

POLITICAL SCIENCE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

-Mahatma Gandhi



VOLUME VII, ISSUE II

GREETINGS

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For those of us who spend much of our time talking with students about the behavior of elected officials, we tend to be quite pleased when some of those students choose, what Max Weber called in a famous essay, “politics as a vocation.” In that essay, Weber, mindful of the travails of living in the midst of political conflict and finding resolution to those conflicts, described the political vocation as “the strong and slow boring of hard boards.” In this issue, we honor three PC political science alumni who have chosen a political vocation with all its ordeals which Weber rightly names, but also its satisfactions, and triumphs. The three we have chosen represent two generations of political science alumni: one veteran politician who has risen to position distinction and leadership in Rhode Island - Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian and two more recent graduates who are beginning their political careers – Vemala Phongsavanh and Kenny Woodland. While Scott has many perforated boards to his credit, Vemala and Kenny are just beginning to mark their own. Despite the generational divide, you will see in their profiles that they exemplify the values, political knowledge, commitment to service, and policy intelligence we hope to instill in our political science graduates. These three we think are a good sample of our many graduates who have chosen the political vocation.

Included also in this issue are updates on the goings on in the department such as continuing faculty research and the exciting work of three of this year’s six Forand Research Scholars.

Once again, many thanks to Danielle Ladd for her fine work editing this issue. Congratulations to her, as well, as she graduates as President of the Providence College Class of 2012!

“Keeping the flame alive”

William E. Hudson



KENNETH WOODLAND

CLASS OF 2011

WATERTOWN, DISTRICT D TOWN COUNCILOR



*“Professor Battistoni’s
Community
Organization class was
one that greatly
influenced me.”*

“At 8am, 5 days after graduation, I pulled papers in my Town Hall to become one of the youngest councilors in my town’s history,” said Kenneth Woodland. After graduating from Providence College in 2011 with a degree in Political Science, Kenneth spent his next few weeks gathering signatures, designing his logo, acquiring a campaign manager, and creating a website, “basically the nuts and bolts of a campaign” to kick start his political career. After a series of fundraisers and door-to-door campaigning, Kenneth was elected Watertown District D’s Town Councilor in November and sworn in January 3, 2012. He knew that he had wanted to do this for a long time and found that professors at Providence College helped give him the tools necessary to succeed in his position.

On the Council, Kenneth serves as Chair of the subcommittee on education, Vice-Chair of the subcommittee on public safety, and Secretary of the subcommittee on Human Services. Besides this, he is in his first year of law school at the New England School of Law and working full time as a Marketing Development Specialist at Mimecast, Inc.

Kenneth has also co-founded the Betsy Ross Good Citizenship Scholarship, which gives out college scholarships to Watertown High Seniors that are looking to go into a service related field in post high school education. He has also co-founded an event called “Flagging Cancer,” which “is basically a youth movement where

we play a huge “flag” football tourney with all proceeds going to cancer research,” said Kenneth.

During his time at PC, Kenneth was involved in BOP, Student Congress, PC Democrats, and College Democrats of RI. “All had major influences in what I’m doing today,” said Kenneth. The commitment to BOP gave him the time management skills he now uses to balance a full time job with law school and a Town Council position. It also gave him the planning skills to do fundraisers and hold campaign events. “Student Congress made me comfortable with speaking in front of large group, and more to speak my own, true opinion even with knowledge of contrary viewpoints in the crowd,” said Kenneth. Being a part of PC Democrats also helped him shape his ideology and participate in the political process.

Aside from his extracurricular involvement, Kenneth’s Community Organizing class taught by Professor Battistoni greatly influenced him. Kenneth said, “It encouraged students to get out, get involved, and use the resources available to you, and showed how differences can be made by an individual coordinating a group effort.” He also still uses arguments from Professor Hudson’s Public Policy class when debating and reasoning in the political realm, and as proposals come before the Council, they discuss evaluation strategies and results that were the highlights of Professor Hyde’s Public Policy Evaluation class. Kenneth notes that “credit must also be given to Professor Cammerano’s

classes that brought political theory and philosophy into real world applications” that he still uses today.

