Greetings Geneseo Alumni. We hope you are doing well during these most unusual days. We made it through the semester, and are set to begin the Spring 2021 semester in spite of the pandemic. These are crazy days, with a topsy-turvy political environment and a still raging pandemic. Many, but not all, of our classes were taught remotely last semester, as will be the case for Spring 2021. Professor Koch taught his courses in-class. It was an unusual experience; I and the students were always masked and socially distant (a class of 22 students met in a room constructed to hold 125). The most up-to-date air filtration devices have been placed in the rooms where Geneseo held on campus classes. This is not the ideal but we made it work. It was much harder for me to learn students’ names given their masks. With a strong commitment from faculty and students we can do this.

Much happened this semester for Geneseo Political Science and International Relations. Professor Robert Goeckel was named SUNY Distinguished Professor (a well-deserved honor); we held numerous talks on Zoom during the 2020 Presidential campaign; Alumnae Elizabeth Allen delivered a talk on her experience working as Vice-President Kamala Harris’s Director of Communications; and the department welcomed new Assistant Professor Hanna Brant to the Department. On the downside, Instructor Jo Kirk succumbed to cancer. We will miss her greatly.

As always, this newsletter contains information on the department and its activities. The number of Political Science majors remains high, with many students interested in the new Biden administration and the drama following the November election, as well as the impact of the pandemic on American life and politics.

Enjoy, stay safe, remain engaged in American politics (how can you not). I love to hear from you, so do not hesitate to send me an email when you can.

Jeffrey Koch,
koch@geneseo.edu

When you give to Geneseo, please restrict your contribution to the department of Political Science and International Relations
Alum Elizabeth Allen serves as Kamala Harris Director of Communications during Campaign

Elizabeth Allen, a 2006 graduate of SUNY Geneseo, virtually met with Geneseo students several times this semester to answer questions and give insight on her unique career path. Originally intending to become a social studies teacher, Allen switched to a political science major during her sophomore year, as she found herself more excitedly drawn to current events than her other classes. Allen recounted her time as a student at Geneseo, remarking on moments spent in classes taught by Professors’ Grace and Koch.

After college, and a brief moment working at an Outback Steakhouse, which Allen jokes as being “the best job I ever had,” she began a career in government with a job at the U.S. State Department in Washington. After a few years, Allen took a leap into the more political Washington and worked on President Barack Obama’s first campaign. Following his inauguration, Allen spent five years working for then-Vice President Joe Biden on his communications team. Staying in the White House, Allen then became president Obama’s Custom Communications Director.

After her time spent working in the White House, Allen moved to the private communications sector, working as a consultant. She has worked for a variety of companies and campaigns, from assisting the communications plan for Dick’s Sporting Goods as they announced they would not be selling automatic guns, to answering the questions of Hollywood’s writers and producers as they create content that requires an understanding of the government network.

After a few years in the private sector, Allen was asked to join the Biden campaign. She remarked that she wanted to be placed wherever she was most helpful to the team, which led her to cover communications for Vice President Kamala Harris. After working hard on the campaign for several months, Allen has temporarily returned to the private sector. She is excited about where her career will take her next. She anticipates and hopes to serve again, remarking that “public service will always be my North Star.” In the meantime, she remains in DC with her family, and continues to be a self-described “huge Bills fan.”

During the fall 2020 semester, Allen gave a talk to Geneseo students about her experiences working on the election campaign. The highlights of the talk are discussed further on in the newsletter.
Geneseo Votes Coalition and the 2020 General Election

The Geneseo Votes Coalition is an organization on campus whose goal is to ease the student voter-engagement process. The organization includes representatives from numerous student organizations from around the campus including Andrew Goodman Fellowship Ambassadors, members from the Center for Community, Livingston County Board of Elections, the College Democrats and College Republicans, the Roosevelt Institute, the Student Association, the Peace Action Coalition, the Political Affairs Club, Civic Engagement Interns for Hillel, and members of Greek Life. The Geneseo Votes Coalition played an integral role in enhancing student voter-engagement during the 2020 General election.

