Carah Ong Whaley

Current Position

Lecturer, University of Virginia, Department of Politics
Executive Director, Better Choices for Democracy

Contact

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Education

University of Virginia
Ph.D., American Government | December 2015
Fields: American Politics, International Relations
Dissertation: *Reaching Critical Mass: The Rise of Grassroots Groups and the Politics of Nuclear Accountability*

University of Virginia
Master of Arts, Foreign Policy | December 2010

MA Thesis: *Think Tanks, Appointees and the Politicization of American Foreign Policy*

University of California at Santa Barbara
Bachelor of Arts, Spanish and Global and Peace and Security | 2002

Previous Positions

Vice President Issue One 3/24-1/31/25
Selected Overview of Responsibilities

- Convene in partnership with the Democracy Communications Collaborative an Elections Communications Hub of more than 85 national, state and local organizations and 1,000+ messengers (Election Officials, former Members of Congress, Veterans, Faith-based leaders) to monitor election narratives and coordinate messaging, rapid response, earned and paid media, with the goal of building confidence in U.S. elections and mitigating violence.
- Fundraise for election-related programming, raising more than $4 million in six months.
- Conduct survey research to assess public attitudes, analysis and research-tested messages for public education.
- Develop content for websites, including HowElectionsWork.org, and a toolkit for *The Officials*, a documentary.
- Research, design and implement paid media campaign to support local election officials.
- Research, design and implement an Influencer campaign to reach target audiences to educate about election processes and humanize the people serving their communities.
- Convene the National Council on Election Integrity, including providing briefings and statements for media.
- Oversee election protection advocacy efforts to increase federal funding for elections and election worker protections.
- Provide policy research and analysis on elections.

Languages

Spanish

Previous Positions (Cont.)

Academic Program Officer, Center for Politics at University of Virginia, 2022-2024
Facilitate learning initiatives, research, courses and programming to educate and inspire people to address public issues and cultivate a just and inclusive democracy. Developed a vision, launched and co-organized the Defenders of Democracy event and served as co-executive producer for a documentary on January 6; co-edited and contributed chapters to three books on democracy and civic learning, including Civic Pedagogies (Palgrave) Leaning Into Politics: Higher Education and Democracy (IAP), and Red Ripple (Rowman & Littlefield); Launched and hosted a podcast featuring bi-weekly interviews on elections and civic issues, expanding public engagement and discourse; led digital communications, including designing graphics, managing social media content, assisting with press releases, and supporting ad campaigns; led efforts that earned UVA recognition as both a Voter Friendly Campus and a Most Engaged Campus, while also developing campus-wide communications and organizing major events such as the VA Student Democracy Summit, National Voter Registration Day, and Young Leaders in Politics; Designed and implemented courses on addressing challenges to democracy and developed a K-12 curriculum on election administration for the Youth Leadership Initiative, where I also conducted information literacy workshops for educators.

Associate Director, James Madison Center for Civic Engagement at James Madison University, 2018-2022
Collaborated with a range of interlocutors to develop and shape the Center's vision and strategic plan; developed a civic studies for future teachers program; integrated civic learning throughout the curriculum through the JMU Civic Faculty Fellows Program; facilitated statewide initiatives like the Virginia CIVIC network; developed and led public programming, including workshops, town halls, and faculty panels; served as Communications Director, overseeing content creation, social media, newsletters, Giving Day campaigns and the production of the Democracy Matters podcast; facilitated campus and community voter education initiatives; represented JMU Civic at regional and national conferences; and supervised undergraduate Democracy Fellows.

