears or frustrations or ask questions about options that they may have. I have been able to begin mentoring relationships with 4 or 5 students through this process.

To make this goal more formal, I would like to consistently have at least one GPL fellow to work with each year. These projects are often used as capstones and end up being fairly important in the student's academic career. As I mentioned above, I would also like to have a student co-author on at least one other project, likely based off of exceptionally involved RA work.

For other citizenship goals, I have been happy to work on the college's DCI committee but have been released from the assignment and I am not clear on what my new assignment will be.

I would like to engage more with other scholars and also connect them to BYU. As such my goal is to suggest at least two outside speakers to come to BYU, either to present at our weekly faculty working group, or in some other forum.

Teaching

Self Assessment

The core of my teaching philosophy lies in failure. Not in grade failure, per se, but in the day-to-day falling short that happens when people are learning and trying new things. When failure is an accepted part of the learning process, students are able to participate in their learning with a sense of curiosity, instead of fear. This curiosity fosters not only skill-acquisition, but develops high-order thinking and analytical skills.

Once students know that failure is accepted, they become less afraid of "getting it wrong" and instead adopt a growth mentality. This allows them to encounter their ignorance more easily, and feel more at ease to ask questions that may seem obvious or ill-founded, but which are crucial to understanding. Working with peers becomes less intimidating, and office hours become far more interesting. In a homogeneous group such as often exists in college classrooms, especially at BYU, this environment can be more amenable to inclusion of those who may otherwise feel as an outsider.

As a professor, accepting that students will likely fall short in some cases acknowledges that students are people, who have complex lives and inherent value. This moves me to compassion for those mistakes. I do not believe in a classroom without consequences, but I do believe that students are usually trying their best and that providing ways to correct past mistakes is the best way to foster growth and education. When students are not valued and respected, they know it, leading to a stunted academic experience.

I have learned that lesson through unfortunate experience. In a particular class for which I was one of a team of teaching fellows, I found that the TAs held some antagonism for the students, and were openly frustrated in their performance in the class. I allowed that antagonism to color my view of the students. While I thought the class went well, the feedback from my students at the end of the semester showed that they were intimidated by me and many thought that I was an exceptionally harsh grader. While the latter was statistically untrue, it bothered me that my students thought of me as an adversary. In subsequent teaching experiences, I made a point to remind myself, even verbally before each section, that my students had inherent worth as human beings.

This culture of respect for failing forward can be fostered in the classroom in four ways:

1. State the expectation explicitly, early and throughout the semester.
2. Model the behavior by eagerly correcting my mistakes and admitting errors.
3. Show respect for students in interactions. Make necessary corrections without shame. Insist they do the same for peers.
4. Provide routes for correction and change, even in cases of graded work.

Aside from students being able to interact with the subject more readily, this idea of accepting failure as a part of the learning process has additional benefits. Fostering diversity of thought and exploring a broader range of viewpoints feels less intimidating when students are not looking for

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the "right" answer. Providing a wider variety of learning methods, beyond informative lecture, can help students engage with the topic in ways that would be less helpful in fear-based education. I have seen great success in using methods such as prepared debate, student presentation, role-play scenarios, and as much discussion as possible. Lectures are an essential tool for gaining knowledge of a concept. Those concepts can then be re-enforced and more fully understood with active participation. Such participation can also allow otherwise unheard voices to be included.

Learning is the process of failing forward. I believe in failure and I believe that to do well, students must learn to embrace and not fear failure. Knowing that every student will get something wrong can encourage instructors to respond with compassion and respect, leading to the change needed to learn. Knowing that perfection is not expected from the beginning can help students to take the risks needed to learn. I accept failure, but I also expect change for the better. By accepting failure in the process, I can expect excellence in the outcomes.

Thus far in teaching at BYU, I have been fairly satisfied with my teaching experiences. The students were excellent and stayed engaged throughout the semester. Student rating generally reflected a positive opinion of the course, with few exceptions. The category that I was most lacking in was organization, which was not entirely surprising. These were both new preps, of course, so it took some time to figure out the mechanics of teaching. After getting similar feedback when I had a SCOT come in to both my classes around mid-term, I made some changes to the Learning Suite structure to make it easier for students to find readings, for example.

I was surprised at how many hours in the week could be taken up with prepping for class. Though I think that some things need a bit of revision, I am glad to have the first pass at these classes done, which should reduce prep time in the future.

The part of teaching that I was most pleased with was being able to engage the students in the material. One benefit of upper division course is that students are generally there because they have an interest in the topic. Class discussion usually took a large part of the classroom time, which students have commented is helpful. Additionally, I was a bit nervous about the class discussion in the International Political Economy of Women, as we discuss some very delicate subjects. But even when discussing hot-button issues, the discussion was able to remain respectful and open.

Goals

With two semesters behind me, I have a much clearer idea of how I would like to progress in my teaching skills. As was mentioned in my self-assessment, I was not as organized in my teaching as I could have been. This can, of course, be frustrating for students and TAs who are looking for as much help as they can get. One way that I have implemented this is having a document for each major assignment that clearly outlines the expectations and requirements of the assignment. My goal is that as I expand the classes that I teach, that I will create such documents in those future classes. They reduce a lot of frustration for students and probably cut the number of panicked emails that the TAs receive late in the night as well.

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As I mentioned above, I would like to foster an environment in which it is safe to be wrong or to fail at something. To do this, I would like to demonstrate the concept by being more transparent about my own process. This could be by showing the series of mistakes that led me to a better conclusion or sharing more information about the challenges of research. This also means admitting when I do not know the answer to a question and then returning to show how I found the answer. By showing the process of the information that I am presenting, not just the result, I hope to make students feel more confident in their messy process of learning.

The topics that I teach tend to change fairly quickly. Politics on the African continent can move rapidly and unexpectedly and the research around gender politics is constantly building. As a result, I would like to set a goal, or make the habit rather, of not only keeping up with the changes, but being sure to review and update the reading materials for each class that I teach, each semester that I teach it.

Finally, this year I failed to avail myself peer review in my classrooms. My goal is that I have peer observation not only this year in each class that I teach, but that each time I teach a new class, I have a colleague give an opinion in the materials and observe that class so that I can get continual feedback and avoid falling into bad teaching habits.