

EDITORS' CORNER

This issue of *PS* is the first since the APSA Council changed our status from an interim to permanent editorial team. We are pleased to serve as co-editors from 2014–18.

During the initial search process, and again during the reappointment process, we were asked our thoughts about the future of *PS*. We consulted with many colleagues, read many past issues of *PS*, and carefully reviewed the Report of the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Future of Publications (Publications Planning Committee 2014) and “Let’s Be Heard,” the report of the APSA Task Force on Public Engagement.¹ We discussed *PS* with the editors of *APSR* and *Perspectives* (John Ishiyama and Jeff Isaac have provided invaluable advice) and with members of the APSA Council.

It was clear to us that *PS* is a crucial vehicle for building coherence and community in the discipline. *PS* for many decades was the only outlet for articles on political science teaching and pedagogy (now joined by the *Journal of Political Science Education*). *PS* remains the only venue for political science scholarship on our discipline of political science. What was also clear to us, however, was that many of us evaluate publications like *PS* through our own individual lenses, and that we had very little sense of how our readership viewed *PS*.

We didn’t know how many of our readers preferred the print edition of the journal, how many read the journal electronically, and within this second group, how many used tablets versus laptop computers. We suspected, but did not know, that many electronic readers access the journal via their institutional credentials rather than the APSA website. Most fundamentally, we recognize that *PS* provides a service to the field that is quite different from cutting edge research journals like *APSR* and *Perspectives*, journals that scholars read in part because they are compelled to in order to keep up with their field.

Why do people read *PS* and what do they expect to find? That, it seemed to us, had to be the starting point before we could answer questions about the future of the journal.

Consequently, we arranged with the Association to administer a survey of a subsample of the APSA membership to get a better sense of how our readership consumes *PS* content today, how they may wish to consume content in the future, and whether there are substantial sources of variation in how individuals consume *PS* (e.g., by age, type of institution, subfield specialty) that we would want to recognize as *PS* moves forward. These issues are detailed in the following sections of this report.²

DIVERSE EXPECTATIONS: THE DISCIPLINE AND A LOT ELSE

One thing we wondered is what do APSA members want or expect from their professional journal *PS*? Should it be primarily an outlet for political science research, albeit presented in a shorter and less technical format? Should the journal focus on political science teaching and learning? Or is *PS* a venue for political scientists to debate the nature and direction of our discipline?

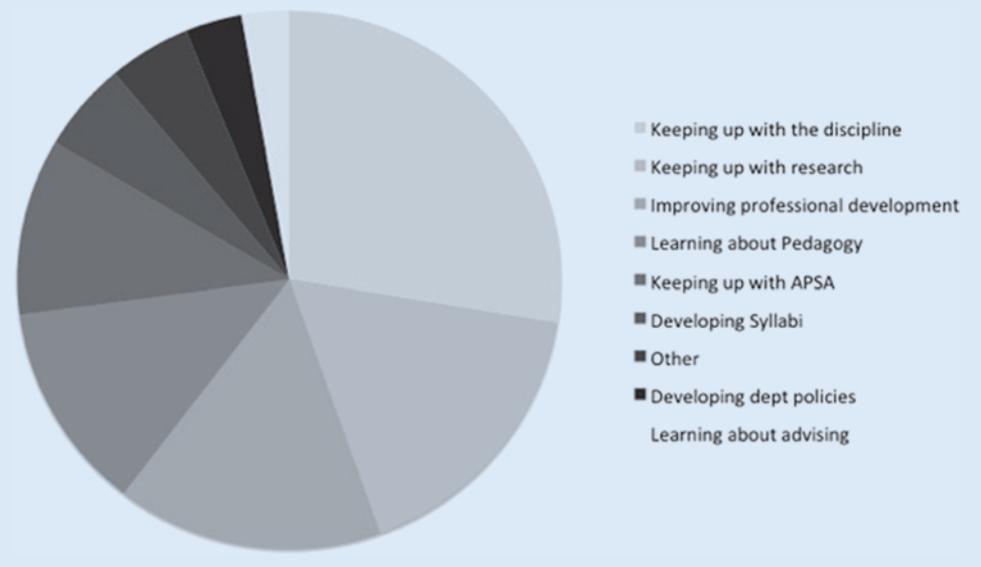
Not surprisingly, members expect *PS* to serve all three roles—and more. When we asked respondents to select the top three reasons they read *PS*, the most common responses were (1) keeping up with the discipline, (2) keeping up with research, (3) improving professional development and (4) learning about pedagogy (figure 1). While disciplinary information was the most common option chosen by respondents (28% of all options selected), the next three categories were mentioned at roughly comparable rates, with “keeping up with APSA” mentioned slightly less frequently.

