Civic Engagement in Political Science

PREFACE TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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The United States generally and higher education specifically are grappling with the decline in civic engagement, an increase in uncivil discourse and divisive politics, widespread falsehoods and conspiracy theories, and a decline in Americans' confidence in its political institutions. As higher-education institutions rediscover their civic mission, more political scientists are focusing on civic engagement as a pedagogy, research subject, and community service. The newly formed Civic Engagement Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) is the latest response by the discipline to (re)engage in higher education's civic mission.

The purposes of this Spotlight are to introduce the new Civic Engagement Section to the discipline, to demonstrate how civic engagement can be integrated into all dimensions of faculty work, and to encourage our colleagues to become involved with civic engagement. ■

INTRODUCTION: APSA'S CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SECTION SHINES A SPOTLIGHT ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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The Civic Engagement Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) formed in 2020 to promote the teaching, research, and praxis of civic engagement. The Section draws on past work by political scientists and by APSA to integrate civic engagement into teaching, research, and public engagement. This includes online resources for public engagement, sponsorship of the Alma Ostrom and Leah Hopkins Awan Civic Education Fund of the APSA Centennial Center,[1] establishment of the APSA Distinguished Award for Community and Civic Engagement, creation of the APSA Institute for Civically Engaged Research (ICER),[2] creation of the APSA Educate website,[3] and APSA's Raise the Vote campaign.[4] APSA also officially endorsed the Campus Compact initiative that asked universities to develop an action plan to promote more civic engagement by students, faculty, and staff and recommended that political scientists become involved in these and other similar efforts.

The APSA Civic Engagement Section is indebted to the founders of APSA, who were motivated by a desire to improve the functional workings of government and strengthen the operation of democracy. The Section is equally indebted to members of the Political Science Education Section, who worked with APSA leaders to create the APSA Teaching and Learning Conference and the *Journal of Political Science Education*, which feature numerous conference tracks, workshops, and articles on the topic of civic engagement. The Civic Engagement Section seeks to build on this work as well as the work of the editors and authors featured in APSA's three published books on civic engagement: *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* (McCartney, Bennion, and Simpson 2013), *Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines* (Matto et al. 2017), and *Teaching Civic Engagement Globally* (Matto et al. 2021). By building on this work and other efforts, including the Political Engagement Project,[5] the creation of the Civic Engagement Section provides the dedicated space that the topic requires and deserves.

The APSA Civic Engagement Section creates a central hub for political scientists interested in civic engagement by providing opportunities for professional development, publication, mentoring, and networking. The Section highlights the importance of civic engagement to the discipline and brings together faculty and graduate students from diverse backgrounds, institutional settings, and career trajectories while promoting high-quality traditional scholarship and scholarship of application, teaching and learning, and engagement.

Recognizing that current institutional reward systems often encourage faculty to think of themselves primarily as teachers, or as scholars, or as practitioners, the Civic Engagement Section encourages greater communication among these groups; promotes collaboration and synergy among faculty engaged in different types of civic engagement work; and facilitates, recognizes, and rewards work across these three domains. The Section also provides models for faculty members who want to use civic engagement as a way to integrate different aspects of their work.

From the beginning, the founders of the Civic Engagement Section envisioned it as a partner to other APSA sections. We opted to co-sponsor panels at the 2021 APSA Annual Meeting with other sections, including Political Science Education and Elections and Voting Behavior. Section officers envision co-sponsoring panels, workshops, and other conferences and year-round events with additional sections in the future, and we invite proposals for collaboration from teachers, scholars, and practitioners across the discipline.

