I began my tenure-track appointment at UNC Charlotte in 2013 after completing my PhD in political science at UNC Chapel Hill. I became a faculty affiliate in the Women and Gender Studies Program at the time of my hiring, and recently became a faculty affiliate for the Public Policy PhD Program as well. My research and teaching interests center around questions related to substantive representation—the alignment of public policy with the preferences of a particular group—and under that broad umbrella, my projects fall into two distinct categories. The first examines how the news media inform public policy opinion, and how public opinion feeds back on the policy-making process. The second examines the impact of gender diversity on the Congressional agenda and on substantive policy debate.

My research record includes a solo-authored book, *Combative Politics: The Media and Public Perceptions of Lawmaking*, published by a top university press in my field (University of Chicago Press),[1] three peer-reviewed articles published in top subfield journals, a chapter in a peer-reviewed edited volume, and an invited essay on fake news. I also have a number of article manuscripts in the pipeline and a volume under contract with Cambridge University Press.[2] In working on each of these projects, my goal is to produce high quality scholarship that is visible within the discipline and beyond it. Toward that end, my book has received positive reviews in three scholarly journals, my work on women in Congress has been cited by the popular press and summarized on the LegBranch blog, and my scholarship on measuring the media agenda has been summarized for practitioners by Harvard's Shorenstein Center. As a whole, my research portfolio illustrates my commitment to academic rigor, demonstrates a positive career trajectory, and offers promise of distinction in the field.

I outline my published and ongoing research in greater detail in the following sections, and then turn to discussions of my teaching and service—both of which are influenced by my research interests.

Research Stream One: The News Media and Public Policy Opinion

One of the most central questions in modern American politics is whether the public has the ability, interest, and information needed to participate in the democratic process. Each of the projects that fall into this stream address this question in some way. Collectively, they measure and categorize the information the news media provide to the public about Congressional lawmaking, they question the impact of that information on public knowledge and policy support, and they investigate the degree to which Americans respond to this information in a rational manner. In this way, my research contributes to the theoretical development of the fields of public policy, public opinion, and political communication, and offers insight into the health of our democracy.

My first book, *Combative Politics: The Media and Public Perceptions of Lawmaking* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), is the centerpiece of this line of research. The book offers a unifying theory that explains why members of the public frequently reject policies that seem to give them exactly what they want. From the Affordable Care Act, to The No Child Left Behind Act, to the Federal Marriage Amendment, to the Health Security Act—examples abound of Americans

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[1] University of Chicago Press is ranked third in American politics by "Ranking Scholarly Publishers in Political Science: An Alternative Approach" (Garand and Giles, 2011).

[2] The manuscript is due to the publisher in December of 2019 and publication is expected in 2020. Cambridge is the top-ranked publisher in political science (Garand and Giles, 2011). The volume will be part of the Elements Series of short monographs.

expressing support for the goals and key provisions of policies while simultaneously opposing the bills as a whole. Using a multi-method approach, I demonstrate that Americans are rejecting the divisive, partisan process of policy making rather than the substance of the legislation.

Combative Politics has been reviewed by three journals: *Public Opinion Quarterly* (POQ), *Perspectives on Politics*, and *Congress and the Presidency*. An excerpt from the review in POQ is provided below as an illustration of the reception the book as received.

> "Combative Politics ... weaves together several important threads of American politics research of recent years: the dominance of game-frame news coverage, the renewed emphasis on citizen discontent, and the gap in public preferences and policy outcomes in often-gridlocked Washington. This project uses a range of evidence to make its case, including content analysis of media reports, multivariate analyses of public opinion research, and experiments that expose subjects to genuine and subtly altered news reports to measure reader responses to different media content.

> This combination of research approaches ... provides an effective and comprehensive framework for examining the roles that media content play in increasing public cynicism and in creating obstacles for passage of even popular legislation. This well-written book offers compelling evidence that journalism norms work against both sound policy development and legislative compromise" (Steven J. Farnsworth, *Public Opinion Quarterly*).

