

## AN OPEN LETTER CONCERNING INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND BLACK LIVES MATTER

*This letter is authored by faculty members of the University of St. Thomas Department of Political Science. The undersigned faculty members are speaking for themselves in their individual capacities, and not for the University of St. Thomas.*

Institutional racism exists and reflects how white supremacy is embedded in our country, state, local communities, and every institution, including the University of St. Thomas. The killings of Jamar Clark, Philando Castile, and George Floyd in the Twin Cities and of Black Americans around the country, throughout the history of the United States, testify to the racism and anti-Blackness that have existed and currently exist. Silence is not an option. Black Lives Matter.

We recognize that words are not enough and that we have been socialized in a world of white supremacy that infects us and our discipline. Each of us has unique experiences as a perpetrator and/or victim of institutional racism. We recognize the impact of intersectionality on our own positions of marginalization and privilege. We commit to listening and learning to do our part in seeking true justice. We also commit to use our power as faculty members to speak and act against racism through our courses, research, and positions of influence throughout the university.

Beyond the university, we stand with those calling for fundamental reform of our criminal justice system and investigations into racial inequalities in many other public policy areas such as health care and education. We stand with those who fight resolutely against the misappropriation and mischaracterization of the Black Lives Matter movement. We stand with those who march peacefully in our cities demanding action.

Dr. Angela High-Pippert  
Dr. Renee Buhr  
Dr. Tim Collins  
Dr. Caleb Goltz  
Dr. Tim Lynch  
Dr. Arijit Mazumdar

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## A NEW MINOR: LEGAL SKILLS

For the past two years, the Political Science Department has been working on a new minor designed to equip students with the skills they need to be successful in law school or a career adjacent to legal practice. This minor is composed of five areas: writing, formal and applied reasoning, analysis of legal and political texts, and oral communication proficiency. If this sounds interesting to you, you should talk to Dr. Goltz (JRC 406, [goltz@stthomas.edu](mailto:goltz@stthomas.edu), 651-962-5724) to learn more! You can also find an outline of the requirements in the catalog at <https://www.stthomas.edu/catalog/current/lesk/>.

## ACTION STEPS RELATED TO OPEN LETTER CONCERNING INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND BLACK LIVES MATTER

**Dr. High-Pippert:** Our commitment to these critical issues of justice, citizenship, and equality extends beyond these words to individual and collective actions. As we write in our open letter, we commit to speaking and acting against racism through our teaching, research, and roles within the university. This fall, my POLS 104: *Government and Politics* course is book-ended by readings from Isabel Wilkerson's recently published book, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*. On the second day of class, we discussed Wilkerson's powerful use of caste rather than race to examine the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police on the streets of Minneapolis on May 25, and we integrated an Undertold Stories Project video, "Minnesota Nice if You're White," into our discussion. Although we've always used an intersectional lens to examine the experiences and impact of Black women as legislators, this spring's POLS 302: *Women and Politics* will also include a specific focus on Black women as activists and as political scientists. My current research agenda includes an analysis of the first Native American women elected to Congress in 2018 (Representatives Deb Haaland and Sharice Davids), and I am exploring a few possible research projects involving media coverage of women in Black Lives Matter protests. In my work as program director for Ready to Run Minnesota, a nonpartisan campaign training program for women candidates, we are poised to encourage BIPOC women to seek public leadership and thereby increase the representation of women of color in elected office across our state. In the short term, I am attending an Overcoming Racism Virtual Conference in November to learn from others and begin building an academic network based on shared commitments to these issues.

As I wrote to Political Science majors and minors in June, it's going to take all of us, working individually and collectively, to create new ways forward. We know the importance of our discipline to increasing our shared sense and understanding of these critical concepts. Rather than making all of the plans ourselves, **we are asking for your ideas as to what kind of related programming you would like to see our department engage in this academic year. We will be seeking your feedback and would welcome your ideas.**

Relevant links:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/magazine/isabel-wilkerson-caste.html>

<https://www.undertoldstories.org/2020/06/02/minnesota-nice-if-youre-white/>

**Dr. Buhr:** My courses routinely address issues of protest, extra-institutional behavior, and how these align with unmet social needs. I am paying more attention to how the cases I routinely discuss – from the French Revolution to the “color revolutions” in places like Ukraine and perhaps Belarus today – share ground with our own social movements at home, especially Black Lives Matter and women's protests.

My courses, and research, routinely address issues of identity and exclusion. For example, in my upcoming Aquinas Scholars course Dr. Shams (French) and I will be focusing on immigration and identity in France and Canada. Learning about these issues in an international context provides students with frameworks with which they can examine our own issues of immigration, race, and identity in the United States.

