"LESS STRESS, MORE CONFIDENCE": SUPPORTING JUNIOR SCHOLARS ONLINE AT THE GRADUATE STUDENT INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY WORKSHOP

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The COVID-19 pandemic did not affect all scholars equally. In particular, junior scholars—primarily doctoral students—faced challenges that may not have been immediately obvious to senior scholars. It was necessary to revise dissertation prospectuses and ongoing research as fieldwork became impossible and archival access was limited (Rowland 2021). Opportunities to present work disappeared as departmental seminars were canceled. Networking up with senior scholars and across with other junior scholars became more difficult as conferences moved online. Fears over a weak academic job market increased as junior scholars[1] faced an uncertain professional future. In response to these stressors, graduate students developed depressive and anxiety disorders at twice and 1.5 times the pre-pandemic rate (Chirikov et al. 2020). In response to these pressures, we sought to build a graduate-student–led community focused on the work and professional needs of junior scholars. The Graduate Student International Political Economy (GSIPE)[2] workshop began on Twitter. We asked academics on the platform if an online workshop targeted at graduate students had an audience, and the answer was a resounding "yes." More than a year later, we are the proud founders of an active virtual community of more than 550 international political economy (IPE) researchers from 260 institutions and 28 countries (figure 1) who collectively organized 36 weekly workshops and five mini-conferences and panels from June 2020 to May 2021.[3] As figure 2 demonstrates, the majority of our members as well as all of our workshop presenters are doctoral students. Under new leadership, GSIPE plans to continue hosting virtual workshops while transitioning the workshop to include in-person events at conferences.

This article describes three core steps we took to develop and grow the GSIPE network: (1) defining the mission of the workshop, (2) cultivating community through outreach, and (3) engaging membership in the organizational structure.

Defining GSIPE

By focusing on a single subfield (i.e., IPE), we created a clear value-add for graduate students. GSIPE members share common interests and intellectual backgrounds that enable fluidity of communication, create clear opportunities for coauthorship, and make the community easily recognizable to observers. GSIPE is an inter-disciplinary space for political scientists, economists, and other social scientists who have obvious intellectual connections. This reflects the intellectually diverse heritage of IPE while further broadening the discipline through the cross-pollination of ideas. Scholars exposed to different disciplinary norms, methods, and ideas will be stronger, more versatile researchers who can appeal to other researchers across disciplines.

Early in the process, we wrote the following mission statement: "GSIPE is committed to promoting the work and voices of Black, Indigenous, scholars of color, and women scholars." We explicitly defined the space to include historically excluded

