

## Organized Sections in APSA: A Status Report\*

Michael Brintnall, APSA

Organized sections became a formal component of the American Political Science Association in 1983. Since that time, membership, numbers, and the role of sections in the APSA have grown steadily. This overview reports on growth and involvement of organized sections within the Association.

There are 27 approved organized sections. The newest, the Organized Section for a New Political Science, was approved in May 1991. Forty-five percent of all APSA members (5,434 people out of 12,022) belong to at least one section, and half of these belong to more than one section. Combined memberships in all of the sections total 10,798.

Growth has been steady; sections are not just getting more numerous, they are also getting bigger. Figure 1 shows combined memberships in all sections since 1984 have grown at a linear rate, and that after absorbing several new sections in the mid-1980s, the mean number of members per section has also grown to over 450 in 1991.

There are many reasons for the strong appeal of organized sections. Contributing factors are likely the accessibility allowed by their scale, the opportunities for leadership, their efficiency in leading members to colleagues with similar interests, the low dues, and the forum they provide members to provide greater definition to their fields within the discipline. Almost all sections prepare an informal newsletter for their members and provide mailing lists of members, and some are exploring new modes of electronic communication through computer networks. Many also have established annual awards for work within their fields. Perhaps the most important activities of organized sections have been their involvement in planning aspects of the APSA annual meeting, which is discussed further below.

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## Section Membership

Sections have been formed in almost all fields of the discipline. The largest section is one of the newest—the Comparative Politics Section with 869 members, established in 1988. Figure 2 shows current membership for all sections.

The membership of organized sections tends to be composed more of people holding academic positions than of students or applied political scientists. Fifty percent of APSA members in colleges and universities belong to organized sections, compared to 42 percent of APSA student members and APSA members in the government. Among academic members, associate professors are most likely to join sections—56 percent at that rank belong to at least one section, compared to 50 percent of assistant professors, and 49 percent of those with full professor rank.

On a chronological basis, members earning their degree in the 1970s are most likely to be section members—at a rate of 53 percent. Only a third of those earning degrees in the 1950s hold a section membership. Retired members are far less likely to join sections than other association members; only 21 percent of the retired members hold a current section membership.

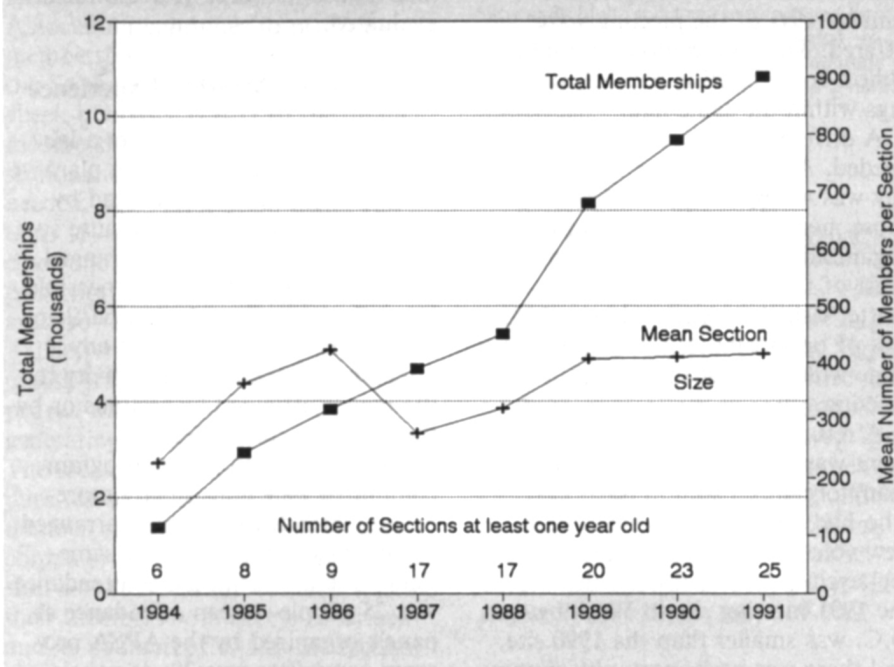
Section members are not separate from those people active within the Association as a whole. Among APSA leaders, defined as members holding seats on the APSA Council or any of its standing and special purpose committees, 61 percent belong to organized sections.

## Section Leadership

One feature of organized sections is the number of leadership opportunities they provide. In total, organized sections provide 233 leadership positions, counting their officers, board members, newsletter editors, and annual meeting program organizers—filled this year by 217 people. This compares with 174 leadership positions within APSA itself, filled by 154 people.

