Greetings from North Stevens Hall!

The Department of Political Science continues to do what it’s done for so many years—attract students, teach with verve and integrity, conduct ground-breaking research, and reach out to the broader community to contribute our expertise.

Perhaps the biggest news for the department this last year was the retirement of Professor Michael Palmer, who had taught political theory here for thirty-five years, and the hiring of Professor Robert Ballingall to teach political theory and constitutional law. In addition to teaching in Political Science and the Honors College, Palmer was also an internationally recognized scholar of Thucydides and the organizer of an externally funded lecture series that brought well-known political theorists to campus. Faculty, students and administrators feted Palmer with a good-bye party that featured several varieties of blueberry pie. Professor Glover distributed ranked choice ballots for the pies. We will miss Prof. Palmer but are very excited about our new colleague, Prof. Ballingall.

This year’s elections had high turnout and interest nationally and many students and alumni were involved in political campaigns. Harold “Trey” Stewart III ’16 of Presque Isle was elected to his second term in the Maine House of Representatives. He was then selected as the Assistant Leader of the House Republican Caucus and will be the youngest member of legislative leadership in the 129th Legislature. Margaret (Payne) Reynolds ’11 ran the field operation for Maine Rep. Jared Golden of Lewiston, who won the 2018 congressional election in Maine’s second congressional District. Reynolds will serve as Golden's district director, overseeing the congressman’s Maine offices. Whether their electoral efforts were successful or not, we salute every person who contributed to our civic life.

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Among the department students who were honored in recent years were Bangor native Allyson Edin, UMaine’s 2017 Valedictorian, and Aliya Uteuova of Kazakhstan, UMaine’s Outstanding Graduating International Student of 2018.

Prof. Robert Glover won the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher and Advisor Award in 2018. Prof. Mark Brewer won the September 2018 Faculty Excellence Award from the UMaine Alumni Association.

Whatever you are doing, we would love to hear from you. Please drop an email to policie@maine.edu or add your information on our webpage. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter. If you would like to contribute to our gift fund, which supports various student and faculty projects, you can do so through the University of Maine Foundation’s Political Science page.

Best wishes to all for a joyful holiday season and a happy New Year.

Amy Fried, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science

Ranked-Choice Voting and the 2018 Elections in Maine

Professor Mark Brewer

This election cycle Maine did something no state had ever done before: Maine became the first state in the United States to decide United States congressional elections using the method known as ranked-choice voting. Historically, American congressional elections (indeed the overwhelming majority of all elections in the US) have been decided by a plurality vote—the candidate who gets the most votes wins. Those few states that do not employ the plurality method use a run-off system, where in cases that no candidate gets a majority of votes cast the top two finishers compete in a new, run-off election (usually within a few weeks) to determine who gets the seat in question. Ranked-choice voting is different than both of these models. Under ranked-choice, voters are given the opportunity (but are not required) to rank the candidates for office in order from most preferred to least preferred. If one candidate gets 50% of the vote on the first ballot, she or he is declared the winner. So far business as (mostly) usual. But if no candidate gets a majority after the first round, the ranked-choice element kicks in. The last place candidate is eliminated, and the second choice rankings on the eliminated candidate's ballots are allotted to the continuing candidates. This process continues until a candidate gets 50% or more of the vote.

The institution of ranked-choice voting has a short but thus far highly conflictual history in Maine. Maine voters approved ranked-choice voting for all congressional, state legislative, and gubernatorial elections via citizens initiative in November 2016. Many influential political actors immediately cried foul, citing concerns (also raised during the campaign season) that ranked-choice voting violated the Maine constitution. In March 2017 the Maine Supreme Court agreed, issuing an advisory opinion that ranked-choice voting for state legislative and gubernatorial general elections did indeed violate the Maine Constitution. The Court was silent on US congressional elections and state primary elections. After this ruling the Maine Legislature passed a bill that delayed the implementation of ranked-choice for any Maine elections until 2021, unless the state constitution was amended to allow it. This was seen by many as effectively killing ranked-choice voting in Maine.

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New Faculty Hire Robert Ballingall

This fall it has been my honor and privilege to join the Department of Political Science at UMaine, where I’ve started at the rank of Assistant Professor, teaching political theory and constitutional law. I’m thrilled to be working alongside such consummate scholars and estimable colleagues and am looking forward to taking advantage of all that the great state of Maine has to offer.

Before coming to Maine, I was Postdoctoral Fellow in the Program on Constitutional Government at Harvard University, and before that was Allan Bloom Memorial Postdoctoral Fellow for Research in Classical Political Thought at the University of Toronto, where I also took my PhD.

