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FIRST DRAFT; COMMENTS WELCOME

Seeking Relevance: Toward A Strategic Plan for Political Science*

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ABSTRACT. Surveys suggest that in the 1970s most political scientists wished they had chosen a different profession, a true tragedy, as Ricci (1984) writes. We discuss the causes of alienation, but also offer data suggesting that the situation had improved markedly by 1999. We speculate that this has much to do with a better job market and more realistic expectations about that job market. Nonetheless, all is not well. Both conservative senators and prominent political scientists continue to question the importance of Political Science (*e.g.*, Cohen 1999). The APSA has attempted to increase its relevance by returning to its Progressive roots, attempting to shape public policy in a statist direction. We argue that such attempts will lack empirical power and political legitimacy, and thus will have little impact. Instead, using lenses borrowed from strategic planning and from the public personnel management literature, we argue that our field should build stronger links with the applied world. Second, APSA needs to study and systematize public personnel issues of the field, much as we have already (quite properly) done regarding race and gender issues. Third, we should encourage political debate within the field. This would require valuing political diversity and intellectual flexibility. Finally, to a considerable degree the Political Science niche is that of a prep school for lawyers. This is not the right market for us. Rather, given American voters' remarkable ignorance of the political system, we should take over new markets: undergraduate civic education and the training of secondary social studies teachers. In this way we can, over time, assure both a more rational electorate and our own relevance.

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Seeking Relevance: Toward A Strategic Plan for Political Science

"...scholars following Weber's lead have often noticed that even while bureaucrats tend to create and conserve knowledge, the substance of that knowledge is not necessarily useful to society. That is, although bureaucracies are presumably designed to fulfill the nation's need for goods and services, a bureaucrat is likely to favor his organization's immediate ends instead, where so long as the work contributes to the survival and prosperity of the institution; it is deemed satisfactory by his colleagues.

David M. Ricci (1984, 11-12)

Are We Happy? Missions, Job Markets, and the New Normal

As Downs (1967), Kaufman (1967), and Wilson and Clarke (1961), among others suggest, professions need agreed upon practices and terms, as well as a mix of ideological, social, and material incentives to recruit, guide, and retain members. For political scientists and other academics, social incentives arise more or less organically through the field, and are probably not subject to policy-making (though for a slightly different take see the APSA *Task Force on Mentoring*, described in Bennion 2004). Material incentives are provided by the usual bureaucratic job markets, with official and semi-official criteria for promotion (as applied to Political Science see Ricci 1984, 10-17). Arguably, American Political Science lacks what Anthony Downs calls an organizational ideology---a vision of how the profession contributes to society. As we will argue below, this is not an entirely bad thing. Indeed we are delighted that our field embraces a range of different methods, and maintains some ideological diversity. It was not always so. American Political Science began in the first decade of the last century with a clear mandate to as Frank Goodnow put it in his inaugural APSA presidential address, promote "the realization of state will" (Dryzek 2006, 488). A Progressive agenda to promote a unified, bureaucratized, and essentially modernized state able to solve problems such as inequality dominated the field, as reflected in such efforts as the 1950 APSA report (published in APSR) advocating a responsible party model (Ceaser and Maranto 2009, 213-15).

Yet since the behavioral revolution, at least to hear many tell it, Political Science has faced more of the worst of times than the best of times. In his classic treatment, *The Tragedy of Political Science*, David Ricci laments that a 1976 survey conducted by Walter B. Roettger found that only 24% of American political scientists would choose the same profession if given the chance to start all over again (cited in Ricci 1984, 18). For so many intelligent and talented people to lead lives of quiet desperation marks a true tragedy of staggering proportions. As we note below, a more recent survey finds far more positive results, though both in the 1960 and in 1999 surveys suggest that political science professors are somewhat less satisfied with their field and their career choice than professors in other fields, even other social sciences.