Section leadership is not evidently any more or less representative than the leadership of the Association as a whole, if gender can be used as an

**FIGURE 1.**  
Section Memberships—1984 to 1991



indicator. Twenty-three percent of all APSA members are women. The leadership both of organized sections, and of APSA as a whole, is 30 percent women. One slight exception is the pool of section members selected to organize panels at the 1990 annual meeting, where there were numerous panels arranged both by the organized sections and by an APSA-wide program committee. Twenty-four percent of the panel chairs selected by the program committee were women, compared to 19 percent of the chairs from the organized sections.

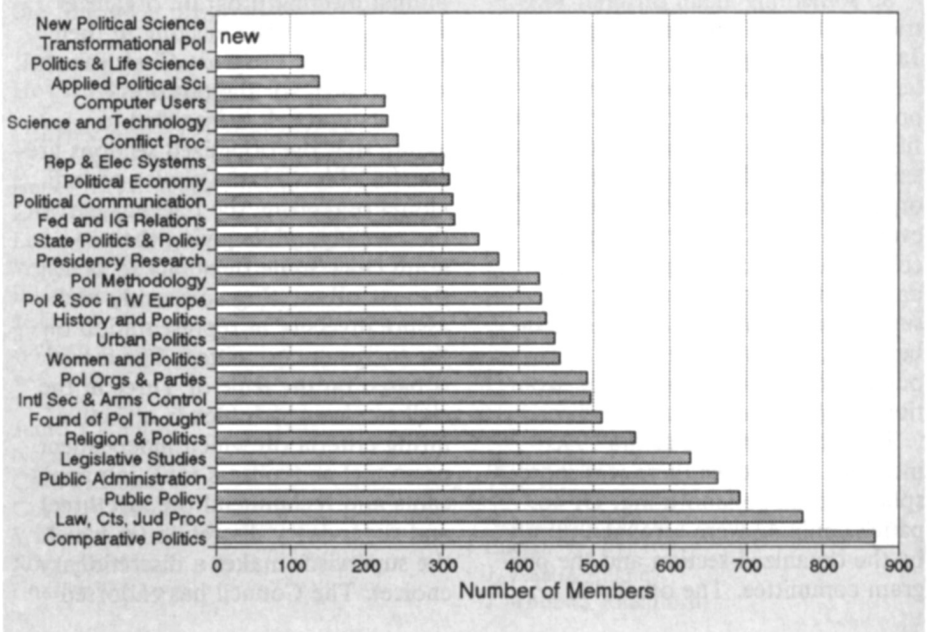
**The Role of Sections Within the Association’s Annual Meeting**

The role of organized sections in the Association has evolved as they have grown. Perhaps the most important change has been the relationship of organized sections to the program committee in planning each year’s annual meeting. Beginning with the 1985 meeting, panel planning has been split between the organized sections and the program committee. Frequently each group has organized a part of the meeting, comprising multiple panels, on the same subject.<sup>1</sup> In 1985, 8 of 31 parts of the annual meeting pro-

gram were planned by the organized sections. At the same time, it was thought that panels arranged by the organized sections would be offered in lieu of equivalent panels by the same people in their former role as related groups. The Association has a standing policy of providing meeting space and courtesy listings in the Annual Meeting program to groups related

to political science but unaffiliated with the Association.<sup>2</sup> Most organized sections emerged from this pool of related groups. But growth raised problems. By 1987, there were 17 parts of the meeting offered by the organized sections, and 27 organized by the program committee, without significant diminishment in the numbers of related groups seeking space at the meeting. All of these demands, however, needed to be accommodated within a Council policy to contain the annual meeting sessions in a single hotel, and to avoid convention centers where costs escalate dramatically. Anticipating a logjam from increased requests to offer panels in the face of unexpandable space, the APSA Council in 1987 established an ad hoc Committee on the Structure of the Annual Meeting to design a remedy. The ad hoc committee recommended that panels be allocated roughly in a proportion of 50 percent to the program committee, 30 percent to organized sections, and 20 percent to related groups. For the first time, the Executive Director of the Association emerged with a major role in parcelling out numbers of panels to organized sections and related groups, because of the need to divide up panels outside the control of the program commit-

**FIGURE 2.**  
APSA Organized Section Members—1991



tee. The strategy in 1988 was to provide every group at least some space, and to determine allotments largely based on the level of panel attendance in previous years. In 1988, 18 parts of the meeting were offered by organized sections, and 23 by the program committee.

