Tom's Comments

Advice about Graduate School, Finding a Job, Reaching Tenure in Political Science and other Social Sciences, and All of the Steps in Between

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To my past, present, and hopefully future graduate students.

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About the Author

Tom Carsey grew up in Nebraska and loved everything about school. From the two room country school house where he attended most of his elementary years to Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska, he was an eager learner. He changed his major every semester in college for the first couple of years and he read the course catalog cover to cover and wanted to take most of the classes in it. He loved to learn and had broad interests.

Tom went to grad school at Indiana University - Bloomington where he fine tuned his interests in American politics. His dissertation was on governors, but he expanded his research interests to include state politics, electoral behavior, and research methods.

He was a professor of political science at the University of Illinois-Chicago (1995-2000), Florida State University (2000-2006), and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (2006-2018) where he was the Thomas J. Pearsall Distinguished Professor. He published three books with scholarly presses, had articles published in some of the most prestigious journals in the discipline, including The Journal of Politics and the American Journal of Political Science, and was a PI on several large grants. He served his discipline and departments in many capacities of service and leadership, and was a tireless mentor for graduate students.

Tom died in 2018 at the age of 52. This book carries on his desire to teach, strengthen, and give guidance and encouragement to those trying to make their way through graduate school in a social science field.

Acknowledgments

Writing this book presumes that I have something of value to share regarding the navigation of graduate school and those early years as an assistant professor. My own students know I have plenty to say, but its value will be for readers to determine. I could not have written this book without the help of others. I trace its roots back to some of my best teachers in high school, a great group of faculty in college, and my own experiences in graduate school. My own students have let me try out this advice on them for more than 20 years. This includes my advisees, but also lots of students in graduate seminars and especially lots of methods classes, and even students I have encountered from other departments and universities. Virginia Gray and I also started a dissertation working group in the Fall of 2008 for graduate students where a lot of this has been fleshed out and refined.

I decided to write this book about the same time I was diagnosed with ALS (a.k.a. Lou Gehrig's disease). Those who know me know that I love to give advice. I genuinely enjoy brainstorming with people about their projects, challenges, and problems. When I learned I had ALS, I knew one of the things I would lose was the chance to continue advising students and young scholars. My current and former students serve as a living legacy of my professional life, but I couldn't resist writing down at least some of my suggestions on how to navigate the academic path hoping that others might find it beneficial.

My students have endured my advice for more than two decades now – as have my own children, Simon and Jane. My wife, Dawn, has endured me since we met in college in the Fall of 1985, and my parents since the beginning. All of the above have been very patient with me over the years, and they have also served to keep me grounded. For example, when my daughter was about three years old, she once explained to someone that her father was a doctor, but, "Not the kind that helps people." Similarly, when my son was about two years old, my wife taught him that my formal name was Thomas. However, to my wife's delight, when my son tried to pronounce my name, it sounded like he was saying dumb ass. My kids have always helped me keep a healthy perspective. All of these wonderful people graciously allowed me to be part of their lives. I have been blessed with much good fortune. This book serves as modest effort at repayment.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This book summarizes the advice I have given to prospective graduate students, graduate students, and young faculty members in political science over the course of my career. While focused on political science, I hope the advice is valuable across the social sciences, broadly defined. I think the general principles I articulate translate easily across disciplines. My experience rests primarily in empirical social science, both qualitative and quantitative, but again I hope my advice is useful to students and scholars of all types working across the social sciences.

I don't pretend to have the only advice or even the best advice for everyone. I hope to have at least some useful, concrete, pragmatic advice. You can read the table of contents for the list of topics I discuss – no need to repeat all of that here. Let me spoil the mystery right from the beginning, however. There are no shortcuts or easy paths to a PhD and an academic career. If you are looking for that answer, you can stop reading now. If you are ready to work hard, I invite you to continue.

Let's start with the most obvious – normal people do not get PhD's. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2014 nearly 32% of US citizens age 25 and older had a four-year degree. In contrast, only 1.77% of US citizens age 25 and older had a doctorate degree. Of course, only a fraction of them pursued careers as college professors. Normal people don't do this. That doesn't make you weird for wanting to do this, but it does make you rare.

Most people want to get out of school as soon as they can. A colleague of mine

regularly says that education seems to be the one commodity that people pay for, yet the consumers of it act as if they want less for their money, not more. Can you remember anyone complaining in college if a class got canceled for some reason? In contrast, how much complaining do you hear if a lecturer runs five minutes too long?

People who pursue a PhD and an academic career do so because they love learning. Because they want more of that, not less. Because they want to spend their whole lives immersed in education. I decided I wanted to be a college professor before I selected a field of study for my PhD. I loved college! This was before everything was online, but I remember looking through the catalog listing course offerings for each upcoming semester with great enthusiasm. I always wanted to take more courses than I could, and I regularly took a heavy load. I just took classes from smart professors and worried about settling on a major later. I spent five years as an undergraduate student, and for half of that time I was classified as a senior in terms of number of completed credit hours. I blew past the minimum required number of hours long before I graduated.

You must have a passion for learning if you want to follow this path. You also must have a passion for research and discovery. Pursuing a PhD means more than just consuming and learning what others have discovered. It means contributing to that knowledge base yourself. It means doing your own research and publishing articles and/or books about it. I know many people who thoroughly enjoy discussing and debating politics and current events, but most of them have no interest at all in systematic research of these topics. Getting a PhD is about learning to do research. It is not about arguing with others about current events. Of course, you can still argue about current events for fun!

Beyond a passion for learning, there are a few characteristics that are beneficial to have in this pursuit. You need to be reasonably bright to get a PhD and become a college professor. You don't have to be a genius or the smartest person in your class, but you do need enough ability to be successful in an academic environment. If you are able to be reasonably successful in college (GPA of at least 3.2, but 3.5 and higher is better), you're probably smart enough to pursue a PhD. While important, I would argue that raw intelligence is not the key ingredient to success.

At least as important, if not moreso, is your internal drive and work ethic. Nobody will force you to get a PhD, and nobody is looking over your shoulder every day or every week to make sure you are doing your work. Success in graduate

school and as a professor requires at least 40 hours a week or more for most people. You have to be able to commit the time and energy when nobody is watching. I have seen some very smart people flame out in graduate school because they just didn't do the work. In contrast, I have seen several people admitted off the waiting list go on to excel in this profession because of their internal drive. It takes work, and there are no shortcuts.

Investing the time necessary is critical, but managing that time effectively is just as important. This book is full of tips about time management. A focused four hours on a research paper can be much more productive than an unfocused four days.

A big part of effective time management involves building time into your schedule every week for you to work on things that do not have immediate deadlines. Immediate deadlines have a way of focusing your attention on the task at hand. However, research papers and dissertations rarely have weekly deadlines associated with them. As a result, such tasks often get less attention week in and week out. Thus, I think it is important to map out a plan for each semester with a list of concrete goals to be achieved and a weekly calendar that allocates time as needed to achieve those goals.

A final aspect of time management involves taking a longer view of your training and your career. It typically takes five years to earn a PhD in political science. The job market begins at the start of that fifth year, so you really have four years to be ready to search for a job. Chapter 13 on the academic job market describes the kind of profile you need to be successful. I strongly suggest you start counting backwards from that date four years in the future and map out what you need to have accomplished at each step along the way in order to have the profile you want. You can repeat this process in the pursuit of tenure (described in Chapter 14), which is another five-year process. My point is that these milestones occur at predictable points, but it takes years of effort to be prepared for them. You cannot coast along for several years, and then cram everything you need to get that first job or to earn tenure into the last six months.

Another attribute that is helpful to have or develop is a relatively thick skin. Pursuing a PhD and being a college professor involves putting your research and teaching in front of others all the time. This is a very public endeavor. That does not mean you need to be an extrovert, but it does mean you need to get used to the idea of putting yourself and your work on stage.

Furthermore, you will receive lots of criticism/critique of your work. Professors will be evaluating your papers and performance in the seminars, but so will your classmates. Audiences at conferences will evaluate your research presentations. Editors and reviewers will evaluate papers you submit for publication. Other scholars in your subfield will evaluate your papers that do get published. Students will be evaluating your teaching, as well as others. Search committees will evaluate your job application, and promotion committees and external reviewers will evaluate your case for promotion and tenure.

Nearly all of this feedback is meant to help you improve your research and teaching. Still, it can be difficult for some people to receive this much feedback. Even if it is meant to be helpful, it may still come across as criticism. Those that are able to separate the content of the criticism from their emotional reaction to it end up dealing with this much better. I've seen many senior accomplished scholars still struggle with hearing criticism. They often get angry and defensive. You will be happier and healthier if you can separate your sense of personal worth from your academic work. If this is hard for you before you start graduate school, that is okay. Graduate school will give you plenty of opportunities to develop a healthy perspective on criticism. If you are still struggling with it after graduate school, you might need to take more direct action, or you might need to consider a professional path that is not so full of public criticism.

In my very first graduate seminar, my professor, Elinor Ostrom, talked about how she spent 80 to 100 hours a week working. She read journals outside of political science regularly, and kept a notebook by her bedside in case she woke up with an idea. It was common to receive emails from her at any hour of the night. I never worked that many hours on average, but then again, she won the Nobel Prize in Economics (there isn't one in political science, and she is the only political scientist to ever win a Nobel Prize and the only woman to ever win the prize in economics), and I certainly won't. It does take a lot of time and hard work to be successful on this path, but I think it is also important to have some balance in life. If you manage your time effectively and work hard when you are supposed to, you should still have plenty of time for other things in life.

Lastly, you need to take responsibility and ownership for your own success. Faculty will support you as you pursue your PhD and colleagues will do the same as you start your career, but it is *your* PhD and *your* career. You have to do the work. You have to seek out the support and information you need. You have to

speak up if you need something or are confused. You need to reach out to your advisor if they are not being responsive, or find an advisor who will be. Lots of people stand ready to help, but they are busy also. Nobody can do this for you, and that is the way it should be.

Getting a PhD and having a successful academic career is hard work. If it wasn't, more people would pursue it. However, to paraphrase from one of my favorite movies, it is supposed to be hard – it is the hard that makes it great.

Still, given the amount of effort and hard work that is required, I return to my opening point — you need to have a love of learning to pursue a PhD and an academic career. You will spend too much time and energy doing this for it to be worth it if you don't love it. You won't have the internal drive to work while no one is watching if it is not something you enjoy. Life is too short and this is too hard to do if it doesn't bring you pleasure (at least most of the time). Now, enough with the introduction – let's get down to work!

Chapter 2

Picking a Graduate Program

2.1 Introduction

The decision to pursue a PhD requires careful consideration. It takes real effort to succeed in graduate school, and it also takes time. You must decide if you are willing to forgo, or at least delay, the other opportunities you might pursue. You also must decide whether you have the passion and the drive to do the work. You will likely experience some uncertainty as you think through these questions because it is hard to know what graduate school is really like until you are immersed in it. Still, it is a big decision and should not be made on a whim or because you just couldn't think of anything better to do.

A PhD is a research degree, meaning that PhD programs focus on training researchers. For many who majored in political science as an undergraduate, this marks a significant change in the approach to classes. Many undergraduate programs focus on the content of politics while PhD programs focus on how to conduct research on political processes. Students who major in biology and chemistry routinely participate in labs associated with the coursework while they are undergraduates. This provides those students with a real sense of what graduate school would be like for them. In contrast, the social sciences rarely give students much or any exposure to what it is like to do research in the field. This is one reason why getting research experience and exposure during your undergraduate studies is such a good idea.

2.2 Selection Criteria

Assuming you have decided to pursue a PhD, there are several factors to consider when deciding where to go. You can learn some of this information from department websites, from your undergraduate faculty, or others you might know with some relevant experience. There are also reviews and rankings of programs, as well as websites like the grad cafe (urlhttp://www.thegradcafe.com). As a general rule, I trust personal sources I know and department websites much moreso than anonymous posts on websites or blogs. Oftentimes, these anonymous websites contain more misinformation than real information. I strongly suggest you avoid them altogether.

However, there is no substitute for visiting the programs in which you are most interested and speaking directly with current faculty and graduate students about the program and their experiences. Make these visits and trust your judgment. This is your decision and one you need to be comfortable with.

With that, here are a few criteria you might consider, presented in no particular order. The importance of each of these criteria will differ for different students and different circumstances.

2.2.1 Ranking of Program

US News has attracted a lot of attention for its rankings of undergraduate and graduate colleges and universities. They provide rankings of individual PhD programs, including political science. You should not be overly dependent on these rankings, but they do provide some guidance.

There is a lot of measurement error in these rankings, which means there really is likely no measurable difference between programs ranked similarly. The program ranked 5th and the program ranked 10th will be quite similar, and the relative ranking should not be an important criteria for you. Similarly, a program ranked 45th and a program ranked 50th are likely to be quite similar. However, programs ranked in the top 10 are likely to be much stronger than programs ranked between 40th and 50th. You want to choose a strong program, and rankings provide some information, but that is not the only information you should use.

2.2.2 Fit of the Program

This is extremely important. You need to select a program and a department that fits well with your interests and needs. Many of the other items in this list are really about aspects of fit. Some departments are more competitive while others are more collaborative. Some departments emphasize a particular approach to political science while others support multiple approaches. Some departments have rather structured programs while others are less structured/more individualized. Some departments have a culture where most students and faculty come in and work from the office while others have a culture of most people working from home or someplace else. All of these features are important to learn about and consider, but especially those that matter most to you and your success.

A critical element of program fit is whether the department has strengths in the areas of political science that interest you most. You do not need to know exactly what you want to study in graduate school before you even get there, but you should have some sense of areas of interest. You need to select a program that will support you in those areas of interest. If you want to study Russian politics, or political psychology, or the politics of the US states, you need to go to a program that has faculty members working in that area.

If you are pretty sure about what you want to do, you can pick a program based on that interest. If you are like I was, and you only have a general sense of what you want to do, you need to pick a program that has more depth and breadth in that general area so that when you finally settle on something you have support. In any circumstance, it can be risky to select a program based on a single faculty member who is there. You might find that you are not compatible with that person, they may not work with many students, or they may leave the department for another job. If you select a program based primarily on one scholar, you should at least imagine what your backup plan will be if that scholar leaves.

2.2.3 Methods Training

Because a PhD is a research degree, you should select a program that will provide you with excellent training in research methods. Chapter 7 discusses research methods in more detail. Here I will only emphasize the need for developing a strong foundation in research methods. These skills will be critical to

your success regardless of the direction your own research takes and regardless of the career path you ultimately follow. Strong research methods training definitely includes a strong foundation in quantitative/statistical methods, but there is more to it than that. There are many different ways of gathering and analyzing information. It is critical that you develop a core understanding of research design that underlies all of these methods.

Strong methodological skills, particularly in quantitative methods and what people now call data science, are also extremely valuable on the job market. Demand is already high for scholars who can teach introductory and/or advanced quantitative methods, and that demand is growing. Departments need to provide this training to their advanced PhD students, but there is also a growing demand for teaching data intensive courses at the undergraduate level. Even if you don't want to teach methods, the demands of modern research in nearly every area of social science require substantial quantitative skills. If you want to improve your chances of getting an academic job, get the best quantitative methods training you can. Quantitative methods and data science skills are also in high demand for careers outside of academia.

Some departments provide methods training within their own department, while others will send you to other departments on campus for methods training. Many departments offer a mix of courses within their department as well as opportunities to take courses in other departments. Some universities have research centers or other programs that provide additional opportunities for methods training. A great example of this is the Odum Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (`http://odum.unc.edu`) located at the University of North Carolina. I generally recommend departments that provide at least the core methods training within the department. That makes it more likely that the training will be suitable for the discipline. It also demonstrates a level of commitment to methods training by the department if they invest their own resources in terms of faculty in classes to provide this training internally. At the same time, it is great if the university has a culture of students taking advanced methods classes in other departments to receive specialized training.

An increasing number of universities make it possible for PhD students in the social sciences to earn a Masters degree, graduate certificate, or some other formal credential in applied statistics and/or data science. Many of these programs are relatively new at this time, so they might require some investigation on your part.

In general, however, I think these new initiatives are great for the social sciences. I strongly encourage students to consider these opportunities.

In contrast, beware of the department that places all or nearly all of the methods training responsibilities on a single faculty member. That person will likely be overburdened, which means you will have difficulty getting access to them, and you will really be stuck if they leave. Similarly, beware of the department that makes it easy for students to complete the PhD with little or no formal methods training. Departments with minimal requirements or ones that overload their one "methodologist" are signaling to prospective graduate students that they are only willing to make a minimal investment in methods training. Such departments either do not view methods as an important subfield within their discipline, or have at least decided it is of minimal importance.

2.2.4 The Level of Financial Support

Virtually every decent PhD program in political science provides financial support for its students. Some people would say that if a department is not covering your tuition plus providing a stipend, you should probably not pursue a PhD with them. If they want you in their program, they should signal that by investing in you.

The size of stipends has been increasing in recent years. The difference in the size of stipends from one program to the next, and even within individual programs, has also been increasing. Stipends are designed to provide you with enough money so that you can pursue your PhD full-time. Most stipends come with a work requirement, either as a research assistant, a teaching assistant, or teaching your own class. Those work requirements are generally not meant to be overly burdensome, again so you can have time to pursue your own degree.

The size of the stipend at some universities is also meant as a recruiting incentive. Departments are hoping that a few extra thousand dollars will convince you to join them over their competitors. I won't deny the value of a higher stipend. However, you should think more about your long-term earning potential rather than your short-term income. If you have offers from two departments, and one offer includes more money, but the other department is much stronger and/or better for you in some important way, you should probably go to that stronger depart-

ment. Your long-term earning potential depends on the quality of your training, the quality of the work you do, and the type of job you're able to get coming out of your program. Some stipends are higher than others, but nobody gets rich while in graduate school.

2.2.5 The Program's Placement Record

Where graduates from a PhD program get jobs, how many of them get jobs, and whether they get the types of jobs you might be interested in tells you a lot about the performance of the program. Good departments will provide complete information about how many students start their program, how many of them finish with the PhD, how long it takes the average student to complete the program, and the job placement success for all graduates. Successfully placing former students does not guarantee you a similar job – you still have to do the work. However, a placement record does suggest how successful the program is.

Beware of programs that only highlight the placement of their very best students. That may signal that they only care about their very best, that their other students don't get placed, or that the department actually does very little to help their students, and it is only those who are able to help themselves who subsequently get good jobs. Elite programs may place their top graduates very well simply because they were able to recruit top prospects, some of whom were able to succeed on their own. Look at what happens to their average student, and look at the support they provide for the entire graduating cohort. Top students may do very well because of, or despite, the effort of their program. Looking at the success of students in the lower half of the distribution is a better indicator of the effort a program puts into its placement.

Historically, it has been very difficult for programs to place even their very best graduates in jobs at departments ranked higher than the program in question. Some graduates of lower ranked programs might land their second or third job at a higher ranked department, but it is not easy. Part of this is reputation. Part of this is that there are more candidates than there are job openings at the highest ranked departments. Part of this stems from competing with graduates of highly ranked departments – the same departments that had the initial advantage in recruiting incoming students. I mention this simply to help readers calibrate their expectations regarding job placement.

2.2.6 Size of the Program

PhD programs differ substantially in their size and composition of students. Large programs tout their ability to offer a wider variety of courses and specializations. Small programs emphasize their ability to provide personalized attention. These might be real advantages, but there are also potential disadvantages.

For example, it may be difficult to get personalized attention in large programs. It may also be harder to differentiate yourself from other graduates of your program if there are a large number of them working in the same subfield. I remember serving on a search committee one year where we received 4 or 5 applications from the same department from students who were all working in the same research area (voting behavior as I recall) and who had essentially the same set of faculty advisors. It was extremely difficult to tell the difference between these candidates. In fact, several of the letters of recommendation were so similar, it made me wonder if their own faculty could tell them apart.

In contrast, small programs may not be able to offer many graduate seminars, leaving you with doing independent studies or taking courses that also include students from terminal masters programs or undergraduates. A lot of learning happens in graduate school by interacting with your peers in courses dedicated to the PhD program. This experience gets diminished in small programs.

I think the best programs have enough students in your general area of interest (e.g., American politics, comparative politics, research methods) that there is a critical mass of students to support the offering of graduate seminars and to provide you with opportunities for good peer interaction. At the same time, programs that will have 20 students in a seminar and potentially multiple students interested in the same subfield (e.g., public opinion, legislative politics, authoritarian regimes) might be too big for you to be able to distinguish yourself. Ultimately, you have to decide what is right for you, but recognize the potential trade-offs and be prepared to deal with them.

2.2.7 Apprenticeship or Mentorship?

Some PhD programs, and some individual faculty members, prefer a system where graduate students become identified with a single advisor. Students become

known as students of Professor X moreso than students of University Y. Students work as an apprentice under the direction of an advisor, often in the same research area as the advisor. Such students are seen as an extension of their advisor and his/her research agenda. In fact, some advisors will only take on students if the student commits to working on the advisor's research agenda.

The advantages of such a system are that students get funneled into a research agenda efficiently, they can capitalize on the visibility and success of their advisor, and they are working in a research area already demonstrated as viable by their advisor. This can accelerate a student's progress toward publication and completion of their degree.

The major disadvantage of such an approach is that students do not create an independent scholarly identity. The advisor retains the credit for launching the original research agenda, while students can be seen as merely riding on the coattails of their advisor. Beyond this perception, this approach can actually limit the development of the graduate student. Success requires being able to develop new research ideas. Students who only work in the shadow of their advisor do not get the opportunity to develop this skill. This can leave a young scholar floundering for what to do next after their dissertation.

I prefer a mentorship approach where the advisor seeks to guide a student as that student develops their own individual scholarly identity. In fact, the best programs encourage students to seek advice from multiple advisors and not just the chair of their dissertation committee. Students in such programs become known more for the program they came from rather than simply as a student of the advisor they had.

The risk of this approach is that the student has to work harder to develop his or her own research project, and that project will likely be unproven at the start. This might take more time and effort, and might result in a project that does not work out as planned. One of my most successful graduate students had his first two ideas for a dissertation crash and burn before successfully developing and defending his third one. He subsequently turned that dissertation into an award-winning book, so clearly it worked out okay for him.

However, the advantages of this approach outweigh the disadvantages, in my view. This approach helps a student develop independence and the ability to generate their own research ideas. Long-term professional success depends on these

abilities, so graduate school is where you should start developing them. I often say to graduate students that a dissertation titled, "The Title of My Advisor's Most Recent Book, Three More Years of Data" would be a bad dissertation to write.

Before leaving this topic, you should also consider whether faculty in the department adopt an active or passive mentorship strategy. Do they actively talk to and work with current students in the program? Do they provide timely and thoughtful feedback on student papers? Are they in their offices with their doors open most days? In contrast, do they simply wait for students to take the initiative? Are they slow to respond or do they require multiple reminders before they will respond to emails or with comments on papers? Do they mostly work from home or with their office door closed?

You need to have a sense of the norms in the department that you are considering. It is also likely that these behaviors differ across individual faculty members within departments. Ask specifically about the faculty working in your possible areas of interest when you visit the department.

2.2.8 Teaching and Research Experience

Most PhD programs fund their graduate students to serve as research assistants, teaching assistants, or instructors of independent courses. Regardless of your funding source, it is important to get training and experience for both teaching and research. If you are going to be a college professor, these are the two key elements of your profession.

Some programs tout their ability to fund all or nearly all of their students as research assistants. This sounds great because it provides numerous opportunities to conduct research and to publish papers while avoiding some of the unpleasant parts of teaching (i.e. grading). However, such students are often ill-prepared for their first job as an assistant professor. I have seen numerous students with such a profile spend the first year or two of their careers (and tenure clock) struggling to figure out how to teach effectively.

Other programs tie virtually all of their funding to teaching assistants and instructors. Students in these programs receive ample experience in teaching, but they must be able to gain research experience as well. Sometimes faculty have

grants which they use to hire research assistants, but students should seek research opportunities even if no money is involved.

When I was on the faculty at Florida State University, we started a program where every student wrote a paper under the supervision of a mentor during their first year. They worked on the theory and research design in the fall semester in conjunction with a required Scope and Methods/Research Design course. The professor for the course provided 50% of the grade for the paper and the mentor provided the other 50%. In the spring semester, the student would execute the paper in conjunction with the second semester required quantitative methods course with the same mentor and same grading approach. Finally, we would devote one day in the spring semester where every student would give a 10-15 minute presentation followed by 10-15 minutes of Q& A. This made students very nervous, but it was a great experience for them.

At UNC, I helped start the tradition of second-year students doing a presentation in the spring related to their masters thesis which they were supposed to be completing that term. This also provides a great experience for students. Students produced much better papers for their masters thesis, and did so in a much more timely manner compared to the period before this innovation. Several of those papers became publications and/or the foundation for the student's dissertation.

I have also long advocated for holding a Graduate Student Research Day every spring where students in their third year and beyond gave presentations on the research they had done that year. Departments that provide this kind of structure are building a culture of active research among their students by showing that the faculty cares enough to spend the time and energy to make this happen.

I don't know if every department needs to have structure like this, but you do want to find a department where doing and presenting research is normal. You want to be in a program where students are actively co-authoring with each other and with faculty members, and where students are routinely publishing papers before going on the job market.

In terms of selecting a program, there should be lots of examples of faculty co-authoring publications with graduate students, of graduate students publishing their own papers and co-authoring publications with other grad students, and of students going on the job market with several publications to their credit. Students without publications are at a major disadvantage on the academic job market.

Doing research and publishing papers does not require the presence of research assistantships, but it does require your effort and a supportive environment.

As mentioned above, you also want to select a program where you can gain teaching experience. Teaching is central to your academic career. This makes teaching experience incredibly valuable on the job market. It also prepares you for early success as an assistant professor.

2.2.9 Time to Completion

How long does it take the average student in the PhD program to complete the program? Currently, most programs in political science take five or six years to complete. When students require specialized training in a foreign language, for example, or extensive time in another country to do their research, six years is more common. These timelines assume you are starting the PhD without any prior graduate level work being transferred in to your program.

Some programs stress getting students done quickly, sometimes in less than five years. Other programs emphasize that your funding lasts for five years whether you finish in that time or not. Still others encourage students to finish in five years, but will fund students in good standing for a sixth year. Finally, some programs seem to let students take as long as they want.

Getting a PhD takes time. You should be cautious about programs that push students to finish early or seem to create shortcuts to the finish line. If you do not receive the training you need in graduate school, you will be at a disadvantage seeking your initial job and for the rest of your career.

At the same time, lingering in graduate school for longer than is necessary wastes time and resources. It also leads prospective employers to speculate on your ability to finish what you have started. If two people apply for the same job and have the same basic level of accomplishments, but one person achieved that in five years while another person took 10 years, the person who did it in five will get the job.

I once spoke to a student who attended a visitation weekend for prospective graduate students at another university. They were all gathered together for a dinner hosted by current graduate students in that department. Partway through

the dinner, one of the existing graduate students stood and called for everyone's attention. He welcomed the prospective students to the event, and said at one point something like, "Feel free to ask me or my colleague next to me any questions you might have. I have been here for 10 years and my colleague for 11, so we know everything there is to know about this place." The student to whom I spoke with about this experience rightly recognized the blunder of having two students who failed to finish in 10 years or more play leadership roles in helping recruit new students. He chose a different department.

2.2.10 Competition or Cooperation?

When I was applying to graduate programs, I was admitted to one that told me I could come for one year without funding and earn a Masters degree in that time. After that, the department would select about one third of us for admission to the PhD program where we would then receive funding. I could not afford to pay my own way for the first year anyway, but I definitely did not want to be part of an environment that forced students to compete with each other.

Some programs are competitive. Some evaluate students every year and rank them in priority order for continued funding. Some fund all of their incoming students, but have an evaluation at the end of one or two years designed to screen out those not performing as well. Some programs use their required methods training as a mechanism to weed out students who might not be as strong.

In contrast, some programs emphasize cooperation among students. They encourage collaboration and coauthorship. They encourage the creation of study groups for methods training, seminars, or exams. They plan for every student admitted to the program to successfully complete the program, and they evaluate student success against standard markers for progress rather than against the performance of other students in the program.

Even the most competitive programs will experience cooperation among students, and even the most cooperative programs will still have elements of competition for awards, fellowships, and the like. Even if your funding does not depend on outperforming other students in your program, you will still be watching what other students are doing and trying to measure up. The key is finding a program with a mix of competition and cooperation that best suits your personality. Given

the growth of coauthorship in the discipline, as well as the growth in interdisciplinary research that requires partnering with others, I lean toward programs that emphasize cooperation.

2.2.11 What Are the Other Students Like?

As the previous section suggests, a big part of graduate school is the group of other graduate students with whom you will share this experience. Do they support each other, or do they compete with each other? Do the more senior students provide advice and direction to the newer students? Do they socialize together outside of the department, and does that matter to you? Are they generally happy with their program? Do they seem to be working hard, and are they producing?

My most prolific co-authoring relationship has been with my best friend from graduate school, Geoff Layman. We have also published several papers with another dear friend from graduate school, Bob Jackson. Both are wonderful friends, and both have been wonderful collaborators. I remember after we all got our first jobs we talked about publishing together as a strategy to get more done. Everyone gets to claim a co-authored paper as one of their publications, and it made doing the work more fun.

Most of my own graduate students have also co-authored publications with their graduate student friends. Your graduate school experience will most likely be strongly influenced by other students in the program. This is good, but it means you should evaluate the general climate among current students when you visit a department you are considering.

2.2.12 What If You Don't Finish?

Many people who start a PhD program do not finish it. They decide it is not for them, something happens in their life to derail them, or it just doesn't work out. One thing you might ask about is whether a student pursuing a PhD has the opportunity to earn a Masters degree or some other credential along the way. If you invest significant time in starting a PhD program, it would be nice if you left the program with something even if you do not finish the PhD.

2.3 April 15: Last Day to Decide

Once you have been admitted and made your visit, it is time to decide. There is a well-established ethical guideline which all departments and universities should follow which gives students up through April 15 to make a decision. The goal is to prevent a department from pressuring a student to make a decision before they have heard from all of the programs to which they have applied. No department should be pushing you hard to decide early, and absolutely no department should be making any financial offers contingent on deciding early. Such behavior is unprofessional, unethical, and suggests that they may not treat students well who do enter their program.

That said, it will be helpful to departments to inform them of your decision before April 15 if you have already made it. Most departments make an initial round of decisions about who to admit, but they often keep additional applicants on a waiting list in case a number of folks they initially admit end up declining. You might find yourself on one or more waiting lists. If you know before April 15 if you are going to accept or decline the offer, you will be doing a favor to both the departments in question and those folks on waiting lists.

Finally, as graduate student stipends have increased, and as the differences between stipend levels both across and within programs has grown, some students attempt to negotiate better deals for themselves. As I said above, the level of funding should not be a major consideration, as long as you are going to receive enough support to pay rent and buy the occasional pizza. What I tell students is that if there is a barrier to you going to the program of your choice, let the program know. Maybe they can do something about it, and maybe they can't, but there is no harm in asking. However, I don't think you should view this as an opportunity to try to squeeze every last dollar out of the offer.

2.4 You Made Your Choice – Now What?

You have been admitted and you have made your choice. Many students then ask, now what should I do? Most PhD programs are designed to teach you what they want you to know. Still, you could spend some time getting ready before you arrive. Of course your first objective should be to graduate from your current

degree program if you are still a student. You might not have time to take a formal course or two, and I don't think you should worry too much about it. Some reading and self-directed study might be time better spent. Ask faculty from the graduate program you are about to attend whether they have any recommendations for you.

Doing something useful in the months before starting graduate school is a good idea, but don't go overboard. You don't want to start a PhD program already physically or mentally fatigued. As most veterans of this process will tell you, there is plenty of time for fatigue in graduate school.

2.4.1 Suggestions Regarding Research Methods

If you do not have a strong background in math or statistics, you might consider doing some reading and watching some online tutorials or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Ask the graduate director or someone who runs the methods training at the department you will be attending to give you some recommendations. A former student of mine, Jonathan Kropko, has an excellent book published by Sage titled *Mathematics for Social Scientists*. Berry and Sanders have a nice book titled *Understanding Multivariate Research*. If your current university library has a subscription, Sage has a set of short training modules and practice data sets covering dozens of statistical methods called Sage Research Methods Data Sets. Of course, there are hundreds of other resources available. Again, ask for recommendations.

On a related front, you might choose to spend some time learning how to use statistical software. I would strongly recommend learning a little bit about `R`. `R` is an open source free statistical software environment that runs on any computer. I provide a lengthy discussion of `R` in Chapter 7 on methods training.

You might also consider learning a bit about a scientific writing software platform called LaTeX. LaTeXis not really a point-and-click system, but it is a superior environment for producing publication-quality documents, especially if they include tables, figures, and/or equations. Again, I have a longer discussion of LaTeXin Chapter 7.

2.4.2 Suggestions for Substantive Reading

You might also spend some time reading articles from academic journals about topics of potential interest to you. Look in the leading general journals as well as journals focused on subfields of potential interest. Ask your undergraduate professors or faculty members in the PhD program you are about to begin for recommendations.

Another place to look is at the websites of faculty members at your PhD program. Maybe read an article or two in order to get a better sense of the kind of research they do.

I think reading a couple of papers published by current or recent graduate students from the program you are about to enter is also a great idea. This shows you some examples of what students in the program are currently producing. Since that will be you in a couple of years, it can be helpful to see what finished papers look like.

Don't be worried if these articles are confusing to you. You will learn how to read them, critique them, and eventually write them yourself in graduate school. My recommendation is focused on just creating a little familiarity with the kind of material you will encounter in graduate school.

2.5 Conclusion

Picking a good program for yourself is important. You are going to spend a big chunk of your life in that program, and it provides the foundation for your future success. However, don't confuse picking a program that is good for you with the idea that there is only one program that is right for you. There are many good programs and many ways they could be organized effectively. You need to take the choice seriously, but don't agonize over it. Odds are if you are finding it difficult to choose between two or three places, that all of those places could be good for you and you could likely be successful in any of them. Remember, your success will depend far more on your effort and hard work than it will on anything else.

There are many factors to consider when choosing a PhD program. You need

to decide which factors are most important to you. Then you need to visit the programs you're considering and find out how they stack up on those factors. Ask people at each program the same questions, and ask those same questions of multiple people at each program, so you can form a clear picture of the choices you have. Once you make a decision, commit to it. Second-guessing will just distract you and undermine your own efforts to succeed.

Chapter 3

Deciding What to Study

3.1 Introduction

Figuring out what to study vexes many young scholars. Some have scores of ideas while others worry that they don't have any. They know that scholars write lots of articles and that many publish books as well. They know that getting a PhD requires writing a dissertation. All this sounds intimidating to many people just starting out. Both the amount of written work you have to produce and the type of writing itself can be scary. Chapter 8 covers writing, so here I focus more on topic selection.

I decided halfway through my undergraduate experience that I wanted to be a college professor. I liked college, I liked learning new things, and I enjoyed talking about them. I had not even chosen a discipline at that point, though I was taking classes mostly in the social sciences. I first considered studying American history. However, I learned that the academic job market in history was very challenging, and that most programs still required students to show basic proficiency in a foreign language. I struggled mightily in my attempts to learn a foreign language as an undergrad, so that seemed like a bad path for me.

What I really liked about history was the politics aspect, and I had always followed politics since I was a kid, so political science was the next logical choice. The academic job market looked better, and the opportunities for nonacademic

jobs also looked better. At the time, I was most interested in the Soviet Union (there still was one) and Communist China. However, if learning Spanish was extremely difficult for me, Russian and Mandarin seemed clearly out of reach. That pushed me towards American politics. I also learned that the study of American politics was increasingly quantitative and that many programs even then would allow graduate students to develop their quantitative skills rather than spend time learning a foreign language. I was much better already at math and stats, so this was right up my alley.

There are many paths to selecting a field of study. I was certainly quite interested in American politics, but, as noted, I also considered practical matters regarding the job market and my own strengths and weaknesses. Maybe I should have been less concerned about my limitations, but I've been happy with the choice I made. Anyway, you need to make some broad choices about general fields of study, but also specific choices about topics for papers and for your dissertation.

3.2 Field of Study

Let's assume for the moment that you have gotten as far as deciding you are interested in political science. Most political science departments divide the discipline into a handful of general fields. These typically include: 1) American Politics, 2) Comparative Politics, and 3) International Relations. Most departments that grant PhD's also include: 4) Political Theory/Philosophy, and 5) Political Methodology. Some departments might offer Public Policy as a field as well.

A few departments are organized quite differently. They might be structured around political behavior, political institutions, and international conflict. Others provide 10 or 12 different fields of study that might include more specialized areas like formal theory or political psychology. How a department is organized is not the most important consideration, but it does suggest whether your training will be relatively narrow or broad, and relatively traditional or cross traditional subfield boundaries.

Some PhD programs in political science also encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary work. Others are more inward focused. Depending on your interests,

one structure might be more useful to you.

Another thing to consider is that most academic jobs are advertised under common general headings used within a given discipline (i.e., American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Theory, and Political Methodology within political science). Smaller departments are more likely to be seeking someone to hire that has broader training, while large research oriented departments might be more likely to be searching for someone working in a particular subfield of one of those larger fields.

I do not want to discourage students from pursuing interdisciplinary research or working in areas that bridge traditional subfields. Some of the best work in political science crosses traditional subfield or disciplinary boundaries. I simply want to point out that you might be called upon to classify yourself and your teaching and research interests into these traditional categories when the job market rolls around.

3.3 Subfields

Most scholars focus their research interests more narrowly into one or more subfields within the general fields described in the previous section. In American Politics, for example, scholars might focus on mass political behavior or the behavior of political elites within the formal institutions of government. Within political behavior, scholars might further subdivide into public opinion or voter behavior. This might further break down into a focus on behavior in national elections or local elections. The other general fields can also be broken down into subfields, sub-subfields, etc.

Many individual studies can also be classified into distinct subfields. For example, if you study the behavior of female state legislators, the project could be classified as legislative behavior/institutions, gender studies, or state politics, just to name a few. To me, it is less important for you to pick a particular subfield than it is to recognize how other scholars might perceive you and your work. To continue with this example, you would want to be sure that your research spoke to scholars in these three subfields. Doing so would broaden the appeal of the project and reduce the risk of being criticized for ignoring work in one or more of

these subfields.

That said, scholars are generally better off defining their research in terms of general political processes rather than specific objects. I would rather read about theories of legislative behavior that happened to be tested in the context of the U.S. Congress as opposed to a detailed description of Congress. A study of social identity tested in the context of gender will have broader appeal. Framing your research around a political process rather than a political object will help your research be more generalizable and more appealing to a broader audience. It also fosters an understanding of politics (or any other social process you might be studying) as dynamic rather than static.

3.4 Specific Research Topics

Actual papers and books are written about much more specific topics. I will focus most of my attention at the level of individual articles. I will address selecting a dissertation topic below.

3.4.1 Is It Interesting to You?

First, a research topic must be something that interests you. You need to be excited about the project in order to be willing to put in the time and effort required to do an excellent job. If you find the topic uninteresting, it will be very difficult for you to make it interesting to others. Picking a topic for an individual paper does not require that you commit the next 20 years of your life to it, but it does mean committing significant time and effort over the course of at least a few months in most cases.

3.4.2 Will It Be Interesting to Others?

Second, it needs to be something that could be of interest to others. In most cases, that interest will center on the theoretical contribution that your paper might make. Scholars want to learn something new about a general political process

when they read a paper. Your topic might also be of substantive interest to many readers. There might be theoretical lessons to learn from an analysis of fake news stories during the 2016 US presidential election, but a lot of people will also be interested in that specific topic. Still, if you want your paper to be read and cited by others, you will need to make a theoretical contribution.

Do not pick a topic simply because it is understudied. Many topics are understudied or not studied at all for very good reasons. Just because no one has done it before is not a sufficient rationale for you doing it now. You have to make the case in positive terms about what can be learned from a particular study and why learning that is important.

At the same time, you cannot simply justify the value of the study because a lot of other researchers study the same or similar things. Dozens of articles about a topic suggests that the topic is of interest to many scholars. That does not automatically mean that another study of the same topic will also be of interest. You still must make the case for what can be learned from your study and why learning that is important.

3.4.3 Is It Feasible?

Third, the project must be doable. There must be a way to articulate the theory, generate predictions from that theory, and then evaluate them empirically (either quantitatively or qualitatively). Maybe the paper can be written exclusively as a theory, either with mathematical formality or not. Maybe there is a simulation that could be done in lieu of empirical analysis. Still, there must be a feasible path to a finished paper.

While feasibility is important, I listed it third rather than first because projects should be driven first by their potential contribution. Also, I have never seen an interesting idea that failed to produce any feasible projects. For that reason, scholars should focus on developing ideas first, and then worrying about translating those ideas into feasible projects. If you worry about feasibility first, you will close your mind to a broad range of interesting ideas.

3.5 Where Do Research Ideas Come From?

Ideas for projects can come from almost anywhere. However, rarely do they come from out of the blue. They come from thinking about politics and why it works the way it does. They come from engaging the ideas of others. They come from noticing contradictions, puzzles, or tensions in the way people think and write about politics. Sometimes they come from noticing where so-called conventional wisdom conflicts with observed behavior. They can come from anywhere, but they certainly come from somewhere.

A great place to start for graduate students is the existing published literature on a topic. Reading that literature in a critical and active way will allow you to identify gaps, conflicts, and contradictions. Many students are taught that the literature tells us what we know about a topic. That is a reasonable starting point, but actively engaging the literature, questioning what it says, and challenging the methods that have been employed should really tell us what we don't know about a topic as well. The list of things we don't know is a good starting point for a list of possible research projects.

In the discussion regarding graduate seminars in Chapter 4, I advocate for writing a critical 1-2 page reaction paper in response to each week's readings. I further encourage concluding that paper with one or two research ideas that emerge from your critique. If you do this for every week of every seminar you take, you will have scores, possibly hundreds, of research ideas. They won't be fully developed, and many may prove to be useless, but you will still be left with plenty of ideas worth pursuing. More importantly, you will be developing your ability to identify and articulate research ideas.

Sometimes ideas come from exploring the tension between conventional wisdom in two different areas. For example, I have published several papers with Geoff Layman on party polarization, focused specifically on a process we call conflict extension. One of the motivators for this work was recognizing that the dominant view of party identification at the individual level emphasized how stable party identification tends to be. At the same time, the dominant view in the literature on aggregate party change emphasized that periods of significant change, often called party realignments, involved people switching parties rather than changing issue preferences when the two of them were in conflict. So the literature on aggregate party change seemed to rest on a microlevel model that was

in conflict with the dominant view of microlevel party identification. Puzzling about this tension helped motivate our work. Had we stayed within either of these traditions, we may not have seen this tension.

Conversations with classmates, colleagues, mentors, and others are a great way to generate new ideas and flesh out the ideas you already have. Playing with and discussing ideas is one of the best parts of being a scholar. However, I would make three points about having such conversations.

1. Talking about research ideas is not the same as writing about them. Most of us cannot keep an entire argument in our heads. We skip over things or miss potential problems when we talk about our research that we only discover when we sit down to write about it systematically. Talking is necessary, but not sufficient.

2. You need to be clear about fair use of ideas generated from conversations. If a friend generates an idea, are they simply helping you with your paper, are they generating an idea for a possible co-authored paper, or are they sharing one of their own ideas upon which they plan to work? It is a good idea to make sure everyone is clear about the purpose of the conversation and how you plan to proceed. If it seems like someone gave you an idea, ask whether it is okay for you to use it. It is much better to avoid later misunderstandings by being clear up front.

3. The flipside of the previous point is to consider how much of your own ideas you feel comfortable sharing in a particular conversation. My default position is to share ideas openly with whomever is interested. However, I have had a personal experience where I shared ideas about what I was working on with someone at a conference only to hear that person express my ideas as their own later on. Young scholars in particular often have concerns about their ideas being taken or someone publishing a paper that steals their thunder from their own work. Many students worry about this particularly in regards to their dissertation. Again, I think most of the time it is quite safe to share your ideas with others, but there are some circumstances where you might want to limit sharing your ideas at the early stages of a project to people you know and trust.

As I have said, developing ideas depends at least as much on thinking about what we don't know as it does considering what we do know. However, remember

that you also must consider the potential value of addressing something that we don't know. To my knowledge, very little research has been published on the role of Lieutenant Governors in the state policymaking process. That alone is not a sufficient reason for doing such research, however. What can we learn from doing this research that helps us understand policymaking more generally? Why would someone who does not care at all about Lieutenant Governors still want to read your paper?

3.6 Selecting A Dissertation Topic

Selecting a dissertation topic is not that different from selecting any research topic, but the stakes are a little more important. Your dissertation helps define you for your first foray into the academic job market. The writing sample you submit as part of your application should be from your dissertation, as should your job talk. Your dissertation highlights your ability to generate interesting research ideas and your ability to execute them.

This chapter covers some of the same ground covered in Chapter 4, repeating some of the text verbatim. Chapter 4 focuses more on the mechanics of executing a dissertation, while this chapter focuses on selecting a dissertation topic.

Do not let the importance of your dissertation lead to paralysis on your part regarding selecting a topic. There are more good ideas than there are students writing dissertations, so have confidence that you will select one. By the time you're picking a dissertation topic, you should have lots of experience brainstorming ideas as well as writing research papers, presenting them at conferences, and even trying to publish one or more of them. Spend time with your advisor and others exploring ideas. While it is true that the first idea a student has does not always pan out, I have yet to work with a student who reaches the dissertation phase that has not been able to develop, write, and defend a quality dissertation.

As with research topics in general, start by identifying ideas that are interesting to you. Next, think about how they might be interesting to others. Focus your time and energy on these two tasks. In particular, it is critical to *write* about the ideas you have and how they might be interesting to other scholars. Writing about your ideas imposes a discipline and structure that simply talking about your ideas

cannot achieve. Once you are confident you have addressed these first two tasks, you can begin to consider the specific feasible analyses you could pursue.

Dissertations generally take one of two forms. Traditionally, dissertations are written like a book, with introductory and concluding chapters serving as book-ends around a series of substantive chapters. Often in this format, there is a separate chapter that articulates the main theoretical argument guiding the rest of the research. I generally assume a minimum of three empirical chapters that make up the core of the dissertation. More recently, departments have allowed students to write a collection of standalone papers as a dissertation project. Sometimes the papers are related by a common theme or theory, but other times the papers are really independent. A hybrid model might provide a short introduction and conclusion tying the three papers together.

I don't think that one model is necessarily better than the other. Under either model, you would be expected to produce three empirical papers or chapters. The ultimate goal might be to publish these papers or chapters as separate journal articles, to publish them together as a book, or some combination thereof.

You should emphasize the quality of the work you produce over the quantity of pages you write. Nevertheless, good advisors will expect well-crafted papers or chapters that are complete and could potentially be considered for publication in leading journals if everything works out. You have no incentive to cut corners or to be overly brief in your dissertation. This is your chance to get a committee of experts to read your work carefully and offer you advice going forward. You should take advantage of that by providing your committee with your best possible work.

A real value of having to do at least three empirical papers/chapters is that this gives you room for one of those papers to fail. You will learn, if you have not already done so, that even well thought out and designed studies sometimes don't work. Generally students can still successfully defend a dissertation if one of their chapters blows up. In fact, sometimes we learn a lot from projects that don't work out. Of course, the publication world is heavily biased in favor of publishing articles based on studies that do work out, so your committee will want to make sure at least something from your dissertation succeeds.

Advising individual students requires consideration of their individual circumstances, but I often encourage students to take some risk in at least one of their

papers/chapters. Papers designed to make an incremental contribution often succeed because they are taking a small step away from already published work. There is little risk in taking a small step, but the reward is also small. Your opportunity to make a larger more exciting contribution is strongly related to how far away you step from existing work. Taking that bigger step increases the chances of the project not working, but it also increases your chance to make a substantial impact. On a related note, if you build a track record of publication while in graduate school unrelated to your dissertation, you can also afford to take more risk in your dissertation.

Many graduate students lose too much time while they are picking a dissertation topic. Part of this comes from worrying about picking a good topic. A large part of this, however, comes from the circumstances in which students find themselves. Most PhD programs consist of coursework for two or three years followed by comprehensive field exams, often called comps or prelims. Most programs don't expect students to defend a dissertation proposal until sometime after comps.

The problem is that too many students fail to start thinking about a dissertation before comps. Many students also reward themselves after taking comps by giving themselves permission to do nothing for a month or two. Finally, with classes completed, students no longer have the weekly structure of seminars to help make sure that they are moving forward on their work from week to week. You should avoid these traps.

For example, there is no need to select a dissertation topic during your first semester of graduate school, but you should begin thinking about it in the back of your mind early on. As you take more classes and write more papers, you should begin to develop a sense of where your interests lie. Studying for comps should also help you synthesize what you have learned, which should provide a foundation for your own research ideas. Besides, if you have been paying attention and working hard from week to week during your coursework, your preparation for comps should be more about organizing and reviewing than it is about studying.

I developed my dissertation proposal as part of the required research paper I had to write for the last substantive seminar I took in graduate school. My professor was very supportive of this strategy. This provided me with structure and regular feedback, which I found extremely helpful.

In my experience, students planning to complete their PhD in five years while being on the market during that fifth year are much more successful if they can defend their dissertation proposal in the spring semester of their third year. This allows them to spend the summer after their third year working on their dissertation as opposed to just their dissertation proposal. As a result, students can make much more progress on their dissertation and improve their chances of getting something published out of their dissertation project before they go on the job market.

3.6.1 What Is a Dissertation Proposal/Prospectus?

I mentioned defending a dissertation proposal several times in the previous section. A dissertation proposal, sometimes called a prospectus, is a written document that outlines your plans for your dissertation. You will be required to defend your proposal in front of your dissertation committee. This allows you to get feedback on your plans before getting too far along on your project. It also provides students with some protection at the defense of their eventual dissertation because if you execute the plan that your committee approved, they should be supportive of your final dissertation.

The event is called a proposal defense, but you should not be defensive. You want to highlight areas of concern and get help, not hide those areas of concern hoping that no one notices. The proposal defense gives you the chance to get feedback from experts with lots of experience. For that 1-2 hour period, they will all be focusing on your work. This is a great opportunity for you. Besides, you should be working closely with your advisor, who should not let you schedule the defense unless you are ready.

The best dissertation proposals provide a motivation for the project. You should describe the theoretical, substantive, and/or methodological contributions the project will make. You should also include a detailed outline of the work you will be doing. In a perfect world, that work plan would be so sufficiently detailed that you could hand your proposal to one of your grad student friends and they could execute the dissertation pretty much the way you would have. That level of detail requires identifying data sources, specifying analysis plans/statistical models, and articulating the evidence you expect to find if your theory is supported.

People disagree on the desired length of a dissertation proposal, but I tend to think that 20-30 double-spaced pages should be enough. Less than that, and you probably are not providing enough information. More than that is often associated with ideas that have not been boiled down to their most important components.

This page length also corresponds with the guidelines for the National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant program that is part of the Political Science Program at NSF. [1] I think every graduate student doing empirical research for their dissertation should follow the NSF guidelines for their dissertation proposal whether they plan to apply for funding or not. Funding agencies require a clear rationale for the proposed project along with a detailed plan that convinces the funding agency that the researcher knows what they are doing and can execute the project with a high probability of success. If you can meet these standards, you will easily pass your proposal defense. Accepting the discipline and rigor of the NSF guidelines will serve you well. Currently, their deadline for proposals is June 15 of every year, which is also perfect for those able to defend their proposal in the spring of their third year. I encourage you to apply – even if you do not get funded, it will be a good experience.

I applied to NSF for my dissertation. I did not get funding from them, but I did get funding from another source. Even without that funding, however, the process was extremely beneficial to me. It gave me a clear path for my dissertation as well as experience seeking funding. Many of my students have applied to NSF. Some received funding and some did not, but all of them were grateful for the experience.

3.7 Narrow Versus Broad Focus

Some scholars will spend their entire careers within a single narrow area of study. For example, several scholars have spent their entire careers studying the US Congress – many of whom focus exclusively on just the House of Representatives. Furthermore, many scholars who focus on a narrow area of study also focus on a particular theoretical perspective. This often results in scholars spending much of their time defending their own theoretical perspective against critiques by others.

[1] `https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5418`

Other scholars do research in multiple subfields over the course of their careers. I definitely fall into this second group. Each individual study might look quite different from the others, but hopefully there is something tying them together. In my own case, I have done work on legislative behavior, campaigns and elections, voting behavior, and party polarization. In all of that work, there is a role for political parties. Hopefully, what I say about how political parties structure the allocation of distributive policy benefits in Congress is consistent with what I say about the role of political parties in voting behavior, and so forth.

There are pros and cons to each approach. A person with a narrow focus has the opportunity to become a leading expert on their topic. However, if their particular theoretical take on that topic falls out of favor, their work will get less attention. This probably explains why scholars of this type sometimes get defensive in response to criticism of their work. If scholars shift from testing their theory to defending it, they are moving away from the traditional conception of scientific research.

A person with a broad focus has the opportunity to make contributions to multiple topics. However, they risk being seen as a minor contributor to any one area. They also open themselves up to potential contradictions within their own work. For example, a scholar might articulate an elite driven view of representation when studying Congress but a mass driven view when studying voter behavior.

Scholars in either tradition will constantly be pushed to think about the other end of the scholarly spectrum. For example, a person with a narrow focus will regularly be pressed to think about whether their research has any important implications for the general study of politics. At the same time, the person with broad interests will be pressed to express how their various research projects relate to each other to comprise one or two broader research agendas.

The need to summarize your work and articulate your contribution will definitely appear when you apply for jobs. It will also be necessary when you put together your materials for consideration for promotion and tenure. I do not think you should worry about this when you are generating research ideas, nor should it restrict your thinking. However, thinking in terms of your broader research agenda should help you think about how you can make each article you write more appealing to a wider audience, which is a good thing.

3.8 Conclusion

A PhD is a research degree, and an academic career means making research an important part of your professional life. Various chapters throughout this book provide lots of advice on conducting research, writing about it, and presenting/publishing it. All of those aspects of research are skills that can be learned, and following the concrete advice offered throughout this book can make developing these skills sound almost formulaic.

Generating ideas for research is also a skill, but it is harder to write down a concrete formula for success for this task. Generating and developing good research ideas requires more creativity, insight, and cleverness than just about any other aspect of research. That makes generating ideas somewhat more challenging for many scholars, but I think it also makes this part of the research process the most interesting, exciting, and rewarding. I know many academics who describe their love for their work in terms of the joy they experience in playing with ideas. I equate this directly with the process of generating ideas for research.

Don't let the challenge of developing interesting research ideas discourage you from trying. Keep reading, keep talking with colleagues and friends, and most importantly, keep writing about your ideas. You will learn through practice and repetition how to do this. Some students wonder how they will ever come up with one idea for a seminar paper or their dissertation – they can't imagine coming up with enough ideas for their entire career. When I entered graduate school, I was so intimidated by the prospect of doing a dissertation that I simply chose not to think about it, trusting that I would know what to do when it was time. I learned what nearly every student learns – before long you find yourself with more ideas than you have time to pursue.[2]

The key is to avoid long stretches when you are not thinking about your research. Stay engaged with what you are reading and writing. Keep your mind open to possible ideas for papers. Keep a notebook, a document on your computer, or a list on your cell phone so you can easily jot down ideas that occur to you. You can worry about whether they are good ideas later – just get them down before you forget.

[2]Then the danger becomes enjoying the process of generating ideas and starting new projects so much that you neglect finishing and publishing your research. Like in so many things, balance is key.

I think sometimes researchers, especially students, let their fear of failure prevent them from trying something in the first place. Some projects won't work. That is just part of the research enterprise. Your job is to generate several ideas with the confidence that some of them will work out. While in graduate school, your advisors will help you sort out potentially good from potentially bad ideas. If you are in a good graduate program, you will have a lot of opportunities to develop this skill by writing many research papers, so by the time you are an assistant professor you will be pretty good at it yourself.

Chapter 4

Core Components of Getting a PhD

4.1 Introduction

Every PhD program has some unique elements, but all programs also share a few common features. In this chapter, I discuss three core components of virtually every PhD program: 1) Seminars, 2) Comprehensive Exams, and 3) The Dissertation. Along the way, I will discuss how these core components might differ slightly from one program to the next. The topic of writing a dissertation is also discussed in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 8.

Though I will discuss each of these components separately, you should view them as integrated parts of a single program. They are related to each other, with each building on what came before. Seeing how the parts are connected will help you maximize your experience in graduate school.

4.2 Seminars

Most of the courses you take in graduate school will be seminars. They vary in style based on the instructor, but nearly all are designed to thrive on discussion and interaction among the students. Some seminar sessions will even be led by students rather than the faculty member. They generally meet once a week for

about three hours, and the weekly agenda typically centers around readings from journal articles or books.

As you read and prepare for the seminar each week, you certainly want to understand the substantive content of each reading. However, much of the discussion will center on analyzing the theory motivating the reading, the analysis done to test the theory, and whether the conclusions are justified. You are not just consuming and remembering what the author says, but rather you are analyzing and critiquing what the author has done. Critique means more than just criticize. It means evaluating the theoretical and methodological choices the author made.

Thus, seminars entail learning about some of the research done on a topic, but they also entail learning how to critically evaluate that research with an eye toward developing your own skills and abilities to conduct your own research. Graduate school is about training you to be a critical consumer and ultimately a producer of research. You will learn a lot from the readings themselves, but you will also learn a lot from the conversations in the seminar.

You must participate in the discussion for a seminar to be successful for you and overall. You are there to share your ideas, listen to the ideas of others, offer feedback, and get used to the idea of receiving feedback yourself. A seminar is not a contest to see who is the smartest. In my experience, the person talking the most is generally not the person making the most useful contributions. You should not try to dominate the conversation, nor should you feel the need to defend every comment you make if someone else happens to disagree. Keep your ears open and listen to those disagreements. That is where real learning takes place. In contrast, if you do not participate at all, you might learn something from listening to the other students, but you will never develop your own critical thinking and research skills.

You must prepare for each seminar in order to gain benefits from it. Read all of the required readings each week. Do not skip any of them, hoping that you can sit on the sidelines when those articles are discussed. Doing so hurts yourself and also shirks on your responsibility to the rest of your classmates.

Effective reading requires active reading. Avoid distractions. Highlighting is okay, but actively taking notes in your own words is much better. Develop a rubric for yourself for every article you read, and take notes on topics like theory, methods, data, findings, and your critiques. Add keywords to your notes that allow

you to classify the article in groups with other articles. Maybe the article is about Congress, but also about representation or the politics of race. Actively taking notes will help you more fully engage each article. It will also make preparing for exams much easier.

When I taught substantive seminars, I made students write weekly reaction papers. Reaction papers are supposed to focus on critiques of the readings, points of compatibility or tension between the readings, and potential research ideas spawned from the readings. Students were explicitly told not to summarize the readings. I would make students turn these in 4-5 hours before the seminar so I could read them and provide comments. I would then return them to students at the start of the seminar. These reaction papers often provided an opening to each discussion.

