

Report to the APSA Council on the Proposed *Political Science Research* e-Journal

APSA Committee on Publications

The APSA Committee on Publications offers the following recommendations on the Political Science Research e-journal, originally proposed as the “APSR-Prime” journal by Arthur (“Skip”) Lupia, Adam Berinsky, and others. The APSA Council remanded the proposal to the publications committee in October 2012 for further consideration and resolution of specific issues identified by the publications committee, council and others.

The recommendations herein reflect the committee’s deliberations and discussions on and leading up to a meeting at the APSA national office in Washington, DC on August 9–10, which included the following attendees:

Committee Attendees:

- Kaare Strom (chair), University of California, San Diego;
- Karen Beckwith, Case Western Reserve University;
- Darren Davis, University of Notre Dame;
- Rob Hauck, *PS* editor;
- John Ishiyama, *APSR* editor;
- University of North Texas;
- Simon Jackman, Stanford University;
- Jan Leighley, American University;
- and Albert Weale, University College London;

Not in attendance:

- John Geer, Vanderbilt University;
- Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Perspectives on Politics* editor; and
- Lisa Wedeen, University of Chicago.

Staff: Michael Brintnall, executive director; Steven Rathgeb Smith, incoming executive director; Pauline Karpowicz, director of communications and publishing; Barbara Walthall, managing editor of *PS*; Betsy Schroeder, program associate, communications and publishing; and Anastasia Fete, program assistant, communications and publishing.

To facilitate a thorough discussion, the committee had before it a full set of background materials, including the proposal, prior discussions of the proposal inclusive of past committee and council minutes, a memo from council members Htun and Walt, a memo from three former APSA presidents, and financial models and editorial cost estimates. The appendix to this report contain a partial set of the materials before the committee offered now to provide context to the points made in this report. Committee members were invited to identify any additional data or materials to aid in their deliberations.

Committee chair Kaare Strom reviewed the charge before the committee and over two days led the committee through a thorough discussion of the major components of the journal concept proposed including:

- mission,
- audience,
- content,
- field representation,
- market potential,
- existing journal models, including editorial structure and board,
- peer review,
- formats and use of technology,
- production issues, and
- business plan and financial models

Strom ensured the committee was fully aware of the background and history of the journal proposal’s consideration to date, referencing the background documents provided to the committee and a recent communication from Jenny Mansbridge shared shortly before the meeting (See the “Framing Memo and Appendices” and the “Journal Proposal Worksheet” in the appendix of this report (available online). He noted that the journal has been before the council twice previously. This iteration was formally proposed to the council in the spring of 2012, when it was then referred to the publications committee. In July 2012, the committee deliberated on the proposal. A majority of the committee’s members

(6-1) expressed general support for the journal concept and provided a list of specific concerns, with a recommendation to the council that these be considered and addressed. Strom presented this recommendation and the specific concerns of the committee to the council in person at the October 2012 meeting. The council decided at that time to remand the journal proposal to the publications committee to address various issues and questions raised by the council and previously by the committee itself. Strom asserted that the committee has the benefit now of further information, including a more specific business plan for the proposed journal, and referred the committee to the collection of background documents provided to the committee on June 24 and in the weeks leading up to the meeting.

Strom articulated the committee’s task now as considering the new journal proposal in light of questions and concerns raised by the council, by the committee itself or by other members of the association, and report back to the council for its August meeting with a recommendation on the viability of the journal concept. He noted that the committee was given the freedom to amend the journal concept to a certain degree in its consideration, though he suggested that the committee would be wise to retain the core proposal elements that define the unique character of this journal, including rolling, expedited online publication of “distinctive” peer-reviewed, original, short articles (2500–4000 words) presenting discrete, single research discoveries from all fields and methodologies. In its deliberations, the committee considered the original proposal, critiques or recommendations proffered by the council, the committee itself or others and outlined for the committee in the June 24 framing memo and its appendices, the journal concept worksheet, and the financial/business models also attached to this document.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE JOURNAL

ISSUES DISCUSSION: The following pages represent the committee's recommendations and its discussions of the various core issues concerning the proposal. See the concept worksheet in the appendix for a summary of the defined characteristics and the questions and recommendations raised.

Each section of the proposal (as outlined below) was discussed first by the full committee, subsequently in separate working groups led by a committee member, and and for the final two hours of the meeting in a concluding plenary session to come to agreement on the viability of the proposal and to formulate specific recommendations for the committee's final report.

