

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Adriano Udani

Adriano Udani, APSA member since 2006, is an associate professor of political science at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. He is also director of the Public Policy Administration Program and research advisor for the community innovation and action center.

How did you learn about APSA? When did you become a member of APSA, and what prompted you to join?

I learned about APSA in graduate school at the University of Minnesota in the department of political science. I became a member shortly before going onto the job market in 2011-2012.

How have APSA membership and services been valuable to you at different stages of your career?

My APSA membership has developed alongside my career interests in research, teaching, and service from a graduate student to a faculty member. I once used my membership to solely find jobs in the academic market; now, my colleagues and I have used our membership to conduct faculty searches. My teaching and research interests have changed over time. One of the many things I like about being an academic is that I have the privilege to pursue those interests and see where they take me. I've participated in the APSA Interpretive Methodologies workshop, the Teaching and Learning conference, conference panels, and invited round table discussions. I've been lucky to find supportive people along the way and helped me further articulate and envision what I want to contribute to political science.

Can you tell us about your professional background and your research?

I am an associate professor of political science and Director of the Public Policy Administration Program. I also serve as the Research Advisor for the Community Innovation and Action Center, a center that focuses on using research methods to engage and collaborate with communities in work devoted to making our region more equitable and resilient.

My research has involved studying how immigration policymaking influences political attitudes toward immigrants and migrant communities in the United States. I have examined how US attitudes toward immigration has also contributed to mass political support for restricting forms of democratic participation as well as fostered distrust toward electoral institutions and outcomes. Tenure has allowed me to pursue my biggest passion and work that I have always wanted to do, even before entering graduate school. Cur-

rently partnering with immigration attorneys and grassroots advocacy groups in St. Louis, I work with Central American and Mexican asylum seekers to create a process that educates, accompanies, pays, and positions asylum seekers as policy leaders and knowledge producers to abolish all forms of detention. This work provided many benefits for my work partners who are asylum seekers, grassroots organizers, and service providers. I am most proud of this work that has been mutually developed by all of us, and has provided outcomes that have a real impact for asylum seekers.

You recently received a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. How has this grant allowed you to move further with your project?

My partners and I are grateful for the Henry Luce Foundation's support of "The Pursuit of Dignity." The work aligns strongly with the foundation's vision to build knowledge and use it to enhance action or implementation. It is supported by the Henry Luce Foundation's Religion and Theology Program as part of a new initiative to advance public knowledge on the topic of race, justice, and religion in America.

"The Pursuit of Dignity" extends local work that created a process to foster collective action through regular meetings that offer asylum seekers emotional support and decision-making authority to navigate highly uncertain and violent environments enabled by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and its private contractors. We started with a group of 8 asylum seekers in November 2020; the group has grown to 48 people to date. The group is a mix of people who currently wear ankle monitors and who had them removed before joining the group. Facilitating group support meetings with asylum seekers who can discuss their fears and hopes as well as stand with others is itself a form of resistance and fills a need in the community. Our group meetings also became a safe place to provide spaces to discuss fears, concerns, and adverse effects of COVID-19 as well.

During our project, 19 people self-advocated in front of an ICE officer or initiated a telephone call and successfully remove their ankle monitors. Of the 48 active members, only two (who are the newest members) are wearing ankle monitors. We're finding that our asylum seeker partners were not only building courage, but our support group provided the space for asylum seekers to exchange information about ankle monitor removal and are thus more informed about how to self-advocate for themselves and others.

Through "The Pursuit of Dignity," we will support "advocacy hubs" in other US cities over the next three years. A hub

will consist of a group of asylum seekers, an academic researcher, and an organization(s) that prioritizes ankle monitor removal work and provides legal and/or social services and/or mutual assistance. The St. Louis team, including asylum seekers (who have named themselves “Migrantes Unidos”), will lead a training for advocacy hubs on how to equitably offer information, resources, and compensation for asylum seekers to lead and own system changes as movement leaders in their respective region. Advocacy hubs will also receive funds to compensate asylum seeker partners for the time and presence they give toward ending all forms of detention.