Conduct Primary and Secondary Research for John Dickerson, CBS News, 2015-2021
Assist with research and writing on 2016 Presidential Election, and for Whistlestop (Twelve, 2016) and The Hardest Job in the World: American Presidency in Trouble *(Penguin Random House, 2020)*

Associate Director, Peace and Security Funders Group, 2006-2012
Research Associate for Dr. Larry Sabato, Center for Politics, University of Virginia, 2009-2024
Research Assistant, Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, 2011-2013
Graduate Assistant, Politics and History Section of the American Political Science Association
Graduate Assistant Conference Organizer, Center for International Studies, Office of the Vice Provost, University of Virginia
Consultant, Nobel Women's Initiative, 2008-2009
Iran Policy Analyst, Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, 2006-2008
Washington DC Office Director / Director of Research, Publications and Advocacy,
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Santa Barbara, CA, 1999-2006
Public Relations and Publications Manager, California Center for the Arts, Escondido, 2003-2004

Selected Publications

Executive Producer of the Documentary: Defenders of Democracy: The Thin Blue Line, PBS, https://weta.org/watch/shows/defenders-democracy-thin-blue-line

Danielle S. Allen and Carah Ong Whaley. 2024. Educating for Democracy: The Case for a New Civics. Democracy: A Journal of Ideas. No. 74. Fall 2024.

Carah Ong Whaley and Kim Wyman. 2024. Election Law, Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Facts. American Bar Association. Fall 2024.

Leaning Into Politics: Higher Education and the Democracy We Need. 2024. Information Age Press

Civic Pedagogies: Teaching Civic Engagement in an Era of Divisive Politics. 2024. Palgrave Macmillan.

Abraham Goldberg, Dena Pastor, and Carah Ong Whaley. 2024. "Counting on Higher Education: Teaching and Assessing Knowledge and Participation in the 2020 Census." Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement.

Katie Robiadek, Lauren C. Bell, John Forren and Carah Ong Whaley. 2022. January 6 hearings show democracy in crisis. Civic education can help. The Monkey Cage. Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/06/28/jan-6-house-committee-misinformation-education/

Angelina Clapp and Carah Ong Whaley. 2022. "We the People, We the Process We the People, We the Process: Engaging Students in Election Administration," Political Science Today

Guest Editor, Special Themed Issue, "Civic Engagement in an Era of Divisive Politics and Civil Unrest," eJournal of Public Affairs, https://bit.ly/16ejopa

Abraham Goldberg, Dena Pastor, and Carah Ong Whaley. 2022. Let's Get Political: Co-Creating and Assessing Civic Learning and Engagement. PS: Political Science & Politics, 55(2), 398-400. doi:10.1017/S1049096521001694

Suzanne M. Chod, Abraham Goldberg, William Muck, Dena Pastor, Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Can We Get an Upgrade?: How Two College Campuses Are Building the Democracy We Aspire to Be," in *Teaching Civic Engagement Globally,* Elizabeth Bennion and Elizabeth Matto, eds. American Political Science Association

Selected Publications (Cont.)

Abraham Goldberg and Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Bringing Politics Back In," Political Science Now

Abraham Goldberg and Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Let's Get Political: Co-Creating Civic Engagement Campus and Community Programming, PS

Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Voting Systems." Encyclopedia of American Political Parties and Elections,

Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Internet and Elections." Encyclopedia of American Political Parties and Elections,

Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Absentee Voting." Encyclopedia of American Political Parties and Elections,

Abraham Goldberg and Carah Ong Whaley. 2021. "Voting Trends Among Young People." Encyclopedia of American Political Parties and Elections,

Abraham Goldberg, Dena A. Pastor, and Carah Ong Whaley. "Assessing the Effectiveness of a Campus-Wide Census 2020 Education Initiative". Journal of Higher Education and Engagement

Carah Ong Whaley, "Political Parties," "Campaigns, Elections and Voting," and "The Media" chapters, American Government: Roots and Reform, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022 editions. Pearson.

"If You Think Voting Is Important, Try The Census," Forbes, February 2020
"Reimagining Democracy," Madison Magazine, Fall 2020

Lori Britt, Abraham Goldberg, Carah Ong Whaley, Dena Pastor, Kristen Shuyler and Emma Thacker. 2019. "Political Learning and Democratic Engagement at JMU: A Campus Climate Study."

David Krieger and Carah Ong, eds. 2001. A Maginot Line in the Sky: International Perspectives on Ballistic Missile Defense. Capra Press.

