

Centering Career Preparation in Political Science
William O'Brochta*
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Student career preparation is a critical part of the mission of political science faculty. The collection of articles in this symposium discuss the call for more career preparation work in political science while continuing to emphasize the role that political science plays in teaching core liberal arts skills. The articles offer a variety of innovative strategies for including career preparation in courses, programs, and student experiences. Articles are grouped into three key themes. First, authors explore the importance of teaching students career skills. Second, authors identify political science as a discipline positioned particularly well to integrate career preparation into the curricula. Third, authors discuss models for such an integration, doing so in courses, programs, and co-curricular activities. Taken together, the symposium provides faculty across institutions and roles with a starting point for discerning how career preparation is part of their pedagogical approach.

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Biographical note: William O'Brochta, Ph.D., is the Hugo & Georgia Gibson Endowed Assistant Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Department of Political Science at Texas Lutheran University. He serves as the Director of Professional Development for the APSA Civic Engagement Section. He moderated the career preparation track at the 2025 APSA Standalone Teaching and Learning Conference that formed the basis for this symposium.

* Department of Political Science, Texas Lutheran University. 1000 W. Court Street, Seguin, Texas 78155. wobrochta@tlu.edu.

The articles in this symposium recognize that political scientists have an obligation to center career preparation as one of the variety of skill-based student learning outcomes that are part of political science courses and curricula. Along with developing writing, reading, and critical thinking skills, political science students should consider how those skills help to prepare them for a range of exciting, fulfilling, and employable careers. Career preparation efforts can and should be considered in a variety of courses as both small and large parts of course curricula.

Symposium authors met as part of the career preparation track at the 2025 American Political Science Association Standalone Teaching and Learning Conference (APSA TLC). In the process of reading, presenting, and discussing their work, symposium authors noted the range of approaches used to teach career preparation skills and the lack of an easy-to-access repository for career preparation pedagogy ideas. The articles in this symposium highlight the importance of small interventions and the process for scaffolding or developing larger career preparation initiatives in collaboration with other faculty and campus partners.

Importantly, symposium authors demonstrate that centering career preparation does not mean losing political science's traditional focus on the liberal arts. Rather, teaching career preparation skills helps students to better understand how what they are learning can translate into career opportunities. This "both/and" approach is a hallmark of good vocational discernment --- vocation here in the Lutheran sense of developing a calling and purpose in life. We want our students to understand and to develop their passions such that those passions extend beyond college and to the rest of their lives. Students can be effective engaged citizens regardless of their careers. However, absent opportunities for students to consider their vocation and to understand the landscape of various careers as part of their college curricula, we abdicate our responsibility to act as guides and mentors of vocational and career development, hoping that students make these linkages themselves.

The 2024 APSA Presidential Task Force Report *Rethinking Political Science Education* places career preparation as a key best practice for the undergraduate curriculum. The best practice recommendations in the report emphasize informing students about career options and following course and curricular design guidelines like including effective learning objectives, implementing high impact practices, and structuring the political science major following best practices (Deardorff and Lake 2024). This symposium centers (primarily undergraduate) career preparation as a specific and intentional practice, with descriptions and examples ranging from broad curricular reform to individual classroom interventions. The goal of this symposium is to inspire readers to make career preparation a systematic part of political science programs, understanding that doing so meaningfully enhances the traditional focus on liberal arts concepts and skills.

Both the *Journal of Political Science Education* and *PS: Political Science & Politics* have featured pieces that discuss career preparation. In particular, Collins, Knotts, and Schiff (2012) survey political science department chairs and find that career preparation is not systematically integrated into most departments. Various authors have identified and tested interventions that implement key career preparation strategies like more intensive faculty advising (Chaturvedi and Guerrero 2023) and versions of a standalone professional development (Bram 2023), career development (Mallinson and Burns 2019), or career exploration course (Broms and De Fine Licht 2019).

This symposium contributes to existing work by centralizing a variety of approaches to career preparation. It also helps readers connect common classroom activities and curricular designs to components of career preparation, with particular attention paid to how political

science can teach skills that are often regarded as part of the hidden curriculum --- things that faculty assume students know, but that are often unfamiliar and unstated. Finally, the symposium responds to the call in the task force report for describing new and different methods to center career preparation as one of our primary goals as faculty.

Symposium authors reiterate the three key themes from the TLC track presentations in these articles (Arnzen et al. 2025). First, students need career skills. Second, political science as a discipline has a responsibility for addressing career preparation. Third, faculty have developed various successful models for integrating career preparation into their courses.

The symposium features seven short articles from nine authors who participated in the career preparation track. These authors represent a variety of institutions and roles in the discipline, including contributions from faculty at major research universities and primarily teaching institutions as well as adjunct, non-tenure track, and tenure track faculty.

There are, naturally, many interesting and relevant insights to draw from reading the articles as a set. One way to group the articles and to think about their contributions is to examine the scope of the intervention that each article describes. Pearl Matibe (2026) discusses an intervention within a capstone course to find ways for students to produce work that is similar to how practitioners write in a variety of careers. Any faculty member can implement these kinds of interventions by revising or tweaking an assignment or series of assignments within an existing course. Ivy Hamerly (2026) and William Schlickemaier (2026) describe interventions as part of traditional coursework, but that include the perspectives and expertise of practitioners outside of the classroom. Faculty can ask students to identify practitioners with whom to engage and to network or, for a more comprehensive intervention, faculty can themselves begin building a network of alumni or others willing to mentor and to engage with students. Taken to its natural conclusion, Carly Schmitt (2026) outlines a full course on career preparation and development that includes a series of assignments and experiences packaged together into a term-long course.

The second set of articles considers interventions that move beyond the classroom to co-curricular programming and program structure. Joshua Wood (2026)'s article on career preparation workshops provides information on how such a program might be structured and a comparison between providing career-relevant information in an out-of-class setting versus as part of a course. Co-curricular experiences can also be designed to add a career emphasis, as Amanda Wintersieck and Chapman Rackaway (2026) discuss in their article about a state legislative simulation with intentionally designed career preparation elements. Finally, Carrie Humphreys and Adnan Rasool (2026) tie these interventions together when they describe how they approached revising their political science program to teach career preparation.

The articles reiterate and support our call to action that has implications for all in the discipline. Faculty have a responsibility for considering how career preparation activities can be integrated into their existing courses. Departments should examine career preparation strategies and compensate faculty for their work on improving career preparation. The discipline must communicate more effectively about how we help students to discern their vocations and prepare them for their intended careers, and APSA as an organization has an obligation to meaningfully support students and faculty in these efforts.

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