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To Twitter or Not to Twitter?

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Recent years have seen an increased presence of academics across rank, discipline, and institutions on *social media*, particularly *Twitter*. Popular hashtags associated with online academic communities include #AcademicTwitter and our community of focus: #PoliSciTwitter. Several subcommunities exist within #PoliSciTwitter, often divided along subfields (i.e., International Relations and American Politics) or shared recreational interests (e.g., #PoliSciRuns and #PoliSciCooks). Scores of political science graduate students have joined these spaces with their own Twitter accounts, leading to greater interaction with faculty and peers worldwide. However, many graduate students choose to not create Twitter accounts or to not engage in online academic communities. Several reasons account for this choice, including caution over future employers surveying their online presence as well as uncertainty over how to start “networking” on academic Twitter. This chapter further unpacks the choice to use Twitter examining arguments for and against its use by graduate students.

We argue Twitter can serve several purposes for graduate students, emphasizing that Twitter usage need not follow a single formula. Specifically, having a Twitter account gives graduate students the freedom and versatility to follow several different pursuits in line with their own goals. Students can promote their ongoing or published research to a wider audience of academics while also learning about new or understudied fields of research. This pursuit can result in students networking with potential co-authors and collaborators while also remaining an active member in their research field’s development. Conversely, students interested in non-academic careers can use the site to network with non-academic professionals. This networking is particularly relevant for individuals who want to transition from the academy to think-tanks and NGO positions, government positions, or other positions. A growing and accessible community of academics-to-practitioners is active on Twitter, providing tips and feedback on students’ non-academic job market materials as well as general tips with networking outside the academy.

However, we also recognize common concerns about Twitter raised by non-users and other issues graduate students should keep in mind while navigating the site. Non-users generally raise concerns with Academic Twitter becoming a “time-suck” in line with other social media applications and argue they would be less productive if they participate in #PoliSciTwitter. Non-users are further concerned with the implications of their online presence. These concerns include potential employers using students’ online content against them during the hiring process as well as digital harassment. (For additional insight on digital harassment, see chapter 26). In addition, non-users express uncertainty over

Twitter as a viable networking resource. While private social media usage has its own sets of norms, some non-users believe the norms behind managing more “professionalized” accounts are less clear. Ultimately, graduate students must weigh the pros and cons of setting up a Twitter account and decide what is best for themselves.

We proceed as follows. First, we further establish why Twitter has become salient to conversations about graduate school and academia more broadly. We use nascent scholarly research on academics’ Twitter behavior to highlight six main applications among political scientists. Following this section, we lay out the nuts and bolts of Twitter: how to set up an account, how to tailor your account to your research interests, how to reach out to fellow academics, how to set boundaries on your Twitter account, and how to use Twitter’s safety features to protect yourself. We briefly conclude with a summary of our main points.

Navigating the Bird App: Why Does Academic Twitter Matter?

For better or for worse, having an online presence is a baseline expectation for today’s graduate students. Candidates on the job market are expected to have an accessible online presence documenting their research, expertise, and skill set for potential employers to survey. While students typically use personal websites or LinkedIn accounts to meet these expectations, Twitter has served as a viable supplement or alternative. This development fits into a broader discipline-wide trend: political scientists’ Twitter use has grown dramatically since the platform launched in 2006.¹ Research conducted by Kim and Patterson (2021) finds that 41% of political science faculty at the top 50 US News and World Report graduate programs have identifiable Twitter accounts. Its microblogging format allows for many different types of engagement, from research conversations with fellow scholars to summarizing the politics of current events in real time. In short, Academic Twitter matters for graduate students because having an account is arguably becoming a necessity among political scientists.

Providing a Blue(check)²print: What You Can Do on Academic Twitter

Existing blogs and scholarly research suggest several main uses for academic Twitter. We base our uses for #PoliSciTwitter on research outlining seven networked practices of scholars on social media. These practices include kinship in community, self-directed learning, digital norms, navigating context collapse, career advancement, reputation management, and risk versus reward assessment (Pasquini and Eaton 2021). These practices are highlighted by Twitter users and non-users alike as motivations for their social media decisions. We suggest these practices are applied to at least six goals among political science graduate students: finding research, promoting research, asking for advice, networking, finding jobs, and teaching. Below we unpack each goal and offer practical tips and suggestions.

Finding Research

Graduate students have several useful resources for finding research relevant to their interests. Being an avid research consumer helps graduate students become better research producers, and Twitter can serve as a great means to stay up-to-date with work in your subfield. We recommend following all major political science journals and subfield-specific journals for your area of interest. For instance, the *American Political Science Review* (@APSR), *Comparative Politics* (@Journal_CompPol), and *International Security* (@Journal_IS) all manage active accounts. These accounts tweet out studies from their latest issues, making them rich resources for up-to-date work. We also suggest following scholars at all stages who work on your area of interest as well as academic blogs which regularly tweet out posts. Other accounts like @PoliSciRes automatically retweet any tweet containing #polisciresearch. You can put all of these resources into a “list,” which allows you to quickly glance through any research updates separate from your main Twitter feed (Twitter 2021).

