

# Executive Director's Report

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This essay is my first report as executive director of APSA. I am honored to be succeeding Michael Brintnall. APSA is one of the leading academic associations in the world. It is more than 110 years old with more than 13,000 members, representing a wide variety of universities and nonacademic settings including think tanks, research institutions, advocacy organizations, and government agencies. Our membership is increasingly international from many different countries. In conjunction with our partner, Cambridge University Press, we publish three highly respected journals, the *American Political Science Review*, *Perspectives on Politics*, and *PS: Political Science and Politics*. Another hallmark of the association is its diversity: our members are engaged in an incredibly varied set of research and teaching endeavors from many different types of institutions. Moreover, the association has a long record of thinking broadly about diversity and promoting representation and leadership opportunities by underrepresented groups and individuals. Several thousand political scientists convene every year for the APSA Annual Meeting, and the Teaching and Learning Conference has evolved into a major event for members with a particular interest in pedagogy and the newest trends in higher education. We have more than 40 organized sections that give members with similar research interests an opportunity to network, sponsor panels, and develop new research projects and initiatives. We are strong financially with a balanced budget of more than \$7 million, two buildings in downtown Washington, DC, and a substantial endowment. I have been especially impressed with the energy and dedication of our membership. Indeed, APSA has many younger members who are thinking very creatively about research, teaching, and public engagement, especially using social media. Faculty from large research universities, smaller liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and other academic settings are making a genuine difference in the lives of countless students. Many political scientists hold leading jobs in government

agencies, think tanks, consulting firms, and advocacy organizations. The breadth of positions and roles held by our members is truly remarkable.

At the same time, APSA is facing a rapidly changing social and political environment that is buffeting academic associations as well as higher education institutions. Government funding of research is in decline, increasing the overall competitiveness of grant programs. Political science (and more broadly social science) is facing intense skepticism and sometimes hostility from policy makers and citizens who question its relevance and utility. Peer review is facing critics in Congress and elsewhere.

The digital revolution has transformed the relationship between members and associations. Historically, political scientists joined APSA to gain access to the association journals and to attend the conferences. Preferential registration fees for APSA membership linked conference attendance at least in part to membership. And the conference was the central vehicle for presenting research, gaining visibility, and networking with colleagues.

The digital revolution has fundamentally changed this dynamic and the central role of intermediary associations like APSA in connecting members with valued professional benefits and priorities. First, political scientists can now access the association journals through their university library systems; thus, journal access has been effectively decoupled from membership. Second, the World Wide Web has made it far easier to network with colleagues, publicize member research, and learn about new research. Many political scientists are actively engaged in blogs where important substantive political analysis is posted and discussed. Third, the digital revolution is changing higher education, creating new opportunities for learning and the delivery of education. In addition, changes in funding for higher education have reduced faculty travel budgets and research grant opportunities. Faculty salaries at many universities are under severe strain. Many political scientists are also working in non-university employment,

creating obstacles to journal publication, and conference attendance.

In short, trends in higher education have changed the value proposition for membership in APSA and other academic associations. Consequently, APSA needs to adapt and change to serve members in this new environment. This effort requires new approaches to signature activities of the association and a different relationship between the APSA staff and members. For example, the APSA Annual Meeting is the major event of the year for the association where important research is presented and discussed; prestigious awards are given for distinctive, path-breaking scholarship; and high-profile addresses are delivered by the APSA president, senior members of the profession, and distinguished guests. While the conference will always be a one-time event, the content of the conference can be made accessible to conference attendees, the wider political science community, and interested citizens and policy makers. Possible innovations in the conference format to enhance accessibility include live-streaming key conferences events and lectures on the APSA website; videotaping plenary sessions and lectures to be placed on the APSA website; and offering hybrid sessions with conference panelists and a remote video feed for a distant panel member. In addition, the focus of the conference—the 105-minute panel—could be expanded through different panel formats to increase the suppleness, liveliness, and attractiveness of the conference. Further, the APSA staff can facilitate this new networking and participation for a different environment by fostering opportunities for attendees to meet and exchange views and information.