My first book, The Reverent City: Plato’s Laws and the Politics of Ethical Authority, is under contract to the University of Pennsylvania Press. This project is the culmination of research begun while pursuing my doctorate. It brings out the enduring relevance of one of Plato’s least-studied dialogues for our understanding of the cynicism, apathy, and nativism to which democratic publics are increasingly prone in modern societies. I show how Plato anticipates these worrying trends with remarkable foresight yet locates their germ in novel cause. Whereas contemporary observers point to economic disruption, persistent racism, and communication technology to explain the so-called new populism, Plato dwells on the disruptive consequences of neglecting a certain virtue - reverence, the capacity for showing due respect for what exceeds and circumscribes the human. Inasmuch as we have become irreverent ourselves, I suggest that we can ill-afford to dismiss Plato’s warning that civilized life depends on its observance.

Ranked-Choice Voting

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But ranked-choice supporters refused to concede defeat, quickly gathering more than 80,000 signatures to secure a people’s veto of the law delaying ranked-choice voting, and thus requiring the June 2018 primaries to be conducted using ranked choice. This survived a state court legal challenge from the Maine Secretary of State and a federal court challenge from the Maine Republican Party, and ranked-choice was used for the first time in Maine in June 2018. This received some national attention, but was really only the dress rehearsal for the use of ranked-choice voting in Maine’s US congressional elections (but not state legislative or gubernatorial elections) in November 2018. National and even international eyes were on Maine as it carried out its experiment in representative democracy.

Maine general election exercise in ranked-choice voting went off without a hitch, but the aftermath has been filled with controversy and legal challenges. Ranked-choice was used in Maine’s three 2018 congressional races—Maine’s first congressional district, Maine’s second congressional district, and one of Maine’s two seats in the United States Senate. In Maine’s First CD and in the US Senate race the incumbent—Chellie Pingree and Angus King respectively—easily reached the 50% threshold on the first ballot and were thus declared the winners of their contests. It was a different story in Maine’s Second CD. On the first ballot with 95% of districts reporting Republican incumbent Bruce Poliquin had 46.2% of the vote and Democratic challenger Jared Golden had 45.5%, with two independents holding the remainder of the votes. Since neither Poliquin nor Golden could reach 50% on the first ballot, Maine Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap implemented ranked-choice procedures. After the two independent candidates were eliminated and their votes reallocated, Golden was declared the winner by a margin of 50.5% to Poliquin’s 49.5%. Poliquin and some of his supporters challenged this outcome in federal court. At various points, Poliquin asked to stop the count, declare ranked-choice voting unconstitutional and order a new election. Judge Lance Walker first declined to grant a temporary restraining order to stop the RCV tally and later ruled the system constitutional. Poliquin then asked the First Circuit Court of Appeals to halt certification. After this was denied, Poliquin withdrew his appeal. Golden was sworn into office on January 3. RCV remains unconstitutional for state general election contests in Maine. Now we must watch where Maine’s innovation goes from here.
Notes from Department Professors

Professor Richard Powell

Professor Richard Powell was just recently reappointed to a second four-year term as Director of the Cohen Institute for Leadership and Public Service. The Cohen Institute was founded in 2012 in honor of Secretary William S. Cohen’s distinguished career in public service. It promotes a wide variety of campus programs that train future leaders to be ethical, visionary, innovative, civil, thoughtful and independent minded in the service of Maine, the United States, and the world.

The Cohen Institute’s programming is highly complementary to the Political Science Department. For example, the biennial Cohen Lecture brings major public figures to campus for a public discussion of significant issues in U.S. politics and international affairs. Past speakers have included former heads of state, cabinet secretaries, members of Congress, diplomats, military leaders, and prominent journalists. The events are typically hosted by Secretary Cohen.

The Institute also led the creation of UMaine’s interdisciplinary Leadership Studies minor. The minor, in its fifth year, has grown dramatically and is open to students from any UMaine academic major. It provides students with in-depth knowledge of leadership theory, ethics, skills, and context-based issues, as well as practical, experiential training applicable to nearly any area of study or social setting. The minor prepares students for diverse, real-life experiences as citizen leaders in local, state, national, and global communities.

Working with Peter Madigan ’81, The Cohen Group, and a network of distinguished UMaine alumni, the Institute will be co-sponsoring a Washington D.C. travel course with the Political Science Department this coming May for the fourth consecutive year. The course takes a group of about 15 students to Washington for immersive leadership training through on-site seminars with notable leaders in fields such as government, the military, business, non-profit organizations, athletics, education, and the arts.

