CONGRESS & NEW MEDIA:

A DATA DRIVEN STUDY OF CONGRESSIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

A RESEARCH PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The primary focus of this study aims to provide a comprehensive time series analysis of the United States Congress and the extent to which supporting congressional staff have been relied upon to deliver modern public relations strategies involving New Media. Supporting data and related research suggests that turnover activity for legislative seats in the House and Senate have continually introduced a higher concentration of official press functions with each proceeding session of Congress among individual members, standing committees, and leadership offices (though not proportionally). Through an extensive collection and examination of congressional disbursement records, this study explores the hierarchical concentration of New Media skillsets identified as the primary function for press staff supporting key congressional groups. The findings of this study offer evidence to congressional researchers regarding the extent of New Media messaging developed and managed by congressional staff members servicing each of the national parties as well as individual political actors.
Introduction

Scholars of the United States Congress have frequently attempted to reconcile the dramatic differences that exist between the modern legislature and that of prior sessions. Unlike the legacy environment of “regular order” that is attributed to the post-World War II era, our current congressional environment is routinely fueled by a competitive nature of partisanship continuously broadcasted through modern television, radio, and social media outlets. While decades of enhanced media coverage have gradually normalized our associations of Congress to the flare of its partisan dialogue, leading academics have diligently focused on the behavior of the institution itself by assessing the internal staffing arrangements publically reported by members on the Hill. From decades of congressional disclosures, researchers have catalogued and documented the transformation of staffing levels for individual congressional members, standing legislative committees, and presiding leadership offices since reports were first published publically in 1964.

In support of this field of research, this exploration builds upon decades of congressional research data and integrates reported totals with summary statistics sourced from modern electronic disclosures by the House of Representatives beginning in 2009. Combined, the collected data depicts the internal staffing assignments supporting congressional actors inside the halls of Congress over the span of the last four decades. As a contribution to the field, this study identifies the extent to which congressional staff members have been increasingly utilized to pursue modern public relations campaigns by key groups on the Hill. Among other effects, such campaigns have fueled a growing demand among key officials for congressional staff that
are assigned to official press responsibilities, and more specifically, New Media public relations strategies. Based on the findings of this study, the growing demand for staff members that specialize in New Media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, and Instagram have been most prominent among committee officials and leadership groups within the House. To support these findings, personnel compensation disclosures from the House’s Statement of Disbursements (SoD) were cited from leading academic literature and congressional scholars leading up to 2008. For data reported after 2008, public document file (PDF) source data were published by the House from late 2009 through 2014. From this source data, itemized reporting of congressional receipts and disbursements were delivered using supporting Python programming libraries to extract, transform, and load reported personnel compensation totals for intended time series analysis (see Appendix for additional information on Python). Once accessible for statistical analysis, the data-driven observations required for this research were made possible.

In order to convey a sense of perspective into the rapidly changing environment of Congress over the last four decades, this research cites leading academic literature that describes the post-World War II congressional environment and its associated staffing levels leading up to 2008. Through a historical examination of congressional staffing allocation, modern reporting provided by the House can be better understood as it pertains to larger institutional changes that have occurred on the Hill. This study will also cite specific actions taken by prior congressional leaders that have exerted greater control over Congress and the provisioning of legislative resources. As a result of these reforms, leadership in the House has effectively restructured the institutional incentives and behavioral norms of Congress for individual members and standing committees. As these transformations have persisted within the legislature, subsequent congressional leaders have elevated partisan themes to available media outlets in effort to stimulate “outside” messaging activity by individual House members
and associated legislative committees. As most scholars would agree, this modern brand of “outside” messaging by members of Congress is at the core of what intensifies today’s nature of political partisanship. As a final component of this research, this study will provide supporting tabular data and graphical evidence that depict the rise of modern public relations and New Media functions supporting key groups within the legislature. By capturing and depicting the growth of reported press activities within the House, scholars can more definitively quantify the degree to which modern institutional resources are utilized to deliver public relations strategies that function as part of today’s legislative process.

