



ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



Greetings Geneseo Political Science and International Relations Alums!

We conclude a remarkable academic year. We made it! This was a time like no other. Socially distant, wearing masks, weekly testing, remote learning... oh boy. But we did it. A senior class graduated, we held various lectures, and conducted our senior awards and recognition ceremony. Though the conditions were challenging we were able to continue. We look forward to a return to normalcy

during the Fall 2021 semester. We hope you are doing well, like us looking forward to a return to normalcy, and able to reconnect with family and friends. This newsletter represents an effort by us to maintain connection to you. We hope you are well, and that you can maintain your connection with Geneseo.

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Department of Political Science and International Relations***

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How the Covid-19 Pandemic Affected Students: A Department Perspective

The Covid-19 pandemic played a significant role in the conduct of Geneseo during the Fall and Spring semesters of this academic year. Among those affected was obviously the Political Science and International Relations department, which saw classes being held in various formats such as face-to-face, synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid formats.

A survey sent across the department's student body was able to provide a glimpse into how the pandemic affected their learning experience. Out of the 33 respondents, approximately 15 percent were freshman, 24 percent sophomores, 36 percent juniors, and 24 percent seniors. Approximately 54 percent of respondents rated their Fall semester as either good or very good despite the adaptations that were requisite of a year riddled with a global pandemic. Ninety-four percent of the students said their professors were accommodating during the pandemic. One respondent said that their professors were "very understanding if [the student] was unable to make it to class."

Despite this, 49 percent said that their professors could have been more accommodating toward student needs, with the general consensus

being that the pandemic created increased stress toward hitting deadlines. This is evident given that 61 percent of respondents said that the Fall semester was more challenging than previous semesters. Once again, the culprit was generally that online classes made learning more difficult for students. Additionally, over 50 percent of students perceived their workload to be greater than prior semesters. Some students attributed this to reaching upper-division classes; others, however, attributed this to a disconnect between professors and their students where professors increased student workload because they believed students would have less work after everything was moved online.

Evidently, the Covid-19 pandemic altered the situation for students and faculty alike. The data obtained from the responses evinces the required adaptations that the pandemic created for students of the department. The pandemic created alterations in the usual conduct of the classroom environment which affected the department's student body in a way that hurt some students' ability to grow and develop their knowledge of the department's curriculum.

The January 6 Insurrection and Trumpism: American Democracy under Stress.

On February 3, the office of student volunteerism and community engagement along with the Political Science department hosted a forum that discussed the January 6 insurrection at the United States Capitol. Moderated by Garth Freeman, the Coordinator of the Center for Community, the panel featured four speakers: three faculty members and one student. Beginning with a brief introduction by Freeman which provided a timeline of the events that preceded the insurrection and its ramifications, the conversation began with **Michaelena Ferraro**, a Childhood/Special Education Major, English Concentration '21, President of the Black Student Union at SUNY Geneseo, and Chief Justice of the Student Court at SUNY Geneseo.

Ferraro described the racial motivations behind the insurrection. She also noted the prevalence of blue lives matter flags and police officers who



participated in the insurrection as well as the slurs that were hurled toward black Capitol police officers while on duty. Following Ferraro was **Jeffrey Koch**, the Chair of the Political Science and International Relations department.

Koch discussed the revelations of democracy's fragility in light of the insurrection. Koch pointed



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out that not only did Trump play a role in its occurrence, but so too did other political elites, each of which purported and promoted Trump's lies. Koch also noted the insurrection's racial motivation.

After Koch, **Kathleen Mapes**, Associate Professor of History, looked at US history and the events that occurred on January 6 mirrored past occurrences. Particularly, in the 19th century, North Carolina had their own "big lie" which aimed to keep African Americans out of the body politic. Leaders suggested that rapes would continue to occur if African Americans were included in North Carolina politics in order to ensure this lie's effectiveness. Mapes continued by looking at the racial tones that surrounded the January 6 insurrection.

Karleen West, Associate Professor of Political Science, closed the forum by talking about her

personal experience with the insurrection and how it compared to democratic breakdown in authoritarian regimes. West discussed Trump's disregard for democratic norms, exhibited in actions including calls to jail Hillary Clinton and his constant attacks against the media and freedom of the press. Dr. West discussed how authoritarians were able to rise in democratic regimes and maintain power. West also discussed how her mother participated in the insurrection, something that she also describes in an article she authored on syracuse.com. (Professor West's mother did not enter the Capitol).

