

Perspectives on Politics Editor's Report

Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Editor in Chief*

With the assistance of James Moskowitz, *Managing Editor*

I am happy to report that *Perspectives on Politics* continues to thrive. In the almost eight years since we assumed editorial control of the journal, in June 2009, we have succeeded in strengthening journal operations and procedures and in projecting a new and growing excitement about *Perspectives* and the role it can play in contributing to the invigoration of the discipline.

We have a highly talented, energetic, and well-organized staff, and we have developed a strong set of procedures for dealing with authors, reviewers, and each other. As a consequence, we have continued to work efficiently and stay on production schedule with APSA, Cambridge, and the compositors. I continue to receive a great deal of positive feedback from authors and from readers about the journal, its quality, its special sections, and its accessibility and responsiveness. More importantly, we continue to receive a growing flow of manuscripts of an increasingly high quality, from established scholars eager to place their work in our journal and from more junior scholars who regard *Perspectives* and its mission as hospitable to their view of political science. In the past year we received a record number of article submissions—up 32% from last prior year. The journal now annually engages twice as many manuscripts as it did when we took over in 2009. As usual, we have published a wide range of authors from a variety of institutions.

In 2016 *Perspectives* published 21 articles (with 32 authors), 11 Reflections and Praxis essays (with 13 authors), three Reflections symposia (with 24 contributors), 10 book symposia (with 55 contributors), and 13 book review essays, as well as 18 critical dialogues and 279 book reviews. We thus published the work of over 450 political scientists. If you add the number of manuscript reviewers with whom we have corresponded to the total above, the journal networked with more than 1,200 political scientists in 2016. Through our extensive and substantive correspondence, and through the product of that correspondence—the journal itself—we believe we are succeeding in our goal of fostering “a political science public sphere.”

Along these lines, I am especially happy to report that the journal has built a very strong queue of accepted articles. Our June 2017 issue is in press; our September issue is completely filled and ready for production; and there are currently enough accepted articles in the queue to fill at least two or three subsequent issues. This queue continues to grow, and will enable the new editorial team to hit the ground running, on June 1 2017, so that they can develop their own material with a very comfortable cushion.

The appendix to this report includes some basic publication and production data. We will be happy to answer any questions about this data to the best of our ability.

This is the final report I will submit. When my term ends on May 31, 2017, I will have served as Editor in Chief of *Perspectives* for eight years, and as Book Review Editor for 12 years. I am by far the longest serving editor in the short history of *Perspectives*. And I believe that only two or three APSR editors have served for eight years or longer in the entire 100-plus years of that journal's history. In what follows I would like briefly to outline some of the main commitments which together help to explain our success over the past many years. I believe that the journal has established itself as a very important “political science public sphere” for the discipline and for the broader public; that the journal's core editorial mission and approach has become institutionalized; and that the journal has an exciting future ahead in the hands of the a new editorial team, Michael Bernhard, Editor, and Daniel O'Neill, Associate Editor, University of Florida.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS

Our editorial tenure at the journal started with the books, and it was the experience of being the Book Review editor that disposed me to consider applying to be the editor in chief. We regularly include a Statement on Books in the front matter of the journal. Books are a medium in which ideas can be developed with breadth and depth. Most influential “big ideas” in our discipline's history are associated with important books. We regard books as a central element of political science research, and book reviewing as a fundamental form

of peer review. We also regard the Book Review section as the place in the journal where we connect with hundreds of authors, of books and especially of reviews, each year. (Indeed, this year the works of nearly 450 authors were treated by 330 contributors across our various formats ranging from standard reviews to symposia and critical dialogues.) The book reviews play many important intellectual functions in the discipline. For many of our colleagues, they also represent invaluable opportunities to write, and be edited and published, in a serious way.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF BROAD AND BROADLY READABLE ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

We have sought to promote a style of journal article writing that treats articles in some ways like books. A conventional political science research article is addressed primarily to a specialized, “expert” subset of the discipline, and reports on research findings in a fairly formulaic manner (“here is a problem, here is a lit review, here is my research design, here is my research, here is ‘discussion,’ etc.”). We have viewed *Perspectives* articles differently, emphasizing broad and engaging writing intended to speak meaningfully to a broad disciplinary readership beyond conventional subfield and methodological divides. We encourage articles that are framed as interventions in live scholarly discussions and debates, and proceed via careful critical engagement with actual interlocutors, in the manner of actual conversations. Research “findings” of conclusions are crucial to all research articles. But we have encouraged authors to think about and write about their findings in an engaging fashion, embedding the findings in well-crafted and readable discussions of the problems that motivate the research, the views already articulated in the literature by relevant interlocutors, and the important implications of the research for specialized inquiries and also for broader problems of interest to political scientists.

