

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR MAI TRUONG

Welcome to Marquette University! Professor Truong (pronounced true-ong), what drew you to Marquette and the Midwest? What are your impressions of the Marquette campus and community so far?

Thank you! What drew me to Marquette was the focus on both high-quality teaching and research, which fits very well with my professional goals. At Marquette, I have a chance to teach small -sized classes allowing me to connect with students better, and pursue my research passions.

I am very impressed by the mission of Marquette and the atmosphere at the university. The university feels like a community which is friendly but at the same time highly professional. I was touched when during my very first class, a few students said “welcome to Marquette, professor” with big smiles and sincere attitudes.

Your research explores the conditions under which movements of markedly different natures build coalitions to confront authoritarian governments. What inspired this interest?

My research is often inspired by what I observe in the real world. Many times, I don't feel satisfied by the answers provided by other scholars, and I set out to find the answers for myself. I noticed that in authoritarian regimes, such as China, Vietnam, and many others, while protests have occurred much more frequently, protesters do not always build coalitions. Sometimes, protesters of different natures are willing to work together to confront authoritarian governments. In other times, they just work alone and avoid building alliances with others completely.

This observation naturally leads to a question: Under what conditions do protests/movements work together to challenge oppressive governments? I read the literature extensively and realized that this topic has not been addressed satisfyingly. And this question has been my passion since then.



What courses are you teaching this semester? What should the students expect from those classes?

This semester, I will teach two courses. One course focuses on the politics of China and East Asian countries for undergraduate students and one course on research methods for graduate students. I think the students should expect a lot of free writing and self-reflection in my courses 😊

I strongly believe that free writing to self-reflect on what we learn during the day is very important for both personal and academic development. Towards the end of the class, I like to ask students to write down the biggest takeaway from the lecture or their impression/opinions about a video or an article. I will also ask how the discussion/lecture fits with their broader goals for the course. I think that self-reflection writing will help students connect the lessons with their personal interests and goals.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED:

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR MAI TRUONG

What inspired you to become a professor?

Thank you for this question! I feel like I took the long route to becoming a professor. Born and raised in a small town in Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam, I always dreamt of studying abroad. I was not able to fulfill my childhood dream until I was 26 years old. I was lucky to receive a full scholarship to study a Master's degree in the United Kingdom for one year. One year abroad completely changed my life and made me dare to dream big.

Before going to the UK, I thought that upon finishing my degree, I would come back Vietnam, find an office job, get married, and settle down (which is expected for women at my age at that time). After coming back from the UK, I found a job at an international organization focusing on development projects. However, I quickly realized that this job was not for me and that I did not find meaning in what I was doing. At the same time, I missed spending the day reading and writing as when I was in the UK.

I decided to quit my job, leave Vietnam, and pursue a PhD in Political Science at the University of Arizona. My biggest goal during my PhD was to become a professor in the US. I was so lucky to be able to fulfil this dream. I love being a professor, because I have a chance to teach and learn from my students. I am always amazed by how much I can learn from my students. Being a professor also allows me to think and write about topics I am fascinated about.

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AND LEARN FROM MY STUDENTS."**

-- Assistant Professor Mai Truong

If students have questions about class or upcoming courses, what are your office hours?

My office hours are on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 – 3 PM. Students can also make an appointment.

For those students who would like to pursue research in the region of southeast Asia, what advice would you offer them?

If you would like to pursue research Southeast Asia, my most important advice is to be always curious. Pay attention to the social and political events that are happening in the region. Pay attention to what fascinates you and why it fascinates you. If you have a chance, travel to the region and immerse yourself in the culture. I would encourage you to learn a language of the region.