Promoting Research

Students can use Twitter to raise awareness of their own projects and promote their work. Graduate students can opt to post research findings for a non-academic audience and walk through some implications of their work. Tweeting about your working papers and publications helps other political scientists to find you and your research. When tweeting, graduate students should summarize their research in a short thread with their research question, main contributions, and some implications (Taylor & Francis Author Services 2021). Recent research by political scientists finds that those who tweet about their research are more likely to be cited by others (Klar et. al 2020).

Like expectations for having an online presence, expectations for scholars to produce public scholarship have grown over time. Public scholarship includes different forms of public engagement, such as producing written work with outlets like the Washington Post's blog *The MonkeyCage* or *Political Violence at a Glance* or giving interviews to media outlets about one's research (Iber 2016). Graduate students can use Twitter to circulate their public-facing publications to a broader audience, often with a thread about the article's main arguments.

Asking for Advice

Graduate students are constantly learning and evolving, and Twitter offers an informal way to ask for help outside of your home institution for a variety of issues. We have observed graduate students requesting assistance concerning research and methods, the job market, pedagogy, and various discipline-specific problems. For instance, students can post questions to resolve coding issues, to find datasets, or to direct them towards bodies of literature they are unfamiliar with. Candidates on the job market can also reach out to faculty members or postgraduate individuals from other institutions for additional perspectives on their job market materials.

Many graduate students seek advice on coping with graduate school stressors, including feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome, drifting during the dissertation phase, and uncertainty over financial support. During the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, we witnessed several informal groups emerge across *#PoliSciTwitter* where students and faculty alike could check in to alleviate isolation by holding informal Zoom hangouts and writing sessions. For many, sharing their stressors on Twitter reminds graduate students they are not alone on the PhD journey. (For further insights, see chapter 63).

Using Twitter to find solidarity and support is particularly relevant for graduate students from underrepresented groups. The site allows informal networks to emerge between graduate students passing tips and advice along about their own experiences navigating graduate school. When seeking advice, you can either tweet at the person or direct message them (where possible). Direct messaging scholars on Twitter can feel less formal than email and allows for casual conversation prior to a more formal meeting. Even commenting on scholars' Tweets and ongoing threads is a valuable way to offer your perspective and garner advice at the same time.

Networking

Twitter can serve as a resource for informal networking across the political science discipline and beyond (Drutman 2016; Kim, Lebovits, and Shugar 2021). While we acknowledge that Twitter networking is more informal than spaces such as LinkedIn, this does not diminish its value as a resource to connect with other professionals. In fact, the informal nature of Twitter engagement—as mentioned above—makes networking there more accessible than other more formal spaces. Broadly, students can integrate many of the same tips presented above (following relevant peers, scholars, journals, and outlets) to begin networking.

Graduate students can use several other available resources to maximize their networking potential on Twitter. Virtual writing and workshop groups based on subfield or topic are often formed on Twitter, allowing students to engage with scholars within their subfield or topic. Several Twitter accounts focus their networking efforts on underrepresented scholars, such as *@1stGenScholars*, *@POCalsoknow*, *@womenalsoknow*, and *@Jam3a_MENA*. *POCAlsoKnowStuff* and *WomenAlsoKnowStuff* allow students to log their name, rank, and expertise so that employers and media outlets looking to integrate under-

represented viewpoints can find them more easily as well. These accounts also tweet out the achievements and work of underrepresented students, broadening their outreach.

Finding Jobs

While Twitter is only one place to find academic jobs - the APSA job website, group listservs, and spreadsheets created and shared by current job market candidates are all invaluable sources—political science faculty increasingly share job postings via Twitter. Twitter job posting has become institutionalized over the last year, with the @PoliSciJobs account automatically retweeting any tweets containing #PSJMinfo, #PolSciJobs, #PoliSciJobs or #PoliSciJobMarket. Some faculty use Twitter to increase transparency in the job market by sharing their institution's progress on the job search and when their shortlist candidates have been selected. Some faculty also offer to review job market materials for first-gen and underrepresented scholars via Twitter, an offer we encourage graduate students to take.

On-the-market candidates can use Twitter to find alternative academic jobs in government and policy, in the private sector, and in NGOs and think-tanks. Through their own accounts, these employers also post job opportunities on Twitter prior to other outlets, giving followers an acute advantage. Similarly, graduate students can attract attention from different private sector organizations by posting their expertise or recent public engagement work, as mentioned above. Some Twitter accounts, such as @AltAcJobs and @HireHigherEd, provide job postings for relevant alternative academic jobs and send out newsletters with advice on navigating the non-academic job market. Other resources include accounts by individuals who successfully transitioned from the academy to industry and offer tips for others interested in alternative academic careers. (See chapter 41 on non-traditional options.)

