Department of Political Science

The MIT Political Science Department remains one of the country’s leading departments. It continues to attract top-quality graduate students and junior faculty and serves as the home of several important educational and research activities.

Since 2010, MIT Political Science has gone through a continued rebuilding of the department to full staffing levels. With the exception of upcoming searches to replace departing faculty members in American politics (fall 2018) and security studies (fall 2019), all faculty slots are now occupied. The department continues to take steps to strengthen the graduate program, develop stronger ties with other departments and research initiatives at MIT, and foster the research creativity of its faculty.

This past year, the department focused on:

- Maintaining and strengthening its finances so that the department can support a healthy (and competitive) PhD program and hire to fill all open faculty slots.
- Reviewing and upgrading its graduate and undergraduate programs to ensure that students receive the very best possible education in politics, policy, and the underlying methods required to understand and evaluate competing political positions/policy options.
- Increasing the quantity and quality of scholarly activities occurring within and sponsored by the department in order to enhance both its visibility (within MIT, the discipline, and the world) and its intellectual community.
- Fostering the norms and culture of the department so that it can maintain a rich and nurturing intellectual community.
- Building stronger ties to other departments and research centers at MIT by both playing a greater role in various policy-related debates on campus and promoting collaborative projects and joint courses with faculty from other units at the Institute. Strengthening its ties and identification with MIT is key to its return to prominence.

Although the department still has much work to do, it has made significant progress on each of these tasks.

Fundraising

The department must continue to make progress on raising funds for its graduate program in order to reach its goal of admitting 13–15 students every year. Although permanent fellowship funds from external donors (Andronico Luksic, Jon Borschow, Nike Inc.) have gone a long way toward establishing three endowed graduate fellowships, the department still has a major gap and is working hard to close it. PhD alum Jesse White established a fund for graduate student support, and in fall 2017 the department hosted him at a luncheon at which he met the first graduate student to benefit from his generosity.
Faculty Searches and Diversity Initiatives
In AY2018, the department undertook a junior search for a position in international relations with a specialty in nuclear security. The department invited four candidates to give job talks. No one was offered the position, and the department plans to renew this search.

Along with attracting qualified underrepresented minority (URM) candidates to the department through its regular faculty search process, the department participates in the Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship program, which is sponsored by the provost and the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS). This fall the department was fortunate to host two scholars participating in this program, Patricia Posey (from the University of Pennsylvania) and Brianna White (from Northwestern University). In addition, the department hosted two MIT Summer Research Program (MSRP) students in summer 2017. This program brings minority, first-generation, and low-income college students interested in graduate school to MIT for research experience and mentorship. Kennedy Middleton (Spelman College) worked with Professor Lily Tsai and the MIT Governance Lab (MIT GOV/LAB), in support of Ph.D candidate Phil Martin, on political behavior in Cote d’Ivoire. Cayla Barry (Swarthmore College) worked with Professor Ariel White to review the literature on the role of race in local news coverage of crime and to collect crime data that could be compared with news coverage to determine the types of stories on which the media focus. Finally, to increase diversity in its graduate program applicant pool, Professor White publicized the program at the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute, an academic program for top URM undergraduates interested in political science careers. An African American graduate student recruited by Professor White at the institute is entering the program in fall 2018.

Intellectual Commons
The department continues to support a series of research-related activities, including the Political Experiments Research Lab (PERL), the American Politics Speaker Series, the Latin Americanists Working Group, and the Comparative Politics Speaker Series, that have all created a sense of intellectual energy and excitement within the department.

The Graduate Student Council (GSC), reconstituted a couple of years ago after an episodic earlier history, is now fully institutionalized and is a very helpful resource for graduate students and the department alike. The GSC serves as a platform for student programming and a forum for student concerns. The council runs a student-to-student mentor program, organizes social events, and co-sponsors (with the department) an annual dinner for female graduate students and faculty. This spring the GSCs Political Science Gender and Diversity Working Group conducted a department climate survey with input from students, faculty, the Title IX office, the Office of the General Counsel, and Institutional Research. Results from the survey were largely positive but revealed some problems with behavior among some graduate students inside and outside the classroom. The department is currently formulating training sessions for both faculty and students for fall 2018.

