

Overall, the results of the survey seem to indicate that the *APSR* Book Review does as well or better than some book review sections and not as well as others in providing a finished product that is useful to readers and writers. Since political science does not have a separate journal for book reviews, such as sociology and psychology, the discipline lacks the same access to authoritative reviews of its literature. Far fewer books are reviewed and less space is devoted to reviewing by the *APSR* than by the major journal in history. A particular area of concern, and one the *APSR* Book Review is working hard to improve, is timeliness. It is imperative that books are reviewed as quickly as possible after they are published so that the discipline is informed about recent scholarship. Doing so is difficult because time is required to invite and commission a potential reviewer and to allow the reviewer to complete the task. The six to nine month lag time inherent in the submission/publication process adds an additional delay in timely reviews of books.

The performance of the *APSR* in reviewing books may well be a reflection of the relative importance in conveying scholarship of books as compared with journal articles. Clearly historians place rather more stock in authoring books than do political scientists. In contrast with the social sciences, the art of criticism has greater stature in the humanities where the ability to fashion an incisive and witty critique is a significant professional asset. Even so, political scientists have a definite interest in the quality of the *APSR* Book Review Section since it is the most widely read part of the journal.

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Applied Political Science: Bridging the Gap or A Bridge Too Far?

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I. Introduction

We can all point to examples of a political scientist turned market researcher, a political scientist turned government employee, or a political scientist turned shoe salesman, and so on. Yet rarely does a political scientist seem to get hired in the public or private sectors *because* he or she is a political scientist.

Many other disciplines—and not just the “hard” sciences—have done a better job of bridging the gap between the theoretical and the applied within their professions and in helping their members move back and forth between applied and theoretical settings without losing their sense of professional identity, connection, or esteem.

Political scientists must begin to rethink the relationship between theory and practice if we want the discipline to grow and expand, and if we want greater recognition for the work we do and the work we are capable of doing both within and without colleges and universities.

This paper makes several suggestions for bridging the gap between theory and practice. It suggests that political science research and theory should move beyond description of political phenomena and focus more on developing real world predictive models. And, it argues that political scientists in applied settings should help develop these models as well as incorporate them in their work. Finally, it argues that “doing political science” or being a political scientist should be more a state of mind than a place of employment. Political scientists need to develop a sense of professional identity that transcends occupa-

tional boundaries and labels and overcomes the "real world/ivory tower" dichotomy—an unnecessary and undesirable distinction.

II. Why Bridge The Gap?

Bridging the gap between theory and practice is important for the discipline for several reasons. First, it will enhance the profession's identity and esteem, externally and internally. This should, in turn, attract more people to the field. As we move beyond the perception that the only thing you can do with a political science degree is teach, professional opportunities should become more abundant.

Second, theories will more accurately reflect reality. Theory has a role to play in applied political science as much as any

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other avenue of the discipline. Applied political scientists have unique insights for developing, validating, and testing both empirical and normative theories. These regular participant-observers of the profession can enhance the relevance of political theory as well as evaluate theoretical applications from other disciplines.

Third, practitioners who understand theory should understand politics and policymaking better than those who don't know theory. This will help make political scientists more important to the media, as interpreters of political phenomena, to the business community which wants to understand how politics and policy impact their industries, and politicians and other policymakers who want to better understand political and policy processes.

Fourth, bridging the gap will offer substantial contributions to public sector, private sector, and political decisionmaking

processes. We have already noted the importance of bridging the gap between the academicians and applied political scientists in the interest of better theory. There are other levels at which training in the discipline can be a plus. A scholarly approach to politics and policy can facilitate decision-making that is better informed and more systematic. Political scientists can offer a variety of analytical tools, from research design, to data collection, to qualitative and quantitative methods. There also may be advantages over other disciplines in our experience with slippery research questions and soft data. And because of a unique understanding of decisionmaking processes, political scientists may be especially skilled at providing politicians and policymakers with ideas that are more digestible and, for lack of a better term, more relevant.

III. Not Another Call For Relevance

Those of you with a theoretical bent might be thinking at this point, "Please, not another call for us to come out of our 'ivory towers' and get our hands dirty in real world politics. Not another call for relevance. Not another call to take to the streets, to the wards, or the the smoke-filled rooms." No, as a matter of fact, stay right where you are. We need you there and we need your theories.

Political science research logically falls into three areas. First, a political phenomenon must be described. Second, it must be explained. Yet as a cursory review of our scholarly journals reveals, many political scientists seem to be fixated on these first two areas—description and explanation. In order for our research to have more relevance we need to take the next step—to prediction. What makes our work relevant, interesting, and useful to the outside world should be our ability to answer political and policy questions better than anyone else.