Other publications in this research stream include "Measuring the Media Agenda" (*Political Communication,* 2014),[3] and "Taxing Death or Estates: When Frames Influence Citizens' Issue Beliefs" (in *Winning With Words,* 2009). The former provides scholars with a practical guide to the construction, validation, and evaluation of time series measures of media attention to policy topics. This is of interest to scholars across a range of subfields, including mass communication, public policy, and public opinion. The more media attention an issue receives, the more likely government actors are to address it, and the more likely members of the public are to believe the issue is important. A summary of the article was featured on Harvard's Shorenstein Center's *Journalist's Resource* site.[4] The latter publication uses a survey experiment to examine how the "death tax" frame influences public attitudes toward the federal inheritance tax. My coauthor (Brian Schaffner) and I show that people who trust the Republican Party (a key disseminator of the "death tax" frame) tend to believe what it implies—that everyone who dies will be subject to this tax. Of course, that is not how the inheritance tax works. Only estates worth upwards of $1 million were subject to it when the study was conducted. In sum, our findings shows that trusting the messenger can lead members of the public to accept misleading frames. Finally, I also contributed an invited essay on fake news and its impact on attempts at policy reform to the Winter 2018 issue of *Extensions: A Journal of the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center.*

In addition to my published work, I have a number of projects in progress that fall into this research stream. First, I am continuing my research on political conflict by examining the macro-level implications of conflict-laden news reporting. While *Combative Politics* examines individual-level support for specific policy proposals, my ongoing work examines changes in aggregate-level support

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[3]In 2014, *Political Communication's* 5-year impact factor was 2.621. In 2018 (the most recent year for which data are available), it was 3.887 (Journal Citation Reports, 2018).

[4]https://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/news-media/measuring-agenda-how-research-coverage-trends-topics/

for broad policy goals (like increased federal healthcare funding, or decreased social welfare benefits) that result from heated policy debate. In short, I ask whether the public can be so turned off by an ugly debate over a *specific* policy that it rejects policy change in *general*—even when the status quo remains in place. My preliminary findings suggest that it can be.

Second, I have a new co-authored volume under contract with Cambridge University Press titled *Three Models of Opinion Dynamics*.[5] The study of substantive representation hinges on accurately measuring public preferences for government goods and services, and assessing the relationship between those demands and government outputs. This book makes advances in both areas. We develop a novel theory that outlines the important role political parties play in facilitating public responsiveness to government action. On issues where the parties regularly take opposing positions (most welfare state policies), the public infers the direction of policy change in Washington based on which party is in control. Public demand for more or less government action, therefore, cycles over time in response to changes in party control. But where party cues are absent, and where cleavages other than partisanship are dominant, different patterns of public response emerge. In the first instance, public opinion is stable, and in the second, major events and social movements spur *absolute* opinion change. Absolute change reflects shifting societal values and results in long-term opinion trends. We develop and classify 66 new time series measures of policy-specific public opinion to test our theory.

The third project is an examination of policy and public opinion related to mental health in the United States. This project measures public dialogue around the issue of mental health over time—paying particular attention to linkages with additional policy topics (like homelessness, gun control, and women's health). I then examine how this dialogue impacts federal spending and the passage of laws related to mental health. Finally, the fourth project (coauthored with Kevin K. Banda) examines how the public responds when party leaders take counter-stereotypical policy positions. This work is particularly relevant in the Trump era. President Trump is reshaping the Republican party by taking a number of policy positions that conflict with the established GOP platform (such as protectionist trade policies). We use a survey experiment to investigate how partisans perceive the ideology of policies championed by the "wrong" party—cases in which party cues fail to provide accurate signals about the content of legislation.

Research Stream Two: Gender Diversity and Lawmaking in Congress

My interest in substantive representation is clearly displayed in my second line of scholarship, which examines the role gender diversity plays in shaping the Congressional agenda and policy debate. The first paper in this stream, "Gender and Policy Agendas in the Post-War House," is forthcoming at *Policy Studies Journal*.[6] It assesses the relationship between the size and composition of the female delegation in Congress, and the degree of difference between the issue agendas developed by women and men. I hypothesize that the female agenda will diversify to look more like that of men over time, as the number of women in Congress increases. This is because female members of Congress can share responsibility for women's substantive representation with other women in the chamber. This allows each woman to broaden the scope of her legislative agenda and to spend

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[5]It is coauthored with Elizabeth Coggins, Jim Stimson and Frank Baumgartner.

[6]*Policy Studies Journal* had a 5-year impact factor of 4.758 in 2018. It was ranked 5th out of 176 journals in the Political Science and 3rd out of 47 journals in Public Administration in 2018 (Journal Citation Reports, 2018).

less time on women's issue bills as the delegation grows, without fear that these issues will not be addressed. This is precisely what I find in an analysis of all bills introduced in the U.S. House over a 60-year period. Increasing the number of women in Congress increases both the breadth and depth of their collective legislative agenda—simultaneously offering increased substantive representation *and* representation across a wider range of topics.

