Improving Virtual Workshopping: Reflections from an Online Community of Migration Ethics Scholars

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ABSTRACT The COVID-19 pandemic is hastening the shift of the world of work and study to online, remote, and flexible hours. The political science profession and its attributes of conferencing and workshopping will likely follow suit. To help direct this flow into relationships of reciprocity and scholarly co-creation, this article details the experiences of a successful online workshopping community known as the Normative Theory of Immigration Working Group (NTIWG). For the past 10 years, this voluntary association comprising 88 migration ethics scholars has been meeting routinely and exclusively online to workshop penultimate drafts of research papers. Three workshop conveners here reflect on the joys of group participation and mutual learning and listening. With the intention of smoothing the way for like-minded groups to emerge and solidify, we elaborate our group's animating values and its learned-by-doing rules for scheduling, moderating, and offering feedback online. In the spirit of collectively facing the diversity and equity challenges confronting the future of political science, we conclude by reviewing steps that we are taking to address our own challenges of inclusivity.

The world of work and study is shifting to online, remote, and flexible hours, and the political science profession will likely follow suit. The profession is unlikely to return to a conference schedule analogous to the pre-COVID-19 standard. Both empirical and anecdotal evidence document the pandemic's profound disruption of academic labor and the foundation of smoothly running care work and support in the home (King and Frederickson 2021).

Like other white-collar workers, the university workforce has moved en masse onto the internet and into the home.

Political science career advancement is linked to the number and quality of a person's academic publications and their success in obtaining funding for research projects. Across political science, public affairs, international studies, methodologies, and policy studies departments, however, a "leaky career pipeline" is endangering minority faculty members' chances at recruitment, advancement, and promotion. Women and other minorities may have fallen into pre-COVID-19 pipeline "chutes" as they confronted lowered rankings of their competencies and outputs, lower recommended starting salaries, fewer colloquium invitations, implicit bias in teaching evaluations and grant funding decisions, unbalanced expectations of institutional norms and expectations, and a reduced likelihood of seeing their research cited in the literature (Brown et al. 2020; Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018;

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Edwards, Holmes, and Sowa 2019; Esarey and Bryant 2018; Fattore 2018; Guarino and Borden 2017; Hancock, Baum, and Breuning 2013; Key and Sumner 2019; Liu, Devine, and Gauder 2020; Mitchell and Hesli. 2013; Mitchell, Lange, and Brus 2013). Difficult pre-pandemic conditions disproportionately impeded the advancement of particular groups of scholars: "those with children or other caring responsibilities, those who are precariously employed or more junior, those who are disabled, those who are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or those working in laboratory-based disciplines" (Pereira 2021, 3; see also Arnold and Woolston 2020; Herman et al. 2021).

The "leaky career pipeline" disadvantages scholars from the so-called Global South, as well as Black, POC, queer, and disabled academics. Minoritized identities are found to be intertwined with, for example, lower publishing rates. Women, especially those with children, spent more time in care activities during COVID-19 lockdowns than they did before; many could not find the time, silence, and concentration needed to work (Minello, Martucci, and Manzo 2021). The "maternal wheel" decreases women's research output and raises their stress levels while not resulting in a marked decrease in publishing rates for men (Flaherty 2020; King and Frederickson 2021; Minello 2020; Minello, Martucci, and Manzo 2021; Viglione 2020; Vincent-Lamarre, Sugimoto, and Larivière 2020).

We are concerned here with leveraging the online world of academic work to facilitate the emergence of new groups based on reciprocity and scholarly co-creation. In this article, we share our expertise as conveners of a successful online workshop known as the Normative Theory of Immigration Working Group (NTIWG). By no means trained in online professional networking, we have nonetheless developed a vibrant scholarly community. Its 88 members range from graduate students to full professors. Our community is unique for being entirely online, relying on voluntary participation, and enduring for longer than a decade.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE NTIWG: START SMALL, ESTABLISH THE GROUP, GROW SLOWLY, EXPAND LATER