Even if you are not required to write weekly reaction papers, I would strongly recommend that you do so for yourself. They help you make connections between the readings for the given week. Most importantly, they get you thinking actively about the research you are reading and the research you might do. I required every reaction paper to conclude with two or three sentences each about two or three research ideas inspired by that week's readings. Sketching out these ideas in advance will help you make valuable contributions to the seminar. It will also give you an opportunity to get feedback on your own research ideas. Even if many of those ideas are half-baked, at the end of each seminar you will have a folder with dozens of possible ideas for research papers.

Proper preparation for a seminar takes time. You need to manage your time effectively so you allow enough time to prepare well for each class meeting. Of course, you will be taking several classes, and you will likely have other responsibilities, so you cannot put all of your time into just one class. Still, pursuing a PhD is more than a full-time job, so make sure you allow for the time you need.

Some students form study groups around seminars where they meet to discuss the readings before the seminar itself meets. This can be valuable, but it does take time. Also, you would not want to let your study group prevent you from bringing your ideas up for the seminar as a whole. It is valuable to hear what your classmates think about your ideas, but particularly valuable to get feedback from your professor as well.

When thinking about which seminars to take, several criteria are important.

These include:

- **Focus Versus Breadth:** You should take some seminars closely related to your research interests. Getting a PhD is about becoming an expert in something, and a seminar devoted to your topic of interest or one close to it will help you develop that expertise. At the same time, you want to be able to place your interests into a broader context. Taking courses that appear distant from your area of specialization will help you stretch your mind and broaden your views.

- **Substance Versus Methods:** You should take substantive seminars but also advanced seminars on research methods related to your area of research interest. The required courses in research methods in most programs are not sufficient to develop the expertise you will need in order to conduct cutting-edge research in your field. You may need to look outside of your department or even your university to find the best methods and substantive seminars for your needs. If methods is your primary field, you need to think about making sure you take the electives you need to build your expertise in methods, yet you should still take some substantive seminars that address topics where your methodological expertise is most likely to be useful. Methodologists in political science still need some knowledge of substantive political topics.

- **Who Is the Instructor?** I routinely found that my best courses as an undergraduate or as a graduate student were those with the best instructors, regardless of the subject of the course. I learned the most from instructors who were smart, but were also really engaged and committed to the mission of educating their students. I was fortunate to find many such instructors while I was a student. Once I found them, I tried to take multiple courses from them.

- **Who Are the Students in the Course?** I don't mean that you should ask for a roster in advance of each course to identify individual students who might be registered. Rather, I mean you should consider what the makeup of the seminar will look like. Will it be exclusively PhD students, largely PhD students, or largely MA and/or upper-level undergraduates? Many smaller PhD programs rely on non-PhD students to populate their graduate courses, which can diminish the experience for the PhD students. Will the students

be mostly from political science, the social sciences generally, or from other fields? This comes up most frequently when taking methods electives in a different department. In those cases, you should check with the professor to see how they feel about you joining the class and if they think you have adequate preparation for the course.

- **Does the Course Require a Paper?** I can't imagine a graduate seminar that does not require students to write an original research paper. The best way to learn how to do research well is to do a lot of it under the supervision of an experienced faculty member. Seminar papers allow you to explore areas of possible interest, which should help you eventually select a dissertation topic. Seminar papers give you the possibility of doing publishable research prior to your dissertation. They give you the opportunity to make mistakes and have research projects fail when the stakes are relatively low. While a class might sound easier if it does not include a full research paper, you are missing a valuable learning opportunity by choosing such a class over one that does require a research paper.

- **Does the Course Include A Final Exam?** Graduate courses are rarely about taking tests to demonstrate mastery of the content of the course subject matter. Methods courses are exceptions to this rule. However, I think good substantive seminars include a final exam as part of the requirements. Such an exam will generally provide students with the opportunity to integrate material across the entire semester in order to answer one or a small number of broad questions. If weekly reaction papers push you to integrate the readings for that week, a good final exam will push you to integrate the readings from the entire semester. In this way, a good final exam for a seminar provides practice for writing answers your comprehensive exams that follow.

In my first semester of graduate school, I had a seminar on elections and voting behavior that put all of this and more into practice. Each week consisted of 5-8 required articles to read, along with a similar number of recommended readings. All of us had to write weekly reaction papers about the required readings that were submitted several hours before the seminar met. Each of us also had to sign up for one or two weeks where we were responsible for reading the supplementary reading and preparing a 3-5 page report on that reading to be shared with the rest of the class. We had to write a full-blown original research paper. Finally, the

course included a one-on-one hour long oral final exam with the professor where everything on the syllabus was fair game.

The weekly discussions were great, and needless to say, I was never more prepared for a final exam. The seminar was demanding, but extremely interesting. The professor was tough, but fair, and he encouraged a lighthearted and relaxed atmosphere. That seminar, more than anything else, convinced me my first semester that I had made the right choice to pursue a PhD and to do so at that particular program. That instructor, Gerald (Jerry) Wright, became my dissertation advisor, co-author, and good friend.

4.3 Comprehensive Exams

Most PhD programs require students to take comprehensive exams, or comps, upon completion of their coursework. Sometimes called preliminary exams or prelims, these exams are meant to evaluate your knowledge of your field(s) and your readiness to move on to your dissertation. Since my own time as a graduate student, I have not found many students or faculty members who are fully satisfied with how comps are conducted or with how well they meet the stated goals.

Most students and faculty agree that the most important outcome of comps is the studying and preparation they provoke. If weekly reaction papers promote integrating across individual articles for a given week in a seminar, and seminar final exams promote integrating across multiple weeks of readings within a seminar, comps promote integrating across multiple seminars, often supplemented with additional reading outside of seminars. Comps mark the one time in the graduate program where the entire focus is on the big picture. For most faculty, the main value of comps is the way they encourage students to develop that integrated big picture view.

Most students spend too much time worrying about comps and studying for them. If you do your job during each week of each seminar, reading the material and taking notes, then you have already been studying for comps since the first week of graduate school. Studying for comps should be about organizing the material you already have and supplementing that material with a few key readings. It should not require you to reread a bunch of old material.

Most faculty say that the best answers on comps go beyond demonstrating knowledge of the literature to engaging in original critique and ideas. Most students fear presenting bold original ideas because they don't want to be wrong. The result is that many students write fairly boring answers, based mostly on reviewing the literature, that most faculty find to be acceptable if somewhat underwhelming. This problem stems from students' desire to minimize risk and maximize passing and from faculty's hesitancy to properly incentivize risk-taking in comps.

Comprehensive exams take a multitude of forms across programs, and many programs change their comp format from time to time, trying to improve the experience. Unless the format of the comps changes the incentives for the students, however, the format itself is unlikely to alter the outcome. That being said, sometimes students take only one comprehensive exam in their major field, while other times they take comps in more than one field. Comps are typically written exams, but they may include an optional or required oral component as well. Sometimes students are given eight hours to complete a written exam, sometimes 24 hours, or sometimes longer. Students may be allowed to use notes or other resources during their comps, or not. Sometimes students get to pick their comprehensive exam committee, and other times those committees are set by the department. Students rarely know the exact questions they will be asked in advance, but many programs make copies of previous questions available to students for review.

Because the form and format of comps can vary so much, the best thing a student can do is to meet with the faculty who will be evaluating the exams to ask them directly for their advice and their expectations. Do this a few months before the exam so you have time to prepare. Your faculty want you to be successful, and they certainly do not want you to do poorly because of a misunderstanding. They will tell you what they want, and you should try to provide it.

One of the problems I see with how comps are executed in many programs is that they often discourage students from thinking about their dissertations until after they pass comps. They might spend a few months studying/preparing for comps, then sit nervously waiting while their faculty frequently take embarrassingly long to grade their comps, then take a month or so off to celebrate passing comps and decompress from the process. What a waste of time.

Needless to say, I was thrilled when the American politics field in my department at UNC decided to alter the format of comps. Historically, comps at UNC consisted of two back-to-back days of eight hour exams. In American politics

at least, the first day was typically devoted to common questions everyone answered, and the second day gave students more options to focus on their area of specialization.

We changed the second day to be a preliminary research proposal that might serve as a starting point for a dissertation proposal. Students were told this well in advance and were encouraged to start writing well before the day of the exam. They were given a page limit to avoid endless rambling. As a result, students spent a significant amount of their time before comps actually thinking and writing about possible dissertation ideas. This was a document they could then share with a potential advisor even if that person was not on the comp committee. The student and advisor could then begin or continue discussing the student's potential project while waiting for the exam committee to do their work.

This reform works because it incentivizes students to think about their dissertation much sooner than they would otherwise. It also forces students to lay out a plan for original research rather than just playing it safe with a literature review. The first day of the exam still pushes students to think broadly about what they had learned in their seminars, but the second day provides a much better indication of their readiness to write the dissertation.

Comps are important and useful exercises, but they should not be over-emphasized. I have rarely seen letters of recommendation for job candidates give glowing reports regarding how the student performed on comps, and I have never seen a search committee care about that. Your primary goal with comps is to pass them. If done well, they provide a good bridge between seminars and your dissertation. They push you to think about the big picture and the big debates in your field of expertise while also demonstrating your readiness to engage in original research. Comprehensive exams are a natural extension of and conclusion for your coursework. As noted above, if you have taken your coursework seriously week in and week out, then you have already been preparing for comps.

4.4 The Dissertation

The dissertation is the final component of a PhD program. The dissertation should be a substantial, independent research project designed to make an orig-

inal contribution to the study of some topic. Students typically spend 2-3 years taking classes and passing comps, then another two or more years writing their dissertation. Courses and comps should be used to prepare students to write a dissertation. By this point, students should have read hundreds of articles and books, generated scores of research ideas, and written many seminar papers and other research papers. In other words, students should be well prepared to produce a dissertation. This should be comforting news for students just getting started, who might be a bit intimidated by the prospect of having to produce a dissertation.

This chapter covers some of the same ground covered in Chapter 3, repeating some of the text verbatim. Chapter 3 focuses more on selecting a topic for your dissertation, while this chapter focuses more on the mechanics of executing a dissertation.

The path to settling on the content of your dissertation differs for everyone. Some students build on a previous paper or master's thesis while others develop entirely new ideas. Some start with a very general notion of what they want to do, which they gradually narrow down, while others consider multiple specific topics before settling on one. Some begin with a theoretical proposition, some with a particular substantive interest, and some with a methodological problem. Just keep thinking, talking with your advisor, and writing down your ideas to share with your advisor and others as you work through this process.

Dissertations generally take one of two forms. Traditionally, dissertations are written like a book, with introductory and concluding chapters serving as bookends around a series of substantive chapters. Often in this format, there is a separate chapter that articulates the main theoretical argument guiding the rest of the research. I generally assume a minimum of three empirical chapters that make up the core of the dissertation.

More recently, departments have allowed students to write a collection of standalone papers as a dissertation project. Sometimes the papers are related by a common theme or theory, but other times the papers are really independent. A hybrid model might provide a short introduction and conclusion tying the three papers together.

I don't think that one model is necessarily better than the other. Under either model, you would be expected to produce at least three empirical papers or chapters. The ultimate goal might be to publish these papers or chapters as sep-

arate journal articles, to publish them together as a book, or some combination thereof. The format of the dissertation is much less important than the quality of its content.

The dissertation is important because it demonstrates your ability to conduct original research. Your dissertation will be an important part of how you are defined when you enter the academic job market, particularly by departments with an emphasis on research. It seems like a very large task, but it actually consists of a collection of smaller and more manageable tasks that you should know how to do. All of the work you have done to get this far in the process should have prepared you.

The most important factors in completing a dissertation are individual motivation/drive and effective time management. Your dissertation will take about two years (plus or minus) to complete. It will require consistent work every week over that stretch of time. The motivation to continue grinding away every week for such a long stretch must come from within. You cannot expect your dissertation advisor or anyone else to push you toward completion. I have never seen a student reach this stage who is not capable of writing a dissertation. It is not a question of ability, but rather a question of willingness to invest the time and effort necessary to get the job done.

Your dissertation will be executed under the supervision of a dissertation committee. That committee will generally consist of 4-5 faculty members who are able to support some key aspect of your proposed research. The committee will include a chair, who will be your main advisor throughout the process.

There are three main stages to the dissertation process. First, you must develop and defend a proposal that describes what you plan to do for your dissertation. Second, you must actually write the dissertation. Third, you must defend your dissertation and make any corrections or revisions that are required before depositing the final version with your university.

4.4.1 Selecting a Dissertation Committee and Chair

The most important member of your committee is the chair. This person will be your primary advisor and guide you through the dissertation process. Often

it will be someone who taught one of your seminars, who you worked with on a paper, or with whom you have some other kind of relationship or experience. You might choose the same person who chaired your master's thesis committee, but it is certainly not required. You need to make the choice that is best for you.

You should meet with your possible committee chair prior to making the decision. You need to discuss your expectations and their expectations for how the relationship will work. Some committee chairs want to be very involved while others will allow the students to work for months on end without any communication. Some committee chairs want their students to work within the same research area in which they work while others push their students to develop their own research agenda. These relationships work best when the student and potential advisor are on the same page from the beginning.

It is perfectly reasonable to schedule appointments with two or three potential committee chairs before selecting one. You can also speak to current and former students about their relationships with their advisors. No relationship is identical, but you might be able to identify some important patterns in what other students say about their advisors.

Your advisor/committee chair must be able to support the research you plan to do for your dissertation. You cannot select a faculty member who studies American politics to chair your dissertation on international conflict. Your chair needs to be from your general field of study and at least plausibly able to supervise the specific study you plan to execute. When you apply for jobs, the outside world needs to recognize your choice as reasonable.

However, no one person can provide you with all of the expertise you need. That is why there is a committee. Your three or four additional committee members should be selected to balance these additional needs. Maybe you need a methods expert. Maybe your dissertation is on race and representation in state governments. Your chair might be an expert on the politics of race, but maybe another committee member is an expert on state politics. Perhaps you are studying public opinion and want the perspective of a political psychologist on your committee. Your job is to assemble the best team of scholars to support your dissertation. That might even involve having two co-chairs of your committee rather than a single chair, though a single chair is by far the most common. Keep in mind that your committee chair and at least two other committee members will most likely be people writing your letters of recommendation when you begin

searching for a job.

Choosing committee members is up to you, but you should at least discuss it with your committee chair first. Your committee chair has more experience. They also might be aware of potential problems or conflicts that you don't know about. For example, there might be conflicts among some faculty members in your department that you would not want to impact your dissertation. Sometimes Professor X and Professor Y, who are otherwise perfectly reasonable folks, just can't get along with each other. Fortunately, I have never been in a situation where I had to steer a student away from any potential committee member, but I know the problem exists in some departments. Debates/disagreements are a healthy part of intellectual exchange. I am definitely not advising against working with people who have different perspectives. I am just acknowledging that in some departments, there are some faculty members who take their disagreements too far.

At every stage, it is absolutely critical that you work closely with your advisor. Your advisor is there to provide feedback, but is also there to help you navigate the process. Your advisor cannot perform these tasks if you do not communicate with him/her regularly. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that communication happens.

Other committee members may be involved to varying degrees. Some may only wish to review your dissertation proposal before you defend it, and then not read anything until you present them with the completed dissertation prior to its defense. Other committee members want to be more involved throughout the process, or you may want their feedback on particular theoretical or methodological issues. When you ask people to serve on your committee, you should clarify with them what you hope to gain from them and how they see their role. As you interact with other committee members, always make sure to keep your advisor informed.

4.4.2 The Dissertation Proposal

A dissertation proposal, sometimes called a prospectus, is a written document that outlines your plans for your dissertation. You will be required to defend your proposal in front of your dissertation committee. This allows you to get feedback on your plans before getting too far along on your project. It also provides you

with some protection at the defense of your eventual dissertation because if you execute the plan that your committee approved, they should be supportive of your final dissertation.

The event is called a proposal defense, but you should not be defensive. You want to highlight areas of concern and get help, not hide those areas of concern hoping that no one notices. The proposal defense gives you the chance to get feedback from experts with lots of experience. For that 1-2 hour period, they will all be focusing on your work. This is a great opportunity for you. Besides, you should be working closely with your advisor, who should not let you schedule the defense unless you are ready.

The mechanics of the defense might differ from program to program. Generally speaking, the student is asked to open with a brief presentation. It is generally unhelpful to simply summarize the proposal because your committee has already read it. I encourage students to emphasize the theoretical and/or methodological contributions they believe they are making, and to highlight areas where they need help and advice. Your best strategy is to simply ask your advisor what to expect during the defense and what you should prepare.

Often a proposal defense begins with sending the student out of the room for a few minutes while the committee gets organized. At this time, the chair often asks whether anyone on the committee has any real fundamental objections to the proposal.

The student is brought back into the room, and the defense occurs. The bulk of the defense will consist of committee members asking questions/raising issues and the student responding. The goal is not for the student to successfully defend every decision they have made in the proposal. Rather, the goal is for the conversation to lead to consensus around a stronger proposal. It should be a conversation, not an argument or a debate.

After the discussion, the student will be sent out again so the committee can discuss the proposal. The committee may strongly suggest major or minor revisions to the proposal. They will ultimately decide whether the student has passed the proposal defense or whether they want the student to defend a revised proposal before proceeding. The student is brought back into the room and informed of the committee's decision. Typically the chair of the committee will be charged with the task of working with the student to reshape the proposal as needed in response

to the committee's suggestions.

The best dissertation proposals provide a motivation for the project. You should describe the theoretical, substantive, and/or methodological contributions the project will make. You should also include a detailed outline of the work you will be doing. In a perfect world, that work plan would be sufficiently detailed that you could hand your proposal to one of your grad student friends and they could execute the dissertation pretty much the way you would have. That level of detail requires identifying data sources, specifying analysis plans/statistical models, and articulating the evidence you expect to find if your theory is supported.

People disagree on the desired length of a dissertation proposal, but I tend to think that 20-30 double-spaced pages should be enough. Less than that, and you probably need to provide additional information. More than that, and your ideas probably need to be boiled down to their most important components.

This page length also corresponds with the guidelines for the National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant program that is part of the Political Science Program at NSF.[1] I think every graduate student doing empirical research for their dissertation should follow the NSF guidelines for their dissertation proposal whether they plan to apply for funding or not. Funding agencies require a clear rationale for the proposed project along with a detailed plan that convinces the funding agency that the researcher knows what they are doing and can execute the project with a high probability of success. If you can meet these standards, you will easily pass your proposal defense. Accepting the discipline and rigor of the NSF guidelines will serve you well. Currently, their deadline for proposals is June 15 of every year, which is also perfect for those able to defend their proposal in the spring of their third year. I encourage you to apply – even if you do not get funded, it will be a good experience.

The National Science Foundation evaluates all grant proposals on two criteria: 1) the intellectual merit and 2) the broader impacts of the research. The first criteria refers to the theoretical contribution of the research, and is centered on how the research will add new knowledge to help scholars understand the topic at hand better. The second criteria deals more with how the research might have practical implications and how products of the research, such as data that can be shared, might impact the work of others. Every successful proposal must meet

[1] `https://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5418`

these two criteria.

I applied to NSF for my dissertation. I did not get funding from them, but I did get it from another source. Even without that NSF funding, however, the process was extremely beneficial to me. It gave me a clear path for my dissertation as well as experience seeking funding. Many of my students have applied to NSF. Some received funding and some did not, but all of them were grateful for the experience.

Brief Outline for Prospectus

If we assume a twenty page document, I suggest the following structure:

1. **Introduction** - 1-2 pages

   This section should include three paragraphs. The first paragraph should say what the project is about. What problem are you addressing, or what question are you answering? Your reader needs to know what your dissertation is going to be about after reading this paragraph.

   The second paragraph should explain why answering this question is important. What theoretical, methodological, and/or substantive contributions are you making?

   The third paragraph should provide a brief chapter outline of your dissertation. Most dissertations consist of three core empirical chapters. You should write no more than two or three sentences for each empirical chapter.

2. **Theory** - 4-6 pages

   Here you need to articulate the general theory guiding your dissertation. You should place your theory within the existing literature, but you should NOT write a literature review. You need to present your argument, not the arguments of others. Importantly, you must be clear about your unique theoretical contribution.

3. **Overview of Empirical Chapters** 12-15 pages

   This section needs details on the data, research design, and analyses you plan for each chapter. In a perfect world, these plans will be detailed enough

> that you could give your prospectus to another student and they would be able to pretty much execute your dissertation themselves.

Of course your prospectus should also include a list of cited references. If you are planning to conduct a survey, elite interviews, an experiment, or some other similar type of study, you should also include an appendix that provides the survey instrument, proposed interview questions, etc. Providing these details to your committee gives you the opportunity to get more specific feedback from them at the defense.

4.4.3 Writing the Dissertation

If the dissertation proposal is clear and specific, writing the dissertation should be driven by simply following the plan. Like any other research project, you need to develop the theory, articulate your expectations, develop the research design, gather and analyze the data, and write up your results. Some dissertations unfold this easy, but many others require making adjustments along the way.

Sometimes students discover something new in the literature that provokes a new idea or impinges on their plans. Sometimes new data becomes available, or sometimes anticipated data cannot be found. Sometimes preliminary analyses reveal patterns or findings that were not anticipated. Sometimes the student's interests change dramatically. Sometimes the dissertation proposal itself was vague. The point is, it is fairly common for the final dissertation to differ from the dissertation proposal. You should make these adjustments in complete consultation with your advisor, and the rest of your committee should be informed if any dramatic changes are made.

Chapter 3 provides more information about selecting research topics, Chapter 8 provides a great deal of detail on writing, and Chapter 14 discusses the role of your dissertation in applying for academic jobs. Here I will simply say again that managing your time and working closely with your advisor are important.

I generally establish weekly or biweekly meetings with the students I advise in order to keep tabs on their progress. Students can give me a draft of one chapter to review. While I am reviewing it, they can work on another chapter. You do not need to work on chapters in any particular order. Early in the process students

can push all of their chapters along. Eventually, however, it becomes important to focus on finishing a particular chapter before moving on to finish another one. In fact, I often encourage students to try to publish one or more of their chapters prior to the defense of their dissertation, primarily because of the advantage this provides on the job market.

Regular meetings also push students to make regular progress every week or two. A student does not want to come to a meeting with their advisor only to report that they got nothing accomplished in the previous week or two. Regularly scheduled meetings provide structure to a process that is otherwise largely unstructured. Regular meetings also make sure that the student does not drift too far away from what the advisor deems reasonable.

What If Something Goes Wrong?

Of course, even the best of plans can go wrong. It does happen, but together with your advisor, any problem can be overcome. Let's consider a few of the more common fears graduate students have while writing their dissertation.

1. **What if my data explodes?** Sometimes the data you collect or the analysis you conduct just does not work as expected. Sometimes your results are the opposite of what you predicted, sometimes your results contradict each other, and sometimes there are just no results or patterns of any kind to be found. My own dissertation depended heavily on whether a particular interactive/conditional effect emerged as expected. Computers were slow at that time, and I remember waiting for an agonizing minute or two for the results to appear on the screen. That might have been my most anxious moment in graduate school, but fortunately, everything worked.

   I have had students who have not been so fortunate. I have seen students conduct original survey experiments only to find that their experimental treatment had no effect. One student, in particular, had two different dissertation topics fail when the analyses did not work out. I have had students plan projects that required funding which they had to adjust dramatically when that funding did not appear. In every case, however, these students went on to successfully defend their dissertations.

To navigate these sorts of problems requires adaptability and communication with your advisor. Rest assured that your advisor has had projects of his/her own which blew up. Oftentimes another chapter can be expanded and divided into two chapters. Students generally have more ideas than will fit in a dissertation at the outset, so you can revisit those ideas. Finally, as noted elsewhere, one of the reasons a typical dissertation includes at least three empirical/substantive chapters or papers is because of the real chance that at least one of them will not pan out.

A colleague of mine often advises students to have at least one chapter in the dissertation that would be interesting almost regardless of the outcome. Finding a circumstance where party identification does not shape people's attitudes or behaviors might be more informative than finding yet another circumstance where it does. I often tell students who want to study the behavior of political elites not to worry about finding a pattern. Such students should theorize about what they expect the pattern to be, but there will almost certainly be one, even if it is not what they expect. Political elites act with intention, and intentional behavior will not be random.

2. **What if someone else publishes my idea?** I remember every time a new issue of a journal was published while I was working on my dissertation that I nervously flipped through it looking to see if someone had just published a paper that undercut all or part of my dissertation. I have seen this happen only once or twice. There will almost certainly be new papers published that are related to your dissertation, but rarely do such publications derail a dissertation. You might need to make some modifications, but there is room for multiple papers on a similar topic. Even if the topic is the same, the data, methods, and/or theoretical approach of your dissertation will likely differ.

   Still, it can happen. This means you want to stay on top of new publications in your area just in case. If a problem emerges, the sooner you identify it, the easier it will be to address. Talk with your advisor and others about the situation and brainstorm ideas for how to adapt/respond.

3. **What if I want to change topics?** Sometimes students think they have a better idea part way through their dissertation. Sometimes students decide they hate or are bored with their dissertation. For these or other reasons, sometimes students want to scrap what they are doing and start over.

   If you are early enough in the process, this might be a good strategy. I have repeatedly stressed the importance of being excited about your own

work. However, if you have already made substantial progress, changing your mind might be a mistake because of the time and effort you have already expended.

Maybe you can replace a chapter you had planned with something new. You could also write about your new ideas as part of your future research plans when applying for jobs. Maybe you could co-author a paper with a fellow graduate student on one of these ideas as a side project to keep you from burning out on your dissertation. In all of these circumstances, my basic advice is that if you have sunk considerable time and energy into a research project, you should not abandon it unless it really has no potential of producing publishable work.

4. **What if my advisor won't communicate or the relationship is not working?** Much of my advice relies on communication with your advisor. That is why it is important to select an advisor that will work with you. Unfortunately, the relationship between an advisor and student sometimes just doesn't work out. The fault might lie with the advisor, the student, both, or neither.

   If your advisor simply won't communicate, read drafts of your chapters, or respond to email, you will need to take action. Start by meeting in person with your advisor. If they won't answer an email, go to their posted office hours. Stop by their office 20 minutes before or 10 minutes after they are scheduled to teach. If they can't meet with you then, schedule an appointment. You need to at least try to find out the nature of the problem.

   If such a meeting does not resolve the issue, you can either seek advice from other members of your committee or switch advisors. If you are concerned that your advisor might hold a grudge, you could also consider adding someone as a co-chair. You need to do something to make sure that at least someone on your committee supports what you are doing and provides the guidance you need.

   The worst thing you could do is nothing. You should not write a dissertation without some direction and support. You do not want to enter the defense of your dissertation without knowing that at least someone on your committee agrees it is time to defend and supports your work.

   Communication can also break down when the student stops communicating with their advisor. It is your dissertation and your career, so you should

take responsibility for communicating with your chair and your committee. When I was in graduate school, we were told a story about a previous student whose dissertation was rejected by his committee primarily because he failed to communicate. As I understand it, the project was supposed to examine the impact of local government institutions on local policy. The question was whether different institutional arrangements produced differences in policies. The student purportedly randomly selected a handful of local governments to study. Unfortunately, all the local governments in the random sample ended up having the same basic institutional arrangements. In other words, the data the student studied had no variance on the key independent variable. As a result, it could not be correlated with any differences in policy outcomes across these local governments. This error could have easily been avoided if the student had been in touch with his committee chair from the beginning. He wasn't, so he showed up with a dissertation that, by design, could not address the question at the core of the project.

Sometimes the problem is not a lack of communication, but a lack of agreement. The student may want to go in one direction while the advisor recommends something different. Step one is trying to understand each other's perspective. This might involve doing a little bit of work in both directions to see if you can add evidence rather than just speculation to the discussion. If you are still struggling to agree, you can reach out to another member of your committee. You should let that committee member know about the disagreement between you and your chair. You want that committee member to hear both sides so they can be an honest broker. Ultimately, if you cannot resolve the problem, you may need to make a change.

It is difficult to describe the relationship between an advisor and student in the abstract. Individual personalities differ, as do students' needs. Sometimes what a student needs and what a student wants are not the same. This can be hard for a student to accept. At the same time, if the student simply waits for the advisor to tell them what to do, and then just does it without thinking, they are not becoming the independent scholar they need to be. A good relationship should be open with both people contributing.

4.4.4 The Dissertation Defense

The defense of your dissertation will probably be quite similar to the defense of your proposal. At both stages, your advisor should not let you schedule a defense unless you are ready.

You may be asked to leave the room for a few minutes at the beginning, and you will definitely be asked to leave the room for a few minutes at the end. In between, you will have a discussion about the research you have done. Typically this unfolds through a series of questions from members of your dissertation committee.

Again, the meeting is called a defense, but you should not be defensive. Bring your concerns out into the open, and use this time as an opportunity to make your dissertation better. You want to do more than just pass your dissertation defense – you want to maximize your chances of publishing your research in the best possible outlets. You want your committee to help you identify and resolve potential problems so that down the road, reviewers do not identify those problems as reasons to reject your work for publication.

The dissertation defense should be a discussion among equals. You don't want to be defensive, but there is no need to simply wilt in front of the committee either. Remember, you are the expert on your research.

Once the discussion is over, you'll be sent out of the room so the committee can discuss your dissertation and your defense. By far the most common outcome is for the committee to conditionally approve the dissertation. The conditions will be spelled out to you in the form of revisions the committee wants to see in the final dissertation before it is deposited with your university. Most of the time, the committee will simply charge the chair of the committee with making sure these corrections are made. In this circumstance, the committee chair will generally not sign the formal paperwork until they approve your revisions. Occasionally, one or more committee members may want to review some or all of the changes for themselves. Approval without revision is extremely rare, and failure to successfully defend is also extremely rare.

If you and your advisor have both done your jobs, the dissertation defense will not be stressful. Some students even find it somewhat anti-climactic. By the time you reach the defense, you should have gained the experience and the confidence

necessary to conduct quality research and to share it confidently with others. Also, a fair amount of time at the defense can focus on publication strategies for the dissertation and ideas for what the student might do next, more than just questions about the research.

My last bit of advice here is to tackle the revisions right away. There is a tendency to relax after the defense and let the process of making revisions drag on. Don't let this happen to you. Make the revisions while the discussion is fresh in your mind. You are so close to the finish line at that point that you should push through to the end. Besides, you may find that properly formatting your final dissertation to meet the guidelines of your university takes more time than you imagined, and you don't want to miss graduation because you put off your revisions too long.

You cannot claim to have a PhD until your university confers the degree on you. You cannot even claim to have met all the requirements for a PhD until your final revised document has been approved by your department and the Graduate College at your university. In fact, you should not claim to have successfully defended your dissertation until your advisor signs off on your final revisions. You need to be extremely conscientious about this. I have seen and heard about some newly hired assistant professors who have gotten into considerable trouble by claiming to have a PhD prematurely.

4.5 Conclusion

Seminars, comps, and a dissertation – sounds simple enough doesn't it? These components of a PhD program should not be viewed as separate and independent. Rather, they are interrelated steps helping you reach the final goal of becoming an independent scholar and researcher.

There is no substitute for doing the hard work yourself, but remember that pursuing a PhD is a social enterprise. Classmates in seminars, study groups for seminars and comps, and your dissertation committee are all examples of how you can work with others to succeed through this process. Let me describe a good example of this.

A colleague of mine at UNC, Virginia Gray, and I established a dissertation

working group in 2008 (or was it 2009?) to help students we were advising make progress on their dissertations. This group meets every other week, taking summers off. At each meeting, one student presents a draft of their prospectus or a dissertation chapter. That document is emailed out to everyone in the group about two days before the meeting. Everyone in the group – faculty members and students – reads the paper before coming to the meeting.

At the meeting, we give the student on the agenda that day about three minutes to make any opening remarks, and then we spend an hour asking questions and making suggestions. We keep the mood light with lots of joking, but the student presenting ends up receiving a lot of constructive feedback. Students get used to receiving criticism, and they also get used to giving constructive feedback to each other. Everyone learns to see regular patterns in the comments that are made as well, whether they are about writing, theory, methods, etc. Students learn to anticipate those kinds of comments and write better first drafts as a result. I still typically meet with my own advisees every week, but this workshop setting has been a positive experience for everyone.

Graduate school is great! Dive in, participate, communicate with your faculty, explore your interests, and take risks. Work hard every week, and find out if this is what you love.

Chapter 5

Making it Through the First Year

5.1 Introduction

The first year of a PhD program is always hard. It's hard because everything is new. You are living in a new place, you're interacting with new people, there are new expectations, and graduate courses are just different than undergraduate courses. All of this newness requires time to absorb. It will take some time to adapt, so just be ready for that.

As Chapter 4 describes, getting a PhD is a long process. You can't blow off the first year, but you also can't complete your dissertation and publish five articles in your first year either. Use your first year to begin building a strong foundation in theory, methods, and substance. The stronger the foundation, the easier and more productive your subsequent years in graduate school will be.

As I often say, learning to manage your time is critical. Allow enough time each week to get all your work done. Equally important is learning how to motivate yourself to do your work and do it well each and every week. Your first year is a great time to start establishing good work habits.

5.2 Should I Be Here?

Nearly every PhD student has a moment during their first year when they seriously question whether they should be there or not. Don't be surprised when this happens, and don't feel like it only happens to you. You might question whether you want to do this or whether you are able to do this. Both of these are fair questions.

In terms of whether you want to do this, it is useful to remember that getting a PhD is kind of an odd thing -– not getting a PhD is what normal people do. Many if not most undergraduate political science courses do a poor job of showing students what it's like to be a professional political scientist. In Biology 101 or Chemistry 101 students often have a lab as part of the course where they perform experiments, record results, and write up reports.

In contrast, Political Science 101 and nearly every other introductory political science course works through factual material and textbook presentations of it through some combination of lectures and discussions. Rarely are our undergraduate students shown how political scientists reached the conclusions that allow them to make claims to knowledge that get published in these books.

Thus, when a biology or chemistry major moves on to a PhD, they already know what it's like to work in the lab and be a real scientist. All too often, a student who starts a PhD in political science has had little or no exposure to how political scientists do their work. In most serious PhD programs, the first year or more includes a heavy dose of quantitative methods training and sometimes training in formal theory as well. For many students, the mathematical and methodological expectations of modern political science are not what they imagined.

Similarly, graduate seminars are heavy on reading and place a lot of responsibility on the students to lead the seminar based on their discussion and critique of each week's readings. While undergraduate courses often focus on the findings and conclusions of scholars, graduate seminars focus heavily on the theory, methods, and data used by scholars to make their knowledge claims. All of this is part of the process of helping to convert a graduate student from a consumer of political science knowledge into a critic and ultimately a producer of such knowledge. The contrast between what undergraduate political science looks like and graduate level political science looks like is stark for many students and is a leading cause

of why some graduate students decide pursuing a PhD is not for them.

Another concern many students have is whether they have the ability to pursue a PhD. The work is harder and often quite different from anything they have done before. For many students, graduate school is the first time they're surrounded by people who are just as smart or smarter than they are. Sometimes first year students just doubt themselves and their ability to ever reach the level of their professors or even that of the more advanced graduate students. Here I have three things to say.

First, any respectable PhD program will not admit students that they do not believe have the raw ability to complete the PhD. If you are in a reasonably good program and that program is funding you, you can rest assured that the program would not make the heavy investment in admitting you if they thought you were not up to the task. So relax a little bit and remember that you were good enough to get in.

Second, it has been my experience that the students who appeared to be the smartest early in that first year do not always turn out to be so. Sometimes they just know a bit more jargon. Sometimes they have a confidence or even an arrogance that allows them to speak first and speak often in class. Sometimes they have taken graduate coursework already. Some have some exposure from a prior job that helps them look more comfortable. Sometimes they are actually smart. However, as I will point out several times, hard work quickly replaces raw intelligence in graduate school. You may have a genius in your cohort, but the more likely outcome after five years of graduate school is that the person who works the hardest and manages their time effectively is the person who performs the best.

Third, pursuing a PhD is a marathon, not a sprint. Having it all together or looking like the smartest kid in class in the first semester or even the first year might be nice, but this is a long process. Like running a marathon, being the first person to pass mile marker number one rarely predicts who finishes the race strong. There is a reason it takes five years. Have patience, and cut yourself some slack regarding what you know and what you don't know during the first year. Of course, I do not mean slack off regarding your work ethic. Rather, just start to get comfortable with the idea that you don't know everything yet. In fact, I will let you in on a secret: you will never know everything – no one knows everything. I think advanced education should be about embracing your ignorance, not hiding from it.

5.3 What Should I Study?

Many first year PhD students can be divided into one of two groups: 1) those who think they know what they want to do for their dissertation already, and 2) those who are worried they don't know what they want to do for their dissertation and never will. Chapter 3 explores selecting research topics in more detail. Here I want to say that I think both types of students have the wrong idea about pursuing a PhD.

Pursuing a PhD is about opening your mind to the critical analysis of political processes. Eventually you will focus on something more specific, but early in your graduate career you should be exploring new ideas. Students who start graduate school with a dissertation topic already in mind often close their minds to interesting ideas. They tend to come to graduate school with a narrow view of their interests, and they miss the opportunity to broaden those interests. They may think they are becoming a deep expert on their particular topic, but I believe the most interesting work and the most impactful work on any specific topic is work that can engage a broader audience both substantively and theoretically. Those who never explore different topics in graduate school often struggle to connect their work to a broader understanding of politics.

5.4 You Are Not Alone

Pursuing a PhD often feels like a solitary endeavor. You spend a lot of time reading alone, writing alone, and relying on your own internal drive to push you forward. However, you are not alone.

First and foremost, the faculty in your department are there to help you navigate this process. Reach out to them. Seek their advice. Volunteer to work on a project. Ask them questions. Share with them early and often any problems you have or obstacles you encounter. They want you to succeed. Students often worry that admitting confusion, frustration, or some other problem to a professor will be taken as a sign of weakness or limitation. I can assure you that the opposite is true. Faculty members want to know early on if a student is struggling. We see it as a sign of maturity and self- reflection if a student recognizes a limitation or problem and seeks to address it. Most students most of the time underutilize their

faculty while in graduate school.

You are also part of a cohort of new students. You will see some of them regularly in your substantive courses, and you may see all of them regularly in your methods courses. Form study groups, consider collaborating on papers, and share the experience with each other. This can be particularly helpful for methods courses where there might be a lot of variance in background or initial ability among you. Of course you don't want to just copy the work of others, but working together and learning together can be an effective strategy. For many students, working together extends to socializing together. I formed some of my closest friendships with colleagues from graduate school.

There are also more advanced graduate students from whom you could learn. They are traveling the path that you are on – they are just further along in their journey. Identify those students who are doing well and learn from them. My best friend from graduate school and I have another good friend who was one year ahead of us in the program. It was great because in many circumstances we could simply ask ourselves, "What did Bob do?" and we would have a good path to follow.

It can be a bit intimidating to see where students a year or more ahead of you are at. In my department at UNC, we started having all second-year American Politics students give presentations in the Spring on either their Masters thesis research or another research paper. We encouraged the students to take this seriously, and the presentations are part of our weekly American Politics speaker series. Thus, all of the first-year students got a glimpse of where they were supposed to be just one year later. This can be a little scary, but I also hope it is reassuring that we know how to bring students to that level by the time they need to be there.

It is also important to take the advice of more advanced graduate students in perspective. Second-year students delight in telling first-year students how much more difficult the second year is. Of course, students in their third year and beyond like to share their scary stories about comps, the dissertation, and the job market. Don't be alarmed. It is natural for them to focus on the stress they are currently experiencing. Also, people struggle to keep their current circumstances in perspective.

Similarly, while current graduate students have their own personal experience

fresh in mind, they lack the experience of faculty members who not only completed their own PhD, but have observed many others doing so as well. I was walking down the hall in our department a few years ago and happened to overhear an advanced graduate student say to a couple of younger students, "What is really important for the job market is ..." I did not hear the end of the sentence, but I remember being a bit perplexed at what a student who had never been on the job market or served on a search might be doing offering job market advice with such confidence. I am sure it was well-intentioned, and there is no harm in hearing another perspective, but students would be better served listening to their advisors about such matters.

I told the story in Chapter 2 about the prospective grad student visitation at another university where the two current students selected to lead the opening event had been in the program for 10 and 11 years, respectively. Sure, they might have a lot of experiences to share, but do you really want to take advice from folks taking twice as long as expected and having still not completed their degrees? I am a big fan of students learning from each other. I am just saying it is wise to consider the source of any advice you receive (including everything I've written in this manuscript!).

Finally, every university provides counseling and support services for both undergraduate and graduate students. I think more students should use these services. They can help you if you are in a crisis, but they can also help you cope with more difficult stress, frustration, anxiety, and/or depression that can begin to emerge in anyone pursuing a PhD, like any other problem, are much easier to solve if you address them early and get professional help.

5.5 Balancing Graduate School with Your Personal Life

Pursuing a PhD takes a lot of time and energy. It can feel overwhelming and all-consuming when you're in the middle of it. There is no avoiding the time and effort it requires, but you need to balance this against your personal life. This is a long process, and you will burn out if you don't pace yourself and if you don't pay attention to other aspects of your personal life.

What this looks like can be different for married students or those with children compared to those who are single. I was married before I started my PhD program, and my son was born the summer after my third year. I have seen both males and females become parents during graduate school. I have also seen one or two students who had significant care responsibilities for a parent or other relative while in graduate school. Other students grapple with issues of dating or maintaining long-distance relationships. Others struggle with building new friendships in a new environment.

Regardless of what it looks like for you, you simply cannot and should not work on your schoolwork every waking moment. Find a hobby, join a running club, read for fun, go to the movies with friends, or take your kid to the park. Some students get a pet, others get involved in a community group or church, and others do some volunteer work. Any of these and many others are great ways to spend time away from work. Of course, you won't have time for all of these activities, but you will be a more effective graduate student and a happier person if you can maintain some balance in your life.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is also critical. Getting adequate sleep is the foundation to a healthy lifestyle. What you eat and drink also matters, as does getting some exercise. Paying attention to your mental health is equally important. Taking breaks from the stress of graduate school is necessary. Learning to keep the pressures of graduate school and the anxiety of being evaluated all the time in proper perspective is also key. As mentioned in the previous section, every university offers counseling services to graduate students. Please seek out help – doing so is a sign of strength and maturity.

5.6 Common Questions from Graduate Students

5.6.1 What Should I Do over Summer and Winter Breaks?

The most important thing you can do during a break is to actually take a break. Earning a PhD and being a professor are time-consuming and challenging activities. You need to take a guilt-free physical and mental break.

That said, breaks between semesters often provide blocks of time that you

don't have available to you during a semester. Summer in particular is too long of a period to let pass without accomplishing something. Early in your graduate career, semester breaks might be used to learn a new skill. Maybe learn more about statistical software or a particular statistical method.

Summer might also present the opportunity to teach a summer course on your own. Enrollments are often lower, which makes grading easier. It also gives you the experience compressed into a 5 or 6 week period rather than stretching it across an entire semester. However, it will be difficult to get much else done while you are teaching that summer class.

Often the best thing you can do during a break besides relaxing is to work on a research project or paper. This might be a project in collaboration with someone else, or it might be your own. The summers after your second, third, and fourth years are particularly important. You should be working on your own research at that point, again potentially with co-authors. By your third and fourth summers, you should also be working on your dissertation.

Just like during the semester, set a schedule for yourself, goals you would like to achieve, and a way to touch base with your advisor or others in order to hold yourself accountable. The goals should be realistic, and your schedule should include genuine breaks.

5.6.2 Should I Take Summer Classes In Graduate School?

Most PhD programs are structured so that you can complete the necessary coursework within that program during regular semesters. It is not unreasonable to consider taking a course or two at some point in the summer during graduate school, but the previous section offers several other ideas about what you might do during summers. There are two exceptions to consider, however.

First, you might require specialized training in a foreign language. This might be easier done in summer intensive sessions rather than during the semester on top of your regular coursework. Some universities offer overseas immersion programs for language training. If this is relevant for you, ask faculty in your department for suggestions and information.

Second, you might require specialized training in research methods that is

not available at your university or at a time when you need it. Several summer programs offering courses anywhere from one day to four weeks exist across the country. The Odum Institute at UNC, for example, offers short courses and workshops throughout the summer. The largest program in the social sciences is offered by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. ICPSR offers a range of courses during two separate 4-week sessions in Michigan, plus a number of courses that last 3 to 5 days at locations across the country.

Summer programs like this have advantages and disadvantages. They do provide the opportunity for specialized training, and you meet other students from across the country and across the social sciences. However, some of these summer programs are quite expensive. You also might expect better follow-up support when you take courses from instructors in your own department or university. In Chapter 2, I strongly encouraged selecting a PhD program that included strong methods training. Summer programs like those mentioned here can be good supplements to your training, but beware of programs that rely on summer programs like these to provide core methods training.

5.6.3 When Should I Start Attending Conferences?

Chapter 10 is entirely devoted to discussion of professional conferences. Still, a common question among first-year students is when to start attending. There is nothing wrong with attending the conference in your first or second year of graduate school, but there is also nothing imperative about doing so. If a conference is nearby or relatively cheap to attend, go for it. It would give you a chance to see what they're like and to meet people. At the same time, if attending would be a burden, don't bother for the first couple of years.

I think the more important criteria is whether you have a research paper/project that you could propose to present at a conference. Presenting your own work and getting feedback increases the value of attending a conference. You should expect to be at this level by your third year in graduate school. It's possible you might co-author a paper earlier in your career, but by your third year, you should have something of your own or potentially a paper co-authored with one or more other graduate students.

5.6.4 When Should I Create a Website?

My advice about a website is similar to my advice about attending conferences. You can create one during your first or second year, but you probably won't have much to put on it. It becomes much more important when you get closer to searching for a job to have a website. By then you have research papers you have written that you can post, maybe a syllabus or two on a course you have taught, or other materials of a professional nature worth sharing.

A professional website should remain professional. This is not the place to post photos of your dog. This is also not the place to post your movie reviews, dating advice, or personal political blog posts. You might post a short personal biography about where you're from and what you do for fun, but you should really keep it professional. Your professional website is not for you, your family, or your friends. It is for other scholars, and particularly for search committees who might be thinking about hiring you.

I would say keep all of your personal stuff limited to social media, but even then you should be careful. Again, imagine your boss or prospective employer seeing what you have on social media before you post it. There are many examples of professors and others getting themselves in trouble for controversial statements on social media viewed as inappropriate by some. I am not trying to limit free speech. I am merely suggesting that you think about the consequences before you post or share something that you might come to regret later.

5.7 Conclusion

You can't blow off the first year, but you also can't publish 3 papers and write your dissertation in the first year, either. Remember the calendar and plan for success. I just put the dissertation out of my mind my first year or two – trust that the program is designed for you to be ready to do what you need to do when you need to do it. If those ahead of you are making normal satisfactory progress, you should know that you should be able to as well.

Nearly every student questions their choice to start a PhD program sometime during the first year. Don't be surprised if the same questions emerge for you. Be

patient and give yourself some time to settle in. If you are struggling, talk to your professors early and often. Most professors want to hear more from their graduate students, not less. It is not a sign of weakness to talk to your professors, but rather a sign of strength, self-awareness, maturity, and a desire to succeed. I can't say which year of graduate school is the hardest, but I can say that it all becomes increasingly familiar the longer you are in it. I can also say that all students get better with practice at doing the work.

Chapter 6

A 5 year Research Plan

6.1 Introduction

Every person travels a slightly different path to a PhD. Still, there is a basic structure to the process, and having a plan/map to guide you down your path can be helpful. Chapter 4 described the core components of a PhD program, and Chapter 5 focused on making it through the first year. This chapter maps out a five year schedule for your PhD program. I will mention seminars and exams along the way, but I will focus on research. Departments are often very clear on their schedules for coursework and exams, but they are frequently vague or silent on providing a schedule and expectations for producing research.

This outline is meant as a general guide, not a rigid structure. I have in mind the typical student doing empirical research. The schedule might have to be adapted for students who require significant foreign language training or who must spend a semester or more overseas. The content of the schedule may also need to be adjusted for students pursuing traditional political theory research. However, the primary goal remains the same for all students – getting enough of their own research done and published. Chapter 8 examines professional writing in detail and Chapter 11 describes the publication process, so those topics will not be reviewed here.

This chapter also differs from the others because I offer advice to departments

in this chapter in order to help students achieve the goals I identify. I believe that a modest amount of structure, effort, and public accountability provided by the faculty in a department will pay big dividends for their graduate students. Of course, if faculty members don't take the lead, graduate students could always do what I suggest for themselves. Students should always feel encouraged to take responsibility for their own education.

6.2 Year 1

6.2.1 Goals for Students

Goals: 1) one paper co-authored with a faculty member, 2) one solo-authored paper.

Much of your first year is devoted to coursework and just getting acclimated to graduate school. This also includes beginning your methods training. Still, you should be writing papers in your seminars, but I think you should pursue these two specific goals.

Co-authoring with a faculty member in your first year may require you to take the initiative. In the first few weeks of the fall semester, make appointments with some of the faculty in your field working on topics that might interest you. Just tell them that you are eager to get research experience, and that you wanted to know if they had something on which you could work together. Tell them that you would hope to contribute enough to be considered as a secondary author, but that you would follow their lead on the project. Most faculty have multiple projects at various stages, and most should be eager for help.

If you talk to more than one faculty member, be sure to let each of them know. You don't want them to offer you something only to be surprised when you decline. You also don't want to commit to more than one of these at a time. Getting yourself spread too thin is almost as bad as doing nothing. It is better to do a small number of things well than it is to do a large number of things poorly.

Working with faculty at the outset will give you valuable experience. If you are following their lead, you won't spin your wheels at the outset just trying to

come up with an idea. Importantly, you can compare how you and your faculty co-author approach and write about the same material. This works best if the student writes the first draft and then compares that to how the faculty member revises it.

Another advantage of this approach is that the faculty member should have a better idea about the publication potential of a project. This greatly reduces the risk that the student will spend a lot of time on something that ultimately doesn't work out. This will give the student exposure to the publication process and hopefully a line for their CV.

Students should separately pursue a paper on their own. Your seminars should provide you with many opportunities to write papers. You should start every paper with the hope of publishing, but not every paper will work out. Also, some seminars will only require you to write literature reviews or research designs rather than a full paper. Regardless of the requirements of your courses or program, you should try to identify an opportunity to produce at least one full paper of your own. I have two strategies to suggest.

One option might be to link paper assignments across courses. In your first semester, you are likely to be taking an introductory seminar in your major field of study (American politics, comparative politics, etc.). It is quite likely you will be asked to write a research design or literature review for that course. Use the paper from this class as the foundation for a full research paper for a seminar in the second semester. Similarly, most programs require a scope and methods or general research design course for all students in the first semester. Again, writing assignments for the course could be used as the foundation for a full paper in the spring.

Another option to consider is writing a paper that replicates and extends an existing published paper. To replicate the paper, you need to find the data used by the author and see if you can reproduce the original published results. Then, offer some theoretically and/or methodologically interesting extension of that work. This might involve adding another independent variable to the analysis, including an interaction term, using a different statistical method or model, or adding more data for additional years or countries.

You need a rationale for your extension, but you don't have to develop the entire rationale for the paper yourself. The authors of the original paper already

provided motivation for it. This can save you a lot of time searching for a topic. It also helps you identify something that is potentially publishable by trying to make an improvement on something that is already published. This can be particularly effective as a writing assignment for a methods course. I taught our second semester statistics course at UNC for years, and I routinely assigned a replication and extension paper. However, you might be able to do this for another seminar, or just on your own. The point is to do something, and this kind of paper might be easier than starting from scratch.

Finally, even though you are trying to be the sole author of your paper, you should seek advice from the faculty. Talk to the instructors of your seminars, your advisor if you have one, or anyone else that you think might be helpful. Writing your own paper does not mean working in solitude and isolation. Use the resources around you.

6.2.2 How the Department Can Help

I begin with an idea designed to help students produce their own papers. When I was a faculty member at Florida State University, we adopted the following. Every first-year student was required to write a research paper under the direction of a faculty mentor selected by the student. We devoted an afternoon early in the first semester where interested faculty gave short presentations on their current research interests to help students identify a possible mentor. The mentor was supposed to serve as an advisor, but NOT as a co-author.

The student developed the theory and research design as a required paper in the first semester Scope and Methods course. The instructor for the course provided 50% of the grade for the paper and the mentor provided the other 50%. During the second semester, students executed the paper in conjunction with the second semester stats class. Normally the student kept the same mentor, and the grading for the final paper was again divided between instructor and mentor 50-50. Sharing grading responsibilities helped make sure that the mentor stayed engaged.

Importantly, near the end of the spring semester, every first-year student gave a 10-15 minute presentation of their paper followed by 10-15 minutes of Q&A. These presentations were attended by most of the faculty and graduate students in the department. This signaled to students and their mentors that the department

took the entire process seriously. Having public presentations gave the students experience presenting their research. It also made students feel some pressure to do good work. This whole process elevated the value of student research in the first year with a relatively simple innovation and modest investment of effort from the department.

Co-authoring with a faculty member could also be institutionalized. Again, the students could be required to select a faculty member to work with, or they could be assigned. Either way, the student should be asked to present the paper in the spring of the first year if they are not presenting their own paper as noted above.

Whether a department does one, the other, or both of these, the department should create a form to track who the student selects as a mentor and whether they completed the required task. The mentor should also be asked to rate the student's performance, and the students should also be provided a mechanism to provide feedback on their experience.

Finally, if a department does not adopt any of these suggestions, there is nothing to stop an individual field within the department from doing so. Students could also organize their own forums for giving presentations, and they could even invite the faculty to attend. My point is that doing research in the first year is good. I think it is better if the department or someone provides some structure to support this, but if not, individual students should still pursue these goals.

6.3 Year 2

6.3.1 Goals for Students

Goals: 1) one paper co-authored with a faculty member, 2) one solo-authored paper.

You no doubt noticed the similarity between the goals for Year 1 and Year 2. This is intentional. The second year of graduate school is much like the first. It is dominated by taking seminars, continuing your methods training, and writing papers. Having similar research goals is consistent.

However, you now have a year of training and experience under your belt. Thus, the goal is not to do more work in your second year. The goal is to do work of a higher caliber.

For the co-authored paper, this time you should seek to be the lead author. This means having more responsibility for shaping the direction of the paper and playing a more prominent role in writing it. I still think it is good to work with a faculty member at this point because you can continue to benefit from their experience. You might work with the same professor you worked with the previous year, or you might seek out someone different. It can be beneficial to continue a successful collaboration, but it can also be good to gain a different perspective.

For the solo-authored paper, I suggest doing something more original than a replication and extension paper. This will push you to identify and develop your own potentially publishable topic. This might be done in conjunction with a seminar, to meet some other requirement of your program, or independently. As before, just because you are trying to be the sole author of the paper does not mean that you shouldn't seek out the advice of one or more faculty members. Meet with an advisor early on as you begin to develop the paper, and check in with them regularly as you make progress. A good advisor can help you keep your paper on track.

6.3.2 How the Department Can Help

Some departments require students to complete a masters thesis or some other significant paper by the end of their second year. This is sometimes used as part of a formal review of every student at the end of their second year to determine their suitability for continuing on to the PhD. Other departments might make earning a Masters degree and/or writing a thesis to do so optional. Many programs have no sort of thesis or paper requirement at the end of the second year.

Of course, simply having a requirement in place may not be enough. My department at UNC has required a Masters thesis for years. However, when I arrived in 2006, many of the current students complained to me that the thesis was not being taken seriously. Most students failed to defend at the end of their second year as required, and many students had the impression that their colleagues were writing poor papers that were being accepted anyway. I proposed within American

politics that we devote one or two of our standing speaker series slots in the spring to presentations by second year students of their Masters research in progress. Simply asking/requiring students to give public presentations motivated them to do a high-quality project in a timely manner. Nobody wanted to stand up in front of their faculty and peers and say they had nothing done. No mentor wanted their student to stand up and say this either. Now nearly all of our students complete the thesis by the end of their second year, and several students have been able to publish their papers.

As for fostering collaboration with faculty, students can either be assigned to faculty mentors, or faculty can just adopt a norm of co-authoring with second year students. Since both faculty and students benefit, this should not be too difficult to get established.

6.4 Year 3

6.4.1 Goals for Students

Goals: 1) pass comps, 2) publish a paper, 3) defend dissertation proposal, and 4) apply for a National Science Foundation dissertation improvement grant.

Passing comps is obviously a must. However, as I have said elsewhere, you should not spend too much time preparing for comps, nor should you spend too much time celebrating when you pass them. Spend some time getting organized, but if you have been doing your work in seminars, you've been studying for comps since day one. As for celebrating, order a pizza – there is a lot more to do this year.

In trying to publish a paper, I suggest one of two options: 1) try another solo-authored paper, or 2) co-author a paper with one of your classmates. Co-authoring with a classmate can be fun, and both of you will get to claim the paper on your CV. My most productive co-authoring relationship is with my best friend from graduate school. These relationships can continue well past graduation day.

I did not suggest co-authoring with a faculty member in year three because I think it is better to gain some independence. You will need to be seen as a

scholar in your own right by the time you go on the job market, and certainly by the time you go up for tenure. I think this is a good time to start developing that independence.

Your most important responsibility in year three is defending your dissertation proposal. Your dissertation will be the most important feature of your job application, and it will likely set your research agenda for the next five to ten years. Chapter 4 describes the dissertation proposal in more detail. Here I want to emphasize how important it is to defend the proposal by May of your third year. This will allow you to spend the summer after your third year working on your dissertation rather than just working on your proposal. A successful summer is critical to making enough progress on your dissertation to be ready for the job market at the start of year five.

Applying for an NSF dissertation improvement grant is good for two reasons. First, if you get the grant, it will provide resources to do a better dissertation than you could do otherwise. Second, even if you don't get the grant, the rigorous application process will help ensure that you write a high-quality proposal. In fact, in Chapter 4 I suggest using the NSF guidelines as guidelines for writing your proposal. Since you have to write and defend a proposal anyway, why not also apply for funding?

6.4.2 How the Department Can Help

By now, it is clear that I am a big believer in public presentations of student research. It is a great way to get feedback on your work. It is also much harder to be lazy, to cut corners, or to miss deadlines in public. Besides, an academic life is all about exchanging ideas – this is supposed to be fun! Thus I think the department should hold an annual Graduate Student Research Day. At this event, third and fourth year students should present their papers. This could be organized into panels or poster sessions similar to those at national conferences. This event should be separate from the public presentations I advocated for above for first and second year students.

To support students as they work on their dissertation proposals, departments could organize a class or a series of workshops devoted to the task. One colleague of mine teaches such a course. This year he has six students. He has divided them

into two groups. Each week, one group shares drafts of their dissertation work with everyone in the class and the class meeting is devoted to providing feedback. The groups will alternate every other week.

Another example is a dissertation working group that I lead with a couple of my colleagues at UNC. We meet every other week and devote each meeting to providing feedback to one student who has circulated their proposal or dissertation chapter to everyone a few days in advance.