Ricci blames the behavioral revolution, which systematized and bureaucratized political research in ways which limited what we study and how we study it, while producing "a very large body of literature intended mainly for students and teachers and only marginally including items that were universally considered important to political learning and practice in the past" (10). (See also Seidelman 1985.) Hyper-specialization created an increasingly irrelevant discipline, and also discouraged engagement in real world policy-making, a theme explored more broadly across the social sciences and humanities by Russell Jacoby in *The Last Intellectuals*. As both Ricci and Jacoby note, academics now produce such volumes of (often impenetrable) research as to preclude genuine community within the field. When James Madison studied at Princeton, a mere 50 volumes covered politics; by 1976 60 significant journals and nearly 400 books per month addressed Political Science (Ricci 2004, 9). Both authors complain that since the rise of the New Left and its entrenchment in universities rather than in the applied world of politics and policy, social science and humanities intellectuals have grown increasingly isolated and irrelevant rather than engaged in the world like the progressive intellectuals of old.

These arguments are not completely persuasive. The behavior revolution, after all, swept all the American social sciences, and to some degree the humanities. Behaviorism's impacts on Political Science are far from unique. Further, even before the inroads of Perestroika (e.g., Flyvbjerg 2001; Monroe 2005), behaviorism was more of a current than a dominant force in Political Science. Elements of our field remained qualitative; still others remained applied. Indeed, Political Science remains far more eclectic and for that reason more interesting than other social sciences (Almond 1988; Ceaser and Maranto 2009; Merelman 2003; Grant 2005). As Jim Ceaser cleverly puts it (Ceaser and Maranto 2009, 217), for publishing representatives "sentenced by their superiors to attend the professional meetings of academic disciplines" the APSA "is by far the most lively and interesting of all the professional association conventions," featuring a variety of perspectives and methods, and even some ideological diversity.

Further, more recent surveys suggest that political scientists are more content than they were in the 1970s, the time addressed by Ricci. Unfortunately, since the 1970s the APSA has not surveyed members to measure their job satisfaction, and large n surveys like UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) data are expensive to access. Accordingly, we will use the North American Academic Survey implemented in 1999, and designed by Stanley Rothman with support from the Center for the Study of Social and Political Change at Smith College (and provided by Matthew Woessner).

TABLE 1. Job satisfaction among professors.

In general, how satisfied are you with your career?

	All faculty	social science	political science
Dissatisfied (1-3)	4.3%	3.8	3.7
Neutral (4)	5.7	5.9	9.2
Satisfied (5-7)	89.8	89.9	87
Missing	.2	.3	--
n	1645	539	61

If you were to begin your career again, would you still want to be a college professor?

	All faculty	social science	political science
Definitely yes	54.4%	53	48.7
Probably yes	31.4	32.2	34.3
Probably no	6.1	7.3	12
Definitely no	3.1	2.6	2.2
Missing	5.1	4.9	2.8
n	1645	539	61

The small n for our field invites caution, and in any event political scientists remain somewhat less satisfied than other academics. Further, we must acknowledge that after enormous sunk costs in earning a PhD and tenure, professors may be reluctant to admit a mistaken career choice (Menand 2010). Nonetheless, the results in Table 1 suggest far more job satisfaction in 1999 than in the 1970s. Nearly nine of ten political scientists report being satisfied with their careers. Despite the critical nature of academic culture, in which contentment is often mistaken for shallowness, 83% of our colleagues would choose the same career again, more than three times the percentage found by Roettger in 1976. Assuming comparable samples and survey design, what accounts for the difference over time?

Since 1999 was pre-Perestroika, reforms within Political Science cannot account for our improved collective disposition. Quite possibly, Roettger's findings were an artifact of the mid and late 1970s. As Menand (2010, 144-45) writes of social science and humanities professors generally, from the 1940s through about 1970 academia boomed. Capable job candidates typically enjoyed multiple offers. Then, in the early 1970s, everything changed. A rapid increase in the number of PhDs met a sharp and sudden downturn in the job market:

Between 1945 and 1975, the number of American undergraduates increased 500 percent, but the number of graduate students increased by nearly 900 percent. On

the one hand, a doctorate was harder to get; on the other, it became less valuable because the market began to be flooded with PhDs.¹

