American Council of Learned Societies

Joe Lane, *APSA Delegate to ACLS*

Many members of the American Political Science Association are probably not aware of the work of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). Founded in 1919 as a coalition of the professional societies that represents the diverse disciplines in the academic humanities, the ACLS now engages in a wide range of activities—offering generous grants and fellowships to scholars in humanistic disciplines; advocating for the strengthening of faculties in the disciplines; working with both government and private foundations to provide access to great works in the humanities, resources for departments, colleges, and universities; and facilitating efforts to define and preserve standards for peer review and quality research.

The APSA was one of the first members of the council, joining in 1920. Today, the ACLS has 70 constituent societies including both the broad umbrella societies that represent the major academic disciplines (Modern Languages Association, American Historical Association, American Sociological Association, and many others) as well as more specialized organizations (including the National Council of Public History, American Society of Comparative Law, and the American Society for Legal History, to name just three that might include some political scientists).

I confess that I knew little of the ACLS before I was asked to serve as the delegate to ACLS on behalf of the APSA. I knew one thing though—they offer very generous fellowships. Unfortunately, it appears that too few political scientists have ACLS on their list of "must apply" lists for sabbaticals and other leaves. They should.

In 2008, the ACLS awarded 191 fellowships worth more than $9 million. They offer fellowships for doctoral students to complete dissertations, fellowships for assistant professors completing their first books, and fellowships for associate and full professors seeking support for sabbaticals and unfunded leaves. Scholars of political science make up a relatively small share of both the applicants and the fellows in the ACLS competitions—in the last two competitions for the general fellowship program, political scientists accounted for only about 5% of the applicants and between 7% (in 2007) and 2% (in 2008) of the fellows. In the last two competitions for the doctoral dissertation completion program, political scientists accounted for about 8% of the applicants and 6% of the fellows. By contrast historians accounted for over one-third of the applicants and the funded fellows in both programs. There were more applicants from philosophy, art and architecture, and religious studies departments than from political science departments.

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It is true that ACLS focuses on areas of *humanistic* study, and some political scientists may consider their work too quantitative to qualify for ACLS programs. It may be that advisors in political science departments may be more inclined to point their graduate students and junior colleagues towards the National Science Foundation than the ACLS, but a perception that work in political science cannot qualify for these fellowships is misleading. The ACLS defines the humanities very broadly and works with significant quantitative elements that may be, and have been, funded. In a period in which the NSF

About the American Council of Learned Societies

The American Council of Learned Societies was created in 1919 to represent the United States in the Union Académique Internationale. The founders of ACLS—representatives of 13 learned societies—were convinced that a federation of scholarly organizations, most with open membership but all dedicated to excellence in research, was the best possible combination of America's democratic ethos and intellectual aspirations. The constitution of the new council stated its mission as "the advancement of humanistic studies in all fields of the humanities and social sciences and the maintenance and strengthening of national societies dedicated to those studies."

Since its founding, ACLS has provided the humanities and related social sciences with leadership, opportunities for innovation, and national and international representation. The council's many activities have at their core the practice of scholarly self-governance. Central to ACLS throughout its history have been its programs of fellowships and grants aiding research. ACLS made its first grants, totaling $4,500, in 1926; in 2008, the council gave more than $9 million in fellowship stipends and other awards. All ACLS awards are made through rigorous peer review by specially appointed committees of scholars from throughout the United States and, in some programs, abroad.

In addition to convening scholars for the purpose of peer review, ACLS has often organized committees of researchers to identify promising fields of study. The development of area studies in this country owes much to the impetus provided by ACLS. The original concept of organizing scholarly expertise around an area or cultural region grew out of the council's early work in Far Eastern and Slavic studies and language training, and the Council's ability to bring a wide variety of humanists and social scientists together in interdisciplinary work made it possible to launch area studies and sustain them over an extended period.