The APSA Civic Engagement Section provides numerous opportunities for active leadership and involvement. It works through a committee system, with regular (i.e., bi-weekly or monthly) committee meetings and monthly meetings between committee chairs and the executive board. The Awards Committee developed a new set of civic engagement awards to celebrate innovative teaching, scholarship, and service by faculty members at different stages of their career. The Mentoring Committee developed a robust mentoring program that links experienced mentors with mentees who seek to integrate civic engagement into their work and career plans. This program

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offers opportunities for one-on-one mentoring, informal group mentoring (e.g., virtual happy hours), and professional-development webinars. The Publications Committee developed editorial teams and released Requests for Proposals for a special issue of the *e-Journal of Public Affairs* and for this *PS: Political Science & Politics* Spotlight on civic engagement in the discipline. The Publication Committee is actively exploring future publication opportunities, up to and including future books and a new online journal. Using the online platforms that have become familiar during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Civic Education Committee proposes a series of virtual civic cafes, webinars, workshops, and other events to be offered at formal conferences—for example, APSA's Annual Meeting, the APSA Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC), and the TLC at APSA—and throughout the year. The APSA Civic Engagement Section website provides more information about these opportunities.[6]

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The Civic Engagement Section provides a unique opportunity to focus on the civic mission of higher education and of our discipline. We invite scholars across the discipline to collaborate with us to increase the visibility, support, and resources available for civic engagement pedagogy, praxis, and research. To encourage colleagues to think about the steps that they might take inside and outside of the classroom, the Section presents this Spotlight. It highlights examples of political scientists who are actively engaged in promoting civic engagement on their campus and/or in their community.

The articles by Merivaki, O'Brochta, and Fullmer focus on civic engagement in political science education. These three contributors engage students in hands-on experiential-learning activities that are themselves a form of civic engagement. The students learn civic knowledge and skills through praxis. As education reformer John Dewey (1916) suggested, people learn by doing.[7] Political scientists can help students develop civic knowledge and skills inside and outside of the classroom.

In their three articles, Kaufman and Ellis, Jorgensen, and Franco focus on campus-wide approaches to civic engagement through course development, accreditation, legal mandates, and other campus-wide approaches to civic learning and democratic engagement. These political scientists worked with stakeholders across campus to boost students' civic knowledge, skills, and engagement. As Goldberg, Pastor, and Whaley emphasize in their article, these efforts should promote long-term partnerships and engagement by connecting students' concerns about public issues to their participation in groups and activities that address those issues.

Promoting civic engagement through teaching, research, and service requires significant time and effort. In their two articles, Kedrowski and co-authors Moffett and Rice discuss civic engagement as a scholarly endeavor and explain how departments can align civic engagement work with faculty evaluation, tenure, and promotion incentives. Moffett and Rice offer advice for scholars and institutions that want to foster such alignment.

In their conclusion, Bell and Forren summarize the benefits and challenges of implementing civic engagement activities. They view the path forward as including the important elements of equity and inclusion, campus partnerships, and assessment, while expanding the role of higher education in promoting civic engagement.

These Spotlight articles provide examples of how political scientists place civic engagement at the center of their work, and they demonstrate how civic engagement can be integrated into all dimensions of faculty life.

The APSA Civic Engagement Section encourages graduate students and faculty across all subfields and institution types to consider how they might promote civic engagement through their teaching, research, and service. We invite you to join an active and energetic group of political scientists who are working together to prioritize and fulfill the civic purpose of higher education. ■

NOTES

1. To learn more about the Centennial Center's Institute for Civically Engaged Research, Grants and Awards, Public Scholarship program, and Teaching & Learning Symposia, see https://connect.apsanet.org/CentennialCenter.
2. To learn more about ICER or to apply to become an ICER fellow, see connect.apsanet.org/icer.
3. To learn more or to contribute to this online library of teaching, see educate.apsanet.org.
4. To learn more or contribute to the Raise the Vote campaign to effectively encourage student voter registration, voting, and democratic engagement, see www.apsanet.org/RAISE-the-Vote.
5. To learn more about the Political Engagement Project, a study of educational practices at the college level that prepare students for responsible democratic participation, see Colby et al. (2007).
6. To learn more, see bit.ly/apsacivic.
7. For more examples of how faculty are using active-learning strategies to teach political science and international relations, see Bennion (2015).

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