

ISSUE 6 • MAY 2026

THE VIEW FROM OLD MILL

The Official Newsletter of the UVM Political Science Department

Message from the Chair

Greetings once again from the 5th Floor of Old Mill!

As usual, far too much to tell in a short message about all the news from the department! But be sure to have a look inside to read about our amazing faculty, students, and alumni. Special thanks to Chase Vaughan, Sarah Sapirstein, and Joel Kasnetz for sharing their stories with us. And thanks as well to Hannah Baker for helping to put this newsletter together. Last, and most importantly, special congratulations to all of our graduates as they venture on! Remember, UVM is always your home!!!

One of the big highlights of the last semester was connecting with our alumni in Washington DC. Grateful to all of those who came to reconnect and get to know our students. Check out the pic below from our Saturday evening reception!

As I have said before, keep in touch!

Peter VonDoepp, Chair
pvondoepp@uvm.edu



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FACULTY FEATURE:

Melissa Willard-Foster: The Power of Studying IR

In this edition of our newsletter, we are excited to spotlight Professor **Melissa Willard-Foster**. A member of the department since 2012, Willard-Foster teaches several courses related to international relations, including seminars on foreign military intervention and making U.S. foreign policy. In 2019, Professor Willard-Foster published her book, *Toppling Foreign Governments: The Logic of Regime Change*, which explores the question of why stronger states overthrow governments when they could attain their aims at the bargaining table.

Professor Willard-Foster's work has garnered special attention over the last year in light of conflicts with Venezuela and Iran. In November 2025, she wrote a piece on U.S. foreign policy for the *Duck of Minerva*, a prominent, independent blog focused on international relations, foreign policy, and academic life. Entitled "Here We Go Again: Why American Presidents Can't Resist Regime Change," the article reviewed the conflict between the US and the Maduro regime in Venezuela in light of the insights from her book.





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MELISSA WILLARD-FOSTER

As she argues, U.S. presidents often believe that removing a foreign leader, as opposed to negotiating with them, will more easily and effectively address the challenges posed by those leaders. Part of this dynamic ensues because, even if they are willing to negotiate, leaders of weak regimes resist undertaking changes that might undermine their hold on power. At the same, the weakness of these regimes makes overthrowing them look relatively easy, causing US presidents to conclude they can achieve their objectives through regime change. Yet, this is seldom the case, as foreign-installed leaders typically experience the same internal pressures that led to their predecessors' defiance.

During the time that she was writing this piece, there were only whispers about the possibility of removing President Maduro in Venezuela, although Willard-Foster suspected that the same logic might push the US government to do so. Consistent with Willard-Foster's expectations, the Trump administration ultimately did remove Maduro from power. Also consistent with her expectations, rather than work to induce regime change—which tends to involve costly measures and ambiguous goals—the Trump administration appears to have accepted leadership change, with Nicolás Maduro's vice president stepping into power. Whether that will solve the core problems presented by the Maduro regime remains an open question.

Notably, Willard-Foster's work also illuminates several aspects of the conflict with Iran. Here again, the United States faced real challenges in realizing its security goals through negotiations with the regime, partly because power-holders in Tehran faced exceptionally high risks and costs in acceding to US demands. And while the ultimate goals of the attack remain somewhat unclear, for now, the outcome appears to have fallen short of inducing the regime changes that might have been hoped for.

Department Members are Hard at Work

Getting Published!

Minh Ly

We are delighted to celebrate the publication of Minh Ly's *Answering to Us: Why Democracy Demands Accountability*. In this urgent and revelatory book, Professor **Minh Ly** challenges facile understandings of democracy to propose a new conception that is based not on a uniform popular will but on equal accountability: the idea that we must be equally empowered to hold our officials democratically accountable. Equal accountability requires the very rights and institutions—from freedom of the press and freedom to protest to independent courts and congressional oversight—that elected authoritarians threaten.

Drawing on political thinkers that include Herodotus, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, John Rawls, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Ly addresses issues that are both piercingly present and historically enduring. He challenges the widespread misconception that democracy is about carrying out the people's will, as defined by the majority and executed by the president, arguing that this ignores the people's diversity and enables the stigmatizing of minorities.