As Menand reports, at the very time when higher standards meant that it took longer than ever to earn a PhD, new PhDs were no longer assured academic jobs at the end of an often decade long penance in graduate school. Those who did earn a tenure track post faced increased demands to publish since in a poor job market, they could be easily replaced. Both in the hiring and in pre-tenure processes, the simple numbers game increased the demands that job candidates and junior faculty conform to departmental norms, reducing ideological diversity within the academy. Academics, as it turns out, are like other employers. Faced with large numbers of well qualified job applicants, they tend to select and promote people who are just like themselves (Menand 2010; Klein and Stern 2009). Menand (153) argues that the desperate condition of graduate students on the job market led to implicit, but nonetheless very strong pressures to conform to group norms: "The academic profession in some areas is not reproducing itself so much as cloning itself." The poor academic job market meant that many graduates of highly ranked PhD programs were under-placed, and often unhappy about it. The poor market also severely limited geographic mobility, stranding some professors in regions they thought of as far from culture and far from home. As Menand (150) observes of the academic condition broadly, "Job satisfaction is actually higher among PHDs with non-academic careers than it is among academics, partly because spousal problems---commuting marriages---are not as great outside academia."

The good news, as detailed by Masuoka et al (2007), is that, by the mid 1980s, Political Science seemed to have adjusted to the new normal. After PhD production tripled in the 1950s and then doubled in both the 1960s and 1970s, it declined substantially in the early and mid 1980s before increasing at a sustainable pace (about 3% annually) in the late 1980s and 1990s. Disproportionate numbers of PhDs are now and always have been produced by a handful of elite universities. Further, through the period Political Science programs seemingly grew more proficient at placing students in non-academic posts (Masuoka et al 2007, 363). As Davis (2002) documents of the 1998-2002 period, the number of jobs for political scientists and the number of new PhDs produced were each in the 1,000 range at the turn of the century, and PhD granting departments typically reported 70-80% placement rates, though many of these were in temporary posts.

In short, we suspect that political scientists are happier now than in the 1970s not because the field has become more or less applied or more or less uniform, but rather since their job prospects have improved. Further, as any perusal of *PS* shows, over the past 30 years those entering the field are socialized early on into accepting the new normal of Political Science personnel markets: If you get a PhD from a good department you will probably get a job, though probably not a prestigious job and almost certainly not where you want it (e.g., Simien 2002; Cohen 2002). We suspect that diminished (and realistic) expectations explain greater job satisfaction. In short, changes in personnel markets and personnel management have improved our collective well-being.

¹ For a hilarious novel chronicling essentially the same phenomenon in Britain, see David Lodge's *Nice Work*.

The Case for Strategic Planning---But Not Unification

In short, data suggest that state of our field is not as dire as some would have it, or indeed as *we* had it in our plan for this paper. Yet that is very different from saying that all is optimal. We argue that a serious problem within academia generally and relatively non-applied fields like Political Science in particular is the relative inability of those in the field to see the big picture of how their field supports or at least should support humanity, or as Downs (1967) puts it, an ideology of how the profession improves society. Just as "where there is no vision, the people perish"², without a public interest ethic, professions are apt to become irrelevant at best, corrupt at worst. Indeed the lead author of this paper worked with government executives in the Clinton years and was reminded of this almost daily. Government executives, both career and political, both liberal and conservative, frequently speculate as to whether particular agency practices serve a broader public interest, and how to better align agency practices with the needs of taxpayers (Maranto 2005). Such discussions are unusual, to say the least, among political science professors, who seem far more concerned about pay raises and teaching loads, just as critics like Ricci and Jacoby suggest.

The relative absence of a mission leads to two contradictory tendencies within Political Science, each dysfunctional in its own way. First, as lamented by Ricci (1984) behaviorists have by and large eschewed a direct role influencing politics, instead producing theory driven works of social science. As Jacoby (1987) writes, the same can be said of leftists in the academy. These authors blame the incentives of academic bureaucracies, which reward narrow scholarly publication rather than affecting policy. Particularly for junior faculty, time is a scarce resource. Scholarly publication helps one earn tenure; writing newspaper op-eds or working in campaigns does not. Critics like Joseph Nye (Cohen 2009) and Cohn (1999), among others, also blame the temptation of quantitative methods and mathematical models, which have, as Nye puts it, pushed the field "in the direction of saying more and more about less and less" (quoted in Cohen 2009, C7). Save in certain public policy or public administration programs, graduate training seems to focus one's thinking and vocabulary away from applied concerns. As John Pitney (1990, 443) tartly put it:

Graduate school trains young scholars to think and write in ways that will get them published in major journals. While this training has great value, it sometimes has the side effect of leaving political scientists unable to communicate with anybody but other political scientists.

