

Alum Spotlight

Dr. Hollis France is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the College of Charleston's Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program, and the Women and Gender Studies Program. She is also the director of the Gender and Sexuality Equity Center in the campus. Dr. France graduated from the Graduate Center in 2002.

Ayşe Obalı: What research projects are you currently working on? How did your research interests evolve since your dissertation?

Dr. Hollis France: I am currently working on indigenous political movements in Guyana and exploring 1) how the Guyanese postcolonial state continues the practice of *strategic visibility*: reducing Amerindian representation to cultural tropes as a means to satisfy the discourse around national unity, and *strategic invisibility*: substituting cultural representations for political power as a means of further displacing and marginalizing Amerindians from the political sphere; and 2) how Amerindians are navigating and resisting the strategies of the postcolonial state.

My dissertation centered around the formal political structure in Guyana in regards to the state-decision-making apparatus in connection to structural adjustment economic programs. I have since shifted my research to more bottoms up approaches to economic development, with a particular focus on Community Based Development (CBD) in Indigenous Amerindian communities and how they present an alternative ontological vision of development, which is in stark contrast to the dominant neoliberal development model embraced by global and national elites.

AO: You secured your position at the College of Charleston immediately after you graduated from the GC. What advice do you have for current students about to enter the job market?

HF: In discussion with your advisor, and others whose opinions you trust, get a clear sense of whether you would be happier primarily teaching or doing research. In other words, should you be establishing the building blocks for employment at a research institution (where turning out publications yearly are strongly emphasized, while teaching responsibilities are less), or a teaching institution (where there is a heavier teaching load, and a publication is expected every two to three years). If you want to go the research route start co-authoring with your professors and/or other graduate students and get manuscripts submitted for publication. In other words, start establishing a publishing record, which shows strong research promise. If you want to go the teaching route, TA some classes, but also try to acquire some classes in which you are the independent instructor. In other words, start establishing a teaching portfolio that demonstrates how effective you are in the classroom.

Apply for funding and attend conferences and present your work. This is both an opportunity to get feedback from scholars in the field and for folks in the discipline to become familiar with you and your work. You might also want to take advantage of volunteering to do a job talk at the GC so that you can be provided with feedback about your strengths and weakness, and how to improve before hitting the job market.

Do your research on salary negotiations so that you are in a strong position to negotiate your salary if offered a position. Women and minority job candidates, do your research to avoid the wage gap. Know your worth!

AO: What resources were the most helpful to you during your time at the GC?

HF: My advisor W. Ofuately Kodjo, and Lenny Markovitz -- forever my heroes! Without their guidance, patience and their belief, I do not know if I would have made it through. Interacting with and befriending students from other disciplines at the GC was also very useful. My Political Science knowledge was greatly enhanced by discussions with, and reading recommendations from, folks in Anthropology, Sociology and Economics. In a sense, I would say they shaped and influenced my current inter/trans-disciplinary approach to research.

