
LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Mismatch between (Some of) APSA and (Some) Political Scientists?

Jennifer Hochschild, *Harvard University*

I have had many occasions recently to think about the relationship between the discipline of political science and the structure and activities of the APSA—with the result that I see a, perhaps increasing, mismatch between individuals' professional circumstances and the bulk of activities of the organization. I outlined this mismatch in my President's report to the Governing Council in September 2016. Several people, including APSA staff members, suggested that these issues warrant broader discussion, so I am writing this letter in the hopes of encouraging a conversation.

As we know, the structure of and participants in higher education in the United States are changing; they no longer match very closely our (or at least, my) image of young adults living for four years on a campus, with their main task being to study and attain a bachelor's degree. Perhaps that image never matched reality well, but it is increasingly inapt. After all, "some 38 percent [of undergraduates] are older than 25, nearly 60 percent work while enrolled, and 25 percent are raising children. . . . Nearly two of five students with financial, work, and family obligations leave college in their first year. . . . Only 11 percent [of low-income students] graduate within six years" (Merisotis 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that half of undergraduates have parents who did not attend college. Relatedly, the proportion of underrepresented minorities in higher education has risen over the past few decades, although graduation rates for African Americans and Latinos remain well below those of non-Hispanic whites and Asian Americans (Casselmann 2014).

In short, undergraduates are older, less Anglo, less likely to be full-time students, less likely to have well-educated parents, and more financially stressed than students used to be. That change is actually good news; it mostly results from Americans' expanding access to higher education. But expansion brings with it new issues around teaching needs and purposes, the role of professors, and support services. Whether APSA is doing all it can to serve the political science faculty who engage with these new types of students is, I think, an open question.

Not only students but also educational institutions are changing. Almost three in ten undergraduates take at least one and sometimes all of their classes online.¹ Private for-profit institutions now enroll about two million students, one-tenth of the enrollment in all degree-granting postsecondary schools. Conversely, the share of students in private nonprofit colleges has shrunk from three tenths in 1967 to about one fifth now. Two-year colleges enroll a third of students, compared with just over a quarter in 1970. Structural changes,

like demographic ones, imply new questions about teaching, faculty, and services—with which APSA may not be sufficiently engaged.

Graduate education is probably altering less; relevant evidence about change over the past several decades may exist, but would require considerable effort to unearth and analyze. Even so, we can see another mismatch between individuals' situations and much of APSA's focus. In 2015, 859 people obtained a PhD in political science (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics 2015, table 7). Only 39% of them reported "definite employment" in NSF's terminology; another 14% planned "definite postgraduation study," while 27% were "seeking employment or study" (a few reported "other" plans). Just over three-fourths of those with jobs were entering "academe" (*ibid.*: table 63). In short, only three in ten newly minted political scientists became assistant professors in 2015 (76% of 39%). Perhaps the postdocs also intend or hope to move into academe, but even if all eventually do, fewer than half of new political science PhDs are clearly on track to become professors of political science.

The earliest comparable data that are readily available are from 2010. Among that year's crop of new PhDs, 46% had definite employment, 17% planned postgraduation study, and 23% were seeking a job or postdoc. The same share of employed PhDs were entering academia, leading to a total of 36% (77% of 46%) of new political scientists becoming assistant professors (NSF/NIH/USED/USDA/NEH/NASA 2010, table 61). I am not willing to portray the change from 2010 to 2015 in the NSF data as a clear decline—but note that APSA's own data from its annual placement survey also show a decreasing share of new PhDs entering academic jobs, from 63% in 2009–10 to 51% in 2014–15 (Meyers and Super 2015).²

Finally, the structure of faculty jobs does not mirror membership in APSA. About half of college and university faculty worked part-time in 2013—up from just over a fifth in 1970. Symmetrically, fewer than half of all degree-granting postsecondary institutions now have a tenure system, down from more than three fifths in 1993 (*Digest of Education Statistics 2015*). The American Association of University Professors reported in 2016 that "the overall number of full-time tenured positions has dropped by 26 percent [since 2008], and the number of full-time tenure-track positions by 50 percent" (Schmidt 2016). In short, even among the minority of new PhDs moving into academia, non-tenure-track faculty, whether part-time or non-ladder full time employees, are now a majority of the higher education labor force.³