By encouraging this style of writing, we have sought to promote scholarly dialogue across conventional divides, about a wide range of things that matter to the discipline

3. A RANGE OF FORMATS FOR SERIOUS SCHOLARLY DISCUSSION

We are a general journal of political science, and the articles we publish represent the best of what is submitted to us that makes it through our review process, including research articles; “Reflections” essays less centered on research findings; book review essays; book Critical Dialogues; book Symposia; and conventional single, double, and triple book reviews. But by thinking strategically about timing and production schedule, proactively soliciting “Reflections” essays, and developing special book review theme sections, we are able to call attention to some of the “big topics” that touch on all areas of political science—as it is our mission to do. I regard this kind of editorial “visioning” and planning as a central aspect of my job as Editor in Chief of this particular journal. The themes that I decide to feature are developed on the basis of my own extensive reading, conversations with board members and other colleagues, and extensive staff deliberations. At the same time, I am always listening to and indeed soliciting feedback, from editorial board members and from colleagues more generally, about what we are doing, about themes that are worthy of attention, and about how we can do what we do better.

With Special Review formats and sections, *Perspectives* seeks to nurture “a political science public sphere” that allows scholars to move beyond their normal comfort zones and reach broadly, beyond conventional methodological and subfield divides, and to the discipline as a whole. Towards this end, in the past eight years, we have instituted a number of innovative formats to our Review section—book Symposia, Critical Dialogues, creative categorizing of certain books. Two years ago we added an additional innovation: each issue now typically contains, in addition to the “standard” four-subfield sections, a special “theme” section highlighting books that address an important substantive theme irrespective of field or approach.

It is worth underscoring that the overwhelming majority of the book reviews that we publish appear under one of the standard four subfield categories, and that while we have made important innovations in the book review section, the basic mission of the review section remains unchanged: to publish careful, constructively critical, and interesting reviews of political science books that feature important scholarly research and writing.

It is also worth underscoring that every aspect of the review section—its innovations and its more conventional features—is designed to serve our journal’s core mission, which is the promotion of “a political science public sphere.” We believe that the book form represents an invaluable genre for the scholarly development of sustained, integrated analyses and arguments, and that scholarly books are thus an essential component of scholarly publishing. We thus seek to highlight the importance of political science books and to feature interesting discussions of books, in the hope that this will help sustain a book culture within political science and the social sciences more generally.

Indeed, one of our goals is to give full due to the entire range of genres and formats in which scholarly work in our discipline is published, from scholarly research articles and reflective essays to books, book reviews and review essays, and dialogues. *Perspectives on Politics* is a single journal with a single mission that links all sections, and we believe that the integrated character of the journal is one of its great strengths. Toward this end, we carefully plan each issue, in advance, in order to try to publish materials in each issue that speak to each other, and sometimes even are linked by a clear theme.

4. EDITOR INTRODUCTIONS

Perspectives publishes editor introductions that link materials together thematically, and that are explicit about editorial perspective and voice.

5. THE PROMOTION OF A “POLITICAL SCIENCE PUBLIC SPHERE” AS THE ACTIVE CULTIVATION OF SCHOLARLY COLLEGIALITY

This involves many things:

1. A prompt, efficient, and professional review process in which reviewers are encouraged to be constructive in their criticism. Toward this end, we have eliminated the language of “Rejection” from our official vocabulary, something I have explained here: <http://duckofminerva.com/2015/12/beyond-rejection.html>
2. Active editing of all manuscripts slated for publication, with the goal of helping authors to use their writing to actively engage interlocutors as colleagues and as participants in ongoing collective practices of inquiry, something I have explained here: www.the-plot.org/2015/11/24/publish-publish-and-be-yourself-on-being-nice-in-political-science/

3. Treating prompt, collegial, and nice communication as the hallmark of all journal operations, and regarding every single letter, memo, or e-mail as an opportunity to encourage identification with and participation in the journal, as a reviewer, an author, and reader.
4. Regarding every aspect of editorial activity as a contribution to the professional development of colleagues and especially junior colleagues. Even letter declining manuscripts are gracious, appreciative, and encouraging. When I have declined a manuscript, I try to offer helpful suggestions for revision and also about alternative venues that might be more interested in the piece in question. All work is treated as valuable, and all work is treated as in the process of ongoing development, a process that involves pre-publication review, publication, and post-publication review, criticism, revision, etc.