By bringing scholars together as scholars rather than as specialists in particular fields, ACLS is well positioned to serve as advocate on behalf of the scholarly humanities in public fora and policy arenas. The Council's critical role in helping establish (in 1964) and reauthorize (in 1985) the National Endowment for the Humanities is perhaps the most notable example of its exercise of this function.

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is suggesting that it will curtail its giving for social sciences research, scholars whose work has humanistic elements should consider the ACLS as a possible source of support.

One political scientist who did receive an ACLS fellowship is Aurelian Craiutu, a political theorist at Indiana University. Professor Craiutu's work in political theory explores the role "moderates" and "moderation" in modern political thought. In particular he focuses on French and English writers and their reactions to the French Revolution. He insists that many projects that focus on political thought, political rhetoric, or political philosophy would be competitive for ACLS funding.

Furthermore, in recent competitions, the ACLS has supported a number of graduate students in comparative politics. Kushanava Choudhury, a recent graduate of Yale's Ph.D. program, received two fellowships for his work on Calcutta, India, and he credits the ACLS with making it possible for him to turn directly from his dissertation work to a second major project without having to take on a full-time teaching load immediate after completing his degree. At least three other graduate students received 2008 fellowships for dissertation studies in comparative politics: Yuen Ang (Stanford, writing on markets and bureaucracy in China), Kenneth Haig (University of California, writing on immigration policy in Japan), and Aaron Hale (University of Florida, writing on political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo). Furthermore, the ACLS reserves fellowships for specific areas of study, particularly on China and eastern Europe, that may be particularly well suited for some political scientists.

If political theorists and scholars of comparative politics appear to be the most likely candidates for ACLS funding, they are certainly not the only ones. Given the great number of fellowships given each year in American history, scholars in the field of American political development should seriously consider pursuing fellowships from ACLS. Others in fields like environmental politics, international relations, and political rhetoric are also likely to have projects that would be competitive.

Descriptions and deadlines for ACLS fellowship programs are detailed on the Web site at http://www.acls.org/grants/. The Web site also lists all the recent fellowship recipients and their abstracts so scholars may consider whether and how their work might best qualify for support from the ACLS.

But ACLS offers much more than funding opportunities that are too little known by scholars in our discipline.

Since 1999, the ACLS has run the Humanities E-Book Project (HEB), an electronic library that is pioneering the electronic transmission of scholarship by placing over 2,000 titles online in easy to use XML formats so that scholars everywhere can have access to the material necessary for their work. Perhaps one of the most promising of the Electronic Library's projects is the effort to work with academic publishers to make out-of-print classics and datasets that are now in the public realm available through the ACLS Electronic Library so that they can be reached by a wide range of scholars.

At present, the staff of the Electronic Library is working with some 13 of the constituent societies to expand these offerings, and we are planning to coordinate an APSA partnership in this project. If members of APSA have ideas about books, journals, datasets, or other research materials that are not widely available but may be candidates for presentation in that format, please communicate those requests to me. We may plan a roundtable discussion of ways that political science research may be advanced by the HEB Project at the 2009 annual meeting in Toronto and welcome hearing from scholars who would like to participate. Those interested in the ACLS Humanities E-Book Project may access the Electronic Library at http://www.humanitiesebook.org/intro.html.

Finally, the ACLS works actively with the National Humanities Alliance and the Association of Research Libraries to lobby for and support the missions of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. As a leader in gathering information about the state of faculties; the practices that govern peer review of scholarship, tenure, and promotion; and the funding of higher education and research in the United States, ACLS is a vital venue through which APSA can work with other scholarly organizations and bring attention to concerns that affect us as members of the academic professions.

In summary, the ACLS offers a range of fellowship opportunities for humanistic members of our profession and engages in a number of projects that may protect and advance the cause of research in our discipline. If you have any issues that you would like to see discussed in the forum of the American Council of Learned Societies or questions that you would like to ask about its work, please feel free to contact me at jhlane@ehc.edu. I look forward to hearing from you. ■

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