A Q&A occurred after the speakers finished their dialogues.

If interested in watching this, a recording of the forum is featured on the Student Volunteerism and Community Engagement webpage.



Moderator: Garth Freeman

Participants:

Michaelena Ferraro: Childhood/Special Education Major '21, President of the Black Student Union, and Chief Justice of the Student Court

Jeffrey Koch: Professor and Chair of Political Science

Kathleen Mapes: Associate Professor of History

Karleen West: Associate Professor of Political Science

I've spent my career studying insurrection. Then my mom was in one (Commentary)



Like so many other Americans, my mom was radicalized by one of our country's major parties. It's time that the Republicans end their support of authoritarian tactics to ensure that citizens like my mom—and our

democracy—remain secure.

"Mom is safe. I just checked in with her," my sister texted me at 2:53 p.m. on Jan. 6, 2021. I had some idea why she was sending me this, knowing that my mom had flown across the country—in the midst of a pandemic—to participate in Trump's "Save America Rally" in Washington, D.C. My pulse raced as I checked the news to discover what we now all know too well—Trump supporters had stormed the Capitol to prevent the ratification of a democratic election. "Is she in the capital (sic)?" I responded. "Not inside," my sister replied.

Although our political views diverged once I started college, I had never been frightened by my mom's politics. My mom—a registered Democrat to support Ted Kennedy in the 1980 primary—began voting Republican in the Reagan era. But the 2016 election was different. My mom put a MAGA placard in her yard; I signed onto a prescient letter of concern written by political scientists warning of the dangers of a Trump presidency.

We got to this point because the Republican Party willingly chose authoritarianism over democracy when they nominated Donald Trump and openly manipulated the American people.

'Alternate facts' are propaganda

"News is not showing the truth," my mom wrote in response to my sister's inquiries about her involvement with the Capitol insurrection. "Only one side of capital (sic) some people tried jumping the fence." My mom was deep in the crowd that day and, thankfully, was not part of the cohort that stormed the building. Nevertheless, her willingness to doubt the truth rather than bear witness to an event happening before her has become a hallmark not just of Trumpism, but also of conservative politics. Since the 1960s, the Republican Party has adopted the strategy of deceiving voters to achieve their political ends, enabled by conservative news organizations, and bolstered by social media.

As I know too well from studying Latin America, aspiring dictators recognize the power of deceit. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was an expert on the manipulation of the media—and the truth. But he was also the victim of media bias. In 2002, Venezuelan conservative media claimed that Chávez supporters shot and killed opposition activists in a march on the capital. The media used the event to justify a military coup that removed Chávez for 47 hours, placing in office a candidate who was more palatable to Venezuela's conservative upper class. Despite documentary footage of the shoot-out that shows Chávez supporters were likely not responsible for the deaths, the anti-Chávez narrative, fostered by private media, was powerful. "It's not true," an international student from Venezuela insisted after watching the documentary, reminiscent of my mom's denial. Events leading up to the coup against Chávez remain hotly contested, fueled by the divisive political environment. Following the coup attempt, Chávez grew increasingly

extremist, and Venezuela's democracy was never the same.

What's incredible is that we have allowed outright deceit to become a viable electoral strategy for a mainstream political party in the United States. In any other country, we would have called it what it is: propaganda. No wonder my mom is suspicious of reality; she is the victim of a sophisticated campaign of misinformation backed by some of the most influential people in our country.

Trump as *Caudillo*

"You're fired!" Trump's voice echoed across my mom's living room, week after week. Trump doesn't read books? That's OK, neither does my mom. Trump ignores his advisers? My mom doesn't take crap from anybody either. As a long-time single mother that had lived on the verge of poverty, my mom admires Trump's lifestyle and identifies with his personality.

But Trump is what Latin Americans call a *caudillo*, an authoritarian strongman who uses populism and charisma to govern with an iron fist. Like other infamous *caudillos*, Trump capitalizes on his popularity to undermine democracy. Just as Juan Perón did in Argentina, Trump threatens to jail his opposition. Trump impugns the impartiality of judges, following the lead of Alberto Fujimori who dissolved the judiciary in Peru.

That the Republican Party welcomed a would-be *caudillo* to lead their party is not only shameful, it's dangerous. The GOP's willful ignorance of this fact in search of votes puts America in a class with fragile democracies around the world. It also



legitimizes Trump's unacceptable behavior for average citizens like my mom.