Other Studies and Briefing Books

Populi ex Machina: How the Public Views AI and Election Administration, October 2025

A Better Way to Vote: Transparency and Trust Under Consensus Choice," December 2025

Testing Interventions to Increase Trust for Election Workers, December 2024

Democracy Amplified: Winning Hearts and Minds Through Influencer Power, December 2024

University of Virginia Voter Friendly Campus Report, 2022, 2023

James Madison University Voter Friendly Campus Report, 2020 and 2018

Nuclear Funding by U.S. Foundations, 2008-2011; published by the Peace and Security Funders Group.

Grantmaking by U.S. Foundations, 2008-2009; published by the Peace and Security Funders Group with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Back to Basics: Reviving Nuclear Disarmament in the Non-Proliferation Regime; April 2005, prepared for and delivered to the delegates to the Seventh Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Disarmament: The Missing Link to an Equitable Non-Proliferation Regime; April 2004; prepared for and delivered to the delegates to the 2004 Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee Meeting to the 2005 Review Conference.

Briefing Book on the Status of Nuclear Disarmament by David Krieger and Carah Ong; April 2002; prepared for and delivered to the delegates of the 2002 Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee Meeting to the 2005 Review Conference (also published in Russia with Russian Translation).

"The Growing Danger of a Nuclear Middle East," published in Middle East Report Number 247, June 2008

"New Intelligence Estimate Calls for Credible Diplomatic Option to Extend Iran's Nuclear Weapons Halt," Foreign Policy in Focus, December 4, 2007

"War Is Peace, Sanctions Are Diplomacy," Middle East Report, November 23, 2007

"Force Above Law: The New International Disorder?;" July 2002; Published by the International Network of Engineers and Scientists Against Proliferation (INESAP)

Selected Conference Participation

- The Election Center Annual Conference, 2026
- Election Science, Reform and Administration, 2026
- Texas Tribune’s TribFest 2025
- American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Our Common Purpose Convening, December 2024
- 2024 Bipartisan Policy Center Election Summit - plenary speaker and two research posters.
- Election Integrity: The Road Ahead, Journal of National Security Law Symposium, Georgetown University 2024.
- Leaning Into Politics, American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2023
- This Sh*t Is Hard: Teaching Civic Engagement in an Era of Divisive Politics, American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2023
- This Sh*t Is Hard: Teaching Civic Engagement in an Era of Divisive Politics, Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Conference 2022.
- Preventing Democracy’s 404: How Higher Education in Virginia Is Rebooting Civic Learning & Engagement, Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Conference 2022.
- "Advocating Democracy in Africa," African, African American, and Diaspora (AAAD) Studies 12th Annual Conference, Moderator and Discussant
- Preventing Democracy’s 404: How Higher Education in Virginia Is Rebooting Civic Learning & Engagement, AAC&U Annual Meeting
- The Antiracist Gen Ed Project: A Student-Centered Design Justice Approach, AAC&U Conference on General Education, Pedagogy, and Assessment Conference, 2022
- Mobilizing Students During COVID-19, APSA 2021
- 2021 Virginia Humanities Conference: Democracy, Technology, and Social Justice: Humanities in an Unequal World
- African, African American, and Diaspora (AAAD) Studies 11th Annual Conference, Moderator and Discussant
- Student Leadership in a Time of Global Crisis: From Ideas to Action for Full Participation in the 2020 Census & Elections, Campus Compact 2020
- The Arc of Citizenship Bends Toward Justice When We Work Alongside Communities, Campus Compact 2020
- Counting for Community Resilience, International Town Gown Association 2020
- Electoral Engagement and Political Learning - Let's Share What Works!, Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Conference, 2019
- Beyond Service and Voting: Developing Civic Agency for Social Justice, Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Conference, 2019
- If We Build It, They Will Engage: Constructing Diverse and Inclusive Coalitions, NASPA 2019
- Charlottesville Festival of the Book, 2018 Moderator and Discussant
- Presidency and Executive Action, Southern Political Science Association, 2014 and 2013
- Politics of Presidential Power, Eastern American Studies Association, March 2013
- Peace and Security Policy Briefing: A View from Europe; Brussels, Belgium June 2010
- Charting a New Course for US Nuclear Policy; 2004 Nuclear Age Peace Foundation International Law Symposium, Santa Barbara, CA
- Moving Beyond Missile Defense, Workshop Executive Summary; Santa Barbara, CA, 2001
- Missile Defense, Missile Control, and North-East Asian Security; Moving Beyond Missile Defense Conference in Shanghai, China, 2001