Mission and Focus

Mission: The committee recommends retaining and supporting core elements of the proposal that state the mission of the journal as publishing *concise, discrete research discoveries from all fields and methodologies in political science, and published incrementally online*. The committee sees this mission as a unique contribution and opportunity for the discipline. The committee notes that quick and timely review and dissemination are unique advantages of the journal proposal and that statements about the mission and technology help reinforce this.

The committee therefore recommends the following mission for this journal:

- Publishing discrete, peer reviewed, research discoveries¹
- Being open to a diversity of subfields and methods in political science
- Supporting research for a primarily scholarly audience²
- Promoting integrity, transparency, and accountability in political science research
- Providing quick and timely publication

Niche: The journal fills the need for more distinctive, unique pieces of research as building blocks of knowledge in political science. This journal could be considered as supporting a new "common pool" of discrete findings, from which larger

integrated pieces could be developed. Scholars could build on journal articles to create larger integrated works or use articles including replications, debates, and critiques to assess scholarly merit and support transparency in the discipline. All of these types of publication align with the association's responsibility to support and improve scholarship in political science.

The committee recommends that clear signals of inclusivity of all types of work be made and that care should be taken in the submission guidelines to avoid language that inadvertently signals only certain fields and methodologies are welcome in the new shorter article format. There should be recognition that discrete research findings may be described differently in different fields.

Journal Title: At the request of APSA President Jenny Mansbridge, the committee discussed alternative titles and recommends that the journal title should be descriptive, distinct, and succinct. The committee discussed a number of possible titles trying to identify one that would not conflict with the name or acronym of an existing journal. One option favored by the committee would be *Contemporary Political Science*, provided it is not perceived to be in conflict with the journal *Comparative Political Studies* (CPS). The committee suggests that overlap with other journal titles be avoided if possible and that the viability of the title should be vetted with the publisher from a marketing standpoint.

Audience: The committee recommends that academic audiences be considered the primary audience of this journal given its mission to publish concise articles on single discoveries in political science. The committee notes that there will likely be "spin-off" effects or positive externalities in that some of the content published could be presented or packaged for a public or non-expert audience.

Measuring success: The committee recommends that specific reasonable measures of success and failure be defined prior to launching the journal and that evaluation of progress toward these goals be monitored periodically so that corrections could be made. At the same time, the committee understands that some lead time may be needed before data is available on each of these metrics. The committee suggests that success measures might include:

- impact factor (noting a several year lag in rankings for new journals),
- submission numbers,
- and inclusiveness of submissions by field, methodology, rank, and gender (if these data can be obtained).

During the discussion, the committee noted interest in developing a standard set of metrics to determine the breadth, impact, and originality of contributions to all the APSA journals, and to ask editors to report more complete and comparable data in their annual reports. The committee notes that this may be a fruitful topic for future consideration.

Content and Field Representation

Field Representation: The committee agrees that the journal description, submissions information, and call for editors should be carefully crafted to reinforce openness to all fields and approaches.

Content Types: The committee suggests referencing in the mission an emphasis on *integrity, transparency, and accountability* in the profession and that the prospective editors understand that replications and research notes could be part of a balanced set of content in the journal. There is broad agreement that there are limited outlets for article types such as replication studies and research notes, and such articles should therefore be welcome in this journal. Yet the committee wants to see care taken to avoid signaling too much focus on quantitative work in the mission statement. Moreover, in its submission guidelines the journal should stress that non-empirical pieces fit its mission and if possible provide examples. It may be useful to identify several types of content suitable for the journal. Yet, the committee points out that with rolling publication the notion of "sections" of content may be less defined than in a print journal. Rather, an article might be labeled in the title or lead matter as "replication" or "debate" or other type of content. The committee feels that it is important to ensure that readers understand the breadth of submissions welcomed in the journal and that the content published can be as strong a statement in this regard as submission guidelines. The committee also agrees that state of the profession articles would not likely fit in this journal, as this would be in direct competition with *Annual Reviews* and as such articles would not tend to fit the length format.

Future Publication Opportunities: The committee suggests that this new journal should be held to the same standards as all professionally edited journals, where subsequent publication elsewhere of results or arguments from its articles is at the discretion of the editors of those journals and largely determined by the uniqueness and importance of the manuscript. The committee considers it to be outside the purview of the committee to suggest what editors of other journals ought to publish. The judgment as to how pieces of research published elsewhere relate to the independent publication of papers in this journal should be left to editorial discretion on a case-by-case basis.

