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January 25, 2019

Dear Student Faculty Collaborative Research Grant Committee,

I am writing to enthusiastically recommend the project that Abigail Overturf and Taryn Smith are proposing for funding. The project they are proposing is thoughtfully designed and will have value for the campus, the discipline of political science, and for the students' academic careers.

In 2018, the Republic of Ireland voted overwhelmingly to repeal the Eighth Amendment to their Constitution, which banned and criminalized all abortion within the country. This success built upon the country's successful referendum to legalize same sex marriage a few years before. How does a country with such a tradition of Catholic, conservative lawmaking manage to accomplish such progressive social change via popular referenda? And can such strategies be effective in Northern Ireland, where abortion is also illegal? These are the questions at the core of their project. Abbie and Taryn's project exists at the intersection of social movement theory and social policy. Questions of social change are of great theoretical and empirical importance in the field of political science, and across academia. Many of our threads – Democracy, Chaos, Justice – grapple with the question of how societies overcome the collective action problem in order to produce change. This project provides an exciting opportunity for students to gain experience conducting original research on an issue at the core of the Wesleyan integrative curriculum. Abbie and Taryn plan to conduct a case study of the 2018 Repeal the Eighth campaign, and compare it to the strategies movement organizers in Northern Ireland are using to build upon the momentum of organizers in the Republic of Ireland. The reasons why turnout was so high in the campaign are not well documented; Abbie and Taryn believe it is because of the way that the campaigns constructed a highly successful media campaign. In order to investigate the way organizers strategically crafted their messages, Abbie and Taryn plan to conduct a series of interviews with movement leaders and advocacy organizations. Qualitative research involving interviews and fieldwork is the best way to understand the complex relationship between political identity, strategies of mobilization, and voter turnout.

This research project is an excellent example of scholarship within the discipline of political science. Abbie and Taryn have constructed a most similar research design that compares organizers in Dublin, Ireland, with those in Belfast, Northern Ireland. By focusing on momentum in the two capital cities, they'll be able to understand how organizers targeted both voters and politicians. They will interview advocacy organizations and activists in each of the cities. Because they have narrowed their research focus to understanding three facets of the campaign (political technique, mobilization, and messaging strategies), they will easily be able to use interviews to investigate these facets of the topic in the requested timeframe. They will be contacting organizations in advance to make plans for interviews once we arrive on the ground. Dublin and Belfast are easy cities to navigate. Based on my experience conducting fieldwork, two to three interviews per day is a realistic expectation; the students will be able to carry out the research within that timeline.



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Both Abbie and Taryn show exceptional promise as academics, and have expressed interest in attending graduate school. This project will promote their development by giving them the opportunity to conduct a manageable research project. Both students are interested in becoming serious students of comparative politics, which requires an understanding of how people in other countries envision the democratic process and their democratic identities. This can only be done by traveling to, and conducting research in, foreign countries. Doing research in Ireland and Northern Ireland will provide both of the students with the foundation they need to engage in future research endeavors.

Both students spent this year gaining the theoretical and methodological experience they need to conduct research on this topic. Both took my Politics of Europe class last semester. Abbie's work focused on the United Kingdom, which helped her understand the uniqueness of Northern Ireland. Abbie also took Research Methods last semester, where she gained methodological insight into how to design a research project, interview techniques, and how to analyze data.

Although neither Abbie nor Taryn has conducted field research previously, Ireland is an ideal location for a first experience: English (albeit with a brogue), is the primary language of communication, Dublin and Belfast are both easy to navigate, and most of the interviews they will want to conduct are in a geographically confined area that is easily accessible by walking or by bus and train. This means that the logistical barriers to conducting field research will be minimal, and the students will be able to focus on the research process itself.

The students have accurately described my role in their project. We envision my role as that of a faculty mentor. I have extensive experience conducting research in Europe, and I am available as a resource to help answer any of the questions they may have and to collaborate on the research design and data analysis for the project. I have a network of professional contacts in Ireland that we can draw upon for assistance and introductions if necessary, and political science colleagues at the Trinity College in Dublin and University of Belfast are eager to connect Taryn and Abbie with interview subjects, and facilitate introductions as necessary. I am also dedicated to fostering a sense of independence. I will not attend the interviews themselves, so that the students gain experience conducting independent research, but I will facilitate contacts as necessary and be available before interviews so they can prepare for the interviews and afterward so they can process what occurred during the interview. I will also help with data analysis and interpretation once we are back in the United States.

The Political Science Department is also committed to preparing our students to conduct fieldwork. I will help them with the IRB process, and ensure they are trained in the basics of doing fieldwork, such as research ethics, identifying research subjects, interview techniques, and data analysis. I will set up mock interviews to give the students experience with conducting interviews with research subjects.

The students plan to present the results of their research at a series of talks and conferences, and ultimately to submit the paper for publication. They are eager to share their findings with the



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Wesleyan community. They plan to present at the May Symposium, which is attended by students across the university, as well as at a brown bag for political science students. Additionally, they will present at regional conferences in the fall and spring, which is an excellent means to disseminate their findings in the field. There are undergraduate panels at the Great Plains and Midwestern Political Science Association Conventions, which would give the students valuable experience presenting to their peers and allow them to network with future colleagues. They also plan to submit the paper to undergraduate political science journals such as the *Journal of Democracy*, an undergraduate journal of political science at Georgetown University.

Based on my experience in the region, the budget the students have requested is accurate. The flight and hotel information is based on current rates. The public transportation systems in both cities are quite good, and all-day passes cost around \$6/day. The train between Dublin and Belfast is around \$100 for a round trip. Food prices vary widely, but the students will be able to eat inexpensively for about \$20/day, and will bring their own money to supplement this if necessary. The hotels in Scotland provide complimentary breakfast and internet. The students have spoken to Student Affairs Senate about offsetting the price of their hotel and transportation if necessary.

I am requesting a \$1000 stipend; I am working closely with the students on the project proposal, pre-departure workshops in the department to make sure they are prepared to do fieldwork, and I will spend the two weeks with them in country, and then be available to help them analyze the data and prepare the paper for presentation and publication.

Taryn and Abbie have chosen an important topic to research and designed a project that has intellectual merit, is feasible to implement, and will contribute to vital conversations about democracy on the Wesleyan campus and in the field of political science. Thank you for taking the time to consider their proposal.

Kind regards,

Kelly A. Clancy, PhD
Assistant Professor and Chair of Political Science