Of course the same could be said of economics and psychology, which are at last as quantitative as our field. The difference, as Stark (2002) points out, is that these fields are inherently applied and thus have very different relationships with the real world. Most members of the American Psychological Association and roughly half of the American Economic Association are non-academics, compared to only 25% of the

² Proverbs 29:18, *King James Bible*.

APSA, and fewer still among our field's leaders. It strikes us that the relative absence of political science from political activities impoverishes both the field and political life. As it stands, if a terrorist bomb or wayward plane killed all attendees at the annual APA or AEA meetings, there would be significant social costs to economic management in the one case and to treatment of the sick in the other. On the other hand, should such a fate befall attendees of APSA, only our loved ones would grieve.

Second, particularly on the left but occasionally (as the case of Straussians) on the right, some political scientists conceive of their roles as, in the old Progressive sense, philosopher kings and queens guiding public policy. For most prominent political scientists, issues of equality trump concerns about freedom. For example, in the outstanding collection of 100 essays by leaders in the field addressing the future of Political Science (King et al 2009, xvi), four of the nine categories of essays address either equality or social movements. Only one essay (Eric Nelson's, on pp. 121-22) addresses classical liberal concerns. It is thus not surprising that the work of the APSA's Task Force on *American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality* is among the latest manifestations of such efforts. Unfortunately, as figures as diverse as Popper (1945), Lindblom (1959), Lindblom and Cohen (1979), Wildavsky (1972, 1987), and Ostrom (1973) point out, there is a certain danger in those who have relatively little ideological diversity, relatively little real world experience, relatively little input from other actors, and limited and often dated data having such power. Regarding this report in particular, see Weissberg (2006). Even if these efforts are empirically sound, the committees undertaking them seem unlikely to represent a broad range of values. Lacking descriptive representation, they will lack legitimacy outside the narrow confines of the ivory tower. After all, Republicans (and moderate Democrats) may find little reason to trust findings from an APSA task force; just as women might question a report from an all male commission on gender discrimination, or the traditionally religious might question a report on religion in public life written by secular intellectuals (Ceaser and Maranto 2009).

The crux of the issue, then, is how to make Political Science relevant but not authoritative, applied but diverse. We believe that we can best pursue this goal by understanding how the field's internal operations and external constituencies relate (or fail to relate). Strategic planning offers one approach, or rather set of approaches, for doing so. Strategic planning usually represents a political and analytical attempt to align an organization and its environment. Key to strategic planning is operationalizing an organization's values by aligning its goals and missions with external forces (such as opportunities or threats) and internal strengths and weaknesses. Inherently political, strategic planning can serve to clarify and come to judgment while also considering new opportunities and employing analytic techniques. Strategic planning typically uses benchmarking, finding similar organizations for comparison and showing members how their organization compares; thus strategic planning has an educational function. Basic steps in the planning cycle typically include:

Identify vision, values, and mission; Develop long range strategic plan; Develop operational plans and measurable objectives; Implement those plans; Monitor and evaluate operations

The lead author of this work was once very skeptical of strategic planning since such exercises are often an elaborate, ritualized waste of time.³ As a result of his time in government, he now sees its potential value. Done well, strategic planning can clarify what an organization does, how it does it, and how it might do it better. This is particularly important to those new to the organization, who often arrive with little idea of its purpose and its funders. A common variant of pre-planning exercises are SWOT analyses outlining organization Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats which may affect its markets (Bryson 1995; Wheeland 2004; Carnevale 1998; Brown and Brown 1998).