America deserves better

"We're good," my mom texted, having returned safely to her D.C. hotel on Jan. 6. But my mom isn't "good," and neither is our democracy. Using strategies that could easily be drawn from the playbooks of Latin American dictators, today's Republican Party not only radicalized my mom, it also brought about the greatest threat to American democracy in recent history. As a daughter, I am sad and frightened that my mom has been seduced into activities that undermine our democracy. But as a scholar who has spent my career studying political stability, I know that the future of our country requires Republicans in power to stop acting in their own self-interest, and start prioritizing our democracy. It's what the American people—and especially Trump supporters like my mom—deserve.

Reprinted from the *Syracuse Post-Standard*.
January 28, 2021

By **Karleen West**, Professor of Political Science
and International Relations at SUNY-Geneseo

Who Corrects Political Misinformation?

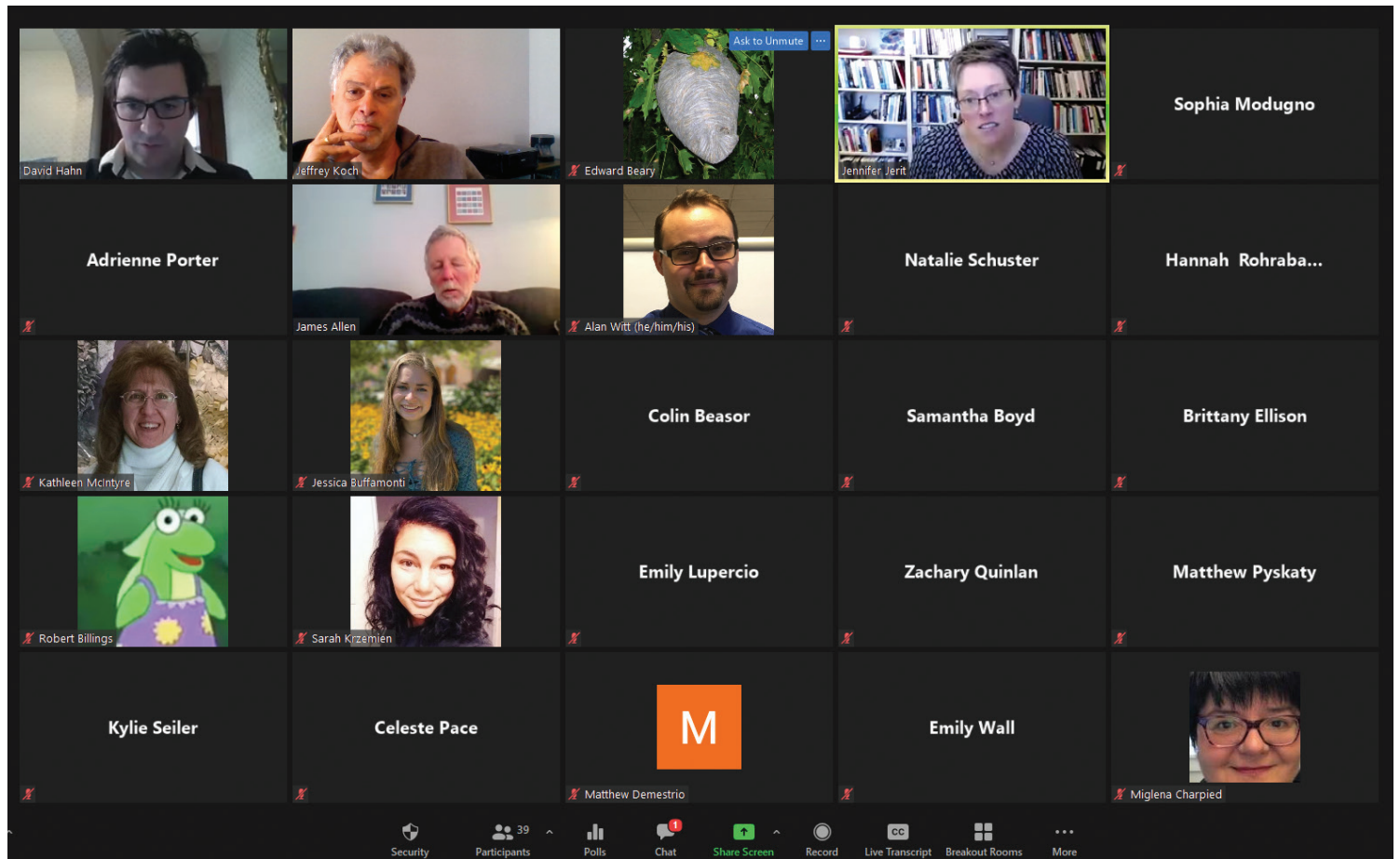
On March 17, Professor Jennifer Jerit of Dartmouth College spoke to Geneseo students and faculty on “Who Corrects Political Misinformation.” The talk examined the types of people most resistant to changing their primary beliefs when they are aware that they are misinformed. Jerit’s previous research has been published in *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, and other scholarly journals.