In 1989, the Association tried something else. Nelson Polsby, as program committee chair, elected to merge the organized sections directly into the official program. This avoided the duplication of topical coverage which had occurred in the past when the program committee and the organized sections arranged separate parts of the meeting on the same topics.

But the strategy revealed another difficulty—organized sections did not encompass all fields and interests of the discipline, and some new parts had to be added to the meeting to fill the gaps. It also generated controversy over the proper allocation of panels between different sections.

In addition, some members objected to the plan on a more general basis. They felt that the sum of the organized sections did not necessarily add up to a sense of the whole discipline, and that the profession as a whole would benefit more from a meeting planned in a more centralized fashion. People expressing this view added that they were reluctant to lose the opportunity for a program chair to craft a good meeting—to place an emphasis on “who’s good” regardless of field.

So something again different was tried at the 1990 annual meeting. Jane Mansbridge, program committee chair for the annual meeting, proposed to the Council that in those fields for which organized sections exist, the program chairs and the organized sections split the panels evenly, with an encouragement to collaborate in the assignment of panels. Her analysis leading to this suggestion, printed in *PS* in September 1989, is one of the more thorough discussions of the role of sections in the Association.

This plan was used at the 1990 meeting. In practice there was more splitting than collaborating. Of 469 panels, only 47 were arranged jointly by the organized section and the program committee. The other 422

panels were arranged either by the sections or the program committee, and on almost every subject two similar parts of the meeting were offered. The Association appeared almost to be holding parallel meetings within the same hall.

A different approach for 1991 was needed. A reprise of the 1989 strategy was unappealing, at least to those members concerned that having organized sections alone account for most of the Association’s subject matter risked fragmentation and the loss of opportunities to achieve discipline-wide goals at the annual meeting.

A return to the pre-1989 arrangement was also unattractive, since many organized section members, who had been working hard for a new voice in the Association, would feel excluded. And finally, the size of the 1991 meeting site in Washington, D.C. was smaller than the 1990 site, and there was no opportunity simply to add more panels to please all interests.

### Rule of Three

For 1991, consequently, APSA President Theodore Lowi proposed a new strategy, building on elements of all of the past practice. Under this plan, the organized section and the program chair work in sequence to nominate and select the heads of the different parts of the annual meeting program. The organized section nominates three candidates to be the annual meeting program organizer for the part of the meeting in their field, and the Program Chair selects one of them for the position.

This approach is intended to assure that the organized sections are comfortable with the choice of individual organizing the relevant part of the meeting, while giving the program chair some flexibility to plan the overall meeting coherently and assure diversity in representation on the program committee. The model is based on the Rule of Three in the civil service which blends objective hiring criteria (in which independent personnel committees rank job applicants and recommend the top three) and supervisory discretion (in which the supervisor makes a discretionary choice). The Council has endorsed

this plan, and in an effort to stabilize annual meeting planning, has authorized its use for three years, while it is evaluated.

### 1990 Annual Meeting Experience

The 1990 meeting provides a laboratory for studying meeting planning by organized sections and by the program committee, because so many similar panels were arranged independently by each. It is possible in particular to see whether participation in the meeting reflected any apparent difference in receptivity to the panels arranged by sections or by the program committee.

Panels arranged by the program committee were consistently more heavily attended than those arranged by organized sections in the same field. Overall, mean panel attendance was 25 people—mean attendance at panels organized by the APSA program committee was 28; at panels arranged by the organized sections, 20.<sup>3</sup>

There is no obvious explanation for this preference to attend panels arranged by the program committee. Nor is voting by one’s feet necessarily a desirable measure for success of a scholarly meeting. However, it does lend some support to the argument that there is broader appeal to an annual meeting guided by some mode of central organization, than to one made up of an amalgamation of distinct groups.

### Issues and Directions for the Future

The Association has gained some time to explore the ideal arrangement for the annual meeting by the agreement to use the Rule of Three strategy for the meeting for the next three years. So far there is a measure of comfort with the arrangement, and clearly an opportunity to reflect on the balance between interests of individual sections and the Association as a whole.

In the meantime, there may be other areas in which new roles for sections with the Association could be explored. One possibility, for example, would be to engage sections in offering the short courses for professional development before each

annual meeting.