It may be interesting to learn of the fits and starts that characterized the development of this online community. The NTIWG began on Skype more than 10 years ago. Based on the premise that she and other political science scholars would benefit from a forum to discuss the ethics of immigration enforcement, Author 3 snowballed invitations to join a new online group with no elaborated mandate. These ad hoc invitations were extended simply to colleagues and friends or to students of friends. With no intentionality other than reconnecting after a transatlantic move, Author 3 was pleased with the 10 to 15 early-career researchers who wanted to discuss the intersections of ethics and citizenship and migration studies. Such a niche community was otherwise impossible to replicate in their new home communities. In this self-selecting manner, only people already interested in normative issues of immigration became NTIWG members.

Every other month or so, an NTIWG member would voluntarily circulate a paper, and the group would read it and workshop it together. Members found it refreshing and enjoyed being able to begin discussions with a shared point of view and an assumed familiarity with key terms, definitions, and concepts. This mutuality dispensed with the need to explain or defend the subtopic. Because people were confident that the group would continue, and the papers were of high quality, members participated in bimonthly sessions even when they were not presenting or contributing very much.

Since its inception, the NTIWG has grown to 88 members, almost all of whom remain on the mailing list. Author 3 executed most organizational and administrative responsibilities in her free time for about two years. Then she went on maternity leave and invited Author 1 to become co-convener. In the following six years, membership grew slowly to 50 or so, and exclusively by word of

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We are a wholly voluntary association with no perks beyond the joys of group participation and mutual learning. The NTIWG has led to many concrete outcomes beyond its emotional and affective benefits, including published papers, special issues, panels, and books. In developing the NTIWG, we have enhanced our digital literacy in administrative and online tools, including managing email lists, scheduling meetings, and hosting workshops online via institutional accounts at Skype or Zoom.

The next sections trace how we developed the NTIWG and what the NTIWG looks like as a group; we then explore the evolving set of values that we have promoted and inculcated with our NTIWG members. Next, we provide a "nuts and bolts" explanation of how interested readers can operate a similar group for their political science subdiscipline or convergence of scholarly interests. Throughout, we share key takeaways that we have learned by doing, as well as results from a survey conducted with our members in 2022. We conclude by inviting further conversation on solving some of the challenges we face at the NTIWG.

mouth. After anecdotally noticing an upswing of interest in the group's rather niche focus, Authors 1 and 3 decided to put out a call on email List-servs and social media for new members. This call went out in 2019 over the List-servs they were already on, including CARFMS, MIG-CIT, and IMM-PROF. It was also circulated on Twitter. Author 2 came onboard as graduate convener as the membership doubled to 88. About 30 NTIWG members actively participate, with Author 2 currently assuming most administrative responsibilities.

The NTIWG as a Group

With the caveat that not all members explicitly state their preferred pronouns, and we are thus estimating gender for some of them, 44% of the membership is female. One of the 12 respondents to our survey identifies as transgender femme. The great majority—83%—of members are non-Hispanic white, with the remainder Asian (9%), Hispanic (3%), and Black (2%). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to compare the gender and

ethnicity of our group with that of all normative immigration scholars, we suspect that women are overrepresented in our membership and minority scholars are represented in line with their proportion in the subfield. (The non-Hispanic white category includes Turkish scholars, who constitute 6% of our total membership and who are best viewed as minority scholars in the European context.)

Among the NTIWG members, full and associate professors are most represented at 43%, followed by postdoctoral fellows, researchers, and visiting lecturers (18%); graduate students (15%); and assistant professors (13%). We also have practitioner members. Nontenured scholars are overrepresented among the presenters and active participants. This is not surprising: our group is focused on serving early-career scholars and others who lack access to workshopping and networking opportunities, yet who would benefit most from them. A conservative count of past attendees and presenters reveals that 40% of our membership have attended at least one session and 30% have presented at least one paper. The 2022 survey reflects similar results. Since its inception, the NTIWG has organized at least 50 workshopping sessions.

