

October 22, 2015

Dear Undergraduate Research Committee Members,

I am writing in support of Andrew Powell, Reno Jamison, and Xinyang (Shane) Xuan's request for funding to attend the upcoming conference of the Southern Political Science Association (SPSA), which will take place in San Juan, Puerto Rico in early January.

The SPSA conference is a particularly good venue for undergraduate research presentations. It is the only professional conference that I know of in political science that has a section of panels dedicated to undergraduate research. In organizing these panels, special effort is made to both encourage students' interaction with peers at other schools who are engaged in similar research projects *and* provide them with constructive feedback from faculty who have both subject area expertise and experience mentoring undergraduate research. As such, while there are opportunities for students to present their work at some other political science conferences, the SPSA is uniquely supportive of undergraduate research.

The paper Andrew and Reno will present, "Mobilizing the Electorate: Evidence from the 2014 Senatorial Candidate Twitter Feeds," is the product of more than a year of collaborative original research. Andrew was one of five students in my Congressional Elections seminar last fall who first led nearly forty PSC 111 students through an effort to "harvest" all of the tweets issued by Senate Candidates in the last month of the 2014 midterm election season and then conducted preliminary content analyses of the tweets' tone, issue coverage, and mobilization appeals. Andrew presented the initial findings of this exercise at the Celebration of Student Research on his own last year and then he and Reno began meeting with me to discuss the possibility of conducting a more rigorous content analysis focused on the particular question of how Senate candidates use social media to mobilize supporters. As part of an independent study course under my supervision, they have read prior research on democratic mobilization and used it to inform their development of a content analysis coding protocol, which they have just finished applying to more than 8000 tweets from the 2014 Senate campaign. This volume of hand-coding is impressive, and I expect that their analysis of the data in the remaining weeks of this semester will yield findings that will make for a compelling presentation at the conference in January.

I have had less to do with the development of Shane's paper, which he began under the supervision of Professor Michael Burch last year and has continued to execute independently since Michael's departure from the College. That said, I can attest generally to Shane's strengths as a student and budding political scientist. As his personal statement indicates, he intends to earn a Ph.D. in political science, and my experiences with him in class and as founding president of an organization to promote research by political science students suggest that he is well suited to that endeavor. As I understand it, the paper he will present at the SPSA conference is closely related to his Senior Seminar paper, which is among the most well-developed and sophisticated in the batch of first drafts that were submitted last week.

The students and I have been seeking funding from other sources to defray some of the costs of what we understand is a large travel budget. While most such efforts have been unsuccessful so far, I have secured a commitment of \$300.00 from the Political Science Department. In addition, a small travel grant I have received from the SPSA will cover all ground transportation expenses.

Sincerely,

Shamira Gelbman

Proposal for Undergraduate Research Committee Funding to attend the 2016 Conference of the Southern Political Science Association, San Juan Puerto Rico, January 7-9, 2016

Reno Jamison '17
 Andrew Powell '17
 Xinyang (Shane) Xuan '17

We are the following funds:	Total	Per person
Flights (roundtrip IND-SJU)	\$1875.00	\$625.00 (estimated based on current price quotes)
Hotel (shared room for 2 nights)	\$482.60	\$160.87 (actual)
Conference registration	\$390.00	\$130.00 (actual)
Meals and incidentals	\$450.00	\$150.00 (estimated)
Ground transportation	\$150.00	\$50.00 (estimated)
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Subtotal	\$3197.60	\$1065.87
- PSC Department contribution	-\$300.00	-\$300.00 (Shane)
- Ground transportation costs covered by SPSA Artinian Award for Dr. Gelbman's travel	-\$150.00	-\$50.00
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TOTAL REQUEST:	\$2897.00	\$1065.87 (Reno) \$1065.87 (Andrew) \$765.87 (Shane)

Reno Jamison and Andrew Powell, Conference Paper Title and Abstract:

"Mobilizing the Electorate: Evidence from the 2014 Senatorial Candidate Twitter Feeds"

Over the last couple of years, we have begun to see social media including Twitter used in ways once never thought possible including in political campaigns. In the 2014 election 70% of Senate candidates had some form of an official Twitter presence, but how did they use it? This project examines how the 76 Senate candidates on Twitter used it in 2014. This was done by analyzing over 8,000 tweets from these 76 candidates in the month leading up to the midterm election. Each tweet was individually coded, and was subcategorized as an attack, issue, mobilization, or multipurpose tweet. These tweets were all then sorted and analyzed using a number of categories including the state, party, and incumbency or status of the tweeter, as well as the race's competitiveness, President Obama's percentage of the vote in that state in 2012, and the number of favorites/retweets it received. The results so far show that, overall, candidates tweeted more in competitive races, and that party affiliation was a strong indicator of what kind of tweet was used. More specifically we are interested in how and which candidates were able to mobilize voters through Twitter. We are further interested to both quantitatively and qualitatively determine how candidates mobilized supporters. This research is still ongoing, and tweets coded as promoting mobilization are being analyzed further.