Jerit began by looking into misinformation and where the media and politicians’ rhetoric can disseminate misinformation. Jerit discussed that generally it is difficult to correct misinformed people’s false beliefs and that those same people are generally confident about their beliefs. Jerit used genetically modified foods in her research

to exemplify these traits, choosing to look into people’s beliefs on this topic because it is viewed as an apolitical topic. The talk mainly focused on how personal importance with an issue affects the effects of misinformation.

In her research, Jerit found that people with lower issue importance had greater likelihood of “correction” when their views were incorrect. In contrast, those with higher issue importance were less likely to observe such behavior and change their attitudes relating to the issue. Fascinatingly, these findings occurred even in nonpolitical issues which reveals how the bias of issues is a detriment to the correction of incorrect beliefs.

After Jerit concluded her presentation, Professor Koch moderated a Q&A period in which faculty and students participated.



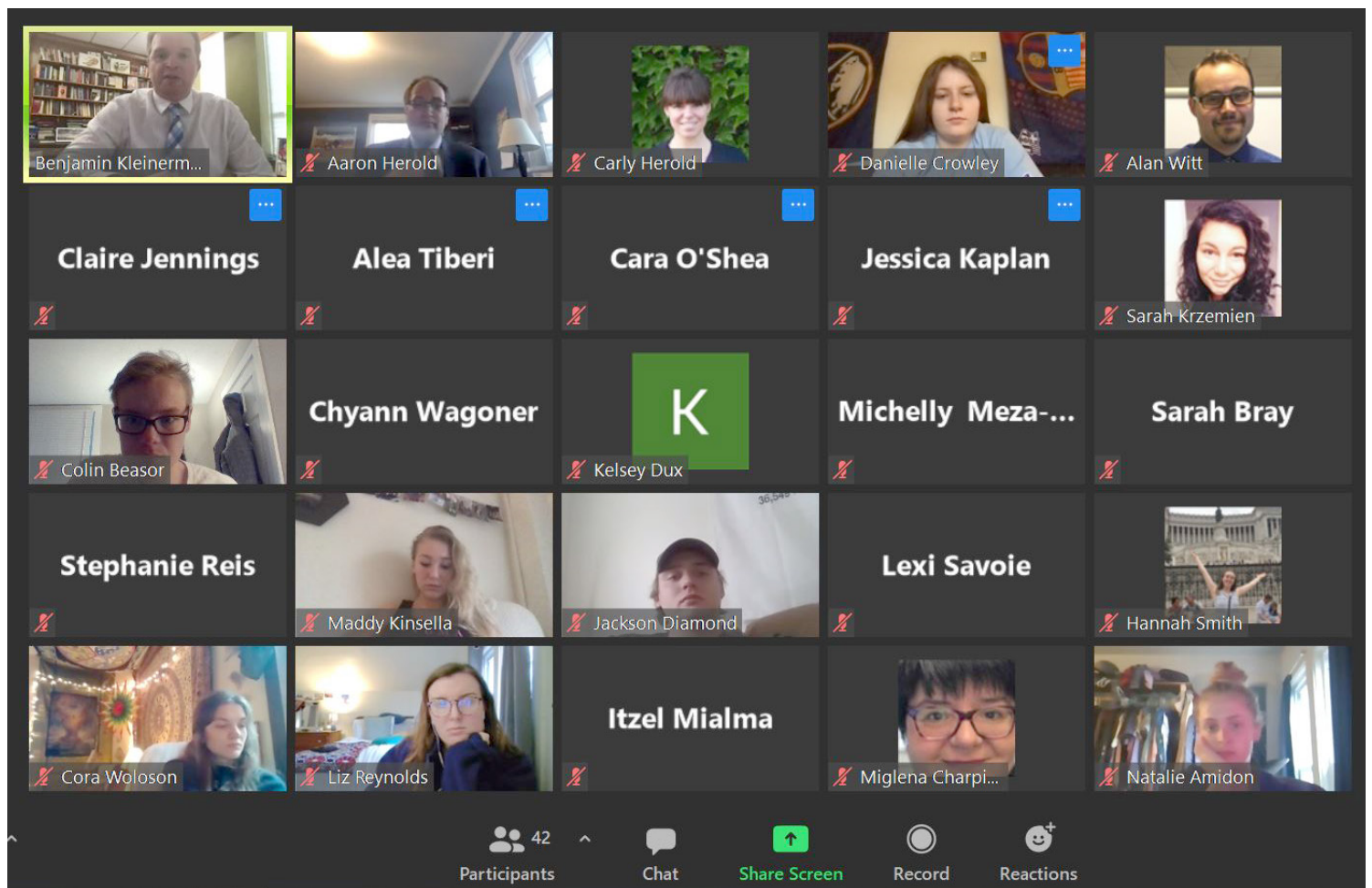
Crisis Presidency

On March 18, The Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy hosted Professor Benjamin Kleinerman, R.W. Morris Chair of Political Science at Baylor University, for a talk entitled "The Crisis Presidency." Kleinerman discussed a book he intends to write about the presidency, noting that the Trump presidency altered the direction he originally intended to take.