Ly affirms that we must govern ourselves in a democracy—that we should be the ones ultimately in charge of our government. To be freely self-governing, we must be able to hold our government accountable not only in elections but also in office. Elected authoritarians, Ly contends, actively disempower us by taking away our rights and institutions to hold our government accountable. We must empower citizens with the resources and civic education to demand accountability and to exercise the vital democratic duties of oversight over our officials and solidarity with each other.



Lisa Holmes

Professor **Lisa Holmes** is co-author of *Judicial Process in America*, a comprehensive, market-leading textbook for both academic and general audiences. We are delighted to celebrate the publication of the thirteenth edition of the book! Considering the courts from every level, the authors cover judges, lawyers, litigants, and the variables at play in the judicial decision-making process, the impact of those decisions on American citizens, and what the consequences are for the United States today.

The new edition accounts for the groundbreaking changes to the U.S. political scene that are driven by increased partisan polarization of the judiciary, the implications of President Donald Trump's success in appointing conservative judges across the federal courts, declining support for the Supreme Court by the public and calls for judicial ethics reform, President Joe Biden's successful efforts at diversifying the federal judiciary, and the implications of the 2024 presidential election on the judiciary.

The book also considers how the implications of party polarization and appointment politics on the judiciary extend to the lower federal courts. This has led to discord between the political branches and the judiciary in certain states. Finally, based on original data collected by the authors, this edition includes an updated analysis of the voting patterns of US trial court judges, as well as the characteristics of President Biden's appointees to the federal judiciary.



Faculty articles this year...

Caroline Beer

"Judicial Federalism and Abortion in Mexico and the United States." 2025. PS: Political Science & Politics 58 (1):52-55.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and electoral preferences in a federal system." 2025 Regional & Federal Studies:1-24 (with Alejandra Armesto).

"Pandemia, shock económico negativo y apoyo a la redistribución en México. ¿Intereses materiales o valores?"2025. Opinão Pública 31:1-37 (with Alejandra Armesto).

Alex Garlick

A Renaissance in State Interest Group Studies." State Politics & Policy Quarterly (2026): 1-18.

"Prescribing Affordability." The Pennsylvania Gazette, February 27, 2026.

"Measuring the Policy Content of Congressional and American State Legislation Using Machine Learning." Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy 6, no. 3-4 (2025): 455-498 (with Ethan Dee).

Peter Henne

"Measuring Relative Repression of Christian Minorities Worldwide: Implications for Advocacy Approaches," 2026. Review of Faith and International Affairs," 24.1, pp. 52-67.

"Undivine Interventions: How Social Networks Mediate the Relationship between Religious Repression and Political Violence." 2026. Conflict Management and Peace Science, 43.2.

"Religious nationalism and terrorism," 2025. Chapter in the Routledge Handbook on Religious Nationalism and Terrorism, ed. Jeffrey Haynes, (London: Routledge)

"What if I decolonized my syllabus and no one noticed?" 2025. In: Fletcher-Watson, B., McAra, L., and Osborne, D. Essays in Decoloniality: Volume 2. Occasional Papers, 30. Edinburgh, IASH

Leigh Raymond.

"Comparing Public support for Alternative Climate Policy Designs: An Experimental Study. 2026. Review of Policy Research, 43 (with J. Basseches, J. R. Bromley-Trujillo and K. Gurganus).

Tom Sullivan

"Free Speech Rights and Academic Freedom," Trustee Magazine, (March 2026)

"Is Trump's Iran War Constitutional?" Minnesota Star Tribune,(March 11, 2026) (with Richard Painter)

"Constitutional Rights are Under Assault in Minnesota", Minnesota Star Tribune (February 14, 2026) (with Richard Painter)

Alex Zakaras

"Citizens' Complicity in State Action: Exploring the Limits," Ethics and International Affairs 39, no. 3 (2025), 230-242.

"Review Essay: The Crisis of Liberal Modernity and the Conservative Restoration," American Political Thought 14, no. 3 (Summer 2025), 433-447.