Professor Teppei Yamamoto launched the Political Methodology Lab to advance new computational and analytical research by department faculty, host a speaker series and workshops on advanced quantitative methods, and fund innovative data science projects by students. Adam Berinsky is lead on a multi-school effort focusing on political misinformation with faculty from the Sloan School of Management; the Institute for Data, Systems, and Society (IDSS); the Media Laboratory; the Department of Economics; and other units. Kathy Thelen is participating in the Institute’s Future of Work Initiative.

Both the MIT GOV/LAB and the MIT Election Data and Science Lab continue to grow in personnel and scope. Political Science faculty members (Chappell Lawson, Michael Piore, Richard Samuels, Suzanne Berger, Benjamin Schneider) continue to play a major role in the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI) program.

In short, the department is making progress on all of the key issues facing the department, issues it needs to address if it is to meet its goals of becoming one of the country’s top five departments and of reinventing the discipline.

Educational Initiatives
The department’s core mission is education, starting on the MIT campus and extending into the wider world. Fulfillment of that mission is centered on the undergraduate and graduate programs, both of which have established equilibria following the reforms of several years ago.

After steady improvements to the graduate program, the department has achieved a state of equilibrium; it is consistently offering graduate students the courses they need to make progress in the program and compete in the job market. The department’s political methodology classes are increasingly attracting students from other MIT departments as well as Harvard. It is also worth noting that the scope and methods course continues to produce great results in terms of students being awarded National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Program Fellowships. During the past year, two students received these fellowships.

On the undergraduate front, the faculty developed new subjects aimed at increasing enrollments during AY2018. These courses include STS.081J/17.395J Innovation Systems for Science, Technology, Energy, Manufacturing, and Health and 17.835 Machine Learning and Data Science in Politics. To increase participation in and the popularity of its applied international studies minor, the department requested and received Communication Intensive in the Humanities (CI-H) status for the 17.951 Research Seminar in Applied International Studies required class; subsequently, enrollment in the course grew from four students last spring to nine students this spring. The multi-country feeder course for MISTI students developed by Chap Lawson was successful again this year. Professor Evan Lieberman created and launched 17.571x Democracy and Development: Perspectives from Africa, an MITx online course, and integrated course materials into his 17.571 residential class to create a “blended” learning experience.

In addition to its own curriculum, the department is home to a number of internships and other “hands-on” experiences, mostly for undergraduates. These activities allow science and engineering students to engage with policymakers at home and with laboratories and industries abroad. Two are worth highlighting here, MISTI and the MIT Washington Summer Internship Program.
Although MISTI is formally affiliated with the Center for International Studies (CIS), almost all of the faculty directors of the country programs are from the Department of Political Science, as is the director of MISTI, Professor Lawson. In addition to being an important part of the education of hundreds of MIT students each year, MISTI serves as a model of international education among other colleges and universities with a large number of students in science and engineering.

The MIT Washington Summer Internship Program continues to allow MIT’s technically oriented students to experience how institutions vital to their later success operate. It also provides the federal government and other policymakers with early access to the best young scientists and engineers in America. Sixteen undergraduates from all five of the Institute’s schools (School of Architecture and Planning; School of Engineering; School of Science; School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences; and Sloan School of Management) were chosen to participate in summer 2018. They will be working at the US Department of Health and Human Services, the US Census Bureau, the US House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee, the District of Columbia Mayor’s Office of Planning, the Government Accountability Office, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Nuclear Threat Initiative, the Environmental Defense Fund, the World Bank Group, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Federal Reserve, the Aspen Institute, the Department of Justice Antitrust Division, and the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

Student Recruitment, Placement, and Enrollment

The department reviewed 384 applications for the PhD program, up 7%. In 2017, 13 of the 31 students admitted accepted the offer, with one deferring to 2018. Since one student had deferred from the previous year, the net incoming 2017 cohort was 12, just above the department’s ideal of 12. This year, the department again admitted 31, 12 of whom accepted the offer. With the deferral from last year, the incoming 2018 cohort will be 13, once again almost on target. Six members of this cohort are women. Significantly, the department had 18 URM applicants to the PhD program this year, up 28% from last year. The department admitted four URM applicants and succeeded in recruiting its top URM admit, who chose MIT over several competitors.

Graduating doctoral students continue to garner rewarding and prestigious appointments in higher education and industry. In 2018, the department placed students in tenure-track positions at Princeton University and the University of California, Berkeley, and in postdoctoral positions at Stanford University, the University of Toulouse, and Brown University.