The Geneseo Votes Coalition was created in the Fall of 2019 and primarily functions with volunteer efforts from students in the various other organizations on campus. Through their use of social media and text banking, the group was able to reach hundreds of students to remind them to vote in the November election. Additionally, they held an event called the “Party at the Polls” where volunteers reminded students to vote while offering food and beverages and pointed them toward the polling place located on campus. They also answered questions students had about voting on campus. After the election, the group collaborated with the Geneseo Opportunities for Leadership Development (GOLD) program to host a day-long therapy event where students had access to resources aimed toward helping their mental health.

Rachel Wallisky, a senior History major and Political Science minor who is a member of the Geneseo Votes Coalition, also noted the group’s involvement outside of the campus community as well. “We do have partnerships with the community. We have two meetings every month, biweekly. During the previous semester one of our meetings was with local community members, including the Democratic Party Commissioner for Livingston County, the Republican Party Commissioner for Livingston County, and both election officials from the board of elections,” Wallisky said. “We’re just trying to remedy that from the civic engagement standpoint as much as possible, so we meet with them on a regular basis.”

As an organization, the Geneseo Votes Coalition has tremendously helped Geneseo with student voter engagement, exhibited by their activity during the general election and their own rendition of a non-partisan get out to vote campaign.

Political Quotes

“When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become president. I’m beginning to believe it.”

Clarence Darrow

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

Winston Churchill

“If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn’t sit for a month.”

Theodore Roosevelt

“Build a man a fire and you will keep him warm for a day. Set a man on fire and you will keep him warm for the rest of his life.”

Anonymous

Winston Churchill, On Americans: “We can always count on the Americans to do the right thing, after they have exhausted all the other possibilities.”

“There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can’t remember the second.”

Mark Hanna
The Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy Grant

Professors Aaron and Carly Herold’s Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy successfully received two $10,000 grants from the Jack Miller Center. These grants will provide their program, which was established in 2019, with the ability to bring speakers to the Geneseo campus to facilitate conversations about civic education and liberal democracy. While some of the scheduled speakers for the last academic year were unable to present their discussions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy was able to host four speakers in the Fall of 2020. These included Nicholas Buccola who spoke on “The Great Debate: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley Jr., and the Struggle for the American Soul” talk on October 1, Laura K. Field and J. Russell Muirhead who discussed “Conspiracy and Democracy: Misinformation, Anti-Liberalism, and Our Constitutional Future” on October 23, and Jeffrey Tulis, who spoke on “The Civic Constitution” on November 19.

The goal of the Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy is to provide the campus community with a setting to openly discuss topics which pertain to civic education and liberal democracy. “If you look at a lot of the problems we’re seeing in the news right now, I think a lot of it can be traced to a decline in civic education. And we are seeking to remedy that by bringing in speakers across the ideological spectrum to promote engagement with and discussion of civic ideas and to promote an understanding of the American constitution and its philosophical and historical backdrop,” professors Aaron and Carly Herold said. With this recent grant, the program will be able to continue its pursuit of these goals.

Both professors hope to have two or three speakers present discussions in the upcoming Spring 2021 semester. Additionally, they indicated that they hope these discussions can soon be conducted in person once it is safe to do so. “We hope to, once the conditions allow and we’re back in person hopefully in the fall, to have not just these lectures, but also to bring back to the informal discussions and dialogues and things like that, to really keep actual conversation going between students and faculty and with campus community members, and to sort of model the way that discussion about difficult topics can happen,” professors Aaron and Carly Herold said. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused talks hosted by the department to be moved online to Zoom in an effort to safely host them.
New Faculty Member
Hanna Brant

This semester the department welcomed new faculty member Professor Hanna Brant as an Assistant Professor. Brant earned her Bachelor’s degree from Indiana State University in Political Science with minors in Women’s Studies and Civic Leadership. She earned her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Missouri with concentrations in American politics and public administration.