The Institutional Behavior and Structure of Congress

Congressional scholars maintain that the behavior of individual members in today’s Congress is distinctly different to that of prior congressional sessions immediately following World War II. Historically, researchers have described the work of the legislature as being insular, ordered, and committee-driven in its official functions (Rohde 2005). Sponsored legislation was routinely introduced to members of supporting committees, who jointly held the responsibility of assessing proposed changes and determining their intended effects on public policy. During this process of legislative deliberation, supporting congressional staff members served under official position titles such as Legislative Director, Legislative Assistant, or as otherwise assigned Legislative Aides (Hammond 1977). In direct support of committee work performed within the House, these assigned staff members held the collective responsibility of contributing to the review process of proposed bills by providing substantive policy analysis and actively assisting lawmakers and fellow staffers.

Even then as partisan disagreements existed over the means and methods used to deliver public services, senior legislators routinely encouraged junior members to find ways to deliberate potential issues within committee in a bi-partisan fashion with colleagues from across
the aisle (Fenno 1962). Through this insulated environment of committee deliberation and review, members of Congress were consistently urged to work together on proposed legislation through their supporting staff members before sending bi-partisan recommendations to presiding chairmen (Shepsle 1989). Upon the guidance given to House members from these long-standing committee chairs, most legislative votes went along with the respective committee’s developed recommendations.

While this nature of ‘regular order’ can be quickly recognized as a core function of the legislature, official media functions were historically reserved for the congressional leadership circles on the Hill. Such exclusivity of press functions was intentionally designed by leadership in the House as a means to provide consistent national messaging for each of the respective parties against rival political opposition. This reservation for press functions among key members of Congress was often insulated even further through personal relationships held with featured columnists and correspondents who routinely reported on news emanating from the Capitol (Sullivan and Uslaner 1978). Since the nation’s founding, newspaper reporting served as the primary means of news and information for the majority of Americans. It was during this legacy era that printed media outlets initially provided an important editorial function for organizing, prioritizing, and disseminating news pertaining to national issues and matters of public policy. Stated differently, the tradition of printed media served as an integral component to educate the American public on issues being deliberated by Congress at the national level.

By comparison, today’s environment on Capitol Hill looks much different to that of prior legislative sessions. While modern congressional committees continue to serve as a proving ground for proposed policy changes at the national level, the internal environment for congressional actors is a much different place. Breaking away from the committee-driven rules of prior legislatures, leadership in the House instituted a series of changes beginning in the 1970s (Rieselbach 1994) and again in the 1990s (Schickler 2005) that gradually restructured
committee appointments and assumed a greater level of assertion over assigned staffing resources. These changes were accelerated beginning in 1994, when House Democrats lost their 40 year majority to Republican control and watched from the sidelines as Newt Gingrich (R-GA) was selected as Speaker of the House beginning in 1995. Under Speaker Gingrich, Republican officials were charged with advancing the policy goals outlined under the heavily publicized “Contract with America” in part by limiting the number of years members could serve as a committee chair. As a result of these reforms, from the end of 1994 to 2001 only half of all House committee chairs were reported as being the most senior members of their panels: a ratio that has changed little since then (Stewart 2011).

Through these committee-centric reforms within the legislature, congressional leadership has effectively strengthened its position in the House by injecting partisan influences into the core environment of legislative work. At the same time, a range of emerging media outlets continued to evolve our national news cycle (Cohen 2006). Subsequent years have witnessed a continuing trend among House leaders to assert new stakes of control over the legislature by awarding committee chair appointments to members who have proven most successful at fundraising or demonstrating partisan loyalty through public messaging (Evans 2011). Both Democratic and Republican led Houses have accelerated partisan themes by encouraging individual members to echo these ideologies by way of their supporting congressional staff (Malecha and Reagan 2012). The results have yielded our modern legislative environment in which legislators have proven more eager to engage with national media outlets on behalf of each of the national parties.