Kleinerman talked about the image that the president holds during times of crisis, explaining that most recent presidential candidates run on a platform that espouses their ability to fulfill this executive role and not necessarily on their legislative success. Kleinerman emphasized that the preservation of the regime relies on a president's ability to respond to political crises because people want a president who they feel can manage crises.

Thus, appearance is an important component that alters people's opinions on the presidency. Should a president fail in this regard, Kleinerman said, the people "fire" them (vote them out). The presidency, therefore, is fundamentally about their handling of various crises with this aspect making or breaking a president's success.

After Kleinerman concluded his presentation, Professor Aaron Herold moderated a Q&A session. This talk was a part of a series on The Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy at SUNY Geneseo which was established by Professors Carly Herold and Aaron Herold in 2019 and was conducted over Zoom. This was one event that occurred during the spring semester with the goal to "foster campus conversations about civic education and liberal democracy."



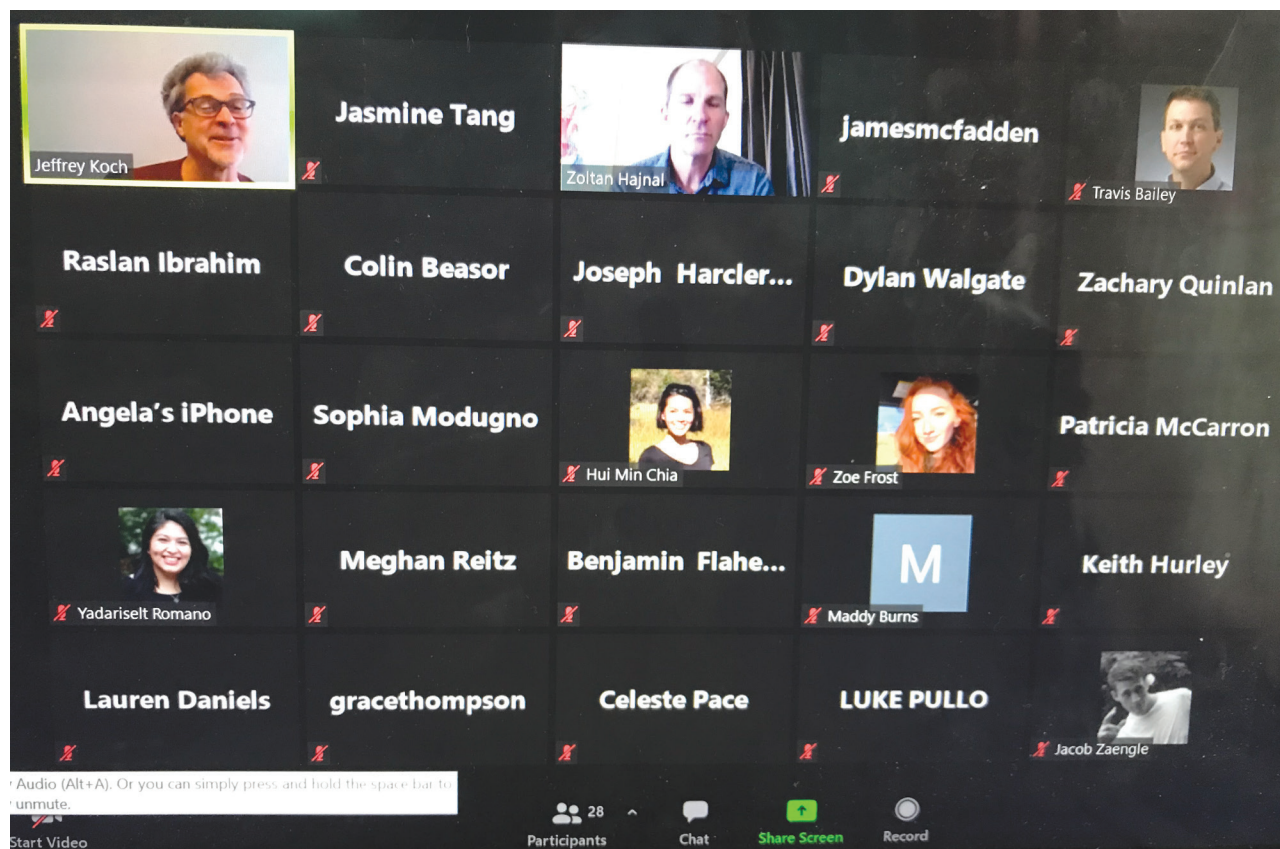
Dangerously Divided: How Race and Class Shape Winning and Losing in American Politics