What does it take to predict the outcomes of a Congressional election? What new regulations will be adopted by a state regulatory agency? Who will be the next President? What steps must an interest

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group take to pass or defeat a piece of legislation or to change an administrative policy?

If theoretical and applied political scientists were to both think of themselves as involved in the predictive process, much the way a theoretical chemist and a clinician both engage in the search for a cancer cure, the discipline would benefit from a greater understanding of political phenomena, as well as outside recognition and enhanced professional membership.

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But this new state of mind must transcend occupational boundaries. We need a common sense of identity, a cadre of people who think of themselves as political scientists regardless of their place of employment. There is no reason why the discipline cannot be devoted to both the development of theory and the application of theory in the world of politics and policy. There is no reason why the discipline cannot support members devoted to these equally important endeavors.

Political science, then, is not a matter of only what one does or where one does it, but a sense of what this discipline is all about, and where our work fits in.

IV. Promoting Applied Political Science

No doubt, we could do more to promote applied political science. The burden of doing so rests on practitioners in both academic and applied settings. Bridging the gap cannot be a one-way endeavor.

The academic community can go a long way in promoting the application of the discipline. Though we do not advocate tinkering with the academic curriculum in political science, because of the risks to the discipline's identity, we would emphasize the need for graduate training that encom-

passes application as well as theory, prediction as well as description or explanation, and participation as well as observation.

To this end, universities could encourage applied research and methodology and provide opportunities for dialog among teaching and non-teaching colleagues. They could also encourage internships, provide continued support for Ph.D. candidates working in applied settings, and be more realistic about career goals and job placement for graduates.

Perhaps most important is for the academic community to not perpetuate the unfortunate but all too common notion of the applied political scientist as a second-class member of the discipline. There is a particular need for greater recognition in tenure and promotion decisions of applied experience. Often, when an academician takes a leave to work in government, politics or the private sector, there are few professional rewards upon returning to an academic environment.

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For their part, political scientists who reside outside of the academy need to keep up with the discipline, try to contribute to its thought and literature, and seek out opportunities to interact with colleagues. Political scientists in the public and private sectors need to work harder to develop and maintain a sense of professional identity along with their academic counterparts and avoid the tendency to "drift away" from the discipline. They must also learn to market their abilities,

create a demand for their talents, compete successfully with members of other disciplines, and seek positions of responsibility and authority within governments and other organizational bodies.

Membership associations are critical to professional identity. For this reason, the American Political Science Association (APSA) has an important role to play in promoting applied political science. The APSA can play a leadership role in bridging the gap between the theoretical and applied sectors of the discipline and encouraging a common identification among diverse members. The scholarly journals and professional meetings of the Association are the key vehicles for achieving these goals.

The Applied Political Science Section sponsored five panels at the 1988 Annual Meeting in Washington and will continue to encourage this dialog in appropriate forums.

Too often we just stop talking to each other. Political scientists working in academic settings are correct when they say their colleagues who leave academia leave more than a college or university; many times they leave the discipline. On the other hand, many who leave the discipline do so because after leaving an academic setting they feel no role, sense of professional recognition, or esteem. They also lack the automatic and regular interaction with other political scientists that one has in an academic department. This is where the Association and the meetings can fill a professional void.

In sum, theoreticians need to spend more time conforming their theories with reality and practitioners need to spend more time integrating theories with their work. And all political scientists need to foster a common sense of professional identity. These goals can be given higher priority by the APSA in two of the major ways we "talk" to each other; our journals and our professionals meetings.

V. Conclusion

We have argued for the importance of bridging the gap between theory and practice in political science and the promotion

of "applied political science" as a way to bridge this gap.

We need more political scientists in academic and applied settings who think of themselves as political scientists—experts in describing, explaining *and* predicting political phenomena. If confined only to academic settings, doing only non-predictive research, the discipline will become a social science cockerspaniel—overly inbred and increasingly unpopular. Conversely, members of the discipline in applied settings must keep abreast of their academic counterparts, lest they lose the scholarly touch.

Political science research in academic settings should become more predictive in nature if we want it to be of interest to broader audiences. Researchers should think of their colleagues outside colleges and universities as resources to test and refine their research. We repeat: as colleagues, not as those who have left the profession.

Those outside the context of a college or university need to work diligently in applying political science theory to their work, and to encourage and participate in the development of predictive theories if none exist. This will encourage more useful theories and help political scientists outside the academic setting to maintain their link to the profession.

Bridging the gap between theory and practice, encouraging a greater sense of professional identity among political scientists, and providing broader recognition for political science to the outside world will not be easy. But these tasks do pose an interesting challenge for the discipline and goals we certainly can *all* strive for.

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