Our training will position asylum seekers to produce three main forms of practical knowledge to end state-sanctioned violence against them: 1) highlight the physical and mental toll of ankle monitors and other immigration surveillance tactics that are inappropriately referred to as “Alternatives to Detention;” 2) develop collective strategies to prevent harm on oneself and others; 3) visualize core values and priorities to end all forms of detention in immigration policy enforcement. The project will culminate with a national conference featuring sessions on faith, race, abolition, partnerships, and mutual assistance informed and co-led by asylum-seekers. Our work and resources provided will hopefully provide asylum seekers residing in other US regions new opportunities to lead discussions among local leaders, including congregations, on how to abolish detention humanely and with dignity.

Which programs or events would you recommend to people who are not members of the association, and why?

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University has convened The Frontiers of Democracy conference annually since 2009, with a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It traditionally attracted about 140 activists and scholars or advanced students from many countries for relatively informal discussions of civic topics. This year, the conference will be held on June 24, 2022. Organizers have intentionally designed the conference shorter and hybrid in format. For more information, please click here.

“The Pursuit of Dignity” team will be sending out a request for proposals soon. We plan to offer training for the hubs beginning in August.



Is there anything else you’d like people to know about you or the work that you do?

I would like to amplify the work of my community partners. Without them, this collective work would not exist. “Migrantes Unidos” is a self-named group of Central American and Mexican asylum seekers in St. Louis, who are collectively making efforts to reject all forms of detention deployed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the agency’s private contractors that administer “Alternative to Detention” (ATD) Programs. The trauma-informed framework that is the basis for recruitment and group meeting was co-developed with María Torres Wedding, MPH, formerly the Director of client services at the Migrant and Immigrant Community Action (MICA) Project. Grassroots organizers at the Interfaith Committee on Latin America - Sara John, IFCLA’s Executive Director; Allie Seleyman, IFCLA Accompaniment Co-Coordinator; and Ángel Flores

Fontáñez, IFCLA Accompaniment Co-Coordinator - have also provided the vision and resources for the mutual assistance work to position asylum seekers as leaders.

Finally, I would again like to express our gratitude to the Henry Luce Foundation. The Henry Luce Foundation seeks to enrich public discourse by promoting innovative scholarship, cultivating new leaders, and fostering international understanding. Established in 1936 by Henry R. Luce, the

co-founder and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc., the Luce Foundation advances its mission through grant-making and leadership programs in the fields of Asia, higher education, religion and theology, art, and public policy.

On Being an Alumni of the Institute for Community Engaged Research

Scholars in many disciplines are grappling with how to produce rigorous scholarship that addresses significant social challenges in collaboration with communities, organizations, and agencies. They strive to learn from those working outside of academia, to benefit from the insights of all kinds of groups and institutions, and to give back to communities rather than extract value from them. Although political scientists offer models of excellence in civically engaged research, relevant methods and strategies are not yet widely taught in the discipline's graduate programs or sufficiently valued in the profession as a whole.

In 2019, in an effort to address this need, the APSA Presidential Task Force on New Partnerships launched the APSA Institute for Civically Engaged Research (ICER). ICER is a four-day, residential institute that provides up to 20 ICER Fellows drawn from political science faculty and advanced graduate students with training to conduct ethical and rigorous civically engaged research. Over the course of the Institute, ICER Fellows network with other like-minded political scientists and learn best practices for conducting academically robust, mutually beneficial scholarship in collaboration with communities, organizations, and agencies outside of academia.

Adriano Udani is one of ICER's many standout Alumni. Udani was a 2019 ICER Fellow who now serves on ICER's advisory board. Professor Udani has been a stalwart advocate for civically engaged research within the political science profession, and was the co-recipient of an APSA Special Projects Fund grant in 2020 to further develop civically engaged research practices and awareness of them within the profession. In November 2021, he, along with his partners at the Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America, received a \$250,000 grant from the Luce Foundation for a project entitled "The Pursuit of Dignity."¹

As a member of the 2019 class of Institute for Community Engaged Research Fellows, can you tell us about your time in the program and how it supported your research?