6. DA-RT

I am very proud of the leadership that our journal has taken in resisting the momentum generated on behalf of DA-RT. I have written extensively about this, in a number of widely read pieces. The most important piece was my introduction to the June 2015 issue, “For a More Public Political Science,” a 13,000-word essay that was the second-most viewed piece published in an APSA journal in 2015 (since publication it has been viewed over 19,000 times and has earned an Altmetric score of 28). In this piece I did two main things: (1) I explained the reasons why many aspects of DA-RT were both unnecessary and inconsistent with our journal’s broad editorial mission, and why *Perspectives* would never sign on to the DA-RT statement so long as I am its editor—a position supported by the journal’s editorial board; (2) I argued more generally that DA-RT was motivated by a very narrow conception of “public accessibility,” and urged a broader and more vigorous disciplinary discussion, both of DA-RT and of the public roles of political science.

I believe that our journal’s very early and publicly explained position contributed to a great deal of constructive and civil conversation within the profession that is still ongoing. Indeed, a number of *Perspectives* editorial board members were principals of a widely signed petition calling for more deliberation, and subsequently created an important website, Dialogue on DA-RT, which has circulated a wide variety of perspectives on DA-RT and related issues (<http://dialogueondart.org>).

7. TRANSPARENCY

While the journal has refused to adopt the DA-RT guidelines, it has also been very clear, and very public, about its long-standing commitment to research transparency broadly construed. On November 2015 we posted a statement on “transparency” explaining our policies at <http://dialogue-ondart.org/2015/11/30/perspectives-on-politics-editors-share-policy-established-in-2009/>.

8. INCLUSIVE CITATION

More importantly, *Perspectives*, with the full support of the editorial board, issued a broader statement on scholarly recognition that linked support for scholarly honesty to support for greater inclusivity regarding citation practices and other forms of scholarly professional development. See http://www.apsanet.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=_ossKGV37e0%3d&portalid=54. I personally regard this statement as one of the most important things the journal has done under my editorship.

9. TREATING THE EDITORIAL TEAM AS A REAL INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

Almost all of the work of scholarly journals is done by the graduate students who serve as editorial assistants. Assistants are responsible for processing manuscripts; identifying potential reviewers; using electronic systems to send invitation letters, and follow-up reminders, and to keep track of each manuscript as it moves through the system; helping to properly format all manuscripts; communicating with each author about copy editing processes; and proofing all composited manuscripts against the final manuscript copy version to check for errors.

In all of this work, editorial assistants are supervised and guided by the managing editor, who monitors all operations; controls all electronic processes; is responsible for all transactions with copyeditors, compositors, and staff at Cambridge and APSA.

Under our editorial team, the managing editor, James Moskowitz, has been my full partner in all things. We do different things. He “manages.” I “decide.” But we work as closely together as any two colleagues could work. And we both work extremely closely with the entire editorial staff.

Graduate student mentoring is an essential aspect of our journal operations.

The graduate students who work on our staff are making an enormous and largely unheralded contribution to the discipline as a whole. They are also just starting out in their own careers as political scientists. Valuing them, including them, recognizing them—these things are essential to successful journal operations.

We have weekly staff meetings at which I provide lunch. The assistants participate in discussion of all aspects of journal planning, operations, and decisions. They help plan the special issues; they help select cover designs; they make suggestions about reviewers, about themes, about ideas they have gotten through their own scholarly work. I subsidize Assistant participation in MPSA or APSA conferences, so that they can participate in editorial board meetings, and benefit their own careers through their journal work. The single most important key to successful journal operations is having an editorial staff that is valued, respected, and engaged.

10. A PERSONAL NOTE

I have served as Book Review Editor of *Perspectives* for 12 years, and as Editor in Chief of the entire journal for 8 years. I am not simply one of the longest serving editors in the history of APSA; I am currently the longest serving member of the APSA Council. When I started with the journal Michael Brintnall was executive director. I have edited the journal during the transition to the directorship of Steven Smith, and during the effort of the association to centralize publication operations and to reform governance.

Perspectives on Politics is a relatively young journal. When I became Editor in Chief in 2009, it was a much younger journal. It was also a journal in a precarious institutional position that had not yet established a clear and compelling mission and *modus operandi*. With the support of my distinguished editorial board, and my extraordinary editorial staff, I proceeded to address these problems. We billed the journal “a political science public sphere,” and I worked very hard to clarify, refine, and develop the journal’s mission. I did this through very proactive editing and active and demanding involvement in the line-editing of all manuscripts; through the development of new features and special thematic issues; through advocacy of the journal’s distinctive mission on the

APSA Council, on a whole range of issues, the most controversial of which was DA-RT; and through a great deal of blog posting and essay writing, published in venues from *PS: Political Science & Politics* to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

I have been an outspoken advocate for a vision of “a political science public sphere.” This has involved staking out some strong positions. It has sometimes also involved some tension with the APSA bureaucracy. I have always been motivated by a commitment to the editorial vision of the journal, and by the belief that while the journal has now “arrived” as one of the top journals in the discipline, its mission still requires careful nurturing and active promotion.