**The Rise of Partisanship & Congressional Public Relations**

The institutional transformation on Capitol Hill that reflects our current legislative environment has largely been the byproduct of an evolving power structure deep within the halls
of Congress. While prior legislatures have often been characterized as being “insular” and “ordered” within their official committee-centric functions, an outpouring of partisan messaging from congressional leaders and the growing availability of emerging media outlets has prompted individual actors to go “outside” in effort to engage public discussion and to build national constituent support for legislative causes. As a result, a growing concentration of political messaging through mainstream radio and television has increasingly allowed members of both political parties to fuel a competitive environment of partisanship in order to provide public contrast against political opposition (Jacobs 2010). Simultaneously, demonstrated skills in modern communication strategies have grown in importance and today are commonly seen as a prerequisite for leadership within both major parties. In order for ambitious members of Congress to rise through the ranks of their peers, a combination of communication skills and political acumen must be demonstrated in front of the cameras, lights, and microphones of the press (Stolberg 2008).

When considering this media-centric dynamic within Congress, there is an underlying importance regarding congressional staff and the rise of official press functions within the legislature from a historical perspective. Beginning in 1994 under Speaker Gingrich, the Republican-led House reduced the total number of assigned committee staff by roughly one-third for the year in which changes took effect (Peterson and Reynolds 2010). While these cuts were calibrated to satisfy the Republican base after a historic victory in the House, they also accelerated a growing concentration of power that had begun to accumulate among leadership of both major parties. In order to illustrate the magnitude of these cuts within the House, the following data table reflects staffing levels reported for each legislative group within Congress since 1979 (Vital Statistics on Congress 2008). While the House Statement of Disbursements will be discussed in greater detail later with this paper, data presented below for 2009 and 2014
reflect calculated personnel compensation records that were assembled from public disclosures as part of this research (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Totals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Staff</td>
<td>2,027</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>2,267</td>
<td>1,266</td>
<td>1,267</td>
<td>1,272</td>
<td>1,324</td>
<td>1,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Offices</td>
<td>7,067</td>
<td>7,528</td>
<td>7,569</td>
<td>7,186</td>
<td>7,216</td>
<td>6,804</td>
<td>6,907</td>
<td>6,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Offices</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>9,256</td>
<td>9,808</td>
<td>9,939</td>
<td>8,586</td>
<td>8,662</td>
<td>8,252</td>
<td>8,420</td>
<td>8,528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 (See Appendix for Full Graph)


As reflected by the subtotals of Table 1, the number of supporting staff assigned to members of the legislature underwent a dramatic decrease in committee staff from the years between 1989 and 2009. According to the collected data, the largest change to congressional staffing levels occurred among committee staff (-42%) and personal offices (-9%), respectively. These figures are further emphasized by evidence that cites the erosion of legislative policy positions among standing committees within the House. According to supporting research, staffing changes surrounding the events of 1995 have had a sustaining impact on continuing committee assignments and have eroded the ability of available staff members to contribute to the traditional legislative process (Wonderlick 2013). Stated differently, any measured growth of official press positions reported since 1995 have increasingly come at the expense of positions that had historically been dedicated to active study of public policy and traditional legislative analysis.