The second paper, "Gender Stereotypes and the Policy Priorities of Women in Congress" (co-authored with Jason Windett), is forthcoming at *Political Behavior*.[7] This piece examines the relationship between the policy portfolios female legislators develop while in office and the gender stereotypes they face when running for reelection. Scholars find that women who run for Congress are just as likely to win as men are, yet women face considerable challenges related to their gender on the campaign trail. To combat these challenges, we show that female members of Congress develop reputations of competence by proposing more bills, spread across more issues, than do men. Overall, women must introduce twice as many bills as similarly situated men to successfully deter primary challengers. Dr. Windett and I were invited to submit a blog post summarizing this article to LegBranch,[8] and the article was cited in the *New York Times* in November of 2018.[9]

Both of these projects reveal high levels of female sponsorship in policy domains long thought the province of men, such as defense and foreign affairs. My latest work (with Reza Mousavi of the Belk College of Business and Jason Windett) investigates whether the contributions women make to these policy topics are qualitatively different from those of their male colleagues—asking whether female members of Congress bring distinct perspectives to floor debates on defense-related bills. As an initial test of the theory we develop, we employ a new text analytics method called structural topic modeling (STM) to analyze the entire population of floor speeches made in the U.S. House during the 109th Congress (2005-2007). Our main finding is that Democratic women are the most likely to talk about what's happening on the ground in Iraq. This includes discussions of military missions and strategy, training military forces, building military coalitions, and establishing a democratic government in Iraq. Republican women talk the most about defense generally, and in particular, they raise issues related to terrorism more frequently than do other MCs. Moreover, their speeches about terrorism are distinguished by discussions of the impact of terrorism on women. These findings hold up when controlling for a number of individual-level and district-level factors known to shape legislator priorities and suggest women do raise distinct substantive considerations during the lawmaking process.

Teaching

As an assistant professor at UNC Charlotte, I have taught more than 2,000 undergraduate students in a mixture of freshmen level, junior level, and senior level courses since the fall of 2013. The bulk of these students were enrolled in my introductory American Politics (POLS 1110) course, which meets the university's social science general education requirement. I teach American politics each fall and spring, and have taught the course both in-person and using a hybrid format that is 50%

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[7] *Political Behavior* had a 5-year impact factor of 3.239 in 2018 (Journal Citation Reports, 2018).

[8] The blog post is available at this link: https://www.legbranch.org/2018-6-13-gender-stereotypes-and-the-policy-priorities-of-women-in-congress/

[9] Chira, Susan. "There's no nice lady caucus in Congress." *The New York Times.* November 10, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/10/sunday-review/theres-no-nice-lady-caucus-in-congress.html

online. The course typically enrolls between 150 and 250 students. I also regularly teach a junior-level seminar on women and politics (capped at 45 students), a senior seminar on issue framing (capped at 25), and I taught a junior-level mass media course for the first time in fall 2018 (capped at 45). The senior seminar is writing and oral communication intensive and requires students to complete an original research paper.

Outside the classroom, I have served as an academic advisor, a senior thesis advisor and committee member, and as a Charlotte Research Scholars (CRS) mentor. My CRS mentee successfully completed the program in 2016 and is now a doctoral student at UNC Chapel Hill. These roles have been some of the most rewarding during my time at UNC Charlotte. They have allow me to work closely with students, to advise their research, and to mentor them as they prepare for graduate school. In my new role as a faculty affiliate with the Public Policy Program, I look forward to mentoring graduate students as well.

Tenured members of my department have evaluated my teaching annually. My peers have given me high marks for my skill at engaging students in discussion, my ability to clearly explain complex concepts, and my syllabi development. These sentiments are exemplified by the evaluations written by Dr. Cherie Maestas, who observed my American politics class in the spring of 2016, and Dr. Joanne Carman, who visited the hybrid version of this course in the spring of 2019. Excerpts from their evaluations are provided below:

> "[Dr. Atkinson] does a great job of explaining complicated concepts to students. One of the more challenging topics in teaching American government is the description of the rational choice model of voting which, if handled badly, can discourage students from engaging in politics. She did a masterful job of explaining the model in a way that contrasted the tensions between normative expectations of democratic society and rational choice explanations for behavior. Her explanations stimulated an animated discussion with the students" (Dr. Cherie Maestas, 2016).

> "I found the course to be well-designed and nicely organized, with clear learning goals and assignments. ... While teaching a large introductory undergraduate class can be challenging for some instructors, Dr. Atkinson seems to have mastered this quite well. I was very impressed with the high quality of her teaching and her command of the classroom" (Dr. Joanne Carman, 2019).