One of the appeals about SUNY Geneseo, according to Brant, was the fact that it provided professors with the means to conduct research alongside their professorship. Primarily, a place which contributed both scholarship and teaching was one that appealed to Brant. Brant’s area of research can be broadly summarized as studying the members of Congress and legislative staff, the women in legislatures, and political ambition. Her work in these areas has been published in the Congress & the Presidency, Journal of Women, Politics & Policy, and Social Sciences Quarterly journals respectively.

In the Fall 2020 semester, Brant taught the PLSC 110: American Politics, PLSC 251: Modern Political Analysis, and PLSC 361: Women & Politics courses. Brant said she particularly enjoys teaching the American Politics class because it teaches the fundamentals of the American political system. Brant indicated that in the future she would like to teach a class examining the relationship between identity and politics. Professor Brant also remarked that she is thankful to the students for making her first semester at Geneseo a smooth transition.

Karleen West

For the past several years, the Geneseo State University of New York has granted five awards to community members who show the principle values of the college: learning, creativity, civic responsibility, and sustainability. This fall, Professor Karleen West has received the academic award for learning, a recognition of her research and dedication to educating students.

The award comes after publications of two research-founded books from West. In 2019, she co-authored a book with American University Professor, Todd Eisenstadt, titled Who Speaks for Nature? Indigenous Movements, Public Opinion, and the Petro-State in Ecuador. The book comes after over six years of research in Ecuador, research that includes a nationwide survey of Indigenous environmental attitudes in Ecuador.

In 2020, Professor West published another book, Candidate Matters: A Study of Ethnic Parties, Campaigns, and Elections in Latin America, which includes work she began while completing her PhD. The book looks at political parties, candidate attitudes, and the ascent to power in Latin America.

Professor West enjoys researching, and continues to think about her work when doing everyday activities, such as walking her dog. When asked what she enjoys most about the research process, she says it is “the moment when you analyze the data... after you get a statistical package and you ask yourself ‘am I gonna find something?’”

While completing her own research, Professor West has also educated the students at SUNY Geneseo with dedication. She teaches several courses in the Political Science and International Relations departments and has led two honours classes. She encourages students to explore their own research interests as well. Her advice is to find something of personal interest and “just start reading about it” in order to get inspired and answer the world’s unanswered questions.
Dr. Robert Goeckel Recognized as a SUNY Distinguished Professor

Recently Professor Robert Goeckel was recognized as a SUNY Distinguished Professor for his research examining the relationship between church and state as well as the role of religion and politics during the Communist period in Eastern Europe. Dr. Goeckel is only the third professor from SUNY Geneseo to receive this recognition and is the first member of the Political Science and International Relations department to be recognized.

“The entire thing is a real honor,” Goeckel said. “I’m just so grateful for the recognition.” Dr. Goeckel attributed part of his success to the ability that Geneseo professors have to be teacher-scholars. “There’s a recognition that our department places a high value on scholarship and Geneseo aims to produce teacher-scholars who combine the classroom with their own research, goals, and achievements. I think it is a recognition that our department is pretty active.”

Dr. Goeckel’s scholarship has been published by leading US publishers, including Cornell University Press and Indiana University Press, as well as in Germany. The Distinguished Professorship, per SUNY, “is conferred upon faculty having achieved national or international prominence and a distinguished reputation within the individual’s chosen field through significant contributions to the research and scholarship.” Thus, it was Dr. Goeckel’s renowned research on East Germany and the Soviet Union/Russia that contributed to his recognition as a SUNY Distinguished Professor.

His fascination with these countries developed from a study-abroad experience he participated in during his undergraduate career at the University of Michigan, where he learned German in Austria and explored a different Eastern European country every weekend during the communist era. From these experiences Dr. Goeckel developed an interest in the study of communist systems and eventually his research investigated the role religion played in these states.