How this is structured is less important than simply providing some structure and support. Doing it together as a group allows students to learn from each other. It also reduces the chance of a student failing to make progress for months on end. It helps make a solitary process more social. If the department is serious about students applying for grants from NSF or elsewhere, it should also organize a workshop or two on grant writing. If noone in the department is well-suited to lead such workshops, there are certainly people in research centers and/or in the graduate dean's office who are.

6.5 Year 4

6.5.1 Goals for Students

Goals: 1) complete two dissertation chapters, 2) attend one or two professional conferences, 3) write one other paper for publication.

You need to be ready for the job market by the end of this year. This requires significant progress on your dissertation. By complete, I mean you should have at least one chapter under review at a journal and another chapter fit for presentation at a conference. Better still, you'll have one paper accepted for publication and another out under review. You don't need to be finished with your dissertation, but you do need to be well past the half-way point. Having two of your three empirical chapters done is much better than having two-thirds of each chapter done. Showing that you can finish chapters demonstrates that you can finish your dissertation.

While I recommend that you spend 80% of your research time this year on

your dissertation, I also recommend that you spend some time on a paper that is not part of your dissertation. This could be a solo-authored or co-authored paper. It is good to have something else to work on for those times when you're sick of your dissertation.

Finally, you should try to present your work at one or two professional conferences this year. It is good to practice presenting your work to an audience of strangers, and it is also good to meet people in advance of going on the job market. I used the annual meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association and the American Political Science Association to create deadlines for myself to complete chapters of my dissertation. It was great to get feedback on those chapters and also helpful to put in my job application materials that I had completed and presented those two chapters.

6.5.2 How the Department Can Help

I already mentioned the idea of the department holding a Graduate Student Research Day. I think third and fourth year students should present their original work at this event. Fourth year students should be strongly encouraged to present something from their dissertation. As for attending conferences, the department could hold a workshop on what to expect at professional conferences. The department should also provide funding for students to travel and attend conferences as long as the student is presenting a paper.

6.6 Year 5

6.6.1 Goals for Students

Goals: 1) complete and defend your dissertation, 2) publish a paper, 3) graduate and get a job.

These goals are self-explanatory. If you followed the guidelines for the previous four years, you should know the drill by now. Other chapters offer detailed advice about defending your dissertation and the academic job market, so no need

to go into those items here.

6.6.2 How the Department Can Help

Remember that Graduate Student Research Day I have recommended – I think fifth year students should serve as discussants on research panels or poster sessions where third and fourth year students present. The fifth year students should have plenty of experience presenting by now. Serving as a discussant will expose you to a new role and also give you the opportunity to help students following in your footsteps.

Most departments also provide job placement services to their students on the job market. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 14.

6.7 Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this chapter is meant to provide an outline for a five year research plan. Students are encouraged to adapt this plan to their specific situations. One major takeaway point should be that your research career begins long before you start your dissertation. It should begin in the fall of your first year. Research should happen in conjunction with your coursework, not after it.

If you follow this plan, you will produce about ten research papers. Not all of them will turn into publications – sometimes papers blow up. Still, if even half of them pan out, you'll have an excellent record when you hit the job market as well as a good start on earning tenure.

I've also suggested several things departments can do to support the research efforts of their graduate students. I hope more departments build in this kind of support. If they don't, students can still approach individual faculty members about organizing these kinds of activities, or students can organize it themselves. Research often has the least amount of structure built around it. It is left to students to do on their own. My suggestions are really designed to provide some structure to research and to shift research from a solitary to a social activity.

Chapter 7

Methods Training

7.1 Introduction

Getting a PhD centers on research. It requires shifting from being a consumer of knowledge produced by others to becoming a critical consumer and producer of such knowledge. Every field of study has a set of research methods associated with it. Becoming skilled at research methods is essential to your success as a graduate student and a scholar.

The focus on research and research methods is a surprise to many who enter PhD programs in the social sciences, especially a generation or two ago. Undergraduate programs are partly to blame for this, as many of them do a poor job of introducing research methods to their students. Students who major in the natural sciences like chemistry or biology take numerous courses that include lab sections. In those labs, students conduct experiments and do analyses that mirror what actual chemists and biologists do. Many social science programs do not offer similar experiences to their majors. This is attractive to many undergraduate students who want to study politics or other aspects of social behavior and who are otherwise not interested in analysis, mathematics, statistics, or the scientific method. Unfortunately, such students are not well prepared to pursue PhD's in the social sciences.

Fortunately, most of the stronger PhD programs in political science recognize

this and adjust accordingly. They are prepared to deal with students coming from all different starting points, yet they provide enough rigorous training for students to be successful. There are a few programs that place a heavy emphasis on research methods training during their admission process. These programs prefer that students already have a baseline set of skills before they are even admitted. At the other end of the spectrum, there are programs that do not emphasize methods training even during their program.

I have more to say about selecting a PhD program in Chapter 2, but for now I will emphasize the point that quality methods training is critical to your success. Strong quantitative methods ability is also highly valued in both the academic and nonacademic job markets. It should be one of the criteria you use in picking a program, as well as a criteria for the courses you select. Get the best methods training you can. Don't cut corners, and be wary of programs that allow you to do so.

7.2 Research Methods In Political Science

Political scientists use an incredibly diverse range of methods. You will never be an expert in all of them, but it is good to get exposure to many of them. The key is to build a strong foundation and solid conceptual understanding of research methods so you can continue to learn new methods as they emerge. Staying up-to-date on methodological advances in your field will be just as important as staying up-to-date on theoretical and substantive advances.

The social sciences generally, and political science in particular, have experienced several significant changes in approaches to research methods over the decades. I don't want to review that history here, but some significant events include the advent of survey research, the incorporation of formal mathematical models – particularly from game theory, a reawakening of interest in experimental research combined with a broader interest in causal inference, and the emergence of new methods for machine learning/data mining associated with the so-called "Big Data" revolution. I have more to say about these and other methods below, but for now I will point out two things they have in common. First, scholars using these tools are generally grounded in the fundamentals of the scientific method. Second, all of these methods involve quantitative data, statistical methods, and

mathematics.

There have also been many debates and disagreements about research methods in political science. Again, I do not want to review all that history here, but a few comments need to be made.

7.2.1 The False Quantitative Versus Qualitative Debate

There is much debate surrounding the pros and cons of quantitative versus qualitative methods. Certainly there are distinct advantages and disadvantages to each approach. Qualitative methods are particularly useful for gaining a deeper more nuanced understanding of some political process. They also give you the chance to understand how participants in a political process view that process and their roles in it. Quantitative methods help researchers impose a formal mathematical rigor to their analysis. Quantitative methods facilitate comparison with other data and studies, and they promote the ability to reproduce or replicate a particular analysis in another setting. Scholars often say that qualitative methods promote a deep understanding while quantitative methods promote a broad understanding of some process.

However, to argue that one is inherently better than the other is silly to me and misses the point. Scholars are equally capable of effectively using and grossly misusing both types of methods. To my mind, the salient point is that both quantitative and qualitative scholars are being empirical as they look for observable evidence to test hypotheses derived from their theories. Whether that evidence appears as a regression coefficient or as a summary statement based on in-person interviews is trivial compared to whether the scholars in question are trying to apply the scientific method to study a political process.

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods breaks down even further when you consider advances in Bayesian statistics and machine learning. Bayesian statistics is designed to allow researchers to combine information from qualitative and quantitative sources. Knowledge from qualitative information can be used to form the priors necessary for a Bayesian model while quantitative data is used to inform the more traditional looking statistical component (likelihood function) of the model. Those two sources of information are combined in a principled way to allow for updating our views on the process under

study.

Similarly, modern machine learning algorithms can be used to plow through large collections of unstructured text, audio files, and/or images to detect general patterns as well as outliers or unique cases. When a computer algorithm is used to determine the likelihood that Shakespeare authored a particular play, is that quantitative or qualitative analysis? Since I think the distinction is increasingly trivial, my answer would be, "Who cares?"

I have used both quantitative and qualitative analysis in my own research, and have encouraged graduate students and other young scholars to do the same. A great example of this is a dissertation chapter later published by a former student of mine, Jason Windett, that examined female candidates running for governor. [1] As a field, we should use multiple methods and multiple types of data as we study political processes to make sure that our findings are not artifacts of the method we use.

I would make similar claims about debates regarding the pros and cons of using observational data versus experimental data, formal models versus simulations versus informal models, population random samples versus nonrandom or convenience samples: all of these approaches can be used effectively and all of them can be used badly. The point is to understand the pros and cons of different approaches relative to your own study or the study you are reading.

7.2.2 Is This Science?

The much more important debate is about the validity of the scientific method as it relates to studying politics. This debate emerges under various forms, but in the 1990s it emerged as a critique of the scientific method by the self-labeled perestroika movement. At the risk of offending many, let me try to boil down this debate.

On the one side are scholars who believe in applying the scientific method to the study of politics. By this they mean that scholars can be systematic, objective, and guided by the idea that we can learn something from observing a set of

[1] Windett, Jason H. 2014. "Differing Paths to the Top: Gender, Ambition, and Running for Governor." *The Journal of Women, Politics and Policy* 35(4). pgs 287-314.

cases that will help us understand what is likely to happen among cases we do not observe. In other words, the scientific method emphasizes generalizability of findings. It also emphasizes transparency in research methodology and data sharing so that other scholars can verify published results and potentially replicate or contradict those results in a new study. Scholars working in this tradition are supposed to develop theories and then submit them to rigorous testing in an effort to contradict or disprove them. Scholars are not supposed to dig in their heels and defend their theories, but rather conduct the empirical analyses and let the chips fall where they may.

On the other side are scholars who do not believe the scientific method can be fruitfully applied to the study of politics. They reject the notion that individual scholars can be objective, claiming instead that scholars all start with a particular perspective that colors/biases how they view their subject. Scholars cannot help filtering what they observe through that perspective, meaning that every scholarly product is the unique combination of both the scholar's idiosyncratic views and the observations he or she made. Some will further argue that external events themselves are also uniquely defined by their time, place, and broader context. Even if scholars could be objective, observations of any particular political process would still be unique. Thus, scholars in this tradition reject the notion that findings could be generalized, implicitly or explicitly, rejecting the notion that findings could be verified or replicated by another scholar.

In my view, neither side can perfectly adhere to its ideals, and both raise interesting points that help scholars on the other side develop deeper and more nuanced views. Still, I identify strongly with the camp using the scientific method. I often joke that political science is so self-conscious that we felt the need to put the word "science" in its name. Still, I believe strongly in the goals of generalizability, replicability, transparency, and open sharing of data and methods. Certainly we all have biases, but if we focus on trying to disprove our theories rather than defend them, and if we are open and transparent about our research, those biases can be mitigated.

Our contemporary political/information climate includes a significant attack on science in general and on the social sciences in particular. This puts scientists in a difficult position. Scientists are taught to continuously question and challenge the results of scientific inquiry and openly acknowledge our uncertainty about results. However, scientists also want to defend strongly the merits of the scientific

method. I think we must continue on both fronts and strive to educate those who are critical of science. The best way to do that is to adhere to scientific principles and be as transparent about our methods and data sharing as is possible. Scientists should have nothing to hide and nothing to fear about open and honest debate. We should police ourselves, adopting strong policies for research transparency and data sharing while also encouraging verification and replication of published work. Finally, while science should go in whatever direction individual scientists choose, we do have an obligation to consider the importance to the larger society of the problems we tackle.

7.3 Statistical Software

There are many software programs available for conducting statistical analysis. They all have different strengths and weaknesses. SAS and SPSS are two of the oldest platforms still in use. SAS is a powerful and flexible platform capable of doing almost anything you can imagine. However, it can be a bit cumbersome to learn. SPSS also has a wide variety of built-in features. It is very easy to use because it is based on point-and-click menus. However, it can be extremely difficult to use if you want to do something different that is not included in its menu system. Stata is widely used in political science. It also has a point-and-click menu system, but it is more easy to modify or adapt as needed compared to SPSS.

More recently, the statistical platform `R` has become quite popular. It is an open source free software platform that runs on any computer. It is a cross between a programming language and statistical software. In that regard, it is more similar to SAS. However, `R` has thousands of built-in commands, called functions, and a large user community that has generated thousands more additional add-on packages. Being free is a big plus, but the real value of `R` is that you can program it to do anything. It is also an excellent environment for conducting simulations. I have more to say about `R` below.

Some scholars go further, using real programming languages like Python and Julia, tools for large databases like SQL, or even foundational program languages like C++. These tools go beyond what is necessary for most social science research. Still, it is good to know they are there.

Finally, there are a number of specialized software tools designed for specific types of analyses. Virtually all of the analysis executed by these programs could also be done in R or some other programming environment. You will have to evaluate the usefulness of these specialized programs on a case-by-case basis. The frontier of statistical programming is always changing. That said, I want to discuss two tools in more detail.

7.3.1 Using R

I have a strong preference for teaching and learning in R. Point-and-click menus make it too easy to conduct an analysis without really understanding what they're doing. Programming in R slows a student down and forces them to understand what they're doing. I often require students to program the actual mathematical operations rather than letting them use the built-in functions. R is also great for simulations, which makes it ideal for illustrating what researchers call the Data Generating Process (discussed in more detail later in this chapter). In my view, if you learn how to use R, you can learn how to use software like SAS, SPSS, or Stata, and you can also learn to program in something like Python.

You can download R online at: `http://cran.r-project.org/` and you can learn more about R in general at the R-project homepage: `http://www.r-project.org/`. R is not a point-and-click program. There are some Graphical User Interfaces (GUI's) available for R , but I don't recommend them. Instead, you should learn to write text files, called script files in R , that send R a series of commands to execute. It is best to use a text editor in conjunction with R. R has one built in, but there are others with many more useful features. I currently use RStudio (`http://www.rstudio.com/`), which runs on both Windows machines and Macs. Learning R can be a bit more challenging than learning a point-and-click program, but it is much more powerful, flexible, and is increasingly the computing environment of choice for those doing statistical work across a wide range of disciplines including Political Science. More importantly, your goal is to learn about statistics, NOT about software. Programming in R is a far-superior way to learn about statistics than is using a point-and-click program.

There is no substitute for reading the documentation for R . I **STRONGLY** recommend that you begin with the manual called "An Introduction to R." This document provides the core basics to understanding R as a statistical computing envi-

ronment. You can find the manual by clicking the "Manuals" link on the CRAN homepage. The direct link to the .pdf file is here: http://cran.r-project.org/doc/manuals/R-intro.pdf This manual is also downloaded and stored on your computer when you install R .

Springer books (http://www.springer.com) has numerous books in their Use R series that are designed to be practical applications of R for users. Many of these can be accessed through a university's library online for free if the university has a subscription. One in particular that is quite useful is *Data Manipulation with R* by Phil Spector. Another is *A Beginner's Guide to R* by Zuur et al. Chapman and Hall's CRC Press also publishes a series called *The R Series* that has many good offerings.

There are also some very helpful and short reference documents for R commands that you might want to print and keep handy, which are located at: (http://cran.r-project.org/doc/contrib/Short-refcard.pdf) or (http://cran.r-project.org/doc/contrib/Baggott-refcard-v2.pdf) or http://www.psych.upenn.edu/~baron/refcard.pdf. John Fox wrote a book on Applied Regression, the website for which is: (http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/jfox/Books/Companion/index.html). There is a companion book focused specifically on using R for regression analysis. Finally, just searching online generally, through RSeek (http://www.rseek.org/), or at Quick-R (http://www.statmethods.net/) will often turn up quick and easy answers to most questions.

The Odum Institute (http://www.odum.unc.edu/) at the University of North Carolina has an online short course on using R available here: (http://www.odum.unc.edu/odum/contentSubpage.jsp?nodeid=665). Another online for R training is here: (https://www.datacamp.com/#/). There must be many others.

Finally, if you want to see R in action, I would point you to a book I co-authored with Jeffrey Harden titled *Monte Carlo Simulation and Resampling Methods for Social Science*, (Sage 2014). The book is meant to offer an introduction to statistical methods and simulations, and it provides lots of examples with sample code.

7.3.2 Using LaTeX

LaTeX is not statistical software, it is a platform for scientific writing. LaTeX is a document processing environment like R is a statistical computing environment. LaTeX is not really a point-and-click system, but it is a superior environment for producing publication-quality documents, especially if they include tables, figures, and/or equations. In addition, there are some packages in R that will format the output of R functions with all the codes necessary to make the output look nice in LaTeX. All you need to do is copy and paste the output into your LaTeX document. LaTeX is actually used through a text editor, of which there are many. TeXnicCenter is a popular one for Windows users. TexStudio and Texmaker work on Windows, Mac, and Unix platforms. Most of these editors include spell check functions, and there are also grammar check tools that can be downloaded and installed. They are all free and come with online help manuals. The Odum Institute at UNC also has an online short course available on using LaTeX located here: (`http://www.odum.unc.edu/odum/contentSubpage.jsp?nodeid=665`).

Using tools like R and LaTeX do not make someone smarter than a person who uses Stata and MS Word. They are just tools. Like any tool, they are well-suited for some tasks, but not others. These two tools are quite useful and flexible, which makes learning something about them a good idea. There are corners in the social sciences, especially among methods experts, where there seems to be a bias in favor of these tools over standard software. Some scholars view the use of programming-based tools a way to separate and elevate themselves from others. Of course this is silly. I don't think students should worry too much about this, but it is worth being aware. I am a big fan of R and LaTeX(I wrote this book using LaTeX), but only because I find them useful.

7.4 Which Methods To Study?

Contemporary political science is strongly influenced by quantitative methods. I think all students should build a significant base of knowledge in quantitative/statistical methods. This should include a strong foundation in both classical and Bayesian inference, the linear and the generalized linear model, maximum likelihood estimation, and at least an introduction to modern machine learning techniques. This is a much longer list than it was when I was in graduate school,

but I think this marks the current status of the discipline.

Another topic that merits special attention is network analysis. A network is defined as a set of units, some of which are connected to each other. Those units might be members of Congress, countries, Supreme Court decisions, or virtually any other object of study in political science. Those connections might be serving on the same committee in Congress, trade between countries, citations to prior Supreme Court decisions, etc. The great value of network analysis is the ability to model these relationships. Most other methods of statistical analysis assume that the individual units are conditionally independent of each other. In my view, this assumption runs counter to thinking about politics as a process of collective decision-making. New advances in network analysis facilitate studying change in networks over time. If you think politics consists of dynamic interrelated actions and behaviors, you must learn something about a dynamic network analysis.

There has also been a renewed interest in experimental methods specifically and causal inference more generally. This includes methods around matching, regression discontinuity designs, difference in difference designs, synthetic control case designs, and directed acyclic graphs (DAGs). Questions regarding causal claims also underlie more traditional regression-based and structural equation models. Good methods training should address these questions, beginning with what is often called the fundamental problem of causality. This is best illustrated using a simple experimental design.

7.4.1 The Fundamental Problem of Causality

Suppose you had a group of people with a particular disease and a particular treatment that you wanted to test to see if it helped people with this disease live longer. You make the perfectly reasonable decision to randomly divide the people into two groups. The experimental group will receive the treatment while the control group will receive a placebo. Neither you nor the participants will know until after the study is complete who received the treatment and who received the placebo.

Before the experiment started, every individual had two possible outcomes: their outcome if they receive the treatment and their outcome if they do not. To measure the true causal effect of the treatment on an individual, we would have to

be able to observe them under both conditions. However, that is not possible. A person can only be put into one of the two groups. We can never know for sure how the treatment might have impacted any one of those individuals. The best we can hope for is that the two groups are equivalent so that we can measure the average lifespan of those who received treatment and compare that to the average lifespan of those who did not. In other words, the best we can hope to estimate is an average treatment effect.

The situation described has come to be known as the potential outcomes framework for causal inference. This framework provides the basis for the Rubin Causal Model, named after the statistician Donald Rubin. It is also known as the Neyman–Rubin Causal Model because Rubin's work is seen as a generalization of a point first made by Neyman in 1923.

Numerous methods have been developed in an effort to make stronger causal claims based on non-experimental data, often called observational data. Traditional regression models assert/imply that independent variables cause the dependent variable, and not the other way around. Instrumental variables, two-stage least-squares regression, and more general structural equation models have been developed to help strengthen causal claims within the regression framework. Rubin's work led to an extensive research agenda on using matching to make causal inferences. Other methods like synthetic control case designs and regression discontinuity designs all focus on improving our ability to make causal claims from observational data.

I apologize for the excessive use of jargon in this section. This is not the place for a long essay on methods of causal inference. I just wanted to provide some vocabulary for those interested in learning more about these methods.

Because of the importance of causal claims in scientific research, I think every methodology should be evaluated regarding how it relates to this fundamental problem. This problem is important because it establishes a limitation for scientific inquiry. However, it should not be viewed as a reason to reject the scientific method. Instead, it provides the rationale for the scientific method and the principles of verifiability, reproducibility, and transparency.

7.4.2 The Research Data Lifecycle

Research methods involve much more than just how data is analyzed. Good methods training should focus on the entire process from developing an idea, designing a data collection strategy, doing analysis, interpreting and reporting results, and openly sharing your methods, data, and findings with the scholarly community. Researchers in the data archiving community refer to this as the research data lifecycle. They emphasize the need to think of all of these steps as connected.

A lot happens, and many decisions are made, before data is analyzed. All of that activity can substantially influence the quality of your work and the findings you produce. Fancy statistical methods are no substitute for good research design. In fact, the best research designs often result in relatively simple statistical methods being most appropriate. Learn to think about the research process from start to finish as a single multi-step process where each step impacts the next.

7.4.3 Data Access and Research Transparency

I mention this elsewhere in this book, but it is worth repeating. Science isn't science if the methodology is not clear and open and if results cannot be verified. When I was in graduate school, papers were published with tables and figures, and with footnotes assuring readers that various diagnostic tests had been conducted. No data was provided, no computer code was shared, and all supplementary materials were not published. Those standards are now obsolete.

Now, graduate students should be taught to document everything. You should write code in whichever software platform you use that begins by pulling in raw data and then proceeds to execute every step along the way. Every transformation of a variable, computation of a new variable, deletion of cases, etc. that is done before the analysis takes place should be in the code and documented. Every analysis that is reported in a table, figure, footnote, appendix, or supplementary material should also be in the code and documented with comments. The codebook naming and describing all the variables should be included as well.

All of this information should be posted in a reliable data repository, like the one operated by the Odum Institute at UNC, which uses the Dataverse software platform. It should be easy for other scholars to reproduce your results and to

know all of the choices you made along the way. Placing comments in your computer code that describe what each chunk of code is supposed to accomplish is absolutely necessary. More academic journals are requiring authors to meet stronger data sharing and research transparency standards. Fortunately, places like the Odum Institute provide tools and training to help make this easier.

All of this might seem onerous and time-consuming, but actually you will find that you work more efficiently and effectively if you start your project with these principles in mind. Imagine, for example, sending a paper out for review for possible publication in a journal. Three months later, you get an invitation to revise and resubmit the manuscript for continued consideration. In that decision letter, you are directed by the editor and/or reviewers to conduct several additional analyses. If you have documented everything well from the beginning, the supplementary analyses will be easy to perform. If you have not, you may find it difficult to even reproduce your original results, let alone perform any supplemental analyses with any confidence that they are correct.

There is a Data Access and Research Transparency active group within political science called DA-RT. There is also the Center for Open Science at the University of Virginia, and of course the aforementioned Odum Institute at UNC. These and many other groups provide information and tools for scientists seeking to be more open and transparent in their work. This is good for science and good for those who consume the findings of scientists.

For years I have had graduate students try to reproduce and then extend the findings of a published paper as an assignment for a graduate methods course. The success rate at reproducing those published results has been about 10-15% over the years. This is not because the original authors lied or cheated. Rather, it is because the original authors have not posted their data, kept records of their analyses, or archived code or a useful codebook anywhere. Contemporary scientists have no excuses. With modern tools and appropriate dedication to these principles, this should be an assignment that a student could complete in a day. Good methods training should include instilling these principles and providing the necessary skills to implement them.

7.4.4 The Data Generating Process

Good empirical research ties theory and data analysis closely together. This is true whether the data and analysis methods are qualitative, quantitative, experimental, etc. A theory provides an explanation of why some process works the way it does. Why do voters vote the way they do? Why are some countries more likely to experience war than others? The answers to questions like these are theoretical statements. These things happen because [Fill in the Blank]. What you use to fill in the blank is a theory.

The best way to ensure a close connection between the theory and the data analysis is to think of the outcome of interest as data generated by some process. The outcome of interest might be how citizens vote, if countries go to war, if particular policies are passed, or how strongly someone feels about their group identity. These outcomes are the result of some process. It is that process that you are trying to understand and explain with your theory and analysis. In other words, you want to develop a theory and complementary statistical model of the data generating process you are studying.

You should be able to write down your theory in three ways: 1) in words, 2) as a statistical model, and 3) a figure or illustration. You should be able to translate back-and-forth between these three representations. Let's look at an example.

Suppose you have some outcome, Y, that you believe is related to some other factor, X, but that it also has some random or unpredictable component. We can be more specific, and we should be, by being more precise about what we mean by "is related to." To keep it simple, let's say that we believe when X takes on higher values, Y is also likely to take on higher values. In other words, we expect there to be a positive relationship.

A statistical model consistent with this description is presented in Equation 7.1:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{7.1}$$

Where Y is the dependent variable and X is the independent variable. Each β is a parameter to be estimated. The first parameter, β_0, is often called a constant or an intercept, and it represents the expected value of the dependent variable

when the independent variable equals 0. The second parameter, β_1, captures the relationship between X and Y. Specifically, it represents the marginal effect of X on Y. This means that when X increases by one unit, Y is expected to change on average by an amount equal to β_1. Finally, ε represents a residual or error term that is assumed to be random. Y, X, and the error term are also scripted by i because every individual observation in your data set will have its own value of Y, X, and the error term. The parameters are not subscripted this way because you will be estimating a single average value for each one of them.

Equation 7.1 is somewhat consistent with our theory as expressed in words, especially if β_1 turns out to be positive. However, there is already some inconsistency between our theory in words and our statistical model. In particular, our statistical model embodies a more focused definition of the relationship between X and Y. The statistical model assumes that Y is a linear function of X. This is much more specific than saying Y is related to X. It is even more specific than saying Y is positively related to X.[2]

The expected positive linear relationship between X and Y can be illustrated in Figure 7.1. This figure presents a hypothetical two-way scatterplot. Values of X are represented on the X axis while values of Y are represented on the Y axis. The individual dots in the plot represent data points, while the black solid line within the plot represents the linear relationship between X and Y.

The lesson here is to make sure that we can write about what we expect in words, represent that as a statistical model, and as a graph or figure, and then ensure that all three representations are compatible, if not identical. Generally speaking, mathematical formulas like statistical models require more precision than do verbal descriptions. Regardless of where you start, you should be able to produce all three representations of the data generating process implied by your theory.

Now let's make things a bit more complicated. Suppose that you believe that Y is not only a function of X, but that gender plays a role as well. You think that males and females differ from each other as it relates to Y. Luckily, you have another variable in your data set named `female` that is coded as a 1 for people who are female, and as 0 for those who are not.

[2]This statistical model makes additional assumptions, as would any particular method used to estimate the statistical model, such as Ordinary Least Squares. I am ignoring all of those complications for now to simplify the presentation.

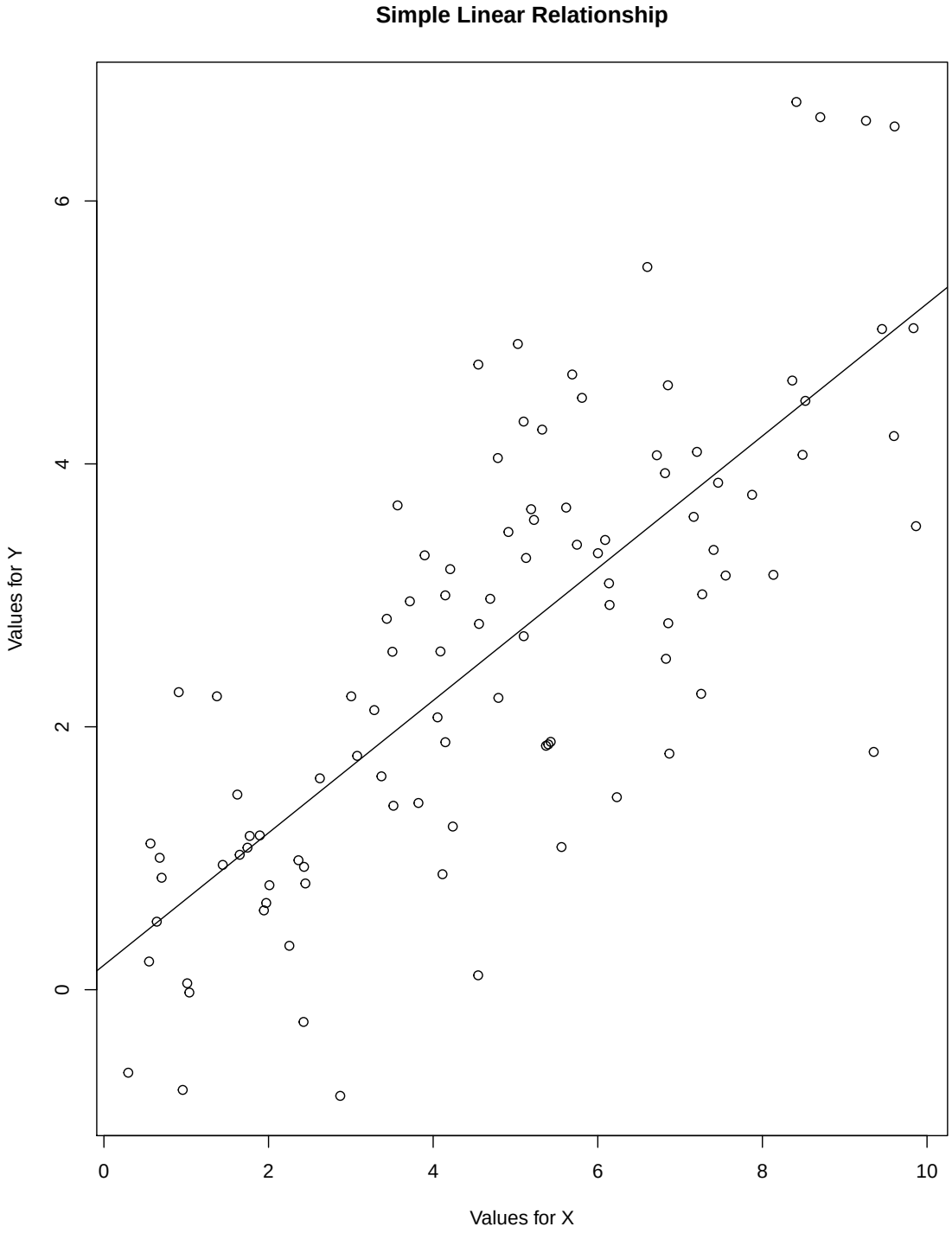

Figure 7.1: Illustrating a possible simple positive linear relationship between X and Y.

To say that Y "is a function of" X and `female` is not a very precise statement. Nor is it precise to say that Y differs for males compared to females. How exactly is Y a function of these two predictors? If Y is a linear additive function of X and `female`, we could write a statistical model like Equation 7.2:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 female + \varepsilon_i \tag{7.2}$$

Equation 7.2 would imply a scatterplot with two lines, one representing the relationship between X and Y for females, and one representing the relationship between X and Y for males. If males and females did not differ at all from each other regarding Y, these two lines would be plotted on top of each other and you would only see one. However, if males and females do differ from each other regarding Y, you would expect two distinct lines. Because the statistical model is linear and additive, these two lines would be parallel to each other (e.g. they would have the same slope). Whether the line for females is above or below the line for males would depend upon whether females or males have higher values of Y on average, after accounting for X.

Multiplicative Interaction Terms

However, suppose you think that the reason males and females differ in regards to Y is at least in part because the relationship between X and Y is different for females compared to males. That would imply a statistical model more like Equation 7.3, which includes a multiplicative interaction term.

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 female + \beta_3 (X \times female) + \varepsilon_i \tag{7.3}$$

In Equation 7.3, the marginal effect of X on Y now depends upon the value of the variable `female` according to Equation 7.4:

$$\text{Marginal Effect of X on Y } = \beta_1 + \beta_3 (female) \tag{7.4}$$

Thus, when `female` equals 0, the marginal effect of X on Y simplifies down to just β_1. However, when `female` equals 1, the marginal effect of X on Y equals $\beta_1 + \beta_3$.

Equation 7.3 would *ALSO* imply a scatterplot with two lines, one representing the relationship between X and Y for females, and one representing the relationship between X and Y for males. However, we would *NOT* expect the two lines to be parallel (e.g., they would *NOT* have the same slope). In fact, Equation 7.4 tells us exactly what the slopes of the two lines should be.[3]

The models represented by Equations 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 represent three different models of the data generating process, which means they also represent three different theories. Of course, there are many more models we could consider – indeed, an infinite number are available. The point remains that you need to be able to articulate a theory in words and write down a statistical model you can estimate that comports with that theory. If your theory in words implies Equation 7.3, but you estimate the model in Equation 7.2, your statistical results will be meaningless at best, but more likely misleading.

The single biggest problem I see in student papers, conference papers, and even published articles is a fundamental incompatibility between the theory described in words and the statistical model specified that is supposed to be used to evaluate that theory. As the example above illustrates, simply saying that Y is a function of X and whether or not someone is female is too vague because multiple statistical models are compatible with that one statement. How can the reader know if your statistical model is appropriate if your verbal description is too vague? I just illustrated two statistical models that are compatible with that phrase, but if you consider possible nonlinear relationships and other forms of the relationship between Y and these two predictor variables, an infinite number of statistical models are possible. When seen in this light, the verbal statement that Y "is a function of" X and whether or not someone is female is almost meaningless.

Think about the social/political process you are studying as a data generating process. What is the outcome of interest that is being generated? What is the set of

[3]Inclusion of the interaction term also means that the marginal effect of `female` on Y depends upon the value of X. Interpreting interaction terms and their statistical significance properly requires more than just looking at the output your computer generates. You need to compute meaningful marginal effects. You also need to compute proper standard errors associated with those marginal effects. Generally the best way to present results from models including interaction terms is to generate marginal effects plots. Incorrect interpretation of interaction terms is by far the single most common mistake I see in scholarly research. If this were a book about methods, I would spend more time on it here. Go read about this and make sure you understand them.

factors that combine to generate this outcome, and how exactly do they combine to produce it? Every statistical model comes with extremely precise answers to these questions. It is critical that the precision of the statistical model is matched by a precision in the verbal description of the theory. I think a good way to ensure that match is to draw a picture or figure of how you think the data generating process works. This is a fundamental component of good research methods training.

7.4.5 Simulations

Computer simulations are powerful tools for modern social science research. A simulation turns your computer into an experimental laboratory where you control all aspects of the environment. You can set the conditions, run the simulation, and evaluate the patterns that you see. Then, like any experiment, you can change one condition, rerun the simulation, and compare the patterns between the first and second executions of the simulation to evaluate the impact of the condition you changed.

Effective use of simulations requires that you be able to write down a data generating process with mathematical precision so you can write the proper computer code. Thus, if you skipped the previous subsection titled The Data Generating Process, go back and read it! Simulations have a number of uses that build off the ability to write down a data generating process. As mentioned above, a former graduate student of mine, Jeffrey Harden, and I wrote a book that explores a number of features of simulations in quite a bit of detail (*Monte Carlo Simulation and Resampling Methods for Social Science.* SAGE (2014)). Thus, I will only briefly review several uses of simulations here.

Generating Synthetic Data

Oftentimes, researchers lack the kind of data they need for some aspect of their research. In other situations, data is available but access to it is restricted. In these and other situations, computers can be used to generate synthetic data that has the desired attributes. Depending on the methods used, synthetic data can sometimes under-represent the level of complexity in actual data as well as the possibility of outliers. It will be up to you to determine whether that is the case in your situation,

and if either would present a problem in your particular study.

One of the ways simulated data has been used in political science is through the simulated case-control method. The logic behind this method is to use a computer to generate a comparison case to be matched with a real case for which you have data. The idea is to generate a synthetic case that is comparable to the real case in every way except for the single treatment or attribute you are studying. The logic of this method rests on the potential outcomes framework noted above.

For example, California is one of two states that has recently adopted what is called the top-two primary system for its state legislative elections. In this system, candidates from all political parties run in a single primary election. The two candidates that receive the most votes in this primary, regardless of their party affiliation, move on to face each other in the general election. Thus, you can have general election contests where both candidates are from the same political party. If a scholar wanted to measure the impact of adopting this primary system at the state level, they would need a comparison case. One option would be to select one or more states that do not have this system that are most similar to California. The drawback of this approach is that there are not any states that really are that similar to California. Another approach would be to compare California before this reform to California after this reform. However, this approach requires that you assume that nothing else in California changed except for the adoption of the system. A third approach would be to construct a synthetic version of contemporary California designed to look like what California would look like had it never adopted the top-two primary system.

Scholars are also developing methods to generate synthetic data when protecting the anonymity or privacy of entities in a data set is critical. Suppose you have a survey of individuals that includes particularly sensitive information about them. Even if the data does not include their names, if it includes descriptive features about their race and gender, along with location indicators like ZIP Codes, it has been demonstrated that merging this anonymous data with the data from the U.S. Census or other sources can allow for the accurate identification of most of your survey respondents.

In order to make the data available to researchers, we need a method of completely protecting the privacy of the survey respondents. This is done by generating a simulated version of the data set in question designed to contain the same properties as the original data, but consisting of observations that are by definition

not real people.

Evaluating Statistical Estimators

If the assumptions behind Ordinary Least Squares regression are all met, it can be demonstrated that the parameter estimates of an OLS model are unbiased, efficient, and consistent. If we violate one of those assumptions, however, what are the consequences? In this case, we have formal mathematical proofs that tell us what to expect. However, mathematical proofs are not always intuitive. We can use computer simulations to evaluate the performance of statistical estimators instead.

For example, we might first generate a sample of data based on a regression model where all of the assumptions are met. For example, we might generate data for a simple regression using the following model:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{7.5}$$

Where we set β_0 = 0.2 and β_1= 0.5. If we did this 1000 times to generate 1000 sets of data and then ran a regression on every data set, we would have 1000 estimates of each regression coefficient. Thinking about the 1000 estimates of β_1, some of them would be larger than 0.5 and some of them would be smaller than 0.5 strictly due to random chance (because of the random error term that is part of the data generating process). However, because the estimates should be unbiased, the distribution of them should be centered at nearly 0.5 and the average of them all should be very near 0.5. If the estimates for this parameter were biased on average, they would not be centered around 0.5 and the mean of them would not be near 0.5.

One problem that introduces bias into the estimate of parameters from a regression model when using OLS is random measurement error in the independent variable, which in this case is X. This can be demonstrated using a mathematical proof, but you could also alter your data generating process to include a random component to the construction of X. You could use this new data generating process to generate a thousand simulated data sets, estimate a regression on each data set, and then look at the mean and the distribution of this new set of 1000 values

for β_1. That distribution will not be centered on 0.5 and the mean of those 1000 estimates will not be near 0.5. How far away from the true value of 0.5 will they be? That depends on several things, including how much random measurement error there is in the independent variable. You can rerun the experiment changing the amount of measurement error and see for yourself.

This can be a great way to learn about statistical methods. It is also an excellent way to evaluate the performance of particular methods against the types of data you might have. Notice that we use the computer in this example to both simulate the data and to evaluate the performance of the statistical model. For more detail, including sample computer code, for this and many other similar simulations, I encourage you to look at the book Jeff Harden and I wrote that was mentioned above.

Evaluating Theoretical Propositions

I have already stressed the need for your theory written in words to be compatible with the statistical model you hope to use to evaluate the theory. Both must be compatible representations of the same data generating process. If so, you can use a computer to define everything after the equals sign of a statistical model, use that to generate a set of outcomes from that data generating process, and then compare those generated outcomes to an actual measure of the outcomes to see how well your predictions fit.

This can be taken further in a number of directions. For example, agent-based models are computer simulations used to generate predictions regarding the patterns that might emerge from the joint behavior of lots of individuals. The idea is that individual agents have a set of rules that govern their behavior. Those rules include what to do in response to the behavior of other agents around them. Thus, the behavior of agents is interdependent. The result is oftentimes surprising patterns in the behavior of the group that you might not have predicted based on the decision rules that govern each agent.

In a classic example, Thomas Schelling proposed a model in 1971 to explain racial residential segregation. He imagined a checkerboard where each square represented a residence. Then he imagined two types of people living on the checkerboard. He assumed that each person had a slight preference for their set

of immediate neighbors to be a majority of their type.

He then started by randomly assigning individuals to squares. All those with a majority of their immediate neighbors being of their type would prefer not to move. All those with a majority of their immediate neighbors being not of their type would prefer to move. You allow all those who would prefer to move to relocate. Neighborhoods have changed as a result, so all individuals reevaluate their location again. Again, some would prefer to move and others not. If you continue this process until no one wants to move, Schelling discovered that even if people only have a small preference for living in a neighborhood that is just a majority of their type, you end up with a residential pattern where a vast majority of people live in neighborhoods that are overwhelmingly of their type. This simulation shows that a society can end up with a very high degree of racial segregation even if most people only have a slight preference for being in neighborhoods where just more than half of their neighbors look like them.

Environmental scientists, climatologists, population ecologists, and public health scholars, among many others, have been using agent-based models and other types of simulations to study complex interdependent systems of behavior. Social scientists have not used these methods as frequently, though there are some excellent studies of crowd behavior that do so. Such simulations can be evaluated against observable data as a way of assessing their performance.

Generating Null Hypotheses

I once saw a presentation by a graduate student who had developed an agent-based model to explore recidivism among people released from jail or prison. There is ample evidence that people who have been in prison before are more likely to commit crimes than are people who have not been in prison. A common argument is that it is the prison experience that makes people more likely to commit crimes. She built a model that said the likelihood of committing crimes is a function of the local environment in which people find themselves. Her model had absolutely no recidivism mechanism built into it. Her idea was that people who leave prison are more likely to find themselves located in dysfunctional family and/or friendship networks, and this was the cause of continued criminal behavior. Her simulation produced results showing higher rates of criminal behavior among former prisoners that matched existing data, but her model produced that

result from a simulation that explicitly ruled out the prison experience as the cause of criminal behavior.

Does this analysis prove that the prison experience itself does not make people more likely to commit subsequent crimes? No, but it does demonstrate that a different theory about the local context into which released prisoners move can also provide an explanation for the pattern we see in the real data. Evidence of more criminal activity among former prisoners is consistent with the idea that the prison experience is the cause, but it is also consistent with this other theory. The implication is that researchers need additional evidence to distinguish between these two theories. In particular, they need a circumstance where the two theories render different predictions.

My main point is that many research projects start with a null hypothesis that is way too simplistic. The null hypothesis should describe what you would expect to see if a particular factor had no impact on the outcome of interest. In this case, a scholar might start with the idea that if the prison experience had no impact on the likelihood of future criminal activity, then the crime rate between those with prison experience and those without it should be the same. Finding a difference constitutes evidence for rejecting that null hypothesis. Finding something other than nothing might be an important first step, but this agent-based model built around a reasonable set of assumptions resulted in a prediction of a difference in crime rates even in the absence of a prison experience effect. In my mind, this model provides a better baseline for comparing the effects of the prison system – a better null hypothesis.

In the simulation book Jeff Harden and I wrote, we explore several examples where simulations can help you generate much more plausible null hypotheses. Our objective is to encourage researchers to think about what the process under study would look like with and without a particular causal factor that is key to the theory at hand. The process in the absence of that predictor is still likely to have structure, predictability, and patterns that emerge. A null hypothesis of nothing going on is, thus, frequently naïve and simplistic.

Performing Statistical Tests

Many statistical routines are similar in spirit to computer simulations. This is particularly true in the family of methods based on resampling. Resampling methods are similar to simulations because resampling methods generate large numbers of data sets. Simulations generate those data sets out of a data generating process that you create on the computer. In contrast, resampling methods generate lots of data sets out of the actual data you have in your hands.

For example, suppose you have 10 students in a seminar. I could create another sample data set by selecting from these 10 students one student at a time, recording their information, putting them back in the pool where they might be selected again, and then selecting another one of the 10 students, etc. I do this until I have 10 observations in my new sample. Because I am sampling with replacement, Mary might show up in this new sample twice while Billy is not included at all. I could repeat this 1000 times and have 1000 different reconfigurations, or resamplings, of my original data. I could then compute any statistic of interest for each of these 1000 data sets. Then I could treat those 1000 estimates of the statistic as capturing the range of plausible values for that statistic. In fact, I could compute that statistic for my original data, and then use the 2.5 percentile and the 97.5 percentile of the values of the statistic from my 1000 resamplings to construct a 95% confidence interval around my statistic of interest from my original sample.

This sounds like a lot of work, but in most circumstances computers can do this very quickly. In the example above, I could compute the mean grade-point average of my 10 students and then use resampling to construct a 95% confidence interval around that. Of course, there is a well-established formula for computing a confidence interval around a mean, so I could use that instead. In this case, I might prefer resampling if I am concerned that my small sample size might render that formula inappropriate.

A better example would be to compute the median grade point average of my 10 students and then use resampling to compute 1000 more medians that I could use to construct a 95% confidence interval. Why is this a better example? Because there is no statistical formula we could use to build a confidence interval around a median.

A former student of mine, Justin Kirkland, put this logic to good use when studying the degree of partisan clustering in co-sponsorship networks in state legislatures.[4] Networks consist of nodes and ties between those nodes. In this case, each legislator in a chamber is a node and whether they cosponsor a bill together or not constitutes a tie between them. In network science there is a statistic called modularity. It measures the density of ties between nodes within designated groups compared to the density of ties between nodes that bridge groups. Specifically, Justin wanted to look at cosponsorship ties among members of the same political party relative to cosponsorship ties that crossed party lines.

Modularity is a perfectly good measure of this phenomenon, but it has no known statistical distribution. In that sense, you cannot declare a particular value of modularity to be statistically significantly different from zero, nor could you claim two different values of modularity are statistically significantly different from each other. Simulation to the rescue!

First, Justin computed the observed level of modularity in each chamber. Then, for each chamber, Justin held the number of Democrats and Republicans constant, the total number of cosponsorship ties constant, but he used a computer to randomly assign cosponsorship. He did this 1000 times (or more) for each chamber, each time computing a measure of modularity between Democrats and Republicans. This produced a distribution of modularity scores that might occur strictly due to random chance under the hypothetical situation that legislators ignored party when deciding which bills to cosponsor. If legislators actually care about party when deciding which bills to cosponsor, the observed modularity scores for each chamber would be much higher than the scores produced through random chance. In fact, Justin used the same method described above to compute a 95% confidence interval and then evaluated whether the observed level of modularity fell within or outside of this confidence interval.

The general point is that resampling and other similar methods allow you to conduct statistical tests regarding any statistic you can compute, even if that statistic does not have a known distribution, and thus, a known formula that you could use to test statistical significance. These kinds of simulations really broaden the range of the types of analyses people can do. Resampling methods can also be used even when a statistical formula exists, if you are concerned that your data

[4]Kirkland, Justin H. 2013. "Hypothesis Testing for Group Structure in Legislative Networks." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly.* 13(2): 225-243.

might not conform to the assumptions embedded in the formula. This approach can be particularly useful for smaller data sets.

Resampling methods are also similar to methods used for out of sample forecasting, used to evaluate the fit of a statistical model. Any sample of data will have evidence of patterns and relationships in it strictly due to random chance. You can prove this to yourself: use any statistical software to generate 51 random variables with a sample size of 1000 for each of them. Pick one of the variables as a dependent variable and regress it on the other 50. See how many "statistically significant" coefficient estimates you get.

As a result, if you run enough statistical models on a sample of data you will eventually stumble across patterns in the sample that are not reflective of the population from which the sample was drawn. To combat this problem, researchers can estimate a statistical model on a subset of their data, but evaluate the fit of the model on the other portion of the data. You can randomly split the data once into two subsamples, or you could do this iteratively.

One example of cross validation involves rerunning the model multiple times, each time dropping one observation. Suppose you have 500 observations in your dataset. Drop the first observation, estimate your model on the other 499 observations, then use your results to predict the dependent variable for the first observation that you left out. Now drop the second observation, put the first observation back in, and reestimate the model. Use the new results to predict the value of the dependent variable for the second observation. If you repeat this process 500 times, you will have a predicted value to compare to the actual value of the dependent variable for every observation, but every predicted value was produced with that particular data point being left out of the sample. Hence the phrase out of sample forecasting. Another version of this process would randomly divide the data into a subset of data to estimate the model with and a subset of data used to evaluate the fit of the model, again doing this multiple times.

7.5 Conclusion

A PhD is a research degree. This makes learning research methods incredibly important. There are no shortcuts. Graduate school is the best time to build a

strong foundation in research methods. You need to come out of graduate school well-versed in contemporary methods. However, you also need a foundation upon which you can build in order to keep up-to-date on methodological advances as your career unfolds.

You will never master, or even learn, every possible method out there. This is why building a core foundation is more important than learning lots of individual methods or models. If you build a core foundation, you can see how different methods share some things in common and that many methodological innovations are really just extensions or modifications of something that already exists. Building a foundation and taking a holistic view will make learning easier both in graduate school and down the road.

Get the best methods training you can get!

Chapter 8

Writing Professional Papers

8.1 Introduction

Academics and researchers write for a living. Chapter 11 describes the process of publishing scholarly work. This chapter focuses more specifically on the act of writing. Writing about research effectively is a skill that can be learned. Some talk about writing as an art or craft, but I do not. True, some seem to have a gift for writing with style and flair, but research writing requires little of that. Research writing emphasizes clarity and precision. Your job is to make sure your readers understand what you have done and what you are saying. Flowery prose, vivid imagery, and dramatic flair are great for novels, but these features in professional writing often cloud rather than clarify precise meaning. Professional writing is more structured and formulaic. This makes it easier to learn how to do. Such writing might be less entertaining, but entertainment is not the goal – effective and efficient communication is. This chapter begins with a general discussion about how to approach writing. It then turns to the basic structure of a professional paper. I conclude with a series of do's and don'ts for professional writing.

8.2 How We Write

Everyone who writes has an approach to writing.[1] I have asked scores of students over the years about their writing routines and rituals. Some have said they need to clean their apartment before they can sit down to write. Others say they need several freshly sharpened pencils and a clean legal pad. Many turn on music, but many others seek noiseless isolation. Some only write in the morning – others only at night. Most say they need a block of at least 2 hours before they would even think about starting to write. Most say they struggle with writing, though a few say they bang out papers from start to finish in one long sitting.

My point is that we all have rituals when we write. Most of our rituals emerge from a combination of stress or anxiety about writing combined with superstitious learning. Writing causes stress for many of us, and most people prefer to avoid stress when they can. We create rituals about writing as a way to generate excuses for not writing now. The mood is not right, the room is not right, the timing is not right, etc., so I just won't write right now. Avoidance is a common response to lots of situations that cause anxiety, and all of us have some situations that cause us anxiety, so don't feel bad – you are in good company.

Of course, many of us also have experienced the growing anxiety that comes with putting off something that we know has to get done – I certainly have. It can hang over me, interfering with my ability to get other work done or my enjoyment of down time. I know I will feel better once the unpleasant task is completed, and rarely is the task as unpleasant as I imagined. I know this because I have repeated the cycle many times, but I still find myself in this situation all too often.

Superstitious learning occurs when we associate some unrelated event or circumstance with a positive or negative outcome. Athletes are the best at this – if a baseball player ate a turkey sandwich before having a great game, you can bet that they will be eating the same sandwich tomorrow. Athletes might have lucky shirts or lucky socks. They may go through a specific warm-up routine before each game. They may have a favorite saying they repeat before each play. They sit in the same place, listen to the same music, or drink the same thing every day, every game. This is more than just a routine – these are rituals that they believe impact the outcome of the game. Players "learn" their rituals because good performances

[1] This section is influenced by the book *Writing for Social Scientists* by Howard Becker.

lead them to want to repeat what they've done and bad ones teach them which behaviors to avoid. Sometimes a ritual runs out of magic, but if the player has been doing it for awhile, they often just redouble their efforts to properly adhere to the ritual.

Writers do the same thing with writing. We remember times when our writing went well and we try to repeat that experience by recreating the steps that led up to that experience and the environment in which it happened. Sure, a quiet place and sharp pencils can be useful, but too often we give way too much credit to those kinds of factors. We transform preferences for certain conditions into essential conditions for success. We believe that we can't write effectively except under nearly perfect circumstances. We probably could write just as well in a wide variety of circumstances – we just don't like to do so, and so have convinced ourselves that we can't.

These three things – anxiety, superstitious learning, and avoidance – feed off of each other. If we step out of a ritual, that makes us anxious. That makes it harder to concentrate on our writing, which makes the experience less pleasant and potentially less successful. This reinforces our belief that our rituals are critical for success, and feeds into our desire to avoid the unpleasant task of writing until we can create the proper set of circumstances our rituals demand.

I think this has its roots in anxiety. Most students express feelings of stress, anxiety, frustration, and/or fear about writing. Even those who experience very little anxiety still know that writing takes work. Thus, for a great many of us, writing produces some sort of negative feeling. These are powerful feelings, which is why they change our preferences into things we view as essential, which is why we change our routines into rituals.

If you have the luxury of accommodating your rituals, go right ahead and do so. However, as personal and professional lives get more demanding or complicated, our ability to accommodate our writing rituals is reduced. If you are a graduate student now, I can tell you that being an Assistant Professor or working as a professional researcher will place more demands on your time, not less. You might as well start getting ready for that now. Fortunately, if we recognize rituals for what they are, we can reduce our dependence on them and/or adapt them to be more flexible.

One way to do this is to intentionally break your rituals using simple writing

tasks. Sit someplace different each of the next five times you sit down to write a letter home, a memo for class, or the day's Facebook posts. Change or turn off your music. Go to a noisy place in the library and write that one-page book review.

Time is a big issue for a lot of writers. If you have a seminar paper to write for class, schedule a 20 minute break in the middle of your day to write anything for that paper – random notes, a partial outline, the references, a paragraph on the methods – and then stop. Do it again later that evening and again the next day. Don't worry about the quality of what you are writing – you might delete all of it next week. Just write something.

In short, demonstrate to yourself that it is possible to write under a lot of different circumstances. I particularly value having learned how to write during short spans of time, or during longer spans of time that include multiple interruptions. You may still have preferences, but recognize them for what they are and don't give them so much power over you.

In addition, reward yourself for small successes. Bang on that paper for 20 minutes and then take a walk, check a website, or just close your eyes and breathe for a minute or two. Get used to feeling good about your writing as you are doing it rather than only when the full paper is done. Notice the decline in anxiety that comes from making progress and getting started.

All of this is easier if you are not alone. Find a friend, colleague, spouse, or even advisor to share all of this with. Encourage each other, report back to each other, celebrate the small victories together, but also hold each other accountable. Take it one step further and co-author a paper together. Doing so lowers the burden and increases the sense of being in this together. We think of writing as a solitary act, but we are social beings. Plus the whole point of writing is to communicate something to someone else. Of course it is hard to write and talk at the same time, but if you are a social person, you can make writing a more social experience.

8.3 Real Writing is Re-writing

Professional writing takes time. The most successful professional writers spend a large majority of their time rewriting their work as opposed to writing the

first draft. Rewriting is more than just checking for spelling errors and whether you've met the minimum or maximum page requirement. Rewriting involves the careful consideration of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Rewriting might involve moving entire sections, deleting entire sections, or splitting existing sections in half. Rewriting might involve reframing the argument or revamping how results are presented. Most of us simply cannot produce our best written work in our first attempt at a paper.

This is good news. Recognizing the importance of rewriting lowers the pressure and anxiety associated with producing the first draft. If you know substantial changes are likely to follow, you don't have to worry about trying to get it right the first time. Just get your ideas written down in whatever form you are able and worry about crafting a coherent paper later. As we will see below, professional writing typically follows a basic structure, so you can use that structure as the initial framework for your paper. That means you already have a ready-made sketch of the basic outline. Just start writing phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or bullet points into that framework and you have already got the ball rolling.

8.3.1 The First Draft

The first draft is important because it signifies that you have started, but the quality of the first draft is much less important than its simple existence. Once you have the draft, then you can begin to work on making sure the paper is complete, clear, and organized around the main point you are trying to make. I routinely produce 6 to 10 drafts of any manuscript I write by myself, and co-authored papers routinely go into the teens. That might sound like a lot of work, and it may seem discouraging that it takes so many times to produce a satisfactory paper. I agree – it is a lot of work and it takes a lot of time, but the time and effort pay off in the quality of the manuscript that is produced. Furthermore, I think it takes at least as much time if not more to agonize over the first draft of a paper trying desperately to get it right the first time.

Sweating over the first draft feeds back into the previous point about anxiety and using rituals as excuses to avoid starting our papers. Writing the perfect first draft would seem to require the perfect setting and circumstances, along with large blocks of uninterrupted time. In contrast, simply jotting some notes about the methods section for your paper without even worrying about construct-

ing complete sentences or paragraphs might be something you could do in 20 spare minutes before your next class or meeting. If the writing does not need to be perfect, neither do the circumstances.

Once you have something written, it is much easier to work with that to refine it into something better. You have already cleared the most important barrier by having written something. Now it is just a question of refinement. Again, if you anticipate this requiring multiple passes through your paper, the need to be perfect on the second draft is also eliminated.

8.3.2 Finishing a Paper

Some writers have no trouble getting started on a paper, but they have tremendous difficulty knowing when it is finished. Sometimes such folks keep wanting to add additional material to the paper. Sometimes they want to keep tinkering with the writing. Sometimes they simply postpone completing the final task that is needed to finish the paper. For whatever reason, some people just have trouble finishing. By advocating for the use of multiple drafts, it may appear that I am feeding into the problems of those who have trouble finishing. That is not my intent. I advocate multiple drafts to lower the barriers associated with starting a paper. I also want to emphasize the idea that a first draft or even a second draft need not be perfect. In response to the problem of never finishing, I simply want to say that no final draft is ever perfect either. Perfection is unattainable, and every paper could be written in multiple ways.

One strategy to help you finish papers is to limit the focus of a paper from the outset. A mentor of mine frequently said that you should have only one idea per paper. Generating new ideas is great, but cluttering a paper with multiple ideas can make it confusing, too long, and difficult to finish. Another way to think about this is to imagine drawing a box around your paper. Limit what goes into that box to only those ideas and analyses that are absolutely necessary to execute the paper. Anything that can be left out should be left out.

Another good strategy to help you finish papers is to share your drafts with others. More experienced mentors in particular could help guide you toward the finish line. A related strategy is to work with a co-author, particularly one with more writing experience. One of my best writing experiences came from co-

authoring a paper with my dissertation chair. I was charged with writing the first draft. I worked hard on the paper and made it the best that I could, and then sent it to my co-author. He completely restructured the paper and rewrote much of the text before sending it back to me. The paper contained the same basic information and set of findings, but the structure of the paper and the delivery of those findings was so much clearer in his version compared to mine. I learned a tremendous amount from seeing how an experienced author crafted the same information that I had into a much better document.