As a member of the inaugural cohort of ICER, I felt that it was one of the few professional development opportunities where I felt totally immersed and genuinely engaged in discussions. I think it was because I

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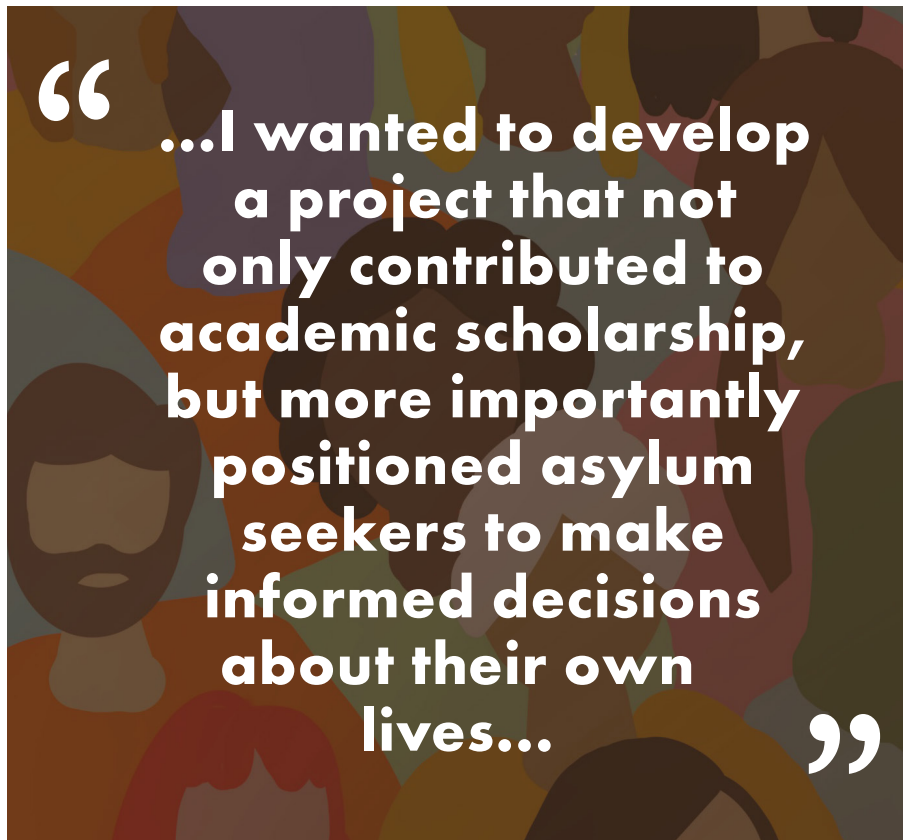
was with people who were in a similar position as me. ICER helped me connect to creative, thoughtful, resourceful, and energizing political scientists at different stages of their careers and in different kinds of academic institutions. It's been wonderful to have a supportive group of people to engage in discussion, writing, and professional development. It's a complicated terrain, and I appreciate learning from different perspectives.

Entering ICER, I wanted to learn more about what it takes for researchers, practitioners, and people to develop truly mutually beneficial partnerships to address social problems, particularly ones that are deemed important by people with lived experiences of oppression. I instantly gravitated toward the questions that guided our discussions: what is the role and position of the political scientist in society? To whom are we accountable? Who should do this work? What is our role in partnership work? We engaged in constructive and challenging discussions that helped us as a group and individually explore own responsibility to inquire to research and write about injustice, violence, and failures of governance. These discussions generated a lot of self-reflection about who are and should be considered knowledge producers, how do we genuinely commit to co-learning and listening to non-academics in partnership work, and what kind of outcomes would really matter. Having a cohort of people with such a rich and different experience with academic-community partnerships was such a valuable resource.