Getting on the Air

Academic books and articles are only one avenue for sharing knowledge; platforms such as podcasts, radio, social media, and television are increasingly important for reaching broader audiences. Podcasts in particular have grown remarkably, so much so that nearly any topic, whether for in-depth learning or casual conversation, is readily accessible. Here's a few highlights of podcasts, streamed lectures, and TV appearances that have featured our faculty members

Professor **Brad Bauerly**, a specialist in international political economy (among other things), appeared on alumnus Weston LaBar's growing podcast, *On the Waterfront*, which focuses on trading logistics for local communities and the international stage. Their conversation explored the direction that international trade and the global economy are taking. One key theme concerned the misplaced hope that expanding trade would diminish political disputes, an outcome that has clearly not been realized,



Instead, political tensions have intensified, with patterns resembling older colonial systems, albeit now driven by investment rather than militarism. Both Professor Bauerly and LaBar reflected on how today's emerging multipolar world gives countries more choices in alliances and economic strategies, raising new questions about global alignment, decoupling, and the future of trade.

Professor **Peter Henne** is a specialist in international relations with a particular focus on the Middle East and international religious politics. Often sought out for commentary on the Middle East, in April he offered insight on the developments leading to the conflict with Iran, the prospects for peace in light of the ceasefire and negotiations, and the challenges the conflict may present for the United States' place in the world.





Professor **Alex Zakaras** has been actively discussing his new book, *Freedom for All: What a Liberal Society Could Be* (discussed in our January 26 newsletter) on a number of podcasts. Perhaps most notably, he was featured on the Politics Girl podcast with Leigh McGowan, which has nearly half a million subscribers. Check out the conversation [here](#).

Professor **Minh Ly** has garnered a lot of attention for his new book, *Answering to Us: Why Democracy Demands Accountability*. Among his notable appearances was his discussion with former White House ethics lawyer Richard Painter for the 92nd Street Y lecture series. This highlighting of Professor Ly's work by this world-class center of culture and conversation attests to its importance in our current environment.





Anthony “Jack” Gierzynski Wins Scholar-Teacher Award

Professor **Anthony “Jack” Gierzynski**, a specialist in American politics, was the recipient of the College of Arts and Sciences Scholar-Teacher Award. The award recognizes professors who are both excellent teachers and highly respected professionals in their own discipline. Award winners are especially effective in translating their knowledge and skills into exciting classroom experiences for their students.

Professor Gierzynski has been a college leader in fostering students' interest and engagement in the research process. Many of his classes involve research projects designed and executed with students, sometimes leading to published work. He recently published an article with six students ([see our May '24 newsletter](#)) in the *Social Science Quarterly* and has been presenting other co-authored work with students at national conferences. As importantly, Professor Gierzynski founded and continues to teach the department's Vermont Legislative Research Service class, which is one of the signature seminars available to our advanced students. In this class, students undertake research projects brought to them by Vermont legislators seeking insight on a particular issue or topic. Over the last 25 years, under Jack Gierzynski's supervision, students have produced hundreds of policy papers for legislators, many of which have shaped legislation.



On his own Professor Gierzynski is the author of five books, most recently, *The Political Effects of Entertainment Media: How Fictional Worlds Affect Real World Political Perspectives* (Lexington Books 2018) and *Harry Potter and the Millennials* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2013). He has published over a dozen articles and book chapters on campaign finance and political parties. He has been part of research teams awarded grants by the National Science Foundation and the Joyce Foundation to study the financing of elections at the state and local level. In addition, he has been an expert witness and consultant in several court cases testing campaign finance laws, including *Landell v. Sorrell*, a case ultimately settled by the U.S. Supreme Court.

For his lecture on receiving the award, Professor Gierzynski's focused on the issue of how popular authoritarian-dystopian stories have shaped the political attitudes of Gen Z. The fictional worlds of *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Maze Runner* transported many members of Gen Z during their youth, but did this affect their political inclinations? Professor Gierzynski's research revealed a clear relationship between being deeply involved with dystopian media during youth and an individual's predisposition to authoritarianism.

Scenes from Professor Tom Sullivan's Retirement Party



STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

Pi Sigma Alpha Induction

On May 15th, the following political science majors were inducted into the Chi Nu Chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, the national political science honor society:

Kendyl Johnson
Isabella DeGroot
Amanda Smith
Adelyne Collin
William Oliver
Padma Mendelsund
Theodore Sternberg
Haley Hemeon
Sarah Gentili
Wren Tetreault
Eben Baring-Gould
Emily Garcia
Rowan Lilly
Amanda Reinert
Melanie Mason
Suzannah Buehler

Meghan Lee
Timothy Hayden
Neil Rohan
Jenna Sajecki
Alexander Grover
Claire MacDonald
Astrid Foster
Emma Whatley
Alana Bauer
Annaliese Crook
Erin Geib
Ava Pick
Willem Cornish
Joseph Shevak
Peyton Paquette
Robin Olsen



Student Spotlights

Department Award Winners

Hats off to the winners of our departmental awards for academic excellence!