Improved services and new technologies also offer promise. The Association continues to provide membership management services for the Sections, collecting dues on a check-off basis as part of the annual membership renewals, and providing sections with member mailing lists as needed. The Association office retains \$3 of section member dues to cover the costs of this service. News of section awards and other activities are also regularly reported in *PS*.

The Association office will soon be taking steps to offer sections improved member lists and facilities for generating timely member directories. The idea of a reduced rate of student dues for sections is attractive. A number of sections are establishing computer bulletin boards and discussion lists to automate contacts among their members with access to Bitnet and its counterparts, and the technology and experiences with attempting this might be disseminated among the sections.

Organized sections have transformed APSA—broadening opportunities for participation and leadership in the fields of the discipline without evidently weakening the spirit of common enterprise. This success is not uncharacteristic, since the Association has a history of embracing diversity and persisting in the search for a balance among varied interests and common goals, albeit sometimes through controversy. But it has been a little surprising, since these new roles have arisen suddenly, spontaneously, and organically. The next several years should be of special importance, as the Association consolidates the new roles of the organized sections into more of its practices.

## Notes

\*An earlier version of this article has appeared in *Policy Currents*, the newsletter of the Public Policy Section.

1. APSA vocabulary here is confusing. The Annual Meeting has been split into what are called program sections, not to be confused with organized sections. Each program section of the meeting comprises 5-15 panels. In this article program sections will be called "parts" of the meeting.

2. Traditionally these groups have been named unaffiliated groups. The terminology

has recently been changed to related groups.

3. These data exclude 57 roundtables held at the meeting, because attendance at these is unusually high, and most are arranged by the program committee. Multi-variate analysis controlling for type of panel, time and day of the panel, and sponsorship shows a similar differential.

## Section is Forming for Political Psychology

The Committee to Initiate a Political Psychology Section is soliciting signatures of APSA members. Signatures of 100 members are needed for establishment of a new section to be considered by the Committee on Sections. If you are interested in the creation of a new section on political psychology, contact Maryann Kusimano, Department of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218; (301) 889-6062.

## APSA Members and Friends Continue to Provide Program Support

Many of the Association's programs and awards would not continue to operate without the generosity of APSA members and friends of political science. Some of the awards have been discontinued because of the lack of funds. So APSA is very grateful to those who contribute to awards and other programs. During the past year these individuals have made a significant contribution to the following programs.

*William Anderson Award*  
Howard R. Penniman

*Congressional Fellowship Program*

T. W. Adams  
Robert B. Alexander  
J. W. Anderson  
Louis A. Baer  
Walter E. Beach  
Eliot Berkley  
Jeanne C. Blamey  
Richard Bolling  
Ken Bowler  
J. Cudd Brown  
James Campbell  
Norma W. Carlson  
Celia F. Cohen  
Guy C. Colarulli  
William Connelly  
Roger Davidson  
Charles N. Davis

Lynn Drake  
Ronald Elving  
Leon Epstein  
Heinz Eulau  
Randy D. Ferryman  
Nancy Connolly Fibish  
Linda L. Fowler  
Beth Fuchs  
Frances Lai Fung-Wai  
Norman I. Gelman  
Irwin Gertzog  
Loren Ghiglione  
Nancy F. Green  
Margaret G. Guild  
Richard L. Hall  
Michael Hardin  
Harriett J. Harper  
Samuel Halperin  
John P. Harrod  
Jonathan P. Hawley  
Robert Healy  
Kenneth A. Heath  
Paul Herrnson  
John Hibbing  
Peter Higgins  
John Hoadley  
James Hoge  
Larry Hojo  
F. Lynn Holec  
James R. Horney  
Charles O. Jones  
Judith Justice  
Tomoaki Iwai  
William G. Kagler  
Warren W. Kane  
Edward Keltz  
Changsu Kim  
Allan Kornberg  
Michael H. Levin  
Serge E. Logan  
Burdett A. Loomis  
William Loper  
Robert Lorish  
Marvin R. Lowey  
Robert F. Lundy  
James M. McCormick  
David Magleby  
Ardith L. Maney  
Joel Margolis  
Lance Marston  
Janet M. Martin  
Vincent Mathias  
David R. Mayhew  
Patrice Mitchell  
Cornelia H. Moore  
Roy D. Morey  
Curt Masiello  
M. Elaine Neenan  
William L. Oakley  
Leonard Parkinson  
H. Carroll Parish  
Robert L. Peabody  
Betty Phillips  
Jack Pitney  
Richardson Preyer  
Lucian W. Pye  
J. Austin Ranney  
J. Thomas Ratchford