Andrew Powell, Personal Statement:

I am a junior studying Political Science and Chemistry with hopes of one day attending medical school. One may then ask why I am so interested in political science and taking an independent study research project in the discipline rather than doing something more generally regarded as scientific such as examining the impact of a particular enzyme on protein function. In my opinion, that is the beauty of a liberal arts education. I took PSC 111 in the spring of my freshman year, and enjoyed it so much that I ended up taking PSC 310 which was a special topics course on the 2014 Congressional elections. Part of that class was collecting and analyzing data from every single Senate candidate in the month leading up to the election, and I was fortunate enough to be able to present our initial findings at the celebration of graduate research last January. There were quite a few members of the faculty and alumni that attended my presentation and they asked some really good questions regarding how candidates mobilized the electorate, but I simply could not answer them because we did not have the time during the class to go very far in depth regarding mobilization. So when Dr. Gelbman approached me and a few others about delving into the data set further I was really excited to get to the bottom of some of those questions, and more specifically the ones involving mobilization.

This independent study has challenged me as a student, and forced me to use some of the skills I have learned in genetics or chemistry lab work and then apply it to my project. Creating a way to systematically analyze and code tweets, and then going through the set to actually perform the analysis has been a really cool experience, and I cannot wait to finish coding and get into examining the data. I feel like the only thing we are missing is the peer review aspect of our work, and that is where I think the SPSA conference in Puerto Rico fits in well. It will give us

the opportunity to go before a panel of experts, and present/hone our findings so that we will hopefully be able to publish our paper and make a contribution to how future Senate candidates will mobilize voters using Twitter. This experience would not be possible without the help of the undergraduate research committee, and I hope that I have made clear the value I place on the chance to attend and represent Wabash College.

Reno Jamison, Personal Statement:

The research project my colleague Andrew Powel and I are undertaking examines how Senate candidates in 2014 used twitter to mobilize the electorate. The use of social media in elections is a relatively new phenomena, beginning on a wide scale in President Obama's 2008 campaign. We are using a data set collected last year by students in PSC-111. When coding, if the candidate's tweet has an imperative verb it is considered mobilization and scored with a "1". If the tweet is considered mobilization we determine if it is outreach, transformational, or neither. An outreach tweet is one that asks the candidate's twitter followers to spread the word about the candidate typically through retweeting or talking to friends and family. A transformational tweet is one that asks the followers to participate in an action that may lead to more action or turn the follower into an organizer of the campaign. This is most commonly done through asking followers to volunteer in various capacities. The hope is that upon the completion of this project my colleague and I will be able to shed light on how elected officials turn to social media platforms and thereby inspire future research and scholarship on the topic.

Attending this conference would be a once in a lifetime experience for me as a young political science scholar. As a junior I am only a short year away from working on my senior seminar paper. Through working on this project and presenting this work to a panel of academics I will gain invaluable experience leading into senior seminar and comprehensive exams. Additionally, this experience presents the opportunity to have our work publish in a political-science journal, which would substantially increase my colleagues and my credibility as undergraduate political-science scholars. Having the experience of conducting this research, but especially presenting it at the SPSA conference will prove to be extremely beneficial whether we continue our education after Wabash or begin our professional careers. Professionally, this project will provided a unique proof of our proficiency in written and oral communication, as well as working collaboratively to accomplish a major project, which are qualities all employers seek in job candidates.

This project will be continually worked on over the course of the semester beginning with coding a data set of roughly eight thousand tweets and ending in an academic research paper. Andrew and I have coded on average one thousand tweets per week up to this point in the semester. The coding portion of this project is expected to be finished in the next two weeks. This will lead to the next portion of our project which is analysis of our data, compiling sources for a literary review, and working on the methodology section of our paper. Once the analysis of our data is complete we will begin drafting our paper and complete it by winter break. Early into winter break we will work on the conference presentation and hopefully conduct a practice presentation to faculty, staff, and students who are on campus during the break. Our semester's worth of work will culminate at the SPSA conference in Puerto Rico where we would present our research alongside other undergraduate students and established political-science scholars.

Xinyang (Shane) Xuan, Personal Statement:

Over 2015 summer and fall, I have been conducting an independent research. My research project considers the exponentially increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad. Specifically, I consider the puzzle: Why do Chinese students study abroad? Although the potential explanations of emigration are well-documented in previous literature, very few empirical studies systematically explicate the exponentially increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad. Thus, my paper addresses this question by using and modifying Truex (2014)'s China Policy Attitudes Survey. I argue that economic and ideological factors, instead of political ones such as grievance toward local government, are the dominating reasons that empirically explain the puzzle such that why so many Chinese students decide to study abroad.

In order to present the current progress of this research project, I decide to present my paper at the Southern Political Science Association 87th Annual Conference in Puerto Rico in January, 2016. Fortunately, my paper was accepted for presentation on the panel entitled "New Strategic Actors and Voices," under the category of "Comparative Politics: Developing Areas." The panel is scheduled at Jan 9 (Sat), 4:45 to 6:15pm. Drs. Paul Lenze (Northern Arizona University, panel chair), Gwyneth McClendon (Harvard University), Karisa Cloward (Southern Methodist University), and Young Kim (University of Evansville) are also in the panel. I am considering to go to graduate school after I graduate one year early with double majors in Political Science and Mathematics from Wabash, the experiences of presenting my independent research at a professional conference with the world renowned political scientists would give me tremendous help.

Also, the conference would be an extremely important opportunity to network before graduate schools make their admissions decisions. My study abroad paper (accepted by SPSA), along with my series of Chinese media papers (presented at MAR/AAS, and to be presented at ISA-Midwest), and social media paper (submitted to MPSA), aims to solve a bigger puzzle that I am attempting to investigate during my Ph.D. study -- Why is China's authoritarian regime stable compared to other dictatorships in the world? Thus, being able to receive feedbacks on my current project will not only help my graduate school application, but also help me grow as a potential political scientist.