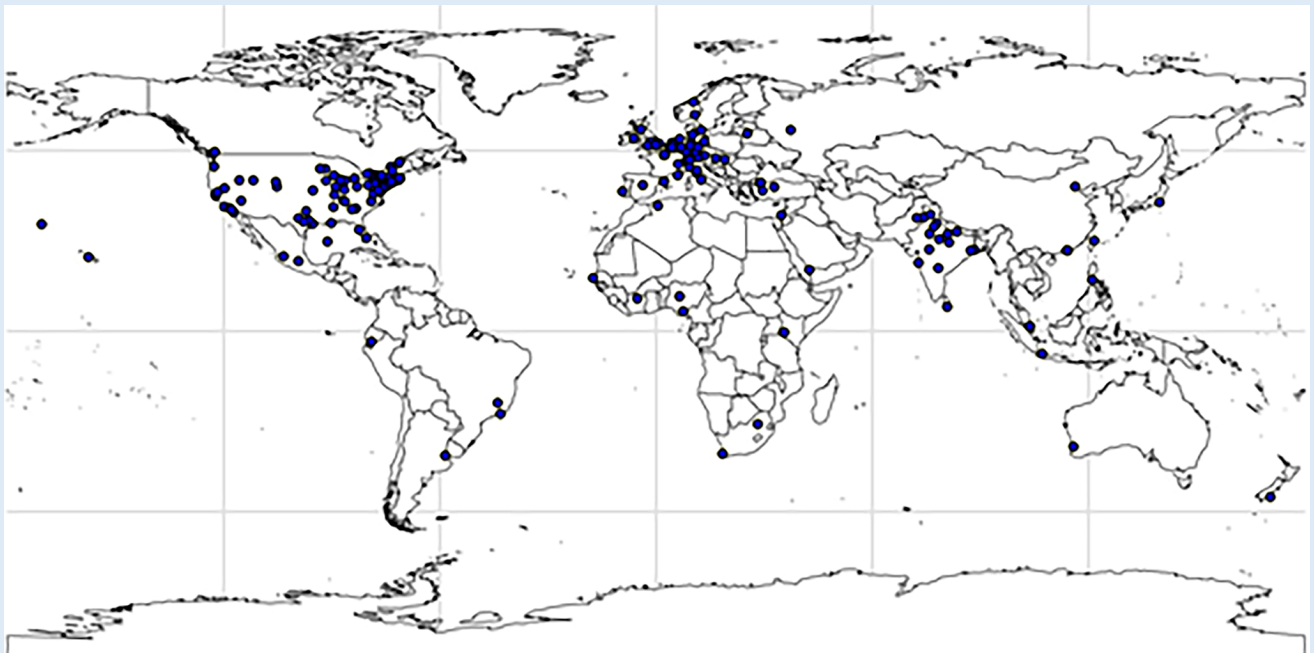*Figure 1*
Locations of GSIPE Members

Figure 2
GSIPE Membership by Professional Stage
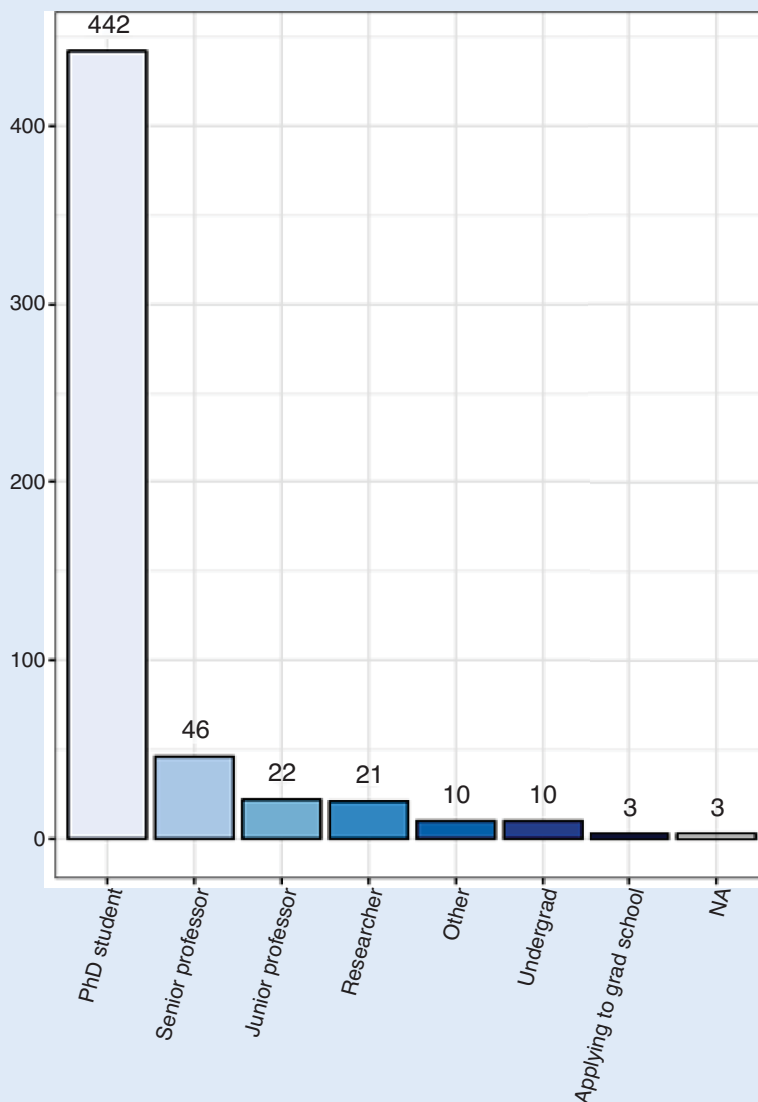

groups, including women, to hold ourselves accountable to combating discrimination in IPE and the discipline and by describing the workshop as a welcoming space. As figure 1 shows, we recruited a geographically diverse group of participants. In light of this diversity, we paid close attention to scheduling events at times that worked across multiple time zones, avoiding evening events to accommodate parents. The workshop format—one hour weekly over Zoom—provided flexibility for presenters to allocate their time between presenting and receiving feedback, with GSIPE moderators enforcing time limits.

Growing the Workshop

We first worked to demonstrate the value of GSIPE and to ensure its accessibility for diverse graduate students. We created a website and listserv to make the workshop visible; both initially were registered online to demonstrate the workshop's validity. We then invited professors in the field and their graduate students to sign up for the workshop; this initial buy-in from key figures in IPE legitimized the workshop. By Fall 2020, we had demand for weekly workshop slots that far outpaced supply, a pattern that has repeated in all subsequent semesters. This growth (figure 3) resulted from the demonstrated value of the workshop and the active involvement of our membership.