Following the intensive depletion of committee staff within the House beginning in 1995, reported staffing totals have fluctuated widely between standing legislative groups. Within the past twenty years congressional staffing levels among committees for House Administration (-
85%), Rules (-27%), Budget (-25%), and Agriculture (-15%) have each sustained continuing reductions to their rolls long after the effects of the Gingrich led shake-up. Just as each of these legislative committees have sustained cuts to their assigned staffing totals, other House committees have successfully recouped assigned staff positions during the same period. Resurgent staffing levels have been identified as part of this research among House committees supporting the policy related work of Energy & Commerce (+55%), Financial Services (+40%), Armed Services (+39%), Judiciary (+38%), Government Reform & Oversight (+28%), Appropriations (+22%), Science, Space, and Technology (+15%), Ways & Means (+13%), and Foreign Affairs (+13%). When combined in their entirety, the total number of official staff positions supporting the work of standing committees in 2014 was calculated as being eight percent less than after the staffing reductions of 1995. Since that time, legislative majorities have been both won and lost by both major parties in effort to advance competing national policy goals. In order to illustrate the internal shift of staffing resources among established legislative committees in the House, the supporting data table is provided below. Percentages reflected within the table below represent changes to House committee staff from 1995 to 2014 (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House Administration</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Infrastructure</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 9 -
While the data indicates that House committees have witnessed a flurry of institutional reforms for assigned staffing resources, the internal composition of necessary skillsets have also changed in an important way. Following the Gingrich speakership, party leaders in the House have placed a greater emphasis on members’ abilities to develop and promote communication campaigns that underscore the ideological differences of political opposition. Speakers Dennis Hasert (R-IL), Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and John Boehner (R-OH) have all demonstrated partisan preferences when appointing members to key committee slots (Malecha and Reagan 2004). By selecting chair appointments in this fashion, the institutional norms and internal behavior of committee members has gradually evolved to become less autonomous when compared to the traditional legislative environment, and more outward-oriented through public communication efforts with available media outlets. As a result, the traditional order of

Table 2 (See Appendix for Full Graph)

policy-driven committee work has largely eroded from today’s legislature, just as ambitious members of Congress have accelerated the polarizing brand of public dialogue stemming from national partisan themes.

In this capacity, incentive structures on the Hill have been reorganized by House leadership and have influenced the growth of staff positions operating with official press functions for key groups (Cook 1989). Consider that in 1979, only 22 percent of House committees had at least one staff member officially assigned to communication responsibilities. By 1999, the concentration of assigned press functions changed dramatically as all but one House committee reported assigned press positions amongst the ranks of their staff (Malecha and Reagan 2015). By 2014, all standing House committees had reported at least one member of their assigned staff operating under such titles as Press Secretary, Communications Director, or other similarly identified Press Staff. These media-centric positions have required staff members to serve as formal spokespersons or public liaisons for assigned committee officials, individual Representatives, and members of House leadership. To capture the distribution of press-based positions among key groups within the House, consider the following data table summarizing four major functional concentrations that were widely identified within the House’s disbursement data for 2014 (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House Staff Concentration (2014)</th>
<th>Administrative</th>
<th>Counsel &amp; Advisors</th>
<th>Legislative</th>
<th>Press</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee Staff</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Offices</td>
<td>3,826</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>1,726</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>6,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Offices</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 (See Appendix for Full Graph)

Source: House Statement of Disbursements (2014)

Data from Table 3 indicates four major functional concentrations commonly reported for the vast majority positions supporting legislative groups on the Hill. For administrative based
positions, the demands of constituent casework, scheduling, and related clerical responsibilities make up the most prominent share of congressional member’s personal offices (an estimated 55% of assigned staff). Beyond the nature of these common administrative responsibilities, members of Congress also rely on the support of more senior staff members to provide a range of individual counsel and advisory services to individual offices. As evidence by the data, counsel and advisory positions in 2014 were most abundant among House leadership offices (29%) and legislative committees (27%) for the total share of respective staff positions, while policy-centric legislative positions were most prolific among standing committees (40%) and personal offices (25%). While we may anticipate the concentration of legislative staff to be the strongest among House committees, the historical context of these institutional resources represent a smaller pool of staff compared to sessions of Congress that pre-date the Gingrich-led shakeup. Just as the total number of committee staff has continued to decline since 1995, House payroll data gathered as part of this research suggests that the infusion of press-related functions have grown seemingly at the expense of traditional policy-centric assignments.