East Germany was a particularly interesting case, according to Dr. Goeckel, because of the East-West divide. “In the German case, the country was divided, so the churches were kind of a bond between the communist East and the democratic West during the Cold War. I was interested in how that institution dealt with the political pressures from the communist system and from the Western powers,” Dr. Goeckel said. The fundamental philosophy of communism and its dynamic with religion was another aspect that interested Dr. Goeckel. “Ideologically Christians don’t fit in a communist system because Karl Marx says religion is the opiate of the masses and it’s destined to disappear as the workers discover their true interests. So I wanted to see how religion and church has dealt with communism.”

Throughout his research, Dr. Goeckel has been awarded honors and grants including many Fulbright and IREX grants. In fact, an IREX grant in 1979 provided Dr. Goeckel a six-month stay in East Berlin, establishing him as the first American doctoral student to take part in the IREX exchange while he was attending Harvard University. The ability as a professor at Geneseo to pursue activities that require him to travel to these foreign countries has been something that Dr. Goeckel appreciates. “The college has always been very supportive of my research. I’ve received outside fellowships and awards that go to the Soviet Union or to go to East Germany,” Goeckel said. “The college has been very generous in terms of giving me sabbaticals and time to do my research that the department has always been very supportive in addition to the administration.”

Dr. Goeckel has been a professor at SUNY Geneseo since 1982, during which time he has published a plethora of articles and books, spoken at numerous conferences, and received many awards/recognitions for his research. Among these, he was named as the director of the Center for the Study of the U.S. and Russia in 2000-2001, providing him with significant credibility and opportunity to foster relationships with Moscow State University. Using this international recognition, he later played an instrumental role in the implementation of the SUNY study abroad programs from 2004 to 2012 which provided students with the opportunity to study at Moscow State University in Russia. Goeckel continues to actively research the role of the Stasi in the East German CDU.
Congressman Joseph Morelle Talk

On October 28, New York Congressman Joseph Morelle spoke to students and faculty of the department about the 2020 elections and his work in Congress on a video call over Zoom. Morelle, an alumnus of SUNY Geneseo, graduated with a degree in Political Science and, along with working in Congress, has served in the New York State Assembly and the Monroe County Legislature. Morelle noted that during his time at Geneseo, he obtained an internship which led to his passion for politics. In fact, the experiences from that internship later led to Morelle taking a year off from school to work for a political campaign.

In his talk, Morelle touched on five things that he learned while in Congress. These included lessons about the importance of forming relationships, the differences in human decision making (emotional versus rational), having empathy and sympathy, paying attention to potential consequences, and asking good questions. Each of these lessons play into an overarching theme of having humility, knowing that one does not know everything, and the importance in understanding this. In doing so, better and more effective decision making can occur.

Despite the talk occurring over Zoom, Congressman Morelle was able to field questions using the Zoom chat, which the Department Chair Jeffrey Koch monitored. This process exemplified the measures that had to be taken to ensure the safety of everyone during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Professor Tulis and “The Civic Constitution”

On November 19, Jeffrey Tulis, Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin, presented a talk about what is known as the civic Constitution, which can be thought of as the “common sense reading of the constitution.” Professor Tulis is a highly decorated expert on political development, constitutional theory, and the American presidency, having written numerous books and articles on the matter, including The Rhetorical Presidency, a book that has received many awards for its analysis on the American presidency.

One of the most important aspects of the subject matter Professor Tulis’s talk examined was the difference between the juridical Constitution and the civic Constitution. The juridical Constitution is the Constitutional law that is decided by lawyers and judges while the civic Constitution is how it is understood by actors beside judges, such as office holders and citizens. This talk primarily analyzed the current phenomenon that sees the civic Constitution losing influence to the juridical Constitution. For example, Professor Tulis mentioned the fact that in the 19th century, office holders and citizens were more literate in the Constitution than they are today, which has helped influence the decline of the civic Constitution.