**Dr. Goltz:** Over the summer, I was awarded a grant to revise the POLS 370: *Exploration in Political Theory* course to include a greater diversity of texts. This fall students in POLS 370 are encountering a far greater variety of voices than before, with writers of color and the colonial and post-colonial experiences foregrounded. I worked on these revisions during and after the community unrest following the killing of George Floyd, which made me mindful of the role professors play in deciding who we regard as a speaker worth studying.

## ACTION STEPS RELATED TO OPEN LETTER CONCERNING INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND BLACK LIVES MATTER

(Continued)

**Dr. Lynch:** As I worked with my colleagues on the open letter that appears in this newsletter, the language about committing to use our power had special resonance. While I have recognized this before, the conversation around our statement sparked reflection and conscious action related to my research, activities on campus, and courses. This summer, I pivoted from a research focus on national elections to state legislative contests with a special focus on Minnesota. While in the initial stages, this move recognizes the key role that states and localities play in representing or failing to represent communities in the state. Further, in deliberations regarding the criteria for awarding a scholarship, I was able support colleagues who advocated against using GPA for the award to focus on a more holistic approach for making the determination of the award due to the known biases inherent in GPA.

While I have made some efforts through my research and university service, I have focused on revising courses to better address social justice in my courses. For instance, in the new core curriculum we are paying more explicit attention to power inequities and the consequences of these inequities. In my campaigns and elections class, we will turn attention to state and local elections with an emphasis on the role of institutions in promoting or thwarting representation of marginalized groups during the latter half of the semester. Similarly, in the public policy class, we will use the policy framework developed in the first part of the course to examine racial inequity and the role of public policy in creating and addressing these inequities both at St. Thomas and in the broader community. In making these changes, I have sought to broaden the perspectives that have dominated the discipline of political science by including more work from scholars of color in my syllabi. Finally, in each course I have sought to raise social justice issues on campus and in the larger community by addressing topics like Loras Hall and the Breonna Taylor case as developments emerged, and encouraging students to participate in university-sponsored discussions on these matters.

The actions that I have taken are necessary first steps. However, they cannot be the last steps. I look forward to listening and learning more about how I can promote true justice through my position at St. Thomas and reporting on my new efforts in this direction.

**Dr. Mazumdar:** In my *POLS 352: Developing World Politics* course this Fall semester, I'm discussing the legacy of Colonialism and Slavery on Sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries, as well as the US. We are also examining socio-economic inequalities within these societies, particularly race and ethnic-based inequalities, and the struggle for social justice and political empowerment among the underprivileged and systematically marginalized communities in many of these countries.

## PI SIGMA ALPHA

The Chi Theta Chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha (PSA) will be inducting seven new members during Fall 2020: Emily Dean, Anna Erickson, Thomas Miller, Adriana Van Hout, Jason Vietzke, Shannon Whalen, and Mitchell Zaic. Pi Sigma Alpha is the national political science honor society for undergraduate and graduate students of political science, with over 500 chapters established in colleges and universities in the US. Members inducted into PSA have achieved high academic honors at St. Thomas, and are within the top third of their graduating class.

PSA is co-sponsoring a (virtual) panel discussion on Elections 2020 on Thursday, October 29, involving Dr. Tim Lynch (POLS) and Dr. Adam Check (ECON), as well as students from Dr. Lynch's *Campaigns and Elections* course this semester. PSA has tentative plans to hold its annual banquet during April next year.

## MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The UST Model UN team will be representing the United Kingdom this year at the American Model United Nations (AMUN) International conference. The team will serve on a number of key UN simulations, including all of the General Assembly committees, all of the Security Council committees (current and historical), ECOSOC, and will field an advocate in an International Court of Justice case. The conference is being held online this year. This photo is from last year's conference in Chicago – we're hoping to be back there again next year! (AMUN 2019 photo)



## FOREIGN AFFAIRS CLUB

The Foreign Affairs Club meets regularly during convo hours to discuss major international issues.

## PRE-LAW SOCIETY

The Pre-Law Society has been rapidly growing this fall with many new members. Their events schedule for the fall is full of opportunities to learn more about the legal profession and law school. On October 28th, they will be hosting a panel with the admissions offices of our three local law schools. On November 11th, they will be hosting a panel with current law students about law student life. To finish the semester, they will be holding an attorney networking event on December 1st. Further details and registration options are available through TommieLink. This year Pre-Law Society is led by Kyla Krohn and Kathryn Van Sistine.

## MOCK TRIAL

The mock trial team is hard at work preparing for their fall competition season. The team's events are all virtual this fall, with major tournaments hosted by the University of Connecticut on the weekend of October 24-25, and Hamline the weekend of November 14-15. The team is also getting practice with an intra-squad scrimmage on October 19th, a scrimmage against Macalester on November 7th, and a scrimmage against Carleton on November 8th. This year the team is captained by Dylan Thorson and Jack Thram, and Bree Reeves and Nick Sideras are returning as coaches. Good luck to the mock trial team!