We cultivated a social media presence on Twitter, tagging groups that highlight the work of women (@womenalsoknowstuff), Black women (@citeblackwomen), people of color (@POCalsoknowstuff), and first-generation (@1stGenScholars) scholars. We also consistently reached out to scholars who identify as members of historically disadvantaged groups to encourage submissions and participation and to solicit their input for a more inclusive workshop.[4] Existing listservs for political science and economics were useful for disseminating information about the workshop.[5]
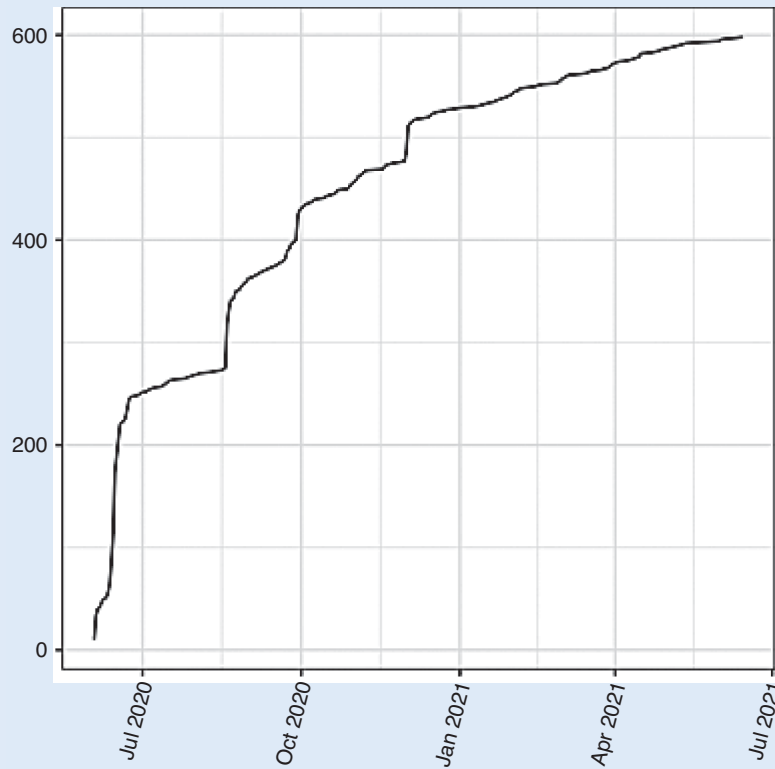
Figure 3

Change in GSIPE Membership

Active Engagement

Each semester, we distribute a form to solicit feedback from our members. We identified scholars who were interested in helping to organize the suggested changes, then gave them the freedom to develop programming. We created functional teams that assisted with moderating workshops, organizing additional events,[6] and writing a regular GSIPE newsletter. These flexible teams helped us to manage the growing needs of our community by delegating tasks to motivated GSIPE members.

In particular, the planning team[7] organized themed mini-conferences to provide more opportunities for junior scholars to present work and to create space for connections among IPE scholars with specific interests. Networking events allowed for chance meetings at GSIPE mini-conferences and in tandem with established conferences. Job-market panels provided GSIPE members and other interested scholars an opportunity to learn about alt-academic careers.

Our engaged membership and flexible structure have allowed us to step down from organizing GSIPE. We are grateful to three new organizers—Carlos Felipe Balcazar, Elizabeth Meehan, and Oriana Montti—for moving the workshop forward. We actively reached out to individuals who had demonstrated an interest in being involved in GSIPE, taking care to maintain a gender, discipline, and sub-subfield balance. The transfer allowed us to centralize the component parts of GSIPE by moving our website and listerv from the original URL to ensure longevity of access; to meet with the new organizers to offer advice; and, finally, to step back to allow them to take GSIPE forward with their own vision. This new vision includes job-market profiles on the website; active solicitation of greater involvement by historically excluded groups; an official GSIPE Twitter presence; and a clear, point-based schema for selecting workshop papers weighted toward historically excluded groups.

Conclusion

The core identity of GSIPE is not defined by its founders but rather by the community we have created and support. We believe a key feature of a successful workshop, whether online or offline, is its ability to grow and change. We hope that our experience sheds light on other research communities to foster more diverse representation of and collaboration opportunities for junior scholars. ∎

NOTES

1. Although our workshop caters primarily to doctoral students, postdoctoral students, junior and senior faculty, and predoctoral students (e.g., undergraduates and research assistants) often attend our meetings and are actively involved in the community.

2. See https://gsipe-workshop.github.io.

3. For updated data on workshop attendance and participants, please contact gsipe.workshop@gmail.com.

4. For updated data on workshop attendance and participants, please contact gsipe.workshop@gmail.com. gender participation is roughly at parity, diversity along other metrics (e.g., ethnicity, institutional affiliation, and disability) is low despite our efforts. Our initial recruitment and workshop design could have attuned GSIPE more to the needs of these groups.