Tenured colleagues have also evaluated my seminar on women and politics. In the fall of 2014, Dr. John Szmer attended the class and stated in his review that "Dr. Atkinson deftly guided the discussion. She did not lecture, but instead used her responses to questions to clarify different points that she wanted the students to understand. She did this masterfully, so that the students were encouraged to participate, and yet the material was still presented in an organized and thoughtful fashion." Dr. Suzanne Leland attended the same class in the spring of 2018 and emphasized the strength of the syllabus and course activities in her review. Dr. Leland wrote, "I was very impressed by her syllabus. ... Her course structure and application allows students to be interactive, [to] work in groups, and emphasizes the developmental skills that are applicable to many different career[s]."

Teaching Philosophy Dr. Leland's assessment highlights one of my primary goals in the classroom. I want students to develop a range of marketable skills in my classes alongside knowledge of course material and strengthened civic values. I create assignments and assessments with these

goals in mind. In my Women and Politics class, for example, students play the part of legislative aids to a members of Congress, and through this lens, they draft policy memos. The memos identify a problem related to gender equality or equity, discuss contributing factors, outline three potential policy solutions, and recommend a course of action. Students write these memos in a concise, professional style, and present their recommendations to the class. The assignment requires students to engage with current policy issues, to conduct research online, to hone their professional writing, and to practice public speaking. They also think critically about issues that affect the lives of millions of Americans and often become passionate about the topics they research in the process. As a result, activities like this one build skills, animate academic topics, and lead students to be more interested in public affairs.

In designing courses, I also work to connect topics from assigned readings with topics of current political debate as a way to make abstract topics concrete and relevant to students. To do this, I choose one or two current political events to follow during each semester, such as midterm and presidential elections, partial government shutdowns, the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, the #MeToo movement, and debates over immigration and the border wall. Throughout the semester, we follow these issues as they unfold and link them to concepts covered in the class reading. For instance, in my American politics course, I linked the partial government shutdowns in 2013 and 2019 to discussions about public opinion and presidential approval, to a reading and simulation on the federal budget process, and to discussions about the balance of power between the president and Congress. To make the subject relevant to my students, we also talked about the implications of the shutdown for programs they were familiar with like student loans, veterans' benefits, and childcare services. This sparked great discussions and lots of questions from the class about a topic that has the potential to be dull.

Finally, I strive to reach students with a variety of learning styles and to engage students with varied interests. Developing a range of activities and delivering information in varied ways helps me achieve this goal. For instance, the readings assigned for my mass media course range from academic articles and book chapters, to editorials and blog posts. Students are also assigned a feature film about the Watergate scandal, and complete a short, interactive online tutorial on how to verify the source of online content. In class, a combination of lecture, discussion, and group work are used to facilitate learning. We also had a guest lecture from a photojournalist who regularly covers political events for *The New York Times*. To review at the midterm and at the end of the semester, I designed a version of Jeopardy to play as a class. Students were also tasked with creating review materials as a homework assignment. Delivering content in a range of formats from a variety of perspectives helps students engage with the material, build a number of skills, and become more interested in public affairs.

Challenges and Improvement   At the end of each semester, I carefully consider what worked and what did not in my courses, and constantly strive to improve my teaching. For example, students in my American politics class often complain that this large lecture course (which does not have sections or graduate student TA's) is too heavy on lecture. Making the course as engaging as possible given the limitations of its format is something I continuously work on. Toward that end, I developed a range of in-class activities and discussion questions designed to facilitate active learning in the traditional version of the course. For instance, students take an abridged version of a literacy test used in the Jim Crow south as part of our discussion on civil rights, and assess the strengths and limitations of a recent public opinion survey during our discussion of opinion polling.

In past semesters, I also experimented with using "clickers" and other technology that allowed me to poll the class in real time.

While clickers turned out to be a hassle for my students and myself, the response to the in-class activities and discussion questions was largely positive and I have seen my teaching evaluations for this course improve over time. When I began teaching the course with a hybrid (50% online) format in 2016, however, complaints that the in-person sessions were too heavy on lecture reemerged. To accommodate the new course structure, I put many of the activities initially developed for the classroom online, and my students correctly noted that this resulted in lecture-heavy face-to-face sessions. In response to student feedback, I've worked to integrate more class discussion, more current events, and more short videos into the lectures, which is helping keep students engaged. I also recently completed a short course on "universal design" through UNCC's Center for Teaching and Learning to help me ensure the materials I use in class and online are accessible for all students.