Teaching

Finally, graduate students learn about how to improve their teaching on Twitter. Scholars often tweet what strategies they have found successful in the classroom or share their course syllabi, among other resources. Graduate student instructors may also use Twitter with their own students as a pedagogy tool, asking students to respond to Twitter polls or to hashtagged threads as part of their coursework (Blair 2013). For instance, Sweet-Cushman (2019, 763) found using Twitter in the classroom “provides a pathway for enhanced media literacy and deeper learning, makes learning about an issue more appealing, and engages students who are less interested in a traditional classroom delivery.” Finally, graduate students can request guest lecturers with expertise on specific topics. This model can be particularly helpful for graduate students teaching a course for the first time or for those who want to give peers an opportunity to share their expertise with undergraduates.

Twittering Away: Account Setup, Boundaries, and Safety

For non-users who are considering whether to join #PoliSciTwitter, or for current users who are reassessing their accounts, we suggest using a checklist (Rust 2019; Academic Positions 2018) like the one below to ask yourself how and why you would use Twitter.

Would I (or do I) use Twitter to:

- Keep up with news, research, conference, funding, and/or job opportunities?
- Promote my own research?
- Find and share teaching and pedagogy tools?
- Bridge disciplinary boundaries with scholars from related fields?
- Network with political scientists or non-academic professionals?
- Ask for advice about graduate school life or research?
- Share parts of my life outside of academia?

If you will only use Twitter for one or two of these purposes, alternative tools are available, which makes setting up an account unnecessary. For instance, you can create a website to promote your research and

teaching. You can sign up for email alerts about new publications in journals and conference solicitations. These are good practices regardless of whether you set up a Twitter account.

If you will use Twitter for multiple purposes, we suggest that you set up an account and tailor it to fit your goals. First, choose a Twitter handle (your username) that you would feel comfortable including on your CV. Write a short biography with your institution, subfield and topics of interest, and state you are a political scientist specifically to increase engagement. Include your website on your profile if you have one (Morajad 2020). Finally, select profile and banner photos that reflect who you are. Once your profile is set up, start by following political science journals, professional associations, and relevant workshop series. Use follower lists from these accounts to find faculty and graduate students working in your area. Hashtags like *#poliscitwitter*, *#polisciresearch*, and *#poliscicooks* can help you find other political scientists you want to connect with. You should also be mindful to promote accessibility and inclusivity when you tweet. Remember to caption images, include links to sources, reference someone's Twitter handle if they have one, and other citation practices to ensure many people can engage with your account.

If you set up an account, you must learn Twitter's safety features and use them to protect yourself (Doerfler et al. 2021). Muting, unfollowing, blocking, reporting, ending location sharing, and other tools within Twitter all exist for a reason. Junior scholars working on sensitive topics must utilize safety features like locking your account and restricting direct messages to protect them from attacks from state and non-state actors alike (Cox 2020). Using Twitter can lead to harassment from individuals to hate groups. Underrepresented scholars—women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ individuals—are more likely to be harassed and to experience more severe harassment (Gosse et al. 2021). One of the authors has co-written a list of recommendations for how to protect yourself online before you publish an article³ and for your online presence in general.⁴ Relatedly, while there is debate over whether Tweets harm one's job prospects, using Twitter could contribute to employers discriminating against you for your online presence (Bateman 2017).

Set boundaries on your Twitter usage across multiple domains. Ask yourself if you would verbally say your tweet to someone's face. Recognize power dynamics, such as between you and your undergraduate students, and never punch down. You should also ask yourself if you want a piece of personal information about you in public. You can consider setting up separate personal and professional accounts if you want to share vulnerable details about your life. Balancing between wanting to share one's personal experience and finding solidarity with others while protecting your physical and emotional well-being is crucial. Moreover, Twitter is addictive (Brewer 2019; Flanagan 2021) and can take up a lot of time. Use apps like Freedom⁵, StayFocus⁶, and RescueTime⁷ to moderate your Twitter use. Alternatively, you can deactivate your account for short periods to meet deadlines (Meyer 2021). These boundaries help ensure a healthier relationship to Twitter.

To Tweet or Not to Tweet: It's Up to You

We emphasize that you do not have to be on *#PoliSciTwitter* to succeed as a political scientist. Graduate students who do join Twitter often find resources and communities they lack in their home institutions. These connections are often deeply rewarding and enriching, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Alternatively, graduate students can still obtain some of the benefits of Twitter, such as finding research and job opportunities, without having an account. Journal profiles and many scholars' profiles are public; you can make a list of helpful accounts that you check from time to time. Whichever decision you make now, you can always change your mind in the future.

Endnotes

- 1 Twitter does not have a built-in way to track and show trends of specific hashtags over time. Google Trends (<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2006-01-01%202021-10-27&geo=US&q=Academic%20Twitter,Political%20Science%20Twitter>) searches for AcademicTwitter and PoliSciTwitter increased initially and have been steady over time.
- 2 Verified accounts on Twitter have a blue check mark (<https://help.twitter.com/en/managing-your-account/about-twitter-verified-accounts>).

- 3 Cantwell, Devon, Elizabeth Meehan, and Rosalie Rubio. 2021. "Pre-Publication Digital Harassment Prevention Checklist." Retrieved January 3, 2022 (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D1JaqTJRCiP8YAqLjN4x7364BX8P8iq_N-3d-9MqoQM).
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