The survey included open-ended comments about *PS*, and these were as diverse as the rank-orders. We provide a short sample of these comments below:

- *I really like PS. I wish it could attract somewhat stronger pieces on teaching and learning sometimes—perhaps this is because we just don't have many multi-school studies on pedagogy and what works, etc. I think there is a big disconnect between what colleges of education know about how students learn and what gets disseminated in our profession.*
- *I think the section on the teacher should be expanded.*

Figure 1

Desired Content: The Discipline, Research, Professional Development, and Pedagogy



- *PS is the only journal that all of us have in common. It is an important social hub for the profession.*
- *I'm not a US-based academic and rarely read PS because it's so US-centric that it rarely speaks to the context of higher ed in my country, or current debates dominating the field in my country-- yet tends to present US-specific matters as universal.*
- *This is my favorite APSA journal! I love being able to keep up with developments in the discipline. I appreciate the text of APSA presidential speeches, reading about what others are doing in their classrooms, being recognized for awards, being able to submit names of award winners on my campus, hearing a group of scholars present different perspectives on an interesting topic, and having the information I need to congratulate colleagues worldwide on their achievements.*
- *Great journal! Please don't screw it up.*

Many of the open ended responses asked us to provide more and higher quality content about teaching. We have begun to coordinate with the editorial team of the *Journal of Political Science Education*, and are collaborating on an "Editor's Roundtable" at the 2016 Teaching and Learning Conference dedicated to the publication requirements for articles dealing with political science pedagogy.

Other commenters applauded the diverse focus on scholarship, the profession, and teaching. The symposia in *PS* received special praise. We expect that symposia will continue to be an important feature of *PS*, and readers will notice that we have begun, with this issue, to present the symposia within the thematic sections of the journal (Features, Teaching, Profession).

A few commenters asked us to try to include more content from outside of the United States. While this will probably be an ongoing challenge, we are happy to report that we are building a partnership with the European Political Science Association, and will be co-publishing a set of essays on issues of relevance to political science from the American and European perspective.

However, there is no denying the fact that our readership mirrors the political science profession: methodologically and

substantively diverse, with a dizzying variety of expectations and demands.

DIVERSE METHODS OF ACCESS AND AN AGE DIVIDE

We also wondered *how* our readers accessed *PS* content. The Publication Committee speculated that some portions of *PS* could be provided online, and open access, web-based journals are becoming increasingly important in many academic fields. Yet, the production process for *PS* (and for all APSA journals) is very print-centric. Both editors of *PS* are regular users of RSS "feed readers," but conversations with colleagues indicated that we were unusual in this respect. Some colleagues learn about *PS* content (and other journals) via emailed tables of contents ("eToC"), others learn about content via blogs such as "The Monkey Cage." Because this was such an important part of our survey, we had a large number of questions about print versus electronic consumption, access credentials, and dissemination channels. We report on only a small subset of items here.

