

Additional Annual Meeting '18 Highlights

National Academy of Sciences Meeting Report

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APSA members who are in the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) had their annual meeting at the APSA convention in Boston. Each year we devise strategies to increase political science representation in the NAS, where political scientists are egregiously underrepresented. We also seek to further the goals of the NAS. This year we took advantage of the appointment of Arthur (Skip) Lupia, a political scientist at the University of Michigan, as head of the Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) of the National Science Foundation. He met with us a few hours after he officially assumed that role. The question we raised, and the title of his recent article in *Social Forces* is “How to Increase the Value of Social Science.”

In this article, Skip asks “What do we know about the motivations of the people who pay for the research, teaching, and public service that social scientists do?” His answer is that in a competitive marketplace for knowledge, science must improve communication, transparency, and engagement with stakeholders. In his new position, as he explained to us at the APSA meeting, this becomes a very practical question, as he treks from congressional office to congressional office seeking to learn what our representatives want to learn, and what they would be willing to allocate in order to learn it. This involves for Skip (as he recounted with on-the-ground examples) reading volumes of communications from congressional offices enabling him to connect to the real concerns of our representatives. His goal is to communi-

cate the public goods that can accrue from science that are typically undersupplied in the private marketplace.

Eager for responses from us, Skip kept his remarks cogently short. Several suggestions emerged on how best Skip could represent social science to those who fund it.

David Mayhew, in his inimitable way, demanded greater concreteness on what it is our discipline actually offers that would be of interest to busy members of Congress. Skip was ready for that one. An example from behavioral research on reaction time to backlights on cars that were one foot higher than the style of the 1960s saved thousands of lives. Not quite political science, but stunning nonetheless.

Bob Putnam questioned Skip's strategy of speaking truth to power. The key to our influence, he insisted, is that through our students, through expert staff members, through law clerks at the Supreme Court, and through policy staffers on the Hill and in the agencies, we have developed rich informal networks. Exploiting these networks, perhaps through internships or informal gatherings among government and academic experts on particular problems, will have a high return on Skip's goals of improved communication and engagement with stakeholders. Margaret Levi was quick to offer a wide range of networks that APSA members could activate in the name of public goods contributions owing to social science research.

I raised the issue of requests coming from stakeholders to the NAS often involving questions for which social science could not (at present) answer, or to use the

language of Joshua Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke, are fundamentally unanswerable questions. Wouldn't it be valuable to meet with stakeholders giving them ideas for NAS studies that were both useful and tractable? Skip's answer was a bit legalistic for us in the room, as he claimed that as a government employee he could not initiate meetings with agency officials, and certainly could not lobby them on how to engage with the NAS. Several of us suggested that this was an unnecessarily cautious reading of how DC actually works, where much of government business is conducted at informal lunches and children's soccer games.

Gary King questioned the premise that we social scientists had a hard sell. The percentage of the NSF budget going to the social sciences (my metaphor here) could be put in a thimble and it would still rattle. Yet if one were to ask members of Congress what problems they think most demand solution, they would likely ignore concerns of celestial mechanics and raise issues of social security, terrorism, and inequality. Our mission needs to focus on the potential of our research to provide credible answers to questions that most concern those allocating funds for science. Why should this be a problem?

We all came out of the meeting with a degree of optimism that one of us and someone who knew how to communicate would be representing APSA interests in the NSF and beyond. We were also thankful to Steven Rathgeb Smith, APSA Executive Director, who attended the meeting and enthusiastically supports our endeavors. ■