Exercises like strategic planning usually focus on a specific organization---not a whole profession. Yet the basic approach can be applied since even a profession as diverse as ours has external funders (markets) who must be convinced that it is succeeding at something, as well as organizational competitors, ideologies, and standards (Downs 1967).

How a Strategic Plan Might Look

A proposed mission statement. We propose that in order to better serve America and the world, the APSA should take stock of its strengths and weaknesses, improving the latter while more sensibly aligning the former to better educate our students, graduate students, policy-makers, the media, and the broader public. Second, Political Science should not strive toward uniformity, but rather in a diverse world, should model relationships between those of diverse political values and methodological approaches.

Strengths. The greatest strength of American Political Science is its well trained and highly intelligent corps of professors, with significant infrastructure in the form of hundreds of reasonably well resourced academic departments, as well as substantial contingents among university administrators and policy-makers. A second strength is our links with government and private funding agencies, and with media sources that can disseminate findings. A third strength is our substantial applied job market, though we have seen this more as a way to place our students than as a way to learn. An additional strength includes our relative ideological and methodological pluralism, which leads to yet another strength, significant knowledge about how political life works. Related to this are our relationships with fields like Sociology, Psychology, History, and Economics, which allow us to bring more analytic tools to bear on problems (Ceaser and Maranto 2009; Almond 1988; Merelman 2003). Indeed quite a number of APSA presidents earned their doctorates in such fields (Lowi 1985).

³ My playful colleague George Denny suggests that on entering a meeting each professor should swipe his or her ID card on a box on the door, recording their participation. A meetings software package could then sum the combined salaries of attendees and post a running total of how many public dollars the meeting cost. This would likely encourage greater efficiency. I would urge colleges to adopt the Denny method.

We propose to use these strengths to engage with government, not to push for specific policies (save regarding education, as noted below), but rather as Wildavsky (1972, 1987) and Lindblom and Cohen (1979) have argued, to assure that all sides in social and political debates are well armed with data. A good example is the role played by political scientists in promoting (*e.g.*, Chubb and Moe 1990) and criticizing (*e.g.*, Smith and Meier 1995) school choice policies. Over time, the debate between supporters and opponents of choice seems to be providing valuable insights which we would not have learned in the event of premature or contrived consensus. To better fill this role we should address the large dog that doesn't bark on Americans college campuses: the near absence of formal debate, and relative scarcity even of informal debates in hallways and food courts. We will model the role of reasoned inquiry and debate in our courses and on our campuses, where we will sponsor and take part in the debates of the day, from affirmative action to gay marriage to tax rates to the wars overseas, without fear that taking an unpopular side could expose one to ridicule, loss of tenure or promotion, or years of teaching 8:00 a.m. classes. Bringing back debate would make universities more enjoyable and intellectually engaged places, and also demonstrate that political scientists hold a genuine commitment to tolerance toward those with whom they disagree. In effect, we are urging Political Science to model good politics for the rest of the polity. Amazingly, such campus debates are now rare, and there is at least anecdotal evidence that some political scientists fear expressing unpopular views. Conservatives fear that exposing their political views will affect tenure, promotion, which courses and students one is assigned, and simple acceptance from one's peers (Maranto 2007; 2010; Ceaser and Maranto 2009). For social justice theorists, fear of political debate may well reflect concerns about enraging outside agitators like David Horowitz (2006) and their student supporters. We believe that it is time for our field to reach beyond its fears, and to systematize policy debates in order to better inform policy-makers and make our colleges and universities more intellectual. This would make our field more fun, increase our legitimacy to policy-makers and to the broader public, and recruit more intellectually engaged students. There are clearly some prominent political scientists who enjoy the interplay of ideas, are secure enough to publicly defend their ideas, and tolerate colleagues they disagree with. It is not clear, however, whether such attitudes and behaviors are widely represented on the APSA Council.