After being elected, Kenneth found that one of his greatest challenges in his new position was his age. He realized that he needed to be familiar with the Economic Development Plan, Safety Study, Road Development Plan, and a number of other documents relevant to Watertown District D.

Despite these hurdles, Kenneth overcame them and gained satisfaction meeting and talking with the people of Watertown. He said, “A constituent brings up an issue, none too small or too big, and I’ve enjoyed investigating the history, economics, and philosophy behind its origin, then examine possible changes, and their resulting impacts on the neighborhood and community as a whole.” He tries to live up to Gandhi’s quote, “Be the change you wish to see in the world” with every conversation.



VIMALA PHONGSAVANH

CLASS OF 2008

**WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND
PROGRAM DIRECTOR AT THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIANS**

*“PC has taught me how to be an ethical
and effective leader in my community.”*

After graduating from Providence College in 2008, Vimala Phongsavanh served as an AmeriCorps VISTA in Chinatown Boston at the Asian Community Development Corporation for one year. After this time, she worked as a Youth Program Manager at NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. At present, she works at the Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians as the Director of Education Programs and the City of Woonsocket as an elected School Committee Member. Vimala also writes a weekly column on education for the Woonsocket Call. This can be read at www.vimalaforschools.com.

During her career exploration process, Vimala found that her entire PC curriculum opened her eyes to what it means to be an ethical public servant. “I always use Dr. Hyde’s quote, ‘without data you are just another person with an opinion,’” said

Vimala because data analysis has been key in her career as a professional and as an elected official. “Every decision I make and every policy I develop is based on data,” she remarked. When she develops policy on educational needs of her community, she needs the data to prove that the policy is needed. Using this data she was able to discover that Woonsocket has the 2nd highest teenage pregnancy rate in the state of Rhode Island and using data she was able to get family planning into the high school.

Vimala also mentioned that the courses that she took at PC were very helpful in her current occupation. “The amount of papers that I wrote in college prepared me to write grants and make an argument,” stated Vimala. The research that she did in college prepared her for research on policies. Overall, she mentioned, “PC has taught me how to be an ethical and effective

leader in my community.”

After she was elected, she faced challenges as a school committee member. Woonsocket is currently facing the possibility of bankruptcy and the financial problems that she inherited were much larger than she could have imagined. She has worked to find solutions to these problems. Also, Vimala was the first Asian-American elected to local office in Woonsocket, so she had to overcome her youth as well as being Asian and a woman. Relationship building was key for her to have her ideas heard.

Despite these challenges, Vimala said that “the opportunity to change a failing school district is what I enjoy the most, it’s a huge challenge, but I enjoy working with others to find solutions to create a better future for my city.” She has learned that changes take time, especially when you’re trying to change a whole culture.



SCOTT AVEDISIAN

CLASS OF 1987

MAYOR OF THE CITY OF WARWICK, R.I.

After his graduation in 1987, Scott Avedisian attended graduate classes at the University of Rhode Island and also completed the State and Local Program at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. He also is a graduate of Leadership Rhode Island.

Scott has been played an instrumental role in government for quite some time. His early career accomplishments include serving as a page to the late U.S. Senator John Chafee, a legislative aid to the Rhode Island Senate, Executive Director of the Rhode

Island Party and Deputy Campaign Manager for Lincoln Almond, Governor of Rhode Island. He was also a member of the staff at the Rhode Island State House between 1995-2000.

Thereafter, Scott was elected the 15th Mayor of the city of Warwick, Rhode Island in a special election and has since been reelected four times. Mayor Avedisian became the youngest person ever elected Mayor in addition to already being the youngest person ever elected to the Warwick City Council. Prior to this election, Mayor Avedisian served five terms on Warwick City Council.