Furthermore, the disbursement data from 2014 indicates that House committees and personal offices reported comparable levels of press-related positions among their supporting staff (7% and 8%, respectively). While press concentrations have slowly risen within each of these legislative groups, it is the House’s internal leadership structure that boasts the largest percentage of press-based positions of all legislative groups studied (28%). For press positions located among House leadership, official position titles were found among staff members occupying a wide range of specialty positions designated with New Media concentrations. A sampling of these specialized position titles included New Media Press Secretary, Director of Digital Media, New Media Director, Digital Communications Director, or similar descriptions encompassing social or online media concentration. In order to demonstrate how New Media positions compare to traditional position assignments found within Congress, the following table
of position compensation is provided below and sorted according to the respective averages that are identified among each legislative group (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House Position Titles</th>
<th>Committee Staff</th>
<th>Personal Offices</th>
<th>Leadership Offices</th>
<th>Average Compensation (2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHIEF OF STAFF</td>
<td>$ 143,181</td>
<td>$ 116,302</td>
<td>$ 129,985</td>
<td>$ 129,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR</td>
<td>$ 122,620</td>
<td>$ 75,304</td>
<td>$ 106,741</td>
<td>$ 101,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNSEL-ADVISOR</td>
<td>$ 114,468</td>
<td>$ 62,279</td>
<td>$ 113,290</td>
<td>$ 96,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESS SECRETARY / COMMUNICATIONS DIR</td>
<td>$ 87,351</td>
<td>$ 57,688</td>
<td>$ 79,698</td>
<td>$ 74,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAFF ASSISTANT (DC)</td>
<td>$ 89,538</td>
<td>$ 33,586</td>
<td>$ 53,677</td>
<td>$ 58,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW MEDIA (PRESS)</td>
<td>$ 47,419</td>
<td>$ 41,725</td>
<td>$ 67,501</td>
<td>$ 52,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASEWORKER</td>
<td>$ 50,021</td>
<td>$ 42,850</td>
<td>$ 57,355</td>
<td>$ 50,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHEDULER</td>
<td>$ 52,784</td>
<td>$ 43,503</td>
<td>$ 41,929</td>
<td>$ 46,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESS STAFF (DC)</td>
<td>$ 54,043</td>
<td>$ 36,169</td>
<td>$ 45,092</td>
<td>$ 45,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT</td>
<td>$ 44,249</td>
<td>$ 42,400</td>
<td>$ 46,542</td>
<td>$ 44,397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 (See Appendix for Full Graph)

Source: House Statement of Disbursements (2014)

Data from Table 4 represents the typical internal hierarchy of modern staffing arrangements in the House for disclosures made available in 2014. Staff members serving in such capacities as Chief of Staff, Legislative Director, Counsel-Advisor, or Press Secretary/Communication Director were each reported as earning the highest levels of estimated compensation among the ten most frequently classified position types within the House. In terms of legislative groups, the average compensation for senior staff members was reported as being greatest among standing legislative committees and House leadership offices. While these more senior positions have traditionally encompassed a range of managerial responsibilities on the Hill, non-managerial position compensation was estimated as being the most lucrative among Staff Assistants, New Media specialists, and congressional
Caseworkers. Of these non-managerial assignments in the House, it is the growth of New Media positions that provides congressional researchers new evidence regarding the extent to which internal staffing resources have been utilized to pursue modern public relation campaigns through prevalent social media platforms.

While this data explicitly captures the embedded nature of New Media functions for assigned staff members by their official position titles, the broader implications remain relatively limited to our sources of data (see Appendix for discussion on the House’s Statement of Disbursements). By strictly assessing reported position titles and compensation data among a wide variety of daily functions performed by staffers, this research and data analysis is unable to fully capture the collective efforts of managerial influence, shared press functions, or other internal contributors to the development of modern New Media messaging. Stated differently, the exclusion of New Media specialization from an official position title should not suggest that these functions are not performed on behalf of a specific office. Rather, we may only suspect that the use of social media outlets is instead supported by a cast of internal stakeholders in the House, just as the institutional growth of public relations activities within Congress have garnered a new set of responsibilities for assigned staff members.