In AY2018, undergraduate enrollment was 1,345, up from 1,168 the previous year. The number of undergraduate political science majors was 14, the same as last year. The number of students in the department’s concentration and in its three minors grew this year. There are currently 118 concentrators (in all graduation years), up from 88 last year, and 55 minorities overall (28 in political science, 13 in public policy, and 14 in applied international studies).

Graduate students received many prestigious awards in 2017–2018. Two students won NSF graduate fellowships (and one incoming graduate student holds one), two more were awarded Smith Richardson Foundation fellowships, and, finally, one received the Alexander George Award for the best paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association.

Faculty Promotions

The department is delighted to report that this year M. Taylor Fravel was promoted to full professor and Teppei Yamamoto to associate professor with tenure. In addition, In Song Kim was promoted to associate professor without tenure.

Faculty Awards and Grants

Notable awards, grants, recognitions, and important professional responsibilities given to faculty members during AY2018 include the following.

Professor Nazli Choucri was awarded grants from the US Department of Defense ($732,731) and MITx ($19,562) for her work on Analytics for Cybersecurity of Cyber-Physical Systems.

Professor Fotini Christia led a joint team of computer scientists and political scientists in a submission as part of the D4R competition sponsored by Turkcell, the largest cell phone provider in Turkey, to be granted access to cell phone data records from Syrian refugees in Turkey. The group was granted access to these data in May 2018 and plan to use the information alongside service provision data and other census data from Turkey to address issues regarding Syrian refugee integration in Turkey.

Associate Professor M. Taylor Fravel served his second and final year as an Andrew Carnegie Fellow.

Cecil and Ida Green Associate Professor F. Daniel Hidalgo won the 2017 James Caporaso Award for the best paper to appear in Comparative Political Studies.

Assistant Professor In Song Kim was awarded two honors: the Niehaus Center for Globalization and Governance Regional Political Economy Fellowship and the Michael Wallerstein Award for the best published article on political economy.

Associate Professor Vin Narang served as a nonresident scholar for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Associate Professor Richard Nielsen served his first year as an Andrew Carnegie Fellow.

Professor Kenneth Oye was presented the Order of the Rising Sun Gold Rays with Rosette Award by the government of Japan. He also received the Faculty Appreciation Award from the MIT Technology and Policy Program and the Joseph A. Martore Award for Exceptional Contributions to Education from IDSS. He was awarded a DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) Safe Genes grant through the Media Lab and a grant from the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment.
Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor Roger Petersen was the official principal investigator for two grants received by PhD candidate Andrew Miller, one from the National Institute of Justice and a second from the Templeton Foundation.

Michael Piore, David W. Skinner Professor of Political Economy (emeritus), received an honorary doctorate (doctorat honoris causa) in industrial relations from the Université Laval.

Ford International Professor Barry Posen helped secure a $1,846,200 grant from the Charles Koch Foundation.

Ford International Professor Richard Samuels began his first year of work on a Smith Richardson Foundation research grant (Study of the History of the Japanese Intelligence Community).

Ford International Professor Benjamin R. Schneider received fellowships from FAPESP (Brazil) and the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (South Africa) for sabbatical support in AY2019.

Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor Charles Stewart III served as an Andrew Carnegie Fellow. He was also awarded a grant of $25,000 from NEO Philanthropy.

Ford Professor Kathleen Thelen served as president of APSA. In addition, she received honorary doctoral degrees from both the London School of Economics and the European University Institute in Florence. She was awarded a grant from Columbia University and an Otto Mønsted Foundation Fellowship from the Copenhagen Business School.

Associate Professor Lily Tsai received the MIT Committed to Caring Award for Graduate Student Mentoring. As director of GOV/LAB, she was awarded new grants from Wellspring ($300,000), the Proteus Fund ($150,000), and the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office ($48,000).

Assistant Professor Ariel White was awarded a Russell Sage Fellowship for AY2019 and a SHASS research fund grant.

Alfred Henry and Jean Morrison Hayes Career Development Associate Professor Teppei Yamamoto received the Susan and Paul M. Sniderman Best Experimental Paper in Political Analysis.