Building Bridges to Practice. A weakness is the relative absence of practitioners from our field (Stark 2002; Jacoby 1987). It seems to us that one way to overcome this would be to increase the number of visiting positions in departments to be held by former policy-makers. From a personnel standpoint, this would increase administrative flexibility when enrollments surge or decline, without endangering commitments to tenured and tenure track professors. More importantly, employing more practitioners would strengthen our understanding of applied politics, and place our undergraduates in jobs, while exposing members of the political class to university based analytic techniques. It is perhaps notable that among the most successful and insightful political science academics (*e.g.*, William Galston, Donna Shalala, and John DiIulio) have held policy-making or campaign positions, and such highly regarded university teachers as Mickey Edwards and Fred Harris previously served in government. A revolving door between applied and academic political science might lead to more understanding across

sectors, and fewer calls from senators questioning our field's existence, as Oklahoma Republican Tom Coburn recently did (Cohen 2009). Accordingly, we recommend that mid-sized and larger departments create visiting professorships for practitioners. Often, such posts can be externally funded, again aiding administrative flexibility.

A secondary way to overcome the gulf between practice and academe would be to increase the ease with which a PhD is earned. Menand (2010, 151) argues that since it takes only three years to become a lawyer and four years to become a doctor, it is not abundantly clear why the journey to a typical social science or liberal arts PhD should approach a decade. Not so long ago, the trip was far shorter. Menand makes a good case that making PhDs easier to get would decrease the power senior faculty hold over graduate students and junior faculty by reducing their sunk costs in the degree. This would make academia freer, and more diverse. Similarly, Woessner and Kelly-Woessner (2009) maintain that lessening the opportunity cost of earning a PhD would increase both gender and ideological diversity in the field. Of course since most of the leaders in the field presumably did well in graduate school and did stay the distance, they might not see the need for this sort of reform.

Graduate Students and Junior Faculty. Most objective observers would describe existing graduate training and mentoring of junior faculty as suboptimal. Though we know of no widely available statistics, it seems likely that most who start PhD programs do not finish, and that many of those who do finish and find tenure track positions do not succeed in those posts. As Table 1 shows, a non-trivial percentage of those who stay in the field are not happy with their choice of careers. Here, we argue that we need to treat entrance into Political Science as any other personnel matter. For any job, certain psychological characteristics seem likely to predict success (Condrey 1998; Berman et al 2009). We propose that APSA set up a personnel management task force to determine what characteristics make a political scientist happy and productive. This could enable graduate programs to better inform prospective students as to their prospects for success. Ultimately such efforts could reduce our failure rates. To take an obvious example, much of the work of faculty is fundamentally extraverted work, teaching and service. Yet the requirements to succeed at writing a dissertation are solitary diligence, characteristics more likely found in introverts. This does not mean that introverted graduate students cannot become successful teachers; nor that extroverts cannot become successful researchers. It does mean, however, that those embarking on the career should both know the work and know themselves even before attending graduate school. Such tests as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can provide information as to personal characteristics which bear on individual happiness and success in a typical professorial workplace (Berman et al 2009). We need to advise future students accordingly. Interestingly, these sorts of basic personnel issues are only hinted at by the report of the APSA's Task Force on Graduate Education (APSA 2004).

A second way that we can make the lives of graduate students and junior faculty more bearable is by **making departments more transparent**. There is no reason why APSA should not survey students and faculty at mid-sized and large departments to measure the organizational climate, and to report means for key items on the web. We should likewise

disseminate department level information on faculty turnover, since high levels of turnover indicate non-trusting environments. Further, high turnover departments may have difficulty serving their students. Over time, reporting department level attributes of this type could decrease the sort of unprofessional behavior which we have witnessed at certain colleges. This would give department chairs and heads incentives to eschew Machiavellian behavior, having an enormous impact on certain colleges and universities.

To explore these areas, APSA must empower a task force on personnel policy and power within political science departments. APSA should employ annual surveys of members to measure their job satisfaction as part of a long term program of research to study the causes of success, and promote successful policies. Our members and future members deserve no less. Currently APSA has 14 task force reports, committee reports, and ad hoc committee reports on its web site (See http://www.apsanet.org/content_4579.cfm; http://www.apsanet.org/content_6827.cfm). These include four on housekeeping matters such as APSA elections and investments, four on race and gender issues, and one each on indiscipline, America's standing in the world, inequality, participation, and graduate education. We maintain that APSA must put more emphasis on personnel policy and power to better serve its members, so a task force on this subject is needed.

