

Disrupting implicit bias: Crowdsourced database highlights women experts in the social sciences #WomenAlsoKnowStuff

Women academics face inherent biases in the profession that limit career progression and influence. [Emily Beaulieu](#) and [Kathleen Searles](#) reflect on the extent of the gender gap in political science and how we might address this gap. One example is the #WomenAlsoKnowStuff website, a searchable database of women experts which has become a rallying cry, with hundreds of expert contributions and a steady stream of media attention.



This piece is part of a wider series on [Women in Academia](#) and coincides with [LSE Women: making history](#) – a campaign in celebration of #LSEwomen past, present and future.

This year's US presidential election holds no shortage of intrigue and demands for Political Scientists to explain current events. As [Republican candidate Donald Trump](#) continues to win primaries, and [establishment candidates fall by the wayside](#); as the nomination contest plays out [between Bernie and Hillary](#), there is high demand for commentary to help make sense of it all. Such opportunities enable academics to communicate the science of politics, and add to the public discourse.



Women academics, however, are often missing from the conversation. This absence is consistent with data on media representation of women experts in general, indicating they are sparse on [TV](#) and in [print](#). Is this simply because there are fewer women faculty in political science, particularly in the more advanced professorial ranks?



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Some of the research on the gender gap in political science might be interpreted as supporting this logic. But the

research also points to a combination of [implicit gender bias](#) and network effects, which arguably lay the foundation for women's absence in expert discussions, ultimately leading to a skewed perception of experts as men.

Research on the Gender Gap in political science

A number of obstacles prevent women from being called upon to serve as experts within the profession and beyond. [Research](#) shows that women in political science do not attain tenure and other promotions at the same rates as men, even when controlling for multiple relevant factors. [Recent data](#) also show women are underrepresented in the top journals in the discipline.

A gap in perceived and actual influence in the discipline has also been documented, both in terms of [“top scholars” in IR](#) (where women are only 2 of 25) and among [the 400 most-cited political scientists](#), where women are also under-represented. [Another study](#) finds that IR journal articles authored by women are cited 20 percent less than articles by men.

But these gender gaps might all seem to explain why women are less likely to be seen as experts—because they are not doing as much, nor receiving as much recognition. However, gender gaps in service and teaching work in the profession are suggestive of the ways that subjective assessments also shape barriers to perceiving women as experts.

Women do more [“low-status” service work](#) than men; both formal service like committee work, and the informal [“housework”](#) recently described by Dr. Prescod-Weinstein, which keeps academia running. Furthermore, when they do hold higher-status service roles, women face [“gender devaluation”](#), where the position is deemed less important once a woman is holding it. Women are also at a [clear disadvantage](#) in terms of student evaluations of teaching, though they can improve those evaluations when they conform to gendered stereotypes. [For example](#), women spend more time with students outside of class but receive ratings for accessibility equivalent to those of male faculty, because students expect women to be more available.

What these gaps show, then, is that women academics face inherent biases in this profession, which have important implications both for those more objective metrics, and for perceptions of expertise. Additional work on service and teaching takes time away from research. Furthermore, conforming to stereotypical expectations of women as nurturing, collaborative, and helpful undercuts a woman's ability to be perceived as an [expert](#).

From Research to Action

Given the nature of the gaps described, it seems inadequate to laugh off the [manel](#) or grumble about [mansplaining](#). And so a group of women in the discipline have decided to do something about it. Not long ago, [Samara Klar](#) reached out to a group of women with a novel idea: *Let's crowdsource a website of women academics in political science to make it easier to find women experts.*

From this idea came a [website](#), which officially launched on March 8, and offers a searchable database of women experts in political science. #WomenAlsoKnowStuff has become a rallying cry, with hundreds of expert contributions to the site and a steady stream of media attention.

**Women
Also
Know
Stuff**



Image credit: womenalsoknowstuff.com

Some weeks later, the board of 10 members, including myself, is grappling with the implications of the website's success. We are currently engaged in planning, fundraising and publicity efforts to oversee the website's growth and to prolong and ultimately measure its impact.

An Evidentiary Basis for Optimism

This initiative stands on the shoulders of several programs that have been developed in the past to address gender gaps in political science and academia, such as [Journeys in World Politics](#), [Visions in Methodology \(VIM\)](#), and the [CeMent program](#) in Economics. These programs bring women together in small conferences to offer research mentorship and networking opportunities, and have been found to be effective when their impact was measured after a few years. For example, five years after the first group of women attended a CeMent conference, [women were found](#) to have an average of 0.4 more major grants and three additional publications. Their probability of publication in a top outlet increased 25 percent.

Similarly, [a survey of women](#) who had participated in VIM conferences revealed VIM participants to be better networked and more productive (both in terms of publications and submission to top journals), compared to men and women who had not attended a conference. These programs suggest short-term interventions can have positive

effects on some of those areas where we see objective gender gaps in the profession. At the same time, it is easy to grow impatient waiting for women to gradually accrue more status and influence in the profession—particularly for those of us in the midst of our careers. We see this website as a more disruptive change, which we hope will also have an impact on some of the many gender gaps in Political Science, and help to shift perceptions of who the experts are.

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March is Women's History Month and at LSE we're celebrating the achievements of the women of LSE. Check out the LSE history blog <http://goo.gl/9R9m8m> for more and get involved using [#LSEwomen](#)



Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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