Faculty Leaves, Departures, and Visitors
Professor Regina Bateson and Professors Christia, Nielsen, Stewart, and Samuels were on leave for the academic year. Professor Narang was on leave during the fall semester, and Professors Hidalgo and Tsai were on leave during the spring.

Faculty Research and Publications
The faculty of the Department of Political Science are prolific in their publication activity across a variety of topics. The faculty’s research is funded through a combination of outside grants and internal Institute funds. The following is a representative sampling of faculty research and publications over the past year.

Raphael Dorman-Helen Starbuck Professor Suzanne Berger presented her research at numerous events, including the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics conference in Lyon, France, and the Third Babbage Symposium on Manufacturing at the University of Cambridge. In addition, she spoke during the Vannevar Bush Lecture Series.

Mitsui Professor Adam Berinsky served on three editorial boards, as a reviewer for 12 publishers, and as editor of the Chicago Studies in American Politics book series. He published four articles, including “Rumors, Truths and Reality: A Study of Political Misinformation” in Science.

Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor Andrea Campbell produced three publications and the article “Policy Feedback,” which appeared in the Oxford Bibliographies in Political Science. She reviewed numerous book manuscripts and articles for publishers and journals and serves on four editorial boards. Professor Campbell shared her research at 17 different seminars, colloquia, roundtables, and discussions, and she presented “Politics of U.S. Taxation” at meetings of the University of Oxford’s Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Society and Department of Politics and International Relations.

Professor Caughey shared his research at 13 different seminars, forums, and conferences, including “China’s Calculus in the South China Sea,” presented at the Department of State in Washington, DC.

Professor Choucri shared her expertise and research at six different seminars and strategic sessions, including the launch of the United Nations’ Preventing Tomorrow’s Conflicts speaker series, held at the United Nations headquarters complex in New York City. She was a reviewer for five different journals and publishers.

Professor Christia shared her research at four talks and conferences, including “Sacred Sect: Explaining Sectarianism among Shiites in Iraq and Iran,” presented at the meeting of the Association for Analytical Learning about Islam and Muslim Societies. She also co-authored 10 different publications and papers.

Professor Fravel shared his research and expertise at 10 different seminars and colloquia, including as a participant in the U.S.-China Dialogue on Maritime Security Issues. He continues service on several national platforms, including the Maritime Awareness Project and the U.S.-China Crisis Management Project steering committee for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Fravel is an editorial board member and reviewer for numerous publications. He authored one book chapter and two articles.

Professor Hidalgo presented his research at three different seminars, including “Legacies of Authoritarian Politics in Democratic Brazil” at Harvard University. He co-authored the book chapter “Horizontal But Not Vertical: Accountability Institutions and Electoral Sanctioning in Northeast Brazil” (with Marcus A. Melo).

Professor Kim shared his research at seven different seminars, including “Measuring Trade Profile with Two Billion Observations of Product Trade” at the Technology University in Munich. Also, he was a reviewer for 11 different publishers and co-authored “Estimating Spatial Preferences from Votes and Text,” which appeared in Political Analysis.

Professor Fravel’s research received a Graham Foundation Grant and a John D. and Catherine T. McArthur Foundation (MacArthur) fellowship.

Student Mentoring. As director of GOV/LAB, she was awarded new grants from Wellspring ($300,000), the Proteus Fund ($150,000), and the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office ($48,000).

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Professor Petersen published one article and shared his expertise at seven speaking events, including as keynote speaker at the 2018 Boston International Security Graduate Student Conference (Northeastern University) and Understanding the Iraq War (Center for International and Comparative Studies of ETH and University of Zurich). Also, he participated in the Malleability of History project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Faculty Institute Service

An important aspect of academic life is contributing to the educational commons through service to the Institute. Members of the Department of Political Science have historically been significant contributors to these efforts across the Institute. The following is a sample of the contributions that political science faculty made to Institute enterprises in AY2018.

Professor Berinsky served as director of the Political Experiments Research Lab, as a member of the Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects, and as housemaster at Ashdown House.

Professor Campbell served her third year as department head and co-chaired the Campus Sustainability Task Force.

Professor Caughey served as the concentration advisor and was a Burchard Scholars Program Faculty Fellow.

Professor Choucri served on the department's graduate committee and undergraduate program committee, was a member of MIT's Committee on Academic Performance, and was a faculty member of the MIT/IC3 Consortium.