Undergraduates. The chief weaknesses of Political Science lie in the character of our markets and how we serve those markets. Taking a strategic planning approach, one might say that the market for Political Science, that is the social mission it serves, includes government grant givers and the media. These savvy consumers we serve well. Unfortunately, there is also a less powerful, more ignorant, and in sum more lucrative set of consumers that we might or might not serve well, our largely pre-law undergraduates. Though we have no data on this, folklore suggests that for a time the pre-law cash cow served our field well. While the percentage of liberal arts and Sociology majors declined through the 1970s and 1980s, Political Science did reasonably well in part because of the pre-law boom, fueled in part by the overstated impression that lawyers are well paid, and by the glamour associated with *LA Law* and other pop culture depictions of the field.⁴ Those in our field seemingly did little to advise pre-law students that Political Science was not necessarily a better pre-law major than English, Economics, History, or Philosophy. To our knowledge our field has not systematically examined the relative advantages of different pre-law majors, even though our social mission suggests that we should do so.

Generally, APSA seems to have never systematically studied how well we are serving our undergraduates over the long term. In a world of Facebook and SurveyMonkey, it should not be difficult to divine over time whether those graduating in our field see their undergraduate major as playing an important role in either their economic or social success five years after graduation. Without baseline data on this, we cannot know how well our profession serves society, nor which parts of our profession are most and least effective, nor how to improve. Amazingly, APSA has issued numerous reports over the

⁴ In the 1980s an attorney I know often peevishly counseled pre-law students that "I like *Star Trek*, but it doesn't mean I'm applying to Starfleet academy!"

years, but none on this issue. Increasingly, we have the ability to ask and perhaps answer such basic questions as whether our graduates (relative to graduates from other majors) have the basic knowledge they need as citizens, and the basic skills they need such as the ability to write well. Right now, we are not asking these questions, and we should.⁵

Again, **APSA should empower a task force on undergraduate education** to match the existing task force on graduate education. Unlike the graduate education task force, the new one should emphasize research, measurement, and ultimately benchmarking. This is an important area, and funders (quite possibly from the U.S. Department of Education) will likely be willing to provide the resources to examine it systematically.

Over the long term, if we do not study whether we serve the long term interests of our undergraduates and how to improve on that score, there is more than a little danger that other academic fields will begin to take our territory, with no loss of social utility.

Serving Society. We wish to propose two additional opportunities to be explored by the proposed APSA undergraduate education task force. There is widespread agreement, backed by no small empirical support, that the American people do not know as much as is desirable to assure good decisions about what policies to support and what candidates to vote for. So long as this is the case politicians will have to run relatively simplistic campaigns, doing their best to gain support from the voters that we educators provide (Popkin 1994; Galston 2003). Recently much attention has focused on the fifth of Americans who believe that their president is Muslim (*e.g.*, Brummett, 2010). This is small beer. Past survey work has found that roughly half of U.S. citizens think that their government is hiding aliens (Dean 1998). Nearly a third believe that 9-11 was an inside job. Pluralities of African Americans think that the government invented the AIDS virus to foster genocide (Turner 1993). Democratic and Republican voters have contrary and equally fantastic beliefs about where public money goes (Kettl and Fesler, 2005, 32), and Americans feel subjective unease in the face of objective progress on such matters as pollution, crime prevention, and health (Easterbrook 2003). In the short run ignorance causes alienation; in the long run it will spawn more Unibombers. It also makes it near impossible for politicians to either raise taxes to support our public sector commitments, or scale down those commitments in a realistic manner, as politicians from Arnold Schwarzenegger to Barack Obama privately lament. Related to this, citizens cannot understand the language used by policy-makers unless they have the basic core knowledge which policy-makers share, particularly regarding recent U.S. history.

Civic education typically focuses on the structures of American government, matters such as the separation of powers and the Bill of Rights. These are very important, and there is evidence that colleges do a very poor job imparting this basic knowledge. Surveys indicate that at many elite colleges, first year students have greater civic knowledge than seniors (Intercollegiate Studies Association 2010). Yet we argue that basic knowledge about such matters as where public resources come from and go to, and what government can and cannot do, are even more important.

