

An Invitation to Respond: Letter to Association Members, Robert E. Lane, President

I have taken a leave of absence in Washington this year to see if I can help the Association develop several programs that seem to me important. This open letter is an invitation to colleagues throughout the discipline to send me ideas and suggestions useful in framing and funding these (and other) programs.

The first area of interest I would like to develop is the discipline's program of undergraduate instruction. It seems to me that some imaginative and searching examination and improvement of laboratory courses, tutorial instruction, training in fundamental modes of analysis, and introductory courses, among others, is currently important. The first step, I believe, is to locate successful experiments to ascertain why they are successful, and to disseminate information about them. Please send me information about such instructional programs.

The second area has to do with the analysis of national and local public policies. Our discipline should improve its capacity for broad gauged and specialized critiques of policies, informed statements of counter-policies, technical policy analysis, and exchange of information between policy scholars and policy makers. This seems to me important as a way of employing our skills to improve the quality of health, housing, community relations, and the deteriorating environment. Have you some ideas on what the Association might do in this area and how we might do it?

Working with the Committee on Academic Freedom, I would like to see the Association participate in developing guidelines for members of universities and colleges under current unfavorable circumstances. At the same time, I believe that we can be of assistance to individuals who themselves feel threatened or who are victimized by the administrations of their universities, by other faculty members, or by students. Since we share these problems with other disciplines, we might find it useful to develop these programs in common with their representatives. Members of the Association can help by bringing cases to the attention of the Committee on Academic Freedom (not yet staffed to service these cases in detail), and by submitting their ideas on the problems of academic freedom as these have developed in recent years.

Other matters are equally important. We shall be negotiating with foundation executives on the proposal submitted by the Committee on the Status of Blacks; developing programs of scientific information exchange, giving careful attention to the problem of pre-collegiate political education, and improving the Association recruitment and placement services, along with other programs somewhat better established as Association concerns. Please let me know what you think the Association can do to serve its members (particularly the disadvantaged) and to improve the quality of research and teaching in political science.

Robert E. Lane