On March 31, Zoltan Hajnal, Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego, spoke on “Dangerously Divided: How Race and Class Shape Winning and Losing in American Politics.” Hajnal is very accomplished in his field of work, having authored numerous award-winning books such as “White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics” (Princeton 2015), “Why Americans Don’t Join the Party: Race, Immigration, and the Failure of Political Parties to Engage the Electorate” (Princeton 2011), “America’s Uneven Democracy: Race, Turnout, and Representation in City Politics” (Cambridge 2010) and “Changing White Attitudes toward Black Political Leadership” (Cambridge 2006). His research has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and a range of other media outlets.

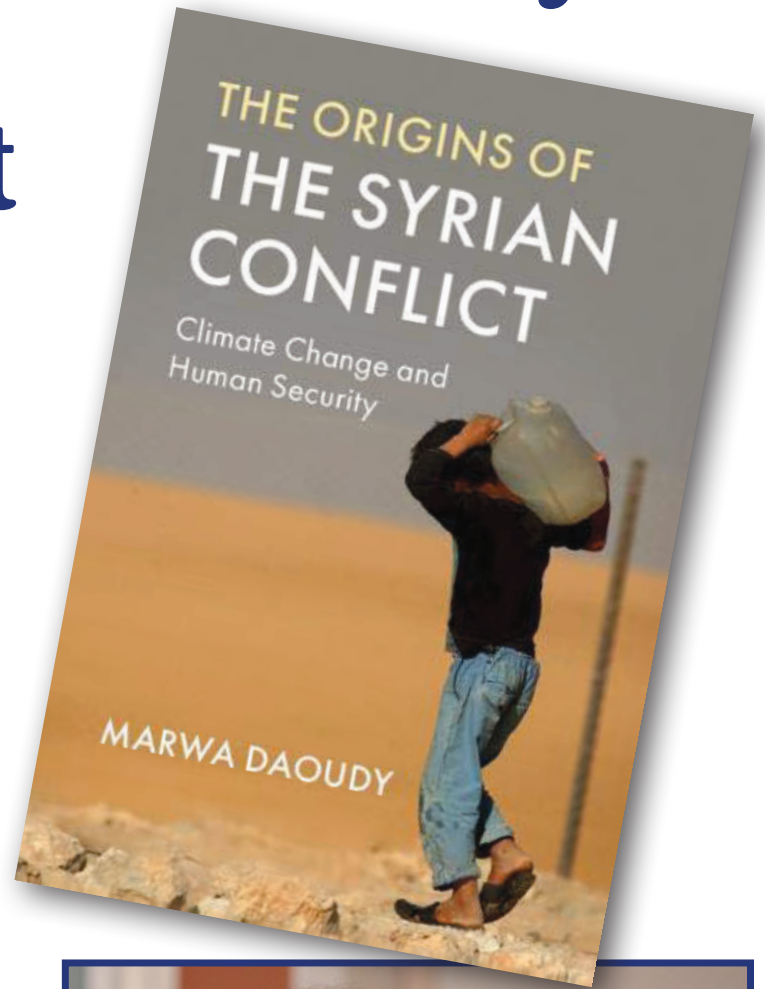
In this discussion, Hajnal focused on findings that stemmed from his book of the same name,

“Dangerously Divided: How Race and Class Shape Winning and Losing in American Politics,” which looks into the role race plays in American politics. Hajnal examined and explained how racial divisions have grown in the political sphere, pointing toward its prevalence in influencing divisions in voting, whether or not groups win on policy, and even who wins with elections, among other studied effects that race has in American politics. Hajnal further elaborated his findings, most of which were consistent with African Americans being the most disadvantaged group in American Politics. Hajnal found, for instance, that regarding policy, African Americans are more disadvantaged than any other group in the United States, losing on every policy area that Hajnal examined.