**Conclusion**

Many of the internal functions of Congress can be assessed in terms of how congressional staff members are utilized by different groups of the legislature. While we may observe members of Congress utilizing New Media platforms as part of their office’s public communication strategy, data presented within this research has identified the greatest concentration of official New Media functions located within the offices supporting House leadership and standing legislative committees. For these groups within Congress, this research has provided new evidence toward quantifying the internal demand of New Media
skillsets reported by congressional disclosures. In support of existing congressional literature, the largest concentration of press functions in 2014 was assigned to positions supporting the House’s leadership offices. As suggested by leading congressional scholars, it is this collective concentration of press staff that have helped to fuel the “outside” communication strategy that is emblematic of the contemporary House, all while the total number of assigned committee resources has continued to erode since the dramatic reforms imposed on House committees beginning in 1995. As a continuing result, the growth of congressional press functions performed by supporting staff have seemingly come at the expense of traditional policy analysis and core legislative study.

As New Media continues to be utilized as an official press function by members on the Hill, it will be important to assess how emerging technology and online user trends continue to shape future demand for congressional resources. Staff members assigned to these types of positions on the Hill will certainly need to keep abreast of developing social media trends as well as enhanced messaging capabilities in order to remain competitive with emerging strategies. As technology continues to change the nature of the national political dialogue, the internal resources dedicated to New Media public relations strategies will be a valuable subject for future analysis. In this way, proceeding congressional disclosures may reveal new insights into the evolving concentration of press and New Media specializations among key legislative groups. For detection of these congressional changes, further data collection and analysis will be needed.
Bibliography


Appendix

I. House Statement of Disbursements & Applied Methods with Python

Since late 2009, the House of Representatives began publishing the quarterly Statement of Disbursements (SoD) in electronic published document file (PDF) format. Since its original release in 1964, the SoD requires by law that members of Congress disclose financial activity of individual House offices to include supporting staff salaries, employer benefits, contracted payment to vendors, travel expenditures, district office rental, mailing expenses, and related operating supplies. Like many PDF files, the underlying data reported by the House was not readily accessible for the type of data analysis required by this research. In order to incorporate the source data from these disclosures, an academic Python distribution from Enthought Canopy was utilized to read published files and return normalized data formats suitable for this study (i.e. comma separated value or CSV).

Out of more than 2 million financial disbursements reported by the House since the first PDF publication was made available online, over 300,000 unique payments were classified as being for congressional staff compensation. In order to capture this data, tools from available Python libraries were required to allow this research to isolate full-time professional staff for reporting and presentation. While Excel may be a commonly used tool to variety of researchers, social scientists, and other data analysts, supporting Python libraries contributed a vital function in the transformation of PDF formatted files into tabular data analysis. By utilizing available syntax supported by installed ‘PDFMiner’, ‘slate’, and ‘Pandas’ libraries, these tools successfully handled a published source data format that would otherwise be unusable for more traditional data analysis applications.

II. Analytical Uses of SoD Data | Future Research & Development

From more than 2 million financial disbursements made by the House, a great deal of congressional spending data was outside of the scope of this research, yet is publically available for future studies. In addition to personnel compensation, the SoD discloses congressional disbursements paid for employee benefits, vendor payments, official travel expenses, district rental expenses, official mailings, and office supplies associated within members within the House of Representatives (http://disbursements.house.gov/archive.shtml).

For future areas of analysis, additional data may be incorporated in order to integrate core congressional demographics, including the depth of social media audience participation. Additionally, the growing ecosystem of associated Python libraries should continue to provide rich visualization to the underlying source data and publish results to the web within the same environment. By harnessing the available ecosystem within the Python language, this field of study can continue to benefit from a range of dynamic capabilities from a wide variety of available data sources.

III. Data Tables

Please see proceeding pages for full page visualization of referenced data tables.
House Congressional Staff (1979-2014) - Table 1
*House Committee Staff (1985-2014) - Table 2*
House Staffing Concentration
Percentage of Functional Staff (2014)

Source: House Statement of Disbursements (2014)
Average Salary Compensation for Staff Members (2014) - Table 4
Source: House Statement of Disbursements (2014)