At the time, I was involved with local advocacy efforts with Central American and Mexican asylum seekers in St. Louis, who were being forcibly enrolled into the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) administered by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE). Rather than being detained as they wait for their immigration court hearing, ISAP enrollees were required to wear ankle monitors. Asylum seekers themselves have expressed an interest to find a way to remove their ankle monitors and abolish them. Some have worn ankle monitors for more than two years. Coming out of ICER, I felt like I had more clarity about how to equitably position asylum seekers as organic intellectuals and movement leaders who could identify a path forward. For me, I felt that researchers, service providers, and organizers locally had to do a lot of de-centering themselves in advocacy efforts and instead let asylum seekers lead and reject dominant stereotypes that they were only recipients of others' services, leadership, and knowledge.

What made you interested in civically engaged research?

Around the time I saw the application for APSA's Institute for Civically Engaged Research (ICER), I just finished a project using a small grant from Creating Whole Communities, a partnership between my university, the University of Missouri Extension, and



status quo arrangement of services offered. Instead, they are pigeonholed to serve as respondents to questions pre-determined by researchers and an array of services offered by NGOs. Such positions undercut people's own creativity to problem solve and set agendas. For me, reciprocity meant that researchers, service providers, and organizers had to de-center themselves in advocacy efforts.

María Torres Wedding, formerly the Director of client services at the Migrant and Immigrant Community Action (MICA) Project, grassroots organizers at the Interfaith Committee on Latin America, and I worked with asylum seekers to co-design working meetings that centers asylum seekers as policy leaders and organizers in discussions to end all forms of detention, including digital surveillance tools. Meetings are conducted all in Spanish. We begin each meeting acknowledging our group norms,

local neighborhoods. That experience was eye opening for me. I wanted to learn more about what it takes for researchers, practitioners, and people to develop truly mutually beneficial partnerships to address social problems, particularly ones that are deemed important by people with lived experiences of oppression.

With my curiosity and commitment focused on academic-community partnerships, I wanted to develop a project that not only contributed to academic scholarship, but more importantly positioned asylum seekers to make informed decisions about their own lives and how systems can be redesigned in more just ways. I also was motivated to reverse commonly held assumptions that prescribe asylum seekers as only recipients of others' services and knowledge. I envisioned a project that rejected such narratives and insisted that asylum seekers are organic intellectuals and movement leaders.

How did APSA's Institute for Civically Engaged Research help you perform civically engaged research?

In a recent PS Symposium on civically engaged research, fellow ICER cohort members and I explored the definition of "civically engaged research" (CER) offered by Graham Bullock and Doug Hess. They defined CER as "the systematic and rigorous production of knowledge through reciprocal partnerships with people beyond the academy that contributes to the improved governance of social or political problems."

The idea of reciprocity resonated with me. Prior to ICER, I felt that few, if any, spaces in St. Louis existed for asylum seekers to address policies that affect them or change the

which explicitly reject any forms of detention of immigrants, including the use of ankle monitors. Asylum seekers are assured that no one here works with or for the US government, and their information is never shared with ICE or ISAP, unless they ask us to communicate with them. The first hour provides opportunities for asylum seekers to share as well as seek advice and give mutual support and assistance; the second hour focuses on consensus building toward what actions should be taken to end detention of asylum seekers. We also acknowledge that those of us working with agencies and universities are getting paid for our time. So, we wanted asylum seekers' time to also be compensated. Thanks to a University of Missouri System Strategic Investment, we are able to pay asylum seekers \$20 per hour for participation in monthly meetings. There are no participation requirements. It is okay for people to try out the group, and leave if they think it is not useful; attend occasionally; or, attend, but just listen. No matter what form of engagement in the meeting, we make sure that attendees are paid for the time and presence they give.

How does your project, "The Pursuit of Dignity," embody the principles of civically engaged research?