⁵ The APSA's *Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century*, which in theory should be asking these sorts of questions, does not seem to be doing so and in any event has very limited representation from non-research universities. (See http://www.apsanet.org/content_60076.cfm.)

Accordingly, we propose that APSA begin a dialogue with former policy-makers to divine what they feel American voters need to know. In the absence of such data, we propose that to be good citizens students have three broad sets of knowledge about how government officials operate:

1. Where public resources go (chiefly to middle class entitlement spending).
2. How government actors make decisions in highly constrained, limited information environments, and accordingly why with the best of intentions, they often make mistakes.
3. How elite and popular interpretations of past historical periods and events (the Depression, World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam) guide the language and thought of policy-makers (e.g., Jervis 1976).

Without this background knowledge, citizens cannot understand how their government (mostly) works. As it happens, our field is well positioned to teach undergraduates this basic knowledge they need to make good decisions about public life.

To get the opportunity to impart this basic knowledge to students, **APSA should lobby for universities to require undergraduates to take both intro American government and intro comparative government as degree requirements.** Further, we should make efforts to standardize at least some of the basic knowledge covered in these courses, after seeking input from policy-makers of each major political party.

This would increase the demand for political science courses, while at the same time serving pressing social and political needs.

Related to this, for a range of reasons there is substantial evidence that the relative ignorance of voters reflects failings of K-12 schooling as well as post-secondary education. Zimmerman (2002), Ravitch (2003), and Chubb and Moe (1990) suggest that political pressures produce bland curricula, leaving students ill-informed. Hirsch (1996, 2009) offers substantial evidence that public ignorance results in part from the organization and ideology of traditional colleges of education, which train and credential the vast majority of American public school teachers, and which eschew subject matter knowledge. Accordingly, we propose that APSA take a more active role in the training and certification of middle and high school teachers, as is typical in European school systems which seem to do better at producing informed electorates. Again, this would almost certainly increase the demand for our services, while also serving society. There is, after all, nothing wrong with doing well by doing good. And can anyone make the case that influencing the education of the electorate is less important than training future attorneys?

Conclusion: Towards Social Utility

In short, Political Science is hardly the sort of tragedy that some suggest. Since the 1970s our field has recovered from abysmal levels of job satisfaction to reach a solidly acceptable new normal. Our field boasts incredibly talented people, diverse methodologies, and even some social and ideological diversity. Nonetheless, we find reasons to believe that our field is serving both its members and its host society in a

suboptimal fashion. We do not do a sufficiently proficient job of protecting and advising future and junior members of the field, and have given little systematic thought as to what makes a happy and productive political scientist. Equally important, given the considerable talent of our members, we underperform in both policy influence and undergraduate education, and have insufficient links with practitioners. Over the long term we can improve this condition through the following steps:

1. APSA should not take positions on contentious political issues, but should instead foster debate on those issues, modeling how a tolerant, well functioning democracy might operate.
2. Political Science departments should build bridges to the world of practitioners through increased use of practitioner faculty, and perhaps through additional steps such as enlarging the APSA Council.
3. APSA should empower a task force on personnel policy and power within political science departments. This would do research to measure the characteristics needed for success in the field, use this knowledge to better advise and protect graduate students and junior faculty, and attempt to make departmental level politics more transparent, humane, and professional.
4. APSA should empower a task force on undergraduate education, which should hold a broad portfolio given the importance of this area. APSA should seek external funding for a long term research program on undergraduate education. Among other things, this task force should:
 - a. Systematically study how well we serve our undergraduates, in search of means of improvement.
 - b. Propose the elements of basic knowledge needed for effective citizens, and study how effectively we teach these elements.
 - c. Lobby for colleges and universities to require introductory political science classes to develop civic knowledge.
 - d. Lobby to increase our role in teacher training, to assure a more policy competent electorate.

In all of these efforts, we should use reasonable quantitative and qualitative benchmarks wherever possible, and should show flexibility as to means and ends. If the right set of policies results, our field might keep its rigor while losing its irrelevance, becoming a model for academia.

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