## IGNITE

St. Thomas chapter of IGNITE became official in Summer 2020. IGNITE is a national organization that works to address the political underrepresentation of women by building a pipeline of politically ambitious young women. Plans for the year include debate watch parties, documentary screenings, informational events, and guest speakers. Anyone interested can join via TommieLink, or email IGNITE President Abby Hammer ([hamm6496@stthomas.edu](mailto:hamm6496@stthomas.edu)). To learn more: [www.ignitenational.org/](http://www.ignitenational.org/).

Dr. Buhr will be teaching an Aquinas Scholars course with Dr. Ashley Shams (French). The course is entitled, “Who Belongs? Identity and Immigration in Canada and France.”

Course Description: What does it mean to be American? Is being Canadian much different? Who are the French, *really*? Such questions about national identity and immigration are complicated and often reveal a messy combination of political, linguistic, social, gender, and legal elements. In the first part of this course, you will study theoretical frameworks that will equip you with the skills you need to probe deeper into discussions about ethnicity, immigration, gender, and the role of state. Then in the second part of the class, using a comparative approach, you will apply this knowledge to case studies focused on issues of immigration and national identity in Canada and France drawing on examples from pop culture and the media. These real life examples include excerpts from the Daily Show with Trevor Noah, political debates over religious symbols and dress, music videos, print advertising, and spoken word poetry.



### POLS 398: Environmental Law and Politics

For spring semester Dr. Goltz will be teaching a course in environmental law and politics, primarily within the United States. The class will address major pieces of environmental legislation and regulation, as well as the formation and articulation of environmental political platforms. Throughout, the course will give attention to the distributional consequences of environmental degradation and preservation. This topics course will count toward the Legal Studies minor, and you should talk to Dr. Goltz directly if you have any questions (JRC 406, [goltz@stthomas.edu](mailto:goltz@stthomas.edu), 651-962-5724).

### POLS 398: Comparative Politics of Asia: China, India, and Japan

Dr. Mazumdar’s course examines the government, politics, economy, and international relations of three major Asian countries - China, India, and Japan. It will use a comparative approach to examine their history, political culture, political institutions, government structures and processes, political economy, political development and transitions, and international interactions. The goals of the course include determining the impact of traditional cultures, western values and influences, economic change, state institutions, nationalism and national identity, and globalization on the political processes of these countries.

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## NOTE FROM PROFESSOR HIGH-PIPPERT

Registration for Spring 2021 is right around the corner. We’ll be offering POLS 104: *Government and Politics*, POLS 205: *Citizen Participation and Public Policy*, POLS 225: *World Politics*, and POLS 240: *Political Science Research Methods*. Our selection of 300-level courses includes POLS 302: *Women and Politics*, POLS 314: *Constitutional Rights and Liberties*, POLS 326: *International Law and Organizations*, and two POLS 398 topics courses: *Asian Politics* and *Environmental Law and Politics*. Dr. Buhr will also be offering POLS 424: *Seminar in International Relations*.

Quick advising tips: Remember that seminars are open to juniors and seniors who have taken at least one 300-level course within that particular subfield. Only one or two seminars are offered each semester, so you need to work with your advisor and plan ahead for your seminar. POLS 370: *Explorations in Political Theory* is offered in the fall, and POLS 240: *Political Science Research Methods* is offered in the spring. As always, feel free to check in with me as needed throughout the semester. Email me with questions or to set up a zoom meeting. Take the best care of yourselves and others.

Professor High-Pippert  
[ahighpippe@stthomas.edu](mailto:ahighpippe@stthomas.edu)

# What do the faculty enjoy most about teaching this fall?

## DR BUHR

1) seeing my students really step up and perform in class despite the abnormality of our academic situation, and 2) grading discussion board comments about Stalinist totalitarianism with these people in the room.



Liliya and Carys

## DR HIGH-PIPERT

I am enjoying teaching POLS 104 again, as this course always reminds me of why I fell in love with the discipline of political science. I am also enjoying teaching in-person and teaching my very engaged students.



Dr. High-Pippert in her favorite mask.

## DR GOLTZ

This fall I have enjoyed working with the seminar in judicial politics to develop individual research projects with each student. Student projects preliminarily include mock jury research methodologies, litigating environmental racism in the Flint drinking water crisis, and legal challenges to governors' emergency powers during Covid, among many other great projects. I am very excited to see where these projects go!



Professor Goltz dropping his ballot off at his local Post Office.

## DR LYNCH

My teaching is all remote this semester. While I miss campus and the chance meetings with students and colleagues, I've been enjoying the opportunity work with students on research projects related to upcoming US Senate and House races.



Dr. Lynch visiting with a colleague who didn't migrate in time!

## DR MAZUMDAR

The ability to teach in-person classes despite the challenges involved and the opportunity to continue having some personal interaction with the students is the most enjoyable part of Fall teaching for me.