Professor Koch moderated the Q&A period, allowing students and faculty to address questions to Professor Hajnal about his research.



Human-Climate Insecurity and the Syrian Conflict



On April 20, Marwa Daoudy, Associate Professor of International Relations and Seif Ghobash Chair in Arab Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, spoke on Human-Climate Insecurity and the Syrian Conflict. The lecture is based on her latest book titled "The Origins of the Syrian Conflict: Climate Change and Human Security" (Cambridge University Press, 2020). The book won the International Studies Association's 2020-21 Harold and Margaret Sprout Award. Professor Raslan Ibrahim moderated the Q&A session.



Geneseo Alumni and Local Officials Speak on Women in Politics



Commissioner Diane X. Burman



NYS Senate Staffer Debbie Medina



Assembly Member Sarah Clark



Assembly Member Marjorie Byrnes



PLSC/IR Career Panel

On May 6, the department held a career panel, hosting 4 graduates of the department. The panel included **Beth Semel**, Program manager at the Aspen Institute, **Eddie Eisenman**, a 3L at NYU, **Ryan Callanan**, an International Project Manager at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), and **Christopher Hanse**, an Education Budget Analyst for the New York State Assembly Ways & Means Committee.

Each alum talked about their journeys from undergraduate at Geneseo to their current positions in their various jobs. Each stressed the importance of gaining experience in their fields. Semel, for instance, mentioned that her first job with event planning, something that seemed completely different to her current position, eventually led to her becoming an employee for the

Aspen Institute. Additionally, Hanse had a similar story involving a chance encounter with a New York State Legislator who hired him and through this he was able to move to his current position in the Ways & Means Committee. Callanan was an intern at the State Department in Washington, D.C. which helped secure defense contractor positions and later his current position. Eisenman received a job offer from a corporate law firm after working for them during the summer before his 3L year. Each alum also discussed how they believed Geneseo helped prepare them for life after graduation, most involving the development of reading, writing, and critical thinking skills vital to success in both graduate school and employment alike.

After each spoke, a brief Q&A period ensued where students and faculty had the opportunity to ask questions to the alums.



Political Science and International Relations Awards Ceremony



On May 13, the department held their annual awards and recognition ceremony meant to recognize excellence in academic achievements and service to the college community. Held the day after in-person commencement and outside at the South Hall Quad due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the ceremony opened with department chair **Jeffrey Koch** performing stand up comedy. After, the audience calmed down, the department recognized its numerous award winners, with the following awards going to the following students:

Keith Hurley and **Lara Mangino** won Outstanding Senior in Political Science: Student with excellence in the classroom as well as service to the department. **Sydney Krause** and **Riley Backus** won the **Outstanding Senior in International Relations** award. **The Edward Janosik Award** for Outstanding Service to the department was awarded to **Kara Burke, Natalie Amidon,**

Adrienne Porter, and Elizabeth Reynolds. Harry Harkins received **The Rose Alent Award** for an outstanding student who majors in International Relations or Political Science and majors or minors in a Foreign Language.

The **Ambassador Apartments Scholarship**, awarded to an outstanding junior majoring in international relations, was received by **Lia Wortsman**. Additionally, the Political Science equivalent of that award, the **Jesse Rogers Award in Political Science** went to **Sydney Carnival**.

Maura MacNeill was the recipient of the **Outstanding Internship Award**, given for outstanding performance in an internship. **The Kenneth Deutsch Alumni Award in Legal Studies** for outstanding students who intend to go to Law School was given to **Madison Burns** and **Alea Tiberi**. **Samson McKinley** was awarded



the **Mark Callanan Scholarship** which is awarded to a student who majors in Political Science or History; passionate about political, military or historical issues that impact humanity, whether local or abroad; in good academic standing; demonstrates financial need, and is preferably given to a Fairport High School graduate if they meet the above criteria.

Additionally, students were inducted into the political science and international relations honor societies and seniors who were present received recognition for graduating and had the opportunity to share their intended plans for after graduation.