Professor Christia was an advisor for an Institute for Data, Systems, and Society PhD student and a co-advisor for a second IDSS PhD student. She was also a member of the Experiments in Governance and Politics Faculty Committee on Community Policing.

Professor Fravel served as acting director of the Center for International Studies, on the Seminar XXI executive board. Petersen served on 11 PhD committees, seven of those as the committee chair.

Professor Narang served as a member of 11 active PhD committees.

Professor Nielsen was a member of the IDSS Statistics and Data Science PhD Committee and presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff visitors to IDSS.

Professor Oye served as director of the MIT Program on Emerging Technologies and was a member of MIT's Center for Biomedical Innovation and Synthetic Biology Center. Also, he was a member of the SHASS Education Advisory Committee and the department's undergraduate program and graduate admissions committees.

Professor Petersen supervised the student-run Strategic Use of Force workshop and began a new informal working group with students conducting research connected to the conflict in Iraq. In addition, he served as a freshman advisor and on the Institute's ROTC advisory board. Petersen served on 11 PhD committees, seven of those as the committee chair.

Professor Posen served as director of the CIS Security Studies Program, was a member of the Seminar XXI executive committee and the graduate program committee, chaired a full professor promotion committee, and presented to the Swedish Defense Ministry on behalf of the Industrial Liaison Program.

Professor Schneider served as director of the MIT-Brazil Program and as director of graduate studies, was a faculty advisor for the minor in applied international studies, and was a faculty sponsor for the Latin American Working Group.

Professor Singer chaired the department's undergraduate program committee; the International Political Economy Speaker Series, and the Institute's Committee on Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response in addition to continued service as associate head of MacGregor House.

Professor Stewart served as the director of the MIT Washington Summer Internship Program.

Professor Thelen organized the comparative politics faculty search committee.

Professor White shared her research at seven different conferences, workshops, and panel discussions, including the Georgetown American Politics Speaker Series “Misdeemeanor Disenfranchisement? The Demobilizing Effects of Brief Jail Spells on Potential Voters.” She co-authored three articles, including “How the News Media Activate Public Expression and Influence National Agendas” in Science. White served as a reviewer for 11 different journals.

Professor Yamamoto spoke at seven different seminars and co-published three articles, including “Party Manifestos and Voters’ Multidimensional Policy Preferences: Identification via a Conjoint Experiment” in Political Analysis. He is an editorial board member of the Journal of Causal Inference and Political Analysis as well as a reviewer for several additional academic journals.

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Professor Fravel served as acting director of the Center for International Studies, on the Seminar XXI executive board.

Professor Hidalgo served on the comparative politics faculty search committee.

Professor Kim served as the Institute's faculty representative to the Harvard-MIT Data Center.

Professor Lawson was director of MISTI and the International Policy Lab. Also, he served as a member of the undergraduate program committee and as the public policy and political science minor advisor.

Professor Lieberman chaired the graduate admissions committee; convened the Poverty, Violence and Development Workshop; and served on a promotion and second-year review committee. He serves on the MIT Africa Advisory Executive Committee, the Campus Action Advisory Committee, and the faculty committee on campus planning and reviewed and consulted on faculty proposals for the International Policy Lab. In addition, he hosted the Boston-Area Working Group on African Political Economy workshop at MIT.

Professor Narang served as a member of 11 active PhD committees.

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Professor Stewart served as the director of the MIT Washington Summer Internship Program.

Professor Thelen organized the comparative politics faculty search committee, served as the department's equal opportunity officer, and was a member of the MIT Task Force on the Work of the Future. She launched both the Presidential Task Force on Advancement of Women in the Profession and an APSA committee research project on the status of women in the profession.
Professor Tsai served as the department’s director for graduate students on the job market. Also, she served on the provost’s working group on graduate student tuition models and the presidential committee on race and diversity and was an MSRP faculty advisor.

Professor White served on the graduate admissions committee and the Hahn-Siegelman Prize Committee, reviewed MISTI Global Seed Fund faculty applications, and traveled to the Ralph Bunche summer program at Duke to recruit undergraduate students from underrepresented groups for graduate study at MIT.

Professor Yamamoto founded the Political Methodology Lab and served on the department’s graduate admissions committee.

Andrea Campbell
Department Head
Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science