8.4 Sharing with Others

I ended the previous section advising authors to share their work with others. There my point was that having others look at your work can help you decide when it is ready to send out for publication. Here I want to emphasize the value of sharing more generally. All of us get so close to our own writing that we risk losing sight of how readers might understand or not understand our meaning. The point of professional writing is to share your ideas in a clear way with others. Writing might feel like a solitary process, but it is really a social experience. Sharing drafts of your papers with others and getting their feedback makes writing and rewriting more social.

Sharing with others will also improve the quality of your work. Others can read your work unencumbered by the thoughts you hold in your head. In other words, they can react to the writing as it exists and let you know if your writing is clear and, if so, whether your arguments and analyses are compelling. When we write something down, we know what we mean to say. As a result, our own writing rarely confuses ourselves. However, when someone else reads your writing, they must infer what you meant only from the words that you provide.

This message was driven home to me in another conversation I had with a mentor while I was a graduate student. This particular faculty member and I attended the same church and we were working at a fund-raising car wash on a warm summer afternoon. Another graduate student and I had sent out a paper to a journal for consideration for publication. We had received the reviews just a day or two before that the paper was rejected. Some of the criticisms raised by the reviewers seemed legitimate to me and my co-author, but many concerns we

considered to be wrongheaded and off target.

I was complaining about this to my faculty member while scrubbing the hood of the car. I said it seemed to me that the reviewers either didn't know what they were talking about or didn't read the paper very carefully. My faculty friend paused from what he was doing and said to me that when he received reviews like that, he generally felt that it was his fault for not being clear enough and that his faulty writing was probably responsible for the reviewers going off track. Of course as soon as he said this, I knew he was right. It is the author's responsibility to communicate clearly, and the best way to do this is to get feedback from others before you send something out for consideration for publication.

Professional writing involves public scrutiny of your work. Others will criticize what you have done. Many will do so in a constructive way, but others will be less polite. That is just the nature of this business. The review process associated with scholarly publication is based on critical commentary of the manuscripts that are submitted. As a professional scholar, you will be called upon to review the work of others, whether that be students, colleagues, or papers submitted to journals for publication. Sharing your work with others and reading their work in exchange will get you used to the idea of giving and receiving constructive criticism.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter 11 on publishing, you improve your chances for publication if you have others read and comment on your paper before you submit it. You have a professional responsibility to make your paper as strong as is reasonable before you ask an editor and anonymous reviewers to expend their time and energy evaluating the suitability of your paper for publication. It is professionally irresponsible to submit a paper for publication simply to get a set of reviews. Sharing your work with others is the best way to avoid this problem. Similarly, sharing your work with others before presenting it at a conference or other public forum helps ensure that the feedback you will receive from that presentation is the best that it can be. You want to clear up easy and obvious problems with your work before you present it so that the feedback you get is new and innovative for you.

When sharing your work, it is important to think about with whom you share. You might feel the safest sharing your draft with a close friend – maybe a fellow graduate student. That might be fine, but if your friend is unwilling to offer criticism where it might be warranted, or if your friend knows how you think and has

similar views, their feedback may not be as helpful. Similarly, if you both lack experience, you may not benefit as much from the feedback you can provide each other. You need to find people who will read your work who are committed to helping you make it better. This means they are committed to pointing out what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the paper. A mentor with experience and/or someone with some distance from your topic and your thinking can also provide a better sense of how effectively you are communicating your ideas.

Being critical does not require being mean. Virginia Gray and I started a dissertation working group at UNC several years ago. Prior to each meeting, a student circulates a draft of the dissertation chapter or other paper that we and the other students all read in advance. At the meeting, the author is given three minutes at the start to say something about the work they circulated and then we spend the next 57 minutes offering comments, asking questions, and critiquing the paper. This often involves a good deal of joking and laughing, but it is always focused on how to make the paper better. I think our students have benefited tremendously from both giving and receiving constructive criticism in this environment. Plus, it's fun to play with ideas – it is one of the reasons people pursue graduate degrees in the first place.

People become researchers because they are excited about ideas and excited about sharing those ideas with others. Sharing your work in progress is a way to acknowledge the social component of research early in the process. Playing with ideas is supposed to be fun, and playing with them early will help make your final papers more accessible and more interesting to a broader audience. The act of writing might be a solitary process, but the act of producing good research papers is and should be a social one. I suggest you embrace that.

8.5 Budgeting Your Time

For many young scholars, finding the time to write is a big challenge. I already addressed the problem of convincing yourself that you can only write under special circumstances and with a sufficient block of uninterrupted time. Here I want to talk about actually finding the time you need to write.

The biggest problem for most people is that other things in their personal and professional lives present them with short-term deadlines while writing frequently does not. For a graduate student taking a seminar, there might be a paper due at the end of the semester, but there is also reading and sometimes other assignments due every week. If you are teaching your own course, you have lectures to prepare every week – sometimes every day – along with grading and meeting with students that occupy you at least every week. When faced with preparing tomorrow's lecture or working on a research paper that is not due until the end of the semester, or better yet working on a dissertation or a paper for publication that does not have a real deadline, it is easy to spend the time preparing the lecture. Writing gets put off until tomorrow, but all too often tomorrow becomes next week, next month, or next summer.

To be successful at scholarly writing requires setting aside the time needed to do it regularly. I think it is best if you can write something every day, but certainly you need to write something every week. I strongly encourage all scholars, but especially young scholars, to block off time on their weekly calendar to be used for writing only. Do not meet with students during that time. Do not chat with your friends or go for a cup of coffee. Do not grade exams or work on your next lecture. Use that time exclusively for writing. Writing is a critical part of your career as a scholar – it deserves a prominent place on your weekly schedule.

Putting it on your schedule will help you get into a rhythm. It will help replace some of your superstitions about writing with a regularly scheduled session. It will also ease your guilt during those times you are not writing because you have already built in writing time on your schedule. There will be times when you don't feel like writing on the day and time you have scheduled. Do it anyway. There will be times when you are less excited about teaching, but you can't skip that day's lecture. Taking your career seriously means applying the same standard to your writing.

Of course, the big difference is that if you don't show up for your class, a classroom full of people will notice. If you skip your scheduled writing session, it's likely no one will know but you. You can combat this problem by finding a friend or mentor with whom to share your schedule. Go to lunch every Friday with a friend where the two of you start by telling each other what you wrote that week and whether you stuck to your schedule. This is another way to make the writing process social, but it also creates some public accountability for yourself and your

friend. If you stick to your schedule every week for a month, treat yourself to a movie or dinner out.

8.6 Basic Outline for an Empirical Paper

Journal articles published in political science generally follow the same basic formula. This can differ somewhat for papers devoted exclusively to theory, and sometimes qualitative scholars present the results in a bit more discursive way. However, the basic structure that I describe below can serve as a reliable outline for the average empirical research paper.

8.6.1 Introduction

The introduction is the most important part of the paper to write well. This is your chance to tell readers what the paper is about and why they should read the whole thing. The introduction sets the stage for the reader. It is the place where you frame the entire paper for the reader. The introduction can be the difference between getting a paper published in a top journal, a lower journal, or not published at all. I have heard many scholars point to papers published in lower level journals that they believe could have been placed much higher with with a stronger introduction. There are also plenty of examples of articles in top journals that report mundane results that are packaged well with an exemplary introduction.

The introduction must include several components. Each must be covered clearly and concisely. A good introduction can be written typically in three or four paragraphs.

First, the introduction must provide the motivation for the paper. What is the problem you are addressing, the puzzle you are solving, or the tension you are resolving? For example, some of my own work on party polarization begins with noting that dominant theories of party identification view partisanship as extremely stable over time. At the same time, dominant theories of party realignment hold that realignments were generally defined by people switching party affiliations. How could these two literatures exist in parallel for decades while resting

on apparently contradictory notions of the stability of partisanship?

Second, the introduction must provide a brief answer to the problem, puzzle, or tension motivating your paper. This answer is a thumbnail sketch of the theory guiding the paper. If your first task is to pose the question of why something happens the way it does, your second task is to answer that question. I discuss what I mean by theory in more detail below.

Third, the introduction must provide a statement about why providing an answer to the question motivating the paper is important. I frequently refer to this as addressing the so what or who cares question. So what if there is a tension in the literature on partisanship? Who cares if you have an answer to it? There should be a rationale based on the scholarly contribution your paper makes. Will this improve our theories about some process? Will we learn something that we didn't know before? There could also be a normative contribution to be made – this research might make some lives better.

Fourth, you should describe the setting in which you will evaluate your theory. For example, you might motivate a problem and articulate a theory about the behavior of elected officials generally, but you plan to evaluate that theory using data from 10 state legislatures collected between 1990 and 2015.

In fact, you should write the first, second, and third portions of the introduction in more general terms and only move to the specific context of your study with this last part of the introduction. The goal in scholarly research is to pose general questions that might be of broad interest to many others even though we inevitably are forced to narrow our focus when it comes to testing implications of our theories with actual data. You might be interested in those 10 states for that 25 year period, but the essence of the paper needs to be broader. You want readers who do not care about state legislatures to still care about your paper because the importance of the paper extends beyond these 10 states. These 10 states merely provide the empirical setting in which you can evaluate your more general theory.

These four components are critical for any introduction. There are two other items you might find in introductions as well. The first is an anecdote, historical event, or some other example used to help motivate the study. These can be helpful in hooking the reader by using a real illustration, but they can also be problematic. Many times, authors devote too much space in their paper toward explaining the motivating example. Also, authors often use examples that do not perfectly fit

with the general question they are asking. This lack of fit creates confusion for readers.

The other optional item in an introduction is a final paragraph that provides an overview of the rest of the paper. Such paragraphs generally say something like, after the introduction, the paper will include an elaboration of the theory and how it fits with existing literature, followed by a discussion of the data and methods used for the analysis, then a discussion of the results, closing with a conclusion and discussion of the findings. This is an accurate outline of nearly every empirical paper, and one that follows closely the structure I am describing here in this chapter. However, because nearly every paper will follow a structure like this, I think writing a paragraph like this is a waste of time and space. When I come to them in papers I am reading, I routinely skip them because they contain no useful information.

Before leaving the discussion of the introduction to a paper, I would like to make two more points.

Gaps in the Literature

A gap in the literature or the fact that something has received little or no scholarly attention to date IS NOT – I repeat, IS NOT – a sufficient reason for writing a paper. Simply because it has not been studied before is not reason enough to study it now. Despite all the research that has already been done, there remain an infinite number of studies that could be done. Nearly all studies that have not yet been done should remain undone. A great many things are not worth studying. Myself and others refer to these as justly understudied topics. If your topic has not been studied before, feel free to note that if you would like, but you must provide a positive explanation for why your study should be done and why readers should read about it. In fact, the burden on you may be greater if you are studying something that lots and lots of other smart people have thus far decided to ignore.

The First Shall Be Last

It is difficult to introduce something that does not yet exist. Put differently, it can be hard to write a clear and concise introduction before the rest of the paper

has been written, or at least outlined in detail. Imagine being at a party and being asked to introduce someone whom you have never met before to your friends. What can you say about this person that would be at all useful to your friends? Now imagine introducing your best friend from high school to your new friends at college. This is much easier because you know a great deal about your best friend from high school.

In the same way, it is much easier to write the introduction to a paper after the paper itself has been written. Some writers go so far as to skip the introduction entirely when writing their first draft. I don't do that, but I do know that I need to spend extra time and attention revising the introduction as part of the entire revision and rewriting process. Often times I find myself deleting the first paragraph of the first draft of my introduction because it generally starts with something vague like the topic I am studying is central to democracy and democracy is a good thing. I start introductions with that kind of meaningless discussion in large part just to get myself started on the paper at hand. Since I know I will be revising the paper later anyway, I don't worry too much about getting the introduction right the first time. Still, whether you write the introduction first or last, I would encourage you to check that your introduction has the four required components I have outlined here, and that it is written as clearly and concisely as it can be once the rest of the paper is done.

8.6.2 Theory/Literature/Expectations

This section of the paper unpacks the first three core items of the introduction. This will likely be one of the longer sections of your paper and will almost certainly benefit from some subheadings. This is the section of the paper where you will elaborate on the theory guiding the paper, the general expectations that emerge from that theory, and the specific hypotheses you will be testing. This is also the section where you will be showing how your paper builds upon and fits in with the existing research on your topic.

Elaborating on the motivation for the paper should not require too much text. It may only take a paragraph or two. Similarly, elaborating on why the paper is important can also be kept to a minimum here. In fact, I often find it much more helpful to save the discussion of the importance of the paper for the conclusion. You really should focus on your theory.

Articulating Your Theory

The theory guiding the paper provides the explanation for why the political process you are studying works the way that you think it does. Theories answer why questions. "Why do voters in the United States most frequently vote for candidates who share their partisan affiliation? Because ..." Everything that comes after the word because is a theory. A good theory rests on a minimal number of plausible assumptions and is built out of logical propositions that build on those assumptions.

In this case, I might start with an assumption that voters are rational and, thus, they would prefer candidates who share their policy preferences. I might also assume that voters do not have the time, resources, or motivation to find out the specific policy preferences of all possible candidates. Instead, voters might use an information shortcut or heuristic in order to guess which candidates share their policy preferences. Party affiliation might be just such a heuristic.

Of course, I might also start with the assumption that people identify with social groups. They might prefer members of their group over members of some other group. Partisanship might serve as a form of group identity, which again explains why voters might prefer members of their own group.

Note that it is quite common to have two or more possible explanations for some political process. Determining which theory is the correct one depends on a number of factors. Scholars generally prefer the most parsimonious, or simplest, theory. They also consider how general the theory is and how many things that it can explain. Sometimes it is possible to find situations where two theories both predict the same outcome in some settings but they predict different outcomes in other settings. Those other settings then provide a place to arbitrate between competing theories. The primary point I want to make here is that you need to provide a thorough presentation of your theory with an emphasis on clarity for the reader.

Once you have articulated the theory, you can generate general expectations about things you can observe if the theory is in fact right. Returning to our example, if voters vote for candidates that share their party affiliation because of a sense of group identity, what else would we expect to see? In other words, if people do what they do at least in part because of a sense of group identity, what patterns in

their behavior or their attitudes might we observe? We have already established that voters might vote for candidates based on shared party affiliation because of group identity. Maybe voters would vote in other arenas in the same way if party labels or endorsements from party leaders are provided. Maybe voters will evaluate political arguments differently if they are provided partisan cues associated with those arguments? Maybe people consider themselves parts of other social groups and respond in their voting behavior to candidates either from those same groups or purporting to represent the interests of those groups? Maybe people even evaluate nonpolitical choices through a partisan lens if they are provided party cues?

In short, once you articulate the theory guiding the paper, you can then explain how that theory produces general predictions/expectations about patterns you could observe in data. It is useful to remember that we do not test the assumptions of a theory, but rather the predictions of a theory.

Notice also how considering all of these other predictions helped us generalize the theory. We expanded from party identification to group identification of any sort. We expanded from voting for candidates to evaluations of both political and nonpolitical items. We might test the theory in a specific context, and certainly no one paper could test all of the predictions outlined above, but just because the context is narrow does not mean that the theory should be narrow as well.

Predictions From Your Theory

Now you are ready to unpack the specific context of your study. Above we imagined that the context might be legislatures in 10 states from 1990-2015. Perhaps we have survey data or some other type of data that allows us to examine whether party attachment is correlated with candidate vote choice, or that allows us to evaluate some other prediction generated by our social identity theory. Here is where we write about the details of this context. Here is where you translate the abstract concepts of your theory into specific variables that can be measured in the context of our study. You will describe their actual measurement in the next section. Here is where you also articulate specific hypotheses in words. A hypothesis is a concrete and testable version of a prediction/expectation that arises from your general theory.

Writing hypotheses can be tricky. You have just spent several pages articulating a general theory of a political process. Now you need to translate that into one or more specific predictions that you could observe in data. It is absolutely critical that a hypothesis be stated in a way that allows for evidence to clearly support or not support it. This is achieved best by making sure each hypothesis contains one and only one prediction.

For example, suppose you were testing a theory about how different racial or ethnic groups in the United States voted in an election. Suppose your theory predicted that African-Americans would be more likely to support the Democratic Party candidate and that white voters would be more likely to support the Republican candidate. One might think that you could write the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: African-American voters will be more likely to support the Democratic Party candidate over the Republican Party candidate and white voters will be more likely to support the Republican Party candidate over the Democratic Party candidate.

This is a bad way to write a hypothesis because it includes two predictions. If both predictions are supported, or if neither prediction is supported, your interpretation would be easy. However, suppose African-American voters are more likely to support the Democrat, but that white voters are equally divided over the Democratic and Republican candidates – would that constitute evidence supporting or not supporting the hypothesis? In this case, it would be much better to separate each prediction into its own hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: African-American voters will be more likely to support the Democratic Party candidate over the Republican Party candidate.

Hypothesis 3: White voters will be more likely to support the Republican Party candidate over the Democratic Party candidate.

Notice that these two hypotheses make no explicit comparison about the behavior of African-American voters relative to white voters. That could be another hypothesis: that African-American voters will be more supportive of the Democratic Party candidate than will white voters.

Similar problems arise when you have a prediction that you believe only applies to a subset of your data, or is conditional on some other attribute in the data. For example, you might imagine that the views voters hold on an issue like abor-

tion will predict which candidate they are more likely to support, but that this effect might be stronger among women compared to men. Again, there are two things going on in this prediction, so it is best to have two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: Across voters, as voter attitudes on abortion become more liberal, they become more likely to support the pro-choice candidate.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship described in Hypothesis 4 should be stronger among women compared to men.

Remember, each hypothesis should make one and only one prediction. As a rule of thumb, if you find conjunctions such as and, but, or or in a hypothesis, odds are that that hypothesis includes more than one prediction.

The Existing Literature

Scholars disagree regarding how best to treat the existing literature related to your paper. Some prefer that writers present separate subsections of their paper devoted to the existing literature and the theory + guiding the current paper, respectively. I disagree. Doing this necessarily separates your theory from the existing literature, making it harder for the reader to see where your paper fits. Separate literature sections also frequently read like answers to grad school comps — just a series of descriptions of individual studies stacked one after the other with little or no integration. Lastly, this organizational style frequently results in the nearly useless section headings of existing literature and theory, respectively.

Instead, I encourage writers to integrate the presentation of their theory in the context in which they are studying it with relevant elements from the existing literature. Your job is to present a coherent theory and set of predictions in a way that allows readers to see how your paper fits with what has been done in the past. Most of our ideas come from what we read, so when we present those ideas we need to cite our sources. Still, I do not need the complete summary of some book or article when citing it. I only need the relevant piece of information for the point you're trying to make at that particular time in the paper. Let me be clear – the existing literature matters in a critical way to any paper you write. However, summarizing the existing literature is not what matters. In fact, I would go one step further and argue that you should not even directly reference something called the literature. By this I mean a sentence like, "Race strongly predicts voting behavior

(Smith XXXX; Jones XXXX)" is much better than a sentence like, "The literature finds that race is a strong predictor of voting behavior (Smith XXXX; Jones XXXX)." Just make relevant declarative statements and provide citations.

To summarize, the theory section of the paper must be clear and understandable to the reader. No analysis that follows will make sense if this section confuses readers. A logical orderly flow to the section is critical. The hardest thing for many writers when writing this section is to figure out where to start. Theories always make more sense when they are complete, yet you have to start somewhere. Often it is best to begin by defining key terms, then laying out basic assumptions. This should give readers enough of a foundation upon which you can build the rest of the theory in a clear way.

8.6.3 Data/Model/Methods

This section of the paper gets into the nitty-gritty of the analysis you are going to do. In the previous section, you identified the context in which you are testing your theory. In this section, you discuss specifically the data that you have from that context, the statistical models you plan to estimate, and the specific methods you will use to estimate them.

Most papers have a specific outcome of interest. We can generally think of this as the dependent variable or the outcome variable. It is the measure of the thing we are trying to explain. To continue with our example, the dependent variable of interest might record how individual survey respondents voted in a recent election. It is generally best to describe how this variable is measured first given that it is the primary outcome of interest.

Your theory generated one or more predictions about factors that would be related to the outcome of interest. In particular, we thought that voters would be likely to vote for candidates who shared their party affiliation. This primary independent variable should be described next.

Even though your theory focuses on partisanship, you know from the literature that other factors likely influence voting behavior as well. You may want to control for these factors in your statistical model, which will require that you describe how these additional variables are also measured.

The description of each individual variable included in the analysis must be precise. All too often, authors simply say they control for things like education, income, and/or race without explicitly defining how they do so or how these variables are measured. Authors often fail to consider what assumptions they might be making when they choose how to measure variables as well.

For example, suppose we measured the partisan attachment of voters as -1 if they are Democrat, 0 if they are an Independent, and +1 if they are a Republican. Such a measurement strategy assumes that all voters within any one of these categories are equivalent to all of the other voters in the same category. It also assumes that the magnitude of the difference between Democrats and Independents is the same as the difference between Republicans and Independents. Maybe a scale that distinguishes between strong and weak partisans would be better? Maybe separating the major parties into two dummy variables – one indicating whether a respondent is a Democrat or not and one indicating whether a respondent is a Republican or not – would be better? These decisions are important, and writing clearly about them is essential.

Once you have defined and explained each variable, you can present the specific statistical model you plan to estimate. Frequently, this takes the form of an equation with the dependent variable expressed as equal to one or more independent variables, with each one having some unknown parameter attached to it. We have data measuring the variables in the statistical model. What we are estimating are values for those parameters. Again, in many cases this takes the form of a regression equation like this:

$$vote_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 party_i + \beta_2 income_i + \beta_3 female_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{8.1}$$

Where `vote` is the dependent variable, and `party`, `income`, and `female` are the independent variables. Each β is a parameter to be estimated, and ε represents a residual or error term.

Once you have written the statistical model, you can translate your hypotheses into specific predictions about the parameters you are estimating. In this case, if the dependent variable is coded equal to 1 if a respondent reported voting for the Republican candidate and is equal to 0 if a respondent reported voting for the Democratic candidate, and if `party` is measured from -1 if they are Democrats up to +1 if they are Republicans, then our theory would predict that β_1 would be

positive and statistically significantly different from zero.

Writing down the statistical model and translating your hypotheses in words to hypotheses about parameters in the statistical model allows the reader to link the statistical analysis directly to the theory motivating the paper. This translation gives the analysis meaning. It allows the author to make knowledge claims based on the data that are relevant to the theory. Without this linkage, the findings produced by the statistical analysis could be meaningful, meaningless, or misleading, and it would be hard to tell the difference.

After writing down the statistical model, you need to describe how you're going to estimate the parameters of the model. If the method is widely known and used, you can simply report in one sentence what you are doing. You might be estimating an ordinary least squares regression, or maybe estimating a logit model via maximum likelihood estimation. If the method is not widely used, and certainly if it is new to your field of study, you need to provide more information about it. In any case, you need to provide a justification for the method you are using. Why is it appropriate for your analysis? If there are other plausible alternatives, why did you choose the one that you did? What might be the consequences of choosing a different plausible method?

When writing down a statistical model and choosing a method of estimation for it, you should consider the assumptions you are making. Assumptions associated with statistical models must be compatible with assumptions you are making in your theory. If not, your statistical model as specified and the results it produces will be biased and likely misleading.

This seems like something that should be easy, but I would say that the most common problem I see in papers is a lack of compatibility between the theory as written in the statistical model as written and/or estimated. I have seen countless examples where authors write in words that the effect of one variable on another might be different based on yet another variable. However, they simply had included a control for the final variable when clearly the words imply the need for a multiplicative interaction term. I have seen work that emphasizes early on that a particular variable does not follow a normal distribution, but later uses that variable in a statistical model that assumes normality. Others often fail to notice assumptions about linear relationships between variables that are built into their statistical models or in how individual variables are measured. Finally, others misuse statistical techniques believing that they are fixing some problem that the

technique does not in fact address.

I could go on, but that implies writing a book about methods, a task I will leave to others. I will note that as a graduate methods instructor of more than 20 years, I spent a lot of time emphasizing the importance of getting the theory right and then getting the statistical model and method aligned with that theory. I urge you to pay careful attention to this aspect of any paper you write or any paper you read.

Finally, you should acknowledge any problems or limitations with the data that might complicate the analysis. Do you have any missing data? Might the data be clustered in some way? Could there be any spatial or serial correlation? The potential for problems is almost limitless, but any that might have consequences for your analysis should be addressed. Major issues should be discussed in the body of the paper. Minor issues can be addressed using footnotes. Either way, you need to note the problem(s) and report what you did in response.

8.6.4 Analysis and Findings

Here you report the results of your analyses. Before discussing how to write this section, I want to emphasize the critical importance of documenting everything you do for every analysis you conduct for the paper.

Document Everything

For science to be science, research must be transparent, repeatable, and verifiable. The best way to ensure this is to produce a file full of comments that executes all of the analyses mentioned in the paper. This should also include any cleaning or transforming of the data. In other words, you should be able to hand someone else your raw data and your computer code and they should be able to run that code against that data and reproduce every analysis you conducted for your paper.

This includes the main tables and figures you produce, but it should also include every alternative model specification and diagnostic test you ran during the analysis or described in the paper whether it be in the body of the paper, a footnote, or an appendix. This computer file should also include information about the

software that was used, any additional packages that were installed, and any other information required to perform the analyses. Each analysis or test performed by the code should be preceded by a comment in the code that describes exactly what the next section of code does.

Researchers working in R are used to doing this in the form of what is often called a script file. Such files generally have the extension .R at the end of the file. Those who use Stata for their statistical analysis can accomplish the same thing by creating what Stata calls a .do file. SAS and SPSS also allow users to write out commands in a text file that can be submitted to the software for execution. While many people point and click through the menus of Stata or SPSS, both programs print the actual syntax of commands they execute in their output. Thus, users of the pulldown menus can still copy and paste the syntax into a file so they have an accurate record of what they have done.

There is no substitute for these computer code files. Authors can try to be as precise as they can be when they write about what they did in their analyses, but any description in words alone is necessarily less precise than providing the actual code itself. More journals are requiring authors to submit the data and code necessary to reproduce the findings presented in their papers. Besides, being careful about documenting what you've done will end up saving you time and improving the quality of your work. You'll make fewer mistakes, and when editors or reviewers ask you to revise something for your manuscript before it can be accepted for publication, revising the analysis will be trivial if you have documented your code well.

Finally, every data set also needs a complete codebook documenting the data and metadata. Metadata is that information that provides meaning to the actual data. Metadata includes the names of variables, labels for the values of variables, information about the sample, when the data was collected, etc. Without this information, knowing that two variables are statistically significantly related to each other is meaningless.

Descriptives and Diagnostics

As for writing the analysis section of the paper, I think it is important to start with a table of descriptive statistics for all the individual variables that are used in

the analysis. For continuous variables, you might present the mean, standard deviation, minimum value, and maximum value. For categorical variables, you might present frequency distributions instead. The point is that before you consider how any set of variables might be related to each other, you should understand the structure of each variable individually. This is also when you would report any oddities about any individual variable that becomes evident from this description.

One mistake authors make when presenting descriptive statistics is to fail to take into account any transformations that are made or any observations that are later dropped from the analysis for some reason. If your table of descriptive statistics reports that 2000 people in your survey reported voting in the last election, but your analysis table only shows a sample size of 1500, then the voters described in the first table are not the same ones being used for the analysis in the later table. The most common reason for this discrepancy is the problem of missing data. Of course, dealing with missing data itself is an important topic that merits explicit attention in your paper. Note: case wise deletion in response to missing data is by far the most common practice and almost certainly your worst alternative. Strongly consider multiple imputation.

At some point you need to perform a complete set of diagnostic tests regarding your analysis. There are standard things to consider, including multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, clustering in the data, influential cases or groups of cases, missing data, selection bias, etc. You want to know how robust your findings are to different model specifications or choices in measurement.

The results of these diagnostic efforts should be reported in the body of the paper, in footnotes, or in an appendix to the paper. Major concerns that require critical choices should be described in the body of the paper. Results should be presented in a precise manner. Footnotes that say the author looked for evidence of a particular problem and found nothing are insufficient. The actual evidence needs to be presented. Footnotes that say the author ran the analysis a different way and got essentially the same results are not sufficient. The alternative analysis should be presented, probably in an appendix. Remember also that all the code for conducting your diagnostics should be included with computer code that produces the main results.

It is your responsibility to evaluate your findings. You want to be the one to find problems in your paper before a reviewer, editor, or future reader finds them. More importantly, your job is to challenge your own findings. It is not your job

to defend a particular result or theoretical perspective from criticism. Rather, you should be the leading critic of your own work in the sense that you should seek to uncover any limitations, weaknesses, or contradictions yourself.

Far too often scholars get personally invested in a research program to the point where they become defensive when others critique their work or offer a different perspective. Science advances when we build on each other's work and we recognize the improvements to our own work made by others. Progress stalls when scholarly camps form and dig in their heels defending their perspective rather than learning from the perspective of others. Too many scholars feel they need to prove that they are right when science demands we open ourselves to the possibility that we are wrong.

How Many Models to Report?

There are many issues to consider when presenting the main results of the analysis. Some authors prefer to present a series of analyses beginning with a baseline model. They then estimate additional models with additional variables, eventually finishing with the model they believe correctly captures the process they are studying. I can see circumstances where this might be useful. For example, a first model might represent conventional wisdom in a subfield and the point of the paper is to demonstrate how conventional wisdom changes under a different model specification.

However, I generally recommend against presenting a series of models when only the final model is the one the author believes is correctly specified. Reviewing results from misspecified models can be distracting for the reader and can be a waste of space in the article. In most cases, the theory should lead to the specification of a correct model and that should be the focus of the analysis.

Once you are satisfied with your diagnostics, you can interpret the results of your model.[2] Start with the key findings that are most relevant for evaluating your theory. Discuss secondary findings and control variables later. It is important to

[2]Many authors would interpret the results of their main analysis and then go through a series of diagnostics and robustness checks. That's perfectly fine. Where those checks appear in the paper is much less important than making sure they are done and that they do appear in the paper somewhere.

lead with the most important results. You are not writing a murder mystery or a joke – there is no need to hold the punchline until the end.

Statistical Significance and Substantive Importance

It is worth writing about the statistical significance of a finding and the direction of that finding – positive or negative. It is also critically important to tell the reader whether the finding is or is not consistent with what you hypothesized. However, these bits of information are not enough. You must provide a substantive interpretation of your findings. Present findings in terms of meaningful quantities of interest that will allow you and the reader to reach richer conclusions about the substantive importance of your findings. Passing a threshold of statistical significance does not ensure that the findings are substantively important. This is a particular danger when dealing with large data sets. At the same time, failure to cross a traditional threshold of statistical significance does not necessarily mean that a finding is of no substantive importance. This can often occur in analyses that include multiplicative interaction terms.

For example, imagine that you ran a model predicting the percentage of the vote received by a candidate as a function of how much money they spent on their campaign. Instead of just reporting a coefficient and its statistical significance, you should report the results in terms such as an increase in spending of $100,000 translates into an increase in vote share of about two percentage points, controlling for other factors in the model. Expressing results in terms of the units in which the variables are measured – in this case, dollars and percentage points, respectively – makes the findings much easier for a broad range of readers to understand. It also allows you to talk about the magnitude of the finding. In this example, you could comment on whether a $100,000 spending increase is large or small, and you could also do the same for a two percentage point increase.

If you are actually doing this analysis, you might be worried about a small number of very high spending candidates unduly influencing your results. You might also reasonably think that there is a diminishing marginal utility for each additional dollar that is spent. As a result, you might follow what most researchers do when analyzing the impact of campaign spending, which is to transform the spending variable by taking its natural log. This only highlights even moreso how important it is to provide meaningful interpretation of your results. Suppose you

find that an increase in the natural log of spending is associated with an increase in the vote share received by the candidate. Most people do not think intuitively about what an increase in the natural log of something really means. It is the author's job to translate this result back into terms the reader can understand.

Deciding what is a reasonable increase for your independent variable of interest can be difficult. Some might choose to interpret a one standard deviation increase. Others might choose a two standard deviation increase. Still others might choose the interquartile range. Still others will evaluate a change from two standard deviations below the mean up to two standard deviations above the mean. Still others will go from the minimum observed value to the maximum observed value. If you are plotting a figure, these last two approaches are reasonable, but if you are just trying to understand the average magnitude of the effect, these two approaches represent rather extreme shifts in the independent variable.

Sometimes it can be useful to illustrate findings using specific cases. Scholars studying the 50 US states, for example, might describe the impact of an independent variable on the outcome of interest in terms of comparing one state that has a lower than average value of that independent variable to another state that has a higher than average value of that independent variable. Instead of saying when the independent variable increases from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean, the outcome changes by some amount, the author might instead describe it in terms of comparing a state like New York to a state like Nebraska.

Special Methods Words

The discussion of statistical significance in the previous section leads to a broader point about writing empirical papers. There are a number of words that have special meaning in the context of statistical methodology. Words like significant, likelihood, variance, outlier, correlation, and many others are used in everyday language, but they have a specific meaning in statistics. I strongly recommend that you limit the use of words like these to their narrow statistical meaning. If a member of Congress is quite different from other members of Congress in a non-statistical way, do not call him an outlier, and do not say that they are significantly different. This will help avoid confusion for your readers.

Reporting Uncertainty

Your results should provide a clear representation of the statistical uncertainty associated with them. Here is where figures can be very helpful. A table with coefficient estimates with indicators of whether or not they are statistically significant at some level is not sufficient. A table with coefficient estimates and the associated T-scores used to determine statistical significance is not much better. A table with coefficient estimates and their associated standard errors is a bit better. At least a reader can use this information in most circumstances to construct a range of plausible values with the coefficient estimates. In the typical regression model, for example, the reader can mentally construct a 95% confidence interval by adding two times the standard error to the coefficient estimate, and subtracting two times the standard error from the coefficient estimate. Of course, you could make it easier for the reader by just providing the coefficient estimate and a corresponding confidence interval.

Conveying statistical uncertainty should carry over to your substantive interpretation as well. Returning to our previous example, if an increase in spending of $100,000 leads to an increase in a candidate's vote share of two percentage points on average, you should also report the upper and lower bound implied by the confidence interval. Suppose in this case the 95% confidence interval ranges from a projected increase in vote share as low as one percentage point or as high as three percentage points, that information should be conveyed to the reader. All statistical estimates come with uncertainty. Thus, all substantive interpretation of statistical results should clearly convey that uncertainty.

Tables or Figures?

Researchers differ on their preference for presenting results in tables or in figures. Currently it is trendy to present everything in figures, but I think there are still some results better shown in tables. For example, some scholars now show the results of regression models as figures with a point plotted to represent the value of a coefficient, a line drawn through the point to represent a confidence interval, and often a vertical line at zero to show which confidence intervals do and do not include zero. Such plots are helpful because they illustrate the confidence interval. However, such plots also encourage comparison of the sizes of the

coefficients across variables. Such comparisons are often misleading because the measurement scales of the variables in question differ, and some may be arbitrary. Some scholars will standardize coefficient estimates before producing such plots, but as Gary King clearly demonstrated, comparing standardized coefficients frequently obscures more than it reveals.[3] My point is simply that you should think carefully about how to present your results in the clearest manner possible. That might include tables or figures.

Regardless of whether you use tables or figures, each table and figure should be able to stand on its own. In other words, each table and figure should have an informative title, explanatory notes, appropriate labels, etc. as needed so that someone who ignored the article and looked only at each table and figure could still understand each table and figure. This requires careful attention to detail. Variable names should be spelled out in meaningful words. For example, write out logged per capita income rather than LN PC INC or as X27 or however the variable might be named in your data set. Even when researchers properly label independent variables in a table, they often forget to define the dependent variable. Tables and figures should include explanatory notes that describe the source of the data. If a figure is based on statistical results, the note should reference those results: e.g. this figure is based on model 2 from table 3.

The explanatory note should also define what is presented in the table. For example, you might say that table entries are coefficients from a logit model, and include 95% confidence intervals constructed via a standard bootstrap. Whatever it takes to convey to the reader what the entries of the table mean must be included.

By the time you are ready to share your manuscript with someone other than your advisor or best friends in graduate school, you should format the tables and figures as you see the best ones presented in the leading journals in your field. You can cut and paste raw output and figures from your statistical software into your rough drafts of papers, but by the time you are showing your work to others, it should be formatted to look professional.

[3]King, Gary. 1986. "How Not to Lie With Statistics: Avoiding Common Mistakes in Quantitative Political Science," *American Journal of Political Science*, 30(3):666-687.

Be Clear and Complete

As you write about your findings, make sure you direct readers carefully to where they can see your findings in the particular tables or figures you present. Explain those findings in the text the same way you would explain those findings if you put up a table or a figure in a research presentation and had to describe it. Take your time and walk readers through everything they need to know. Instead of saying something vague like, figure 2 shows clear support for hypothesis 3, be more complete. Remind the reader exactly what hypothesis 3 predicted and then describe where exactly in the figure readers should look in order to see support for this prediction.

While your focus should be on your primary variables of interest, some discussion should also be provided regarding the control variables as well. This discussion can be brief, but the controls were included for a reason so you should not just ignore them.

Many scholars, particularly students and young scholars, spend too little time on this section of the paper. They write pages and pages setting up the theory and describing the findings of others, often followed by a detailed discussion of the research design and methods, only to be followed by a short paragraph or two describing their findings. This often occurs when authors limit the interpretation of their findings to only whether they are in the right direction and statistically significant. There is so much more to learn from a careful analysis. You owe it to yourself and your readers to fully explore and describe your findings.

8.6.5 Discussion/Conclusion

People disagree about whether papers should have two separate sections at the end or just one. I generally prefer one just labeled as the conclusion. I do not think the closing section or sections of a paper need to be particularly long. It is important that you draw conclusions from your findings, but it is equally important to realize that readers will draw their own conclusions as well. Books and book chapters are better suited for lengthy conclusions. Journal articles should focus concisely on the main points and be done.

Do not spend a lot of time restating your empirical findings. No more than

one paragraph that summarizes the findings is needed, and sometimes not even that. Your reader just finished reading your findings. They do not need a lengthy restatement of them.

Instead, link your findings back to the theory motivating the paper at a more conceptual level. Which aspects of your theory were supported by the analysis and which aspects were not? Remember, a theory is an explanation for why something happens or why something works the way it does. Now that you have performed your analysis, what do your findings imply for how we should think about the process you analyzed? Should we accept, reject, or consider some modifications to the theory you presented? If there was a puzzle or tension motivating your paper, do your findings resolve that tension or solve that puzzle?

Does your study have implications for how to think about other political processes related to the one you studied? For example, if your analysis focused on campaign spending of candidates, do your findings have implications for how elected officials might behave after the election is over? Are there normative implications stemming from your findings? Continuing with our example, would anything in your analysis about the impact of campaign spending imply any reforms that might either reduce that impact or balance it across challengers and incumbents?

It is also useful to consider any serious problems or issues that emerged in your analysis. Are these problems with your data and/or methods, or do these problems suggest a reason to rethink the theory guiding the paper? Were there unexpected findings or patterns that suggest new ideas to you? Based on your conclusions, where might research related to your paper go next? On this last point, I do not think it is necessary to outline a broad research agenda, but if your paper points to the next obvious step researchers should consider, it might be worth pointing out. Of course, you may already have a paper of your own in the works that follows up on the same point. I also think authors could skip any discussion of future research and be just fine.

Just to be clear, I am rejecting what many of us have been taught about writing – that is, many guides to writing say use the introduction to tell readers what you are going to say, use the body of the paper to say it, then use the conclusion to tell readers what you said. This kind of redundancy is a waste of time and space in scholarly writing. Of course the various sections of your paper should be connected, and occasional summary sentences or reminders about hypotheses or

other key points can be helpful, but professional writing should avoid redundancy. It should be clear, concise, and with no unnecessary components.

Thus, the conclusion section of your paper should describe what your findings mean rather than simply restating what your findings are. What are the implications of your findings for broader theories about politics, and why are they important?

8.7 General Tips for Academic Writing

This chapter has already provided a lot of advice about writing. Still, a large number of considerations remain. In this section, I review a number of suggestions for improving your academic writing. Some of these suggestions I feel strongly about while others are more questions of style or taste. These tips are meant to improve your approach to writing, the quality of the feedback you receive, and the quality of your writing itself.

8.7.1 Strive for Clarity

Remember, your primary goal is to communicate your thoughts and ideas clearly, precisely, efficiently, and effectively to your readers. Academic writing is always subjected to criticism. You at least want to be criticized by people who understood what you meant. This means you should avoid specialized jargon, technical terminology, and dense writing more generally. Comparative politics scholars should not assume that readers know which countries are OECD countries. American politics scholars should not assume everyone knows when the 100th Congress was in session. Methodologists should not assume that readers know what bootstrapping is or why someone would do it.

To drive this point home, a former student of mine and I began regularly telling our students that scholarly writing should seek to satisfy three types of reviewers. The first is someone with substantive expertise in your research area. The second is an expert in the methods that you used. The third should be a nonexpert – even a non-academic. We frequently suggest thinking about explaining what you're doing to a favorite elderly relative of yours. A former professor of mine once

said if you can't explain your research so that a typical college sophomore can understand it, you don't really understand it well yourself. Specialized jargon and technical language may help you communicate efficiently with a very small subset of readers, but your work will get little attention and have little impact in your subfield or in the broader discipline if readers can't penetrate your writing style.

From the first draft you plan to share to the final version of the paper, make life easy on your readers. Simple things like including page numbers in every draft make it easier for friends to provide feedback. Similarly, don't expect your advisor, friends, or reviewers for journals to proofread for you. Clean up grammar, spelling, punctuation, and other kinds of writing issues as best you can yourself. If you struggle with any of these things, get help or hire help. You want your readers focused on the content of what you are saying. You want feedback on the problems you did not see. You do not want readers fixating on problems you could have fixed already yourself. Besides, it is in your interest as a grad student or young scholar to put your best professional foot forward each time you send out a manuscript to someone.

At some point in the writing process, you should prepare a detailed outline of your paper. Some start papers this way while others prefer to just write the first draft. Either way creating a detailed outline will impose discipline and structure on your paper. Outlines make it easier to avoid redundancy, to discover gaps, and to recognize unnecessary tangents that need not be pursued.

8.7.2 Making Papers Look Professional

Making the paper look professional in terms of writing format is particularly important when sending out a paper for a conference or for consideration for publication. You are expecting others to take your work seriously in these settings. The least you can do is take it seriously yourself. As a former journal editor, a frequent reviewer, and author myself, I can tell you that reviewers hate articles that are sloppy and they penalize sharply for it.

Most journals expect submissions to be double-spaced with 11 or 12 point type. You should have a title page that lists the authors in proper order and with email addresses. You should include a 100-200 word abstract on the title page. Ta-

bles and figures should be formatted like those that appear in leading journals and not just cut and pasted out of your statistical software. Use an accepted citation format and a properly formatted list of cited references.

Word versus LaTeX

I discuss using LaTeX for scientific writing in Chapter 7. LaTeX is not a word processing program like Microsoft Word, Open Office, or Apple's Pages. Rather, it is a document production platform you use with a text editor to generate papers, slides for presentations, etc.

LaTeX is a powerful and flexible environment, but modern word processing programs are as well. Some people think using LaTeX signals to others that they are more sophisticated, methodologically or otherwise. Of course this is silly. A smart, sophisticated scholar uses whatever tools are most helpful to them. I use LaTeX for some things and word processors for others. Sometimes this depends on the preferences of my co-authors. I suggest that you learn enough about LaTeX to make an informed choice, but after that, use whatever tool is best suited for a particular task. Besides, new tools are always emerging.

8.7.3 Some Don'ts of Professional Writing

Finally, I have a list of things you should avoid in professional writing. Some of these are really important, while others are matters of taste. Most share in common a concern for either clarity or conciseness.

- **Rhetorical questions:** Authors frequently use rhetorical questions to mark transitions in a paper. However, rhetorical questions are inevitably followed by the author's answer to that question. "What does this mean for democracy? Well it means ..." The main point the author is trying to make is wholly contained in the answer to the rhetorical question. The question itself adds nothing to the paper. It contains no information – it merely takes up space. If a general rule to professional writing is to eliminate what is not needed, then eliminating rhetorical questions is an easy place to start.

- **Analogies, metaphors, and similes:** These three forms of argument are all similar to each other in that they seek to explain one thing by making reference to how that thing is similar to or like something else. Such strategies are inherently weak forms of argument that risk confusion and misunderstanding by readers. As an author, you should strive to explain what something is rather than trying to explain what something is like.

  In my experience, this form of argument appears in the social sciences most often when authors make reference to some process routinely studied in the natural sciences. Metaphors about evolution, the spread of viruses, and the like are used to describe social and political phenomena. I suspect that the intent is to sound more scientific in using these references. Unfortunately, such approaches generally create confusion and often expose gaps in the theoretical thinking of the author. This occurs because the metaphor never fits precisely, often leading to distracting arguments about the metaphor rather than the actual topic under study.

- **Negatives and double negatives:** Authors frequently use negative terms to describe what they are studying. A common phrase is some variant of, "This finding is not surprising given . . . " Such a statement actually provides almost no information. It says what the finding is not, eliminating one thing that could have been, but it leaves available a virtually infinite number of things about what the finding is. Imagine asking a friend what time it is and they tell you it is not 10:30. Saying what time it is not provides you with virtually no information.

  It gets worse when authors use double negatives. Again, a common phrase goes something like, "It is not uncommon to see such a result." This uses the negative form of the word common, but precedes it with the negative word not, which implies that it is in fact common to see such a result. If so, saying that it is common is much better than saying it is not uncommon.

  Another version of confusing writing using negatives involves sentences that start with, "Not only . . . " Such sentences generally contain a redundant restatement of something in the first clause of the sentence, followed by what the author often considers the most important point of the sentence in the second clause. Since the first clause is often redundant, it can be eliminated completely. If the second clause is the most important part of the sentence, it should not be buried in the second clause – it should come first.

- **Long block quotes:** Long quotes taken from other published papers are rarely helpful. Such quotes generally require additional explanation because the quote itself has been pulled out of the context in which it was originally written. If you as the author have to explain the quote after you present it, the quote itself is not conveying a clear meaning to your readers. Just remove the quote and provide your explanation in your own words as you must do for the rest of the paper anyway.

- **Long sentences:** Many authors write long complex sentences with lots of often improperly used punctuation to connect clauses and phrases. The ideas we convey are often complex, so our writing tends to follow that same pattern. I believe complex ideas are more clearly conveyed by a series of well ordered short declarative sentences. Readers get lost in the long sentences and authors often mistakenly bury the most important part of a long sentence somewhere in the third or fourth clause.

- **Unnecessary negative tone:** Too many authors appear to believe that the best way to make a case for their paper is to point out what is wrong with the work of others. Criticism of existing work is certainly fair. Every new paper is at some level a criticism of existing scholarship because the new paper provides something that was not there before. Still, nearly every new paper owes its origins to some idea that was provoked by existing research. Even if your paper demonstrates why some other paper had it backwards, your paper should still be thought of as building on that existing work rather than tearing it down.

  This can be a challenge because some scholars, no matter how you phrase it, view any criticism of their work as unwarranted and/or as a personal attack. Still, that is no reason for you to be impolite or unnecessarily negative in tone. I am sure there have been times in my own writing when my effort to be direct came across as unnecessarily negative. I apologize to anyone reading this who I might have offended.

- **Starting sentences with and, but, or or:** These three words are the most common conjunctions. Conjunctions are words meant to connect phrases or clauses within a sentence. By definition, conjunctions cannot be the first word of a sentence. This has become more a matter of taste than of hard and fast adherence to grammatical rules, but I think it has no place in professional writing. Just watch Conjunction Junction from Schoolhouse Rock if you are confused (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPoBE-E8VOc).

Put differently, you will never offend someone by using proper grammar, though you might by breaking common grammatical rules. This is an easy one to follow. More generally, you should review and apply the basic rules of grammar in professional writing. The most common errors I see relate to subject/verb agreement, misuse of pronouns, and misuse of punctuation.

- **Common typos:** We have become accustomed to automatic spellchecking. As a result, it is easy to read past typos in electronic versions of our papers. The result can be some particularly unfortunate typos. Dropping the letter L out of the word public or replacing it with the letter R in the word election can produce embarrassing moments for authors. Read carefully, and do word searches for common typos like these.

- **Efforts to be cute, flowery, or clever:** Every author wants their work to be engaging. Formal academic writing must rely on the power of the ideas being presented to engage readers. Efforts at flowery prose or at a clever twist of phrase are very poor substitutes. Such writing is almost always imprecise, and efforts to be clever often fail. You are better served to devote your writing efforts toward clarity and completeness.

  A special form of attempting to be clever has emerged in recent years in political science – the clever title. Looking at journals today suggests that it is almost an editorial requirement to title an article as, "Effort to be clever: the real title of the paper." If you can succeed at this, there is no harm, but given the high likelihood of failure and the lack of value this adds to the article, I suggest that authors avoid this strategy.

- **In theory ...** The standard paper should certainly be guided by a theory, but authors should avoid using the phrase "in theory" in their papers. It should be obvious when you are writing about your theory. Also, in everyday language people often use the phrase "in theory" in contrast to the phrase "in practice." In this usage, the author is saying what should be happening in theory is different from what actually happens in practice. Academic writing is about predicting what will happen if a theory is correct and then observing whether it happens or not.

- **Significant:** The word significant should be used in academic writing only in the context of describing whether a statistical result meets the definition of statistically significant or not. If you mean something more general like important, consequential, meaningful, etc., use one of those words instead.

- **Synonyms:** Young scholars, especially students, tell me all the time that they do not want their writing to be boring. The goal is admirable, but oftentimes they use synonyms as they write simply to avoid using the same word over and over. The problem is that synonyms are words that only have similar meanings to each other. They do not have identical meanings. Scholars might talk about a partisan cleavage, partisan division, partisan gap, or party polarization. These terms are not identical even though they are similar. Authors should be careful to select the terms that most closely describe the concept under consideration. If necessary, they should provide explicit definitions of those terms. After doing so, it only confuses readers to use synonyms, even if you add a footnote or phrase saying you plan to use two or more words interchangeably. Just use the same word and avoid the confusion.

- **The literature:** In the outline above, I already made the case for not having a separate literature review section of the paper. Here I suggest avoiding use of the phrase "the literature" altogether. When you write something making reference to the literature, just provide appropriate citations after a declarative sentence. Instead of saying the literature finds that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other, simply say democracies are less likely to go to war with each other. The second version is more direct and takes fewer words, and both versions would need to be followed by the same citations anyway.

- **Quotation marks around words or phrases:** Sometimes authors want to emphasize a particular word or phrase. Other times they want to define a word or phrase. Using quotation marks around the word or phrase in question is incorrect in either setting. It is much better to use italics or bold face to set a word or phrase apart from normal text because these two methods do not change the meaning of the word. Quotation marks often do. Putting quotation marks around a word generally implies to the reader that you mean something somewhat different from the actual word you are using. In most settings, it means you intend to communicate something intentionally different from the actual word. Quotation marks around words or phrases are often meant to convey irony, such as the "simple" mathematical formula, or the "lovely weather" we are having in Antarctica. Even if irony is your goal, this method of conveying it is imprecise.

- **Percent change versus percentage point change:** The percent change in

something does not mean the same thing as the percentage point change in something. However, authors routinely get this wrong. They will write something like, "The chance of voting for the Democratic candidate increased from 20% to 40%, or an increase of 20%." That is not correct. The chance of voting for the Democratic candidate increased by 20 percentage points, but the chance also doubled, meaning that it increased by 100%. The percent increase differs from the percentage point increase.

Note also that an increase from 0.1% to 0.2%, an increase from 1% to 2%, and an increase from 50% to 100% are all increases of 100%. Obviously each increase is different if expressed in terms of percentage points.This demonstrates that knowing the percent increase in something really tells us very little about the chance that something might happen. It is always more clear to report the range of the increase from one level to another. It is also more clear to discuss these changes in terms of percentage points. This becomes even more clear when you realize that increasing from 20% to 40% constitutes an increase of 100%, but decreasing from 40% down to 20% constitutes a reduction of only 50%.

8.8 Conclusion

As I said at the beginning of this book, offering advice is a presumptuous act. Writing advice about writing is particularly challenging. No doubt anyone who reads this book will find numerous examples where I violate my own suggestions. Still, I believe academic writing is a craft that can be learned and a skill that can be developed. It is not an art, though certainly some writers are more gifted than others. Whenever a researcher tells me that they are just a bad writer, I tell them that is something they can fix.

The best way to become a better writer is to write a lot and to do so regularly. People can only organize so many thoughts in their own heads. We can talk with friends and colleagues about our work and often feel like we have it nailed down. That is because it is easy to miss or gloss over gaps and inconsistencies in our ideas when we are only thinking or talking.

Writing imposes discipline and structure on thinking. Writing anything at least gets you started. You should set high standards for your final drafts but low

standards for your first drafts. No first draft is suitable as a final draft. However, you cannot get to the final draft without producing the first draft. This makes the first draft essential, but the stakes for its quality are very low. It just needs to get done. Writing a lot and rewriting with care will help anyone at any point in their career become a better writer.

Lastly, you must share your work with others. Academic writing is meant to be shared, and academic writing always attracts criticism (unless it is completely ignored). Sharing drafts with mentors and friends will help you improve your writing, and also help you get used to receiving criticism. You have to learn to find balance between confidence in yourself and openness to criticism from others. Overconfidence can easily morph into closemindedness or defensiveness that prevents you from learning from the criticisms others offer. Being too open to criticism can lead you to prematurely discard your ideas or accept the ideas of others unthinkingly. Emotionally, authors must learn to manage hurt feelings or to avoid snap judgments about the criticisms they receive.

Scholarly writing sits at the core of the academic enterprise. It is how ideas are conveyed. Research is not done until it is published. Knowledge is not generated until it is available for others to consume. I hope this chapter removes any mystery about the scholarly writing process you might've had and offers some helpful tips to make you a better writer.

Chapter 9

Presenting Your Research

9.1 Introduction

Presenting your research shares many similarities with research writing. While some might have particular talents that make them excellent presenters, making a research presentation is a skill that can be learned. Research presentations, just like research papers, have a structure that can be followed. Your goal is for your audience to understand your work, which means clarity should be emphasized. Most importantly, this chapter will emphasize the value of practice. That includes practicing an individual presentation before you give it and finding opportunities to develop and deliver multiple presentations.

Presenting your work should be fun. You got into this business because you like exploring ideas and sharing them with others. Many people get nervous when speaking in public. That is okay, and can be managed primarily by practicing your talk multiple times in advance. Whether it comes from nervousness or excitement, channel that energy into enthusiasm for your presentation. Remember, you cannot expect an audience to be more enthusiastic about your presentation than you are. If you lack enthusiasm, you can almost guarantee that your audience will as well.

The two most common types of research talks are presentations at conferences and job talks that are part of an interview. Most of this chapter is relevant for either type of talk, but there are some important differences. I will note a few of those

differences along the way, but here I will highlight three dimensions of a talk that often differ between a conference presentation and a job talk.

1. **Length:** Presenters at a typical conference in political science are generally given 10-15 minutes for their presentation. A typical job talk allocates 30-50 minutes for the presentation to be followed by another 30 minutes or more of questions and answers.

2. **The Audience:** The audience at a typical conference presentation will consist primarily of professors and graduate students who specialize in the same field and even subfield as the presenters. The audience at a typical job talk will consist primarily of faculty and potentially graduate students from the Department in which you are interviewing. Importantly, most or all of them will not be experts in your subfield, and most will not even be in your same general field.

3. **The Content:** The content of a conference presentation could be solo-authored or co-authored, and it could be work that is nearly completed or work that is still in progress. The content of a job talk should be solo-authored and should be completed work. While conferences might be about what you are working on, job talks must be about the kind of work you are able to do.

As will become clear in this chapter, knowing your time limit and knowing your audience are critical to giving a good research presentation. Let's start by breaking down a research presentation into three phases: 1) preparing the talk, 2) giving the talk, and 3) the question and answer session.

9.2 Preparing the Talk

9.2.1 Ask What To Expect

Ask about the room, the technology (e.g. do you need to bring a laptop?), the allotted time, etc. If possible, go to the location of the presentation early. This will

let you see the room and also allow you to make sure the technology is working properly.

Similarly, ask about the norms surrounding the talk you will be giving. By norms, I mean should you expect questions to be asked along the way or saved until the end, do speakers normally use PowerPoint slides or not, is the setting likely to be formal or informal, etc. Even if you plan to give a talk that deviates from these norms, it is helpful for you to know that in advance. If you are giving a talk in a department around the lunch hour, it might be quite likely for audience members to eat their lunch during your talk. They might also forget that you have not eaten, so pack a snack you can quickly eat before your talk so you don't run out of energy.

Just remember, your audience wants you to be successful. This is especially true for job talks. Whoever is coordinating your talk will be happy to provide answers. On a related point, anticipate equipment/technology problems and have a backup plan in place. If you are using PowerPoint or something similar, have your slides on a flash drive and in the cloud. A colleague of mine said he thought researchers should be prepared to give their talk without slides or notes just in case. While this might be a bit extreme, you should be familiar enough with your own work that you could give an organized and coherent presentation without any notes or visual aids.

9.2.2 Consider Your Audience

Think about the audience for your presentation and adjust accordingly. It is your responsibility as the presenter to meet your audience where they are. That means considering what your audience knows and does not know about your topic, what their interests are in your talk, and what their goals might be for attending your talk.

Suppose your talk is about party polarization following the election of Donald Trump. If you are part of a panel at a conference where every paper is about party polarization and/or Donald Trump, and the audience will all be academics, you might anticipate an audience of specialists on party polarization and presidential elections. If you are giving this talk as part of a job interview for an academic position, your audience will likely consist overwhelmingly of faculty and gradu-

ate students from the department interviewing you, but most of them will not be experts in your particular topic. In fact most will not be in the general field of American politics. If you are giving this talk as a public lecture in your community, most of the audience members will not be professors, let alone specialists in political science or American politics.

Each different audience requires tailoring the talk to match their backgrounds and goals for attending. When presenting to an audience of specialists, you can get away with using jargon and making assumptions about what they know. However, when presenting to a more general audience, they might become lost or confused with such technical language. However, as noted below, even audiences of specialists will respond positively to a presentation that avoids jargon and focuses instead on clarity.

9.2.3 Practice Practice Practice!

There is no substitute for practicing a presentation, and less experienced scholars should practice a talk more than once. This is especially true for young scholars going out on job interviews. However, even experienced scholars need to practice their presentations if they want them to be good.

When I help a student prepare for a job talk, we start with a couple of conversations about the talk, focusing on what to include and what to exclude. I then encourage the student to develop slides and share them with me. I provide comments and we talk about the slides. I then have the student practice the talk in front of me. I simulate asking audience questions, but we focus on the presentation itself. We then might have the student present to a small group, and after taking feedback from them, announce a practice job talk to the faculty and grad students in our home department. Based on feedback from that experience, I might have the student present the talk to me one more time.