Senior Spotlight: Kara Burke '21

Kara Burke is an International Relations major with concentrations in War and Peace as well as a Communications minor. Burke is a member of the department's Model UN team and was its vice-president her sophomore year and president her junior year. Burke stepped into the training position this school year after the former trainer had to leave.

Burke's presence was also felt on campus after leading the "Take Back Geneseo" march in the Fall which, according to Burke, "was fighting for change in sexual assault policy on our campus." Among the numerous goals, including, "establishing a committee on sexual assault, creating more Title IX officer positions, and increasing awareness of anonymous reporting, which have all begun to occur," Burke says she is now "working on trying to establish a Greek Life accreditation system" which "would essentially create a report card for Greek Life [organizations] that would be public to add social pressure for these organizations to be better, as they accounted for a large portion of sexual assault cases." Burke points to this system's effectiveness on other college campuses as evidence that it would benefit the Geneseo campus.

Burke also credits the late Joanna Kirk's Gender and Law class as something that influenced her pursuit in advocacy. "Gender and Law with Professor Kirk was an incredible experience that definitely inspired my work advocating for sexual assault policy," Burke said. "Professor Kirk taught me how to read and understand the law, and ways that sexism in the law could be improved. I also learned how to write in a more legal manner in her class and about systemic sexism, all of which helped me lead the sexual assault movement on campus." Burke's advocacy was a highlight of a year laden with allegations of misconduct perpetrated by some fraternities. In fact, Burke, the current editor-in-chief of the student-run newspaper the Lamron, wrote a story last spring alongside two other members of the Lamron staff about allegations of misconduct perpetrated by a Geneseo fraternity.

She credits the Political Science and International Relations department as having a lasting impact on her academic and extracurricular pursuits. In particular, the department's professors have had significant influence on her. "I really love the Political Science and International Relations department and have found it to have professors that really care about their students," Burke said. "All of my professors have been so supportive through this tough year and I'm incredibly grateful for all of them."

Burke is currently looking to find a job in journalism or public policy.

Model UN

Despite the numerous challenges that have hurt clubs around the entire campus, the department's Model UN club has been able to continue to see participation through the likes of Zoom meetings and eventually in-person meetings held in Doty Hall. Despite the inability to participate in conferences like in previous years, the team continued to see loyal participation from old members and newer members alike.

Ellie Dickerman, the Secretary General of External Affairs, which would normally help prepare the team to go to conferences, said that the team has seen a decline in participation and attributed it to the Covid-19 pandemic. "It has been hard to hold meetings on campus and mini mods because of issues of booking rooms, getting everyone available at the same time, and some students being available over Zoom and some not," Dickerman said. Additionally, Dickerman noted that "in the Fall engagement was pretty low. It was really hard for us to get people to come to Zoom meetings. But in the Spring semester we saw an increase in students."

The Model UN team normally travels to conferences in the Northeast, including places such as Boston and Ithaca and even travels to Montréal. Dickerman contends that the inability to participate in these conferences this school year,

however, has significantly hurt engagement. “We usually get to take freshmen and students who are new to the club to conferences and that is what usually makes them want to be really involved in the club,” Dickerman said. “So that has been a big wall for us for recruiting people.”

Still, despite this, the club continued to see participation that other clubs have struggled to obtain. Perhaps the club will be further revitalized should they be able to participate in conferences in the Fall.

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

*The Summer 2021 Political Science
and International Relations
Newsletter was prepared by
Jeff Koch, Colin Beasor '21 and
Adrienne Porter '21*

Political Humor and Witticisms

Jon Stewart: “I was born in New York City, but I was raised in New Jersey, part of the great Jewish emigration of 1963.”

Trevor Noah: “Often people who can do, don’t because they’re afraid of what people who can’t will say about them.”

From Senior Recognition Ceremony: A few months ago, the Capitol took center stage for Biden’s State of the Union address. Political Science and IR majors thought it was nice to see someone behind the podium who wasn’t wearing deer antlers and a pelt.

Ronald Reagan on the Vice Presidency: “There is absolutely no circumstance whatever under which I would accept that spot. Even if they tied and gagged me, I would find a way to signal by wiggling my ears.”

Jon Stewart on Congress: “If the presidency is the head of the American body politic, Congress is its gastrointestinal tract.”

Trevor Noah: “We spend so much time being afraid of failure, afraid of rejection. But regret is the thing we should fear most.”