What does this swarm of data imply about APSA's structure, focus, budgetary allocations, and activities? Perhaps nothing. Arguably, the main purpose of a professional association is to respond to its members' needs and desires; if the modal member of the APSA is a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in a

Editors' Note: For further discussion of this topic, we invite you to read Amy Atchison's article in *The Profession* section of this issue.

nonprofit college or university with predominantly conventional students, then perhaps the APSA should continue to emphasize the issues of greatest interest to that constituency. That, in any case, is what it mostly does. Judging, for example, by the budget allocations of the association, the modal constituent is primarily focused on research and publication, and somewhat on professional development or teaching and learning. There is no surprise here; most members of the Governing Council, as well as the association journals' editors and editorial boards, officers, section leaders, committee chairs, and members of the nominating committee are among the minority of political scientists with full-time, stable academic positions.

I, of course, may be in the worst possible position to point to the tendency of professional associations toward inward and upward redistribution, since I may have the world's most secure and privileged job. My colleagues and I are very lucky, and it would be hypocritical to pretend otherwise. Nonetheless, I do urge all of us to think hard about what more the APSA can do to respond effectively to the changing nature of our students, teaching context, employment structure, and institutional settings. The APSA staff and leadership are already making substantial efforts in this direction. Among other things, the association is expanding its roster of journals to focus more on teaching and learning and to enable more people to publish in more imaginative ways; it has established status committees to give greater voice to contingent faculty, first-generation professionals, community college faculty, and graduate students; it provides support to bring a wider array of faculty and students to conferences; it is developing a greater public presence. All of this is of great value.

But we can do more. I urge all of us to think hard about matters of descriptive and substantive representation for non-academic political scientists, as well as for teachers and scholars in settings where the *APSR* and even my beloved *Perspectives on Politics* feel distant and irrelevant. How might we do better at bringing contingent faculty into the council, or community college and regional university faculty into the nominating committee, or adult family heads taking (and teaching) courses at night or online into our conferences? Academia is changing and non-academic jobs matter more and more to PhD holders; as scholars who pride ourselves on being progressive, forward-looking, and responsive to new evidence, let's talk about what should—and should not—change correspondingly in our professional association.

NOTES

1. Data in this paragraph come from the *Digest of Education Statistics 2014* or *2015*. In all cases of comparison over time in this letter, I am using the earliest and latest data available.
2. APSA's data show a considerable rise in the share of new PhDs "not placed"—almost doubling from 9% in 2009.
3. Zhang, Ehrenberg, and Liu (2015) offer the best analysis of why this change is occurring in four-year institutions.

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RESPONSE TO JENNIFER HOCHSCHILD'S LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Rogers M. Smith, *University of Pennsylvania*

Jennifer Hochschild, who has done so much to improve political science and the APSA throughout her distinguished career, has made another significant contribution by calling attention to the mismatch between what APSA does and what is happening in the discipline of political science and in higher education more generally. Higher educational institutions are reaching more students and more diverse students, but they are increasingly doing so through institutions other than four-year, non-profit, research-focused universities. The political science teaching that is done in them is provided increasingly by non-tenure-track instructors. I would add to that picture the all too abundant evidence of declining support for many traditional forms of higher education, and for political science. Too many in the constituencies that have long sustained higher education, including parents, legislatures, foundations, and private donors, range from unexcited to actively angry about the form and content of much of the instruction that research-focused universities provide. Many also question, and some polemically condemn, the content of the research most contemporary political scientists do. The golden age of enthusiasm for our endeavors that traces back to the Cold War competition of the 1950s appears to be ending, if it did not already end a good while back.