University of Maine students visit Washington D.C. in 2018

Professor James W. Warhola

Professor James W. Warhola has recently engaged in several overseas ventures related to his teaching, research and publication activities, including in Turkey and Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic) in Spring of 2016, Eastern Europe (Kiev and Budapest) during Autumn of 2017, and Great Britain and Ireland in summer of 2018. Publications that have emerged from these activities include “The Religious Dimension of Patrimonial Rule in Post-Soviet Eurasia” (Journal of Church and State, 2018), “The Useful God: Religion and Public Authority in Post-Soviet Russia,” in Dominic Erdozain, ed., The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment (University of Northern Illinois Press, 2017), and currently in progress, “The Etiology of Triparadigm Democracy in Turkey” and “Brexit Negotiations and the Fate of the Good Friday Accords for Northern Ireland.”

Professor Kristin Vekas

In the summer of 2018, I was selected to join a small group of scholars on a trip to Seoul, South Korea with the Mike and Maureen Mansfield Foundation and Korea Foundation. The trip brought scholars of East Asian politics who have a primary focus on Japan or China to South Korea to encourage us to broaden our research focus to the Korean Peninsula. During our week in Seoul, we met with policy makers from Korea and the United States, as well as South Korean scholars and journalists. Some highlights of the visit included a meeting with the director of the South Korean National Intelligence Service, a visit to the Ministry of Reunification, a discussion with a high-level defector from North Korea, and a tour of the Hanawon facility near Seoul where recent refugees from North Korea are acclimatized to South Korean society. Despite a common language and deep shared cultural traditions, North and South Koreans have radically different lives and habits, and adjustment to the South is quite challenging. I was impressed by the breadth of services and compassion shown to these recent refugees, even as South Korea still has a long way to go in helping these new citizens succeed in their society.

Following the trip, I have been working on a comparative piece of scholarship that complements my research focus on Japan-China relations. The project asks why South Koreans are less likely to link economic interests with their political grievances with Japan compared to their Chinese counterparts even though the sources of the tensions are largely parallel. The answer lies in the different ways economic globalization has shaped national identity in the two countries. In China, economic globalization has strengthened a nativist identity with strong anti-foreign components. Korean national identity, on the other hand, has been formed by economic integration and interdependence. While a strong national identity and anti-foreign elements exist, they are delinked from economic interests.

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Voting is an essential component of democracy. Yet, every election, millions of eligible voters fail to turn out. This is true among younger voters, and is especially the case in non-presidential years, when turnout rates for 18-24 year olds hover around 20%.

The University of Maine is a leader in its campus voting efforts. In 2016, the campus was recognized by the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge for its high turnout rates. And UMaine was named one of the top 28 campuses for student voting in the country earlier this year by the publication Washington Monthly. But there is always room to improve.

This year, Professor Rob Glover helped lead dozens of faculty, staff, students, and administrators in an effort called the UMaine Voter Activation Team (UVAT). This non-partisan group was dedicated to increasing voter registration, voter education, and getting students out to the polls. UVAT aimed to amplify the existing on-campus efforts by the longstanding UMaine UVote program.

In just a few months, these dedicated volunteers accomplished something truly remarkable. To start, UVAT launched a sweeping initiative to get students registered. In roughly a month, over 3000 UMaine students were given opportunities to complete voter registration cards right in their classrooms.

In addition, the campus participated in National Voter Registration Day on September 25th, registering hundreds of students. Those who got information about voting also had the opportunity to enter to win prizes such as iPads, UMaine-UNH hockey tickets, and lots of great University of Maine gear.

UVAT then shifted to voter education, helping provide the campus community with non-partisan information about candidates, races, and referendum questions. And on election day, UVAT had voter information and pizza available in the Student Union throughout the day (an effort that included UMaine alumnus and 2018 Miss Maine, Marina Gray ’16).

When election day arrived, UVAT partnered with the Town of Orono to recruit poll workers to administer this year’s elections and assist in same-day registration. All voting happened on campus in the Field House. On election day, there was a nearly 10% increase in Orono voter turnout from the last mid-term election in 2014. In fact, UMaine and community volunteers helped process nearly 1500 registration cards throughout the day.

In addition, UMaine Political Science students partnered with the Bangor Daily News and the national organization Fairvote to conduct exit polling and offer predictions in races using “ranked choice voting.” This new voting method makes it harder to quickly call election outcomes, but with the students’ assistance the Bangor Daily News accurately predicted the outcomes of ranked choice races.

While voting and elections are frequent topics in our departmental course offerings, this effort enabled students to see their own campus community as a “laboratory of democracy.” Many of those volunteering were participating in an election in which they were eligible to vote for the first time. If 2018 is any indication, the future of voter engagement is bright at the University of Maine.