Academic journal editing surely involves the curation of processes of peer review and efficient production and publication. Indeed, most journals might be able to flourish primarily by being continually curated in a conventional way. At the same time, there is only one journal in the political science discipline that I have ever sought to edit, and it is in many ways a unique journal, because of its youthfulness, and because of its distinctive mission—to foster serious dialogue about politics and political science, in ways that bridge conventional subfield and methodological divisions, and nurture a broad disciplinary public sphere. The kind of political science public sphere I have sought to promote, with the support of an incredible staff and board, does not simply come into being. It must be brought into being, and continually nourished. This requires editorial vision and active engagement.

I have worked with many thousands of colleagues over the course of my tenure on the journal, and I am deeply grateful for having had this opportunity. I have made many friends. I have ruffled a few feathers and have incurred some adversaries. Any important work that is done with conviction is likely to bring such results. I hope that everything that I have done will be judged primarily in terms of its ultimate goal: the quality of the journal itself.

More importantly, I hope that APSA will support the editorial vision and the active engagement of the new editorial team. The journal has a bright future, and the new editors are poised to do excellent work. With the support of the Council and of the new Publications Committee, great things are possible. I wish my successors the best of luck! ▶

Appendix: *Perspectives on Politics* Editor's Report

Books Treated/Authors' Work Featured by Review Section, 2016

	BOOKS TREATED	BOOK AUTHORS
Volume 14 Totals	279	368
SECTIONAL SUBTOTALS		
Political Theory	65	73
American Politics	48	65
Comparative Politics	71	100
International Relations	72	101
Special Section: (Methodology)	8	11
Special Section: (Labor)	15	18

Note: Data in the table above reflect books treated in standard (single, double, and triple) reviews. They do not include our 10 symposia, 18 critical dialogues, and 13 review essays, which variously treated the works of another 44 authors.

Decision Rates 2016

Decision Rates for 2016 (n=325)

SUBMISSIONS

Decline external review	66%
Review externally	33%

FIRST DECISION UPON EXTERNAL REVIEW

Decline	69%
Major revision	19%
Minor revision	11%
Conditional accept	1%

FINAL DECISION TO DATE

Accept	4%
Do not externally review	66%
Decline upon review	22%
Revise	4%
Under Review (V1-R1)	3%
With Editor (R2+)	0%

Decision Rates 2010–2015

SUBMISSIONS

Decline external review	61%
Review externally	39%

FIRST DECISION UPON EXTERNAL REVIEW

Decline	53%
Major revision	21%
Minor revision	9%
Conditional accept	2%

FINAL DECISION TO DATE

Accept	8%
Do not externally review	61%
Decline upon review	22%
Revise	5%
Under Review (V1-R1)	4%
With Editor (R2+)	0%

Note: A comparison of data from the last volume-year against the previous five volume years indicates a slight uptick in the percentage of manuscripts declined for external review. Other decision rates remain relatively steady. Total article submissions were consistent with the prior year, consolidating gains from (2015=259)(2014 = 260)(2013 = 213)(2012 = 200) (2011 = 195) (2010= 185) (2010-2015 n=1312). (Reflections pieces are excluded from data.)

Current *Perspectives on Politics* Staff

James Moskowitz	Managing Editor
Laura Bucci	Will defend PhD in June, 2017
Rachel Gears	
Pete Giordano	
Rafael Khachaturian	
Fathima Mustaq	
Katie Scofield	Defended PhD in March, 2017
Katey Stauffer	

Past Perspectives on Politics Staff

Adrian Florea	Assistant Professor, University of Glasgow
Emily Hilty	Senior Statistician, American Greetings
Carolyn Holmes	Assistant Professor, Mississippi State University
Luke Mergner	Editor, "Conriver's Review"
Margot Morgan	Assistant Professor, Indiana University-Southeast
Hicham Bou Nassif	Assistant Professor, Carleton College
Shanna Dietz Surrendra	Consul, U.S. Embassy, London
Rebekah Tromble	Associate Professor, University of Leiden
Brendon Westler	Post-Doctoral Fellow, Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy, University of Wisconsin–Madison
Rafia Zakaria	Freelance journalist and independent writer-scholar