- Elliott A. Brown Award for the Outstanding Senior in Political Science: **Robin Olsen**
- Alan Wertheimer Award for Outstanding Senior Thesis: **Suzannah Buehler**
- Department Prize in Political Theory: **Theo Sternberg**
- Department Prize in Comparative Politics: **Alana Bauer**
- Warren R and Mildred Austin Prize for International Peace and Security: **Emily Garcia and Melanie Mason**
- Frank M Bryan Prize in American Politics: **Suzannah Buehler**
- Philo Sherman Bennett Prize for the Best Essay in Political Theory: **Meghan Lee**



Student Spotlights: Internships!

Ella Franceschini

Over the past semester, **Ella Franceschini** interned with the Governor's Institutes of Vermont as a part of the Non-Profits and Social Change course offered through the College of Arts & Sciences. The Governor's Institutes of Vermont is a learning residency program that offers 1-2 week institutes held on college campuses across Vermont. Ella has been working to catalogue and eventually contact GIV's alumni database dating back to 1986, to expand GIV's active alumni (and donor) network. She has also helped to create a guide titled "Instructions for Researching Alumni" that future volunteers can use as they conduct their work.



Interning at the Governor's Institutes has enabled Ella to learn more about the non-profit sector in a practical setting and how it functions in a rural, sparsely populated state like Vermont. The team behind GIV is incredibly passionate about helping young people in Vermont and has also been such a great resource for her as she starts thinking about post-grad life and the transition into the job sector.

McKenzie Hart

This spring, **McKenzie Hart** participated in the Vermont Legislative Internship program through UVM, working with **Representative Laura Sibilía**. Based at the State Capitol in Montpelier, she supported legislative work by tracking bills—especially those related to AI data centers and telecommunications, areas tied to Rep. Sibilía's role on the House Committee on Energy and Digital Infrastructure. She also researched Vermont's education governance system and collaborated with the Joint Fiscal Office to analyze multiple years of education finance data.



Her experience provided a firsthand look at how state government operates, from daily legislative activity to behind-the-scenes policy work. In addition to developing a deeper understanding of complex policy issues, McKenzie built connections with public officials and advocates, gaining valuable insight into careers in public service.

Jonah Abramson

Jonah Abramson also participated in the Legislative Internship program this spring. As an intern, he was paired with an elected representative and given an insider's view into their policy goals and strategies. Jonah followed his legislator's priorities closely, tracking bills and reporting back with notes as the legislation progressed. He also conducted research to support policy, often comparing policy from other states and filling gaps of information discussed in committee meetings. The purpose of the internship was to learn, and Jonah was free to pursue policies he found interesting.

Through this experience, Jonah learned about the legislative process, but also how to be an organized and adaptable professional. He was encouraged to take initiative by finding opportunities to contribute and submitting work without being asked. He learned to work efficiently, condensing and organizing information for readability, and he made incredible professional connections at the State House. If he wasn't graduating, he would do the internship again in a heartbeat!



Noor Nabi



Arts and Life, Entertainment, Montpelier

Dancers aim for appreciation, not appropriation, at Middle Eastern night

"Middle Eastern" dancers attempt to avoid appropriation and spread appreciation



By Noor Safana Nabi

As an intern with Community News Service, Noor Nabi not only learned the fundamentals of journalism from seasoned reporters and editors but also had a rare opportunity to pursue stories that interested her -- from refugee rights to arts and culture in Vermont, including contentious conversations around topics like cultural appropriation -- by engaging with diverse voices and perspectives. She gained a thorough understanding of what goes into investigative reporting and the writing process, and a deeper appreciation for the rigor behind clear, responsible journalism has made her a more discerning reader of the news.

Celebrating the Class of 2026!!