5. This includes the European Political Science Association, Political Economy of International Organization, International Political Economy Society, Society for

Political Methodology, International Studies Association, and American Economic Association.

6. See https://gsipe-workshop.github.io/special-events.

7. See https://gsipe-workshop.github.io/our-team.

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THE JUNIOR AMERICANIST WORKSHOP SERIES

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Like all modern innovations in political science, the Junior Americanist Workshop Series (JAWS) originated from a Twitter thread. When one of our cadre mused about whether zero-cost virtual seminars could fill the void left by the many in-person conferences and workshops canceled or converted to costly remote formats due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we came together to answer the call (McCrain 2020). The founding vision of JAWS was to provide cost-free opportunities for early-career American politics scholars to present their research and receive feedback from leading scholars in their field.[1] JAWS has evolved and currently provides free networking and professional-development opportunities, which many scholars had lost access to during the pandemic when conferences were curtailed and university buildings were closed. This article discusses how we developed JAWS, the challenges that we faced, and how we envision the workshop continuing as a complement to traditional in-person conferences in the post-pandemic world.

We began soliciting submissions for JAWS in August 2020 via Twitter, political science listservs (e.g., POLMETH and RACE POL), and our informal networks, which generated significant interest among potential presenters. We also invited several people, including senior scholars (i.e., tenured faculty), to volunteer as discussants, attend our sessions, and join our email list. When the number of submissions quickly surpassed 50, we promptly doubled the number of planned sessions by moving from once to twice a month to accommodate more presenters. During the 2020–2021 academic year, we held a total of 12 research workshops with 38 presenters that attracted a total of 632 attendees. Our Fall 2020 workshops included four presentations in two hours; in Spring 2021, we moved to two presentations in 90 minutes to allow for more engagement with each presentation. Discussants were responsible for only one paper, which made the commitment manageable for those who agreed to volunteer in that role. We also encouraged presenters to submit their papers at least one week before their session for posting them on our website so attendees could read them in advance. We made these decisions in service of our goal to provide presenters with quality feedback to which they otherwise might not have access. Overall, we successfully attracted a wide range of early-career academics to submit their work: approximately 40% of presenters were graduate students, 24% held non-tenure-track positions, and 36% were tenure-track assistant professors. We also succeeded in securing experienced discussants for our presenters: all of our discussants held PhDs and 47% were senior faculty (i.e., tenured).

Although we were successful in recruiting presentations from early-career researchers, we had mixed success in ensuring diversity by gender, race, and institution type among our presenters. Fostering a diverse slate of presenters was a priority because scholars from underrepresented groups (e.g., women and people of color) and from institutions without ample financial support for faculty research (i.e., non-R1 departments) typically are perceived as lacking the very network connections that in-person conferences help to establish. Compared to the demographic characteristics of APSA members in the American politics subfield (as of February 2020), our slate of presenters included a larger percentage of women (47.3% versus 35.5%) and only a slightly smaller percentage of people of color (15.8% versus 20.7%), which suggests that we performed reasonably well in cultivating diversity by gender and race (American Political Science Association 2021). However, we performed less well in attaining institutional diversity because only 10.5% of our presenters were affiliated with non-R1 departments. This is partially an artifact of our focus on graduate students, who come predominantly from R1 universities; moving forward, we plan to account more consciously for levels of institutional support when we solicit submissions and choose presenters. This will be particularly important in the near future because those scholars with substantial institutional support (e.g., conference and travel funding) will be better advantaged by the return of traditional conference formats.

In addition to our workshop series, we created a professional-development series with the goal of helping junior scholars to network and socialize in the profession. In the Spring 2021 semester, we hosted three hour-long events that brought together panelists with expertise on specific aspects of the discipline and more broadly on academia that may seem opaque to early-career scholars. Our panel topics included public scholarship, academic-book publishing, and academic-journal publishing. When we promoted these events, we broadened our outreach by emphasizing that they would be beneficial for all junior scholars rather than specifically those who study American politics. These sessions attracted 186 total attendees, and we will continue holding professional development panels in the future.

A major challenge for those who want to organize virtual conferences and workshops is mimicking the informal networking and discussion opportunities traditionally available at in-person conferences. One way that we facilitated networking was to host virtual trivia events on the same evenings as several of our JAWS panels.[2] Although attendance was smaller at these events than at the panels, we still attracted 80 total attendees who convened on Zoom and received positive feedback from attendees. We are actively considering other virtual networking opportunities for the coming year, including the use of Gather (2021), and we also held a JAWS happy hour at the 2021 APSA Annual Meeting with great turnout. Although it is difficult to replicate in a virtual format the space for networking that in-person conferences afford, our goal is