My student evaluations reflect my dedication to teaching and the care with which I plan my courses. I consistently receive high marks from students for being prepared, helpful and accessible, for giving timely feedback on assignments, and for being respectful of students. The open-ended sections of the evaluations reiterate these strengths and the student quotes below exemplify these sentiments.

> "Dr. Atkinson is a great teacher and was very willing to work with me when I was struggling with assignments. She was very informative and knew a lot about the information and answered questions fully" (Women and Politics, Spring 2018).

> "Dr. Atkinson was a fantastic professor. She made her classes engaging and relevant (especially with the current elections)" (American Politics, Spring 2016).

> "I have learned a lot in this class. I felt the teacher was simply outstanding. She was very well prepared and always ready to assist a student with a question. I would definitely recommend her..." (American Politics, Spring 2016).

> "This course actively challenged my thinking of women's movements, women's rights, and the role that women play in business and political settings. Some of the concepts were difficult for me to fully wrap my head around but Dr. Atkinson made them easy to apply to real world situations" (Women and Politics, Fall 2015).

In addition to positive feedback on course evaluations, I regularly receive recognition from graduating seniors who cite me as the instructor who was the most influential during their time at UNC Charlotte. This information is collected at the university level. Going forward, I will continue looking for innovative ways to keep students engaged and to improve their learning experiences in both large classes and small seminars. I will also continue to attend workshops and teaching demonstrations with a particular eye toward incorporating more active learning in to my courses.

Service

Service requirements for junior faculty in our department are light. Nonetheless, I have served on a range of committees within the department, as an undergraduate advisor, as a faculty affiliate for two programs outside the department, as a reviewer for a diverse set of academic journals and publishers, and I regularly take on service responsibilities at the conferences I attend.

At the college level, many of my service activities reflect my research interest in women's representation. I have been a Women and Gender Studies Program faculty affiliate since my initial hiring in 2013. I teach a course each academic year that is cross-listed with the program (Women and Politics), I attend program meetings, and I participate in program functions on campus. Additionally, I was an active member of the Women and Girls Research Alliance from 2013 until 2016. The center promotes collaboration between the community and researchers at UNCC, awards research grants, and disseminates data to the community. I served on the research committee, which drafted RFPs and evaluated grant applications, until 2016 when a new director dissolved the committee.

Additionally at the college level, I was one of five faculty members selected to present their research as part of the 2018/19 *Personally Speaking* series. I am now serving as a member of the *Personally Speaking* Selection Committee, which chooses series speakers. I also became a faculty affiliate with the Public Policy Program (PPOL) in February of 2019. In this role, I attend program meetings and functions, and participate in the PhD program on an ad hoc basis. I am working with other PPOL faculty to build a research program around the 2020 RNC by applying for grants to fund a survey of Charlotte residents about the RNC, and am serving on a dissertation committee (Samuel LaVergne). I plan to become a core faculty member for the program within the next few years.

Within my department, I served as an undergraduate advisor from 2013 through 2016 and was assigned approximately 20 students each semester. In the spring of 2015, I organized an invited research talk by Dr. Jason Windett that was jointly sponsored by our department, the research center Project Mosaic, and the Women and Girls Research Alliance. I served on a hiring committee during the 2016/17 academic year (a demanding assignment for a junior faculty member), the Undergraduate Awards Committee in 2018, and as a junior member of the Department Review Committee during the 2018/19 academic year. I also strive to be a good department citizen, participating in candidate recruitment dinners, job-talks, etc.

Outside the university, I serve as a reviewer for the *American Journal of Political Science,* the *American Political Science Review*, the *Journal of Politics, Legislative Studies Quarterly, Political Behavior, Political Research Quarterly, Research and Politics,* and *State Politics and Policy Quarterly.* I was awarded *Political Research Quarterly's* 2012 Outstanding Reviewer Award in August of 2013. I reviewed a book manuscript for Oxford University Press in 2019. I am a member of the American Political Science Association and the Midwest Political Science Association. I regularly attend the annual meetings of these two organizations and typically take on a service role (discussant and/or chair) for one or two panels at each meeting.

Conclusion

My record demonstrates promise of distinction in the areas of research, teaching, and service. My published work has been well-received by the discipline and has also garnered attention from practitioners and the news media. Moreover, it advances our understanding of substantive representation at the national level, speaks to the health of our democracy, and informs my teaching and service. In sum, the high quality of my published work, my positive career trajectory, my success in the classroom, and my dedication to service warrant the conferral of tenure and promotion to associate professor.