Geographically, our members are affiliated with universities in North America (36%), non-Anglophone Europe (27%), and the United Kingdom and Ireland (19%), with a few scholars joining from Australia and East Asia (5% each) and one person each from Turkey and Colombia. Five more individuals based in North America are not primarily associated with an academic institution. The lack of geographic diversity is unfortunate but perhaps reflective of the subfield of normative political theory or philosophy, which is arguably underrepresented in Southeast Asia and Africa. When Authors 1 and 3 issued an open call for new members, they anticipated a more diverse group of people to respond than they had been able to reach by way of word of mouth; membership data indicate that this did not happen. A directed outreach effort may be necessary to diversify the NTIWG, and the profession as a whole may need to do more to increase the diversity in our greater subfield.

NTIWG Values Guiding Participation

The NTIWG's online scholarly community is based on values of equality, reciprocity, and good citizenship. Having nonhierarchical membership means a policy of not prioritizing seniority or departmental or university affiliations. Members who have not attended any previous workshops or presented a paper may participate actively in sessions. Indeed, the 2022 survey revealed that only 6 of the 12 respondents had presented a paper, yet all 12 planned to continue coming to workshops.

Author 2 schedules workshopping sessions on a first-come-first-served basis. The group's structure imposes quality control: the paper draft should be on a migration topic and at a stage where the reader can follow the main thoughts without needing an introduction or background presentation. Members' professional incentives to workshop papers that meet a certain threshold of polish and to offer constructive comments on others' papers also function as indirect quality control. We have never received more papers than we can workshop in a semester. In other words, we have not yet rejected a paper proposal.

More broadly, NTIWG's shared ethos of reciprocity and good citizenship means we do not require those who volunteer to share their paper to have participated in previous sessions; we also do not promise group members a time slot for workshopping their paper as a reward for their participation. However, we have found that members pace themselves and only request to workshop a paper every few years, which leaves ample time for others to workshop theirs. We also use our mailing list prudently: it is only used to circulate working papers, calls for papers, and announcements of conferences and other professional meetings. We have not yet had to remove anyone from our mailing list.

Interestingly, we have noticed that relatively inactive members engage more robustly after they have workshopped a paper. This may be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it could be a gesture in the spirit of reciprocity. Members appreciate the generosity with which others read and comment on their papers and are keen to return the favor. On the other, it could

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The synchronous character of our sessions presents a challenge for equal access to sessions for members. It is virtually impossible to schedule workshops to include participants spanning time zones from the American West Coast to Australia, even though presenters are given broad leeway in selecting a time. All but one presenter has joined us from North America and Europe, making it difficult for our East Asian and especially our Australian members to participate in sessions. Should the NTIWG continue to grow, we could consider organizing multiple geographically proximate groups that would workshop with the presenter at different times. In the meantime, a partial workaround has emerged. Presenters usually receive comments and suggestions from one or more members interested in the topic but unable to participate (for a variety of reasons). During COVID-19 lockdowns, Author 2 organized a special, one-day workshop that spanned working hours across more time zones.

reflect a new recognition of the sessions' value. Because the research interests of members overlap, engaging with others' work is its own reward: it is both intellectually interesting and helpful for one's own research. Many survey respondents cited having an intellectual community as a key reason for their participation.

The group's only hierarchical element pertains to the conveners, who oversee membership procedures, paper scheduling, and session formats. Except for receiving spontaneous feedback during sessions or over email, there are no regular procedures for soliciting input. For example, the comments of the peer reviewers of this article and the 2022 member survey spurred our decision to issue a new call for members. The leadership change from the founder and initial co-convener to the current structure of three conveners took place after an open call for volunteers over the NTIWG list.

NUTS AND BOLTS: HOW WE "DO" AN NTIWG WORKSHOP ONLINE

This section, intended as a practical step-by-step guide for emerging scholarly communities, explains the evolving NTIWG practice of workshopping online. It took advantage of freely available tools that facilitate online workshop organizing. The first step is to put out an open call for papers to all NTIWG members. As discussed earlier, we have thus far not rejected a paper proposal. Each NTIWG member who responds to our open calls is contacted by the convener to schedule their session in the order that they expressed interest. The convener asks the author to propose three to four dates for a workshop, at least a month in the future and on days to accommodate as many times zones as

Participants read, comment, and engage a paper and session solely because the topic interests them.

