

SHSU POLITICAL SCIENCE NEWSLETTER

A newsletter for students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the Department of Political Science

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR



Welcome to the inaugural issue of the new SHSU Political Science department newsletter. I am thrilled to begin my first full year as Chair, and I am privileged to be joined by Drs. Dennis Weng and Sungdae Lim, who likewise are starting their first full years as the Directors of our graduate programs in Political Science and Public Administration, respectively. Fall 2026 promises to be an exhilarating semester, with the launch of our new pre-law undergraduate degree concentrations, the midterm elections for the 120th U.S. Congress and for numerous statewide and local offices in Texas, and so much more. This fall, we are also pleased to welcome a new full-time lecturer, Dr. Caleb Griffin, and excited to commence faculty searches for two new tenure-track assistant professors to support recent growth in our legal studies and public administration programs. I look forward to these and many other exciting developments, and I wish each of you a fruitful and fulfilling fall semester.

DR. JONATHAN N. BROWN | CHAIR

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2. Student Spotlights
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FEATURED STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

SHSU MODEL UN CONTINUES ITS WINNING STREAK

Representing Honduras, the 2026 SHSU Model United Nations delegation earned an Honorable Mention Award, continuing Sam MUN's award-winning tradition. Since the program's first year of competition in 2019, SHSU students have brought home an award every year. Selected from more than 40 applicants, the 12-member delegation researched foreign policy, wrote policy papers, practiced negotiation, and represented the university at the conference under Head Delegates Timi Akindele and Muna Mogekwu. This summer, delegation members Pcharles Obaseki and Muna Mogekwu also received full fellowships to study Taiwan and Asia-Pacific issues through the Taiwan Studies Summer Program at UT-Dallas.

[MUN APPLICATIONS DUE SEPT. 25 AT 5:00 P.M. - APPLY ONLINE](#)



STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS



UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

LUKE HEMPFLING

POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT

Luke Hempfling served four and a half years in the United States Army, first as an active-duty cannon crewmember with the 2nd Brigade Armored Combat Team at Fort Bliss. During his service, he deployed to Poland and Germany, where he helped train Ukrainian troops. After his active-duty contract ended, he transitioned to the Texas National Guard and completed his service this July.

Since beginning school at SHSU, Luke has been mentored by Professor Mike Yawn and participated in many opportunities through LEAP. He also volunteers with the Lions Club flag project and the Walker County Senior Center, where, as Luke puts it, the seniors take their bingo very seriously.

This summer, Luke thru-hiked the 486-mile Colorado Trail from Denver to Durango in 31 days. His other interests include running, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, geopolitics, and international affairs. He also completed his first marathon this February.



GRADUATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

ABBIE BERGER

M.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE

Abbie G. Berger earned a B.A. in Government and American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in 2008 and a J.D. from St. Mary's University School of Law in 2020. She is now pursuing an M.A. in Political Science at SHSU, continuing her longstanding study of law, government, and public policy. After years of representing injured individuals and families across Texas, she founded Berger Injury Law Firm, PLLC. Working with clients navigating legal, insurance, healthcare, and administrative systems has given her a firsthand view of how laws and institutions shape people's lives and access to justice. Her academic interests include constitutional law, public policy, legal institutions, prisoner reentry, and criminal justice reform. She is especially interested in the Constitution's enduring questions about individual liberty, governmental power, and the rule of law. After completing her master's degree, she hopes to pursue doctoral study and contribute to scholarship examining the relationship among law, public policy, and political institutions.

STUDENT ORGS, ACTIVITIES, AND OPPORTUNITIES



THE LEAP CENTER

LAW, ENGAGEMENT, AND POLITICS

Sam Houston State University is one of the most engaged campuses in Texas, offering numerous opportunities related to law, civics, and politics. The University ranks among the top six percent nationally in sending students to law school, offers hundreds of community-service projects annually, and has placed alumni at the highest levels of the political, nonprofit, and business worlds.

The Center for Law, Engagement, And Politics promotes these opportunities and provides unique learning experiences in fields including art, politics, theater, civil rights, literature, science, history, law, international relations, and management. Its blog highlights students' many activities. For more information, contact LEAP Center Coordinator Mike Yawn at 936-294-1456 or mike.yawn@shsu.edu.