DEPARTMENT NEWS

DC Visit and the Pi Sigma Alpha Conference

The department was once again delighted to bring students to Washington D.C. for the annual Pi Sigma Alpha Student Research Conference. This year, we brought seven students, all of whom presented their research at the conference!

In addition, we connected with several DC area alums. This included **Jahnessa Ryea** and **Cora Smith**, both of whom work for Senator Peter Welch and facilitated a visit to his office and a tour of the capital. We also met with alumni **Luke Albee**, **Bethany Lipman Frazee**, **Jonathan Kanter**, **Lisa Kanter**, **Natalie Moffett**, **Chuck Morton**, **Andrew Bowen**, **Edward Pagano**, **Lisa Jacobsen**, and **Loren Monroe**.

We wrapped up the visit with an alumni reception on the last night of our stay, where we connected with over 30 program alumni! Special thanks to Professor **Jack Gierzynski**, who joined the event!! See photo on page 1.



Have a look at the topics the students presented:

Erin Geib, "Beyond Religion: Explaining Variation in Gender Policy Across Catholic Europe"

Alana Bauer, "Crisis of Rural Governance: A Comparative Analysis of Morocco and Senegal"

Suzannah Buehler, "Cross Talk: Language that Bridges America's Partisan Divide"

Eben Baring-Gould, "Adoption of Syringe Services Programs Across States: An Analysis of Relationships Between 2008-2022"

Tim Hayden, "Assessing Equality in Remediation Funding at PFAS-polluted Superfund Sites: An Environmental Justice Analysis"

Haley Hemeon, "How Female Legislators Influence the Expansion of Paid Family and Medical Leave at the State Level"

Astrid Foster, "The Unholy Marriage Between the Religious Right and Silicon Valley"



Speakers Come to Campus

It was another semester full of programming events! In addition to bringing in several speakers, the department hosted an important panel discussion, and sponsored a games night which allowed students and faculty members to just enjoy themselves. Here's some highlights:

- On February 2nd, the department sponsored a Florence Davis Dean lecture by Professor **Aaron Hoffman** of Simon Fraser University. The talk, "Are Journalist Sensationalizing Terrorism?", drew from his research on how leading newspapers have addressed and framed terrorist activity.
- On March 4, the department sponsored a panel with **Professor Peter Henne and Professor Melissa Willard-Foster** on the outbreak of war with Iran. In this exceptionally well attended panel, the faculty members brought their expertise and insight to help illuminate the motives and likely trajectories of the conflict with Iran.
- On March 31, **Professor Caroline Beer** brought in **Irma Méndez de Hoyos**, professor at FLASCO Mexico, to give a public lecture, "Contemporary Threats to Democracy in Mexico." An expert in electoral integrity, Professor Méndez de Hoyos was also the coordinator for Mexico's electoral tribunal. In addition to reviewing deeper structural and contemporary threats to Mexican democracy, Professor Méndez de Hoyos pointed out that civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and segments of the media continue to push back against democratic erosion.
- On April 7, The department once again hosted a game night! Organized by professors **Peter Henne and Jonathan Bradley**, this provided a relaxing and fun experience away from academic work. Over 25 students showed up and the department was happy to provide pizza to all who attend.
- On April 8, the department hosted **Professor Mandy Bates Bailey** of American University in Washington DC, who spoke about her research on the impact of Americana music on political attitudes and behavior. The rich presentation provided not only academic insight but also allowed the audience to enjoy samples of music from the genre.

The Drucker Pre-Law Program

The March pre-law information session brought together a strong group of students interested in exploring paths to law school.

Professors Tom Sullivan and Lisa Holmes led the discussion, offering a clear and practical overview of the law school application process. They walked students through a general timeline, from early preparation to submitting applications, and addressed a wide range of questions from attendees.

In addition to the session itself, there are exciting updates from the CAS Drucker Pre-Law Program. The program continues to grow, with a focus on expanding its reach to students outside of political science and making pre-law resources more accessible across campus. This broader engagement is a reflection of the program's commitment to supporting a diverse range of students interested in legal careers.

The program is also seeing early success in its social media efforts. After launching its Instagram in October of last year, the account has recently reached 100 followers, an encouraging milestone that signals the beginning of continued growth and outreach in the digital space.

