Magnifying the Voices of Women in Political Science

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
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Samara Klar [1], an associate professor in the University of Arizona School of Government and Public Policy [2], is a whirlwind of activity. The 2016 book she co-authored, "Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction," made her a go-to source for members of the news media. She also teaches classes, organizes conferences and serves on boards. Last year, her article "When Common Identities Decrease Trust: An Experimental Study of Partisan Women" tied for the best article of 2018 in the American Journal of Political Science.

In the midst of all that, Klar helps run Women Also Know Stuff [3], an online database that she founded in 2016 that promotes the work and expertise of women scholars in political science. The database is designed to make it easier to find these scholars when searching for experts for news articles, syllabi and conferences.

The site has made waves in political science circles, as well as ripples in other academic fields.

Frustrated Into Action

Due to implicit and explicit gender biases, women are often underrepresented as experts in academics and in the media, Klar said.

"In the 2016 election, in particular, the only time women political scientists were being asked about the election was when the issue was Hillary Clinton facing sexism ? as though women political scientists only study sexism. It was frustrating," Klar said.

In February 2016, Klar decided to do something about it. Home on maternity leave, Klar saw an article asking six political scientists about Bernie Sanders, and all six scholars were men. Then she received an email advertising a political science conference featuring 11 men and one woman.

"That is when I thought, OK, this is ridiculous," Klar said.

Klar created a simple database site in WordPress and emailed 12 women in political science to ask them to add their information and forward the site to colleagues.

"This was on a Friday at, like, noon, and I went out for a walk with the baby. When I came back, I had hundreds of emails about the project," Klar said.

She reached out to academics across the country who had expressed the most excitement about the project and invited them to join a Women Also Know Stuff committee.
National Impact

Women Also Know Stuff quickly garnered international media attention. It has been mentioned in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Arizona Republic, The Conversation, HuffPost, BBC News and other media. In 2016, the site received the Jane Mansbridge Award from the national Women’s Caucus for Political Science [4].

The Women Also Know Stuff executive committee maintains the database, which now includes almost 2,000 women, and created a Twitter account [5], which has more than 25,000 followers. The Twitter account promotes and celebrates research by and awards for women in political science.

The Women Also Know Stuff site gets 500 to 1,000 visitors a day, including people from major news organizations. Klar also has heard from colleagues around the world, including faculty members who realized they didn't have enough women represented on their syllabi and junior scholars who said reporters found their contact information through the site.

"We think part of its success is that it helped change the norms," Klar said. "It is not OK to have an all-male conference panel anymore."

The site has inspired spinoff sites across various disciplines, including Women Also Know History, Women+ Do Philosophy, Women Also Know Literature, Women in Sociology Also Know Stuff, and People of Color Also Know Stuff.

And the spinoffs keep coming.

Klar said she recently spent an hour talking to someone in economics who was planning to start a Women Also Know Econ site. Later that afternoon, she received an email from a woman in data science who was interested in doing the same for that field.

With funding received last year from the National Science Foundation, Women Also Know Stuff launched a new-and-improved website in August. Part of the grant will be used to measure the impact of the site.

The executive committee's next goal is to increase the diversity of the women in the database.

"We are addicted to growing," Klar said.

Klar says the School of Government and Public Policy has been immensely supportive, covering the cost of hosting the website and viewing the time Klar spends on the project as service to the discipline. Klar also received support from the Innovation Fund created as part of the school’s Melody S. Robidoux Foundation Fund Chair.

"In addition to working with students, Women Also Know Stuff is probably the most fulfilling thing I've done since I became a professor," Klar said. "You feel like you are making an impact."

A version of this article [6] originally appeared on the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences website.

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