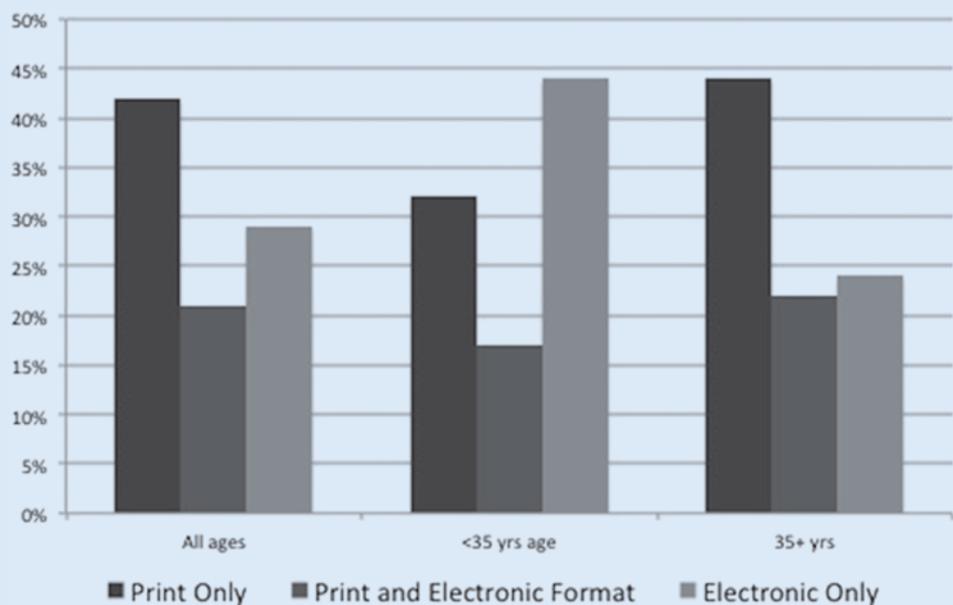
The first, and we think most important, finding is that there is a large generational divide in how our readership consumes *PS*. Overall, 42% of our readership relies primarily on the print edition, 29% read the journal electronically, and 21% told us they access *PS* via both methods. Not surprisingly, however, there are substantial differences in access methods by age.

Among younger scholars, defined here as those 35 years of age or less, less than one-third read the print edition, and almost 45% exclusively read the journal electronically (figure 2). Usage among older scholars (35 years and above) is the mirror image: less than a quarter read electronically and almost 45% rely on print. Clearly, there is a generational divide in how our readers consume *PS* and this has serious and important implications for the future production and distribution of *PS*.

Second, we asked respondents how they access our content. We suspected that electronic readers may be like us, accessing *PS* via their university credentials. (This is what happens when you search for content via Google scholar or another search engine and are asked to provide a university username and password before you read the PDF.) Our suspicions were confirmed, as shown in table 1, 61% of users indicated they access *PS* electronically using their university credentials, and this figure climbs to 83% for younger scholars (who are far more likely to only read the journal online). Very few members access the journal by providing their APSA membership information.

Why does this matter? This is not necessarily important to the *PS* editorial team, but it does have important consequences for APSA. If these results are generalizable to the larger membership, this indicates only a small proportion of APSA

Figure 2
A Generational Divide: Print vs. Electronic Access



We hope we won't screw it up! ■

—Phillip Ardoin and Paul Gronke
Appalachian State University

Table 1
How Do You Access PS Content?

	All ages	<35 yrs age	35+ yrs
My APSA ID	15%	10%	16%
University Credentials	61%	83%	54%
Other	5%	0%	7%
Don't Access Journal online	17%	5%	21%
Not sure	2%	2%	3%

members navigate through the Association website in order to access Association publications. APSA is no longer acting as the gatekeeper for its own publications—universities (and publishers) are. This may seem to be a minor distinction, but the long run viability of scholarly societies depends in part on the value proposition that these societies provide to their membership—and publications constitute

an important part of this value proposition (Berrett 2012).

We hope to provide more results from this survey in future versions of the Editors' Corner. We are excited about the opportunity to produce a journal for such a heterogeneous readership, but recognize the tremendous challenge of navigating the changing terrain of academic publishing and academia at large.

NOTES

1. The full task force report was published in a special issue of *PS*, Volume 48, Supplement S1.
2. We should note this survey is, as far as we know, the first APSA survey administered to a random subsample of the current and recently lapsed APSA membership. The success of this survey may encourage the Association to supplement, or replace, the annual survey that is sent to the full membership with more frequent shorter surveys administered to subsamples.

REFERENCES

- Berrett, Dan. 2012. "Scholarly Groups' Choices Yield Diverging Fortunes." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. April 1.
- Publications Planning Committee. 2014. "Report to the APSA Council." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 47 (1): 246–256.

APSA Offers Free Publications To Members

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