Women in Law



The Women in Law program this semester focused on building community, professional development, and creative collaboration. We welcomed two guest speakers, including **Kasey Emmons**, who shared their experiences navigating the legal field and offered insight into career paths and opportunities for women in law.

Members also participated in a collage night, creating a relaxed space for connection, and attended a headshot session to gain professional photos for future career use. To close out the semester, we partnered with **Feel Good** to create our custom grilled cheese, the “**Legally Berry Blonde**,” combining creativity with outreach.

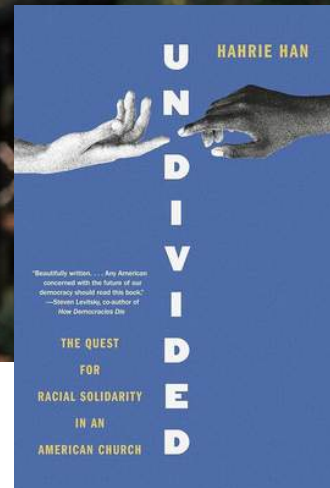


A Public Forum with Vermont Attorney General Charity Clark

As the semester drew to a close, the department welcomed **Charity Clark**, a departmental alumnus (class of 1997) and Vermont's first female attorney general, elected in 2023. Speaking to about 35 students and faculty, she emphasized the importance of defending the Constitution and upholding the rule of law, especially during times of political tension. She noted that while elected officials may win office, they are still bound by constitutional limits—and it is her responsibility to hold them accountable when those limits are exceeded. Drawing on her experience, she highlighted her office's extensive legal work, including numerous lawsuits challenging federal actions, many of which have been successful. She stressed that these efforts are not partisan but focused on protecting democratic institutions, individual rights, and the balance of power.

Clark also addressed current legal challenges, including disputes over government spending authority, tariffs, and ongoing threats to bodily autonomy and civil rights. While acknowledging that these issues can be concerning, she balanced her remarks with optimism, pointing to progress in areas such as women's representation and LGBTQ+ rights. She encouraged continued civic engagement—through protest, writing, supporting independent media, and community organizing—arguing that active participation is essential to shaping the future.

She concluded on a hopeful note, framing this moment as a turning point for the next generation and urging her audience to remain informed and engaged in order to help build a more just and stable future.



The 2026 Summer Book Club!

This summer, students, alumni, and faculty are invited to join the department's book club reading *Undivided* by **Hahrie Han**. *Undivided* tells the inspiring story of evangelicals in Cincinnati struggling to bridge racial divides in their own church, their community, and across the nation. Han asked two questions, and when she set out to answer them, her investigations led straight to an unlikely origin: the white-dominant evangelical megachurch Crossroads, where Pastor Chuck Mingo had delivered a sermon the prior year that set in motion a chain of surprising events. Raised in the Black church, Mingo felt called by God, he told Crossroads parishioners, to combat racial injustice, and to do it through the very church in which they were gathered.

The book explores how meaningful civic engagement can bridge political and social divides by fostering connection, shared purpose, and collective action across differences. Through in-depth research and real stories from a faith community working through issues of race and belonging, Han shows how trust and understanding can be built even in deeply polarized contexts.

Hahrie Han is a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University and the director of the SNF Agora Institute, where she studies civic engagement, organizing, and democracy. She is an award-winning author whose work focuses on how ordinary people come together to create social and political change.



GRADS DO AMAZING THINGS!

Joel Kasnetz (Class of 2015)

UVM is about learning and thinking first and foremost – which is more than I can say for the schools a lot of my DC colleagues went to. The faculty was diverse and they were around – office hours, small seminars, after class. And the people I met, in and out of the classroom, were grounded and there for the love of learning. Some of the best conversations I had at UVM were with friends, not professors.

The Political Science degree was also flexible enough that I had room to explore. I took extra seminars on the top floor of Old Mill, studied History, Religion, and Art, even learned to track wildlife in the research forest. And I had time to sit with the big questions about American democracy with professors who actually wanted to work them out with me. Faculty like Professor Alec Ewald would talk through the praxis, not just the theory.

Vermont itself is part of the education. Because the state is small, it's an easy place to get involved. I interned in the governor's office in Montpelier twice during college, riding the bus down to the State House during the legislative session, working alongside the staff who actually keep a state government running. You can't get that kind of access most places, and it shows you how power actually works.