Because APSA and many of us in the profession are nonetheless happily productive and comfortably provided for, it is tempting to carry on and hope that better days will return. But that is almost certainly foolish. Instead, within the profession, we need to continue to think how we can strengthen the teaching, the research, and the civic engagement of political scientists. And we need to do so with attention to the voices, needs, and aspirations of a greater variety of political scientists and institutions—those in the community colleges that are the real avenues of mobility for the great bulk of Americans, those that out of necessity blend part-time teaching, often in several institutions, with other occupations, those teaching online, and yes, those involved in the still-small but growing for-profit sector of higher education. We also need to partner with other bodies to seek both to defend higher education and to make higher education more worth defending. We and many other disciplines have been part of trends of rising tuition, reduced standing of faculty teaching, and limited or transparently self-interested engagement with our local communities that have brought higher education into disfavor. Political science cannot change these trends unilaterally, but APSA can seek to play a constructive role in partnerships to do so. The points raised in Jennifer Hochschild's letter constitute an agenda that all of us involved in the association should seek to build upon going forward.

COMMENTS FROM A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSOR

Sara L. Parker, *Chabot Community College*

I want to thank Jennifer Hochschild for her accurate and timely commentary. She asks “whether APSA is doing *all it can* [emphasis added] to serve the faculty who engage with these new types of students.” From the perspective of community college faculty who teach close to half of the undergraduate population in the United States (AACC 2015) but comprise just over 1% of APSA membership, the answer is no (Ad Hoc Committee on Community Colleges Report 2015).

In California where I work, over 60% of students who complete a bachelor’s degree were enrolled at a two-year institution within the prior 10 years. Recent data show that these students, who are disproportionately first generation college students, minorities, parents, and those who fall into other “non-traditional” categories, have a higher likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree within eight years than those who begin at four-year institutions (National Student Clearing House 2015). In other words, “modal members” have something to learn from community college faculty. Likewise, all future political scientists deserve and need faculty that are actively engaged in the rigorous scholarship that defines our field’s most important academic organization.

APSA’s creation of a committee on the Status of Community Colleges in the Profession is a great start. I am hopeful that a forthcoming survey will help us learn more about the needs and interests of community college faculty, and allow us to contribute to this conversation about new directions for the organization.

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A REPOSE TO THE PAST PRESIDENT’S LETTER

Michelle Deardorff, *The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga*

As Professor Hochschild clearly notes in her letter, the landscape of higher education has changed drastically over the last 20 years. The constitution of the professoriate and our student bodies, as well as the external pressures on political science programs, have all transformed. Although APSA staff has worked to adjust, the expectations of our discipline’s elected and appointed leadership have been slower to respond to these changes. Perhaps they have been protected by the privilege she references. This recognition by a former president of APSA of political science’s need to adapt is an exciting variation from tradition. While in recent years we have created status communities for graduate faculty and community college professors, our services have not adjusted to think about the needs of contingent faculty. We have begun addressing the needs of graduate students who leave higher education for the public and private sectors, but have not really updated our assistance to undergraduate majors confronting an uncertain workforce. We have offered help for the majority of

faculty whose primary work is teaching undergraduates, but have as yet no clear vision as to how our disciplinary organization can meet their needs. Our latest APSA statement on best practices for the undergraduate political science curriculum was the Wahlke Report in 1991—despite the constant pressure programs are under to document continuous assessment and the potential incredible impact of such curricula implemented nationally. Finally, as a department head, one of the services I have repeatedly sought are shared standards/values we can use to pressure our campus administrations for resources against competing programs with accreditation requirements that they are able to leverage for more faculty, better facilities, and increased budgets. The APSA staff have been willing to pursue some of these directions, but without constant support from the membership and an awareness of this new terrain among the leadership, we risk becoming irrelevant to our discipline’s work and to a changing cadre of new members for whom traditional research is a distant second or third aspect of their professional identities.

COMMENT ON JENNIFER HOCHSCHILD’S LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Steven Rathgeb Smith, *American Political Science Association*

Jennifer Hochschild’s incisive and important letter to the editor highlights central issues facing the political science discipline and higher education. Key trends are highlighted in the letter: the declining number of tenure-track positions with the corresponding increase in the number of adjunct and contingent faculty; pressure on university budgets; greater ethnic and racial diversity among students and faculty; the revolution in pedagogy, especially the broad expansion of online learning; the influx of first-generation scholars and students in the discipline; and growth of the discipline worldwide. These trends have profound implications for APSA. Academic associations including APSA expanded in the post-World War II period with the growth of higher educational institutions including doctoral programs and improved student access. Like many associations, APSA was also rooted in the elite institutions where the leadership of the associations for decades was based. The principal programs of the association—the annual meeting and its principal journal, the *American Political Science Review (APSR)*—reflected the priorities of the leading universities on research and doctoral education. Another major program of the association, the Congressional Fellowship Program, founded in 1953, was designed to foster research on Congress through a year’s fellowship in a congressional office. Overall, the membership and programs of APSA were quite stable for the period starting in the 1960s through the 2000s, though two of the association’s flagship diversity programs, the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI) and the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), were established during this period.