Practicing allows you to get comfortable with your presentation. It also helps you get used to how long 10 minutes or 30 minutes (or whatever length of time) feels when you are talking. Most scholars are shocked at how quickly that time passes. Practicing also helps you identify points of confusion in your own thinking. Finally, practicing helps you identify what is essential and what might be extraneous for your talk. Getting feedback from audiences during practice helps

you understand how audiences might be reacting to your talk. Importantly, practicing a talk also allows you to practice receiving and answering questions.

Practicing allows you to hit your time limit. Whether you have been given 10 minutes or 50 minutes, it is important to hit your target. Never exceed your time limit. Practice your talk so you can comfortably hit your mark. In fact, I have never seen an audience get mad at a talk scheduled for 15 minutes lasting only 12, or a job talk scheduled for 45 minutes coming in around 38. In contrast, I have seen lots of speakers lose their audience by running long.

If your talk is running long during your practice sessions, fix that by cutting something from the talk. You simply must speak fewer words. You should not talk faster. If you try to talk faster, you will feel rushed, and you will also be nervous about the time. The talk will be harder to follow and you will be more likely to make mistakes. Any expert ought to be able to talk about their work for any length of time. For example, you will need to get used to explaining your dissertation on an interview in just a few sentences. The key is to keep what is essential and remove things that are not.

You cannot present everything from a research paper in a 15 minute talk at a conference, and you cannot present your entire dissertation in a 45 minute job talk. It is much better to present a limited amount of information effectively than it is to present a larger amount of information ineffectively. If your project has multiple components (like any dissertation would, for example), simply say early in your talk that your project has several components, but that your talk today will focus on only one of them. You could even invite the audience to ask questions about the other components or to talk to you about them later one-on-one. If you give a good talk about the material you present, your audience will be interested in hearing more about your other research. In contrast, if you try to cram too much into your talk, you risk the audience finding none of it understandable or interesting.

Recently, I have had students record practice job talks so I can watch and listen to them. This allows me to stop the video at any point and offer feedback and advice. Most people do not like to see or hear themselves on a recording, but I think it can be extremely helpful. Especially for important presentations like job talks, I strongly recommend this.

Finally, even more experienced scholars should practice their talks. They too

often assume that their experience will adequately serve them, but most often the lack of preparation is glaringly obvious. If nothing else, a speaker owes their audience the obligation to be prepared to give a coherent presentation. We have a long-running weekly speaker series in American Politics at UNC. While of course there is variance, I would say that the worst presentations have tended to be given by the most senior scholars we bring in, which I attribute to their lack of preparation.

9.3 Giving the Talk

9.3.1 Know Your Stuff

Know your work inside and out. You will not have time to tell everyone everything you know about your research project, but you need to prepare to be the expert in the room. This means knowing your theory, the relevant literature, all the details about your data, methods, and measures, and anything else important for understanding the talk. If this is a job talk, prepare additional supplementary slides on some of this material in case you are asked questions.

I once attended a job talk where the presenter chose to present work they had done with a co-author. The work focused on a particular European country. The presenter noted that the co-author was the real expert on the politics of that country and that the presenter was responsible for the research methods/statistical analyses used. Unfortunately for the candidate, it became quite clear that he was less than a nonexpert on that particular country. It did not go well.

Similarly, I have seen many research presentations where the presenter conducts a very sophisticated statistical analysis, but then cannot answer very simple questions about their key variables. What is the mean and the observed range of your key variables? If one of your variables is a dummy variable coded as either 1 or 0, what percentage of your observations fall into those two categories? A presenter might report that a 1-unit increase in X leads to some amount of change in Y on average, but if they cannot tell you whether or not either of those changes in X or Y are large or small because they don't know the distribution of X or Y in their data set, the finding they report is almost meaningless. You have to understand individual variables before you can meaningfully describe how they might

be related.

9.3.2 Be Enthusiastic

This is your research and you put a lot of time and effort into it. You should be excited about sharing it with your audience. You do not need to do cartwheels or be overly dramatic, you should be upbeat and enthusiastic. Nobody in the room cares more about your research than you. If you appear to be uninterested or bored with your own presentation, you can be sure that the audience will be bored as well.

Some people are naturally gregarious and outgoing. For them, conveying enthusiasm is easy. In fact, I have advised a few folks over the years to rein in their enthusiasm a bit. Other people are quieter or more introverted. Such folks do not need to completely remake themselves. However, even the quietest person can convey enthusiasm for their own work with voice inflection, making eye contact with the audience, and just smiling and enjoying themselves during their presentation. It is much easier to convey enthusiasm if you are confident, and it is much easier to be confident if you know your stuff and if you practice.

If this continues to be a struggle for you, sign up for a class on public speaking or go to the teaching support center at your university to see if they have workshops on giving effective lectures. Public speaking is a skill that can be developed. Take it upon yourself to do so.

9.3.3 Establish Expectations

Tell the audience what to expect and what not to expect during your talk. Your audience should know exactly what your talk is about and not about from the introduction. If you are presenting work in progress or something at a very early stage, tell the audience. Though unlikely, if there is anything particularly controversial or potentially upsetting in your talk, tell your audience in advance.

If you are concerned about disruptions or interruptions, it is reasonable to ask the audience to hold their questions until the end. However, if someone does interrupt you with a question, it is best to try to answer it or to tell them that the

answer should become apparent later in the talk. Similarly, if you have handouts to distribute, don't distribute them until you are ready to talk about them. If you give someone a handout at the start of your talk, rest assured they will be looking at the handout rather than listening to your introduction.

Unless the talk is specifically about research methods, it is best to focus on the theoretical and substantive components of the research during the talk. Most audiences are less interested in the methods, and it is easy to get bogged down in methodological details. Just briefly say what you have done and invite those who are interested to ask you questions about your methods or to speak with you individually after the presentation.

9.3.4 Making Introductions

Get to the point. Your audience members should know what you are doing within the first minute or two and why you are doing it within the first three or four minutes. Sometimes you can bend this rule for a longer talk by starting with an interesting and relevant story/example. The key words in the previous sentence are interesting and relevant. More generally, a research talk is not a murder mystery where your goal is to provide a surprise ending. It is the opposite – your audience should know what you are doing, where your talk is headed, and even a preview of your findings right from the beginning.

This makes the introduction to your talk very important. Just like the introduction to a research paper, the introduction to a talk must inform the audience what the talk is about, why it is important, and what will be learned by listening. Really practice the first 2-5 minutes of your presentation because this is when you'll either capture the attention of the audience or lose it.

Oftentimes, it helps to begin a talk by describing a puzzle you are going to solve or some tension you're going to resolve. Either way, you must articulate why your audience should invest the next several minutes of their lives listening to you. You have an important question and an answer to it.

Other times it can be helpful to start with a political story as a motivating example. Be careful, however, to make sure that the example is interesting and relevant. Interesting can be a subjective term, but your friends and colleagues can

help you there if you are unsure.

In Chapter 8 on writing, I suggested really focusing on the introduction after the rest of the paper is written. The same advice applies to presentations. Your ability to develop a clear, concise, and compelling introduction increases once you know more clearly what the rest of the talk contains. Too often, presenters begin talks with an unfocused rambling effort to try and get started. They hope to hit their stride once they get going, but the problem is they may lose their audience in the meantime.

9.3.5 The "So What?" Question

I once had a professor tell me that every research presentation or paper must quickly and confidently answer what she called the "So What?" question. By this she meant that I should imagine a reader/audience member asking me why they should care about my research. I can say what I am doing or what I have found, but if someone says, "So what? Why should I care about that?" I need an answer.

I would go one step further. I think that an author or presenter has the obligation to provide the answer(s) to this question before the reader/audience member asks it. In fact, if this question is asked after the presentation is completed, you have fallen short of one of your critical goals.

The best way to do this is to make sure your research is motivated by a broader more general question. Your specific analysis might be about the impact of candidate spending on the share of the votes received in primary elections for state legislatures, but your motivation should be focused on a broader question of the role of money in politics, or of representation in democracies, or of legislative politics and policymaking, or something like that. Your specific research becomes the context in which you tackle this broader more compelling question. Having a broader theoretical and/or substantive motivation is how you get audience members who don't care at all about state legislative primaries to still care about your talk.

The conclusion to your talk should return to this broader motivating question and the answer that your analysis provides. Don't just summarize your findings – consider the theoretical and substantive implications of your findings for how we

should think about politics.

Many of us were taught in school that a good speech should tell the audience what you are going to say, then say it, and then tell them what you said. I disagree. I think you should tell them why what you're going to say is important, then say it, and then tell them what the implications are for your findings. A talk ends well if it inspires audience members to think differently about politics and about what their next research project should be.

9.3.6 Two 80% Rules

The previous section described the introduction in great detail and the conclusion more briefly. From my perspective, however, the two of those combined should generally constitute no more than 20% of your talk. Thus, 80% Rule 1 is that the middle 80% of your talk should focus on walking the audience through your research. It takes this much time to be clear and complete about what you have done.

Similarly, audience members came to your talk to hear what you have to say. Thus, 80% Rule 2 is that at least 80% of your talk should be about your ideas, your work, your analyses, your findings, etc. Just like a research paper, the vast majority of a presentation should be about your work and NOT the work of others. That means spending a limited amount of time talking about the existing literature. In fact, I suggest you do not talk about the literature as such, but simply put together your argument while adding citations as appropriate.

9.3.7 Clarity is Your #1 Goal

While giving your talk, strive for clarity and avoid jargon. Even when presenting to an audience largely made up of subfield experts, your goal is to easily communicate with this audience or a broader one. Just like with writing, some people feel the need to use complicated, specialized, and/or dense language to convey to the audience just how smart they are. This is a huge mistake. Giving a presentation that no one can follow only conveys how inconsiderate of your audience you are and/or that you do not understand what you are doing well enough

to communicate it to other reasonably intelligent people.

A professor of mine in graduate school once said that if you cannot present your research so that an average college sophomore can understand it, that you really don't know your material well enough. Similarly, a former student of mine and I are fond of saying that when presenting your research (or writing a research paper), you should try to satisfy three types of people: 1) a substantive expert from your field, 2) a research methods expert, and 3) an elderly relative. By this we mean that you should definitely do challenging and important methodological rigorous research, but that you should be able to explain it clearly to nonexperts.

Impress people with the quality and clarity of your ideas and not with the breadth and depth of your esoteric vocabulary. What you want is for audience members to come away from your talk wishing that they had thought of your idea. You want them asking questions about your ideas, methods, and findings. You do not want them asking questions designed to clarify what you said. If they are going to challenge or criticize what you have presented, you at least want them to do so accurately rather than based on a misunderstanding. Remember, if your audience does not understand you, that is your fault, not theirs.

Don't use acronyms, specialized terms, or anything else that is potentially confusing to your audience. Jargon can take the form of abstract language, specialized vocabulary, statistical methodology, or anything else that seems to separate the people who know the special language from the people who do not.

For example, scholars who study the US Congress often refer to particular congresses by number (the 104th Congress for example) rather than by the years during which that session of Congress was convened. A specialist on Congress might have no trouble with this, but even most political scientists don't have a chart in their heads that converts congresses to years. This example may seem trivial, but it signals to the audience that: 1) the presenter knows something that the audience doesn't, and 2) the presenter isn't courteous enough to make their presentation more accessible to those who lack the special vocabulary.

This can become a bigger problem if the research requires presenting fairly sophisticated methods and/or analyses. Unless the talk is primarily about methods, I suggest moving past this material quickly and simply offering to answer any questions at the end. This is better than spending 3-5 minutes to try to explain something that really takes 7-10 minutes to explain.

One thing you do not want to say when talking about methods (or really any aspect of the research) is something like, "as you can clearly see," or "this is fairly simple," or anything that suggests to the audience that if they don't quickly and completely understand what you are saying that they are to blame. Something that might be simple or obvious to you might be neither to people in the audience. Your job is not to tell them that they should understand what you are saying. Your job is to help them understand.

Cluttered slides containing too much information are the enemy of clarity. Big blocks of text, tables with scores or hundreds of numbers, complex figures with too many features and/or too many colors will overwhelm or confuse audience members. Even clutter in the header or footer of the slide or in the design of the slide template can get in the way. Slides should present what is essential in a clean and simple way, and they should not include anything extraneous.

Let me emphasize that final point. Nothing should appear on a slide that is not something you are going to talk about. If you put up a table with 30 numbers, but you only plan to talk about three of them, you risk confusing the audience. If you can turn entire sentences into bullet points, that is better. If you have a graph that plots five lines, but the real point is the difference between two of them, design a plot that just presents that difference. My one exception to this rule is including citations to published articles, where relevant, without actually talking about those authors or those articles. Just make your point and provide the citation where appropriate on the screen.

One of my pet peeves is when a presenter pops up a slide containing a table of statistical results that includes far too many numbers in far too small of a font to be readable by the audience, and then says, "Sorry about the table – I know it is hard to read." What I always want to say back is, "If you know it is hard to read, why in the world are you presenting it?" Almost certainly the presenter intends to focus on just one or a few of the entries in such a table. That's fine – just present those findings alone and leave the whole table as a backup slide or in an appendix to an accompanying paper.

9.3.8 Graphs, Figures, and Tables

Graphs, figures, and tables are almost always better than slides full of words. They can convey more information more efficiently while also being more engaging for your audience. They also prevent the presenter from just reading words on a slide to their audience.

However, just because they can replace a lot of written words on a slide does not mean they automatically substitute for spoken words in a presentation. I frequently tell my students that if a picture is worth a thousand words, then it should probably take at least a couple hundred words to explain one.

When presenting graphs, figures, or tables, take your time to explain them clearly and carefully. All too often, presenters pop up a graph and start by saying something like, "As you can clearly see, the results support my hypothesis." First, it is wrong to presume that anything is automatically clear to the audience. Second, if you don't explain what is in the graph, how is an audience member supposed to know that the evidence is supportive?

Start by describing the basic structure of the graph, figure, or table. For example, what quantity is being plotted along the X-axis, and what quantity is being plotted along the Y-axis? Does your theory predict a positive or negative slope to this line? Are the dashed lines meant to represent a 95% confidence interval? The same requirements are true for any table or figure as well. What is being represented in the columns or rows of the table? What is being depicted in the figure?

Once you have explained the structure of the graph, figure, or table, you can then point directly to that place within the graph, figure, or table that presents the result you want to discuss. Don't just say that the figure supports your theory or hypothesis. Point specifically to the feature that you are interpreting as support – the slope of the line, the difference between lines, the relative height of bars in a bar chart, etc.

In other words, take the time necessary to clearly and completely explain your results. Most scholars, particularly young scholars, devote far too little time in their presentations (or space in their research papers) to explaining their results. Ironically, they often devote too much time to explaining the work of others (i.e. the literature).

9.3.9 Talk, Don't Read

If you use PowerPoint slides or something similar, do not read the slides to the audience. Talk to your audience, don't read to them. However, presenters are sometimes nervous about saying something wrong or leaving something out, so the slides become an outline/crutch for the presenter rather than an outline/tool for the audience member. This often leads presenters to put too many words on slides as well as leads them to read their slides rather than deliver their talk.

A common type of overly wordy slide is the slide that contains long direct quotes. Such slides are generally a waste of time and space. What happens is that a presenter pops up a long quote, then proceeds to read the quote to the audience, and then moves on to explaining what the quote means. If you have to explain what the quote means, there is no value in providing (and reading) the quote itself. If the speaker somehow refrains from reading the quote, the audience members will, which means they won't be listening to the speaker. Just eliminate the quotes and make the points you want to make.

Presenters also commonly include too many words on their slides. They write out sentences instead of bullet points, they put too many lines or points on a single slide, and they have too many slides. Slides are meant to help the audience focus on key points. They are not meant to contain every word you plan to speak. Clean slides with a large font and minimal words are much easier for the audience.

9.3.10 A Researcher Walks into a Bar...

Most of us would say that the best talks are both informative and entertaining. That may be true, but graduate school is really only geared to teach people how to be informative. Graduate programs don't generally offer training on how to be funny or entertaining. Some universities do have resources to help people become better speakers or better class lecturers. Those options are definitely worth exploring. Still, it is difficult to manufacture entertainment, and even more difficult to do so when your time is limited or you are nervous. When in doubt, just focus on being informative. Bad jokes are worse than no jokes.

It is even difficult to practice being entertaining. Your practice audience might consist of your friends, your faculty and colleagues in your department, your sig-

nificant other, your pet, or just a mirror. None of these audiences accurately reflect your audience at many conferences or at job interviews. That is because your practice audience knows you and you know them, but your actual audience may be full of strangers.

I frequently attempt humor in my presentations, with what I hope is at least mixed success. For me, it is about getting a read on the audience very quickly, knowing whether an informal tone is acceptable or desired, and years of experience. Ultimately, you know more about your strengths and weaknesses here.

I worried about writing this section because I did not want to push readers away from being relaxed or enjoying themselves during a presentation. A joke here or there can lighten everyone's mood and help the talk proceed more smoothly. If your department creates opportunities for you to present your work, and if you go to conferences to present your work, by the time you go on a job interview, you should have a pretty good sense of your relative strengths and limitations on the entertainment front. Practice this aspect of your presentation style and experiment a little bit. Figure out a style that works for you before you have to interview.

9.4 The Q & A

Many audience members believe they find out how well the presenter knows their stuff during the question and answer session that follows most talks. I have heard several colleagues over the years place particular emphasis on the Q&A session following a job talk. Part of practicing a presentation is practicing fielding and answering questions about your research.

This part of a presentation also makes many presenters nervous. The presenter controls the agenda during the presentation, but the audience sets the agenda during the Q&A session. Still, you are the expert on your research, so trust that expertise. Here are several tips to consider when preparing for the Q&A session.

1. Relax and try to enjoy the experience. You are the expert. If you have practiced your talk, including practicing receiving questions, that should raise your confidence. You certainly will receive questions that you have

received before if you have practiced. Besides, it should be fun to talk about your research. Consider it a compliment that someone is interested enough in your project to ask you a question about it.

2. Listen to the question you are being asked. Presenters often start formulating their response to a question after the first few words of the question have been uttered. This distracts you from listening to the actual question and often leads to answers that are off target. Focus on the question you are actually being asked and not on rehearsed answers to questions that might be similar, but are not the same. Listen.

3. Similarly, let the person finish their question before you start answering it. You need to hear the whole thing anyway, plus it is rude to interrupt an audience member. If they have been patient enough to listen to your talk, and if they are engaged enough to ask a question, the least you can do is let them finish.

4. Give direct answers to the questions. You want to be complete, but you also do not want to ramble. I heard a job talk where the presenter gave a 15 minute response to the first question. That is bad. Try to be concise, and if you are concerned that you were too brief, you can always ask the person with the question if they have a follow-up or would like to talk more.

5. It is okay when answering questions to pause for a moment, to jot down a few notes, and to even say "I don't know – that's a good question" (once or twice anyway). Your audience will appreciate your effort to provide a thoughtful response. It also shows confidence to admit if you received a question that is puzzling. If you practiced your talk and know your material, that will come through. Don't worry if one or two of the questions are difficult. As a side note, you can always speak with the questioner later or send them an email if you think of a more complete response after the talk.

   Using a notepad to jot down questions can be a useful tactic to help you pause a few moments to consider your answer. However, remember that your goal is to answer the questions, not catalog them. Don't let jotting notes interfere too much with the free flow of the conversation.

6. Keep your cool. You know your stuff and that will come through in the talk, so relax. You might stumble during the talk or forget to say something you had planned to say, but that is okay. You might get a question you had not

considered before, but that is okay. Pause for a moment and then give it your best shot.

Most importantly, if someone from the audience gets a bit confrontational or seems to be badgering you during the Q&A, do not become defensive or confrontational yourself. Answer the question calmly, answer the follow-up calmly, and if they persist you can suggest that you continue the conversation once the talk is over. It can be hard for a presenter to tell when someone is asking a difficult question versus when they are being confrontational. However, it is easy for the audience to tell, especially at a job talk when the audience consists of colleagues of each other. The audience will know if someone is being a jerk, and if this is a job interview, the last thing they want to do is hire another jerk. Take the high road.

During the Q&A, try to strike a balance:

- Defending your work without becoming defensive.
- Being confident about your work without being arrogant.
- Being willing to accept fair criticism without caving in every time a question is asked or a challenge is raised.

The Q&A should be a conversation among equals about your work. It should not be a confrontation. You can make this happen by practicing, then relaxing, keeping your energy up, and staying cool.

Questions you should not receive if you have practiced include:

- What is your research question?
- What is your theory?
- What is your dependent variable? (Or any simple descriptive questions about any of your variables.)
- What are your conclusions/findings?
- What are the implications of your findings?
- Why should political scientists care about this? (A.k.a. What did we learn from this that we didn't know before?). In other words, "So What?"

9.5 Job Talks

Chapter 14 on the academic job market includes a section on giving a job talk. Virtually every department requires that job candidates give a 30-50 minute presentation on their own research followed by a question and answer session. While all of the principles articulated in this chapter regarding presentations are relevant to job talks, there are a few unique features about job talks worth considering. The material in this section is virtually identical to the material in Chapter 14, but it is worth repeating.

Graduate students and new PhD's out on the market should present solo-authored projects that are complete or very nearly so. For graduate students, this should be something from your dissertation. Presenting co-authored work raises questions about your ability to do research independently, and presenting something other than your dissertation raises questions about how far along you are on your dissertation.

Do not present a work in progress. Present something that is complete in the sense that you have a clear motivation, data and findings, and implications of your findings to discuss. Most often students present the paper they submitted as the writing sample for their application, and this is generally a good idea. However, sometimes several months pass between the application process and an interview. If you have something better or more interesting to present at that time, you should do so.

Do not try to present your entire dissertation. That is just too much information for one talk. Spend 30 seconds near the beginning of your talk providing a brief overview of your larger research agenda/dissertation to give your audience a sense of the bigger ideas that motivate your research. Then say that today you are focusing on one particular component of this project. People can ask questions at the end of your talk or during other parts of the interview if they want to hear more about your dissertation.

Ask in advance about the amount of time that will be set aside for the talk. Ask about the department's norms for such talks as well. Do people ask questions along the way, or do they save them for the end? Do presenters normally use PowerPoint or something similar? Who will be in the audience – just faculty from the department, any grad students or undergrads, anyone else? These are all fair

questions, and search committees should be happy to answer them. You want to know what to expect so you can prepare to do your best.

The question and answer session at the job talk is very important. Practicing in advance will help you anticipate questions you might get. Most political science departments have a norm of saving substantial questions until the end of the talk, though folks might ask minor clarifying questions along the way. Those norms are changing, however. Younger scholars, methods scholars, and scholars at higher ranked departments have begun asking serious questions in the middle of talks. Such behavior is quite common in many other disciplines, including statistics, economics, and computer science. As more interdisciplinary work takes place, norms from other disciplines are bound to come with that. Formal and quantitative methods in political science are heavily influenced by the three disciplines I just mentioned. You should prepare for these kinds of questions, especially if you are applying for methods jobs, and even moreso if you are applying for anything with an interdisciplinary component such as the new data science initiatives taking place at many universities.

The job talk is an important part of the interview. Fortunately, you set the agenda because you get to prepare the talk. That said, it is very important that you practice your talk multiple times before you go on an interview. Get your friends to watch, your advisor, or anyone else willing. In particular, it is helpful to get someone from a different subfield who is not familiar with your work to observe the talk. Remember, the majority of your audience at any interview will not be from your field or subfield.

Recently, I have had a couple of students record their practice talks so I can view them later. This has been extremely helpful because it allows me to stop the recording at any point and make comments or discuss issues with the student. I would encourage you to record yourself at least once so you can see and hear for yourself how your talk is going.

Finally, folks that already have jobs often make the mistake of failing to practice their job talk when they go on an interview. They assume that their experience teaching classes and presenting at conferences is sufficient preparation for giving a good job talk. However, job talks are different – the audience is different, the context is different, and the stakes are different. Even the most seasoned scholar would benefit from practicing her talk in advance.

9.6 Conclusion

Presenters generally spend too much time on their (unfocused) introduction, the existing literature, and their methods (unless it is a methods talk). They generally spend too little time on their own theory, their own findings, and the important implications of their findings.

It is important to practice and to take advice from others. Still, at the end of the day, you need to be yourself. If you naturally talk fast, try to slow down a little bit. If you naturally talk quite slowly, try to speed up a little bit. These and other aspects of your presentation style can be altered a little bit, but you cannot change who you are.

You need to keep your energy up throughout the entire experience. Nobody will be more excited about your research than you. If you appear bored with your own work, how can you expect the audience to stay engaged? Even a person who is normally rather subdued can add energy and enthusiasm to their presentations.

As you practice, strive for excellence. However, remember that perfection is unattainable. Trust your preparation and your knowledge, and don't worry about little mistakes along the way. No one has given the perfect talk – there is no such thing. If you can relax and enjoy yourself, the audience members will relax and enjoy themselves as well.

Chapter 10

Professional Conferences

10.1 Introduction

Professional conferences allow scholars to meet each other, to hear new ideas, and to share their own ideas and receive feedback. Conferences give you a chance to preview work in your subfield before it is published. They are the best way to keep on top of new developments in subfields of interest to you.

For graduate students and young scholars, presenting your research at conferences allows you to gain experience at giving presentations and receiving public feedback. Of course your goal is to publish papers and not just present them at conferences. However, the feedback received at a conference can help you improve the paper before you submit it to a journal for consideration.

While there are some differences, most professional conferences are pretty similar to each other. This chapter provides a brief overview of what conferences look like with some suggestions for how to spend your time at them. I focus particularly on advice for graduate students and young scholars.

10.2 The Basic Structure of Conferences

Most professional conferences last from 1 to 4 days. They are typically organized around panel presentations, each of which might last 60 to 90 minutes. The typical panel will devote most of the time to presentations given by panel members, but there is also generally a chance for audience members to ask questions at the end.

10.2.1 Standard Panels

There are several types of panels. The most common type of panel is organized around a theme and includes 3 to 5 research papers related to that theme. Sometimes those papers are closely related and sometimes they are not. The authors of each paper are typically given 10 to 15 minutes to present their paper. This typically happens in the order in which the papers are listed in the program. There is generally not time for questions or discussion of each individual paper after it is presented. Rather, all the presentations are given back to back.

Typically, a single author gives the entire presentation for a paper even if the paper has co-authors. This is more efficient and more coherent than dividing parts of the presentation among co-authors. With such short time slots devoted to each paper, it is important to be organized and to use the time wisely.

For more on developing research presentations, see Chapter 9.

10.2.2 The Panel Chair

The panel is typically moderated by a designated panel chairperson. The panel chair calls the panel to order and introduces each paper. A good panel chair will keep their introductions extremely brief so that presenters and audience members have all the time they need to participate.

The most important job of the panel chair is to keep the panel on schedule. That means sending an email to panel participants in advance of the conference telling them how much time they have for their presentations and then holding

them to those time limits. It is best if the panel chair sits with the audience, facing the presenters, so they can signal to presenters when their time is up. Good panel chairs often use handmade signs to signal when an author has five minutes left, two minutes left, and no time left. Everyone in the room will be grateful if the chair can keep the panel on schedule.

10.2.3 The Panel Discussant

The typical panel also includes one or two designated discussants. Sometimes the panel chair also serves as a discussant. A discussant is supposed to receive the papers for the panel several days in advance, read the papers, and provide comments on them. Discussants present their comments as part of the panel so both the authors and the audience can hear their take on the papers.

The best discussants provide written comments about each paper to the authors that are similar to the comments reviewers of journal submissions would provide. This might be two or three pages of comments focused on how to improve the paper for possible publication. However, they limit the comments they make during the panel session to two or three general questions or criticisms that might provide a good basis for group discussion. Their written comments might include several nitty-gritty details, but such comments are not useful for the audience to hear. Thus, a simple rule of thumb should be followed: written comments should be for the authors, but spoken comments should be for the audience.

10.2.4 The Question and Answer Session

After the authors present and the discussants offer comments, the panel chair sometimes asks if the authors want to respond to the discussants. I hate when this happens. At this point the panel has been running for an hour or more. If there is an audience that has been patient enough to hang around that long, the chair should instead move to questions from the audience. The chair should moderate that, and should try to avoid letting a single audience member or presenter monopolize the discussion.

10.2.5 Alternative Panel Formats

Sometimes a panel is limited to a single paper presentation. The Political Methodology annual summer conference has historically done this for all panels. Sometimes a panel is organized as a roundtable around a theme or panel members offer comments on the theme without presenting papers. Sometimes a panel centers around a particular book or set of papers by an author where panel members offer their critique of the work in question.

10.2.6 Poster Sessions

Some conferences now include what are called poster sessions. Instead of giving formal presentations of research papers, participants create a poster that presents the highlights of their paper. The posters are displayed during the session (generally between one and two hours long). Authors stand next to their displays, making themselves available to discuss their research further as audience members circulate among the posters.

My experience with poster sessions at larger national conferences has been pretty mixed. However, my experience with poster sessions at smaller more focused conferences has been excellent. For example, the annual Political Methodology conference and the annual State Politics and Policy conference both hold a graduate student poster session every year. Faculty members attending these conferences make a special point to participate in the poster session and interact extensively with the graduate students. Both conferences even offer an award for the best poster presented each year. Graduate students gain a great deal from these events.

A good poster limits the amount of text it presents and focuses on tables and figures. Just like you cannot present an entire paper in 10 minutes, you cannot present an entire paper on a poster. You must ruthlessly focus on the most important elements. What is the core theory driving the project? What data and methods of analysis are you using? What are your key findings? What are their implications?

You also need to practice the 30-second answer to the question, ”So, tell me about your poster/project.” This needs to be about the key puzzle or problem mo-

tivating your project followed briefly by what you found. Do not offer a simple descriptive response. Your point is to convey the most important aspect of your project in 30 seconds. If you do that, they can ask you questions and you can share more. Just like writing an excellent abstract and introduction for a research paper, your job in answering this first question is to hook your audience. This is worth practicing several times.

10.2.7 Other Conference Events

Finally, most conferences include other types of events as well. This might include business meetings for the organization hosting the conference or for other organizations that want to leverage the fact that many of their members will be attending the conference. The American Political Science Association has more than 40 organized subsections, many of which have business meetings and/or receptions at the annual conference. Some groups might hold receptions or dinners. Some might have presentations by the president of the organization. Some might have awards ceremonies. All of these provide opportunities for meeting people and for learning more about the organization. You don't need to attend all of these, but attending those most relevant to your research interests is a good idea. If you are nervous about attending something, ask your advisor or take a friend.

10.3 Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Graduate students often ask when they should start attending conferences and which ones they should attend. The answer depends a little bit on logistics and costs. If the conference is happening in your city or at your university, you should attend. However, paying for airfare and the hotel to attend a conference as a first-year graduate student seems like a waste of time and money. Nobody gets a job or wins a prize for attending the most conferences.

I think the best criteria for deciding whether to attend a conference is whether you have a research project that you could propose to present at that conference. Attending panels and hearing the research of others is valuable, but that alone does not justify the time and personal expense for graduate students to attend. You want to have something of your own to present upon which you can receive

feedback. For many students, their first opportunity might be with a paper co-authored with a faculty member, but that is okay. When I co-author conference papers with students, I always make the student give the presentation. It is more important that they get the experience. However, I am always in the audience to provide support and backup during the question and answer session.

For many students, their third year marks a good time to consider attending a conference. You certainly want to attend a few of them before you are out on the job market. You want to meet some people in your subfield and begin participating in that broader research community. Talk to your advisor about which conferences to target.

It is a particularly good idea for graduate students planning to be on the job market to attend the annual conference of the American Political Science Association that year. Historically this conference happens over Labor Day weekend. It generally marks the start of the job market for that coming academic year. As will be discussed below, both formal and informal job interviews take place at this conference. If you are going to be on the job market, you want to be there.

On a related note, if you have an interest in getting a job at another college or university in your state, many states have statewide political science associations that hold annual conferences. Attending these conference is a great way to meet faculty from the other schools in the state.

10.4 Meeting Others at Conferences

The first political science conference I attended was when I was a graduate student. I traveled to the conference with two other graduate students, and none of us had papers to present. We were encouraged to attend in part to attend a reception hosted by our department where we were told we could meet other scholars. Well, the three of us graduate students spent the entire time together not meeting anyone, except at the reception where my advisor introduced me to one of his very prominent co-authors. Unfortunately, I had to meet that same person seven or eight times more before he remembered me. In other words, I failed at meeting people at my first political science conference.

My primary mistake was choosing the comfortable path of just hanging out

with my friends. Of course, spending some time with your friends at a conference is perfectly reasonable. Once you all graduate and start new jobs, conferences will be opportunities to get together with old friends from grad school. However, spending all of your time with people you know necessarily precludes meeting anyone new.

One way to meet new people is to attend panels as an audience member. Specifically, if you attend a panel with the idea of asking a question, that can open the door to a conversation. Ask a question during the panel, and then consider approaching the author after the panel is over to introduce yourself and maybe offer a follow-up comment or question. Don't try to dominate the question-and-answer session or monopolize the author afterwards. If there is mutual interest from this brief encounter, you can always follow up with an email.

Another way to meet new people is to spend time hanging around your advisor or another senior colleague at a conference. They can introduce you to the people they know without you having to approach someone on your own whom you have never met. I spend a lot of time at conferences introducing my students to people I know. My advisor did some of this for me, and a senior colleague at my first job did a ton of this for me in my first year or two. Using your advisor to break the ice can be particularly helpful if you are on the job market and would like to speak with someone from another department that is hiring that year.

Occasionally, young scholars will contact someone they would like to meet in advance of a conference to see if they can schedule a time to go to lunch, grab coffee, or otherwise get together. I have mixed feelings about this. Some scholars might find it flattering to be asked to meet like this, but others might find it a bit odd or creepy. It is a bit too contrived for me. I think it is better to allow circumstances to unfold a bit more naturally. I do know of young scholars who develop a reputation for being aggressive at building their professional network. You would rather be known for producing quality research.

10.5 You Are Always on Stage

Don't be overly anxious or paranoid about this, but remember that at a professional conference you should behave in a professional way. Besides being the

proper and courteous thing to do, you also never know who might be watching or what opportunities might materialize for you down the road. You could be two years away from the job market, but making a good or bad impression on someone could matter if that person's department is hiring two years down the road. You should relax and enjoy the professional and personal experiences that come with the conference, but you should still think about attending the conference as being part of your job.

As a result, if you are presenting a conference paper, you want to do the best you can in writing the paper and presenting it. Chapters 8 and 9 cover advice on writing and presenting your research. My point here is that you want to do the best you can for your conference paper and presentation. Sloppy writing and/or presentations suggest to others that you do not take the process seriously. You want to make a better impression than that. You also want feedback that helps make your best effort better.

Similarly, if you serve as a chair or discussant on a panel, take that responsibility seriously as well. You want panel members complimenting you on your excellent effort. If you want good comments from the discussant on your own paper, you need to provide good comments to others when serving as a discussant.

As noted previously, a lot of actual job interviewing happens at conferences. I have much more to say about interviewing and the academic job market in Chapter 14. The kind of interviewing that happens at conferences is preliminary, and nobody gets a job based solely on a conference interview. However, departments use these preliminary conversations as a way to screen people in or out of consideration. Again, this could happen even accidentally as you encounter someone from the department that ends up having a job a year or more later.

Much of the interviewing I am describing happens informally. A department might know that it has an opening coming up, or that such an opening is likely. Faculty from that department might reach out to students they encounter to drum up interest in the position. They might also contact friends and colleagues at other departments asking if they have any students on the market that might be good candidates. The reverse may happen as well – if I see a department listing a job opening and I feel I have a student who would be a great fit, I might contact a friend at that department to see if they would like to speak with my student at an upcoming conference.

Such meetings might last 10-15 minutes or they might be scheduled for a lunch. They are typically conversations focused on the student and their research interests, along with some conversation about the department and what the department is seeking. These are informal conversations, not formal interviews. As noted above, these sorts of conversations generally do no more than help screen people into or out of consideration.

The annual conference of the American Political Science Association also holds a formal jobs fair. Departments that wish to can list their positions, and potential job candidates can post their CVs. This all happens online, so candidates can review job postings and search committees can review job candidates. If the hiring department is interested, they can contact potential candidates and try to schedule a brief interview at the conference. Typically these interviews are scheduled for 30 minutes. While they are more formal in nature, they are still primarily screening tools. People have mixed feelings about this process, but I think it is a great opportunity for students to gain experience in an interview setting. Besides, these screening interviews do eventually turn into on-campus interviews and even job offers for some people.

10.6 Conclusion

Professional conferences are part of a scholarly career. They allow you to meet new people, learn about current research, and share your research with others in order to get feedback. They are not the most important part of a graduate student's career, nor are they the most important factor for assistant professors striving for tenure. Still, they are useful events in which practicing scholars should participate. For young scholars, they are particularly useful for getting practice at presenting your research, learning to receive public criticism, and as a way to get feedback to help you improve your papers before you send them out for publication.

On that note, I strongly recommend against presenting the same paper at multiple conferences. Make the paper as good as you can before the conference, make any changes that seem reasonable after receiving feedback at the conference, and send it out for publication if appropriate. Presenting the same paper at multiple conferences makes it appear that you have difficulty finishing a paper, that you have difficulty generating ideas for new papers, or that you are more interested in

attending conferences than in publishing research. None of these are impressions you want associated with you.

A great way to learn from your conference experience is to debrief with your advisor after the conference is over. Talk about what you saw and what you experienced. Share your impressions and see what your advisor thinks of them. Your advisor can help you understand whether your experience was typical or not, and they can help you interpret what you saw.

If you only talk to your friends, if you don't attend panels, or if you don't ask a few questions at panels you attend, you are missing a big part of what professional conferences are about. Meet new people, share ideas, and stretch yourself a little bit. Smaller conferences like the annual State Politics and Policy conference and the annual Political Methodology conference frequently have meals scheduled together. Sit with someone new at those meals and get to know them a little bit.

Conferences should be intellectually enjoyable and can also be fun at a personal level. Relax and enjoy the experience, but don't forget that you are there for a reason and this is part of your job. If you wouldn't do something in your department or on a job interview, you probably shouldn't do it while attending a professional conference either.

Chapter 11

Publishing

11.1 Introduction

Pursuing a PhD and an academic career require doing research. From a practical standpoint, a research project is never done until it is published. This chapter outlines the mechanics of publishing, offering a few tips along the way. There are no tricks or shortcuts to scholarly publication. By far the most important criteria are the impact of the work and the quality of the writing. Still, understanding the mechanics of publishing is helpful.

There are numerous types of scholarly publications. They can generally be grouped along two dimensions: 1) length of the document, and 2) whether or not they are peer-reviewed. Most publications are the length of articles or chapters in a book (maybe 8000 to 12,000 words), or they are longer books. Most scholars publish many more articles than books, but both are perfectly reasonable things to pursue.

The much more important criteria is whether or not the publication is peer-reviewed. A publication is peer-reviewed if the manuscript is sent out to a small number of other scholars familiar with the subfield who provide anonymous reviews of the manuscript which the editor then considers before agreeing to publish the manuscript. This process is designed to screen out manuscripts that either fail to make a scholarly contribution or are flawed in some critical way. The process of

anonymous peer review is supposed to protect the integrity of what gets published as scholarly research.

In advancing a scholarly career, you should focus on publishing peer-reviewed books with scholarly/university presses and/or peer-reviewed articles published in leading scholarly journals. Textbooks, chapters in edited volumes, book reviews, editorials, and other types of non-peer-reviewed publications will not be viewed as scholarly contributions. In fact, publishing too many items that are not peer-reviewed sends the wrong signal that you think these kinds of publications are important.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the process of publishing peer-reviewed journal articles. I will occasionally point out where publishing peer-reviewed books differs.

11.2 Steps In the Publication Process

11.2.1 Submitting the Manuscript

Nearly every academic journal requires that authors submit the manuscript for consideration for publication through an online system. The mechanics of this are fairly straightforward, but there are a few things worth remembering.

Most academic journals require that you provide an anonymous version of your manuscript. They do not want reviewers to consider who the authors of the manuscript are – they want reviewers to focus on the manuscript itself. This means providing a copy of the manuscript without the authors listed at the beginning, but it also means removing any reference to the authors from the manuscript itself. For example, suppose your manuscript builds on a previous paper you published. You cannot say, "This analysis extends my previous work (Smith, 2016) . . . " Instead, you would have to say, "This analysis extends previous work by Smith (2016) . . . " Similarly, you should not include your name in the name of the file you submit, and you should look to make sure that your word processing software does not attach your name or university affiliation to files when they are saved.

Every journal provides guidelines for properly formatting manuscripts for sub-

mission. You should read these guidelines carefully and make sure that your manuscript conforms to the requirements of the journal before you submit it. This may seem tedious, but complying with their guidelines demonstrates your professionalism. In particular, review the journal's policy on sharing research data and replication materials if your paper is accepted for publication. You should know the policy of the journal and be prepared to comply with it.

Many journals allow authors to include a cover letter with their submission. I rarely do so myself, and I never read them when I was an editor. I think this is a holdover from an earlier era before online submissions. Feel free to write one if you would like, but keep it brief and don't expect it to matter.

Most journals allow authors to identify scholars whom the author believes would be good reviewers. You should not include the names of friends or colleagues. In fact, you should not list names of people who are likely to recognize that this is your paper. I rarely provide names. Most editors will look at who you are citing as a starting point for reviewers anyway. When I served as editor of a journal, I rarely chose reviewers from the list provided by authors. Occasionally, it was obvious that authors were recommending people they thought would be sympathetic rather than objective.

Most journals also allow authors to identify scholars whom the author believes would not be good reviewers. It could be that your manuscript criticizes the work of a particular scholar known to be hostile to anything that does so. You may have encountered a hostile reaction to your paper at a conference. Again, I rarely provide a list of such names. When I served as editor, however, I would at least take the author's concern into consideration. If I ended up selecting a reviewer whom I thought might be unfairly hostile to the work, I would consider that as I read the review.

Finally, every journal of which I am aware requires that if you submit a manuscript for consideration for publication, that you do not submit the manuscript to any other journal while you are waiting for the first journal to make a decision. Journal editors take this policy extremely seriously, as does every respectable scholar in the profession. Do not violate this rule. It is surprisingly easy to discover when authors submit a manuscript to more than one journal at the same time. In particular, the odds are pretty high that two editors would have at least some overlap in the reviewers they select to review the manuscript. Those reviewers will report back that they have received the manuscript twice, and the likely

outcome is that both editors of both journals will refuse to consider the paper any further.

11.2.2 Waiting For a Response

It may take anywhere from two weeks to six months or more to receive a response regarding your submission. There is not much you can do except wait. The online submission systems generally allow you to log in to see the status of your submission. The status might be something like: submission received, reviewers assigned, reviews received, awaiting decision, or something similar.

If your manuscript seems stalled at a stage prior to being sent out for review, or at the stage of awaiting a decision, it is okay to send a short note to the editor inquiring about the status of the manuscript. However, 90% of the time or more, the editor is aware of the manuscript's status already. Thus, you want to be careful not to nag or irritate the editor with needless emails. Once you submit the manuscript, your options are limited so you might as well just wait. I suggest using that time to write another paper to get ready for submission to another journal.

Editors often have difficulty getting scholars to agree to serve as anonymous reviewers. They also often struggle to get reviewers who agreed to write a review to actually submit one in a timely manner. Authors often bemoan how long the review process can take, but you should know that many editors are equally frustrated by how long it takes. Remember this when editors ask you to serve as a reviewer.

11.2.3 Receiving a Decision

Most manuscripts receive one of three decisions regarding the initial submission: 1) desk rejection, 2) rejection after review, and 3) revise and resubmit. Very few manuscripts are accepted as is based on the initial submission.

Editors in political science are increasingly using desk rejection. This means that the editor has rejected the manuscript for publication without sending it out for peer review. Editors do this when they believe the manuscript has virtually no chance of being deemed acceptable for publication. This has been a positive

development in the discipline. Desk rejection protects the time and energy of anonymous reviewers by sparing them from reviewing manuscripts that have virtually no chance of being accepted. Desk rejection also saves an author a lot of wasted time. If the paper is going to be rejected, you would prefer to know sooner rather than later so you can decide how to proceed. When many journals reject 75% to 95% of the manuscripts they receive, using desk rejection to screen out manuscripts that have virtually no chance of success is absolutely the right thing to do.

The most common outcome is for a manuscript to be rejected after it has been anonymously reviewed. Editors typically seek anywhere from 2 to 4 reviews. When a manuscript is rejected after being reviewed, the editor will provide a decision letter describing why they rejected the manuscript. They will also provide the written comments provided by reviewers. I discuss responding to reviewers later in this chapter, but at least the process provides authors with the feedback editors used to guide their decision. Some editors require all of the reviews to be positive before they will consider moving forward. Other editors use the reviews more as an information source than as an accounting system. Either way, at least you receive feedback on how your manuscript was viewed.

Because so few manuscripts are accepted as is, the best you can generally hope for is a decision of revise and resubmit. In this case, the editor believes that a revised version of your manuscript stands a good chance of being deemed publishable, so they invite you to submit a revised version of the manuscript for further consideration. As an author, it is your choice whether to accept this invitation or not, but refusal will almost certainly guarantee that the editor rejects the paper.

11.2.4 Revise and Resubmit

When you receive a revise and resubmit (often called an R&R), the editor will provide you with guidance on how to revise the paper. The editor may highlight specific things they want you to do, or they may simply point you to issues raised by the reviewers. Either way, you generally have a pretty clear road map to follow. Of course you will have the written comments of the reviewers along with the decision letter from the editor. An invitation to revise and resubmit is not a promise to publish the revised manuscript, but your chances are generally well above 50%

if you simply do what the editor and reviewers ask you to do.

When you resubmit the revised manuscript, you will also be asked to provide a memo detailing the changes you made. Editors want you to explain the changes you made in response to the comments provided by themselves and the reviewers. There may be some comments/suggestions with which you disagree. That is okay to some extent, but the editor will still want you to explain why you did not make a change that was suggested.

This memo is at least as important as the revised manuscript itself. Editors and reviewers will not be pleased if you simply ignore any of their comments. From a practical standpoint, the more you can make revisions that satisfy reviewers as opposed to arguing with their suggestions, the better off you will be. Even if a reviewer makes a mistake, you as the author should take some responsibility for that error. At the very least, you should probably rewrite whatever section/paragraph is at the root of the reviewer's mistake so you can avoid future readers reaching the same incorrect conclusion.

The revised manuscript, an anonymous version, and your response memo will all be submitted through the same online system used for your original submission. The editor may evaluate this material and render a decision, but more often they will involve reviewers again. They might send it back to the same set of reviewers who saw the original submission. They might send it back just to the subset of reviewers who raised the most concerns. They might also include a new reviewer just to get a fresh perspective. Typically reviewers will focus on how you responded to their original concerns, but occasionally they will bring up new concerns as well.

Typically the editor will make a final decision of acceptance or rejection after the second round of reviewing is completed. Occasionally an editor will give the author a second revise and resubmit opportunity. The second round of reviewing can take just as long as the first round, so be prepared to be patient.

11.2.5 Acceptance

If the editor accepts your manuscript for publication, there are still several steps before the article appears online or in print. First, the editor may ask for

some additional changes to the final manuscript. This could include any changes in formatting necessary to be in compliance with the journal's policy.

Authors are also asked to sign forms that grant the journal the right to publish the paper. These forms also testify that the paper has not been published elsewhere and that the article does not contain anything which does not belong to the author. In other words, is there any material in the article which would require the permission of a third party before it could be published?

Journals increasingly have adopted policies about authors making research data and the computer code used to produce results publicly available as a condition of publication. A couple of journals in political science further require that these materials be verified by a third party prior to publication. You should be prepared to meet these requirements when you submitted the paper in the first place. Besides, maintaining clear records that would allow you or anyone else to reproduce and verify your analyses is good practice. It will not be long before this is the expectation for every published research project.

At some point after the manuscript is accepted you will receive what are called page proofs of your manuscript. Page proofs show you exactly how the manuscript will appear when published. You will be given a very short deadline – sometimes just 2-3 days – to review the page proofs for any errors. This is a time to correct typos and such, but you will not be allowed to make any editorial or more substantial changes. Importantly, you should check the figures and tables very carefully.

Once you send the page proofs back, it is just a matter of time before the article is published. Nearly every journal publishes articles online first. It is common for there to be a 6-18 month backlog before the article appears in a printed hard copy journal issue. As the publishing industry continues to adapt to the Internet, the production of printed journals may go by the wayside.

Importantly, you do not have to wait until the article appears in print for you to claim it on your CV. Once it is accepted for publication, you can list it on your CV as forthcoming. You can go back and edit that line on your CV when the completed publication information becomes available.

11.2.6 Publishing Books

Publishing scholarly books follows a similar process, but there are some differences. Publishing a book generally starts with providing a 4-5 page (single-spaced) proposal to an acquisitions editor. If you are trying to publish scholarly research, you should focus on university presses rather than commercial presses. The book proposal should describe the content of the book, the contribution it makes, how it compares to similar books, and the target audience/market for the book. Acquisition editors may consult with anonymous reviewers on a book proposal, but often they decide themselves whether to pursue the book or not.

If you are a young scholar or if this is your first scholarly book, the acquisitions editor is likely to ask you for your entire manuscript if they decide from your proposal that they are interested in the project. More established scholars can often get away with just a more detailed outline of the book or a couple of chapters. Regardless, the acquisitions editor will want something to send to reviewers to solicit their feedback.

It is common for authors to share a book proposal with several acquisition editors at the same time. If you do this, you should certainly tell each acquisition editor that you have sent your proposal to other presses as well. If an acquisition editor decides to pursue your project further, they will likely ask for the exclusive right to review the manuscript. They do not want to start the process of getting reviewers for the manuscript if there is a chance you will go with a different press. Some acquisition editors push hard on this while others are less insistent. What you can do is check back with acquisition editors at other presses to see where you stand with them before making a decision.

After the acquisition editor receives reviews, they will generally decide whether they are interested in publishing the book or not. More specifically, they will decide whether or not to offer you a publishing contract. Receiving a contract is a very strong signal that they will publish the manuscript, but most contracts still include a clause allowing the publisher to back out if the manuscript does not meet the publisher's expectations. Young scholars generally cannot acquire a contract until the entire manuscript has been reviewed by anonymous reviewers. More experienced scholars can often acquire a contract prior to completing the manuscript, though that contract will still give the publisher the right to back out if the manuscript does not satisfy the editor and reviewers.

The mechanics of responding to reviews, dealing with page proofs, etc. are similar enough to publishing articles that I won't repeat that discussion here. In my experience, one key difference between publishing books and publishing articles is that it is much more important to get the editor on board from the start when trying to publish a book. In addition, I have found anonymous reviewers to be less specific and demanding regarding books compared to articles. In fact, the length of the reviews tend to be similar despite the fact that a book manuscript is much longer than an article. Finally, book editors typically prefer authors to be less technical in their writing so that the book can appeal to a broader audience. Book editors like the idea that a book they publish might be assigned as part of a graduate or undergraduate course.

11.3 When and Where to Submit Papers

One of the hardest skills to learn is when a paper is ready to submit for publication. You want the paper to be of high quality, but you also do not want to endlessly tinker with the paper without ever sending it out. You do not want striving for perfection to become the enemy of producing something that is very good. Young scholars are best served to ask their advisor and other more experienced scholars to read their manuscripts before sending them out. Get the advice of people you trust. Also, graduate students get exposed to hundreds of published articles in their seminars. Young authors should try to assess whether their manuscripts have the same qualities as the articles they read for seminars.

When you do submit a manuscript to a journal for consideration for publication, you want to make sure that the paper is written professionally. Edit the paper the best that you can, present professional looking tables and figures, and format the paper in compliance with the journal's requirements. You need to take the quality of your work seriously if you expect an editor and reviewers to do so. Believe me, anonymous reviewers will not be shy in pointing out sloppy work. Chapter 8 provides detailed advice on professional writing. My point here is that you do not want to send out anything with your name on it that is not professionally written.

Some scholars say that you should send every manuscript you have to the top journal in your discipline first. If you get rejected, you should move to the #2

journal next, and so forth until the manuscript is accepted. The goal is to maximize your chances of getting articles published in top journals, with the idea being that there is some luck/randomness in the publication process. Maybe you'll get lucky and land an article in the top journal if you just try often enough.

I strongly recommend against pursuing this strategy. First, I think it is professionally irresponsible to waste the time of editors and reviewers if you do not honestly believe your manuscript has a reasonable chance to be accepted. Reviewer overload has become a serious challenge for editors. Second, such a process may take years before you get an article accepted. Third, you really don't want to be the author of a paper that got published in a top journal that really should not have been. It is not really "lucky" to be the author of the paper widely viewed as subpar compared to the journal in which it is published.

For papers to be appropriate for top tier general journals, they need to make a clear theoretical contribution and have strong supporting evidence based on an appropriate research design. The theoretical contribution should be more than incremental. The paper must also be of interest to, and have implications for, scholars working in multiple subfields within the discipline. This is a high bar to clear. The top three journals in political science routinely reject more than 90% of the submissions they receive each year. Many good papers get rejected, but many of those papers should have never been submitted to these journals. A paper that makes a substantial theoretical contribution based on an excellent design and analysis, but only has relevance to a single subfield will rightly be rejected by a top journal.

Looking at my own publications to illustrate this point, I and my co-authors sent a collection of three papers to top general journals because we were offering a new theoretical framework for party polarization we called conflict extension, a micro-level theory for how this process works, and a theory and evidence supporting the idea that conflict extension is primarily an activist-led process.[1] In

[1]The three papers in question, respectively, are: "Party Polarization and Conflict Extension in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* (2002) 46:786-802, with Geoffrey Layman, "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* (2006) 50(2): 464-77, with Geoffrey C. Layman, and "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics." *American Political Science Review* (2010) 104(2):324-46, with Geoffrey C. Layman, John C. Green, Richard Herrera, and Rosalyn Cooperman.

contrast, our papers focused on a particular target audience[2] or made a more narrow contribution to a particular subfield.[3]

I think it is a great idea to start research projects with the idea of producing papers strong enough for the very top journals in your field. If you start a project believing that the best hope for publication is a third-tiered journal no one else has ever heard of, I suggest not starting the project at all. Your ambition should be a top general journal or a top subfield journal when you begin a project. However, once you are to the point of writing a manuscript, you should be realistic about where you send it first. Young scholars should get advice from mentors and faculty members they trust. All scholars must ultimately rely on their own judgment.

There are also practical considerations that arise. For example, if you are trying to get a paper published before going on the job market or up for promotion, you might not have time to let a paper get rejected two or three times at top journals. On a related note, editors of different journals develop reputations for how long they take to process a submission. If two journals are similarly appropriate for your paper, but one has a reputation of being particularly slow, you might try the other journal first if you are facing some time constraint.

At the same time, sending a great paper to a journal nobody has heard of just to guarantee a publication is also a mistake. Publishing in unknown outlets will generally not help you get a job or get promoted. The trick is to develop the skill to evaluate the prospects of a paper realistically. If you are unsure, or if you're getting conflicting advice, I suggest thinking about what might prevent the paper from being successful at the higher outlet, making changes if possible, and giving the higher journal a shot.

Some scholars also advise students or others to submit a paper for publication just to receive a set of reviews for feedback. I strongly disagree with this advice as well. The review process is there to serve the decision-making of editors and to protect the integrity of published research. It is not there to provide advice to authors about how to improve their manuscripts. As will be discussed below,

[2]For example, see "Can You Repeat that Please? Using Monte Carlo Simulation in Graduate Quantitative Research Methods Classes." *Journal of Political Science Education*, (2015) 11(1) 94-107, with Jeffrey J. Harden.

[3]For example, see "State Legislative Elections, 1967-2003: Announcing the Completion of a Cleaned and Updated Dataset." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* (2008) 8(4): 430-43, with Richard G. Niemi, William D. Berry, Lynda W. Powell, and James M. Snyder, Jr.

conscientious reviewers do provide such advice, but it is an unfair and unprofessional exploitation of the review process to submit manuscripts simply to get the feedback. Friends, advisors, and other colleagues should be providing that initial advice.

11.4 Articles That Directly Criticize Other Articles

Every now and then a journal will publish an article that is essentially a critique of a previously published article. If you decide to write such an article, there are a couple of things you should consider.

First, you should adopt a positive and constructive tone. Certainly you are criticizing a published piece, but at the very least you owe the inspiration for your paper to the fact that this other article was published. Write as if you are trying to advance the literature and our understanding of some political process, not as if you are trying to tear down a published paper by pointing out all of its flaws. You can't avoid the fact that your paper will be critical of this published paper, but you have complete control over the tone and level of professionalism your manuscript displays.

Second, when you submit your manuscript to a journal for consideration for publication, you can expect the editor to invite the author of the article you are criticizing to serve as a reviewer. In fact, if the editor eventually accepts your manuscript for publication, they will often invite the author of the original article to write a response that will be published along with your article. When that happens, the editor will likely give you a chance to write a short response to that reply. I bring this up because sometimes the original author(s) can be pretty hostile in their response. You might find this unpleasant. You will also be part of a public argument where some readers might not choose your side. Again, this can be unpleasant for some people.

The unpleasantness of these processes is unfortunate because I think the dialogue such exchanges promotes is often healthy and good for the discipline. I have co-authored one paper written largely as a critique of another published paper. I have to say that the experience was much more pleasant than I have described. My co-author and I tried to be clear and direct without being overly negative. The

other authors involved also responded with great professionalism and politeness. I have had other experiences where others felt unfairly criticized by something I had written, and they took it quite personally and responded quite negatively.

It can be a challenge balancing the ideals of objective dispassionate science with the reality that scholars are people who have emotional reactions. Every scholar has to balance this tension for themselves as they decide which papers to write and how to write them. As always, staying positive, professional, and dispassionate in your scholarly pursuits is advised.

11.5 Co-Authoring

There are pros and cons to co-authoring. The pros include:

- Two (or more) heads are often better than one. Having a co-author can help you see angles to the paper you would not have seen on your own. Co-authors can check each other's logic and also each other's writing. Co-authors can also bring expertise that you don't have. Your relative strengths may complement each other. In short, working with co-authors may allow you to produce research papers that you could not produce on your own.

- You might also be able to produce more papers by working with others than you could on your own. Two scholars working together might produce two co-authored manuscripts which they can both claim as part of their publication records. Had they worked alone they might have each produced a solo-authored paper. That is still two total papers produced, but now each author only gets to claim one as part of their publication record. Working with co-authors allows you to be part of more manuscripts, increasing your odds of being part of more published articles.

- Co-authors create a sense of obligation to each other. It is much easier to ignore a paper you are working on by yourself for a couple of months than it is to ignore a paper upon which a co-author might be depending. If you are a procrastinator, working with a co-author who is not can help you get things done more quickly.

- Working with someone is often more fun than working alone. I enjoy the company, collegiality, and friendship that frequently characterizes co-authorship. I also learn new things from co-authors, and I hope I offer something in return. Scholarly research is a social enterprise. It is natural to engage in it with others.