Community Consultation

The committee recommends the use of several consultation procedures, including notice and comment and consultations with organized sections, during the implementation phase. APSA has a number of well-established vehicles for notice and comment—the website, APSA Connect supported forum, all member e-Newsletter, direct e-mail, social media, contact with organized section leadership, and through section membership communications—all of which are available as appropriate.

Models and Market

To help guide its consideration of the appropriate journal concept and its potential market, the committee had at its disposal a set of data on scholarly journals similar to the proposed journal, including *Psychological Science*, *Science*, and *Contexts*, as well as relevant data on APSA and other political science journals.

Models: The committee recommends that *Psychological Science* serves as an appropriate model for the journal concept in publishing speed and format, structure, editorial support, and success in publishing quantitative and qualitative work and research from all fields and methodologies. In addition, psychology shares a number of publishing and professional characteristics with political science, including methodological diversity. The committee also considered *Contexts*, a quarterly magazine published by the American Sociological Association, which publishes sociological research accessible to a general reader. The committee concludes that *Contexts* publishes content similar to *PS: Political Science & Politics*

and that its mission therefore does not align well with the goals of this proposal and does not similarly reflect the unique approach or potential of this proposal.

Markets: The committee reviewed data on journals in the field. With the qualifications expressed earlier concerning field representation and content, the committee concludes that with the amendments recommended in this report this journal could be a valuable addition to the field and create opportunities for publication that are currently unavailable.

Editorial Structure

Editorial Selection: The proposal before the committee includes the first editor of the journal. The committee notes that selecting a journal editor in a closed process neither upholds the norms of APSA nor meets the expectations of the profession. The committee therefore strongly recommends that there be an open call for editors and that a standard editorial selection process must be part of the procedures for this journal. The committee wants to emphasize that it makes this recommendation strictly in order to ensure an appropriate editorial selection process. This recommendation is therefore not a negative reflection on the proposed editor, his institution, or the authors of the proposal, but simply an important procedural norm. If the proposed editor (Adam Berinsky) wishes to submit a proposal, it should be considered with no prejudice of any kind. As noted earlier, the mission and values of this journal should be stressed in the editorial selection process, and particularly the value of inclusivity. Candidate proposals should be required to address how the editorial team will uphold the mission of the journal.

Editorial Structure: The committee recommends that a small team of editors with a sizable board be considered, particularly given the journal's mission to publish quickly and be representative of all fields and methodologies. The committee notes that a lead editor with a small number of associate editors with decision-making authority, similar to the APSR structure, should support the journal well. The call for editor proposals should ask candidates to fully flesh out their editorial and business plans, to include details on how the editorial team will be structured, and to address the questions of editorial decision making, editor and peer-review load, and field representation. The editorial team,

however it will be structured, must be able to assess manuscripts on topics from all fields of the discipline. The committee also recognizes that further details of the editorial and business plans should be left to the proposers and finally negotiated between the proposers and the association.

Managing Editor: The committee recommends consideration of a full-time professional managing editor for the journal. Compared to most traditional journals, the managing editor of this journal may be tasked with greater burdens in working with editors and reviewers given the quick timeline and with authors with respect to copyediting for size.

Timeline: The committee notes that this journal would benefit from very clear editorial decision rules, the use of desk rejects (which in leading political science journals already ranges from ~20%–55% of all received manuscripts), and a practice similar to *Psychological Science* in which two editors (of whom at least one has to have expertise in the area) conduct an initial review within the first week of receipt and reject the manuscript if both agree. The committee recommends that editorial candidates be required to specify their plans for maintaining the expeditious review and production process of this journal.

Peer Review

The committee recommends that standard double-blind peer review should be an imperative aspect of this journal. Editors should have some discretion over the peer-review structure and word limit, with attention to inclusivity and peer-review fatigue issues.

In reference to concerns about reviewer fatigue, the committee does not see abandoning blind peer review for open crowd-sourced review as an appropriate remedy. The committee feels that this type of peer review would break radically with the original proposal, jeopardize forms of quality control to which existing APSA publications are committed, and give the new journal more of the form of a publicly evaluated blog. The committee also notes that the creation of this new journal would not add more to reviewer fatigue than the various other new journals that are appearing, and that the pool of potential reviewers is increasing along with the set of professional journals. Nor would this journal concept raise unique concerns about overtaxing reviewers. Rather, the new journal provides opportunities for

quicker review responsibilities with clear bounds, as revise and resubmit (R&R) decisions would likely be fewer than in traditional journals. The sense of the committee is that the shorter article length and more clearly delineated reviewer responsibilities should enable the journal to attract quality reviewers. The committee suggests that much of the responsibility for R&R guidance would fall on the team of editors and that greater use of initial evaluation by these editors would aid efficient peer review. The committee also notes that the Publication Planning Committee's report proposes a set of ways to systematically include under-utilized reviewers.