Our framework created a process to foster collective action through regular meetings that offer asylum seekers emotional support and decision making authority to navigate highly uncertain and violent environments enabled by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and its private contractors. We started with a group of 8 asylum seekers in November 2020; the group has grown to 48 people to date. In ICER, we discussed the concept of "co-producing

knowledge” a lot. In the St. Louis-based work, we have witnessed our asylum seeker partners produce different forms of knowledge toward ending detention. However, our work shows that the biggest impact is attributed to asylum seekers being *compañero/as* or *compas* (i.e., friends) to others who experiencing difficulties with ankle monitors. It is this “*compas*” style of knowledge production that is making a difference.

How does civically engaged research inform your teaching?

An important lesson that I learned was that civically engaged research is an example of good social science. Engaged research doesn’t make us noble or righteous. It is often needed to answer and understand the “hardest cases” involving power, authority, and state-sanctioned violence that is intentionally kept hidden from public scrutiny. So, I think civically engaged research can foster lesson plans and class discussions challenging students to think creatively on

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how they might examine social and political phenomena.

Civically engaged research also has fostered more discussions about ethics and equity in my courses on research methods, public administration, and policy. In ICER, we talked a lot about our own positions in academic-community partnerships, the importance of co-learning through times of conflict, and being transparent about incentives and expectations in collaborative projects. These discussions highlighted the importance of exploring our own biases and socialization of how we understand our identities in classes about politics, public opinion, survey design, and governance.

What advice do you have for students and political scientists interested in getting involved with civically engaged research?

Civically engaged research requires a significant investment of time in building relationships, trust, and doing work that does not involve research. It took over four years to create trust, develop shared group values, find resources, align personnel, and design a mutual assistance model for the “Pursuit of Dignity” project. To this end, people who are in-

terested in civically engaged research must also permit themselves to engage in a process that is unavoidably messy, uncomfortable, rarely linear, and with uncertain outcomes.

So, people who are interested in civically engaged research must find ways to sustain themselves. Finding a supportive network of political scientists who are interested or are currently working with communities, NGOs, civic leaders, practitioners, or the public was important for me. ICER helped me connect to creative, thoughtful, resourceful, and energizing political scientists at different stages of their careers and in different kinds of academic institutions. It’s been wonderful to have a supportive group of people to engage in discussion, writing, and professional development. It’s a complicated terrain, and I appreciate learning from different perspectives.

Building relationships matters. I think a connection to a community of people devoted to solving a common problem has grounded my interest in civically engaged research. Due to the significant time investment in civically engaged research, academic departments and institutions must also play supportive roles in relationship building. It can’t be left for political scientists and students to do this work alone. Tenure and promotion guidelines as well as dissertation committees could be more inclusive of public scholarship and creative works produced for non-academic audiences. Institutions can offer course releases, options to pause tenure clocks, or more funding to extend dissertation writing so that academics and students can build relationships. Universities and colleges can offer grants to incentivize not only the initiation of research partnerships with non-academics, but also elevating the importance of sustaining long-term relationships and the translation of research-to-practice.

Being clear and transparent about incentives and expectations in partnerships is crucial. In early meetings, we all committed to sharing what we each hoped to gain, what we feared, and what we are risking in collaborative work. I learned a lot from these discussions. From my perspective, I understood the distrust of academic researchers and feelings of being over-researched in immigrant communities. I remember being nervous when it was my turn and I needed to express my research interests and goals. I felt comfortable enough to share my biggest fear, which involved inadvertently creating a project that exploited people for data and my own career advancement, without providing anything useful in their everyday lives. A level of honesty from all members —when we feel safe to express our reservations and worries —is needed the most in critical junctures of forming and sustaining mutually beneficial partnerships to solve problems. ■

Endnotes

1. For those interested in civically engaged research, ICER (<https://connect.apsanet.org/icer/>) is held annually on the campus of Tufts University during the summer and is open to all political science faculty members and advanced graduate students in political science. APSA Educate (<https://educate.apsanet.org/>) provides political science educators with resources related to civic engagement lessons and much more, and gladly accepts submissions from educators and APSA members who wish to share content they have created. Both ICER and APSA Educate are made possible thanks to the generous financial support of the Ivywood Foundation.