This talk was a part of a series on The Forum on Constitutionalism and Democracy at SUNY Geneseo and was conducted over Zoom. This was the third event in this series with the goal to “foster campus conversations, about civic education and liberal democracy,” and was established by Professors Carly Herold and Aaron Herold in 2019.
Elizabeth Allen Talks about the 2020 Election

On December 2, Elizabeth Allen, a 2006 graduate of SUNY Geneseo, discussed her experience as the Director of Communications for Vice-President Elect Kamala Harris. At the beginning of the talk, Allen gave a brief overview of her journey toward that position, including her time spent as the White House Deputy Communications Director, and Deputy Assistant to President Barack Obama. Since 2017, Allen has worked as a consultant at the Glover Park Group, a company that provides consultation to a plethora of clients.

When discussing her experience during the 2020 presidential election, Allen mentioned the fast-paced 24/7 work environment that comes with an election campaign. In addition to the challenges already in place, Covid-19 provided new ones, making campaigning more virtual than ever before.

Allen gave helpful tips to Geneseo students when asked about what skills were needed in such a role. Some of the most important skills were preparation with organization, and planning. Allen and her team created spreadsheets about the potential VP candidates then-presidential candidate Joe Biden would choose to be his running mate. This helped ensure a quick transition to whoever his choice was. Allen also mentioned the importance of quickly establishing a rapport and building trustful relationships. With then-Senator Harris, the two were able to do this in a limited time, working together through a busy campaign schedule.

One of Allen’s biggest pieces of advice to students who hope to work in a similar field is honesty. She stresses the importance of advice over blind agreement, whether that be for a company CEO or the future Vice President. She tells students that whoever you work for “you owe your best advice to.” Allen brings up a personal example of this, as she was the one who gave the tough feedback as she prepared then-Senator Harris for her debate against Vice President Mike Pence.

After her discussion, Allen answered questions from students, and talked about relevant topics, such as misinformation from the Trump campaign and her journey after graduating from SUNY Geneseo.

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Dr. Dannagal Young on “Irony and Outrage”

On October 21st, Dr. Dannagal Young, a professor from the University of Delaware, took a virtual visit to Geneseo with an online talk. Dr. Young has done extensive research on political humor, media psychology, and public opinion, publishing over 40 academic works. For the Geneseo audience, she spoke to her book *Irony and Outrage: The Polarized Landscape of Fear, Rage, and Laughter in the U.S.*

During the talk Dr. Young examined the existence of satire and outrage programs in the United States, while discussing the psychological components that often polarize them politically. The most prevalent differentiation between them came down to two opposing mindsets; tolerance of ambiguity, as often associated with satire; and minds hardwired for surveillance and security, as associated with outrage programs. Dr. Young shared the research that brought her to these connections, in addition to the influence these programs have on the general population.

After her talk, Dr. Young stayed online to answer the questions of the students who attended. The event was held over Zoom, and was organized by the Political Science and International Relations departments for students to learn directly from professionals outside of the college. In addition to having established academic work, Dr. Young has an award from the University of Delaware for Excellent Teaching, and has spoken for TED.

Professor Gregory Gause gave a lecture entitled “The New Middle East Cold War” on October 15, 2020

F. Gregory Gause, III is the John H. Lindsey ’44 Chair, professor of international affairs and head of the International Affairs Department at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University. He is the author of three books and numerous articles on the politics of the Middle East, with a particular focus on the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. He was previously on the faculties of the University of Vermont (1995-2014) and Columbia University (1987-1995) and was Fellow for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (1993-1994). During the 2009-10 academic year, he was Kuwait Foundation Visiting Professor of International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. In spring 2009 he was a Fulbright Scholar at the American University in Kuwait. In spring 2010 he was a research fellow at the King Faisal Center for Islamic Studies and Research in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

His research focuses on the international politics of the Middle East, particularly the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. He has published three books, most recently *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). His articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, Security Studies, Washington Quarterly, National Interest*, and in other journals and edited volumes.
Joanna Henrietta Margaret Kirk: 1963-2021

Jo Kirk died peacefully in her sleep on Tuesday evening, January 12, at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester NY, from complications resulting from cancer treatment and surgery. She was 57 years old. She is predeceased by her mother, Margaret Craig Kirk, and her step-mother, Elsa Kirk-Boon. Jo is survived by her husband of 33 years, Charles (Chuck) Strickland in Nunda, NY; her father, Robin S. Kirk and spouse Ina, residing in the Netherlands; her brother, Robert Kirk and spouse Tracy; and sons, Matthew and Oliver, residing in the UK; her sister, Georgina Kirk Becerra and daughter, Lauren residing in Texas; her sister, Mathilde Kirk and spouse Daan van Kempen, and children Alex and Elsa, residing in Belgium; and her brother, Eddie Kirk residing in the Netherlands.