The cons of co-authoring include:

- Young scholars must be careful not to publish too many papers early on with their graduate school advisor or other senior colleagues. Fair or not, most outside observers will attribute the idea motivating the paper to the senior scholar and assume that the junior scholar did some grunt work and maybe made a methodological contribution, but was really not the source of the intellectual idea. Co-authoring with an advisor early on is a great way to learn about scholarly writing and publication, but young scholars need to create their own scholarly identity.

- Though co-authoring is increasingly common, it is still important for young scholars to demonstrate their own ability to write and publish research. A publication record built entirely on co-authorship could lead some to conclude that the scholar in question is not capable of publishing independently.

  In general, I am quite supportive of co-authoring, but I do think it is important to have at least a few publications that are your own. Doing so demonstrates to potential hiring and promotion committees that you are capable of executing every aspect of a research project. Co-authoring with peers rather than only senior colleagues helps mitigate any concern about your abilities as well. Of course, your dissertation is an obvious source of solo-authored work. I think the concern about having some solo-authored publications is diminishing, which is probably for the best, but it is worth being aware that some scholars still place value on it.

- Co-authoring requires adapting to each other. Everything from writing style to the general timeline for working on a paper must be worked out. Sometimes this is easy to do, but other times it can be quite challenging and even frustrating. If your differences complement each other, that can be great. Still, those differences can also create friction and cause delays.

- As noted above, if you are a procrastinator, finding a co-author who is not can help you. On the other hand, if you are the one saddled with a procrastinating co-author, it could create delays for you. This can be particularly troubling if you are a graduate student preparing for the job market or a young scholar trying to achieve tenure and promotion. You need to be selective about with whom you co-author.

- In order to get a paper done, someone needs to prioritize its completion. When working with a co-author, you might find that each of you prioritizes something other than your shared paper. In my experience, I have had very little difficulty with this issue when there are only two of us. In those situations, it has been easy to assign responsibilities and get papers done. However, whenever three or more authors have been involved, it has been much more difficult. In almost every circumstance, the paper in question only gets finished if one or two of us make it a priority and take the lead. It is difficult to get equal contributions from three or more people. At that point, no one views the paper as a priority and nothing gets done.

  I should be clear that I have happily engaged in these kinds of collaborations, sometimes in the lead role and sometimes not. I have no problem with multi-authored projects. I just want to point out their peculiar nature, particularly to young scholars.

The vast majority of my own work has been co-authored. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience and would recommend it. Don't rush into a lot of co-authoring obligations because you risk getting so many things started that you don't finish any of them. Still, keep your eyes open for co-authoring opportunities. Your friends from graduate school are obvious potential co-authors, but you will get to know other people from conferences and elsewhere who could become good co-authors as well.

The most important consideration when co-authoring is to make sure you work out from the start who is doing what, who is going to be the lead author, and your timeline for completing the paper. Things might change as you proceed, but it is best to discuss these issues before you get started.

11.6 Responding to Reviews

Nobody enjoys receiving criticism, but anonymous reviews are full of it. You will have an emotional reaction to negative reviews. That is natural, so go ahead and experience the anger, frustration, hurt feelings, and any other negative emotions reviews of your manuscripts produce.

However, do not fire off an angry email to an editor in response to negative reviews. Don't ignore the information in the reviews just because you are upset. Vent your frustration in private with friends, not in public in front of students or colleagues.

I have heard several scholars say that if their manuscript gets rejected by a journal, they simply send it to another journal as is. Their argument is that there is no need to make revisions to the manuscript until an editor gives them an R&R. I think this is unprofessional and strategically unwise. It is unprofessional because anonymous reviewers and an editor spent time and energy reviewing your manuscript and providing feedback. To ignore that feedback is to devalue it and the effort behind it. It shows a complete lack of gratitude.

Strategically, there is a good chance that the editor of the second journal you select will send your manuscript to one or more of the same reviewers who saw it from the first journal you selected. When that happens, reviewers often express great disdain for the manuscript and author if no changes have been made in response to their previous review. Until recently, I reviewed 25-35 manuscripts a year for journals, and I put a lot of time and effort into each one. When I received a manuscript I had seen before, and it had not changed, I felt no reason to change my review. Thus, I would send in a review that said I had seen the paper before, no changes were made in response to my previous review, so attached is my previous review. I wanted both the author and the editor to know about the behavior of the author and that I was not pleased.

Finally, even if there is no overlap between the first and second set of reviewers, there is no reason to expect that the second set of reviewers will not see many of the same problems the first set of reviewers identified. However, let's suppose that random chance gives you a set of reviewers the second time around that does not see those problems and the paper eventually gets published. Now the paper becomes fair game for anyone, including the first set of reviewers, to critique in

public. I don't know why anyone would want to publish a manuscript they know has significant flaws/limitations in the eyes of some other scholars likely from their subfield without at least having tried to address those problems first.

Assuming I have convinced you to respond to reviewers even when your manuscript is rejected, the question is how to respond. I suggest you read the reviews, give yourself a day or two to process your emotional response, and then come back and read them again. The second time through, set aside your emotional response and evaluate the content of the comments. What suggestions are the reviewers making? Where did they seem confused? What did they say is lacking in the paper? Did they suggest places to cut?

Next, assess which changes you are able to make, which you are willing to make, and which you cannot or will not make. Your goal is to improve your manuscript so that future reviewers will not raise the same criticisms. Either that, or the reviews help you determine that the paper does not have a future and you should cut your losses and move on to something else. Learning to recognize dead-end papers early in the process is a valuable skill.

Reviewers do make mistakes and they can be wrong. This can be particularly frustrating, and is often behind the ill-advised angry emails that authors sometimes send to editors. A reviewer might be wrong, but you as the author must take responsibility for leading that reviewer down the wrong path. You have to think about how you could rewrite the relevant portion of your manuscript so that future readers do not reach the same wrongheaded conclusion.

Above I discussed writing a response memo in the event you receive an invitation to revise and resubmit your manuscript. In that memo, focus on the issues that were raised by the editor and reviewers, address all of them, and be polite. Thank everyone involved for their effort and acknowledge that the revised manuscript is an improvement over the original. Even when you disagree with a comment from a reviewer, explain why in polite terms and note your effort to revise the manuscript in order to avoid any confusion for future readers.

Anonymous reviewers can be pretty snarky. It is unprofessional, but anonymity encourages some folks to be unpleasant. Below are a few direct quotes from reviews received by myself or others that illustrate this point.

> This paper has no business being published in [this journal].

> Perhaps with a better organization, proper use of grammar, employment of logic and consistency in analysis, a careful treatment of primary texts, and an engagement of serious scholarship from the [relevant] literature, this manuscript could be reconsidered.
>
> While I think the topics addressed in this paper are certainly interesting and important, the narrow question asked by the author does not seem to me to be especially interesting or important.
>
> The main thing that is missing here is context. In other words, this experiment has almost no external validity.
>
> Given what we know after decades of survey research, using the raw assessments from survey responses is completely incredible. I don't buy the estimates as a result.
>
> This manuscript is clearly and concisely written. The hypotheses are clear. The research design is appropriate. And the findings strongly support expectations. Nonetheless, I cannot recommend its publication in [this journal]. I say this because the core argument is obvious to the point of being trivial.
>
> First, (and most striking to me) is that the authors make many claims in the theory section of the paper that are unsubstantiated (through the use of citations) and that strike me as potentially untrue.
>
> This is a technically well done paper on a really uninteresting topic. My general reaction is, "who cares."

Finally, below are two comments from different reviewers about the exact same submission to a journal. This pair of quotes demonstrates the variance and uncertainty that comes with the review process.

> This is one of those preposterously silly and embarrassing papers that begins with the data and starts searching for a story and theory. As is usually the case, it doesn't succeed in finding either. The authors should be really happy the review process is blind, because this really isn't very good work.
>
> There are many things to like about this paper. The theory is interesting and potentially speaks to a wide range of debates in the field. The

> writing is clear and succinct: what could be a confusing theory and research design is laid out carefully for the reader.

The review process can be harsh, but you should NOT respond in kind. Your response memo, emails to the editor, and the revised manuscript itself should always stay on the high road. It might make you feel better to write something snarky, but it does not make you a better person or a better scholar, and it will not help you get your paper published.

11.7 Being a Reviewer

Serving as an anonymous reviewer for journals is a professional obligation you should accept and take seriously. The process of scholarly publication depends upon it. If we want anyone to take our research seriously, we must maintain the integrity of the peer-review process.

Most journals in political science use double-blind review. That means the authors do not know who the reviewers are, and the reviewers do not know the identity of the authors. This is supposed to focus the process strictly on the merits of the manuscript in question. The system is not perfect, but I believe it is better than any other alternative. Some disciplines use single-blind review, where the reviewers remain anonymous but the identity of the author is known to the reviewers. Research suggests this model is biased in favor of more senior accomplished scholars.

Of course, modern technology makes it much easier to guess the author of the manuscript. Since many manuscripts submitted for publication have previously been presented at conferences or posted on websites, a simple search is generally all it takes. I have heard several scholars talk openly about doing this regularly when they are asked to review manuscripts. I have never done this, and I find the practice reprehensible. If you have been asked to blindly review a manuscript, you have an obligation to maintain the integrity of the process.

Furthermore, if you receive a manuscript and you know or have a good idea who the author is, you have an obligation to report that to the editor. You should explain the situation and also describe any relationship or conflict of interest you

might have as a result. You can decline to do the review, or you can offer to let the editor decide. Again, the point is to maintain the integrity of the process.

Editors routinely complain that they have difficulty getting scholars to agree to review manuscripts. Until I became an editor myself and had my own journal to manage, I never declined an invitation to do a review. If I expect others to review my manuscripts when I submit them, how can I refuse to review the manuscripts of others? At a minimum, you should agree to do three reviews for every one manuscript you submit yourself. If you expect to get three reviews of your manuscript, I believe you owe the community three reviews that you provide of other manuscripts. Add two or three more for each revise and resubmit of your own that gets reviewed a second time.

Your responsibility as a reviewer is to provide information to the editor so the editor can make an informed decision regarding the manuscript. Technically, you do not have an obligation to the author of the manuscript. However, providing the editor with a set of comments outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript also provides the author with valuable feedback. Beyond that, however, I still think reviewers should provide feedback that might help the author make the paper better, even if it is rejected in its current form.

Many reviewers write reviews that are only a paragraph or two long. Others get quite snarky or hostile in their critique and offer little or no advice about how to improve the paper. I knew one person who said they would stop reading the manuscript once they got to the point where they knew they would recommend rejecting the manuscript because they felt that was their only responsibility. I think all of this constitutes bad behavior.

Most of the reviews I have written have been 2-4 single-spaced pages long. I tried to be clear and direct, but not mean. I try to imagine that the author might be a graduate student or young scholar who could really benefit from constructive criticism. I don't go easy on manuscripts and I am not shy about recommending rejection, but that does not mean the review still can't be constructive and helpful to the author.

Most journals ask reviewers to submit a review within 30 days of agreeing to write the review. This is a perfectly reasonable deadline that you should try to meet. Maybe set aside one afternoon a week to do reviews, and if you don't have any that week you can use the extra time to do your own research or write to your

mother.

Reviews are submitted through the same online system that is used to submit manuscripts. Those systems often provide an opportunity to give comments just to the editor which the author will not see. I suppose I can imagine situations where this would be appropriate, but I don't recall ever doing it myself. I always felt that the author should have access to all of the information that the editor has regarding my thoughts about the manuscript.

Finally, it almost goes without saying that you must respect the confidentiality of the manuscripts you review. You cannot show them to others, nor should you even discuss their particulars with others. You certainly cannot co-opt ideas from a manuscript you review to use in your own research. Occasionally, a reviewer might contact an editor to see if the editor is willing to contact an author on behalf of a reviewer in order to explore possible collaboration between the author and reviewer. Generally speaking, I think even this is going too far in encroaching on the work of an author that you only became aware of because of your role as an anonymous reviewer.

Being a reviewer is really pretty simple – treat the authors of manuscripts you review the way you would like to be treated by reviewers yourself.

11.8 Publishing Null Results

The typical quantitative paper presents a theory, derives hypotheses/predictions from that theory, and then presents statistically significant evidence in support of that theory. Very few papers are published that lay out a theory but then fail to find statistically significant support. Authors don't like to write papers that say here is my idea, but I was wrong, and editors and reviewers don't like such papers either. About the only time papers like this get published is when they are a direct critique of a previously published paper and the point is to demonstrate that previously published findings do not hold up.

This bias against publishing no findings causes two problems. First, it creates pressure on authors to estimate and reestimate multiple statistical models until they find a specification that produces what appears to be statistically significant

results. This process, sometimes called p-hacking,[4] leads to the publication of papers that appear to produce significant findings, but in fact capitalizes on random chance within the data set in question. You can try to combat this by using out of sample forecasting and cross validation. I briefly discuss these methods near the end of Chapter 7.

Second, publication bias prevents the research community from seeing null findings (because they rarely appear in journals). As a result, scholars are susceptible to unknowingly repeating those same analyses, creating inefficiency in the research process. In other words, publication bias denies scholars the opportunity to learn from what didn't work for others.

Some journals are now reviewing papers for publication based exclusively on the theory and proposed research design. The idea is that if the theory and design are sound, researchers should be interested in the results regardless of what they are. This process might still encourage researchers to peek at their data or run a pilot test before submission, risking a similar problem to p-hacking, but the intent of the idea is good. Hopefully there will be more opportunities to publish papers that do not work out exactly as planned.

11.9 Conclusion

Publishing scholarly research is a major component of an academic career. Demonstrating success at this endeavor is increasingly necessary for graduate students to get their first academic jobs, and necessary for all assistant professors seeking promotion and tenure. There are more than 100 political science journals, plus numerous journals in other fields where political scientists can submit their work. Figuring out how to get papers published is not easy or automatic, but it is a skill that can be learned.

The advice in this chapter should help you navigate the publication process. However, the advice in Chapter 3 on identifying topics for research, and in Chapter 8 on professional writing are more important. Publication success depends first and foremost on the quality of the research you are doing. Mastering the mechan-

[4]The name comes from searching through model specifications trying to get the p-value of a statistic down to an acceptable level to declare a finding statistically significant.

ics of publication without focusing on the quality of the research first would be a mistake. Still, the advice in this chapter should help you avoid common mistakes that prevent many good papers from being published.

Chapter 12

Grants

12.1 Introduction

Most political scientists go their entire career without receiving a grant to fund their research. This would be unheard of at a research university in the natural sciences, but quite possible in the social sciences. Funding opportunities are more limited, funding amounts are lower, and a lot of data for political scientists is either freely available or can be collected without funding.

Still, universities like their professors to obtain grants. Grants also permit you to pursue projects that you could not otherwise afford. University budgets have tightened over the last few decades, so grant seeking is quite likely to become more important as a possible criteria for promotion and/or tenure.

This chapter provides a brief overview of grant seeking. Getting a grant might seem a bit mysterious, but there really is no secret to it. The most important factor in getting a grant is having a good idea. The second most important factor is being able to clearly communicate that good idea. Many of the points about professional writing in Chapter 8 are relevant here as well.

Before applying for a grant from any source, whether you are a student or a faculty member, you need to learn the rules at your university. Any reputable funding agency does not actually make awards directly to a faculty member. Rather, the award is made to the University, with the funds in turn being made available

to the faculty member for the stated research project. This arrangement provides legal protections for the researcher, the University, and the funding agency. You must follow these rules. Your department chair or any research center on your campus should know how to help you get started.

12.2 Available Sources of Funding

Most political scientists think first about the National Science Foundation (NSF) as a potential source of research funding. NSF is a federal agency charged with awarding research grants across the natural and social sciences, broadly defined. It is divided into several divisions, and those divisions include a number of standing programs, one of which is the Political Science Program. Not surprisingly, NSF devotes much more funding to the natural sciences and engineering than it does to the social sciences. Still, NSF is a great place to look.

NSF routinely sponsors a number of special calls for proposals. These special calls are often interdisciplinary, which means the proposal generally requires assembling a team of researchers. Fortunately, NSF is increasingly recognizing the value of social scientists in these interdisciplinary calls. Thus, while the Political Science Program at NSF is small, there really are a lot of other options for political science researchers to consider.

There are many other sources of funding for political scientists. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) dwarfs NSF in terms of annual expenditures on research. Obviously NIH focuses on health related research, but they have large programs in the behavioral sciences and in health policy. Many other federal agencies also fund basic research. The Department of Education, for example, awards research grants, and the Department of Defense and units within it also award large numbers of grants. Another option to consider is pursuing young investigator grants/early career grants for which agencies (NIH and NSF, for example) earmark dollars for PIs within five to ten years of earning their PhD.

In addition to federal agencies, there are a number of private foundations that award research grants. The Gates foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson foundation, the Arnold foundation, the Alfred P. Sloan foundation, the Russell Sage foundation, and many others support research relevant to political scientists. Founda-

tions tend to be interested more in the real world impact of research as opposed to the basic science. Foundations also provide less support for the indirect costs of conducting research, which makes foundation grants less appealing to a university compared to grants from federal agencies. Still, foundations can be a great source of funding if your research interests dovetail with their current priorities. Again, your university should have an office of sponsored research that can help you identify funding sources.

12.3 Challenges for Political Science

I have already mentioned that funding for the social sciences is much more limited than it is for the natural sciences, engineering, and medicine/health. Political science faces unique challenges beyond this.

Federal agencies that fund research are ultimately accountable to political appointees who lead those agencies and to Congress, which provides the funding. Political science research often focuses on questions that might be viewed as controversial in some settings. There is a famous story of scholars seeking NSF funding to study the factors that lead to high quality candidates emerging to run against incumbent members of Congress in an election. It is easy to see why this topic might not be popular with sitting members of Congress. Similarly, topics exploring controversial issues such as climate change, same-sex marriage, or biases held by elected officials might draw more attention from those who oversee NSF than the agency would want. In fact, Congress recently discontinued funding of the Political Science Program at NSF for one year for political reasons.

On the other hand, there are private funding agencies that are expressly political/ideological in their orientation. They might be willing to fund your study, but they may try to influence your results or your interpretation of them. In addition, your own objectivity may be called into question if you accept funding from such organizations with an explicit advocacy position. This concern can extend to federal agencies as well. I know scholars who would refuse funding from the Department of Defense or other similar agencies because they would not want others to believe that the research was influenced by US foreign policy considerations.

Having said all of that, there are foundations considered to be non-partisan

and independent. They aren't advocacy organizations, and while they dictate the agenda through the topics they fund, they don't meddle in the actual research.

Once you have identified a set of promising funders, it is a good idea to subscribe to their newsletter or announcements. Even if you do not have an idea to fund just yet, most government agencies and foundations have set calls for funding or cycles for grantmaking. Some agencies and foundations will not accept unsolicited proposals outside these set funding processes. Signing up for these announcements is a vital first step to knowing when funding is available.

12.4 Strategies for Success

As noted above, there is no secret to being successful at getting grants. Still, the process is different enough from just writing and publishing papers that there are a few tips worth considering. Learning from the success of others is always a good idea, so talk with colleagues in your department and elsewhere about their experiences. With that in mind, here are a few things to consider.

12.4.1 Start Small and Build a Reputation

The biggest difference between writing a grant application and submitting a paper for publication is that the review process for a grant application is not double-blind. The program officer who makes the final decision knows who you are, as do all of the reviewers. In fact, the instructions for reviewers of NSF proposals include asking them to evaluate the ability of the researcher or research team to do what they propose to do. If you don't have a track record of successful grant work, funders will be reluctant to make a huge investment in you.

Start small. Ask for funds for a planning grant or a small pilot study. Just because the application says you can ask for up to $1 million does not mean that you are required to. In fact, if you do not have a track record with grant getting, you're much better off to ask for substantially less. This does not mean you should propose $1 million worth of effort but only ask for $150,000 to do it. That would be unrealistic, and the program officer and reviewers would know it. Rather, it means developing a more modest proposal with a lower price tag so that the funder

takes on less risk if they support your proposal.

Another way to pursue the same goal is to be part of a team being led by more experienced researchers. You can consider partnering outside the university as well – with places like NORC, RTI, or other contract research organizations. It is most effective for slightly larger grants, but partnering affords two benefits: 1) most of these places function almost or entirely based on external funds and are very good at getting funding, and 2) They will then take ownership of some aspects of the project so that the academic isn't using their time to draft survey recruitment material, program or test a survey instrument, etc.

You can ride the coattails of these more experienced researchers while gaining experience yourself. When you are ready to apply for your own grants, you can point to these experiences as evidence that you know what you are doing.

12.4.2 Preliminary Evidence

Funding agencies may claim to be interested in supporting cutting-edge research, but ultimately they tend to be risk averse. Every program officer that decides to make an award will have to report eventually to someone in their organization about the outcome of the projects they funded. Since they want to report on successes, they want to fund projects they believe will be successful.

The best way to demonstrate the potential success of your project is with preliminary evidence of that success. Suppose you want funds to do a national survey to test a particular theory about public opinion formation. Your chances of funding will increase dramatically if you can run a pilot of that survey with undergraduates at your university, on something like Mechanical Turk, or on some other set of subjects. If the analysis of your pilot data looks promising, the funding agency can have more confidence that your larger national study will also work.

Conducting a pilot study also helps the program officer and reviewers understand exactly what you are proposing. They can see based on your pilot study that you know what you are doing and how you would extend it to a full study. This may seem like a lot of work to do before you can even apply for a grant, but it is work you would have to do anyway, and it dramatically increases your chances of getting the grant.

12.4.3 Clarity Is Crucial

The discussion of preliminary evidence in the previous section can be extended to the entire proposal itself. Funders will not fund things they don't understand. Your idea might be brilliant, but if the program officer and reviewers can't see it, you will get turned down.

A grant proposal is a research plan. It describes what you plan to do and why it is important work. The best grant applications are so clear about the research plan that you could hand the proposal to another scholar working in the same subfield and they could execute it by simply following its step-by-step instructions. I encourage you again to consider the advice on professional writing offered in Chapter 8.

12.4.4 Intellectual Merit

NSF requires that all proposals address two specific criteria: 1) the intellectual merit of the proposed activity, and 2) the broader impacts of the proposed activity. For NSF and any other funding agency, articulating the intellectual merit of the proposed effort is absolutely necessary. The rest of the proposal could be perfect, but if the intellectual merit of the activity is not presented clearly and accepted by the program officer and reviewers, your grant proposal will be declined.

What does intellectual merit mean? In most circumstances, it means that you have a theory guiding your research which you seek to test using resources from the grant. Generally speaking, your proposed project needs to be making a theoretical contribution to answering a basic science question. Just like submissions to journals, grant proposals limited to providing yet another test of an already existing theory will not be reviewed well.

In my experience, even programs and calls for proposals that emphasize building data sets or infrastructure for other scientists to use must still defend the intellectual merit of the effort by addressing fundamental questions in science that can only be answered by building this infrastructure. Simply asserting that lots of scholars will have lots of great ideas about how to use the new resource is not enough. You have to be specific about some scientific question that can and will be addressed, even if your emphasis is to build a resource that lots of scholars can

use in ways that can't be anticipated.

12.4.5 Broader Impacts

The broader impacts criteria used by NSF is a way for you to write about how the activities of your grant will have positive impacts beyond answering the scientific question that guides the intellectual merit. Many grant writers place insufficient emphasis on this criteria. It is certainly true that a proposal that is strong on intellectual merit and only adequate on broader impacts can be funded. It is also the case that being merely adequate on intellectual merit will get your proposal declined even if your broader impacts are wonderful. Still, with the competition for grants increasing, the broader impacts criteria often allow program officers to select between two otherwise meritorious proposals. Funders don't want insular research, they want to see evidence of how the work will be communicated and impact scholars or practitioners outside the set of "usual suspects".

Broader impacts might include training a graduate student or two who work for the project, white papers written for policymakers based on the findings of the project, a data set and/or software that can be shared with other scholars, and so forth.

A great broader impact would be if your project facilitates the development of teaching or training materials that could be used in graduate-level, undergraduate level, or even K-12 education. Devoting some resources and time within the grant proposal to develop and distribute these kinds of materials could pay huge dividends in terms of getting the project funded. Such materials might include lessons, resources for in-class projects, online video tutorials, and so forth. Even a 5-10 minute video where the researcher explains the findings of the project and then concludes with one or two scientific questions and/or one or two normative questions that emerge from the project could be exactly the kind of thing a teacher might use in a classroom to introduce a topic and foster discussion.

Some projects might be well served to build an entire webpage that includes links to all these kinds of materials. These kinds of efforts cannot exceed your work on the basic science question driving the research, but adding them to your proposal and showing you are serious by devoting a portion of your budget to make sure they happen is a good idea. Again, there are likely people already at

your university willing to collaborate on such efforts. I suggest talking to research centers on campus and possibly your department or school of education and/or communication.

12.4.6 Data Management Plan

Nearly every funding agency and foundation requires grant proposals to include a data management plan. This is a plan for how you're going to collect, analyze, and share your research data produced by the grant activity. Most funding agencies now require that research data be made publicly available in some way that protects the privacy of research subjects. Effective management of research data will become increasingly important, so you need to learn some skills and/or develop collaborations.

While many researchers look at data management plans as an irritating requirement or nuisance, I think they present an opportunity. Good data management plans can produce excellent broader impacts for the proposed study. Thinking about how to share the data and how to make it easier for other researchers to use is crucial. In particular, your research data becomes much more valuable if it is easier to merge or integrate with other existing data sets. Make your data management plan an asset to your proposal.

Chapter 7 discusses the merits of data sharing and research transparency. Funding agencies increasingly value these principles. I think every empirical scientist should learn more about data management, data sharing, and research transparency. However, you might also want to partner with experienced data managers when applying for grants. A great example is the Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I served as director there for seven years and they have a wonderful data management and data archiving team willing to partner with grant writers from any university. They have a number of great resources on their website as well (`http://www.odum.unc.edu/`).

12.4.7 Success Leads to Success

As noted above, starting with a smaller proposal or as a collaborator with someone else that has a track record of funding is a good way for you to get

started. Getting that first grant is a wonderful experience, but different than getting that first publication. A lot of work goes into writing a grant proposal, but there is more work to come if the grant gets funded. Now you have to do what you said you were going to do. Program officers are certainly open to you modifying your plans as you learn more about the research you plan to conduct, but they gave you the grant expecting you generally will do what you promised.

Successfully getting the grant does not mean you have been successful with the grant. Success with the grant means that you executed the research on time and largely as expected, that you delivered on the scholarly side by presenting papers at conferences and, more importantly, publishing your papers in scholarly outlets. In other words, you need to demonstrate your actual contribution in terms of intellectual merit.

You also need to deliver on your promises regarding broader impacts. You need to provide evidence that you have produced these items, or that they are nearly completed. This includes sharing your research data in compliance with the data management plan you wrote to meet the requirements of the funding agency.

When a grant ends, you will need to write a report describing all that you have done. This is required by virtually every funding agency, and you must comply. Equally important, the next time you apply for a grant, you will be asked to report on any grants you have received in the past and what you produced from them. Scholars who get multiple grants during their careers are able to continue getting them because they can point to what they produced from their previous grants. Funding agencies don't care how many grants you have successfully received – they care about what you have produced from those grants that you have received.

Grant-giving organizations also are concerned with how you achieved your results. Being timely, communicating regularly and strategically with the program officer, and meeting expectations all go toward building your reputation. Similarly, being sure to acknowledge the funding source whenever communicating about the project, etc. (sometimes this is a contractual mandate, but if not it's a small footnote that can pay off). The grantmaking world is pretty small and it's hard to overcome a bad reputation. If you get a grant and don't produce anything from it, good luck getting the next one.

12.4.8 Speak with Program Officers

Nearly every program officer at a federal agency or foundation encourages prospective grant writers to talk with them first. Researchers with a track record of getting grants also emphasize the value of speaking with program officers. I can't say that I was ever very good at this, nor did I do this very often, but I am certain I would have had more success getting grants had I done so.

This is very different than publishing papers, where there is no real advantage to talking with an editor in advance, and in fact many editors would find such efforts annoying. The key here is that program officers want you to be successful. They want to see the best proposals they can see. They want to report back to their bosses about the number of great proposals they have funded and why they need more money because they are having to turn down other great proposals. They want proposals that will produce the kind of outputs regarding intellectual merit and broader impacts that they can include in their own reports back to their bosses.

Program officers cannot guarantee anything prior to submission and formal review of your proposal. However, they can answer questions about whether they see positives or negatives regarding the direction you planned for your proposal. They can identify particular points of emphasis that you might want to include in your proposal, and they can also point out problem areas to either resolve or avoid.

Importantly, program officers are best able to react to your ideas and questions rather than simply proactively point you in a particular direction. The best strategy for interacting with program officers is to prepare a one-page document describing your idea for your proposal as clearly as possible which you can send to the program officer. Be sure the description makes clear how your project relates to the agency or foundation's funding priorities and why it's a good fit for the project officer's portfolio. When you send it to them, you can politely ask for them to take a look and then schedule a time to talk about the proposal. You can do this on the phone, or if you are able to travel, you can visit with the program officer in person. These are busy people, so don't expect 2 or 3 hours of their time, but they are also very committed to interacting with prospective proposal writers, so you're not bothering them. Still, it is important to be prepared for the conversation, so writing that one-page document and making it as clear and concrete as possible is worth the time and effort.

In a perfect world, developing a relationship with the program officer would not be necessary. In a perfect world, everyone would submit their proposals, they would do the best they could, and the most meritorious proposals would be funded. Personal relationships should not matter. However, they do. I don't believe they matter in a way that is inappropriate, but they do matter. You gain better insight into what the program officer is thinking and what they believe will be successful than you can get just by reading about the program. Also, I am using the term relationship in a very limited sense. You do not need to become friends with the program officer. The occasional correspondence and phone call as needed regarding potential proposals is all that I am talking about. In fact, close friends of program officers can often be at a disadvantage due to conflict of interest regulations.

Again, just reach out and ask. They want you to be successful, and they don't want the path to success to be a mystery.

12.5 Conclusion

Your job is to generate interesting ideas and figure out how to communicate those ideas to possible funders. Every university has professional staff to help you find sources of funding and to work with you to make sure your application complies with the rules of both the university and the funding agency. Find those people and use their expertise. Most universities have a centralized office of sponsored research or something similar, but many times you can find the best help in research centers and institutes on campus. Just start asking around – particularly ask those who have been successful with grants.

Seeking grants and managing them after you get them takes time. In political science and other social sciences, you can have a good career without ever getting a grant, though it is likely to become more important in the future. Still, you need to be careful budgeting your time if you are a young scholar. Publications in quality outlets remain the primary currency in academic social science. Spending all your time writing grants, revising grants, and managing grants if you're lucky enough to get them won't give you the time you need to publish the papers necessary to advance your career. Thus, be careful to balance your time and efforts appropriately, especially before you have tenure. After you have secured either

tenure or a record that will get tenure, then you can start thinking about grants as a way to launch your next big project and the next phase of your career. Before then, either avoid grant seeking or collaborate with a more seasoned and experienced scholar who is willing to take the lead.

Chapter 13

Teaching

13.1 Introduction

No one can cover everything useful to know about teaching in a single chapter. In fact, no one can learn everything useful about teaching even over the course of an entire career. I have a much more modest goal in mind with this chapter. I hope to highlight a few tips and considerations that might help beginning teachers avoid some unnecessary problems. I also hope to generate a few ideas for how you might be innovative and efficient in your teaching.

I also hope to convince you that teaching is a skill that can be learned. In Chapter 8 on professional writing, I argued that writing is a skill that can be learned. In both teaching and writing, it is true that some individuals seem to be naturally well-suited to the task. Still, there are some key aspects of teaching that anyone can develop and improve for themselves. Teaching is not entirely mysterious, nor is it strictly an art. There is a science to teaching and a large volume of scientific literature to support that claim. Effective teaching requires blending your strengths, the skills that anyone can learn, and a passion for teaching together in a way that is appropriate for the teaching context in which you find yourself.

Effective teaching requires a commitment of time, energy, and passion. Lacking any one of these three elements dramatically lowers your effectiveness as a teacher. Obviously, this is bad for students, but it is also bad for you. If you lack

time, energy, or passion for teaching, you will not enjoy it. In fact, it could become a real emotional drain for you. If you are not enjoying yourself in the classroom, it is quite likely that your students are not either. In short, you can learn the skills needed to be an effective teacher, but those skills alone are not sufficient to make you an effective teacher.

Lastly, many people have real fear or anxiety about teaching. Teaching is a very public activity. You are in front of an audience over and over again, and sometimes that audience freely shares its criticism of your performance. Nobody likes making mistakes, and making mistakes in front of others is even worse. As a student in a class, you are one of many, and if you get something wrong, it is not a big deal. As the teacher, however, you are the one person in charge of the class to whom students look for the right answers.

At a more general level, many people simply do not enjoy public speaking. An old joke notes that in surveys, more people list public speaking ahead of death as something they fear, suggesting that at a funeral, more people would prefer to be the one being eulogized over the one giving the eulogy. There is no avoiding the public nature of teaching. However, you do not need to be an extrovert or a person who loves attention to be an effective teacher. In fact, many people who are naturally quiet and reserved are often more effective because they focus on the content of their teaching moreso than the style. It is natural to be anxious when walking into the classroom, but if you prepare and develop your skills, you can translate that anxiousness into positive energy.

I am an extrovert who has never shied away from an audience, but I still get a little anxious before starting a class even after doing this for more than 20 years. However, every time I bring positive energy into the classroom, students have responded well. Some people are tired after teaching a class, but I almost always come out of the classroom energized. We all have good days and bad, but I thoroughly enjoy teaching. If I didn't, I think I would have changed careers a long time ago.

13.2 Before You Begin

Before you even begin to design a course or consider which courses you might want to teach, you need to consider your audience. Who is likely to sign up for your course? What skills, abilities, and backgrounds will they have that are relevant to the course? What sort of expectations are they likely to have coming into your course? What are the norms for courses like yours in the department and/or at the university? All of these factors are important to consider before you even get started.

For example, I have seen many new PhD's with very strong research methods training crash and burn in either a graduate or undergraduate classroom when trying to teach research methods. Many of these new instructors have strong backgrounds in mathematics to complement their extensive graduate methods training. However, they forget that many people do not have that same background, and many don't have the same interest in research methods that they have. The new instructor, eager to share their knowledge and demonstrate their sophistication, proceeds to present material in the sophisticated manner in which they learned it, but in a way that is out of reach for their students.

This is a major challenge for many new PhD's. After five or more years of being surrounded by others with the intelligence, drive, and passion needed to pursue a PhD in political science, most find themselves teaching undergraduates who may have no background in the material, and might possibly be in the course only because it is required. I once heard an undergraduate student celebrating in the hallway upon discovering that he had barely passed a particular class. People who care enough to earn a PhD in something have trouble understanding the mentality of a student genuinely celebrating getting a D.

This does not mean you need to conform to departmental norms or lower your expectations of students. In fact, I encourage instructors to be different and to challenge their students. All I am saying is that you need to know where your students are starting from when they enter your class so you can meet them at that starting point. You have to meet them where they are before you can take them where you want them to go.

When I arrived at UNC, I prepared a substantive graduate seminar. The course included about six journal articles as required reading every week, weekly 1-2

page reaction papers written about those readings that included one or two ideas for research papers, a book report to be done by every student, a full research paper including analysis of data, and a final exam meant to mimic the form of the comprehensive exams students take at the end of their coursework before moving on to their dissertation work. Many of the seminars I took in graduate school had a similar format, but I was told by a few graduate students at UNC that I was demanding more work than was typical. I did not change my course, but it was helpful to know that I was outside the norm. I let students know up front that this is what I thought it took for them to get a quality education, and they bought in from the beginning. The class went very well.

Virtually every college and university has some sort of teaching center or other resources on campus to help faculty teach more effectively. You should definitely take advantage of these resources. These folks will know university policies about teaching, tips on developing a syllabus, giving a lecture, or grading. They may also offer workshops on innovative approaches to instruction.

The American Political Science Association hosts an annual conference on teaching political science. There is also a professional journal devoted to research on teaching in political science. The journal *PS* also frequently publishes essays about teaching. Of course, there is an endless array of materials online you can search for as well.

Many people are embarrassed or apprehensive about seeking help with their teaching. You are smart enough to earn a PhD, so you think you should be smart enough to teach a class. Besides, you have been in college for a decade or more – shouldn't you know what you are doing by now?

This is exactly the wrong way to think about this. PhD programs are notoriously bad at training their students to be effective teachers. Everyone knows this – it is not a secret! You might be smart enough to figure out how to be reasonably effective at teaching on your own, but what a terribly inefficient way to do it. If you learned anything in graduate school, you learned the value of efficiency and effective time management. Investing time and effort at the teaching center on your campus will pay off 10 times over or more in terms of saving you time and energy. Plus, you'll be a better teacher! I wish I would have done much more of this in my own career.

Students are often afraid to ask questions of their teachers for fear of looking

like they don't know something they should. Teachers routinely tell their students they actually want to find out what their students don't know so they can correct it. Yet, those same teachers are often afraid to ask questions about how to teach more effectively for the same reason. You must get over that apprehension.

In my view, people should not have a negative view of ignorance. Ignorance simply means that there is something you don't yet know. That is not a personality flaw or shortcoming. It is just something that you don't know. The implication, of course, is that you can reduce ignorance by learning. That's why we go to school, take classes, do research, and earn degrees. Graduate school and an academic career should be about embracing our ignorance. Ignorance provides us the opportunity to learn, and I love learning. Ignorance about effective teaching simply provides us the opportunity to learn how to be better teachers.

Finally, plan in advance to have someone observe you in the classroom. Maybe a colleague in your department, or maybe someone from the teaching center can do this for you. There is no substitute for direct feedback from someone who has just watched you do what you do. In Chapter 14 on the academic job market, I emphasized the need to practice your job talk several times in front of an audience. The same logic applies here. You should invite people into the room with the task of evaluating your performance and offering advice to help you improve. In Chapter 8 on professional writing, I suggested that new Assistant Professors might want to form a group to provide structure and feedback on each other's writing. The same might also work to provide feedback on each other's teaching.

13.3 The Syllabus

The syllabus for a class can be thought of like a contract. It spells out the content of the course, the expectations for the students and the professor, how grades will be assigned, and any other policies relevant to the course. Many universities have a standard template describing the sections that should be part of every syllabus. This might include standard language on students with disabilities, office hours, final exams, etc. Ask your department chair or folks at the teaching center about this, and don't leave anything out that is required.

The syllabus should clearly state your goals, objectives, and expectations for

the class. This includes laying out your responsibilities as an instructor and their responsibilities as students. Students get much more upset about uncertainty and inconsistency than they do about the workload or the difficulty of the class. There should be no mystery for students regarding what they need to do in order to perform well in the class.

Communication is critical. Emphasize this in your syllabus. Make it easy for students to find you in office hours, through email, or by whatever means is necessary. Encourage them to come to you early with problems. I routinely taught an undergraduate course that was required by several programs in order to graduate. On the first day of class, I routinely asked students to raise their hands if they needed this class in order to graduate, and nearly all of them always did. I then said, remember this: It is much easier for me to help you solve problems in January or February than it is in April right before graduation.

Your syllabus should state your policies on attendance, grading, exams, late assignments, etc. You cannot punish a student for turning something in late if you have not spelled it out in advance. Stating such policies clearly makes handling individual circumstances much easier. It also promotes treating students fairly and equally. If extenuating circumstances do arise for a student, it is much easier to grant an exception to a strict policy than it is to impose a harsh punishment in the absence of any policy.

I always include a daily or weekly schedule for the course in a syllabus. Again, that gives students an idea of what you expect and when you expect it. I routinely told students that as the class unfolded, we might get a little ahead or a little behind on the schedule. However, I never moved the dates for exams or the due dates for papers or other outside assignments. I told students this explicitly. I wanted them to be able to plan around exams and due dates. I also wanted to avoid bargaining sessions in class about changing any of these dates.

It is particularly important to have a policy regarding makeup work and/or extra credit. This is especially important for introductory classes populated largely by freshmen. I let students make up exams if they had a legitimate reason for missing an exam. However, I stated in the syllabus that I reserved the right to offer a different exam from what the rest of the class received in order to prevent any perceived unfairness. You don't want someone skipping an exam hoping they can learn about it from friends and do better later.

I also explicitly ruled out doing any extra credit work. This is a shock to many freshmen who experienced ample opportunities for extra credit in high school. In my view, this was an issue of fairness. Every student was presented with the same material and the same opportunities for success. I thought it was unfair to give some students an extra opportunity if it was not provided to all students. Besides, most college classes, graduate programs, and jobs they will ever have do not provide extra credit either.

Finally, it has become useful in many circumstances to include policies on the use of laptops, cell phones, or other devices in class. Some students might prefer taking notes with their laptops, but others prefer online shopping or perusing social media during class rather than listening. I have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, if they are not bothering those around them, college students are legal adults and can decide for themselves how to waste their time. On the other hand, many 18 to 22-year-old students are not very good at making wise decisions for themselves regarding their class time activities. Sometimes it is helpful to divide out the cost of attending college by the number of hours they spend in class so they can see how much it costs to waste the class period viewing social media. All I'm saying is that you should have a policy that you should adhere to.

13.4 Preparation

It takes more time to prepare for each class session than it does to actually participate in each class session. Effective teaching takes time, and the bulk of that time goes into preparation. You need to map out your lectures and other in-class activities in advance. Each class meeting should have an objective and be organized around achieving that objective.

At any point in a class, you should be prepared to answer the question, "Why are we learning this?" This might sound like students just whining, but in fact the question is quite legitimate. If an instructor cannot say why the class is doing something or learning something, maybe the class should not be doing it.

This is completely different from the annoying question, "Do we have to know this for the test?" That is a whiny question, but asking about the value or reason for learning something is perfectly appropriate.

There are endless resources available now as you prepare for any particular class meeting. One cannot possibly consume all the information on the Internet that might be relevant for a particular class meeting. You might also be using a textbook or other readings, and of course you probably read some material in graduate school about a given topic. I cannot tell you the best way to prepare. I can only say that preparation is essential.

As mentioned elsewhere, nearly every university has some sort of teaching resource center. Find that center and use their resources. In particular, they may be able to video you giving a lecture. While most people don't like to see and hear themselves, having a video and the chance to discuss that video with others can really help you improve your classroom presentations.

Early in your career, it is good if you can teach the same course many times. This will dramatically reduce the time it takes for preparation overall, but not for the first time you teach a class. In fact, the idea that you might repeat a course should encourage you to invest more time in preparing it the first time through. The better you do the first time through, the less work it will take to update and revise the course the subsequent times that you teach it.

Finally, I have said many times elsewhere in this book that it is important to balance the time you devote to teaching with the time you need for your research and other commitments. You must prepare for your classes, but you must also recognize when you are prepared enough and stop. Do not let teaching responsibilities intrude on scheduled research time.

13.5 Inside the Classroom

I think the most important element you can bring into the classroom as an instructor is enthusiasm. It is unreasonable to think that students in the class would be more excited about the material than you are. This is your chosen vocation, and something about which you should be passionate. If you appear to be bored or uninterested in being there, how could you expect your students to care? This does not mean you need to do cartwheels or gush like a bad TV evangelist or used car salesperson. However, even quiet and calm people behave noticeably differently when they are enthused about something compared to when they are

not. Your students will know – they are not easily fooled.

Universities and university students increasingly expect their classroom experiences to be more than just lectures from a professor. They expect active learning experiences, exposure to real research, group discussions and presentations, and so-called flipped classrooms where students consume lectures or readings outside of class and work on assignments or projects during class. Students increasingly expect technology to be used as well. This includes slides for lectures, but also online discussion boards, flash polls on their cell phones, or interactive data exploration tools. Like any teaching tool, each of these can be used poorly or effectively. Again, I would point you to the teaching center at your university and to online searches to learn more.

Every profession and every field of study is being revolutionized by the explosion of data and the need to analyze it effectively. So many tools are available now, including excellent free open-source software platforms like R and RStudio, and so much freely available data exists in all domains that there really is no excuse for not bringing data analysis into the classroom. Lots of research shows that students learn better by doing, and that active engagement with the subject matter promotes deeper understanding. Basic literacy in data analysis should be part of any undergraduate experience.

Even if you take a more traditional approach by assigning a textbook and giving lectures, you can still do a lot to enhance that experience for students. Do not simply summarize the textbook during a standard lecture. You will bore the students who read the book and remove the incentive for others to ever crack open the cover. You might foster discussions from the readings or entertain questions from the students about them, but simply summarizing the readings during a lecture wastes your time and theirs.

Instead, tell them to read the material and ask questions, and make sure they know that material from the readings will be on the exams, but make your lectures different. For example, while an introductory textbook on American government might have a chapter on the Congress, you could lecture about collective decision-making or Arrow's Impossibility Theorem. They might read a chapter on political parties and elections, but you could show them the latest research on party polarization. They might read a chapter on the bureaucracy, but you could lecture on the bureaucratic structure of your own university.

For several years at UNC, I taught 171 students in a large lecture hall an introductory course in state politics and policy making. The vast majority of students in the class were not political science majors, but they were there because they were required to be for their program in journalism and communication. Using an idea I got from a colleague at my first job, I would spend the first two class meetings every semester asking the students to view photos on the screen and vote by a simple show of hands whether they thought the scene depicted in the photo was political or not. I told them there were no wrong answers, and we went through 20-30 photos very quickly. I put up the photo, asked for a quick show of hands, and jotted down a quick estimate of the percentage of students who had raised their hands saying that the scene was political. There is no discussion during this part of the process.

The photos ranged from people in voting booths to families in their living room. I might show an elected official engaged in an official activity, but then one just walking on the beach. Images might be of students with their faces painted at a college basketball game, or cartoon characters. After going through this diverse set of photos, I would then go back and pull up a photo so I could ask students to volunteer why they thought the scene was political or not. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. The goal was simply to engage them in thinking about what the word politics means. I wanted to pull their implicit definitions of politics out into the open so we could discuss them. Photos were chosen to highlight different aspects of government, business, and a broad range of cultural and social elements. I needed to get students who are not political science majors and were also principally in the course just because they were required to be there to stop and think about why learning about politics might be interesting and helpful to them.

Over the years, I have participated in many discussions about the differences between teaching a course that is required of the students compared to teaching elective courses. The vast majority of my teaching experience at both the graduate and undergraduate levels has been teaching required courses. The notion is that students come to an elective course voluntarily and with more enthusiasm, while they might come to a required course a bit frustrated or unhappy about having to be there in the first place.

I think these differences are real, but they should not deter you from teaching required courses. In the large state politics course I mentioned above, after

asking for a show of hands from students who were required to take the course and seeing 90% or more of them raise their hands, I would typically reply that I was in fact required to be there as well. I love teaching and enjoyed this course, but if someone really would pay me whether I showed up or not, I might not be a regular attendee either. Since someone thought it was a good idea for all of us to be required to be here, I would tell them we might as well make the best of it and try to learn something interesting about politics.

I find introductory undergraduate courses to be particularly engaging. Partly it is because the breadth of topics you get to discuss is extensive. However, I mostly think about it as an opportunity to teach students something essential about politics that they could use for the rest of their lives. That introductory class might be the only political science course they take, so the opportunity to get them informed and interested in politics is precious. Besides, if you want to grow your major on campus, a department should put its best teachers in the introductory courses.

As I mentioned in discussing the syllabus, there should be no mystery regarding what you want your students to know and do to be successful in your classes. Communicate your goals each day. What is the take-away point from each class meeting? Both you and all of your students should be able to easily answer that question each and every day.

It is important to remember that students differ in their commitment to your course and also in how they learn. You need to be ready to explain difficult concepts in two or three different ways. You might also need different mechanisms for teaching the same concept to different types of learners. If students are struggling, they will hang in there with you if they feel like you are trying to accommodate their learning style and at least meeting them halfway.

In my experience, I have observed that young instructors sometimes have difficulty gaining the respect they need from their students to maintain order in the classroom. Unfortunately, this seems to be a challenge for young female instructors in particular. I blame this primarily on the behavior of students, but there are a few things you can do as an instructor to help limit these problems.

Being prepared for class and conveying a level of confidence in the classroom are essential. If you don't believe that you are capable of leading the class, it will be hard for students to believe it. Conveying confidence, however, does not

mean that you should be inflexible or unwilling to admit that you don't know the answer to some question. If students challenge you in the classroom, you need to avoid becoming defensive or combative. Those kinds of reactions reveal your uncertainty and insecurity. Stay above the fray.

I do not recommend telling the students that you have never taught before, or never taught this class before. I have seen instructors tell a class that they will all learn together and watched as the students largely ran over the instructor. More than once, I have said to students in a class that I have not taught before something like, "Every time I have taught this course . . . " as a way to imply my experience with the course. Similarly, I have told students not to cheat on exams, saying how embarrassing it is for everyone if I have to take your exam from you during the class, tear it up, and throw it in the trash because I caught you cheating. Of course, I have never actually done this, but said in a matter-of-fact way, it conveys a level of seriousness and authority over the classroom.

In short, maintaining order in the classroom rests on conveying confidence, being clear about expectations and consistent about enforcement, and keeping your cool. I don't think this requires intensity on your part, nor does it require instilling fear into the students. I use humor quite a bit in the classroom and strive to create a relaxed atmosphere. Still, I can interact with students and simply say what I expect from them as adults. The implication, of course, is that if they don't abide by those expectations, they are being childish. Most college students are perfectly capable and willing to behave reasonably in class. If not, most college students at least hate the idea of being considered childish.

Simple things like wearing professional attire, starting class on time, being responsive to questions in class or emails received outside of class, and just generally behaving in a professional manner will also help. Those who know me will find the comment about professional attire ironic, but it does help. Even I typically wore slacks rather than blue jeans for the first week or two of an undergraduate class. The idea is that by appearance and behavior you are separating yourself from your students.

Too many young instructors want to be liked by their students more than to be respected by them. Almost all of us who want to become college professors can point to one or more favorite teachers we had when we were in school. Our eagerness to become somebody's favorite teacher can sometimes lead us down the path of trying to be friends rather than professors. When young professors are

nearly the same age as their students, this can be even more challenging. Think back to your own favorite professors. While you might have become very friendly with them, I'm willing to bet that you also had great respect for them. Earning that respect needs to come first.

In the end, if you challenge your students intellectually, demonstrate to them through your time and effort you are committed to helping them meet that challenge, give them clear goals and objectives, and demonstrate a passion for learning and teaching yourself, you will have built a solid foundation for excellent teaching. Flipped classrooms and interactive technology cannot replace your personal investment in your students. The students know when their professors care about them. They know when professors are prepared and know their stuff. My grandfather used to say that you can never expect anyone to work harder than you, especially if you are the boss. I believe that translates directly into teaching – you can't expect students to prepare more, work more, care more, or be more excited about the course than the instructor.

13.6 Outside of the Classroom

You must be available to your students outside of the classroom. Most universities require faculty members to hold a minimum number of office hours every week. You need to post those hours and honor that commitment. If you want students to work on your course assignments outside of class, you need to be available outside of class to support them. Students also have other classes, jobs, or other demands on their time. If they cannot meet during your posted office hours, you need to be available to schedule a meeting at a different time.

Students will also call your office and leave messages or send emails asking questions as well. Instructors can certainly direct students regarding how they can get in contact outside of class. I always tell students that the best way to contact me is through email. Regardless of the mechanism, however, you must be responsive to those contacts. A student should not have to wait more than 24 hours to get a reply, and I would argue that the norm should be same day response. You should be particularly attentive in the days leading up to an exam or the due date of a paper or significant project.

Students may come to your office hours for a variety of reasons. They may have questions about the material, problems with a grade they received, or they just might want to talk about politics. These are all legitimate reasons, though you do have a bit more room to shoo them away if the reason for visiting is not related to the class or some other academic issue.

They may also appear in any emotional state. They might be happy or excited about something, but they may also be angry or upset. It is fine to enjoy sharing their positive emotions, at least to a degree. However, you need to be careful about reacting to their negative emotions. Never respond to anger with anger. If a student starts crying, have a box of tissues handy, but otherwise give them some space and time to process their feelings. You want to be supportive and understanding, but you are not a counselor and you should not pretend to be one.

Students may also come to share personal information or problems. This can be more tricky. You can certainly be friendly with students, and it is appropriate to show concern if they share personal problems with you. However, you are not trained as a counselor and you should be very careful about offering any advice. Keep the contact information for the Student Health Center and/or Student Counseling Center at your university close at hand. Direct students to those services.

If students come to complain about a grade, you owe it to them to listen. Let them state their case and listen with an open mind. Professors make mistakes all the time. It is not a sign of weakness to admit a mistake and correct it. It is a sign of weakness (weakness of character at least) to dig in your heels and refuse to listen. If you listen and give students a fair hearing, they are generally much more accepting when you explain why they got something wrong.

If the student gets angry or belligerent, you should not respond in kind. Keep your emotions in check. Make sure if there is only one person behaving like an adult in the conversation, that it is you. Complain to your colleagues about it later, but matching an emotional student with an emotional response from you will make the situation worse. Conflict requires at least two participants – don't be one of them. In fact, I regularly tell students that they have every right to complain about me to the department chair. Students have every right to be concerned about their own situation. If you have laid out clear objectives and policies in your syllabus, applied those policies fairly, and behaved in a professional manner, you have no cause for concern if a student takes a complaint to the next level.

If at all possible, I strongly encourage instructors to keep their office door open when meeting with a student. This is the best way to prevent any actual inappropriate behavior or the appearance thereof. Occasionally a student wants to talk about something in private. You need to use your judgment in that case, but the default should be to keep your door open.

As noted in this chapter and in Chapter 15 on being an Assistant Professor, you can be friendly with your students outside of the classroom and even occasionally friends with them, but it is your job to be their Professor, not their friend. There is a little more flexibility when interacting with PhD students because they are older and more mature, but even then be sensitive to your role in the power imbalances that exist between professors and students. That said, I have become quite close to many of my current and former graduate students.

When in doubt, err on the side of decorum. Find someone else to go to the bar with. Don't date your students or even attempt to do so. Many universities have policies against such behavior, and the power imbalance between professors and students could easily create an unwelcomed environment that could be interpreted as sexual harassment. It is important to both you and your students that you avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior.

13.7 Grading

Every professor I know says that grading is the worst part of the job. I certainly agree. It takes time, and it can be frustrating when students get things wrong and boring when they get things right. Essays and papers can sometimes surprise you with something interesting, but grading for most people is just a grind.

The most important part of grading is to be transparent about it. Students should know how assignments and exams will be graded. You should explain to them what they did right and what they did wrong. There should be no uncertainty in the minds of students regarding what it takes to succeed and how their performance is being measured.

It is equally important that you apply consistent grading standards fairly across all students. You might do this by removing names from assignments or papers when you're grading them, or grade them in random order. I always develop an

answer key for an exam before looking at the responses. When grading essay exams, I frequently grade everyone's answer to Question 1 before moving on to Question 2. This helps me notice patterns across students and also allows me to provide a more uniform rubric to everyone for each question. It also prevents me from keeping a running tally of an individual student's performance in my head as I grade.

As unpleasant as grading can be, you need to get it done in a timely manner. Students need feedback on exams and assignments in time for them to adjust appropriately if so needed. Many students also have anxiety about grades, so getting feedback quickly can reduce their stress and make it easier for them to concentrate. Besides, it is just rude to make people wait for no good reason. Prompt grading of assignments is another way to signal your commitment and effort to the course.

There are different approaches to assignments and grading. The approach I always took was to create assignments and exams that I felt evaluated students on the most important aspects of the course. I tried to design exams, for example, that students who read carefully the assigned readings and regularly attended class and took good notes could get 100% of the points available on the exam. At the same time, if they did not read the materials, they would struggle to pass the exam, and if they did not attend the lectures, they would have virtually no chance of passing even if they did the reading. If every student scored in the A range, I told them they would all get A's. If nobody scored well, then nobody would get a good grade. In my view, students should be evaluated on what they are supposed to know, and their grade should not depend on how well their classmates did.

A different approach is to grade on a curve. Such an approach might limit only the top 10% of the scores to receive a grade of A regardless of how good those scores were. If enough students got every question correct, then someone who earned 99% of the points available might still get a B. This mechanism for grading is designed to sort the students from best-performing on down. Grades based on performance relative to classmates differs sharply from grades based on performance relative to an absolute standard. Exam grades from my undergraduate courses often followed a roughly normal distribution, but I never imposed a distribution, or curve, on any grades. Again, I think grading against an absolute standard is more fair than grading relative to the performance of others.

A third approach to grading presents students with exams or assignments that

the instructor knows exceeds the ability of the students. The idea is to give the brightest students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability. If a student gets everything right on an exam, the instructor has no way of knowing the upper limit of what the student knows. However, if you create an exam so difficult that no student has a real chance of getting everything correct, the instructor can find the upper limits of the best students. This approach is often accompanied with some sort of scale so that even if the best student only got 50% of the answers correct, they and other top-performing students can still get A's. This approach could be adapted to either an absolute or relative grading scale below the score of the top student. However, the grading will remain at least partially relative because the top of the scale is still being defined by one of the students and not by the instructor.

I see some merit in the idea of providing assignments that allow students to demonstrate their maximum potential. Personally, I prefer to do this through papers or essays rather than through exams. I have already stated my preference for absolute rather than relative grading in general, and I think this is particularly important for exams. It is a question of fairness in my mind. Also, grading against an absolute standard promotes cooperation among the students, while grading on a relative standard promotes competition. I would rather promote cooperation. Others may disagree. Regardless of the approach you adopt, you must be clear with your students about how they will be evaluated.

13.8 Managing Teaching Assistants

If you teach at a large university that has a PhD program, your department undoubtedly teaches at least a few courses as large lectures using a professor and one or more teaching assistants to provide support. Sometimes teaching assistants are there just to grade, but other times they might be there to lead small group discussions in support of the larger lecture class. In fact, many of you probably served as a teaching assistant at some point in graduate school. At least I hope so – doing so is a great learning experience.

If you are assigned one or more teaching assistants, you will have to manage and supervise them. You might include them in designing the course, or in designing individual exams or assignments. If they are grading exams or papers, it is up to you to make sure they are grading fairly and evenly. When I had teaching

assistants grading exams consisting of both multiple-choice and essay questions, I required the teaching assistants to record each student's score on the multiple-choice part of the exam, each student's score on the essay part of the exam, and which teaching assistant graded each exam. They would enter that data, and then I would run a regression predicting essay scores as a function of multiple-choice scores and indicator variables for each teaching assistant. That allowed me to discover if any of the teaching assistants were giving significantly higher or lower essay scores compared to the other teaching assistants.

If your teaching assistants lead small group discussions, you must decide how much leeway to give them and how to incorporate student performance in those sessions into the final grade for the class. I tended to give my teaching assistants a good deal of freedom in designing their sessions, but I have colleagues who proscribe exactly what they want to happen in those sessions.