## STUDENT RESEARCH AND INTERNSHIPS

**Cora Heinzen and Krystal Blas Rodriguez** are serving as interns with the Citizens League this academic year. The political science department has a civic partnership with the Citizens League, a member-supported, non-partisan non-profit organization that champions the role of all Minnesotans to govern for the common good and promote democracy (<http://citizensleague.org/>). We look forward to hearing about their experiences in the Spring 2021 newsletter!

**Isabel Rolfes:** I am a Finance Intern for the Minnesota DFL House Caucus. I work with the department to run campaign finance reports and actblue imports to ensure all of our finance information is in accordance with campaign finance laws. I also do work organizing RSVP's for events and compiling data to know how much lobbyists/donors have given to us. I have met with House leadership over zoom before and have participated with call time with State Reps to take notes on their conversations and encourage them to call as much as they can.

**Karly Hahn and Derek Nauman:** Karly continues to serve as chair of Minnesota College Republicans, and Derek serves as vice-chair. The last time St. Thomas had a chair/vice-chair duo was in 2013, when POLS major Andrew Hasek served as chair and his sister Angie Hasek served as vice-chair. This election season, Karly reports that they've been busy with door-knocking (at respectful distances) and participating in town halls with Republican candidates.

**Casey Mager:** As a student representative on the University of St. Thomas's Civic-Engagement & Voter Education Advocacy Task Force, and as a campus leader, I have helped facilitate the Get-Out-The-Vote efforts you've probably seen around campus, helped with getting funding for our Task Force by creating the skeletal framework for a shark tank styled pitch to be awarded an outside grant so that we can continue implementing our values-driven liberal arts education into action. I've also been an approachable student face for any and all to ask questions on the election processes from voter registration to actual concerns about voting fraud. As a student in particular, I also raise the unique student-based concerns to the task force regarding any and all voting-related issues. With November 3<sup>rd</sup> just around the corner, I am striving to be as friendly to and knowledgeable for as many fellow students with any last-minute questions and concerns they may have. With all that said, let's use our values-driven liberal arts education to get out and vote!

**Dylan Thorson:** I have been a student intern at the Ramsey County Elections office since June of 2018, applying after I saw it posted in a Political Science Newsletter my First Year at St Thomas. In my time there I have had responsibilities ranging from registering voters, to programming ballot counters, to packing ballots and election supplies. Since last summer, my co-workers and I have been hard at work sorting out Coronavirus Protection Equipment for the county, as well as meeting the large demand for absentee ballots. My favorite moments always happen on Election Day, when months of teamwork come together, the ballots all come in, and we can take a big sigh of successful relief as we drive home. I consider myself lucky to do work that is both interesting to me as well as promoting something that I feel is worthwhile. Much work has gone into the security and safety of the 2020 Presidential Election, and I'm grateful I get the opportunity as a student to participate in such a historic event!



## FACULTY IN THE MEDIA

In August, Dr. High-Pippert was interviewed by local media sources when Senator Kamala Harris was chosen for the vice-presidential nomination:

<https://kstp.com/news/analysis-local-political-science-professor-examines-biden-choice-for-vice-president-/5823758/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taTeXloTFUo>

## STUDENT RESEARCH

Isabel Rolfes led a Feminist Friday session for the Luann Dummer Center for Women in October. Her presentation focused on the intersections of violence against women and climate change.



## ALUMNI INFORMATION

Election 2020: We are so proud of our former students running for local office in 2020! Kevin Zabel is running for re-election to the Oakdale City Council, and Dannah Thompson is running for a seat on the Roseville City Council. Dannah Thompson is the first indigenous person to run for city council in Roseville.

Colleen Ryan (UST class of 2014) did a guest lecture on protest and policing in Dr. Buhr's POLS 354: Politics of Post-Soviet States class on October 5. The lecture integrated Ms. Ryan's experiences as a police officer during this summer's protests in Minneapolis and her undergraduate and graduate training in human rights, international security, and gender issues.

## Minnesota State Senate Internship Program - Application Deadline: Thursday, November 5

<https://www.senate.mn/departments/secretary/info/interns/index.html>

The Minnesota State Senate is providing remote internship opportunities for college and university students during the 2021 legislative session. This will be different than previous years and limited in scope. To apply, complete the application (link above) and return it by November 5. Students are encouraged to indicate any specific skills or interests on the application form to aid in selection. The 2021 legislative session will begin January 5 and is expected to conclude no later than May 17. Senate internships expose students to the legislative process and to the internal workings of a specific Senator's office. The internships are flexible and are arranged between the individual Senator, the intern, and the intern coordinator's office.

## NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

If you'd like to see something in our next newsletter, please contact *POLISCI NEWS* editor, Carol Leegard (cleegard@stthomas.edu).