What I took away from 4 years at UVM was the appetite to keep going after that kind of access – taking on new responsibility, jumping into new places, figuring out how things work on the ground. That's what got me to Capitol Hill, and then to running campaigns around the country, including managing one of the most competitive congressional races of the 2022 cycle in Oregon. Today I'm a principal at a firm in DC, where I lead political and public affairs strategy for candidates and clients nationwide.

DC runs on common wisdom and the perpetuation of the status quo. UVM taught me how to think, not how to operate.



Vermont isn't just where I'm from — it's who I am. Born, raised, and educated in the Green Mountain State, I carry Vermont with me everywhere I go. There is something about growing up there that gets into your bones: a love of hard work, a deep respect for community, and a stubborn belief that if you do things the right way, good things follow. No matter how many cities I've called home since — Boston, Austin, and now Nashville — Vermont has always had a special place in my heart. I am endlessly proud to be a Vermonter, and a graduate of the University of Vermont.

I am forever indebted to UVM and, in particular, to the Political Science department. I left Burlington in 2015 with a degree in Political Science and Economics — and far more than a diploma. The faculty shaped the way I think, argue, listen, and lead. They pushed me to ask better questions, understand systems and incentives, and never accept surface-level answers. Those skills have followed me into boardrooms, government agencies, and strategy sessions.

After graduation, I headed to Boston, joined Merrill Lynch, passed my investment licenses, and learned how one of the world's largest financial firms operates. That foundation carried me to State Street Global Advisors, where I worked in Institutional Finance and Sales. It was an incredible opportunity to see how large institutions and organizations think about their prosperity.

In 2021, I made a leap into a world that felt like the future: joining Deloitte Consulting's Government and Public Services consultancy. Today, I work in the firm's AI & Engineering Offering, helping public-sector institutions deploy emerging technologies that make a difference. And more often than people might expect, I find myself drawing on what UVM's Political Science department taught me — how institutions work, how people resist change, and how to build consensus.

To Professor VonDoepp and the Political Science department: thank you. To the students still walking those campus paths: trust the process, lean on your professors, and know that what you're building there matters more than you realize. I would not be where I am without this major, and I will never forget it.

Chase Vaughan (Class of 2015)



Sarah Sapirstein (Class of 2016)



Growing up in the D.C. metro area, I knew early on that I wanted a career in public policy. I spent summers interning in Congress, including with the Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont. After the political shift in 2016, I pivoted to environmental policy advocacy, as I was drawn to the idea shaping federal policy solutions from the outside-in.

I have been lucky enough to pursue this dream, currently serving as Executive Vice President at ENS Resources Inc., a D.C.-based lobbying firm representing public water agencies and municipalities. In my role, I advise and represent clients on matters related to water quality, infrastructure financing, natural resources resiliency and sustainability and emergency management issues, and work directly with policymakers to craft and advance policy and regulatory solutions. As part of the executive team, I also contribute to the firm's business development and organizational management activities.

None of this would have been possible without my time at UVM. The opportunities UVM gave me, from in-depth class discussions to office hours to writing an undergraduate thesis, helped to develop my critical thinking, self-advocacy, and problem-solving skills. All of which have been instrumental to building a career that I love. I'm especially grateful for the mentorship of my Honors College advisor, Professor Bob Taylor, whose patience and guidance not only made me a stronger writer and thinker but also helped me better understand my role as a public citizen. I will always be grateful to be a Catamount!

STAY CONNECTED

We would love to reconnect with our amazing alumni community. If you are interested in being part of the UVM Political Science alumni network, please complete this form via this link:

[I WANT TO BE INVOLVED](#)



Are you interested in supporting the UVM Political Science Department with a donation? Your gift can support student internship and research experiences, enhance faculty research, help to bring in high-quality speakers, and more.

[GIVE TO UVM
POLITICAL SCIENCE](#)



How about supporting our amazing students in the UVM Political Science Club! Your donation can help to buy food for meetings, support educational trips for the club, and much more!

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Please consider joining UVM Connect, our UVM career and networking community. Similar to LinkedIn—but specifically for UVM alums, students, staff and faculty. It's free and easy to join!

[JOIN UVM CONNECT](#)



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