
Political Discussion/Book Project Team, 2015-2016

Midway through October, the SNaPP lab experienced a data identity crisis. Akin to a merging of two worlds, the “Political Discussion” team and the “Social Media” team came together to create the overarching “Book Project” team. The groups had previously focused on very different subcategories that fell under the umbrella phrase “Social Networks and Political Psychology:” the Political Discussion team targeted understanding contextual facets, such as setting and relationships, that determined individuals’ decisions to engage or avoid political conversations, while the Social Media team looked at the influence of political polls on public opinion. The group members abandoned these labels. Instead, they immersed themselves in the more imminent goal of aiding Professor Settle in her book project, *Newspaper to News Feed*, through conducting individual research studies and learning about the general process that goes into constructing a paper for an academic journal.

Each of the team member’s studies investigated a different aspect of political communication on Facebook. They were all included as a part of a survey that was run using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Aidan’s project tested the extent to which different types of political media post frames caused “users” (subjects) to engage with corresponding posts. The different frames tested were group (ie. versus non-group), conflict, and partisan frames. Alexis’s

project was a list experiment that explored whether participants had the tendency to misrepresent their political knowledge level on Facebook, and whether they considered this behavior to be socially undesirable. Megan’s study analyzed the effects political news articles on the writing styles of Facebook statuses.

While the remnants of the Fall semester were spent learning how to develop research questions and fine-tune the logistics of their execution, the Spring semester focused on data analysis and visualization. Members began receiving their study results in December, which meant that Winter Break consisted of a crash-course in learning the basics of R statistical software in order to interpret them. Stressful nights of data crunching pushed the limits of team morale at times, but the team members eventually produced final presentations of their results. Each of the projects not only helps investigate the relationship of social media to the changing American political environment, but also highlights areas of political science research that merit further investigation in their own right.

What should I expect as a team member?

This team offers a remarkable amount of flexibility as its needs evolve. In the upcoming Fall 2016 semester, the focus will be on reading and providing in-depth

feedback on Professor Settle's current manuscript. This project will also involve finding appropriate literature and citations, as well improving the writing itself.

Many members of the book project team have completed independent projects, most often related to political communication online. These have included studies on media perception, source cues, and endorsement effects. The Book Project Team provides a variety of ways to get involved with online political communication.

People:

Faculty: Jaime Settle

Students: Sahil Mehrotra '17, Abby Newell '18, Aidan Fielding '18, Alexis Payne '19, Megan Carter-Stone '16