Jo was born in 1963 in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and grew up in NW England in Lancashire and Cumbria. Always academically driven, she completed her MA in jurisprudence (law) at Hertford College, Oxford University in 1984, and went on to accomplish a post graduate diploma in jurisprudence at the College of Europe in Belgium in 1985.

In 1985 Jo’s adventuring spirit then took her to Colombo, Sri Lanka where she taught at an international school. There she met Chuck, who was in the USG Foreign Service managing agricultural projects. They married in Sri Lanka in 1988 and traveled together to a long-term USG posting in Nepal, followed by a Washington D.C. assignment, before moving to their farm in Nunda, NY. where they have resided since 1995.

Jo was a full-time professor at SUNY Geneseo, teaching in the faculty of a variety of departments. Her service at the college began in 1997 as editor and principal writer for college advancement publications. Jo’s love for teaching drew her into the classroom where she was in her element, interacting with the bright, motivated students of SUNY Geneseo, and she received awards for her dedicated teaching.
Jo’s broad training, multiple areas of expertise (law, global development, politics, literature, writing) and international experience enabled her to serve the college in multiple useful ways, teaching a wide variety of courses in Political Science and Sociology, as well as teaching Freshman Writing Seminars and Humanities courses, serving as Pre-law advisor, helping with the Model United Nations, being involved with study abroad programs in Ghana, Greece and Haiti, and helping to forge a cooperative program with Cuba. She also advised the Mock Trial Club and established and supported the Joanna Kirk One World Scholarship Endowment to support study abroad.

Colleagues, in reflecting on Jo’s life, have called her “irreplaceable.” Her contributions to the prelaw program and study abroad were particularly substantial, doing much to advance the programs and make them successful. She served cheerfully, dependably, and intelligently wherever she was needed, and students sought her out for her dedicated teaching and advising. Her passion and global outlook inspired a generation of students to work in the realms of politics and the law, to be increasingly aware of and adaptable to cultural differences, to construct careful arguments, to write with clarity, and to embrace international partnerships with skill and sensitivity. Her home was a welcome place for faculty and students, and many remember with fondness days of picking apples at her farm.

Jo also had a passion for Yoga, which she studied for many years and taught in regular classes both in Nunda and Geneseo, NY.

Jo embarked on so many adventures and projects throughout her life that there are too many to recall within the limits of an obituary. She was a bright, warm, loving soul who drew people together, and she will be much missed by students, friends and family all over the world.

There will be no funeral service. A memorial event will be held in late 2021 after resolution of the corona virus pandemic.

Students and colleagues are invited to leave comments on the funeral home webpage https://doughertyfuneralhomes.com/Obits/?p=12401

In lieu of flowers or donations, the family would like people to be kind to each other...strike a yoga pose and think of Jo.
On October 14th, Professor Christopher Towler met with SUNY Geneseo students via Zoom to talk about his research, “The Politics of Sports: How Black Athletes can Change the Game.” Towler has studied the relationships between Black political activism, Donald Trump’s America, and group consciousness and leadership in the Black community. During the online presentation, he shared this research with attendees, speaking to the interconnectedness of these areas, and the importance of learning about them. Towler also spoke to Black political participation in the then-upcoming 2020 election, and answered any questions from students and staff.

Professor Towler’s talk stems from his research in political activism and racial studies. He has authored a publication *Shut Up and Play: Black Athletes, Protest Politics, and Black Political Action*. Professor Towler continues to share his research and teach at California State University.