Faculty Spotlight: Suzanne Dovi
Political Science Associate Professor

At what institution did you do your undergraduate and graduate work?
Professor Suzanne Dovi received a Bachelor of Arts from Dartmouth College, a Master of Letters from Trinity College Dublin, a Master of Arts in Political Science from Georgetown University, and a Ph.D. from Princeton University.

What was your favorite course from your undergraduate career?
One course that stands out to me was an education course that discussed problems with the American education system; the course was set up to demonstrate certain problems, such as the imbalanced hierarchy between professors and students. The students graded each other, and papers could be rewritten as many times as you wanted.

What is your field of research?
Democratic theory, with a particular focus on structural forms of inequality. My most cited work involves the representation of women and minority groups and those works that consider the roles of representatives in our political system. Some other topics of my research include the representation of victims in International Criminal Court, misogyny, gender diversity in the judiciary, and political injustice in general.

What initiated your interest in this field?
I loved to read as a child. I remember arguing with my dad about the death penalty in my early elementary years, and I have always felt a strong sense of injustice. We are only in this world for a short time, and I believe we should try to make the world a better place. I have also been influenced by major world events. I remember things that I once thought impossible, like the fall of the Berlin Wall and a peaceful end to Apartheid in South Africa. Those events made me aware that humans have the capacity to change the world.

What inspired you to want to teach, and what do you believe your role is in the student’s academic journey?
I love teaching! I feel that, many times, professors are stuck in a “60s mentality” – that is, if they show the student how bad an issue is, e.g. the Vietnam War, then policies will change. But I no longer believe that making students aware of issues, or of them becoming critical thinkers is enough. It is important to encourage students to be problem-solvers or constructive thinkers. For this reason, I encourage my students to read different theoretical ways of seeing the political world and apply these ideas to different types of real-world problems. In other words, I want students to look at contemporary issues such as mass incarceration and gender pay.

What words of advice do you have for your students?
You need to find a way to secure a job that cannot be done by a computer. My courses are not about regurgitating what I say, and the courses challenge you to be creative and undertake non-traditional writing and assignments. Prepare to come and to figure out your opinions about hard political questions. I hope you read something you love and something that makes you angry, as both can encourage intellectual growth.

What do you like to do in your free time?
Beyond academics, I am a total book and documentary film buff. I most definitely enjoy hiking. I am a mother to two awesome kids!

Who is your greatest inspiration?
One person who immediately comes to mind is Jane Adams, who was the subject of my dissertation. She believed that wealthy and poor individuals needed to live together in democracies in order to facilitate the connections that provide mutual understanding and common interests.