Your teaching assistants generally must hold office hours, and they need to be responsive to students as well. They may have little or no prior teaching experience, so they will need your guidance and support. I found that having a weekly scheduled meeting with the team of teaching assistants was very important. It allowed them to share information with each other and allowed me to discover problems early and get them fixed.

All the discussion in this chapter about interacting with students inside and outside of the classroom, about being prepared, and about being professional applies equally well to teaching assistants. I mean this both in terms of how you interact with them and how they interact with each other and with students in the class. However, as the instructor for the course you are ultimately responsible. You need to expect professional behavior from your teaching assistants.

I always told my teaching assistants to try to handle any disputes or issues they might have with students directly, but by all means to also tell students that they could bring any complaint they had straight to me. I want teaching assistants to learn how to interact with students and manage conversations about grade disputes and such, but they need to know that I have their back should they need support or a more experienced perspective.

Finally, if your teaching assistants are leading discussions, you should observe each teaching assistant doing so at least once or twice during the semester. This allows you to evaluate whether the teaching assistant is following whatever di-

rections you provided. It also allows you to provide feedback and constructive criticism to help the teaching assistant become a more effective instructor. It also gives you something to write about in a letter of recommendation if you are ever asked to do so.

13.9 Teaching Graduate Courses

Graduate courses differ from undergraduate courses in a number of ways. Of course, if you are reading this book, you have probably experienced both types of courses yourself. Just in case, I will note that graduate courses focus more on theories of political processes along with research that has been designed and conducted to evaluate these processes. There is generally much more reading, the readings focus on primary research sources, and students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss and debate what they have read. Writing assignments also generally involve conducting original research rather than just summarizing the work of others. Graduate courses tend to be small and heavily oriented toward discussion.

Especially if the course targets PhD students, you have to remember that a PhD is a research degree. The course should be organized around providing resources/readings and developing skills necessary to evaluate and conduct original research. I spend a lot of time helping students identify the theories driving existing research studies and developing theories of their own. I then emphasize the design of research studies and the statistical analyses conducted in order to identify whether the design and analyses conform to the theory and its assumptions. If they don't, interpreting the results of the analyses is almost irrelevant. If they do, then discussing results makes sense.

In every substantive graduate course I have taught, a significant portion of time in the class is devoted to developing a theory and/or designing a study that would build upon what we read that week. This might focus on resolving a dispute between existing studies, extending an existing study, or even turning an existing study on its head. In doing so, I am focusing the attention of students on the questions provoked by what they read as much or more than on the answers included in what they read.

Graduate methods courses tend to be a bit different. There is often more lecture involved, and discussions often focus on clarifying concepts rather than deductive political science theories. Nevertheless, I always try to engage students in how a particular method or methodological issue might be relevant to someone studying political processes.

I always require full-blown research papers in methods courses so students could put their knowledge into practice. Almost always, I would encourage students to produce what I called the replication and extension of an existing published study. I did this in order to get students through the process of identifying a topic and developing a theory quickly so they could engage with the data analysis sooner. The idea was to find an existing study, see if you could replicate/reproduce at least part of the findings in that study, and then build an extension into that analysis. That extension might involve adding additional data, changing the specification of the model, changing the method of estimating the model, or almost anything else. I always require the students to provide me with a copy of the paper they plan to replicate along with their plan of action within the first three or four weeks of the semester so I could discuss it with them and approve the plan.

Over the years, only about 10% of the students could successfully replicate the results of the published paper. This was not their fault. Rather, what they learned is that authors are terrible about documenting exactly what they have done and sharing the data they used for their analysis. Thus, one lesson I hope all of my students learned was the value of documenting their analysis, their code, and their data. Reproducing the results of published work should be trivially easy, and I hope my students adopt that norm for their research careers.

In more advanced courses, I often encourage students to use the paper assignment as an opportunity to get started on a Masters thesis or chapter for their dissertation. I believe in having students do work that teaches them about conducting real research. I have had a number of students develop the papers from either my methods or substantive courses into a thesis, chapter, or publication.

I also required assignments nearly every week in methods courses. Again, I believe it is important for students to learn by doing. Weekly assignments allow both the students and myself to know what they were getting and where there were still gaps. These weekly assignments took the place of the weekly reaction papers I required in all of my substantive seminars.

13.10 Conclusion

Effective teaching requires preparation, energy, and enthusiasm. Like everything else worth doing, it also requires hard work and effective time management. There are lots of tips and strategies available, but none of them are shortcuts to success. If you don't have a passion for teaching, you should probably think about doing something else.

While some folks have natural abilities that lend themselves well to teaching, teaching is a skill that can be learned. New discoveries on effective teaching are made every day, just like they are in any other research field. Even the best instructor can improve, and there are multiple options to fit every teaching style. Go to the teaching center at your university and learn from them how you can be both more efficient and more effective. Elsewhere I have referred to research as a social enterprise. Teaching is even moreso. There is no reason you should travel this path alone.

Teaching is a noble profession, and I feel quite fortunate to have enjoyed the opportunity to teach a variety of courses in a variety of settings. Teaching provides the opportunity to impact people in small and large ways. That is a wonderful prospect and also a serious responsibility. I thoroughly enjoy teaching (though grading does generally suck)!

Chapter 14

The Academic Job Market

14.1 Getting a Job

Getting a PhD in anything must be rooted in your passion for learning the subject matter. Still, your passion for learning won't pay the bills for long – you will eventually need a job. This chapter focuses on pursuing an academic career as a college professor. However, the advice would be very similar for those who end up pursuing nonacademic careers and includes a section on the topic.

I encourage students to think about their career early on in graduate school, but you should not worry about it too early. Like many things at the start of graduate school, imagining a career can be difficult or overwhelming because you really don't know enough yet to formulate a clear plan. That's okay because things will become clearer as you move through the process. Again, don't worry about your career right from the beginning, but do remember that everything you do or don't do in graduate school will eventually impact your career.

14.2 Planning Backwards

Start by considering when people start applying for jobs. In political science, schools begin advertising for jobs nearly a year before the job would start. The

first application deadlines are typically in September, with a large number of them coming in October and November as well. Traditionally, the American Political Science Association holds its national meeting over Labor Day weekend, and it also includes a large job market event. Thus, a good rule of thumb in political science is to be prepared to have your application ready by the end of August for jobs that will not begin until the following August.

Thus, if you expect to complete your degree in five years and start a job right away, you need to be ready for the job market in just four years. That does not mean that you need to be done with the program in four years versus five. However, it does mean two very important things: 1) you only have four years to build the record that will define your job applications, especially for the early deadlines, and 2) your application absolutely must convince a search committee that you will be done with the program before their job starts.

Start by considering what your application will look like. Imagine what you want your curriculum vitae, or CV, to look like by the time you begin to search for jobs. A CV is the academic version of a resumé. Critical elements of your CV will include your research and teaching interests, your research accomplishments, your teaching experience, honors and awards, and service to your department, university, or to the discipline more generally.

Next, develop a backwards calendar that runs from when you plan to begin applying for jobs back to the present time. Remembering that it takes time for articles to get published, and thinking about the time demands of your graduate program, map out a schedule for when things should happen.

For example, a good and reasonable goal is to have two or three publications in refereed journals by the time you start applying for jobs. To achieve this, you must recall that it routinely takes 3 to 6 months for a journal to make an initial decision on a submission. If they reject, you need to make revisions and then start the process again with another journal. If they offer you the opportunity to revise and resubmit the paper, it will take some time to do the revisions and then potentially another few months for the editors and reviewers to make their decisions. Recognize also that some of the papers you start will turn out not to be publishable.

If you hope to have teaching experience by the time you begin your job search, you need to plan in advance for that as well. Find out what is required for graduate

students in your department to teach an independent course. Take the opportunity to be a teaching assistant for courses as well. If there is a particular course you would like to teach, how can you make that request? The same logic applies for professional service, honors, and awards. If you want them to appear as part of your application materials, you need to apply for those awards or do that service in advance.

This does not mean that what you do after submitting your first application is meaningless. Maybe you are scheduled to teach a new course in the spring semester – you should certainly include that in your application materials. Maybe you have a paper accepted for publication or you receive a significant grant after you have sent off your application materials. You should certainly update your CV online and you can also send an updated CV to a search committee. Don't go overboard bombarding schools with new versions of your CV every week, and don't bother sending a new CV if a change is only minor.

In fact, your last year could be a good year to develop and teach a new course. You need to devote substantial time and energy to producing publishable research and making progress on your dissertation before you apply to your first job. Since developing a new course and teaching it takes a lot of time, you might want to avoid doing that in your first four years.

Still, the main point is that you need to have a competitive profile up to a year before you actually plan to finish the program and start a new job. Make a plan with deadlines and stick to it.

14.3 Parts of an Academic Application

The parts of an application for an academic job are fairly standardized. A few places will require something slightly different, but what follows is a pretty standard list. In all of these materials, it is important to write clearly and concisely. Use active voice. Avoid describing your research and teaching activities as objects. Rather than writing, "In this paper, I analyze the effect of campaign rhetoric on voter behavior," you should write, "Campaign rhetoric shapes voter behavior by defining the choice voters have." Instead of writing, "In my classes, I ask students to write a research paper," you should write, "Students write research

papers."

You have two primary audiences for your application materials. First, there is likely to be one or more members on the search committee from your field of study, and maybe one or more familiar with your subfield. They will be reviewing your materials in the context of how they contribute to the field or subfield. Second, there will likely be one or more members of the search committee who are not in your general field of study. They need to understand your materials and be able to evaluate your candidacy without knowledge of your subfield.

When the committee selects candidates to interview, it is important to satisfy both of these groups. When actually interviewing, the majority of faculty in the department will not be from your field. Thus, you must write every part of your job application using language that anyone in political science can understand. You cannot use jargon specific to your field or subfield, nor can you assume that everyone reading your file has the same methods training that you have. The best way to reach an audience is to be clear. If the search committee members do not understand what they are reading, they are very unlikely to select that candidate for an interview.

Most good PhD programs appoint a faculty member as Director of Placement, and they usually have a staff person assist graduate students in submitting applications. You should seek these people out to learn the nuts and bolts of how your department helps students on the job market.

14.3.1 Cover Letter

A cover letter introduces you to the members of the search committee. It should be a formal letter addressed to whomever is designated in the job ad or generically to members of the search committee. It should start with identifying who you are and that you are applying to the position advertised in their department. It should include an overview of your research and teaching accomplishments and interests.

Your dissertation should be central to the discussion about research. You should provide an overview of your dissertation as well as a statement about how close you are to completion. Do not report an unrealistic date for the defense of

your dissertation. At the same time, most search committees will add at least three months to your proposed defense date. Thus, if you say you don't expect to be done until the end of the following summer, most search committees will simply read that as you won't be done before their job starts. It is very important that you consult with the chair of your dissertation committee about your likely timeframe for defending your dissertation. Your chair will almost certainly write about this in his/her letter of recommendation for you. It is best if both you and your chair are reporting the same timeline.

Many view the dissertation as a young scholar's way to make their first impact on the profession. Your letter should focus on what you are doing and the theoretical contribution you are making to scholarship. For some search committee members, your dissertation signals your ability to identify important research questions and analyze them effectively.

You should also highlight publications or papers out under review in your research overview. If they are chapters of your dissertation, say so. If they are papers that include co-authors, mention that. You must also talk about what you plan to do once you have completed your dissertation. Search committees want to know that you have some ideas for what to do next.

When discussing teaching, you should highlight your experience as well as your basic approach to teaching. There have been a lot of innovations in teaching in the last 10 years. Many involve various forms of active learning, flipped classrooms, and/or the use of technology. More schools are also seeking professors that integrate research experiences into the classroom. In particular, more schools are looking to hire faculty that can help students collect, organize, analyze, and visualize different types of data related to their field. The traditional lecture by the professor still has a place, but it is important to highlight ways you actively engage students in learning.

Finally, the cover letter offers you the chance to explain any other items in your record, such as awards or service. It also gives you the chance to highlight your unique strengths. Why might you be a particularly good fit for the job? Is there something about the job that makes it of particular interest to you? Maybe it is located somewhere particularly desirable for you, or maybe it involves collaboration with another department that you would find interesting.

End your cover letter by thanking the search committee. Provide your email

address and a link to your website, and encourage them to contact you if they require any additional information or if they have questions. Make sure that your contact information is correct and your website is up and running.

Cover letters should be tailored to the individual job for which you are applying. At the same time, your discussion of your research and teaching, or other accomplishments, really should not change from application to application – at least not in a substantial way. You should focus on presenting a clear picture of who you are rather than rewriting your research interests for each different job. You need to be true to yourself and honest with search committees. Besides, you should have a website that includes discussion of your teaching and research interests, and you don't want your cover letter to contradict anything on your own website.

The quality of the writing in a cover letter is for some committee members almost as important as its content. They view the quality of the writing as a sign of your ability to write and as an indication of how seriously you took the application. Strive for clarity, and have others read at least a generic version of your cover letter in advance. Look at Chapter 8 on professional writing for more tips.

It can be difficult to strike the right balance between overselling and underselling yourself. This is why it is very important that at least your advisor or another experienced faculty member reads a draft of your letter in advance.

In my experience, the best cover letters are been between 1 1/2 to 2 pages long, single-spaced. Letters shorter than this convey too little information while letters longer than this often get bogged down in unnecessary detail. As you'll see, your application will include a lot of additional material. Your cover letter is meant only to provide a brief overview, some career highlights thus far, and your one opportunity to tailor part of your application to the specific job. The purpose of the cover letter is to get the search committee to read the rest of your application.

14.3.2 Research Statement

A research statement is a 2-3 page document that describes your current and future research plans in more detail than is possible in your cover letter. A central

part of your research statement if you are applying for your first job out of graduate school is a discussion of your dissertation. You want to provide a clear description of your dissertation that can be understood by people in different fields from your own. You should focus on the problem or puzzle that motivates the dissertation, why solving it is important, and your proposed solution. Focus on the theoretical and scholarly contribution of your dissertation. Neither overstate nor understate your contribution. It is important to get help with that. Do not focus on methods or data (unless you are applying for a methods job), but do point out any methods contribution or original data collection.

A good structure would begin with a general paragraph presenting the motivation for the dissertation and the importance of it in general terms. Then you can provide separate paragraphs to discuss each empirical chapter. Again, start with the question motivating each chapter, then talk about findings, then the implications of your findings, and conclude with the status of the chapter (published, submitted for publication at a journal, complete draft written, data collected and analyzed, or whatever its status is). You could instead write a summary paragraph evaluating the implications of your findings which could also be the place where you report on your progress.

You should also briefly discuss your publication plans for your dissertation. Be realistic – do not claim that every chapter will be published in the top journal in the discipline. I suggest that you do not name specific journals or outlets, but rather that you talk about whether you plan to publish individual chapters as journal articles, whether you plan to publish the dissertation as a book, or some combination. There might be additional work that would be necessary for the dissertation to be a book or for some of the chapters to stand alone as articles. It is better to be honest about this than to exaggerate. Ask your advisor for help.

If you have presented other papers at conferences or published other papers, book chapters, etc., this is the place to discuss those as well. Be brief and focus on the contribution each piece makes. If these other projects cluster around something in common, say so. You might say that along with your dissertation research you are also interested in general topic B. Thus far you have one publication and two working papers on topic B. Then you can briefly describe each. This approach shows search committee members that you think about bigger and more general ideas and clusters of papers that could be written around those ideas.

DO NOT describe each dissertation chapter or other papers by providing an

opening sentence that simply says,"This paper looks at (or examines) the relationship between X and Y. In analyzing my data, my findings are..." Opening like this is boring, and jumping straight to findings makes the paper sound very descriptive and exploratory. This approach leaves out the theory and motivation for the paper, which are elements that should be highlighted rather than ignored. State the core of your theory and predictions drawn from it the same way you would in the abstract to a journal article. Then note the data you analyze and that your findings support your predictions.

A BAD example would be something like this:

> *My dissertation looks at the relationship between what candidates emphasize during their campaigns and how voters respond. Using exit poll data from more than 100 elections for governor, I find that what candidates say influences which factors are stronger predictors of voter behavior. Specifically, when candidates emphasize issues related to underlying demographic differences such as race or gender, those demographic factors become stronger predictors of vote choice. These findings extend to attitudes on specific issues like abortion as well as evaluations of the sitting president. My dissertation offers a new framework for understanding how campaigns matter.*

A BETTER example would be something like this:

> *Voters respond to the information context in which they find themselves, and candidates help shape that context through the issues they emphasize during their campaigns. Specifically, candidates define the choice voters face on election day and influence the factors voters use to make that choice. Campaign themes might emphasize race or gender, positions on specific issues, or evaluations of political figures such as the President. Combining exit poll data with hand coded measures of campaign themes for more than 100 contests, I find consistent evidence that campaigns affect voter behavior as predicted. The choices candidates make during their campaigns limit the choices voters have on election day, which places limits on the representation of voter interests in democratic governments.*

Finally, you should say something about your future research plans. Departments want to know that you have some sense of life after the dissertation. No one will pull this statement out five years later to see if you've done exactly what you said you would do. At the same time, you are being hired for what you will contribute as a member of some department and not so much for what you have already done. Give search committee members at least a general sense of where you are headed next so they have something about which to get excited. Be careful, however, because you may get asked about this future research agenda during an interview. Thus, you will want to be prepared to talk about your plans beyond the paragraph or two that you provide in your research statement.

14.3.3 Teaching Portfolio

Departments differ in what they require in their applications regarding teaching. Some ask for a syllabus of a course you have taught or would like to teach. Some ask for any available student evaluations of courses you have taught. Some ask for a statement of your teaching philosophy. Some ask for all of this. I suggest you prepare a 1 1/2 to 2 page statement about your teaching experience and teaching approach. Supplement that when you can with a sample syllabus and evidence from teaching evaluations. If some departments do not ask for all of this information, you can still post it on your website and refer to it in your cover letter.

The temptation here is to include every new buzzword and trend in teaching in your description of yourself. It is certainly useful to appear up-to-date regarding teaching, but don't oversell. It is increasingly the case that schools want new professors that will engage their students in active learning and critical thinking. There are lots of ways to do this. Group projects, simulations like model United Nations or mock legislatures, real-time polling of students in class, flipped classrooms, and so forth. I strongly encourage graduate students to experiment with approaches like this when they serve as a teaching assistant or as an instructor on their own course so they can write about these experiences in their teaching statement.

Departments also like professors that bring research experiences into the classroom. This can include discussions of your own research, but it is more important to get students engaged in their own research. It would be great if you could say that you have students conduct and analyze their own surveys, download and an-

alyze data from the World Bank, interview local government officials, set up an experiment, or engage in some other similar activity. Get them involved in speculating about why some political process works the way it does, and then have them consider what sort of evidence they could find to evaluate those speculations. You might have students work in groups to make the process more efficient. These kinds of activities promote critical and analytical thinking. Any kind of data analysis also helps develop skills that are increasingly in demand. Again, experiment with this while you are in graduate school so you can write about it in your teaching statement.

Some graduate programs provide little or no opportunity to gain teaching experience while in graduate school. Such programs tout the benefits of having more time to focus on research. However, I have seen many brand-new assistant professors struggle mightily early in their careers if they lack this experience. If your opportunities to teach independent classes are limited, try to find opportunities to give guest lectures, or maybe teach a summer class at a nearby school.

Many universities also offer workshops and other resources to help graduate students and faculty improve their teaching. Time is precious in graduate school, but attending some of these workshops may be a great way to get some ideas for teaching your own classes. It also demonstrates a commitment to teaching on your part that you can mention in your teaching portfolio.

Write about your teaching the same way you should write about your research. Don't provide a simple description of what you have done. Rather, begin with your philosophy about teaching. Rather than listing your teaching experiences, write about what you have learned from those experiences. You don't want to go overboard, but you do want to convey a sense of excitement and enjoyment that you get from teaching. Whether giving a job talk, a conference presentation, or a lecture to a classroom full of freshmen, you can never expect the audience to be more enthusiastic about the material than is the presenter. You want to show search committees that you value and enjoy teaching.

It can be particularly effective to provide specific examples of lessons, activities,in-class simulations, etc. that you have used in your own teaching. Suppose you say that you strive to improve the analytic thinking skills of your students. Talk about a specific example where you analyze how voting rules affect outcomes, how campaign themes motivate voters, or how legislative leaders manipulate the rules of their chamber to influence outcomes. You must be brief, but describe in a couple

of sentences exactly how the lesson works and the point you're trying to convey to your students. Everyone says they want their students to develop certain skills. It is much better if you can show a few examples of how you actually work to develop those skills among your students.

14.3.4 Writing Sample

Specifically, what departments want is an example of your written research. If you are a graduate student, this should be a completed chapter from your dissertation. To be more precise, it should be a substantive chapter in which analysis/results are presented. Just presenting your introductory chapter or a theory chapter that precedes a planned set of empirical chapters is not sufficient. You need to show that you have a substantive chunk of your dissertation done. If you have a chapter already published in a good outlet, that is a good candidate for your writing sample. However, your objective is to provide what you think is the best piece of research that you have produced.

Some departments are strict about sending just one writing sample. Others might permit more, but I would never send more than two. You don't want to flood the search committee, and you should also be able to identify one or at most two papers that clearly demonstrate the kind of research you are capable of producing. If you have more articles published or papers written that you think are good enough to claim on your CV and share with potential search committee members, you can and should post those on your website and point to the fact that they are there in your cover letter and research statement. Remember, however, that someone might actually look at what you post online, so be sure it is something polished and professional.

14.3.5 Curriculum Vita

A curriculum vita, or CV, is the academic equivalent of a resumé. It is written more as an outline with bullet points. There are endless examples online. I suggest looking at some examples from the faculty in your department and top young scholars at other departments. Your name, email address, website, and other contact information should come first. Your email address and website should be live

links that folks could click.

Your education history should come next. If you have not yet received your PhD, you should include the date you expect to receive it. This is generally done by writing: PhD (expected May, 2017). You must not report just the date without also including the word "expected" if you do not have the degree in hand. That includes even if you have successfully defended the dissertation but have not yet deposited the final version with your university or you have not yet received your diploma. It is fraud to imply that you have completed the degree if you have not, and this is something for which you can be fired.

Under the line where you state the university from which you earned your PhD and the year, I strongly suggest you include the title of your dissertation along with the members of your dissertation committee, noting who is the committee chair. I also think it is a good idea to include a short abstract of your dissertation, at least while you are a graduate student or young scholar. The abstract should provide an overview of the dissertation, focusing on the problem motivating the dissertation, the theory you are testing that addresses this problem, and why this problem is important to address. You do not have space to give even one full sentence to each individual chapter. Summarize the analysis done by listing/reviewing the range of data and methods you mobilize to test various aspects of your theory.

If you have prior employment at a university, that employment history should come next. If not, move on. In particular, I do not think it is helpful to provide a history of your nonacademic employment. Maybe there is something you have done that you feel is relevant, such as working on campaigns, in government, as a lawyer, etc. That information might be conveyed better in other places. For example, you might mention these experiences toward the end of your cover letter or in your teaching statement. You might highlight these experiences for how they give you something extra to bring into the classroom. If you want to put them on your CV, add a section at the end titled "Other Relevant Experiences" and show it to your advisor. Your CV should be a summary of your academic credentials, not a full history of you.

You might consider a brief section listing other relevant competencies. Many students list topics in research methods that they know or software/programming skills. Others might list foreign languages and their level of fluency with them. Items you list should be relevant to your academic/research interests. Do not list basic items like Ordinary Least Squares regression or your ability to use Microsoft

Office.

Next you want to report on your research. Start with a list of 4 to 6 research areas that describe your interests. Some might label this as research and teaching interests. I don't have strong feelings, but there will be another area for you to identify teaching interests if you want to keep them separate. This could be useful if you're willing to teach particular undergraduate courses, such as research methods, but you have no research agenda in that area.

If you have publications, have a separate section for publications and use that title. If you have presented papers at professional conferences, use that as another section heading and report those. If you have other papers that are neither published nor conference papers, have a section called working papers where you list those. There are several things to consider when reporting on your research.

Do not use a title like "Publications and Papers" where you list only papers that are not published. This even looks bad if you have one or two publications but list five or six other papers with them. A published article is qualitatively different from any other paper. If you have publications, they deserve their own section. Combining publications with other papers under the same heading leads people to think that either you believe unpublished papers are equivalent to published papers or that you are trying to mislead search committee members regarding how many publications you have. Neither of those impressions are ones you want to create.

All publications are not created equal. Books published by academic presses and articles published in refereed journals are the most valued. Book chapters in edited volumes, book reviews, or other articles or essays that do not go through peer review are less valued. Your goal should be peer-reviewed publications, but if you happen to have some of both, separate them on your CV. Call one section peer-reviewed publications and the other section "Other Publications." You want to separate these types of publications for the same reason that you want to separate published papers from unpublished papers.

Do not claim working papers on your CV unless the paper is polished enough that you would be happy for a search committee member to read that paper. It should be good enough that you are happy to post it on your website or email it to someone upon request. If all you have is a rough draft or a half-baked idea, do not claim it as a paper. If you have a manuscript under review, you should indicate that. I do not recommend listing the specific journal where you have the paper

under review. The peer review process is supposed to be double-blind. Besides, the temptation would be to send the paper to the best journal just so you can claim you have, rather than being realistic about where you submit.

I have served on many search committees, and a common criticism that emerges is of a CV that lists what appears to be the same basic paper being presented at multiple conferences. Another common criticism is of a CV that lists multiple conference papers and working papers without any evidence of publication or that any of the papers are even under review for possible publication. Both of these criticisms arise because a CV like this suggests one of two things: either the student believes that conference papers and working papers are just as important or nearly as important as publications, or they like to start projects but have not learned how to wrap up and publish out of that project.

It should go without saying, but include the names of co-authors when you report papers on your CV. In particular, you should list the names of the co-authors, including your own, in the order in which they appear on the paper or article. You do not want to accidentally create the impression that you are trying to claim more credit for a paper than you deserve.

Next should come a section listing any research grants or contracts you have received. Many young scholars would combine this with honors and awards. This is fine because young scholars often don't have any or many grants or awards. Putting them in the same category until you have enough of both grants and other honors or awards to merit separate sections is a good idea.

Next should be a section on teaching. This section might include a list of teaching interests. Just like with listing research interests, you want to be realistic regarding what you list as teaching interests. If the list is too narrow, you will look like you have unrealistic expectations about teaching only classes that you really really care about. A department might need someone to take a turn teaching undergraduate required courses – maybe a large introductory course targeting freshmen or a course on undergraduate research methods, for example. If you appear unwilling to teach anything but the two or three topics you list, that could be a strike against you in applying for a job.

In contrast, if you list a large variety of courses, including courses well outside of your expertise, you will appear to be trying to please everyone. You risk being viewed as lacking focus or not being reasonable about what you are actually

qualified to teach.

This section should also report your actual teaching experience. List any courses that you have taught on your own, then list courses for which you served as a teaching assistant or in some other capacity. Be sure to list the courses by meaningful title and not just course numbers used at your graduate department. You might also list the enrollment of the course, as well as when it was taught. If you taught an online course, be sure to label it as such.

If you have enough items to populate a separate section on honors and awards, that should come next. These awards or honors should be related to your academic experiences. Maybe you received an award for being a good teaching assistant or instructor. Many departments provide their graduate students travel grants to attend conferences. Maybe you received an award for a research paper. Any of these would be good to list. Awards from activities prior to graduate school are generally not listed unless they pertain to outstanding scholarship or research. When in doubt, talk to your advisor.

Next you can list any departmental or university service. This might include serving on a departmental committee, as an officer in the departmental graduate student club, or possibly in some capacity related to the graduate college at your university. Many graduate students do not have these kinds of experiences, so do not put this section on your CV if you have nothing to include. Of course, another strategy upon reading this advice would be to volunteer for some sort of service so you can list it.

Next you can list any professional service along with professional memberships. Professional service might include serving as a chair or discussant on a panel at a conference, potentially helping to organize a conference or some other event, or possibly serving on a committee. It is pretty rare for graduate students to engage in these activities, so don't feel bad if you have nothing to list here. If you have limited departmental and professional service, you could combine them into a single category (similar to how we might combine grants with honors and awards).

Most graduate students are members of at least a couple of professional organizations. In political science, you basically have to become a member of one of the larger associations if you want to present a paper at their conference. Additionally, most students become members of the largest national organization, which in

political science is the American Political Science Association. The American Political Science Association also sponsors dozens of organized sections. Students might consider joining one or two of these sections that are most relevant to their research interests. You should have some professional memberships, but there is no need to go overboard here. Having two or three would be just fine for graduate students headed out on the job market.

Next you can list any additional relevant experience. Most graduate students would have nothing to list here. You would only list jobs or training programs in which you have participated that are directly relevant. Working two years as a legislative assistant might be quite relevant, but working two years at a restaurant is not. Working as a research assistant might be relevant as well. Basically, if you engaged in some substantial activity that is valuable to you as a teacher or researcher, it might be worth listing. However, remember that a CV is not a personal history – it is a record of your academic credentials and accomplishments.

Finally, you should list the names, titles, professional affiliations, and contact information (most typically just an email address) for three or more references. These should be the names of the people writing letters of recommendation for your job application. The email addresses you list for your references should be live hyperlinks. Once you have a job, it is common to remove references from your CV that you post online at your new university.

14.3.6 Letters of Recommendation

Most departments require three letters of recommendation. You don't write them nor will you ever see them in most circumstances. All you can do is select who you ask to write them and then provide your letter writers with the information they need.

When selecting letter writers, you should ask people who know you and your work well. In most cases, they will likely be members of your dissertation committee. For sure you must have a letter from the chair of your dissertation committee. If you intend to apply for both substantive and methods jobs, be sure to have at least one letter writer who can speak to your substantive strengths and at least one who can speak to your methods strengths. It can be helpful if at least some of your letter writers are reasonably prominent or visible in their fields. However, a

junior faculty member who knows you well is better than a senior faculty member who is not familiar with you or your work.

You should provide your letter writers with copies of your CV, standard cover letter, research statement, and teaching statement. Point them to your website as well in case they want additional information, or otherwise provide them with anything they ask to see. You don't want your cover letter to describe you as a scholar interested in representation, then have one letter of reference call you an expert on Congress, and another still describe you as someone focused on public opinion. That makes it look like your letter writers are really not that familiar with you. That might lead search committee members to discount all the wonderful things your letter writers say about you.

It is up to you to contact your letter writers and supply them with the information they need and plenty of time for them to complete their letters before your first application deadline. In many cases, it might also be up to you to nag them to get their letters done. It should not be that way, and I think it is poor professional behavior to be slow or late in completing a letter of recommendation, but it happens. No one has more at stake than you when you are searching for a job, so you need to take responsibility for making sure everything gets done.

14.3.7 Transcript

Some universities will require you to submit a transcript from your graduate department. Your department should be able to help you with this. It will not be the most important part of your application, but it is important to recognize that it will be part of the file. Do well in your courses and avoid having things appear on your transcript that are weird. Do not take that undergraduate course in Frisbee golf that you always wanted to take.

14.4 What Constitutes a Strong Application?

Start thinking about this early, but don't start worrying about it too early. If you plan to complete your program in five years, then you basically have four calendar years between the start of your first class in your first year and the time

you will have to complete your application for the early job deadlines. Four years is plenty of time to get this accomplished, and you do not have to do it all in the first year or two. Still, when you are starting on the path toward pursuing a PhD and a possible academic career, it helps to know what the target looks like. So what are some of the key features search committees might look for from an applicant? In no particular order, here are several items I believe are critical to a strong application.

1. Many search committee members emphasize the importance of an interesting and compelling dissertation. Many view a candidate's dissertation as an indicator of that person's ability to conduct interesting research. Early publications in your career will likely come from your dissertation, and many scholars push the same research agenda they began with in their dissertation for another 10 or 20 years. Especially for research oriented departments, a candidate's dissertation largely defines them. Chapter 3 offers advice on selecting what to study.

   Substantial progress on the dissertation is also essential. You and your letter writers need to be able to discuss what your dissertation shows. You cannot just rely on your dissertation's potential. If you are doing three empirical papers or three empirical chapters for your dissertation, I think you need to be able to say that one chapter is under review or already published, another chapter is completely written, and all of the data is collected and ready for analysis for the third chapter.

2. Research accomplishments are very important. When I was in college, professors used to talk about the need to publish in order to get tenure and promoted. A common phrase was "publish or perish." By the time I reached graduate school, some graduate students were attempting to publish their work, but it was still more the exception than the rule. Now, nearly all graduate students have some sort of publication by the time they are on the job market. As a result, job candidates without publications are at a distinct disadvantage.

   Search committees want to see evidence that you can publish your research because continuing to publish as an assistant professor remains essential to getting tenure and promotion. Even departments at colleges and universities that emphasize teaching and have high teaching loads will expect some publication activity for tenure.

The type of publication matters as well. Single authored articles in top refereed journals are the best. Co-authoring is quite common, but an applicant will get more credit for co-authoring with other students or peers than they will for co-authoring with more senior scholars, particularly their own advisor. Co-authoring with your advisor early in your career is a good idea, but it is helpful to demonstrate your ability to work independently of your advisor.

Placing articles in the top refereed journals is difficult. Publishing in leading and well-recognized subfield journals that are refereed is also very good. The occasional publication in a minor journal or in a non-refereed outlet is okay, but I would recommend avoiding it. You will not get much credit for such publications, and if all or many of your publications are in such outlets, search committees might conclude that you either value such outlets or that your work is not good enough for better outlets.

Other research accomplishments include awards for paper or poster presentations and grants to support your research. I don't think these sorts of things are necessary, but they can be a nice bonus. Presenting papers at conferences is also good, but presenting the same paper multiple times without publishing it or having lots of conference papers with no publications can again unintentionally signal to a search committee that you are not able to or interested in publishing your work.

3. Teaching accomplishments include experience as a teaching assistant, teaching your own course, or any other activity that demonstrates your ability to communicate ideas effectively. This will be critical for teaching-oriented departments, but even research departments increasingly value effective teaching. In my view, every graduate student should try to teach their own course at least once prior to going on the job market.

   Getting the experience is important, but performing well in the classroom is equally important. Use the resources available to you in your department and your university to help you teach effectively. Don't just lecture – try to be a little more innovative. Teaching is a central component of being a university professor, and successful teaching is an important component of getting tenure and promotion.

   I also strongly recommend that you get at least one of the people who will be writing a letter of recommendation for you to sit in on a lecture or two that you give. I certainly appreciate when a letter of recommendation can

address in a credible way a candidate's teaching ability. It also shows that you are serious about getting feedback on your teaching.

4. Strong methods training is a very valuable asset on the job market. The demand for people who can teach undergraduate and graduate quantitative methods courses is high and getting higher. Bringing data analysis and research methods into undergraduate classes is becoming increasingly expected. Having advanced training also improves your chances of staying on top of the latest substantive research in your field. Thus, strong methods training, particularly in quantitative methods, and what people now call data science, will make you competitive for both methods jobs and jobs in your substantive field.

5. Letters of recommendation provide an evaluation of a job candidate. Nearly all letters are positive, but some are more positive than others. Some faculty write letters making explicit comparisons between the candidate in question and either former students or other recent PhD's now in the profession. Statements like the best student I have had in 20 years differ from statements like the student did well in our program. You can't control what letter writers say about you in this regard. Furthermore, I would strongly advise against becoming overly driven by competition or achievement.

   The better strategy is to make sure that your letter writers are familiar with you and your work. A letter that describes a student as noticeably different from how the student describes herself will be discounted by a search committee, even if the letter is glowing. The best letters make clear that the letter writer is deeply familiar with the student and her work. It is quite common to receive two or more job applications that include letters from some of the same letter writers. Search committees will undoubtedly compare those letters. In my experience, the worst possible outcome for the students involved is for whole sections of those letters to be so similar as to suggest that the letter writer really does not know either student well. I have personally seen an example where entire paragraphs in letters for two different candidates written by the same person were identical or different by only one or two words.

   Thus, rather than worry about whether you are the best student your advisor has ever had, focus instead on making sure that your advisor knows you, your abilities, and your work very well.

6. Your PhD program. Like it or not, search committees will evaluate candidates at least in part based on the perceived quality/ranking of their PhD program. As I have said elsewhere, there is not much difference in programs ranked near each other. Still, it is uncommon for a relatively highly ranked PhD granting department to hire students from lower ranked programs. You can combat this by doing interesting work and publishing it in quality outlets, but only to a degree. Take note that where you earned your PhD becomes less important as your career progresses and you become increasingly evaluated based on your own accomplishments.

   There can be a bit of bias in the other direction as well. Search committees know that top-ranked departments emphasize research and publications in their PhD programs. Some departments without a heavy research focus, of a lower rank, or located in a place that they think might be less desirable will sometimes shy away from candidates they believe will be unhappy in their department and looking to move away as soon as they can. This is an easier challenge to address. Doing so might include emphasizing your passion for teaching, your desire to become a long-term member of a group of colleagues, or any reasons you might have for preferring a particular location.

7. Certainly the content of your application is much more important than its style or physical appearance. Still, presentation matters. First, everything in your application should appear professional. Use a clean standard format for your CV. Make sure everything in your writing sample is properly formatted (imagine you're submitting it to a journal for publication). Remove extraneous material from your website. Be careful about what you post on social media.

   Second, double check the writing for everything. Use proper grammar and punctuation. Strive for clarity. Don't ramble on too long in your cover letter, teaching statement, or research statement. Apply the same high standards to your writing and editing of these documents as I suggest you provide to your research papers in Chapter 7.

14.5 Where to Apply

You should be realistic about where you apply. Talk to your advisors and use your judgment. It does not help you or your department if you apply for jobs for which you clearly will not be considered. This includes both the type of institution and the particular job description.

That being said, don't necessarily rule out jobs for which you do not appear to be a perfect fit. Search committees and departments sometimes alter their preferences as they see the applications they receive. They may not have imagined a candidate with your combination of skills and interests. Sometimes job descriptions list preferences on areas of interest, but those preferences are weak and can be trumped by a candidate who appears to fit less well but is stronger overall. When in doubt, apply. When my students have been unsure in the past, I have frequently contacted the department in question on their behalf to learn more about what the department might be seeking.

All too often I hear graduate students contemplate artificial limitations on their job search. The two I hear most often relate to geography and to type of school. Some students want to only consider jobs in a particular region or setting. Others only want to consider jobs at research universities or small liberal arts schools. Of course people are free to follow their preferences. However, such limitations might narrow the scope of your search so much that you increase the risk of not finding a job at all.

For many people in academia, their first job is not the only job they will ever have. Holding out for that first job to be perfect might prevent you from exploring all sorts of jobs that would be perfectly reasonable places to start. I know of numerous examples of students going to an interview at a place they did not expect to like and coming back with an extremely positive impression. I have friends with strong research interests who have more resources at their disposal at a small liberal arts college than do many people who work at the flagship public university in their state. Simply applying to a job does not require you to accept the job if it is offered. Similarly, accepting a job does not prevent you from seeking a different job down the road. Besides, you might find out that you really like something different from what you imagined or from what you have experienced before.

14.5.1 Jobs Outside of Academia

Finally, some graduate students decide not to pursue an academic career. Several of my students have gone this route with great success. Being a professor is not for everyone. Most of the highest ranked PhD departments are focused on preparing students for an academic career. Students who decide to go a different direction can sometimes feel out of place, and unfortunately, I have heard of too many examples of faculty criticizing or even dropping their students if they decide to pursue a nonacademic career. Of course, such behavior is appalling and unprofessional, but it does happen.

Many who pursue a nonacademic career remain interested in research. Such folks might work for research/consulting companies, government agencies, research and development divisions within private companies, or for nonprofit organizations. Others might work in marketing, sales, or human resource divisions within companies. Still others might work in politics. In any of these fields and more, the ability to analyze data, to think critically about problems, to work independently or as part of a team, and to effectively communicate verbally and in writing are valuable skills.

I have less experience helping students look for nonacademic jobs. However, many of the same rules apply. In particular, asking your advisors for help reviewing your materials and identifying prospects remains important. Balancing the goals of applying broadly versus being realistic still remain, as does for the advice on what constitutes a strong applicant.

Finally, most universities have career centers designed to help students seek jobs after graduation. Most of these offices focus on helping undergraduates, but they can certainly help graduate students identify opportunities and tailor their applications appropriately. You should avail yourself of these services.

14.6 When to Apply

First, you must decide whether you are ready for the job market in general. Do you have the record and profile you need to be competitive? Are people prepared to write strong letters of recommendation for you? What are your options if you

do not go on the market? Assuming your answers to these questions lead you to enter the job market, when should you apply?

There is no need to apply a month or more in advance of the deadline. Most departments will not even be ready to receive or organize application materials that are early. Besides, that paper you have under review might just receive a positive decision soon.

At the same time, if at all possible, you should not wait until the deadline to apply for a job. Experience shows that many candidates do wait until the deadline, presumably hoping that something good happens for their file like that positive decision on the journal article I mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, while some departments will not get started at all until after the deadline passes, many departments will have their search committee defined before the deadline and search committee members will likely have access to candidate files before the deadline. In those situations, search committee members will begin reviewing files and identifying those they want to examine closely. If your file does not arrive until the day of the deadline, some search committee members might already have their list of six or eight candidates for closer scrutiny. To get on that list, you might have to be better than someone to bump them off rather than just equal to them to be added.

I suggest you try to have your application materials sent in 7 to 10 days prior to the deadline. That won't be too early, but it should also keep you from getting buried in the flurry of last-minute applicants. I have seen several students organize this process by picking one day each week to process applications and making sure they hit each deadline that is two weeks out or less each time. This is a good way to keep organized and to not let the job search process interfere with your work for more than one day a week.

14.7 The Interview

Interviews for academic positions vary a little bit from place to place, but most have a set of common features. I'll discuss those features and then provide some general advice. Before doing that, I want to stress that the more you enjoy the interview, the better it will go. If you get called for an interview, that means that

the department has already decided you are one of just a few candidates that they feel are best suited for the job. In other words, you have already proven yourself to them. That should help you relax a little bit. Think of an interview as something like an intellectual vacation. For a day or two, you get to set aside the normal activities of your life and just spend time meeting new people and talking about research, teaching, and other elements of the academic enterprise. It is fun to exchange ideas with new people!

The other point I want to make at the outset is that they want the interview to go well, just like you do. You want to make a good impression on them, but they also want to make a good impression on you. Many departments do have at least one grumpy faculty member who might question you a bit more aggressively, but mostly they want you to enjoy yourself and put your best foot forward. Thus, my best advice is to prepare well for the interview, but then just try to relax, be yourself, keep your energy up, and enjoy the experience.

Most departments will interview three candidates in person for a job. More departments are using phone calls or videoconferencing with 5 to 10 candidates before they choose which three to bring out. By far the most common form of communicating with candidates to schedule these interviews is email, though many will use phone calls as well.

Departments may start scheduling interviews within a few days of the application deadline, but other departments might take a month or two to get organized. Just because a deadline passes without you hearing something does not mean they passed you by. Even if they did, I have seen several searches fail to hire one of their first three candidates and go back to the pool to schedule more interviews. You just never know. The silence can be stressful, but let me assure you that I have never heard of a case where a department wanted to interview or hire someone, but somehow they were unable or forgot to contact the candidate in question.

14.8 Types of Interviews

Interviews take place in a variety of settings. Some are formal while others are informal. Some are brief while others last for more than a day. Interviews boil down to the hiring department getting to know you and you getting to know

them. They are evaluating your qualifications, but they are also evaluating your fit with the department. They are imagining what it would be like to have you as a colleague. You are doing the same. You are evaluating your fit with the department and what it would be like to be a faculty member there.

Interviews are about learning something beyond what is included in a job application or on a website. They are meant to be conversations. Below I discuss the kinds of questions you might get in an interview, some questions you might ask, and some questions I suggest that you do not ask. Before that, I want to describe a few types of interviews.

In all of these settings, it is important to be an active participant in the conversation. You should not try to dominate the conversation, but you should also not just listen. Be enthusiastic, ask and answer questions, and just relax and enjoy meeting someone new. If you enjoy the process, the person interviewing you is much more likely to enjoy it as well.

14.8.1 Informal Interviews

When departments know they will be hiring now or in the near future, oftentimes faculty members from those departments will keep their eyes open for potential candidates. You might get a phone call or email asking if you would like to talk. You may also simply cross paths with someone at a conference or when they come to give a talk at your own department. Whatever the circumstance, you might find a simple conversation suddenly sounding like a job interview.

This is nothing to worry about, and in fact, it could be a great opportunity. If nothing else, it will help you get used to the idea of talking about your research and/or teaching. It will also help you get used to asking and answering questions. As mentioned, below I offer some suggestions on questions you might ask as well as receive.

You want to treat these conversations in a professional way, but don't get ahead of yourself. It is just an informal conversation. Just relax, be yourself, and participate in the conversation. If the person enjoys the conversation, they will leave with a positive impression of you. Depending on the conversation, you might also have the opportunity to follow up with an email exchange and/or sharing drafts of

papers.

14.8.2 APSA Interviews

As mentioned elsewhere, the annual conference of the American Political Science Association traditionally marks the start of the job season in political science. APSA operates a job service at its annual conference. Departments can post job descriptions and candidates can post their CVs. Departments and candidates can interact and potentially schedule interviews to take place at the conference.

These interviews are typically scheduled for 30 minutes, but they might also be scheduled over a breakfast or lunch. These interviews have much in common with the phone/video interviews described in the next section, so I won't repeat all of that information here.

Typically, larger research universities do not participate in this process. It is mostly smaller schools eager to meet as many candidates as possible to help them sort out who is really interested and who they might want to bring to campus for a formal interview. I know of examples where these interviews have eventually led to on-campus interviews and even job offers. However, the majority of them will not.

Still, I strongly encourage graduate students on the job market for the first time to participate in this process. It is great experience and great practice. You get to meet some new and interesting people, and who knows, it might just turn into a job.

14.8.3 The Phone or Video Interview

Many departments make phone calls or schedule video chats with potential job candidates before settling on the final group they will bring out for on-campus interviews. On-campus interviews are time-consuming and expensive for departments. These screening interviews are seen as helpful in making sure that they bring out three good candidates.

They are typically scheduled for 30 minutes. If the search committee is doing

them together, they will often have them scheduled back to back for their own convenience. They will also commonly have a fixed set of questions that they ask every candidate. Because of the time limit and the structure, sometimes these interviews can feel a bit stiff or artificial. Don't worry, they will feel the same for the other candidates as well.

Because of limited time, it is very important to listen to the question being asked and that you provide a complete, but succinct, response. If you spend 10 minutes answering the first question, you will get them off their schedule.

I think search committees are looking for two basic things in these interviews. First, they want to imagine what kind of colleague you would be. Does your research sound interesting, can you communicate clearly and effectively, and would you fit in with others in the department?

Second, they want to know how interested you are in the position. Many departments worry that some candidates might get offers at what they consider to be "better" departments. Many also worry about whether a candidate would move to that part of the country, live in that kind of town, or want the type of job that they have to offer. They are not expecting candidates to promise to take the job at this point in the process, but they are looking for reasons to think that you might or might not be interested. It is very important to be honest in this process, but I also encourage students to keep an open mind about jobs that might not have been on their initial top 10 list.

Given these considerations, I think you're best served to participate in these screening interviews with enthusiasm, to try to enjoy them, and to be sure that you have at least one question for them which indicates that you have looked at the department and/or university website and tried to learn more about them. Remember, they have read your application materials fairly closely if you have gotten to this point. This interview is about trying to confirm the impressions they already have and to learn something about you that they cannot get from your application materials. They want to have an interesting, engaging, and fun conversation.

Given the choice between a phone or video interview, I think video interviews are easier. They give you a chance to read facial expressions and get a feel for what they want. I think phone calls are much more difficult to navigate for the candidate.

Regardless of the technology, be sure to find a time and location that offers you your best chance for success. Make sure your phone or Internet connection is strong. Get away from crowds or background noise. Completely empty offices can be good, but sometimes produce an echo. Be careful of the lighting in a room if you're going to use video. A light source that is predominantly behind your head will leave your face in the shadows on the screen. Also, if using video, wear nice clothing – at least business casual or clothing appropriate for teaching.[1] Practice the technology and location with a friend in advance so they can tell you if the sound and/or lighting in your location works.

14.8.4 Office Interviews

If you get selected to do a formal interview with the department, a big chunk of your time spent there will include a series of one-on-one meetings with current faculty members in the department. These typically last for 30 minutes. You will have a schedule and you will move from office to office. These interviews allow individual faculty members to get to know you and your work better. They also allow you to get a feel for what the department is like.

A big part of these interviews, and of the entire interview process, is faculty members imagining you as a potential colleague while you imagine yourself as a potential member of the department. Some of these office interviews will focus entirely on you and your research. Others will involve the faculty member telling you about the community, housing, and other such things. Still others will focus on encouraging you to ask them questions. In other words, from one office to the next, the conversation might be quite similar or quite different. Just be ready for these different kinds of conversations and follow the lead of the person interviewing you.

It is perfectly fine to repeat yourself from one interview to the next, both in terms of your answers to questions and in terms of the questions you might ask. Providing consistency in your responses will avoid confusion among the faculty members when they talk later about your visit. Asking the same questions of several people will also give you a sense of whether people share similar views about the department.

[1] Those who know me will laugh at the "appropriate for teaching" comment and call me a hypocrite!

These office visits might also include a meeting with a Dean or some other administrator. If so, there is a good chance that the person will be from a different discipline and also a good chance that the only thing they have seen about you is your CV. These conversations are usually pretty relaxed, but they can be a bit awkward if they really don't know anything about your discipline. Be ready to talk about your research in plain language that anyone can understand. Also, be ready with a few questions yourself (suggestions are discussed below).

14.9 Questions at Interviews

Interviews unfold as a series of questions. People from the department ask you questions, and you should have questions to ask of them as well. Asking questions shows you are engaged and taking the process seriously.

Questions You Might Get Asked

There is no way to anticipate every possible question, but there are some questions that are quite common. Two things to remember in anticipating questions are: 1) what was the description of the job in the ad, and 2) anything in your job application materials or on your academic website is fair game. This is one reason why padding your CV with titles of extra working papers that are really just half-baked ideas can be a mistake.

Think about the questions below and how you might answer them before you go on your first interview. Talk with your mentors about your possible answers and see what they think. Get comfortable with the idea of talking about yourself with enough detail to give answers that are responsive, but without rambling for 10 or 15 minutes.

1. What courses at the graduate and/or undergraduate level are you interested in teaching? A good response should start with your willingness to help meet whatever needs the department has, but then you should share your true preferences. This should be consistent with your application materials.

   A different, and potentially more challenging question, would ask how you

might teach a particular course. What readings would you require, what assignments might you include, or what approach to the class you might take could all come up. You should think about how you would answer such a question in advance.

2. What are your research plans after you are done with your dissertation? Of course folks might ask about your dissertation, but that should be easy for you to talk about. The harder question might be what you plan to do next. You don't need a complete picture of what's next, but you should have some ideas. These ideas might include extensions of your dissertation, new solo projects, or projects you might pursue with one or more of your fellow graduate students. I strongly advise against talking about doing work with your advisor or other mentors. You should be independent of your advisor by then.

3. What are your publication plans? Your goal should be to publish articles in the top general journals in the discipline along with the leading subfield journals relevant to you. You may also be thinking about publishing your dissertation as a book with a leading university press. You can be uncertain about whether you plan to produce a book or not from your dissertation or whether the journal articles come from your dissertation or not. However, if you only say that you plan to publish a book, that will be insufficient. Every department will be expecting articles to be part of your future.

   You should not have any plans to publish a textbook, chapters in edited volumes, articles in lower tier journals or in non-refereed journals. These will not generate professional credit, which means they should not be things you do, at least not prior to tenure. This is also not a good time to talk about your plans for a blog or your desire to write lots of editorials and essays for a broader audience unless that is something they are explicitly seeking. Again, these are things that untenured professors should not be doing.

4. Where do you see yourself in five years? They might be asking this to probe what you hope your CV looks like by then, or they might be trying to gauge how interested you are in their particular department/university. You don't necessarily have to say that you hope to be in that department, but I think a good answer includes something about hoping to be a member of a department where people get along, where folks work together for common goals, and where the teaching/research/intellectual environment is stimulating and

rewarding. If you say that you hope to be at a different university or in a different type of department, you won't get this job.

5. How do you add to the diversity of our department? There are many elements to diversity. Some are defined in terms of demographic characteristics, but many are not. People have different backgrounds and experiences. Intellectual/scholarly diversity might be the most important aspect of diversity in this circumstance. A related question might be could you promote or interact with a diverse student body?

6. What do you like to do for fun? This question helps people understand if you might be happy living in the particular community where the university is located. As with all questions, you should answer them honestly, but if you are in a small town for your interview talking about how much you enjoy things that are only available in big cities, folks will wonder about your fit. On the flipside, this question also helps them find out what you care about so they can tell you that it exists in their community. If you say you like classical music, even smaller colleges can talk about the performances held on campus.

7. Are you married? Do you have children? These are two of the more common illegal questions that you might be asked. Questions about your personal circumstances and beliefs are out of bounds. The one exception is that some private universities with religious affiliations may ask you about your religious beliefs. These questions are out of bounds because they have nothing to do with your qualifications for the job.

   The challenge is how to respond when they come up. If you boldly assert your right not to answer such questions, you may come across as someone who might be difficult to work with. If you answer them, you might be sharing information that you don't want to share. If questions like these arise in a group setting, others in the group might feel uncomfortable that they have been asked or that you are answering.

   Often, questions like these are motivated by a genuine desire to learn more about you so folks can describe more about the department or the community. They might ask if you have children because they want to tell you about the good schools in the community. They might ask you about a spouse because they want to tell you about employment opportunities they

might have. They might be asking just to say that there are other colleagues in the department in similar circumstances.

Sometimes, questions like these get asked to see if there is some obstacle to hiring you. Increasingly, academic job candidates have spouses or partners who are also academics. Some departments might be less inclined to pursue a job candidate if they believe the only way that candidate will accept the position is if the department or university can hire the spouse or partner as well. Other departments might see this as an opportunity to get two-for-one. Many universities have a program in place to assist in either hiring spouses or helping spouses find jobs.

Ultimately, it is up to you on how you decide to deal with these situations. You are under no obligation to share personal information. At the same time, there is nothing wrong with you bringing up such information. You might have children and be very interested in the local schools, so feel free to ask. You might have a spouse or partner who would be eager to move to the new location and/or not present any obstacles or place any demands on the hiring university. Feel free to volunteer such information or not as you see fit. There is nothing at all illegal or inappropriate in this regard for you to bring up. They are just not supposed to ask if you have not volunteered the information. In all of this, the reality is that the department with the job opening has more leverage than the candidate who wants it.

Questions You Should Consider Asking

The American Political Science Association has compiled a list of questions they offer as suggestions for job candidates to ask.[2] I think the list is valuable, but I would advise that most of the questions they present are better reserved for after you have a job offer from a department. I would NOT ask most of them during the actual interview. I will elaborate with a few examples below, but I will start first with some examples of questions that I think are good ones to consider asking during the interview. I think all of these work in any type of interview setting.

You should ask questions, and if you have time before your interview to prepare, you should look at the websites of the department and university in advance

[2] http://www.apsanet.org/CAREERS/Careers-In-Political-Science/-Candidate-Questions-JCQ-Program

so you can ask something about what you see there. Doing so demonstrates the effort you put in to preparing for the interview. You do not need to spend hours doing this, but you should spend enough time to generate one or two potential questions about something going on in the department or at the university that might be relevant.

1. What are you looking for in this position? This gives the person interviewing you the opportunity to either describe the position in more detail than is provided in the advertisement, or to tell you what particular factors they would emphasize. The ad might say they are searching generally in American politics, but the person might tell you they are looking more specifically for someone who studies elections. Alternatively, they may emphasize advising graduate students or forming partnerships with another center or department at their university. Such feedback would allow you to describe how you might be particularly well-suited to their job.

2. Where does the department see itself going in the next five years? This question sends a signal that you are interested in thinking beyond the first year and that you are looking for a place you can imagine staying at. The answer will also tell you something about how individual faculty members view their department moving forward. You will learn if they have a vision for their future, and if you ask this question of several people, you will find out if that vision is shared.

   You could also ask a Dean or other administrator where does the university see the department going in the next five years. This is something they should be able to talk about comfortably. A related question would be to ask what are the big college/university priorities in the next five years. Deans should be able to talk about these matters for hours.

3. Are there resources and/or opportunities on campus to help young scholars apply for grants to fund their research? This question signals your interest in seeking funding and your willingness to do the extra work needed. It shows you are ambitious and that you are thinking longer-term about supporting bigger research projects. This question will also help you learn what opportunities are available on campus for this kind of effort. In my experience, this is often where students find out that smaller liberal arts colleges might have more to offer than many larger public universities. This is another question that works for administrators.

4. Are there opportunities to involve undergraduate or graduate students in collaborative research? You know the answer will be yes at the graduate level if the department has at least a reasonably good PhD program. However, more and more universities are looking for ways to involve students, particularly undergraduates, in research. This question shows your willingness to do so. It also lets you find out if you have access to student labor to help you push your own research forward.

5. I was looking at your website (for the individual faculty member, the department, and/or the university), and I wanted to ask about . . . I think it is helpful to demonstrate that you spent some time learning about the place where you are interviewing. A question like this does that. Almost every department or university has something on their website worth asking about. Maybe it is the graduate program, or some new initiative, or some interdisciplinary center that you found. You do not need to become an expert on every faculty member, the entire department, or the entire university. Your time is better spent elsewhere. Still, you want to show your interest. Besides, I'm confident you can find something that you actually want to know about without too much trouble.

6. What are you currently working on in terms of research? Faculty engaged in research typically enjoy talking with others about what they're doing. This is a great way to find out what people are working on, but also a great way to get the person doing the interview to do some of the talking. If they like to talk about their work, they will come away pleased from a conversation where they get to do so.

Questions You Should Not Ask

Below are a few examples of questions that I would not recommend asking at an interview. The department chair or others where you are interviewing might bring them up. If so, then it is fine to talk about them. I just think some questions are better left until after an actual job offer is made.

1. What are the expectations/requirements for tenure here? This might seem counterintuitive, but I think this is a bad question to ask. Your goal is not to determine the minimum requirements for achieving tenure in this particular

department. Your goal is to produce a record that would earn tenure in the field more generally rather than just one department. Furthermore, you should have enough confidence that you should not be concerned about their minimum expectations.

I think asking this question risks two possible misinterpretations: 1) that your goal is to do the minimal amount of work necessary to earn tenure, or 2) that you do not have confidence that you can meet the goals for tenure if they are too high. Neither impression is good for you. It is much better to convey confidence. Besides, the basic answer will be some combination of quality publication, quality teaching, and quality service. You will have plenty of time to learn the specifics of your department after they offer you the job. Chapter 15 covers the tenure process in detail.

