

Perceptions of Value

In 1969, authors of *The Behavioral and Social Sciences: Outlook and Needs*, a joint report of the National Academy of Sciences and the Social Science Research Council, observed, "The rate of growth of the behavioral and social sciences will depend on the wisdom and foresight with which they are organized and funded, but whatever the temporary perturbations, these disciplines will continue to develop both as sciences in their own right and as aids in the handling of social problems" (261). This issue of *PS* examines the public value of political science research, demonstrating that over the course of the past 30 years political science as a discipline has continued to develop as a science as predicted and has contributed in significant ways to our collective understanding of human behavior and institutions.

It is unfortunate that contributions of political science research often go unrecognized, or, worse yet, are denigrated as little more than conventional wisdom rewritten in an esoteric vocabulary. The reason for this misunderstanding is not hard to find, according to the authors of the NAS/SSRC report. Political science, like the other social sciences, addresses complex social behavior and problems to which policymakers and the public would like simple explanations and ready solutions. When neither is forthcoming from political scientists, policymakers discount the value of the research done and oppose increasing public investment in political science research.

As the articles in this issue of *PS* clearly demonstrate, political scientists have been investigating behavior and institutions in international and domestic settings, closely examining how and why nations, communities, and individual citizens respond to the changing worlds in which they live. As articulated by the symposium authors, these studies are not merely academic exercises; they have broad social applicability and value.

In recent years, the political science program of the National Science Foundation has received only token increases while other disciplines have been generously rewarded for their reputed contributions and alleged intellectual excitement. There are new possibilities for change, however.

Addressing an audience at the California Institute of Technology on January 21, 2000, President Clinton first announced his intention to ask Congress to approve a \$2.8 billion increase in federal research funds. The National Science Foundation would, under the Clinton plan, receive an additional \$675 million for Fiscal Year 2000, the largest dollar increase in its 50 year history. There are signs from within the National Science Foundation that the budget of the political science program may increase significantly.

However, the budget of the traditional political science research program will probably not expand markedly. The National Science Foundation is likely to focus new

Symposium Contributors

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spending on broad, interdisciplinary initiatives encompassing such areas as nanotechnology, biocomplexity, and information technology. The relevance of these research arenas to political science remains an open question and a challenge for the discipline. Whatever the level of funding, NSF's programmatic spending will be affected by the perceived public value of political science research. The conventional measure of the public value of a science and technology is its contribution to economic growth and public health. Since political science research will likely never spawn a new generation of dot coms nor increase longevity, a finer instrument is needed to appreciate its value. This symposium, so expertly gathered and introduced by Skip Lupia, clearly affirms the public value of political science research and provides ample justification for continued and expanded public and private investment

Further justification for the need for continued and expanded investment in social science research echoes

through the president's concluding remarks at Cal Tech.

Observing that genomic research has confirmed that the peoples of the world are 99.9% genetically the same, Clinton concluded that the supreme irony of our time is that "the biggest social problem is the oldest demon of human society—we are still afraid of people who aren't like us. And fear leads to distrust, and distrust leads to dehumanization, and dehumanization leads to violence." The dynamics of human social and political behavior and the institutional arrangements within which this behavior takes place is the stuff of political science and its sister disciplines. That mankind is still beset by old demons is argument enough for expanding the search among the social sciences for explanations and solutions.

RJPH

Attention Current and Recent Doctoral Students

Ever wonder how your graduate school experience compares to those of others? Curious which political science department has the best faculty mentoring? The worst career guidance? So are we. The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) is conducting "The National Doctoral Program Survey" (<http://survey.nagps.org/>), a department-by-department assessment of educational and professional development practices and graduate student satisfaction in all academic fields, including political science. The survey is funded by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and is being supported by over 50 professional societies, including the APSA.

The survey will compile the experiences of doctoral students, present and past (any time within the last five years), on a department-specific basis to determine which programs are doing a great job of educating and preparing Ph.D.s – and which need to improve. Rankings and results of individual programs will be publicly available on the Internet by Fall 2000.

Go to the survey web site (<http://survey.nagps.org/>) before June 1, 2000, to complete the survey. A significant percentage of students must respond for the results to represent a broad range of experiences and produce a realistic picture of department and institutional practices. A high response rate is essential, so every current and recent doctoral student should fill it out. Encourage all your friends and colleagues to complete the survey as well. This is your opportunity to open the doors to your department and to praise or pan local practices. Completing the survey only takes a few minutes but can stimulate change in graduate education for years to come.

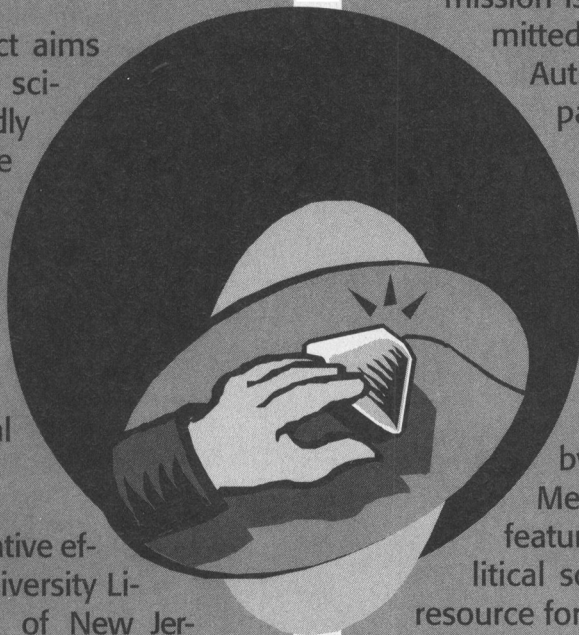
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