STUDENT ORGS

KATS FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

Contact Dr. Robin Bittick for more info:
rmb004@shsu.edu

PI SIGMA ALPHA

Contact Dr. Pablo Ortega Poveda for more info:
pao016@shsu.edu

SCHOLARSHIPS

Questions about department scholarships?

Dr. Tamara Waggener

Scholarship Committee Chair
tamarawaggener@shsu.edu

PRE-LAW NEWS

NEW DEGREE OPTIONS

The POLS B.A. Pre-Law Concentration and POLS B.S. Pre-Law Concentration are now available.

SPRING 2027

POLS 4081: Special Topics: Mediation & Dispute Resolution
Dr. Gene Roberts, Associate Dean of Students
MWF 9:00-9:50 a.m.
CHSS 242B

FACULTY NEWS

Please help welcome our new faculty!



KYLE MCWAGNER

Assistant Professor of Political Science

Hello! My name is Dr. McWagner. I grew up in rural southern Oregon. I earned my Ph.D. at the University of California, Irvine, and previously worked at Loyola Marymount University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I live here in Huntsville and very much enjoy the local library and Eastham Thomason Park, as well as some of the eateries downtown - be sure to check out Tamal - On the Square if you're ever downtown. My research focuses on partisan political intolerance, political violence, partisanship and independence, polarization, and religion and U.S. politics. I have had the opportunity to teach courses in research methods, statistics and statistical programming, political behavior, public opinion, and religion in American politics. This upcoming year, I am excited to add a new course on American political parties. In my spare time, I enjoy reading, watching anime, playing games - both the board and video kind - and playing ultimate frisbee. I have three children, ages 10, 8, and 6, and have been happily married to my lovely wife for 12 years. We met at our early-morning custodial job while earning our bachelor's degrees and have had the opportunity to live in Idaho, Ukraine, Belgium, Oregon, California, Wisconsin, and now Texas. She is a Houston native, so it is a bit of a homecoming for her. We have all enjoyed Huntsville very much, and I am excited to be part of the SHSU community.



ROBERT D. ALVAREZ

Assistant Professor of Political Science

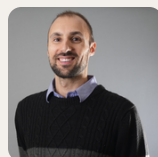
My name is Robert D. Alvarez. I joined SHSU as an Assistant Professor of Political Science last fall. I grew up right down the road in Houston, Texas, and received my Ph.D. from the University of Houston. Prior to returning to academia, I worked as a journalist, first covering sports before turning to business and politics. As such, my research primarily examines questions related to media and politics, with a focus on the relationship between media and American political institutions. My additional areas of interest include Latino politics, campaigns, elections, representation, polarization, and political behavior. So far, I have had the opportunity to teach courses focused on American politics, Latino politics, Texas government, Congress, public policy, and media and politics, with additional courses to come in the near future. In my free time, I enjoy writing, playing games, fantasy football, watching anime, sports, and movies, and teasing my long-term partner, our lovely dog Milli, and our mischievous cat, Haku. Becoming a part of the SHSU community over the last year has been immensely rewarding for me. I look forward to getting to know those whom I haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet.



STEWART ULRICH

Assistant Professor of Political Science

Hello, my name is Stewart Ulrich. I am originally from Utah and have long had an interest in government and politics. When I was a kid, I wanted to be the President of the United States when I grew up. That dream has since faded, but now I study presidents instead. I earned my Ph.D. at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, and my research focuses on presidents, presidential powers, presidential elections, and public opinion in our political system. I have taught courses on American Government, the U.S. Presidency, and American Politics. In my spare time, I enjoy listening to podcasts and audiobooks, going on walks with my wife and twin sons, watching soccer/football, and trying new restaurants. SHSU has been such a welcoming community, and I am glad to be here.



CALEB GRIFFIN

Lecturer of Political Science

Hi everyone! My name is Caleb Griffin. I am joining the department this year as a lecturer. This fall, I will teach Texas Government and Political Theory. I recently completed my Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Illinois. My research interests mostly revolve around identity in politics, especially regional and religious identities. My dissertation focused on regional identity in Morocco, and I have spent three years there in various capacities - so if you are interested in Morocco, come talk to me! I am married to a talented writer (bethanowen.com), and we have two little girls. I am originally from South Africa and love following the national rugby team, the Springboks. Please avoid me if you support the All Blacks - I am kidding, but I may roast you a little. I also love books: literature as well as a healthy dose of fantasy and science fiction. I look forward to getting to know and working with as many of you as I can.