In the last 15 years, however, the association has undertaken a number of new initiatives and strengthened existing programs to effectively respond to the rapidly changing environment of higher education. Importantly, the association has undertaken a multipronged approach to respond to the needs and concerns of the increased diversity of the political science professoriate. Recently, and largely under the guidance of Jennifer Hochschild’s presidency, the association has created new status committees to represent the interests of graduate students, community college faculty, first-generation scholars, and contingent faculty.

Each of these committees has panel space at the annual meeting and support from APSA staff to advocate for and examine the needs of these different constituencies. Consequently, APSA has increased support for community college faculty and contingent faculty generally, including allowing community college and contingent faculty to qualify for travel grants to the Annual Meeting. APSA is also investing more resources in its diversity programs such as the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI), the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP), and mentoring of younger scholars, especially scholars from underrepresented minorities. The emphasis on diversity is reflected in outreach to political scientists from a wide variety of subfields and institutions for representation on APSA committees including the APSA Governing Council; greater diversity in the leadership of the organized sections is also a high priority. In a significant departure from past practice, the APSA nominating committee has recommended for election to the council the first-ever nominees from a community college and a non-tenure-track faculty member.

The association is also investing more resources in research on the profession to understand and improve the career prospects, publishing opportunities, and programmatic support for the increasingly diverse profession. For example, APSA is collaborating with the Committee on the Status of Women on a research study of women in the discipline. More analysis of trends in job placement including non-university positions, surveys of community college faculty, and an analysis of trends among contingent faculty are underway.

In addition to research on career prospects, APSA has invested additional resources in professional development resources for members, including professional development for non-academic careers. These efforts have included developing an interview series with political scientists on non-academic career paths; training on non-academic job options at regional conferences; new resources on the website for applied and non-academic job searches; and new brochures for political science undergrads on career options. In addition, the association has increased the professional development programming at the annual meeting including panels on networking, grant and research funding, academic publishing, academic and non-academic job searches, and dissertation workshops.

The association is also devoting substantially more resources in teaching and learning, broadly defined. In 2004, the association established the annual Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) to provide a forum for the presentation of research on teaching and to facilitate networking among political scientists interested in innovation and research on teaching. The association has also increased the programming on teaching at the annual meeting including a new preconference workshop on syllabus development and many more panels on teaching. More resources on teaching on the APSA website, including a revamped syllabi collection and a recent webinar on effective online teaching, are also available. In an effort to make more cutting-edge research on teaching available to all APSA members, the association assumed responsibility for the publication of the *Journal of Political Science Education*, so the *JPSE* is now available to all members of the association. APSA has also sponsored the development of two books on teaching civic engagement. In 2013, *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* was released and is now available online to all APSA members. The companion volume, *Teaching Civic Engagement across the Disciplines* includes a companion website with syllabi and resources and was made available to APSA members in August 2017.

Elsewhere on the publication front, in 2002, the association established *Perspectives on Politics* as a high-profile journal engaged in major disciplinary and intellectual debates affecting public policy and the citizenry. The journal was founded to reflect the broad range of subfields and methodological approaches in the discipline. Reflecting the growth of open access publishing, the association is also exploring the launching of an open access journal and new forms of delivering political science research and content to its members and the broader public sphere. This theme of innovation in program delivery is also reflected in noteworthy changes in the annual meeting including the addition of new formats such as teaching cafes.

Hochschild's letter correctly and perceptively calls attention to the need for APSA, like other academic associations, to adapt to changes in higher education and the discipline. On behalf of the APSA Council and staff, I look forward to working with the membership to enhance the programming, career opportunities, and publishing options for the our changing and diverse discipline. ■