

NEWS

for Teachers of
Political Science

A Publication of the American Political Science Assoc.

Winter, 1987

No. 52

The College Textbook Acquisitions Review

A Legislative Case Study Assignment

In this issue . . .

- Reviewing College Texts
The Process, p. 1
The Review, p. 4
- Women and American
Politics, p. 6
- Analytical Exercises
Legislative Case Study, p. 1
Political Theory, p. 10
Power in America, p. 12
Using "Development" to
Teach Great Issues, p. 15

NEWS for Teachers of Political Science is published quarterly and distributed free of charge to all APSA members and department chairpersons. Non-member faculty may subscribe for \$7 per year. The next issue of the NEWS will appear spring 1987. All correspondence to the NEWS should be addressed to:

Educational Affairs/APSA
1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Editor/Shellah Mann

Editorial Board

Janet M. Clark, University of Wyoming
Lorn Foster, Pomona College
La Mard Tullis, Barat College
Bruce Wallin, California State University,
Fullerton

Copyright 1987 American Political
Science Association

1987 will be the last year that the NEWS will be published as a "newspaper." In response to the readers' survey, the NEWS will become an 8½ x 11½ "magazine" in 1988. Information on the focus and format of the magazine will appear in the Spring and Summer Issues.

By Irving E. Rockwood, President, Irving E. Rockwood Associates

The Acquisitions Review: What It Is and Why It's Important

While there is considerable variation among college publishers with respect to the type of projects they are willing to consider, the process by which such projects are evaluated is remarkably similar from house to house. Invariably, that process involves the use of "outside" reviewers to whom proposals being given serious consideration are sent for evaluation. Thus, unlike trade publishers, who rely heavily on their own instincts when considering projects for publication, college textbook publishers seldom publish materials that have not first been reviewed, and by and large approved, by a group of potential adopters.

There are two major types of reviews commissioned by textbook publishers: developmental reviews and acquisitions reviews. The former are commissioned after a manuscript has been contracted for publication but before it has actually been published. Developmental reviews are intended to help an author (and publisher) "develop" a manuscript deemed sufficiently promising to warrant publication.¹

An acquisitions review, on the other hand, is a review commissioned before a manuscript has been contracted for publication. Like its developmental counterpart, it represents a request for advice from the publisher. Would you, a potential adopter, be likely to use this book? Why or why not? These are the questions of greater concern to the publisher when commissioning an acquisitions review.

Although seldom publicly discussed, poorly remunerated (in most cases), and generally of little or no value for purposes of promotion or enhancement of the reviewer's professional status, the reviewing of textbooks is, we believe, an activity

of greater professional significance than is commonly acknowledged. For better or for worse, the reviews obtained by college textbook publishers play a major role in determining the type of materials ultimately available for use in the classroom. And if it is true that favorable reviews do not in and of themselves ensure publication, so it is also true that unfavorable reviews are nearly always fatal to the publication prospects of the project involved.

To put it another way, what college textbook publishers publish is heavily influenced by the advice they receive from potential adopters. Such advice, particularly received in the form of acquisitions reviews, plays a determining role in the type and quality of materials made available for instructional purposes and the content thereof.

The rendering of this advice is thus a potentially significant matter. Routine as such activity may appear to those involved, it concerns directly materials which, upon publication, will have considerable potential to influence long-term student attitudes toward the institutions and processes of government and, yes, even the discipline of political science itself. Yet the process by which these influential works are themselves shaped, is a remarkably open one, requiring little more of the average instructor than a willingness to participate.

The Rules of the Game

While there is no set procedures for obtaining acquisition reviews, the following "basic rules" are generally applicable:

1. *Number of readers:* Proposals are ordinarily sent to more than one reader simultaneously. The number of reviews commissioned per project, however, will vary from as few

(continued on p. 2)

by David W. Winder
Valdosta State College

In an article entitled "Teaching the Congress and Legislative Process Courses," L. Sandy Maisel found by examining the syllabi of such courses that about half of them involved legislative case study assignments. He suggested that further exploration of these assignments would be appropriate.¹ Since students are so commonly required to do case studies of bills in legislative courses, a description of this type of assignment and discussion of how to implement it would be useful. In this paper, I will cover my use of this type of assignment in a course on the legislative process. In describing this legislative case study requirement, sections on background information, the case study assignment, and student reaction to the assignment, together with a brief conclusion, will be presented.

Background

Political science majors want to know more about how their academic preparation applies to actual practice of politics and to government service. These concerns are related to a common question asked by our majors and those considering a concentration in political science: "What sort of work can I do with a major in political science?" While our discipline is very valuable simply as a body of knowledge it is also important to address the students' need to see the relevance of the field to future occupations. We do this very deliberately, for example, in supervised internship courses in which students perform work in the sort of administrative and legislative environments with which their political science courses deal. Certain law courses taught in political science departments seem quite clearly related to law school and to the practice of law. Case studies in public

(continued on p. 5)