

Dear Friends,

Happy 2023 to all. The Department of Political Science has had a great year since I last wrote, and I am delighted to share that good news about our faculty, students, and programs with you now.

Let me begin with an update on the Susan Welch Liberal Arts Building. A [groundbreaking ceremony](#) held last August included new University President Neeli Bendapudi, Dean Clarence Lang, and Gene and Roz Chaiken—the benefactors whose gift allowed the building to be named in honor of Susan. Scheduled for completion by September 2024, the Welch Building will be the new home for our department as well as the departments of Anthropology and Sociology and Criminology; the schools of Public Policy and International Affairs; and several institutes and centers, including the McCourtney Institute for Democracy. Renderings of the building and more details can be found [here](#).

Turning our attention to faculty, I am pleased to welcome two new assistant professors to our ranks: [Daniel Tavana](#) (Ph.D., Princeton University), whose research focuses on elections, public opinion, and the dynamics of political opposition in the Middle East, and [Giancarlo Visconti](#) (Ph.D., Purdue University), who studies political behavior and the political economy of developing countries, with a regional focus on Latin America. These two new faculty have already made a big impact on our department through their scholarship as well as through teaching and mentoring students.

Meanwhile, our current faculty members continue to distinguish themselves in myriad ways; here are a few highlights:

- [Ray Block](#), associate professor of political science and African American studies and the Laurence and Lynne Brown-McCourtney Career Development Professor in The McCourtney Institute for Democracy, has been named [RAND Corporation's inaugural Michael D. Rich Chair for Countering Truth Decay](#). As the nonpartisan organization's inaugural Rich Chair, Ray will build RAND's "Truth Decay" agenda, develop funding streams, and expand the impact and reach of research focused on restoring the role of facts and analysis in public life. We are delighted for Ray as he takes on this new challenge while remaining a vital member of our faculty.
- Professor of Political Science [Michael Nelson](#)'s book, *Judging Inequality: State Supreme Courts and the Inequality Crisis*, received an award that recognizes the best political science books published on the subject of U.S. state politics or policy in the preceding three calendar years.
- Teaching Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies [Amy Linch](#) won the college's 2022 Outstanding Faculty Adviser Award for her excellence in advising undergraduate students.
- Congratulations to [Zaryab Iqbal](#), associate professor of political science and Jewish studies, who was named [associate dean of the Schreyer Honors College](#).
- [David Lowery](#), distinguished senior scholar of political science, received the 2023 Manning Dauer Award from the Southern Political Science Association. The biennial award is given to a political scientist for exceptional service to the profession.
- *Religious Parties and the Politics of Civil Liberties*, a book by [Vineeta Yadav](#), associate professor of political science, earned unanimous recognition from the [2022 Stein Rokkan Prize](#) Jury of the International Science Council.

These and our other faculty members have contributed to our graduate students' success. In addition to landing tenure-track faculty positions at the University of Houston, Utah State University, the University of North Florida, and the University of Illinois Springfield—and positions outside of academe—our graduate students have garnered several accolades. For example, **Sangyeon Kim**, along with Professor [Bruce Desmarais](#) and a professor from the University of Essex, received an honorable mention for the John Sprague Award for their article, "Spatial Modeling of Dyadic Geopolitical Interactions Between Moving Actors." **Jia Li** received the Virginia Gray Graduate Student Research Award, which supported Jia's travel to the fall American Political Science Association meeting. **Seth Warner** received the College of the Liberal Arts' Susan Welch/Nagle Family Graduate Fellowship for his academic excellence. Two students won the college's Raymond E. and Roberta Lombra Outstanding Graduate Research Award: **Brandon Bolte** for his article on militia containment during civil wars; and **Christopher Willis** for his article on how political and social factors play a substantive role in determining whether state forces will engage in sexual victimization.

Turning the spotlight to our current and recently graduated undergraduates, here are a few highlights:

- **Nicholas Birosik**, who served as our spring 2022 Social Data Analytics major marshal, earned bachelor's degrees in Social Data Analytics and Political Science, with a minor in History, as well as a master of international affairs degree. He was a [Liberal Arts Change Maker](#) and is the founder and president of NicNac Charities Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to eliminating the digital divide and launching other nonprofits. Nic received the University's Usharni and C. Channa Reddy Mission Award, which honors Schreyer Scholars who best exemplify the mission of Schreyer Honors College through academic excellence, globalization, and civic engagement. Nic is continuing his nonprofit and grant writing work to jumpstart nonprofits and advocate for suicide prevention.
- **Emma Cohen** served as our spring 2022 Political Science major marshal. She earned bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Economics, with a minor in Statistics. A member of the Women in Economics Society and treasurer and event coordinator for Penn State's chapter of the women's health and fitness organization CHAARG, she also was a research assistant for [Professor Matt Golder](#) and an intern at the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development. She is now a consultant at Bates White Economic Consulting in Washington, D.C.
- **Ishaan Anavkar**, our spring 2022 International Politics major marshal, graduated with bachelor's degrees in History, International Politics, and Geography, with minors in Anthropology and Linguistics and certificates in Geographic Information Sciences and Human Geography. Ishaan was a maps and geospatial information assistant at Penn State's Donald W. Hamer Center and a geospatial data and product testing intern at RoadGoat. He is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Chicago.
- **Jacob Roth**, a fourth-year student majoring in Political Science, was [unanimously appointed to the South Whitehall Township Board of Commissioners](#) in December 2022. After graduating this May, Jacob will attend Villanova University's Charles Widger School of Law.
- **Luisina Kemanian-Leites**, a fourth-year student majoring in International Politics and Latin American Studies, [spent last semester in Santiago, Chile](#). While there, she participated in an

internship, where she worked with students from vulnerable communities who were Haitian, Venezuelan, and Peruvian immigrants.

In program news, we have launched a new dual-title doctoral program in African American and Diaspora Studies to add to our other dual-title programs in Asian Studies, Women's Studies, African Studies, and Social Data Analytics.

I continue to be invigorated by the energy and enthusiasm of our faculty and students, and I am looking forward to another productive year. Thank you to all of you who have engaged with the department; I hope you will consider engaging even more by [becoming a mentor](#), serving on a career panel, hosting interns, or providing financial support when possible. Please [reach out to me](#) with questions or comments, [visit our website](#) often, and let us know about your activities since leaving Penn State by clicking on the graphic below to submit your alumni profile. Be sure to follow us on [Twitter](#) and join the college's [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) alumni groups to keep track of what's happening in the department and across the College of the Liberal Arts.

Best wishes to you and yours for a happy and healthy 2023.

Sincerely,



Lee Ann Banaszak
Head, Department of Political Science
Professor of Political Science and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies