

Open Letter to Members of the Association

Robert E. Lane, President

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Dear Colleague:

In this final letter I want to talk about the discipline and the profession—and the Association that serves them. Surely comments on “the state of the discipline” command an instant inattention by discriminating readers, but bear with me for a moment; I want to reveal a contrast between the agendas of our public controversies and what seem to me to be equally important issues which escape public attention, the hidden agendas of Association policies (and politics).

Education: Our public controversies deal with such things as an alleged Association neglect of the smaller or less prestigious schools and the neglect of teaching as contrasted to research. Quite properly so. The public discussion draws attention to grievance or inequities and our desires for the Association to do something about them.

But given the will to do something helpful how should the officers of the Association, the Council, and the Executive Director proceed? We could appoint another committee and, as things now stand, pay for one committee meeting. This committee could prepare a statement on teaching and the importance of community colleges. On matters of these kinds, we could introduce resolutions or endorse resolutions introduced by others and present them to the business meeting where, perhaps with modifications, they would be adopted. But then what? How do such actions reduce grievances? Who listens and acts on our committee reports and business meeting resolutions? How are things different after these actions have been taken?

No, I think there are only three actions that will reduce the grievances and remedy defective situations: (1) the development of Association programs, that is, institutionalized, relatively longer term, well staffed efforts to implement a policy (exchange information, examine cases, develop model programs); (2) serious studies by carefully selected scholars who are funded to permit them to give their time to a complex problem, and (3) national office implementation within existing staff capabilities, as illustrated by the work done this year to modify college and university anti-nepotism rules.

Responsible effective implementation of Association policies usually requires, under current low

dues and low income conditions, the discovery of outside resources. Hence in this area of education we are discussing, we have this year sought a major grant from the National Science Foundation for a program of improving undergraduate education and teaching; we are considering whether or not to submit a proposal for a study on the matching of graduate educational programs with market demand and social need; and we are looking for funds to implement our concern for academic freedom in the discipline. It takes about six months to develop a proposal (including gaining a consensus among concerned groups in the profession, finding the person who can write the proposal, getting it criticized, rewriting it) and often about six months for the foundation to respond. The behind the scenes discussion has to do with strategies of effective implementation, as well as priorities.

Journals and information exchange: The public controversies dealing with our two journals (APSR and PS) have to do with their contents, their backlogs, their referees—things of that nature. I think the *Review* is an excellent journal, (and PS is, too, although it needs to be expanded); but given the plural interests in our discipline there will always be criticism.

Within the more limited confines of the Association officers and editors and regional officers and editors, however, there is another controversy arising from another perspective. The *Review* receives over 420 manuscripts a year; it can publish only about 50. The *Review* also receives over 3,000 books for review; it can review only about 360. Since we cannot afford higher printing and mailing costs, the question arises: should we publish a separate book review journal, expanding our treatment of the literature with which we deal, and also allowing, in the vacated *Review* pages, a few more articles an issue? This would be possible by charging the membership a modest fee for the new book review journal and a larger fee to non-members, thus providing the funds to finance the expansion. There are two sides to the issue (would you be willing to pay for an expanded book review journal?) and its resolution is uncertain.

At the same time, wholly outside the reaches of public controversy, there has been developed a plan to help the regional journals with their business functions (soliciting advertising, library subscriptions, circulation overseas—if

they want this help) and to provide the regional memberships with more choice among the regional journals (through a consortium of regional associations). The Association could also help the specialized journals (like *Law and Society* or *Comparative Politics*) with their promotion, their advertising, and their business matters. The purpose of all of this would be to improve the information exchange process, reducing lost information, and making research more cumulative.

Finally, there is no public controversy about the abstracting and bibliographic facilities within the discipline; yet these are crucially important for both teaching and research. We are proposing a program to the NSF Office of Science Information Service, which, if funded, will permit the Association to improve the abstracting services. *The curious thing is that there has been little articulate demand in our scholarly community for improving these services.*

Manpower, recruiting, placement: The public controversies in the profession over Association policies in the manpower field have to do with elitism (the "buddy system" in recruiting), open listing, and programs for recruiting more Women, Blacks, Chicanos and others into the profession. The Association has responded with policies designed to encourage an open listing policy of positions available, supported resolutions for provisions for half-time study and employment for women, repeal of anti-nepotism rules, has developed and administers a Black Fellowship program, and hopes to expand such Fellowship Programs to Chicanos and others.

These have all been helpful, but consider the little discussed and rather pedestrian question of developing a better manpower information system, including an up to date *Biographical Directory*. This *Directory* is widely used by department chairmen to locate people with special fields, to find out where people are and what they have written. It is now five years old—the five recent classes of Ph.D.'s are not listed, including the growing number of young Black, Women and Chicano scholars in political science. Have we done the right thing in spending so much for referenda, committee meetings, and so forth, instead of developing better manpower information systems including directories? What have been the wastes in

inefficient, or less than optimal allocation of human resources?

The same kinds of contrasts could be drawn between the public controversies and the important behind the scenes issues in other areas. In public affairs, there is much public discussion of the "relevance" of our research, while the means of delivering relevant research findings to policymakers so that it can make a difference goes undiscussed. In governing the Association the powers of the business meeting are thoroughly ventilated, but the problem of changing the President and Council members from private scholars to disciplinary statesmen is little considered.

I don't know how to add to the current (and often useful) discussion of dramatic public problems some elements of these less dramatic but very important Association policies and implementations. But I think several things are clear: (1) the elected officers of the Association must take time out of their private lives to learn about and master discipline-wide perspectives and assume responsibility for presenting these perspectives of the membership; (2) all of us need to think strategically about how the Association can, through its central resources, improve the allocation of manpower, help universities and colleges with their educational problems, devise ways to improve and make more rational the information exchange in the discipline, make our policy-relevant research known to policymakers, and reduce inequities affecting our members; and (3) we need to tax ourselves more heavily for these hidden but vital services to the discipline, services whose benefits affect us all.

For the many letters I have received during the past year—many thanks.

Robert E. Lane