The APSA website should be viewed as a portal that offers APSA members and the broader public access to cutting-edge research, the latest innovations in pedagogy and curriculum design, and information on member activities and scholarship. The APSA website should also facilitate member connections and professional development. To achieve these goals, APSA staff are engaged in

a very substantial overhaul of the APSA website. We hope to have entirely new systems in place by summer 2014. These new systems will allow more efficient utilization of APSA resources, greater responsiveness to member interests, more programming for members, and a more visible public presence for the profession.

The changing environment of higher education also means that APSA must embrace a new approach to public engagement including advocacy. APSA, like other academic associations, has focused its advocacy on issues pertaining to federal policy, especially grant programs and regulations. APSA also works closely with other associations through Washington, DC-based coalitions. The decline in federal support, coupled with the ongoing restructuring of higher education, suggests that advocacy needs to be part of a broader public engagement strategy by the association and its members. APSA staff will need to remain deeply engaged in advocacy on federal policy issues germane to the membership. Indeed, the association will need to devote more resources to this endeavor to ensure that APSA's interests are adequately represented on an ongoing basis and communicated to the membership.

However, a broader view of advocacy and public engagement requires concerted attention to the ways in which APSA and its members relate to the broader society. One component of this new strategy is a focus on the dissemination of political science research to policy makers and citizens. In part, this effort can be achieved by using the website to profile political science research. However, it also requires more engagement by the members themselves to present their own research to a broader public. Blogging, for example, is one way by which members transmit their research findings to a wider audience. But many other strategies exist as well including writing op-ed essays and shorter articles in journals such as the *Boston Review* and participating in panels and workshops across the policy spectrum. Further, APSA needs to work collaboratively with other associations and institutions. APSA already participates in coalitions based in Washington, DC, including the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA). Partnerships with other associations can offer greater member benefits and help strengthen the advocacy efforts of APSA and other associations.

As political scientists knowledgeable about politics, members should also strive to engage their communities. The importance of public engagement of the profession is underscored by the current APSA Presidential Task Force on Public Engagement, appointed by current president John Aldrich of Duke University and chaired by Arthur "Skip" Lupia of the University of Michigan. The task force recommendations will be very important for shaping the public engagement strategies of the association in the years ahead.

Political science is a very diverse discipline with many different methodological approaches to the study of politics. However, the discipline shares an interest in understanding the mechanics of politics in the interests of transparency, good governance, high ethical standards in politics, an engaged citizenry, and responsive government. Political scientists can use this framework to assay particular research subjects such as the role of interest groups in influencing public policy, the impact of redistricting on voting patterns, or the politics of gun control. With the knowledge gained by detailed and in-depth study, political scientists can provide valuable guidance to local, state, and national policy makers on important issues. For instance, the Scholar Strategy Network (SSN), which profiles scholars including political scientists who are experts on specific topics and encourages engagement with policy through interviews, essays, and policy briefs, is one model of this engaged scholarship, but political scientists can also practice this engagement through their own networks and in their local communities. The long-standing APSA Congressional Fellowship Program has as its primary purpose the connection of political scientists and other social scientists with the real world of policy in Washington, DC, including in Congress and the executive branch agencies.

The public engagement aspect of the profession relates to another key trend in higher education: impact assessment. Higher education is being buffeted by much higher expectations for accountability and demonstrations of impact. Accreditation bodies are increasingly expecting universities and their departments, including political science, to demonstrate the impact of their instruction and research. The ongoing controversy regarding the restrictions placed on the

political science program of the National Science Foundation (NSF) also highlights the importance of addressing the impact of political science. The restrictions—the so-called Coburn amendment—limit NSF funding of political science to projects that are in the interests of national security or further the economic development of the United States. The future of the Coburn amendment is unclear (and APSA staff are actively working with other advocates to remove the restrictions on the NSF political science program); however, the amendment has underscored the need for political scientists to communicate effectively with policy makers on their research and to evaluate the impact of their own research.

Impact assessment in the context of political science is a complicated enterprise. One approach is to evaluate the effect of political science research on public policy. For example, did a political scientist's research on voting behavior lead to changes in voting laws? Did research on political inequality at the municipal level lead to shifts in policies of elected leaders? Or did research on the politics of the Middle East produce tangible changes in foreign policy? This type of direct relationship between political science research and public policy is relatively rare and difficult to trace because often the impact of research may take many years to affect policy. Nonetheless, political science research can cumulatively affect the discourse on public policy and over time public policy itself.