Service and Awards

- Committee Member, Civic Education, American Political Science Association, 2024 to present
- Co-Chair, Civic Engagement Section, American Political Science Association, 2023 to 2025
- Vice Chair, Civic Engagement Section, American Political Science Association, 2020 to 2023
- Commission Member, Virginia Community Engagement Index, 2022-2023
- Commissioner, Commonwealth of Virginia Complete Count Commission, 2019-2021
- Reviewer, Journal of Political Science Education, 2020 to present
- Editor, special issue *eJournal of Public Affairs,* 2022
- Civic Fellow, American Democracy Project at American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- Governor's Fellows Program Advisor for JMU students
- United Way Advocacy Committee
- Open Doors Thermal Shelter Harrisonburg, VA
- Faculty Advisor, JMU Student Government Association, '20-'21
- Advisory Member, Students Learn Student Vote @ National Conference on Citizenship
- University of Virginia Teaching Assistant of the Year
- National Advisory Board Member, Washington & Lee University's Alsos Digital Library on Nuclear Issues, 2006 to 2020

Selected Media Appearances

- Comments on voting, elections and democratic participation for various media outlets, including: Wall Street Journal, BBC, Bloomberg, Governing, 19th, NPR, Don Lemon Show, The Guardian, and other television, print and radio.
- Comments on the 2020 Census for various media outlets, including: Wall Street Journal, Teen Vogue, NPR, Richmond Times Dispatch, Virginia Mercury, Daily News Progress, WHSV, NBC, Daily News Record, the Citizen Takes on Harrisonburg.

Fellowships and Grants

- MacArthur Foundation, 2024
- Skoll Foundation, 2024
- Wellspring Advisors, 2024
- Trusted Elections Fund, 2024
- Democracy Fund, 2024
- Catena Foundation, 2024
- UVA Parents Program Grant, 2023
- Pizza to the Polls Grant, 2021
- Campus Takeover Grant, 2021
- Project Pericles Faculty Fellowship, 2020
- JMU Diversity and Inclusion Faculty Minigrant with Carlos Aleman and Melissa Aleman, 2020
- Up to Us Faculty Advisor Fellowship, 2018, 2021
- MTV +1 the Polls Grant, 2018
- Vote Together Grant, 2018
- University of Virginia Community-Engaged Scholarship Grant, 2017-2018
- University of Virginia Student Engagement Grant, 2016
- Bankard Fund in Political Economy, 2013-2014
- John Anson Kittredge Education Fund Research Award, 2012-2013
- Southern Political Science Association Travel Grant, 2013
- University of Virginia, Politics Departmental Fellowship, 2008-2012
- Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2010
- National Science Foundation Grant #0085657 for NuclearFiles.org, 2005-2007

Courses Designed & Implemented

- Making Elections Better
- Politics of Artificial Intelligence
- Campaigns and Elections
- Causes and Consequences of January 6, 2021
- Contemporary American Electoral Politics: Challenges to Democracy
- Artificial Intelligence in Campaigns and Elections
- Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement for Future Teachers
- Honors Civic Engagement
- Political and Civic Engagement
- Virginia State Politics and Elections
- Local Politics and Issue Governance
- Hacking for Democracy: 2020 Elections
- 2020 Census: Counting for Community Resilience
- Politics and Future of Education Policy
- The U.S. Presidential Election
- U.S. Presidency
- Congress and Political Communication
- Political Economy of Climate Change
- Environmental Policy and Politics
- Introduction to International Relations
- Global Politics
- Introduction to Comparative Politics
- Honors Theses and Capstones
  - Andrew Schaeffer, UVA '18
  - Geremia DiMaro, UVA '19
  - Ethan Gardner, JMU '20
  - Tyler Strosneider, JMU '21
  - Anna Connole, JMU '21
  - Corinne Sweeney, UVA ‘26
  - Yossra Samghouli, UVA ‘26
- PhD Students
  - Matthew Kubasack, “Satisfaction in Ranked Vote Settings,” 2026