An enduring, online scholarly community generates network effects. Community and individual intellectual and professional benefits accrue to all members. The direct feedback is vitally important for junior scholars in the profession; women and others whose caregiving responsibilities preclude regular participation in late afternoon, in-person seminars in their current institutions; and members who are in departments with few colleagues with similar research interests. One indirect effect is that more senior scholars on the email list learn about the work of emerging scholars. The ripple effects of such a form of "passive networking" should not be underestimated.

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possible. Using these dates, the convener creates a scheduling survey through the free Doodle platform for members to note their availability and then chooses the date that suits the most members. In a final step, which takes place usually a week before the session, the convener emails everyone who has responded to the Doodle survey with the paper draft and a link for the video call. The blind carbon copy setting is used to protect members from potential phishing.

The informal workshop follows a few rules. First, the convener, author, and participants introduce themselves (and mute their microphones when they are done). The presenter then contextualizes the paper—sharing the idea's origins, the paper's stage of development, what journal or other outlet is its intended home, and on which issues collective feedback should focus. Because all participants have read the paper in advance, the convener can then start to field questions. Participants signal in the chat when they have a new question by raising their hand and only a finger when they have a follow-up. Turning on the video is not mandatory. The convener tracks the order of questions, keeps an eye on time, and ensures equal opportunities to speak. Importantly, the NTIWG is *not* a seminar or a class. Accordingly, another principle is that there is no pressure to talk or write in comments (or, again, turn on cameras). This space transforms peer interactions into deep learning and creates a collaborative, educational, and rewarding online learning environment (Ke 2013).

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUILDING AN ONLINE WORKSHOPPING GROUP

We credit the NTIWG's structure of flexible commitments as the source of its success. The NTIWG neither formally incentivizes participation nor punishes delinquent members. We add individuals to the mailing list when they express interest and agree to become part of it. Because we share the name of the presenter and the topic in advance, members can decide when to participate without consequence to their membership. Presenters only bring forward drafts when they are ready for workshopping.

As a writing and support group, NTIWG lessens the loneliness of the writing process. In the survey, members recognized the NTIWG as a helpful and nonjudgmental forum where all do their best to support everyone else's research progress. Frequently, one or more members who cannot join a live online workshop will email the author with suggestions and comments; members who *do* participate in the sessions will also email the author later with additional thoughts and references. The literature confirms that workshopping groups like the NTIWG challenge traditional power structures by cultivating horizontal spaces for writing as both a practice and the vehicle for outputs or products (Healey and Matthews 2017; Kumar and Aitchison 2018; Wilmot and McKenna 2018).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The NTIWG has exceeded our expectations in providing a welcoming space for scholarship and networking. In the face of broad structural discrimination, however, we must ask ourselves how to transform the NTIWG into a more inclusive space. The ad hoc means of identifying people interested in the niche NTIWG intersection of research fields unduly limited its early membership to invitation recipients. We genuinely worried that having too many people on video calls would create interference on the connection and other obstacles to communication. We were also wary of growing too quickly and of having internal cliques forming, as had been observed in Cummings, Delbecq, and Shull (1970) and Tabak and Rampal (2014). We are pleased that the NTIWG includes women's and minority voices in line with their representation in the subfield, but disheartened that its members disproportionately reside in the "Global North." We intend to more actively seek out scholars in institutions in the "Global South" and mobilize our current membership to suggest scholars to invite. As is the case in the profession more generally, the discussions are in English without translation, including sign language. We also face scheduling issues for participants in certain time zones. We may experiment with

organizing multiple workshopping sessions in different languages and time zones or engaging in an asynchronous format.

Our hope with this article is to demonstrate that online workshopping and informal mentoring can be easy and rewarding initiatives that connect across the abyss. We hope that sharing our experiences of developing and convening the NTIWG will help inspire and provide guidance for other groups, particularly those looking to support women and other minority scholars in the political science profession.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ∎

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