The 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 to make the virtual format feel as similar as possible to the physical one. For example, we decided to hold a virtual trivia event on the same evenings as several of our JAWS workshops with 38 presenters that attracted a total of 632 attendees. In addition, we created a professional-development series with the goal of helping junior scholars network and socialize in the profession. In the Spring 2021 semester, we hosted three four-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 life, and academic publishing. We also promoted these events, thereby broadening 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 workshops. Although we were successful in recruiting presenters 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 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.

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. 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 list servers (e.g., POLMETH and RACE POI), 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 had 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 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 network and socialize in the profession. In the Spring 2021 semester, we hosted three four-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 life, and academic 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. 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
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 email 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—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.

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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


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EUROPEAN POLITICS ONLINE WORKSHOP

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In Summer 2020, we organized the European Politics Online Workshop (EuroPOW) to strengthen the European politics research community during the pandemic. This article discusses best practices, including a regular schedule on a simple website advertised via newsletter and listservs, a mix of talks and roundtables on salient topics, and public recordings for broader reach and for teaching purposes. In addition, we discuss how we approach diversity and inclusion, ranging from professional rank to topical to gender diversity, with a particular focus on highlighting junior scholars whose typical conference forums for feedback and early-career networking were decimated by COVID.

We first discussed the idea of a workshop in early June 2020 and hosted the first Zoom workshop only three weeks later, which highlights a key strength of online workshops: much simpler organization and coordination without travel and associated expenses. Thus far, we have hosted six series (i.e., Summer 2020/2021, Fall 2020/2021, and Spring 2021/2022), including 11 roundtables and 26 paper presentations, all of which are available on europow.com. In terms of best practices, the article focuses on the following three: (1) a mix of topics and speakers; (2) a simple and accessible website and advertising; and (3) low costs for hosts and participants.

From our first discussion, we realized that we needed to offer participants exciting roundtables and presentations with well-known senior scholars to provide well-attended and useful venues for more-junior scholars who were missing out on crucial opportunities to present and receive feedback on their work. Anyone attending in-person conferences knows that certain names draw more attention. For the 11 roundtables, we invited senior scholars to lead roundtables on topics ranging from recent elections (e.g., Germany and the Netherlands), to current events (e.g., the war in Ukraine), to teaching workshops on topics of interest to Europeanists (e.g., democratic backsliding, social democracy, and US–EU relations). For example, an early roundtable on democratic backsliding included presentations by Anna Grzymala-Busse, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Daniel Ziblatt, who discussed the many issues facing several Eastern European countries and the EU more generally before engaging in a rewarding discussion with the audience.¹

This strategy worked well, with in-person attendance at the workshops ranging from 30 to 100 participants and subsequent asynchronous viewings by as many as 1,300. We used this success to our advantage to create a stable, engaged, and consistent audience that would provide a useful forum for junior scholars, and we achieved a consistent and regular audience (although, admittedly, we think the quality of presentations merits higher