

career paths

Dr. Christina Sciabarra Discusses Her Transition to a Community College Career



Christina Sciabarra is an adjunct faculty member in political science at Bellevue College. Her research focuses on building peace after civil wars in the Middle East, particularly Iraq and the Levant region. She is actively engaged with organizations building cultural bridges between the Middle East and the United States. Dr. Sciabarra is an alumna of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Fellowship and the Jackson Foundation Leadership Fellowship and works with an international non-profit focused on youth empowerment.

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What is a typical week like at Bellevue College? What energizes you about working at a community college?

A typical week at Bellevue College includes the usual class meetings, a professional development event, and working on college-wide changes using the Achieving the Dream framework. We are in the process of implementing Guided Pathways and synchronizing this with updating our Integrated Student Support services and faculty professional development. We are focusing on increasing student success (currently defined as retention and completion of degrees and certificates) and there is a lot of work taking place all over the college on this initiative. I am leading the development of the First Year Seminar; we are piloting the course and setting teacher training while building a peer educator program.

What did you study in graduate school? Can you say a little bit about your research?

I always knew I wanted to focus on conflict and peace studies and I discovered that this body of research lives in political science while taking an undergraduate course on armed conflict with Dr. Faten Ghosn (who would become my dissertation adviser). I started out focused on Russia and Ukraine but was mobilized and sent to Iraq after my first semester of the PhD program. When I returned I changed my focus to the Middle East and post-civil war peace-building. My research looks at how civil conflicts are terminated and peace-building outcomes. I started out trying to create post-civil war peace categories, but it was challenging to find cross-national and longitudinal data that worked for my definitions. I am working on taking the peace-building index I created and connecting it with those peace outcomes so we can better understand the impact of conflict termination and long-term peace.

Why and when did you choose to pursue a career in a community college?

I always knew that teaching was important to me and that I wanted to spend the majority of my time focused on showing students how to use basic research methods to think critically and become more engaged in the world. When I realized I wanted to teach full-time I quit my administrative position to become a full-time adjunct. It was a risky move, but there are opportunities for promotion and contracts that guarantee courses for adjuncts at my college. I love working with students and being engaged with the field of political science!

Do you have any advice for PhD students considering a career in a community college?

You must love teaching! Community colleges are 100% focused on teaching and student success. You can find time and space to work on research and some colleges even support it as a pedagogical practice (I am fortunate my college has an entire institute devoted to high impact practices), but at the end of the day, it is all about teaching. ■

Dr. Niambi Carter Talks about Her Path to Becoming a Professor at Howard University

What energizes you about your career at Howard University?

I love the history of this place. The people who have walked through this campus from Ralph Bunche to Toni Morrison to Kamala Harris—I'm always in awe. There is an energy at Howard University that is palpable. And, of course, the students. They're constantly teaching me something and I am so excited to see how they think about the world and how they're going to make the world better. I see them and I know that the world will be a much better place when they are in the position to lead. I also work with some fantastic women who are on top of their respective games. Drs. Dawuni, Grant, and Middlemass are doing awesome work both on and off campus and I am fortunate to be able to work with them.

What did you study in graduate school? Can you say a little bit about your research?

I studied American politics with an emphasis on race and ethnic politics in the US—particularly Black public opinion and political behavior. Paula McClain, my adviser and Howard University alumna, put me on a project examining Black-Latino relations in Durham, NC and that set me on this path. My current research looks at Black public opinion on immigration and argues that Black people use immigration as a way to critique their own exclusion in the American body politic. My book *American While Black: African Americans, Immigration and Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 2019) takes a historical and contemporary look at this issue to try and offer a more nuanced understanding of Black opinion on this issue. My next project investigates American refugee policy, also dubbed the "crisis at the southern border," through the lens of US Haitian refugee policy through the 1970s–1990s. From my vantage point, you cannot understand what is happening now unless you understand what happened to Haitians then.

Why and when did you choose to pursue a career as a professor and scholar?

I knew I wanted to be a professor in middle school when I saw *A Different World*. In some ways, that fictional show gave me a model of what my real professional life looks like today. I certainly would not be here if it were not for that show giving me a way to envision myself in a future I could not see and had not seen until that point. It was also helmed by Debbie Allen, a notable Howard alum.

In what ways did your doctoral training and mentors prepare you for your career?

I've had a number of great mentors throughout my career and I'm very thankful. Of course, Dr. Paula McClain was one of the greatest. She not only trained me well in the discipline of political science, but she also gave me some important soft skills that I still use to this day for how to engage at conferences or during job interviews. Her guidance showed me what it means to be a graduate adviser and mentor and I hope to do the same with my own graduate students. Dr. Shayla Nunnally is another mentor who has not only been my coauthor but a true friend. She gave me my first business suit for

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Niambi Carter is associate professor of political science at Howard University. Her book *American While Black: African Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 2019) explores public opinion with respect to immigration. Her latest project explores US Haitian refugee policy in order to understand the current "refugee crisis" at the southern border. Her work has appeared in *Political Psychology*, *Politics, Groups and Identities*, and the *Journal of African American Studies*.

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Academia can be a difficult profession. It is not for the faint of heart. But when you find your people, hang on to them, lean on them, and be sure to give to them as they have given to you.

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SPOTLIGHTS

attendance at APSA when I was a broke graduate student. Dr. Khalilah Brown-Dean has shown me how to navigate difficult professional situations with a grace that I do not possess naturally. Dr. Lorrie Frasure has been an amazing colleague. Dr. Frasure brought me into the Collaborative Multiracial Post-election Survey (CMPS) and allowed me to share that space with a graduate student. She has shown me how to write grants and provided a space for me to bring younger scholars into the fold. I'm unsure how she does it all but she has truly been a great mentor. Lastly, I cannot forget my colleagues Dr. Keneshia Grant and Dr. Keesha Middlemass. They are not only brilliant but two of the most giving and hardworking colleagues I know. From sharing teaching tips and assignments to providing pointers on my writing ideas to sharing sources for interviews—they are just amazingly giving people and I am so privileged to have them in my department and to be able to interact with them regularly. In short, there are too many people to name here, but I am humbled and almost embarrassed by the people who have mentored and continue to mentor me in the profession.

Do you have any advice for PhD students considering a career in academia?

Academia can be a difficult profession. It is not for the faint of heart. But when you find your people, hang on to them, lean on them, and be sure to give to them as they have given to you. It is also immensely rewarding. If or when you cannot think of anything else you'd rather do then you know you're in the right place. Of course, I've thought of leaving at different points and going to count visitors at the zoo, but that always passes. This profession gives us so much, just remember to take time for yourself and your loved ones. Be kind to others and use whatever power or resources you have to make sure the world of political science becomes larger, not smaller. ■

The **APSA Career Paths** series explores the wide range of career trajectories that political science PhDs can take and provides specific career advice for graduate students entering the job market, as well as other political scientists at all career levels who are looking for new career opportunities. Individuals interested in contributing to the series should email Dr. Tanya Schwarz, APSA Director of Teaching & Learning at tschwarz@apsanet.org

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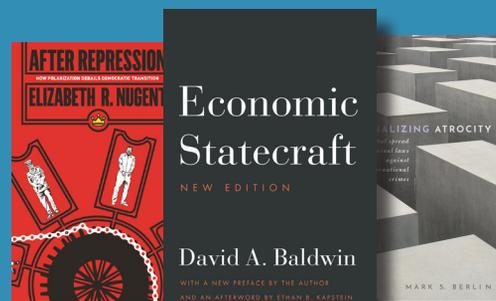
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