

Graduate Student Mentoring Program Overview

Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association

Additional Support Provided by the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy, University of Notre Dame

Overview

Sensing a need to provide a formal mentoring opportunity for graduate students interested in the study of religion and politics, the Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association has established a Graduate Student Mentoring Program (beginning in the fall of 2009). Brian Calfano (Assistant Professor of Political Science at Missouri State University) will serve as the program coordinator. The program's design and scope is the product of collaboration between Laura Olson, Kimberly Conger, Paul Djupe, Clyde Wilcox, Corwin Smidt, John Green, Dave Campbell, Quin Monson, Ken Wald, Elizabeth Oldmixon, Melissa Deckman, Ted Jelen, Joel Fetzer, and Katherine Oates. The program has been approved by the Executive Committee of the Religion and Politics Section. In addition to Calfano's work as program coordinator, Dave Campbell has generously offered monetary support for program functions via the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy at the University of Notre Dame. The mentoring program is also working to establish links with APSA's mentoring program via assistance from APSA President Michael Brintnall and the APSA Mentoring Program Coordinator.

The following is an outline of the program's basic structure and functions. Any questions, comments, or suggestions should be directed to Brian Calfano, Religion and Politics Mentoring Program Coordinator, at briancalfano@missouristate.edu

Program Oversight

The Graduate Student Mentoring Program of the APSA Religion and Politics Section will be overseen by the program coordinator in consultation with the section chair and executive committee.

Program Operations

Unless otherwise stated, all program-related operations will be conducted by the program coordinator and his staff at Missouri State University.

Program Scope

The program exists to facilitate connections between graduate students interested in the study of religion and politics and faculty mentors who may provide guidance in student development in this endeavor. The role of program coordinator will be primarily one of providing introductions between students and potential mentors. Interested students will be asked to contact the coordinator to enroll in the mentoring program. The coordinator will then interact with the student to get to know her/his potential research and/or career interests.

From there, the coordinator will suggest potential mentors to the student, and will send an introductory e-mail to the mentor inquiring as to interest in providing mentoring for the student. At that point, the coordinator's role becomes much more limited. Aside from periodic checks to see if contact between the

mentee and mentor has continued (which is more for bookkeeping purposes than anything else), the actual nature of the mentor/mentee relationship is entirely the product of the mentor and mentee themselves.

If mentees end up having more general questions about pursuing a career in political science, the program coordination with work with them to enroll in APSA's mentoring program while reevaluating their interest in and, suitability for, the section mentoring program. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the mentees receive the benefit of the APSA program while preserving mentor time for those students needing guidance on more research-oriented topics.

Program Eligibility

Any Ph.D. student enrolled in any college or university is eligible for the program *providing they are members in good standing of the Religion and Politics Section*. No exception to this eligibility requirement will be granted, and interested students must first register as section members before enrolling in the mentoring program.

Program Mentor Participation

All religion and politics scholars are welcome to make themselves available as mentors, although it would be appreciated if mentor volunteers are 1) section members, and 2) sure of their ability to commit to a mentoring relationship before contacting the program coordinator. A general call for mentors will be sent out by the program coordinator in early September 2009.

Potential mentors need to provide the program coordinator with their preferred contact information and method, research interests, and desired number of mentees. The coordinator will make every possible attempt to "spread the wealth" in terms of introducing mentees to specific mentors, but some mentors may be in higher demand than others due to their research interests and/or professor reputation. Mentors should communicate with the program coordinator about changes in their ability to take on a particular number of mentees.

Ideally, the program will have mentors available from all sub-fields. Realistically, supply and demand will dictate that certain fields and/or topic areas generate larger number of interested mentees and mentors than others. That said, the program will be better rounded if potential mentors can be tapped for all discipline subfields. The coordinator will work to ensure that at least some mentors would be available in fields where demand might be low, but existent. Efforts by section members and program mentors to recruit faculty mentors in underrepresented sub-fields are appreciated.

Relationship Monitoring

Once the coordinator introduces the mentee to the potential mentor, the relationship will be formed and sustained by the mutual agreement of the mentee and mentor. The coordinator does not definitively assign mentees to mentors. Instead, once a mentee and potential mentor are introduced via the coordinator, it is up to both parties to determine whether they will form a mentoring relationship. If they agree to do so, the mentor should inform the program coordination that s/he is entering into a relationship with the mentee so that appropriate records can be kept.

The program coordinator will check-in with both parties at particular intervals (most likely once per semester) to check on the status of the relationship should the parties agree to form one. However, the coordinator's role is not one of mediator. If issues arise between mentor and mentee that would make the continuance of a

relationship an unattractive option, the mentee may contact the program coordinator for possible re-assignment to a different mentor, but at no point will the coordinator act as an intervention mechanism for mentees and mentors. As stated, the terms of the mentee/mentor relationship are at the mutual agreement of both parties. The coordinator is only interested in knowing the current status of the relationship between the mentee and mentor.

Mentee Monitoring

As stated, the program coordinator will be in semi-regular contact with mentees enrolled in the program to check on the relationship status with their mentor. The coordinator will also inquire as to the mentee's growth and overall satisfaction with their participation in the program (although this will not be conducted as an evaluation of their specific mentor *per se*). If the program coordinator becomes aware of inappropriate behavior on the part of a mentee, he may, in consultation with the section chair and/or executive committee, remove the mentee from the program either indefinitely or for a set period of time.

Mentor Monitoring

The coordinator's monitoring of program mentors will also include regular opportunities for feedback on the program and mentee (although mentee-based feedback will be limited to questions of whether the mentee is meeting the basic contact intervals agreed upon by both parties—it will not gauge academic potential or progress). If the program coordinator becomes aware of inappropriate behavior on the part of a mentor, he may, in consultation with the section chair and/or executive committee, remove the mentor from the program either indefinitely or for a set period of time.

Collective Meeting Opportunities

As part of the mentoring program, and with the generous support of the Rooney Center at Notre Dame, several future meeting opportunities between groups of mentees and mentors will be sponsored. Although the specifics of these meetings have yet to be determined, they will most likely be held at either Midwest or APSA (or perhaps both).

Relationship to Other Mentoring Efforts by Section Members

The section mentoring program is not an effort to compete with existing mentoring opportunities (both formal and informal) that may be sponsored by section members and other interested parties. Section members are, of course, free to pursue mentoring relationships outside of the mentoring program. However, the program itself is intended to provide some degree of unity and organization to individual mentoring efforts that currently exist. As such, the support of section members is central to the program's overall and long-term success. Section members are encouraged to communicate their feedback on the mentoring program (including and especially ideas for changes to program content and procedures) to the program coordinator. Those sponsoring mentoring or academic workshops for graduate students are also encouraged to use the mentoring program coordinator as a way to advertise calls for applications and participation.