to provide early-career scholars with a complementary, cost-free networking environment.

Another challenge facing virtual conference and workshop organizers is avoiding their burnout. We benefited from having a six-person organizing committee, which allowed us to share and divide responsibilities based on schedules and expertise. These tasks included constructing panels, recruiting discussants, and preparing questions to facilitate audience discussion about each paper. We also stayed in frequent contact using Slack, which allowed us to coordinate without overloading one another’s e-mail inboxes. Overall, having enough people to help with organizing tasks is critical. Many in-person conference panels are organized by fewer people, which can result in less in-depth feedback for presenters. Therefore, we are identifying deficiencies in our organizing team in terms of research interests and networks, and we recruited an additional team member for the 2021–2022 academic year.

Overall, we hope to solidify JAWS as a mainstay in American politics and to encourage others to pursue virtual workshops as a way to provide cost-free opportunities for junior scholars from diverse institutions to interact with their peers and senior scholars. We believe that these workshops complement traditional conferences by removing barriers to participation and promoting diversity and inclusion in the post-pandemic world. Many of the inequities in academia that were highlighted by COVID-19—particularly financial and caretaking responsibilities—will continue to be problematic after the pandemic subsides. We believe that virtual workshops provide one way to address those inequities.

Overall, we hope to solidify JAWS as a mainstay in American politics and to encourage others to pursue virtual workshops as a way to provide cost-free opportunities for junior scholars from diverse institutions to interact with their peers and senior scholars.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Charles Crabtree for inviting us to contribute to this Spotlight. We also thank all of our JAWS community members who helped to make our endeavor a success.

NOTES

1. We define early-career scholars as graduate students, tenure-track assistant professors, and those in non-tenure-track positions (e.g., postdocs and visiting assistant professors). We chose to focus on providing opportunities for early-career scholars because they were uniquely affected by the pandemic. Still in the career stage in which they are building research experience and network connections, these scholars are most in need of the feedback and exposure unavailable during the pandemic.

2. We thank Patrick Rickert, postdoctoral researcher in the Center for Effective Lawmaking at Vanderbilt University, for generously hosting these trivia events.

REFERENCES


McCrain, Josh (@joshmccrain). 2020. “Are there any American politics workshops/conferences out there taking submissions? I miss having these deadlines but I am loathe to pay conference-level money for a virtual conference.” August 12, 7 a.m. Tweet.
Although we miss in-person conferences and networking, we think virtual workshops have a place in the post-COVID world.

To be clear, there are challenges in this approach. Some challenges are similar to those associated with in-person workshops (e.g., the weekly time commitment in an already-busy schedule) but others are exacerbated by being online. For instance, everyone certainly experienced Zoom fatigue after the 2020–2021 academic year. We tried to counter this with different topics, such as a teaching workshop. In late spring 2021, we hosted Catherine E. de Vries, Sara B. Hobolt, Sven-Oliver Proksch, and Jonathan B. Slapin, the authors of a new textbook titled Foundations of European Politics. This workshop was a change of pace and offered potential instructors a behind-the-scenes preview of the content choices, along with syllabus examples. In addition, we increasingly asked presenters to invite their own networks to join the workshop, which created a broader ongoing audience. However, we observed declining weekly attendance at the paper presentations and an increase at the roundtables. This trend suggests that we either should shorten the length of the series (i.e., from eight to six weeks) or add a roundtable in the middle.

Unfortunately, by their nature, virtual panels miss out on informal in-person interactions. Therefore, we open early to allow for personal, informal conversation and we leave the room open after the talk concludes for continued discussion. We hope to increase this new community building by hosting an in-person meet-and-greet at the next European Union Studies Association (EUSA) annual meeting.

Our second best-practice suggestion is to have a simple, accessible website including a schedule and list of past recordings, along with a newsletter for advertising content. Our newsletter subscriber base has almost 600 scholars, and this number has grown steadily as a result of advertising on other established listservs (e.g., the EUSA listserv). In-person attendance has varied from 20 to more than 100 and, in some cases, the recordings have been viewed more than 1,000 times. The recordings make the workshops more valuable for participants and hosts. For instance, the co-organizers have used several of the roundtables in our undergraduate courses, such as the democratic-backsliding roundtable. These informal workshops are more accessible forums for scholars to talk about their innovative scholarship.

Third, our model streamlines the operation in terms of time and attention to keep costs low. For hosts, a virtual workshop requires only a website, no travel or other associated costs. Conversely, in-person workshops require not only travel costs but also entertainment for participants, which is beneficial (and fun) for networking but also is challenging for those with other responsibilities (e.g., children at home). For speakers, we require only one hour of their time with no travel involved. In return, speakers receive useful feedback and participate in stimulating discussion.

Although we miss in-person conferences and networking, we think virtual workshops have a place in the post-COVID world. Given environmental and health concerns about international travel, it is difficult to justify a trip for a single talk or even two. For parents who have small children or other caregiving responsibilities, even domestic travel has logistical problems. Virtual workshops complement traditional workshops and presentations, and seminars like the EuroPOW will be a useful forum in the post-COVID future.

NOTES
1. All recorded roundtables and presentations are available at europow.com.
2. In terms of geographic diversity, most of the presenters were based in the United States or Western Europe. Although several presenters were from Eastern Europe, we did not have any representation from universities in the region. We intend to be more inclusive in the future.

REFERENCE