Format, Structure, Frequency, and Production

The committee favors the format, structure, and frequency noted in the proposal and specifically the rolling publication, online-first production plans.

Print: The committee feels the proposed print option would be less valuable for scholars given the nature of the content and the incremental nature of publishing. The committee recommends charging users who want this option the full extra cost of a print edition.

Word Length: The committee considered the proposed word length and feels the 4000 length is rather long for most work appropriate for this journal. The committee therefore recommends identifying a target length to 2,500 words, with a 4,000 word maximum at the discretion of the editor, so that the journal be open to all fields, methodologies, and types of articles fitting its mission. Editors and staff need to be prepared to clearly communicate the norms concerning article length. The committee notes that the incremental online publication and quick turnaround places the incentives appropriately on the author to comply with the size limits and to respond quickly to editorial requests. The committee agrees that the soft limit on tables and figures is appropriate and allows for flexibility. The members suggest asking editorial candidates how they will deal with word length with regards to field and method inclusivity and tables and figures.

Publisher

The staff informally consulted with three leading prospective publishers in the field—Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and Sage. Each

publisher noted interest and a sense that there is a viable market for such an electronic journal. The committee recommends seeking bids from leading publishers, including Cambridge, on publishing this journal.

Financial Support

In its meeting of October 2012, the council asked the committee to procure and carefully assess a business plan for the new journal. For its reference, the committee therefore requested and received (1) a financial model for the journal from Cambridge University Press, (2) an editorial cost model produced by APSA staff, and (3) current APSA editorial cost and journal budget figures to evaluate these models. These documents can be found in the appendices to this report. The Editorial Cost Model and Financial Model in the appendix thus provide specifics on the projected revenue and expenses of this new journal.

On review of these business plans and financial documents, the committee finds the required investment in this new journal to be reasonable and worthwhile. The committee recommends that the association make a significant commitment to the journal in terms of resources and time line, to ensure that this publication has the same opportunity for success as other APSA journals that have been so supported and to assure potential authors that there is a serious commitment to this new journal.

The financial model assumes that APSA cover the cost of editorial expenses for the new journal, as it currently does for other APSA journals. The committee recommends considering the cost of associate editors as a way to ensure inclusivity and rapid decision-making required of the expeditious review process proposed for this journal. In comparing different potential business plans, the committee recommends increasing the managing editor's position to full time to support speed and the potential need for significant editing. Increasing support for the managing editor to this level may also reduce the number of required graduate student assistants to two. When the business model is thus configured and printing costs eliminated, the association investment in the editorial expenses of the journal comes to \$4.69 per member per year, which compares with an average rate of \$4.02 per member for the other APSA journals.

Viability

It is the consensus of the committee in its meeting of August 9–10 that this journal concept has potential to add value and opportunity to scholarship in political science. The committee therefore recommends that the journal proposal, with amendments noted in our report, be approved by the council. The journal concept is sound and offers valuable benefits to the discipline in providing a venue for single discoveries and discrete research in all fields of the discipline and in enhancing opportunities for earlier discovery and access to emerging building blocks of knowledge in political science. Each of these outcomes offers positive benefits to the discipline as a whole and to individual scholars, students, and interested publics. We believe the journal can effectively utilize technologies available and in use today to support its mission to publish incrementally. This consideration further underscores the viability of the journal. The relatively light financial responsibility to the association forms a final point enabling this committee to support this journal concept, again with our noted amendments. This report and its appendices provide details about the investment that would be required of the association. In short this investment would be on a par with the expenses of APSA's other journals, and we believe the models provided show that the association would not be at financial risk by launching this journal.

In conclusion, the Committee on Publications endorses this journal proposal, with specific recommendations and amendments enumerated above under each major section, and pending review of the final business model and financial adjustments noted above. We believe that our association stands to gain from the addition of a journal that in these ways opens access to new building blocks of knowledge in our discipline. We therefore recommend that the Council approve and begin implementing this new journal.

We welcome member comments at journalpublishing@apsanet.org. ■

NOTES

1. The committee recommends avoiding using the terms "research findings" and "avoiding long-windup" as this may be construed as exclusive of some fields and methodologies.
2. Scholars will probably constitute the primary audience for this journal. The committee anticipates that public interest and engagement will be a likely a positive externality of the journal.