Bo Rothstein and his colleagues at the University of Gothenburg, for example, have persuasively argued for the value of political science research in enhancing the quality of governmental institutions by promoting transparency in public administration, anticorruption measures, greater responsiveness to the citizenry, and more accountability. Robert Putnam's pioneering research on social capital also reminds us of the power of high-quality research that connects with the real-world concerns of citizens and policy makers. APSA's immediate past president Jane Mansbridge of Harvard University and Cathie Jo Martin of Boston University are editing a Presidential Task Force Report on Negotiation with direct relevance to understanding and overcoming the political gridlock in Washington as well as many other political dilemmas and challenges. The research by

Rothstein and colleagues, Putnam, and Mansbridge and Martin as well as the NSF controversy in particular call attention to the need for political scientists to consider the impact of their research and ways to communicate the results of their research to the broader community including policy makers, government administrators, think tanks, and journalists. The APSA staff can facilitate this communication but also support in-depth analysis and investigation of impact by providing information and professional development activities.

Impact assessment is directly germane to the teaching and learning activities of APSA members. In the last 10 years, the association has increased its support for teaching and learning through greater attention to pedagogy at the APSA Annual Meeting and the launch of the annual Teaching and Learning Conference. In the coming years, the attention of universities and accrediting bodies to teaching outcomes including more thorough learning assessments is going to increase. One goal for me as executive director is to increase the extent to which the association can support attention to teaching and learning activities through its varied programming including the APSA Annual Meeting, website content, and new initiatives.

Thinking about impact also relates to another central component of the discipline: representation. Many political scientists directly study representation—an essential aspect of democracy and citizen engagement. The profession rightly places a high value on diversity within its own operations and programming. Diversity has many meanings particularly within the context of political science and has evolved in complex ways. One of the association's oldest programs is the Ralph

Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI) that started in the 1960s to support underrepresented minority students in pursuit of graduate education in political science. An essential APSA program, the future of RBSI is threatened by declines in public and private funding. The APSA leadership is working assiduously to continue this program for 2014 and beyond.

This development effort for RBSI offers the opportunity to think broadly about the diversity programs of APSA and ways in which APSA and the membership might support a broad array of diversity initiatives. I hope that a conversation about diversity with the membership will ensue that will inform the policies and practices of the association. One expression of this effort will also be the 2015 APSA Annual Meeting. APSA president-elect Rodney Hero of the University of California at Berkeley recently decided that the theme of the 2015 meeting will be "Diversities Reconsidered: Politics, Governance, and Methods." The conference theme calls attention to the need for the association to think creatively and thoughtfully about strategies to infuse consideration of diversity throughout the association and its programs.

Increasingly, member engagement in the association is also through organized sections and related groups. The association now has more than 40 sections with many related groups that also represent various interests within the association. Sections are a valuable vehicle for member participation and the development of networks of shared interests. The APSA status committees, Women in the Profession, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Members in the Profession, and Latinos in the Profession, also provide an important opportunity for

the association and interested members to address concerns related to professional advancement and leadership.

Importantly, the relationship of the organized sections and the status committees to the overall governance structure of the association will also be addressed in the association's Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Reform. At its August meeting, the APSA Council approved the establishment of this committee chaired by David Lake of the University of California, San Diego. The charge of this committee is to review the governance structure of the association, consult with the membership, and bring forth a set of proposals for governance reform. Part of this effort is prompted by the need to revise, simplify, and update the by-laws of the association due to changes in association practice and laws pertaining to non-profit organizations. However, another goal of governance reform is to enhance the responsiveness of the association to its membership as well as emergent trends in higher education.

In sum, APSA is at an exciting transition moment in its history. It has a long and distinguished history, a large and diverse membership, and a terrific staff. As an intermediary association connecting individuals with specific benefits including academic journals, conferences, and networking opportunities, APSA is affected by other trends influencing intermediary associations including the digital revolution, greater competition, increasing specialization, and changing member preferences. Yet the greatness of APSA, as an association, has been its adaptability over time so I look forward to working with you as the association moves ahead. Your comments are welcome at [executivedirector@apsanet.org](mailto:executivedirector@apsanet.org). ■