2. Is it okay to work from home? This is another topic that is likely to come up during your visit anyway, but this is not the way to bring it up. Many departments prefer to have their faculty members around. Larger research departments and universities in larger metropolitan areas tend to have faculty that work at home more frequently compared to faculty in smaller departments or at universities located in smaller cities or towns. Regardless, asking a question like this suggests that you are less interested in being part of the larger group and more interested in just getting your own stuff done. If you really want to know, you can say something like, "I like to work from my office on campus. Is that fairly common in this department?" I once interviewed a job candidate who said they liked to work on weekends and wondered how accessible the building was on weekends. That might be a bit much, but the point is that asking about how little you have to be there undercuts the idea that you are actually excited about being there.

3. What is the starting salary for this position? This is absolutely a fair question after you get an offer, but before then, I think it is better not to worry about it. They will definitely pay you something, and almost certainly it will be a lot more than your graduate stipend, but a lot less than you might be able to make in the nonacademic private-sector market. Most of us did not embark on an academic career with the idea of making the most money possible. However, it is certainly possible to make a very good living as a university professor. My point is that the interview should be about the intellectual and non-tangible rewards of an academic career and not the money. There will be plenty of time to talk about the money after they make an

offer.

4. What is the minimum number of office hours I need to hold each week? By now it should be clear that my advice suggests avoiding questions that focus on the minimum amount of work you will be expected to do. You should instead focus on the exciting work both in terms of research and teaching that you are hoping to do, and how you can become a valuable member of the department.

5. What is the university's policy regarding personal relationships/dating students? This is an example of what I would consider an over-the-top personal question. However, you would be surprised by some of the crazy things job candidates have asked about in real interviews. Generally speaking, your questions should be related to the professional aspects of the position, not about personal matters. If you would be embarrassed to ask about something if your children or your parents were in the room, you shouldn't be asking about it on an interview.

In medium to larger departments, these interviews will take an entire day or more. You are likely to get tired as the day wears on, but you need to keep your energy levels up. The last interview of the day might be your 10th one, but it will be the first time that person has met you. No one is going to be more excited about you being there for an interview than you. Thus, if you run out of energy, the folks interviewing you likely will as well. Plan for this. Pack a snack in your bag if you need a boost in the afternoon. Ask for a bottle of water or a cup of coffee if you need it. Ask for a restroom break if needed. Remember, you are supposed to be enjoying yourself.

14.10 The Job Talk

Most departments require that job candidates give a presentation about their research as part of their formal on-campus interview. This document includes a separate chapter on giving academic presentations, Chapter 9, so I will focus here on elements unique to job talks.

If you are a graduate student or new PhD out on the market, it is important that your job talk focus on a solo-authored project. For graduate students, this

should be something from your dissertation. If it is not from your dissertation, it will raise questions either about the quality of your dissertation or your progress on it. If you present something that is co-authored, you will raise questions about your ability to do research on your own.

The paper you present should be complete. By that I mean that you have a clear motivation for the paper, all the data gathered and analyzed, findings to report, and implications of those findings to discuss. Most often, students build their presentation around the writing sample they submitted for their application. Presumably, your writing sample was your best paper available at the time applications were due, so it is a reasonable choice for your job talk. However, sometimes interviews happen months after the application process began, and in that time you may have made significant progress on something else. Talk with your mentors about the best content for you to present.

Do not try to present your entire dissertation. That is just too much information for one talk. It is always better to cover a smaller amount of information well than it is to cover a lot of information poorly. Spend 30 seconds near the beginning of your talk providing a brief overview of your larger research agenda/dissertation to give your audience a sense of the bigger ideas that motivate your research. Then say that today you are focusing on one particular component of this project. People can ask questions at the end of your talk or during other parts of the interview if they want to hear more about your dissertation.

Ask about the amount of time that will be set aside for the talk. Ask about the department's norms for such talks as well. Do people ask questions along the way, or do they save them for the end? Do presenters normally use PowerPoint or something similar? Who will be in the audience – just faculty from the department, any grad students or undergrads, anyone else? These are all fair questions, and search committees should be happy to answer them. They should want you to know what to expect so you can prepare to do your best.

The question and answer session at the job talk is also very important. Practicing in advance will help you anticipate questions you might get. Most political science departments have a norm of saving substantial questions until the end of the talk, though folks might ask minor clarifying questions along the way.

These norms are changing, however. Younger scholars, methods scholars, and scholars at higher ranked departments have begun asking serious questions in the

middle of talks. Such behavior is quite common in many other disciplines, including statistics, economics, and computer science. As more interdisciplinary work takes place, norms from other disciplines are bound to come with that. Formal and quantitative methods in political science are heavily influenced by the three disciplines I just mentioned. You should prepare for these kinds of questions, especially if you are applying for methods jobs, and even moreso if you are applying for anything with an interdisciplinary component such as the new data science initiatives taking place at many universities.

The job talk is an important part of the interview. Fortunately, you get to set the agenda because you get to prepare the talk. That said, it is very important that you practice your talk multiple times before you go on an interview. Get your friends to watch, your advisor, or anyone else willing.

In particular, it is helpful to get someone from a different subfield who is not familiar with your work to observe the talk. Your talk might be about party polarization among voters in the US, but your audience at an interview will consist of faculty members and students who are not experts on your topic. In fact, most people will not even be in the area of American politics more broadly. You must consider your audience when preparing your talk.

Recently, I have had a couple of students record their practice talks so I can view them later. This has been extremely helpful because it allows me to stop the recording at any point and make comments or discuss issues with the student. I would encourage you to record yourself at least once so you can see and hear for yourself how your talk is going.

Finally, folks that already have jobs often make the mistake of failing to practice their job talk when they go on an interview. They assume that their experience teaching classes and presenting at conferences is sufficient preparation for giving a good job talk. However, job talks are different – the audience is different, the context is different, and the stakes are different. Even the most seasoned scholar would benefit from practicing her talk in advance.

14.11 Meeting with Students

Most departments with a PhD program set up a time for you to meet with current graduate students during your formal on-campus interview. That might be in someone's office or it might be over a lunch. Take such a meeting just as seriously as you take the meetings with individual faculty members. The department would not set up the meeting with current students if they did not have plans to solicit their feedback.

The graduate students are going to be interested in what you might bring to the graduate program. What courses might you teach? What is your willingness to mentor and possibly co-author with graduate students? Many of them will be close to the job market themselves and might be curious about what you learned from your experience thus far. They want to see if you are interested in their work. It is very important to treat the current graduate students with respect, especially if you yourself are still finishing your own degree. I am surprised by the number of job candidates who treat the graduate students they meet on an interview in a condescending or dismissive way. That is not the kind of colleague I would be interested in having in my department.

Many departments in smaller liberal arts colleges arrange meetings between job candidates and some of their undergraduate students. The same advice applies here – take such meetings seriously, treat the students with respect.

14.12 Teaching Presentation

Smaller departments focused more on teaching often have job candidates deliver a guest lecture in a class as part of their formal on-campus interview. Typically, this would involve giving a lecture in one of their classes that is already scheduled. Sometimes the class is close to your areas of interest, but not always. Sometimes they will give you a topic for your lecture, but other times they will let you decide, even if it doesn't fit the particular class well. You might develop a presentation out of your dissertation, but often times it works better to adapt a lecture that you have given before in your own classes.

This can be a challenging task because you want something that is engaging

for the students, but it also needs to fit in the available time slot. It is best if you can engage the students in discussion or active participation in the class session rather than just giving a 50 minute lecture. If the department is asking you to give a teaching presentation, it means they take teaching seriously and they are looking for a new colleague who does so as well.

Note that departments that only require a job talk will still be evaluating your teaching ability based on that talk. Clear communication, engaging the audience, showing enthusiasm, and exchanging in the free flow of ideas through questions and answers are important regardless of the presentation setting. Whether you give a job talk, a teaching presentation, or both, you need to practice.

14.13 Dinners and Meals

Every formal on-campus interview that I know of includes people from the department joining the job candidate at one or more meals. Typically, these are smaller groups. Dinners tend to be faculty, while breakfasts and lunches might be either faculty or students. Generally these are meant to be informal and enjoyable, but you should definitely treat them as part of the interview.

Conversations will range from questions about your research in the job to broader questions or discussions about the department and/or university to topics about the community, politics, sports, families, etc. Basically, anything you might imagine coming up at a dinner party could come up. It is best to let the others at the meal guide the conversation. Still, you want to be an active participant. This can be difficult because everyone else at the meal knows each other. Thus, the table might spend 15 minutes talking about someone else's kids that everyone knows except for you. In such situations,it can be easy to drift away. This is especially true if you just spent the entire day going through the interview or if you had a long plane ride that day. Fight the urge to space off. Stay focused on the conversation. Participate where appropriate, but there is no need to dominate the conversation.

Other times, the challenge becomes finding time to eat your own food because everyone else at the meal wants to speak with you. They get to eat while they take turns asking you questions, but you are left scrambling to squeeze in a bite

because you are part of every conversation. In those situations, it can be helpful to ask them questions from the list above. You can eat while they tell you what they think the future of the department looks like, or whatever.

Alcohol is often available at these meals (at least at the dinners). You should avoid it or at least minimize your consumption. The old advice I received was that you should be the best dressed and least intoxicated person at the table. That is a pretty safe strategy to follow. You might also avoid messy food for menu items that could cause you problems. I love spicy food, but sometimes it makes my forehead sweat. Thus, I choose something mild in situations like this and save the jambalaya for when I'm out with my wife and kids (they are so lucky).

As with any other part of the interview, it is important to keep your energy up during the meals. You want to relax and have a good time, but you don't want to relax so much that you start to get droopy. In some departments, meals with job candidates are real social events for the faculty involved, and they want to have a good time. If you are tired, just wait to get back to the hotel room and you can collapse there.

14.13.1 Say Thank You

After any interview, I suggest sending an email in the next day or two to say thank you. The email should be short. Just express your gratitude for the opportunity, how much you enjoyed it, to let you know if they need anything else from you, and that you hope to hear from them soon. If someone asked for you to send a paper, or if there is a particular question or discussion you want to comment on, you can do that briefly as well. Still, keep these notes brief and polite.

You should send a note at least to whomever was responsible for your interview. This could be the search committee chair, or for an on-campus interview, the department chair. At the other extreme, you might send a note to each individual faculty member with whom you interacted. You might also consider a note to the office staff person who coordinated your on-campus interview, and maybe encourage that person to pass along your gratitude to the students you met. Generally speaking, I would not suggest sending a note to the Dean or whatever outside administrator you might have met. This is particularly true for young folks interviewing for assistant professor jobs.

14.15 The On-Campus Interview – Some Closing Thoughts

14.15.1 Battling Nerves

Interviews make most job candidates at least somewhat nervous, so if you feel nervous you are simply reacting normally. However, if you have practiced your talk and prepared for the interview, you can trust that preparation to see you through. Remember, the department has already decided that they like you as a job candidate and potential colleague. That is why you are there in the first place. If you can relax enough to enjoy the experience while keeping your energy up enough to stay engaged from start to finish, things will go well. They want you to be successful and to feel comfortable in their department. Remember, they want you to want the job, so if they offer it to you, you will take it. More generally, they want you to have a positive experience so that you say good things about their department, even if they don't hire you. At the same time, you want it to go well because you would like them to think well of you and offer you the job, even if you end up not accepting it. My advice is to relax, engage, and enjoy yourself.

14.15.2 Be Nice to Everyone

During an interview, from the time you step off the plane until the time you get back on it, you are always on stage. Treat everyone you meet with courtesy and respect. Besides being the right thing to do, you never know how information might flow back to the department. The clerk at the registration desk at the hotel might be a student in the department in which you are interviewing. The staff people in the department who arranged for your visit will no doubt share their opinions with others in the department. Sometimes departments even ask a real estate agent to show job candidates around. Almost certainly that agent is a friend of one or more of the faculty members in the department, so don't go on and on about how much you don't like the city. In short, if you are a generally decent person with some modicum of social skills, you should be fine. However, most faculty members have stories they can tell about interviews that went quite badly, which is why I decided to write this down.

14.15.3 Accentuate the Positive

One other thing to avoid are negative comments about your current situation. Whether you are a grad student or already a faculty member in another department, complaining about your current circumstance is not helpful. Some people seem to think that a hiring department wants to hear about how motivated you are to come to their department. That is true, but hiring departments want to hear about your positive views of them. They do not want to hear how eager you are to get away from something bad. Complaints about your current situation might make the hiring department wonder if you are just the kind of person who complains. That will not help you land the job. You can be honest about your current situation if that comes up, but focusing on the positive aspects of the hiring department is always the best strategy.

14.15.4 Dress for Success

My current and former students and colleagues will no doubt roll their eyes at seeing me offer advice about how to dress. Personally, I don't think it should matter, but it does. If you want to be taken seriously as a candidate for a professional job, you need to dress professionally for the interview. A former colleague of mine once said that if there is only one person in the room wearing a suit, it should be the job candidate. I have never heard of a job candidate being criticized for being overdressed, but I have heard candidates we interviewed criticized for wearing something that was considered too informal or inappropriate.

I realize the question of what is appropriate attire carries with it all sorts of gender, generational, and cultural implications. I'm not trying to foster cultural conformity, but it is worth at least considering the kind of impression you want to make during your interview and how to dress accordingly. If you are unsure, ask your advisor or other faculty members for their advice.

14.15.5 Accommodating Personal Circumstances

All sorts of personal circumstances can emerge in conjunction with an interview. I noted above that sometimes you might be asked about whether you're

married and/or have children. As a result, I have been asked by students who are married whether or not they should wear a wedding ring. Given long-standing gender biases, questions about marriage, children, or plans along those lines can be particularly difficult for women. On a related note, women candidates might be faced with being pregnant or nursing at the time they are asked to interview. Others might have religious practices that conflict with a proposed interview schedule.

These are not simple or easy questions to answer. You have to do what is comfortable and necessary for you. Most departments should be more than happy to accommodate any special circumstances, particularly if they are brought to their attention in a respectful way. You should certainly be able to expect appropriate and professional behavior. Still, a number of biases can creep into this process. I bring up these issues now, hoping that they won't occur for anybody, but with the knowledge that you are better off if you are at least not surprised by them. If you are unfortunate enough to have a bad experience around one of these issues or something similar, it will no doubt be upsetting. All I can say is that if a department is going to allow such biases to influence their decision-making, maybe it is better to find that out sooner rather than later.

14.16 Getting An Offer

14.16.1 Ethical Guidelines

The ethical guidelines published by the American Political Science Association[3] designate that job candidates should be given two weeks as a reasonable amount of time in which to respond to a job offer. Those guidelines also emphasize that offers should be received in writing.

Guidelines adopted by the American Association of University Professors provide greater detail on what candidates should expect to see in a job offer letter. These guidelines again stress that offers should be received in writing and that candidates should have at least two weeks from receiving the written offer to make a decision.[4]

[3] `http://www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Publications/APSAEthicsGuide2012.pdf`

[4] "The Ethics of Recruitment and Faculty Appointments," *Academe*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Mar. -

Unfortunately, some departments do not follow these guidelines. If you find yourself in such a situation, you might politely reply to the search committee chair or department chair (whomever you are interacting with about the formal offer) that your advisor told you about the ethical guidelines established by these organizations and that you are expecting to have two weeks to decide. You could get more aggressive and contact a Dean or other administrator at the university in question to ask about their policy. Of course, that will be viewed as confrontational by the department making you the offer. These are difficult situations to navigate, so rely on your mentors.

14.16.2 Basic Content of an Offer

As noted, the offer should be in writing. It should outline the basic terms of employment, including starting salary, teaching load, whether funds are available to help you relocate, and whether funds are available to purchase an office computer or cover any other research-related expenses. Some offers will include a temporary reduction in your teaching load to help you get started. Others might include one-time cash in the form of summer salary for a year so you can have more time that summer for your research.

Many offers also include a clause stipulating that you must have completed your degree by a certain time, or you will instead be hired as an instructor at a lower wage. It is very important that you clarify what they mean by completed degree. Do they mean successfully defending your dissertation, not only defending but making all necessary corrections and depositing the final dissertation, or do they mean actually having your diploma in hand? It should go without saying that you cannot bend the truth on this point. Unfortunately, I have seen a few cases of people doing exactly that and obviously it creates huge problems for the job candidate, oftentimes resulting in the loss of the job.

Apr., 1993), pp. 119-120 Published by: American Association of University Professors. `http://www.jstor.org/stable/40251293`

14.16.3 Negotiating

When you first receive the offer, your response should be positive and enthusiastic, but noncommittal. If the offer is not yet in writing, you can say how pleased you are to be receiving an offer, and that you look forward to seeing it in writing. You can also say that you need to speak with your advisor before making any decisions. Departments will understand, and they do not expect you to accept an offer immediately.

Once candidates have an offer, many are eager to negotiate to try to improve its terms. You have every right to ask any questions and to ask for any changes to the offer, but there are a few things to consider. For example, if you have no other offers in hand, your negotiating leverage is quite limited. This will also be the first real professional interaction you have with what could be your new department. You might want to think about the impression you want to make.

Some departments will have more flexibility to negotiate than others. Where that flexibility lies also differs across departments. Some might be able to negotiate on salary, but could not offer any teaching reduction, even if temporary. Others might be able to offer a course or two reduction in your first couple of years, but have no flexibility on salary. Still others might be able to offer some summer salary for a year or more money in a research account for you to spend on your research as you see fit. The chair of the department seeking to hire you will have the best information on whether and where there is room to negotiate.

It might seem odd to seek information about where there is room to negotiate from the department chair when that is also probably the person with whom you are negotiating. However, at this point in the process, the chair of the hiring department is your ally. The real source of funding for the position rests with a Dean or some other higher-level administrator. In that sense, the department chair is more like a broker trying to close a deal between you and that higher-level administrator. You have to trust that the chair knows what is and is not possible.

Why can you trust the chair? First, she probably would not be chair if she had not already earned the trust of her department and the Dean. Second, the department just voted to hire you and have given the chair the task of closing the deal. Third, your department will view how new hires are treated as a sign of how faculty will be treated more generally. Fourth, every resource that comes to

anyone in the department is good for the department. If a new person gets a high salary, that creates pressure to raise the salaries of others, for example. For all these reasons, the chair becomes a critical source of information and advocacy for you, but they will also recognize the limits of what can be done.

If you decide to negotiate for changes in the offer, you should focus on the one or two things most important to you. If you ask for six changes, they might make the two or three changes that are least important to you. Besides, accepting some of their initial terms shows good faith on your part.

You should also have a rationale for your request. What will your request help you do better regarding the job? Also, be open to different strategies for achieving a goal. If your goal is more time to work on research in your first couple of years, that might be accomplished by teaching the same courses to reduce your prep time, getting a course release, or receiving summer support so you do not have to teach summer school to make money.

Students with spouses/partners often ask whether or not they can expect the university hiring them to also find a job for their partner. Some universities have programs to help with this, but others do not. Such efforts are made more difficult for the typical entry-level assistant professor jobs because of the normal two-week deadline. That is generally not enough time for a university to find another position for your partner. Beginning assistant professors often do not have a lot of leverage in negotiations like this, as there are other candidates waiting in the wings. It does not hurt to ask, but you need to be realistic about your chances. Though still challenging, such arrangements are a little bit easier when a department is hiring a more advanced scholar in part because there is often more time available and in part because a more advanced scholar generally has the fallback option of just staying where they are. This gives them a bit more leverage.

At the end of the day, you need to decide whether you want the position and under what terms. The temptation is to compare your offer to others received by your friends or others you have heard about. Whether your offer involves more or less money than someone else's offer at a different university is irrelevant. What matters is the offer in front of you, the desirability of the position, and what your options are if you turn it down. Finally, while I believe it is quite rare and unlikely, it is possible for a department to rescind an offer if they believe you are not negotiating in good faith.

14.16.4 What about Other Opportunities/Jobs?

Another common question revolves around what to do about other jobs to which you have applied when you receive an offer. If there are places you would consider equal to or better than the place from which you receive the offer, it is perfectly reasonable to try to find out where you stand. If you have interviewed somewhere, it is easy for you to just email the search committee chair to ask where you stand in their process. If you have not interviewed somewhere, you might ask your advisor to contact someone to get an update on the status of their search. I suggest being realistic in this process about the places you contact.

Also, you will likely have a two-week deadline on the offer you just received, so you may not have time to fully explore other options. You can ask for an extension of the deadline, but the department may not grant it. If they really want to hire you, they may not want to give you more time to secure a better offer. It's also true that they may have a second candidate to whom they will make the offer if you decline, and they may not want to risk losing both you and that second candidate by giving you more time.

14.17 What Is a Postdoc and Should I Want One?

Postdoc is short for post-doctoral position. When I finished my PhD, there were very few postdoc positions available in political science or the other social sciences. They are becoming more common, however.

The typical postdoc is a one or two year position focused on research. There is usually no teaching requirement. The position is generally connected to a research center or individual faculty member at the university in question. You are generally asked to devote at least 20 hours a week on joint research projects with the faculty member or center. Your remaining time is supposed to be devoted to your own research. Your primary objective is to get papers from both efforts under review or published. You might also be asked to participate in workshops, a speaker series, or other activities of the home center or department hosting the postdoc.

The pay range varies for these positions. I have seen them advertised between

$40K and $65K most commonly, but some pay higher salaries. While a higher salary is nice, these are temporary positions, so the real value of a postdoc depends on the quality and quantity of research you can produce. A postdoc gives you a pause between completing your PhD and starting a tenure-track position. That pause should be used to improve your prospects on the job market and lay the foundation for earning tenure. If used effectively, a postdoc is wonderful for a young scholar. In particular, moving on to another university and separating yourself from your graduate department and your status as a graduate student makes taking a postdoc more valuable than just staying in your home department for another year. You also meet new people and get exposed to new ideas.

The downside of a postdoc is that it is temporary. You must absorb the costs in terms of time and disruption to relocate to another department for just a year or two. In addition, most of the fruits of a one-year postdoc will not materialize soon enough to appear on your job application materials that fall. Similarly, you will lose a fair amount of time during the fall of that one-year postdoc applying for jobs. This is why a two-year postdoc is much more valuable compared to a one-year postdoc.

Suppose you're faced with the choice between accepting a postdoc or a tenure-track position at a university that is not your vision of ideal. Which position offers the best opportunity to get to that dream job? That depends on several factors. If your dream job would be a position at a teaching-oriented liberal arts college, a postdoc might be less helpful than gaining additional teaching experience. If the postdoc is just for a single year, you have to evaluate the pros and cons of being back on the job market so quickly versus giving yourself time at a tenure-track position before reentering the market. If your dream job would be a position at a research-oriented department, then a postdoc might be more helpful.

This also comes down to your tolerance for risk. A postdoc is by definition a temporary position. You might prefer a tenure-track position at a lower ranked department where you are confident you could reach their standards for tenure. If things go well for you, you can always apply to other jobs, but if things don't go as well, you might be less stressed if you're at a department with lower tenure expectations.

Another consideration is the teaching load associated with the tenure-track position. If the teaching load is comparable to what you would get at a research-oriented department, at least you have the same amount of time to focus on your

research as you would have at such a department. If the teaching load is higher, however, it can be more difficult for you to publish at a rate that fits the profile of a candidate that a research-oriented department would want to hire.

I have seen people follow both paths with success. I have also seen people underachieve relative to their hopes following either path. In the end, your success will depend much more on your own work and effort than it will on the path you choose.

14.18 Non-Tenure-Track Teaching Positions

Universities routinely hire instructors who are not designated as being on a path toward tenure. There is a tremendous amount of variety regarding these positions. Some emerge for a single year with no possibility of continuation. Some are posted for a single year, but come with the potential for renewal. Sometimes a temporary position becomes eligible for conversion to a tenure-track position in a year or two. Finally, some departments hire teaching faculty on contracts that might be up to five years long and subject to renewal. While not eligible for tenure, departments hiring teaching faculty on longer-term contracts often have opportunities for such faculty to earn other kinds of promotions.

A temporary teaching position mirrors the pros and cons of a temporary postdoc position. A temporary teaching position generally pays better than just staying as a graduate student in your own department for another year. They give you the chance to gain teaching experience, to separate yourself from your status as a graduate student, and to meet new people. However, if the teaching demands are high, it can limit your research productivity. If the position is only for a single year, you have to endure the costs of relocation and gear up for the job market again right away.

Whether to apply for or accept a temporary teaching position, again, boils down to your own preferences and circumstances. If your long-term goal is to end up at a research-oriented department, these sorts of positions can be counterproductive because of the disruption they can cause to your research. However, if you plan to focus on teaching, these positions can provide good experience. In addition, if the department in question plans to advertise a tenure-track position

in the near future, you might be able to put yourself on the inside track for that if you spend a year or two there in a temporary position getting to know the faculty and students, and having them get to know you.

14.19 Searching for Your Second Job

Some scholars spend their entire careers at the first university that hired them, but a great many do not. Going back on the market can create opportunities for you, but it also comes with some costs. First, being on the market takes time and mental energy. It is easier the second time around because at least you have a job as a fallback position, but it still takes effort. It will pull you away from other aspects of your work. In addition, you risk upsetting colleagues or students in your current department if they realize you are looking elsewhere.

In searching for the next job, I suggest limiting your applications to those opportunities that seem likely to be a clear improvement over your current situation. Just making a lateral move to a similar department costs a lot of time and effort for little gain. Searching for a job is disruptive enough, but actually moving to a new location will set back your research agenda by several months at least.

Sometimes people go on the job market hoping to secure an offer from a new university which they hope to use to generate a counter offer for more money or something from their current university. Sometimes this works and sometimes it does not. To receive a counter offer, your current department and university must be supportive of trying to keep you, and your threat to leave must be seen as credible. In particular, universities are often reluctant to make a counter offer to someone who has an offer from a lower ranked university. Administrators can more easily defend the expense involved in keeping someone from going to a peer or higher-ranked university. If you get an offer from another university that you are not really interested in joining just because you hope to get a counter offer, you are in an untenable position if the counter offer does not materialize. Furthermore, most universities will not allow you to leverage a counter offer from them very frequently. As a result, I suggest you be careful playing this game and patient in waiting for the best opportunity.

One thing I tell all of my students thinking about looking for another job is that

their profile needs to look measurably better than it did coming out of graduate school. This often means waiting at least a couple of years before heading back out on the market. It takes time to build your publication record and a more complete teaching portfolio. If you are a third or fourth year assistant professor, your record needs to convince prospective search committees that your real production is as good or better than the potential production they might expect from hiring someone straight out of graduate school.

Finally, some people recommend that assistant professors going up for tenure and promotion in a given year also apply to other job openings at the same time. Doing so might give you an option in case you do not get tenure, or it could strengthen your case if your department sees that another department of equal or higher ranking wants to hire you.

I don't generally subscribe to this idea. You should have a pretty good idea of your chances for getting tenure. If your case is strong and everything looks good, going on the market is just a waste of everyone's time, including your own, unless you are serious about potentially taking another job. If your tenure case does not look good, you definitely should be applying to other positions. In fact, you might want to apply the year before you go up for tenure so you can avoid the unpleasant process of getting denied. In short, you should consider your context and your preferences for your current job relative to places you might apply rather than automatically going on the job market during your promotion year.

14.20 Managing Job Market Stress

Searching for a job, especially your first one, is stressful. You send out applications waiting to hear, and most of what you get back is silence. You worry as application deadlines come and go. You get nervous if you are called for an interview, and discouraged if others get called and you do not. There is a lot of uncertainty in the job market, and many elements of it are out of your control. Plus, the stakes are high.

I encourage students to focus on what they can influence while trying to downplay elements beyond their control. Work on your applications, continue moving forward on your dissertation, and practice your job talk. You can't control what

jobs are available, who else applies, or who a department selects to interview. All you can do is apply to openings and try to prepare yourself to take advantage of opportunities that do arise.

As I've said elsewhere, it is also important not to let the job market becomes all-consuming. It is an important part of your life, but it is not the only important part of your life. Lean on your friends and family for support. This might include telling your friends or family to stop asking you about the job market all the time. Take a break or start a hobby to give yourself a mental rest from the stress. Finish a dissertation chapter and celebrate by going to dinner and a movie. It is easy to feel like you're not accomplishing anything when you send out applications and wait for responses, so focusing on work you can accomplish will make you feel better.

You are not in this alone. Your advisor, other faculty members, other students on the market, family and friends all want to help. As I've said elsewhere, every university also provides counseling support for students. I believe more students should make use of these services. Hang in there – the job market has a way of working out for everyone sooner or later.

14.21 Conclusion

There is no secret, nor is there a shortcut, to getting a job. This chapter provides some tips and advice about the job market, but the most important stuff happens in the years leading up to your first job search. Don't be overwhelmed by what is required. Rather, recognize that, week by week, month by month, you can continue to take small steps toward your goals. There is no substitute for just doing the work.

You also should not do this alone. Seek the help of your advisors and others at your university. Commiserate with and support your fellow graduate students going through the same process. Doing your own work does not mean doing it in solitude. In fact, co-authoring with other students might allow you to produce more work that you will each be able to claim.

Make sure that your advisors know where you are applying. They may be willing to send emails to people they know in departments where their students

apply.

Finally, avoid wasting time during the job search. Avoid long conversations with classmates about how stressed you are. Don't look up housing prices in a city until you have a job offer from the university there. Avoid online blogs and rumors like the plague. Channel your nervous energy into something useful, even if it is just formatting tables or references for your dissertation – all of that work has to get done anyway.

The job market feels a bit chaotic because many aspects of it are beyond your control. I often describe it as being like a large wooden box with little holes in the bottom representing jobs. The job market then dumps a bag of marbles in the box, with the marbles representing job candidates, and proceeds to shake the box. It feels chaotic, but somehow the marbles find their way to a hole well-suited for them. I don't tell students not to worry about the job market because worrying is natural. Rather, I encourage students to channel their nervous energy toward the things they can control while trying to minimize the amount of time spent worrying about those things they cannot control.

Chapter 15

Life as an Assistant Professor

15.1 Introduction

Moving from being a graduate student to an Assistant Professor is a big transition. In some ways, this is surprising because your job is to teach and do research – which was basically your job as a graduate student. However, there are major differences between the two.

While you will still be teaching and doing research, you will be responsible for a lot more of both than you were in graduate school. Both the volume of work, and the fact that you are now solely responsible for it, are significant changes. Good departments will provide you with mentoring support as an Assistant Professor, but that is not the same as having an advisor in an environment where you are just a student.

You will also be learning a new city, meeting your colleagues and learning the rules and norms of your department and university, and dealing with all sorts of mundane issues like getting your computer set up, learning how the copier works, and navigating parking on campus. These things sound small, but they add up to consume a lot of psychic energy and time.

You will have more work to do, but the good news is that you will become more efficient at it than you ever were in graduate school. Also, like graduate school, the same two factors are major determinants of your success as an Assis-

tant Professor: 1) you need to put in the work, and 2) you need to manage your time effectively. If you learned how to do these two things in graduate school, you can apply those lessons to being an Assistant Professor.

I enjoyed graduate school a great deal, but being on the other side is much better. You have more responsibility, but you have more freedom in the work that you do. I also enjoy working with students, particularly graduate students. Finally, while most college professors are not incredibly wealthy, it certainly pays better than being a grad student!

15.2 Managing Your Time

Very few people are able to be successful college professors at any rank by working 40 hours a week or less (I think 50 hours is more realistic, but it should not require more than that). It is particularly hard as an Assistant Professor. Your friends or family might tease you about only teaching for a few hours a week with long summer vacations, but that is not the way it works. Prepping for a class takes more time than teaching, plus there are things like grading and office hours to consider. Of course, you also have research and service to do as well. My first point about time management is that you need to allow for enough time in the work week to get your stuff done. This includes planning to work during the summer.

Setting aside time is necessary, but not sufficient for success. You need to manage that time effectively. The biggest problem I see young scholars having is balancing their time between teaching and research. Teaching operates on a set schedule. You must be prepared for each class session, grading has to get done in a timely fashion, and student questions must be answered promptly. In other words, teaching follows a regular routine with a set schedule that creates deadlines every week, if not every day. Furthermore, there is no way to hide if you miss those deadlines. Teaching is a very public activity.

In contrast, research as an Assistant Professor can be a very private and unstructured activity. No one checks or even notices if you worked on your research in a given week. There are no deadlines, and no public embarrassment if you missed one anyway. There is an old saying that structured time drives out un-

structured time. This is why teaching prep, which has a deadline, drives out research prep, which has no deadline, unless you give yourself one. Furthermore, as Chapter 8 on professional writing points out, many of us impose rituals on our professional research and writing where we convince ourselves that we cannot do the work unless conditions are just right.

The result is young scholars respond effectively to the immediate deadlines of teaching and they neglect paying regular attention to their research. This is compounded by being relatively new to the profession and, thus, concerned about embarrassing themselves in the classroom. They look up one more example, find one more funny video, or read one more study as they prepare for class. I have been guilty of this my entire career, specifically by over-preparing for individual class meetings. I frequently end up covering half or less of the material I have prepared for a given class meeting.

The best solution to this dilemma is to block out chunks of time during working hours that you devote to your research. Don't schedule meetings, hold office hours, or prepare for class during those blocks of time. Work exclusively on your research. Don't even check your email, text messages, or social media during this time. Again, harkening back to Chapter 8, at least some of this research time every week should be devoted specifically to writing.

Do not let other demands impinge on this time. If you do not have your lecture for the following morning as prepared as you would like, either do the best you can with what you have, or finish your lecture later in the evening or early the next morning. Do not use your research time to finish the lecture thinking that you'll make up the research time that evening or early the next morning. Your research does not have that kind of short-term deadline, and you will end up blowing it off.

Another good idea is to form a research group with a few of your colleagues. Commit to setting deadlines with each other, reporting back to each other, and even sharing draft manuscripts with each other following a timeline. This allows you to create a structure with deadlines for your research and also makes those deadlines public. Reward yourself if you hit your deadlines. I have heard some people say that a good self-inflicted punishment for not hitting a deadline is to commit to donating money to a political party or candidate that you do not support every time you fail. I don't know if that is necessary, but creating public deadlines and incentives for meeting them can often be helpful.

On a related note, I have mentioned before that co-authoring papers can also create a sense of commitment to making progress. If you don't get your work done, it harms both you and your collaborators. I have found this to be most effective when co-authoring with just one other person on a paper. When a project has three or more co-authors, it is easy for everyone to shirk responsibility.

Another great way to balance teaching and research is to work on the teaching side of the equation. The best advice here is to teach the same courses repeatedly if you are able to do so. Preparing a new course always takes more time than revising or updating a course you have taught before. In my first two years of teaching, I taught eight different courses plus participated in a team-taught course. I was swamped prepping new material all the time. It might sound boring to teach the same small set of courses repeatedly, but wait until after you have tenure before you branch out too much.

Sometimes it is not possible to limit the number of different courses you have to teach. This is particularly true in smaller departments. Still, your friends and faculty from your graduate department have taught a lot of different classes and could be prevailed upon to share some materials. A quick search online might also help. My point is that you do not need to start from scratch.

Universities now expect faculty members to do more than just give lectures. Active learning, simulations, bringing research into the classroom, and flipped classrooms are increasingly common and expected. These kinds of innovations can be demanding, particularly the first time you try them. Again, you can find resources online, but most universities also have some sort of teaching and learning center on campus which is there to help instructors be more effective. You should use those resources while you are a graduate student in your own department as well as when you become an Assistant Professor in your new department.

Fortunately, good research shows the benefits of working in teams, which is also a skill increasingly valued by employers. Thus, one way to save some time is to have your students work in groups. They will benefit, and you will have fewer projects to grade.

Many departments offer a one-course reduction in teaching to newly hired Assistant Professors to be used in their first year. Many people use it in their first semester, but I frequently recommend the second semester. The first semester of a new job is already disruptive. Since research doesn't often have fixed firm

deadlines, it is easy to put off (just like the dissertation can be in grad school). Teaching, however, stops for nothing. The need to prepare for every class requires you to get that work done. Given that moving is disruptive to research anyway, I suggest saving the course off until the Spring. By then, you will be in a more settled routine. You will have more time to focus on ideas. Try to make what you teach in the Spring a repeat of something you just taught in the Fall. This will save you tons of time.

Many departments also conduct a third-year review of Assistant Professors as part of advising them about their progress toward tenure. The next section is devoted to the tenure process, so here I just want to point out that many departments also provide time off from teaching for successfully completing a third-year review. This is incredibly valuable time, to be used to help make that last big push toward tenure. Do not let other things distract you, as this time will go by much more quickly than you imagine. If your department offers something like this, spend some time planning for how to use that time most effectively. By that I mean focusing on activities that will yield publishable papers within the next 12 to 24 months.

Lastly, you should avoid taking on too much departmental or professional service. It's fine to do your part and be a good team player, but an Assistant Professor should not be in charge of anything. Besides, it is a good idea to observe and learn in these settings before taking on any substantial responsibilities.

15.3 The Tenure Clock

It is good to know the tenure expectations in your department, but your real goal is tenure in the profession. So what if your department doesn't care if you publish in good journals or not – you should. You want to keep your professional options open, so the best way to do that is having the kind of record that would be successful at lots of places.

In fact, when you go up for tenure, your department will ask several scholars at other universities who work in the same subfield as you to write letters evaluating your research. These are often leading scholars at top universities. Oftentimes, they will be asked explicitly to compare you to other scholars at about the same

point in their careers as are you, and many times letter writers are asked whether they believe you would earn tenure in their department. This reinforces the idea that your goal is tenure in the profession and not just tenure in your department.

The other critical factor to keep in mind is that the tenure clock is nearly a year shorter than advertised. Universities differ somewhat on what the normal time in rank as an assistant professor someone spends before going up for promotion to associate professor with tenure. Most commonly, you would go up for promotion during your 6th year. That means that the decision-making process unfolds during that 6th year, often starting in September of that year. This often means that in May or June at the end of your 5th year, you must assemble all of your materials so they can be sent to potential letter writers. This means you really only have 5 years to assemble a record that merits tenure.

Generally, the process begins with a meeting of the tenured faculty in your department. They read your publications, review your teaching and service, and read the external letters. They will then vote on whether or not to recommend you for promotion with tenure.

The result of the vote, often accompanied by a letter from the department chair, is then forwarded to a college-wide committee. Depending on your university, this might encompass just the social sciences or reach more broadly across all of the liberal arts and sciences. This committee will review your file and vote as well. The result of this vote, often along with a letter from the Dean, gets added to your file and is forwarded to a university-wide committee.

That committee reviews the file and votes. The result of that vote along with the recommendation by the University Provost then makes its way to the president or chancellor of the University, and eventually to the University Board of Trustees.

Promotion and tenure are not secured until the Board of Trustees signs off. However, the real decisions of consequence are typically made at one of the earlier levels. Most universities prefer that the home department can be trusted to make good decisions. The University would define the decision as good if the department gave a positive vote to a candidate that will easily pass the remaining levels of decision-making, but gave a negative vote to a candidate who would not pass the remaining levels. What a Dean or a Provost does not want is a department that votes yes regardless of merit, leaving it to the college/Dean or the University/Provost to make the hard decision to reject someone.

A candidate does not require unanimous support at every level, but even a substantial minority vote against the candidate at one level can spell doom at the next. Your department chair will know the norms at your university, but the best advice is to develop a record that would achieve tenure nearly anywhere. In other words, don't try to merely meet the minimum expectations at your university. Rather, you should seek to exceed them, making the decision about your tenure an easy one for every step of the process.

All of these decisions typically happen during your 6th year, which means you need to have a record that merits tenure assembled by the end of your 5th year. Of course, if something in your record changes (a paper gets accepted, a grant gets funded, you receive an award, etc.), your record can always be updated. Still, your external letters will only be based on what you have done up to the time they are written. In many places, external letters are considered critical to the process.

As if this were not enough pressure, keep in mind how long it takes for articles to be reviewed and eventually accepted for publication. Now that 5-year window starts to look even smaller. Many departments will conduct a third-year review of assistant professors designed to provide feedback on their progress toward tenure. Many also provide a semester off as part of this. If you get that time off, it is absolutely critical to make good use of it regarding your research productivity.

15.4 What Is a Tenure-Worthy Record?

This varies from department to department, so ask your department chair. Some departments have rather clear and strict formulas while others are much more vague. Some emphasize the quantity of research published while others stress the quality. Some departments give greater weight to books while others prefer to see articles published in top journals. Some departments will count chapters published in edited volumes as similar to journal articles, while others will hardly count such chapters at all because they are not refereed. The same variance exists regarding the evaluation of publishing an edited volume as one of the editors. Remembering that your goal is tenure in the profession, here are some suggestions.

Focus on refereed publications and university press scholarly books. Every

department and every external letter writer will place value on these two types of publications. I tell my students that spending time on anything else prior to earning tenure is a mistake. As noted, chapters in edited volumes and any other kind of non-refereed publication may not count at your university, and they often don't count at the types of universities from which your department might be seeking letter writers.

Don't co-author too much with your advisor or other senior scholars. Rightly or wrongly, it can raise questions about your ability to work independently. Co-author with your peers. You both get to put those papers on your CVs, and it is easier to make the claim that you made a substantial contribution to those papers. Co-authoring with graduate students in your own department while you are an assistant professor is often viewed as a positive because you are helping to develop that student. However, co-authoring with a graduate student can actually slow you down, so be careful to make sure that you get enough of your own work done.

It's less mandatory now, but it is still good to have something solo-authored. That is what your dissertation is for (though I've heard of the occasional advisor forcing his way onto a student's dissertation publications). The point of having some solo-authored work is to demonstrate your ability to be successful on your own from start to finish.

Some scholars, particularly those publishing in methods, publish papers in non-political science journals. This will be increasingly common with the continued growth of interdisciplinary research. Generally speaking, that can demonstrate how broad of an impact you can have as a scholar. However, the burden will fall upon you to explain to your colleagues just how visible/prestigious these other journals are. If you are in a political science department, however, most of them will expect that most of your publications are in political science outlets.

Effective teaching is increasingly important for earning tenure. This is particularly true at smaller liberal arts colleges, but you can be denied tenure for being a bad instructor nearly anywhere these days. Simply giving traditional lectures that generate mediocre student evaluations won't cut it.

Include some innovations in your teaching. Bring in real research and active learning. Flip the classroom. Consider experiential learning. If you can, try to teach the same classes over and over in order to save time, but that makes investing in each course to make it successful worth it.

Most universities have some facility on campus to help faculty improve their teaching. You can also work with current or former colleagues to develop a course together. Borrow materials from others and share yours with them. We co-author research papers on a regular basis – why not co-author classes as well?

If you are not sure if you are doing the right things to earn tenure, just ask. Most departments require assistant professors to have an annual meeting with the department chair. Use that to gain meaningful feedback. Ask other tenured professors in your department for feedback. Ask your old graduate school advisor or others in the discipline whose opinions you respect. Your department wants you to be successful, and the pursuit of tenure is not a mystery. Publish a sufficient amount of research in quality outlets, do a good job of teaching, and be a good colleague and you should be fine. If you just do the work, the tenure process will take care of itself.

15.5 Departmental Politics

My advisor once said the following to me as I was about to start my first job as an assistant professor. He said,"Go to department meetings, keep your mouth shut, vote your conscience, then go back to your office and work on your research." I can't say that I followed this advice particularly well, but it does have merit.

Most departments are open to input from junior faculty, and I have never heard anyone say in a promotion/tenure meeting that they were voting "No" because someone was too outspoken. However, I have heard of situations where senior colleagues did not treat their untenured colleagues very well. It won't take long for you to learn the culture of your department on this front. Still, show some respect for those with more experience by taking your time and learning about the department you are in.

You will be conditioned to think that things should work in your new department the way they did in your graduate department, but things might be quite different. Different doesn't mean bad, however. Take some time to learn how they do things and understand why before you begin suggesting changes.

Some departments are quite collegial when making decisions while others are quite contentious. Some departments share broad consensus on goals and values

while others are divided into factions. In some departments, faculty scurry from office to office politicking to build a coalition in support of some action they favor. In other departments, people simply come to department meetings with an open mind and listen to their colleagues. Political science departments can be particularly subject to aggressive politicking as scholars try to put their knowledge of politics into action. I would advise untenured scholars to avoid aggressive politicking. Frankly, I would advise senior scholars to avoid it as well as it typically just wastes time and antagonizes others.

Another important lesson about departmental politics is learning to read the room. If your side of the argument is obviously going to win, there is no need to argue every point along the way. If your side is obviously going to lose, the same applies. Either way, my point is not to get distracted by tangents or by trying to win debater points along the way. Neither you nor your colleagues will find it beneficial. Think before you speak.

The most common phrase uttered at a department meeting in my experience has been some form of, "I would like to reiterate a point that was already made," followed by actually repeating that point. People with PhD's often think they have something interesting to say, and they like to say it. You should limit yourself to only those things that really are essential. If you feel compelled to voice support for something someone else has already said, just say, "I agree with Mary," rather than repeating what Mary just said.

On a related point, if you speak up about some issue in the department, don't be surprised if you get appointed to the committee charged with addressing it. As an assistant professor, you don't want unneeded committee work. By far the most important decisions that departments make are who to hire and to whom to grant tenure. If you have a PhD program, the second most important decision is who to admit to the program. Those are decisions where it might be worth speaking up.

I was more outspoken as an assistant professor than I should have been, but once I received tenure, another thing I routinely did was to tell assistant professors in my department that if they had a question or if they wanted an issue raised at a meeting, but did not feel comfortable, they could come to me and I would bring it up. More generally, you can always find a colleague in your department you can talk to about the nature of politics in your department, though your time is still probably better spent on your research.

15.6 Interacting with Students

Many young scholars had a professor in college or graduate school who was particularly influential on them. Young scholars often want to have the same influence on their students. This is admirable, but you have to remember that students come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them will like you, but others will not.

Many young faculty members want to develop friendships with their students. Again, this is admirable to a degree. There certainly is no justification for being arbitrarily unfriendly to students. Still, your job is to be their professor, not their friend. Besides, there is an inherent power inequality between professors and students that cannot be avoided. You cannot get too close to students personally without risking the actual or apparent abuse of this power inequality.

Specifically, don't try to or actually date your students. Many universities have policies prohibiting such relationships, but whether it is against the rules or not, it is a bad idea. I certainly know of several examples where professors and students ended up dating and even getting married. However, there is a real risk of exploitation in faculty/student relationships – even if unintentional.

As a professor, you want to be accessible and responsive to your students. Be sure to be present for your stated office hours, respond promptly to emails, and answer students' questions in the classroom. Be courteous and respectful at all times. Even if you need to fail a student from your class, you can do so with kindness and respect. When students come to you angry about a grade, do not match their emotional energy. Stay calm and professional.

The same rules apply for graduate students. One big difference, however, is the potential for collaboration on research projects. If you begin discussing a project with a student, be clear at the beginning about roles and expectations. If you expect to be a co-author on something, or want them to be a co-author on something with you, make that clear at the beginning. Obviously if they come to you for advice about an idea they have, you need to respect the fact that it was their idea. You should not exploit the power inequality in order to get your work done or your name on something where it doesn't belong. When in doubt, do what is best for the student and not what is best for you.

The number one complaint I hear from graduate students is that they cannot get their advisor or other faculty members to communicate with them. They won't

answer emails, provide feedback on papers, or respond to inquiries about classes. If you are an assistant professor and you just don't have time to work with the student, at least show them the professional courtesy to promptly and graciously tell them so.

15.7 A Lifetime of Learning

Embracing a life as a scholar requires embracing a life of continued learning. You must continue to read the latest publications in your field, and you must continue to learn new research methods as they emerge. The only way you can train students on the best ideas and methods that political science has to offer is to keep up-to-date with them yourself.

This can be challenging because you have a lot already on your plate with your own teaching and research. You don't get to report the new stuff you learned as part of your file for promotion and tenure, yet staying on the forefront of your field is critical for your ability to be an effective teacher and researcher. We must carve out time to do this.

One way I have done this has been to attend classes taught by my colleagues. In particular, I have done this for several quantitative methods courses. I didn't always do the assignments, but the structure and regularity of a course along with the public commitment to attend helped me learn enough about the basic material to be useful to me. Another way would be to set up a reading group of friends or colleagues.

At a more general level, political science is changing like every other discipline in at least two ways. First, there has been an explosion of digital data made available by modern technology, along with new methods designed to analyze it. Within political science, the computational analysis of digital text has become particularly important. Everyone in political science should learn something about this.

Second, research in every area is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. More and more, political scientists are working with computer scientists, environmental scientists, health researchers, or others to tackle complex research problems. We live in an interconnected world where the problems we study do not neatly fit into

single predefined disciplines. Young scholars in particular should begin considering interdisciplinary approaches to the problems they care about. The natural corollary of interdisciplinary research is team science. Again, young political scientists should begin thinking about fostering collaboration with researchers in other disciplines relevant to their research questions.

15.8 Maintaining Work/Life Balance

The flexibility of an academic career is both a blessing and a curse. It means you can take a random Tuesday off and go to the movies or the golf course, but it also means that you could spend all day Saturday working on a paper, preparing a lecture, or grading. Most people pursue an academic life because they love the work, but you need to be careful to not let the work become all-consuming. Most of this book describes how much time it takes to be successful. There are no shortcuts, and you must put in the time, but working efficiently is more important than just putting in long hours.

Balancing work and other aspects of your life become increasingly important if you have a spouse or partner. This increases dramatically if you have children as well. It is easy to let the short-term pressures of work intrude on other aspects of your life. Sometimes it is unavoidable, but you can take steps to try to manage your time.

In high school and college, I was a night person. I preferred to stay up late and sleep late. However, I married a morning person. For two years before starting my PhD and five years during my PhD, my wife was a special education teacher. This meant she had a particularly early start for her job every morning. As a result, I adapted to her schedule. I got up when she got up, and I worked when she did. I still had a few evenings and weekends where I needed to work, but I tried to schedule my work when she was working so our free time could also line up.

My son was born during the summer after my third year in the PhD program, and my daughter was born during the second year of my first job. We enforced bedtimes for our children that gave us at least an hour together before we went to bed. That meant that the kids awoke relatively early as well. This evolved into their normal morning routine for school as they got older. In other words, this

reinforced the importance of getting as much of my work done before 5 PM each day that I could.

My work still intruded on my family probably more than it should have, but trying to work when my family was otherwise occupied with work or school helped tremendously. Having a very understanding wife and children also helped! Still, an academic career can expand to consume all available time if you let it. Make time for your family, cultivate friendships and other interests outside of your professional life, and make sure you get enough sleep and some exercise. As I mentioned elsewhere, every university offers some sort of counseling support for both students and faculty. If you are struggling, seek help. These can be difficult waters to navigate for anyone. It is a sign of strength to recognize when you are struggling and ask for help.

15.9 Conclusion

Being an assistant professor is much better than being a graduate student. You do have more work and responsibilities than you did as a graduate student. However, you also have more freedom, the chance to impact others with your teaching and research, and the pay is definitely better.

The keys to success as an assistant professor are the same as they are for a graduate student: 1) you must work hard and do the work (there are no shortcuts), and 2) you must organize and manage your time effectively. This chapter raises a number of additional considerations, but these two are the ones that really matter.

As always, you are not alone in this process. Your advisor, friends, and colleagues in your department want you to be successful and are willing to help. What you need to do to be successful will not be kept secret from you, but you may need to take the initiative to ask for help and feedback. Remember, it is your career, so you should take responsibility for it.

15.10 Epilogue: Associate Professors

Success as an associate professor generally mirrors what it takes to be successful as an assistant professor. Associate professors will be asked to do more departmental service. Some universities also evaluate an associate professor's national reputation as part of what they consider for promotion to full professor. Still, if you figured out how to get promoted to associate professor with tenure, you already know all you need to do to get promoted from associate professor to full professor.

Unfortunately, too many people get stuck as Associates. You get more committee work. Maybe you milked that dissertation for all it was worth, but then you had difficulty figuring out the next project. Also, the pressure of the tenure clock has ended. If you fail to earn tenure in a timely fashion, you get fired. At most universities, you don't get fired for failing to get promoted to full professor. In fact, sometimes departments or universities are more willing to decline someone's case for promotion to full professor precisely because the stakes are lower. Denying someone promotion to full does not mean firing them – it just means delaying that promotion. Finally, at many universities, there is also more financial and other types of support available for assistant professors than there is for associate professors.

It is critical to get the next idea. Most tenure decisions at least consider evidence that another project beyond the dissertation is underway. They do this because failure to generate that next idea leads many scholars to flounder as long-term associate professors.

As I said, most universities won't fire someone for failing to get promoted to full professor. However, your pay raises will be lower, your career opportunities for moving to another university will be diminished, and your standing in your department and the discipline will be weakened. You will also have less credibility as a mentor and evaluator of the work of others.

Some departments have policies that require increasing the teaching load for faculty members who do not continue to produce research. Many universities also have some form of regular post-tenure review that requires faculty members with tenure to continue documenting their productivity. This profession values continued productivity. If you don't continue to be productive, you will quite

likely become increasingly unhappy and frustrated in the profession.

Chapter 16

Conclusion

16.1 Introduction

If you made it this far through the book, I am grateful. I hope at least some of the ideas and suggestions I presented prove to be helpful. Even if you find everything about my perspective to be wrongheaded, at least you spent time critically thinking about what you are doing. That might be the most important lesson of all.

Several common themes emerged across the chapters. Things like time management, hard work, striving for clarity in your written and verbal communication, and the fact that there are no shortcuts appeared often. Among those repeated themes, I think the most important one is to have a passion for learning. There is no substitute for that desire to learn, that curiosity that is never quite satiated, that need to question and explore.

Next in importance is the need for you to take ownership and responsibility for your education and your career. Your success depends first and foremost on what you bring to the table. It will be your work and effort that allows you to take advantage of educational and career opportunities as they emerge.

The ability to pursue a PhD and have a career as a professor is a luxury of a wealthy society. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to follow this path. I decided part way through my academic career that I really should stop

complaining about work, and I have mostly been successful at that (mostly). I teach mostly what I want, my research direction is entirely my own to choose, and I am immersed in an environment full of new ideas and interesting people. Sure there are problems with university bureaucracies, state legislatures, and the occasional colleague or student. Many college professors think they should be paid more, and most could make more money in the private sector. Also, grading sucks. Still, we chose this path, and the fact that this path is even available to us is remarkable. Billions of people have a much harder life – something we would all do well to remember.

Normal people do not pursue PhD's and academic careers – only the lucky ones do.

16.2 Being a Mentor

This whole book is really about the content of what a mentor might share with a graduate student or young faculty member. Thus, this short essay focuses on other aspects of mentoring.

One of my current graduate students, Andrew Tyner, is writing a dissertation about how the structure of political arguments are presented matters independently of their content for shaping the behavior of voters. I make a similar argument here – how you mentor someone is at least as important as the content of the advice you share (sorry for making you read a whole book about advice before making this point).

The most important thing you can do as a mentor is to invest time and effort into your mentee. The content of the advice you share is important, but demonstrating your genuine interest in and support for your mentee is what really matters. Students and young scholars will rise to great heights when they know that someone cares about them and their well-being. As in all things, actions speak louder than words.

I made a comment like this to a former student of mine who asked me about mentoring his students. He responded with agreement. In particular, he noted that many times his students fixed problems or made advances on things that he had not suggested while in the process of responding to things he had suggested. He

attributes this at least in part to his students rising to the challenge and responding to the time and effort he has put into them. I agree.

This story also illustrates how important it is for mentees to take responsibility for their own work and their own success. As a mentor, you must focus on helping your mentee build their own skills and capacity. You cannot simply do it for them. An old adage (of contested origin) comes to mind: give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them how to fish and you feed them for a lifetime. Inevitably it will take longer to teach someone to do something rather than just doing it yourself, but that is failed mentorship.

Demonstrating through your own actions what you want a mentee to do is always better than simply telling them. Another old adage – do as I say and not as I do – rarely works. I know personally that I have fallen short of this goal in many ways. However, I hope I at least demonstrated hard work, a commitment to others, and good humor to my mentees.

One of the best concrete actions you can take as a mentor is to set a regular schedule with tangible tasks and deadlines for your mentees. I routinely established a schedule of weekly meetings with graduate students I advised on either their masters thesis or doctoral dissertation. I have mentioned elsewhere the bi-weekly dissertation working group I helped launch and lead as well. Providing structure like this reinforces two major themes of this book: 1) you must work every week if you're going to be successful – there are no shortcuts, and 2) effectively managing your time will dramatically increase your productivity.

This book is about providing general advice that I think might be useful to just about anyone. However, a critical component of effective mentoring is adapting to the individual skills and needs of each mentee. You also must consider the individual psyches of your mentees. Some respond well to criticism while others need much more positive affirmation. Some students are good writers, some are best at research design, and still others are best at methods and analysis. Some need to be encouraged to be more bold, while others need to learn more humility. I was fond of saying in methods classes that all things interesting in life have variance. Mentees are very interesting.

Of course, there are advisors who see it as the responsibility of the mentee to adapt to the advisor rather than the reverse. In my mind, that attitude and behavior falls outside the definition of mentorship. Mentorship is about advancing

the interests of others. It is about taking pride and finding joy in their achievement moreso than your own. Mentorship is a call to service. Effort in the service of others is always more rewarding than effort in service of one's self.

16.3 The Last Word

I know that I have fallen short of my own advice on many occasions. That includes holding to the ideals that I believe should guide a good mentor. Still, I believe I have been better than I would have been had I not at least tried to pursue these ideals. I guess if you want the real scoop, just ask my students! Pursuing a PhD in an academic career took a lot of time, support, and hard work, but for me it is worth it. It has truly been a labor of love!

Epilogue

In case you read this book without having met the author, Tom Carsey, I am sorry to say you missed out. You missed out on knowing a funny guy with a salty sense of humor, a hard-working student and professor, a good father and husband, a loyal friend, and a supportive mentor. He loved to his core being every one of these. You can believe me, I had the pleasure of hearing all about it for nearly 33 years.

This epilogue... this last word... well, it wasn't very often that anyone got the last word on Tom Carsey. He liked to wait until the end of a meeting or class that he was taking and synthesize, aloud, all he'd heard and what seemed to be the real kernel in all of it.

It was rather serendipitous that he came up with the idea of this book and started it a few years before he got sick. He toyed with publishing it, and wondered which press might be interested in it, but he also thought about self-publishing or making it open source. In the end, it was his decision to create this as an open source document: a sort of legacy, a last word, to a field that he truly loved and to which he devoted his working life.

If you benefited from this book and would like to show a small token of appreciation, please consider donating to one of these funds that were near and dear to Tom's heart:

1. The Tom Carsey Award fund provides travel funds for graduate students to attend the State Politics and Policy Conference. Donations can be made at `https://www.apsanet.org/section22`. Scroll down to "Tom Carsey scholars," enter the dollar amount you wish to contribute, click on "ADD TO CART," and then enter your login credentials and click on "SIGN IN." If you do not have a website

account, click on “REGISTER NOW!” Click on VIEW CART at the top right of the screen to make the payment.

2. Indiana University’s Department of Political Science has established the Tom Carsey Distinguished Lecture Fund, which endows a visiting lecturer series. Donations can be made at `https://www.myiu.org/one-time-gift`. Note: use the ”search all funds” box using the search term ”Carsey” to find the fund.

Thank you, and best wishes to you on your journey.

Dawn Carsey
8-20-2020
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