In addition to his election, Mayor Avedisian has had a

number of other accomplishments. Of note, he has been awarded the Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from the New England Institute of Technology and his receipt of the Senator Jack Reed Advocacy Award from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, and presidency of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns. He has also served two terms as the Vice Chairman of the Rhode Island Republican Party and been elected to the six previous Republican National Conventions. He was also one of eight US Mayors to participate in the Jerusalem Conference of Mayors in Israel in 2006.



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- DR. RUTH BEN-ARTZI
- DR. MARY BELLHOUSE
- DR. DOUGLAS BLUM
- DR. JEFFREY PUGH

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT NEWS FACULTY RESEARCH

Dr. Ruth Ben-Artzi will participate in a panel discussion at the Barrington Public Library on the political economy of the Middle East, along with Dr. Melani Cammet, director of the Middle East Studies Program at Brown University. Additionally, Cambridge University Press is moving forward with Dr. Ben-Artzi’s book manuscript “Banking on Development” which she is revising in anticipation of a contract. Lastly, Dr. Ben-Artzi is also conducting interviews and archival research this semester for her new book project on the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.

Dr. Douglas Blum will attend a conference this summer on “Economics and Culture of Knowledge: Global Context and Kazakhstan Realities” in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where he will also conduct research. He hopes to provide through his research an analysis of “the calculations and processes through which innovations are transmitted, and how this plays out in the lives of those who introduce or experience them.”



POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT NEWS

FACULTY RESEARCH

FORAND RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP:

Scholarship for undergraduate students attending Providence College who are majoring in Political Science. Selection is based on academic achievements, financial need, potential, and community/school activities.

FORAND STUDENT SCHOLARS:

KELLY BRANHAM '12
SARAH DAVEY '12
KARI HARDGROVE '12
KATHRYN MCCANN '12
CARLY MORRISON '12
KATY VAN DE WEGHE '12

Dr. Mary Bellhouse attended the Western Political Science Association annual conference in Portland, Oregon, held March 21-24. At the conference Dr. Bellhouse participated in a panel discussion on "Analyzing Visual Materials," and she chaired a political theory panel.

Drs. Susan McCarthy and Mark Hyde also attended the WPSA conference. Dr. McCarthy chaired a panel on intercultural interpretation, while Dr. Hyde served as discussant and chair for a panel titled "Active Learning: Engaging Students Through Civic, Political, Cultural and Academic Participation."

Dr. Jeffrey Pugh is currently conducting research on Colombian migrants and human security in Ecuador and on international education and peacebuilding; he also recently attended the Mid-Atlantic Council on Latin American Studies (MACLAS) conference in Washington DC, and was elected as Vice-President/ President-Elect of MACLAS.

STUDENT RESEARCH

Kari Hardgrove '12 is exploring how the most recent Congressional redistricting has impacted Rhode Island, specifically looking at the City of Providence. Redistricting traditionally is a deep political process, but as technology advances, the opportunity for a fairer and less partisan process grows. Through the use of Geographic Information Software, Kari will evaluate the proposed plans, checking for equal population, minority representation, and vote dilution, contiguity, compactness, and communities of interest. She is particularly interested in how redistricting has impacted particular racial groups, and how this will affect future electoral outcomes.

Sarah Davey '12 decided to combine her interests in public health and political science to look at "Global Malnutrition and the Politics of Food." He has been looking at how different socioeconomic factors contribute to the face that malnutrition takes within a given community. Although starvation is the most commonly recognized malnutrition epidemic in today's world, developing nations are also experiencing obesity crises, which are also examples of severe malnutrition. Sarah has looked at the concepts of food security and food deserts, investigated local health programming versus international aid efforts, and spoken with a variety of nutrition experts within Providence to gain a good grounding in the information.

Kathryn McCann '12 will be analyzing literature on mission implementation at non-profit institutions and using Providence College and the College of the Holy Cross as comparative case studies. According to Kathryn, P.C. and Holy Cross are microcosms of society and institutions, which must consider how to operate ethically and efficiently. The two schools, while similar in purpose, size, and location have different policies regarding outsourcing. Her research aims to understand the differences in policies and mission implementation at two institutions of higher education, which affect the cities and communities of which they are apart in Southern New England.