FACULTY AND STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AN EXCELLENT 2025-2026 ACADEMIC YEAR

2

BOOKS

2

EDITED VOLUMES

19

ARTICLES

6

BOOK CHAPTERS

20

CONFERENCE PAPERS

SHSU's Political Science Department had an excellent 2025-2026 academic year! Faculty members produced 2 books, 2 edited volumes, 19 journal articles, 6 book chapters, and 20 conference papers. This research covered topics such as public administration, nonprofit innovation, emergency management, civil wars, international affairs, elections, and political polarization. Faculty published in respected outlets including, but not limited to, Presidential Studies Quarterly, Public Management Review, Public Personnel Management, the Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, and with Palgrave Macmillan Press.

We encourage you to read this outstanding work. If you are looking for a place to start, I recommend Dr. Pablo Ortega Poveda's recent publication, *Rebel Reputation and Violent Resistance in Civil Wars*. It can be found online, on the corkboard in the Political Science Department hallway, and linked on this page. It provides important insights into why civilian populations violently resist rebel groups, and when they choose to live alongside them instead. This is an engaging and well-written paper that is well worth reading.

We were fortunate to have two faculty members receive special recognition last year. Dr. Sungdae Lim received the 2026 Best Article Award from the International Journal of Public Administration. Dr. Wenjiun Wang received the 2026 William Petak Best Paper Award from the American Society for Public Administration's Section on Emergency and Crisis Management. And while no award exists for publishing four books in three years, Dr. Lu-Chung Weng would certainly deserve it. His forthcoming book, *The Trump Empire: Re-Globalization and the New World Order*, and his work expanding student opportunities in Taiwan and Asia-Pacific studies have made a valuable contribution to the university.

Additional milestones included former department chair Dr. Jason Enia's promotion to Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Kristin Trojacek, Assistant to the Chair, received the 2026 CHSS Staff Excellence Award, a college-wide honor carrying a \$1,000 prize.

Together, these accomplishments demonstrate the department's commitment to impactful research and student mentorship.

[Read "Rebel Reputation and Violent Resistance in Civil Wars" online](#)

ALUMNI UPDATES



PENNY L. WATSON

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT | B.A. '14, M.A. '17

Penny L. Watson was born in Fairfax, Virginia, but has considered Texas home since attending SHSU. She earned a B.A. in English with a minor in Political Science in 2014 and an M.A. in Political Science in 2017. Courses with Drs. Jason Enia and Masoud Kazemzadeh inspired her graduate studies, while Dr. Jonathan N. Brown played an instrumental role on her thesis committee. Her thesis, *Explaining Iran's Involvement in Latin America*, led to the first of two articles in *Democracy and Security*. She has since published 11 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters.

Serving as an SHSU graduate and teaching assistant inspired Penny to become a professor. She has taught government at Houston City College since 2019 and remains an adjunct professor in SHSU's Political Science Department. Currently pursuing a Ph.D. at Regent University, she studies Middle Eastern international relations, leadership, U.S. foreign policy, Iran-Israel relations, grand strategy, and terrorism. Having lived in Mexico and Japan and traveled widely, Penny enjoys exploring other cultures, kayaking, tennis, and soccer.

Alumni: Please send us updates about notable developments in your career and life. We would love to include alumni news in future issues of the department newsletter.

IMPORTANT DATES

Updates will be sent as more events become available.

SEP 03

Pre-Law Informational
6:00-7:00 p.m. | CHSS 140

SEP 03

Sammypalooza
6:00-9:00 p.m. | Johnson Coliseum

SEP 14-19

SHSU Homecoming Week

SEP 25

Model UN Application Deadline
Friday, September 25, 2026 | 5:00 p.m.

SEP 30

Austin Internship Application Deadline
Gulf Scholars Application Deadline

OCT 05

Voter Registration Deadline
For the November 3, 2026 Election

OCT 06

Graduate School Exploration Fair
11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. | Lowman Student Center

OCT 12-13

Fall Break

NOV 01

Scholarships4Kats Priority Deadline
For the 2027-2028 academic year

NOV 03

Election Day

NOV 13

Last Day to Drop with a Q

NOV 26-27

Thanksgiving Break

DEC 07-10

Final Exams

DEC 10-12

Fall Commencement
Johnson Coliseum

STAY CONNECTED

Department Website

Department Email: polsci@shsu.edu

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[Facebook](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

