

# Tulane's Newcomb Institute Part of a Team Studying How Black Women Participate in Legislative Caucuses

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*Photos of Drs. Nadia Brown, Christopher J. Clark, and Anna Mahoney*

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Faculty from Georgetown University, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, and Newcomb Institute at Tulane University are working on a study entitled *Bridges: How Black Women Coordinate the Lawmaking Efforts of Identity-Based Caucuses*. The collaborative project seeks to understand how identity caucuses facilitate negotiation in Congress. In particular, the team is conducting a study that centers on Black women serving in the U.S. House as participants of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues (CCWI). In addition, they also looked at the founders of intersectional caucuses, including the Black Maternal Health Caucus (BMHC) and the Congressional Caucus for Black Women and Girls (CCBWG).

In 2020, [Nadia Brown](#), Professor of Government, chair of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program and affiliate in the African American Studies program at Georgetown University, [Christopher J. Clark](#), Director, Undergraduate Studies, and Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, and [Anna Mahoney](#), Administrative Associate Professor of Women’s Political Leadership at the Newcomb Institute within Tulane University, received a \$19,000 Understanding Legislative Negotiation grant from the American University’s Program on Legislative Negotiation. The grant was a joint program of the Washington College of Law and the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, with support from the Hewlett Foundation’s U.S. Democracy Program.

With this grant, they immediately hired several undergraduate and graduate student research assistants, including Michael Strawbridge at Rutgers University and Mickey Mickle at Tulane University. These students have had opportunities to gather and organize data and attend the annual ULN conference. They have co-authored several papers so far including “SisterSpace: Collective Descriptive Representation and Black Women in Legislative Caucuses” and [“The Black Women of the U.S. Congress: Learning from Descriptive Data.”](#)

*Video Caption: Undergraduate student research assistant from Tulane University, Mickey Mickle, describes her work on the team*

"A research assistant position offered in freshman year is extremely rare, so I was honored when Dr. Anna Mahoney saw potential in me to work on a project in conjunction with researchers at Georgetown University, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and Rutgers University," said Mickle. "Working under Dr. Mahoney has had an incredible impact on my academic and professional journey through undergrad, allowing me to bolster my experience in data analysis and data collection, as well as explore my passion for black feminist organizing and public policy."

Throughout the project's development, they shifted to include Black women at the state level and to Black Congresswomen's political communication on Twitter due to setbacks at the federal level in arranging interviews. However, these alternative routes enabled them to still investigate Black women's legislative behavior and how they approach legislative negotiation.

The team has done extensive research in these areas since the beginning of the grant. Their undergraduate research assistants have hand-coded over 80,000 tweets under the mentorship of Strawbridge. Initial findings suggest that Black women's credit claiming behaviors differ from those expected by the literature, which is particularly important for navigating personal relationships vital for negotiation. They continue to use this Twitter data to pursue other avenues, including a network analysis of Black women's virtual connections to Black men in the CBC and CCWI members.

Additionally, they have conducted ten personal interviews with Maryland state legislators. These Black women were interviewed in the spring of 2022, focusing on their membership in caucuses and how it impacts their legislative strategy. During this research, the bipartisan women's caucus in Maryland disbanded, and the team continues to seek interviews to trace the explanations for the demise of the country's oldest women's caucus.

In Spring 2021, their grant was generously renewed. The grant renewal enabled their research assistants to continue their work on the Twitter data and pursue further interviews with legislators. In addition, they have presented work associated with this grant at the following conferences: European Conference on Politics and Gender, "The Black Women of the U.S. Congress: Learning from Descriptive Data," Ljubljana, Slovenia, July 2022, and Women in Legislative Studies, "Collective

Representation Negotiated by Black Women Legislators,” Houston, Texas, October 22, 2022.

They are currently talking with colleagues to submit a critical perspectives proposal to *Politics & Gender* to inspire further conversation around marginalized legislators’ political communication within raced and gendered institutions. They believe that by tracing public communication patterns, they can identify negotiation strategies used by Black Congresswomen in their pursuit of collective representation.