A Call to APSA Part 2: Bring in Community College Faculty

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ABSTRACT This article uses data from a 2018 survey conducted by the American Political Science Association Committee on the Status of Community Colleges in the Profession to make specific policy recommendations for how to better reach out to and incorporate political science faculty teaching at community colleges into the association.

In Fall 2018, faculty at two-year colleges offering associate's degrees—also known as community colleges—were teaching 11.8 million students enrolled in both credit and noncredit programs, or 41% of all undergraduates in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges 2020). The same year, the American Political Science Association (APSA) Committee on the Status of Community Colleges in the Profession initiated a survey, administered by APSA and sent to 2,634 community college political science faculty nationwide. The survey asked about demographic information, employment, access to professionalization activities and outreach by APSA, teaching experiences, and the role of community college faculty.[1] One of the most striking findings of the survey was the perception by community college faculty that they are not respected. In fact, only 3.4% of respondents felt that community college faculty were well respected by the rest of the political science academic community. As Weisman and Marr (2002, 100) pointed out: "The positioning of the community college within higher education and the growth and bureaucratization of community colleges place community college professionals at the bottom rungs of the academic hierarchy....The net result of the academic hierarchy is a proliferation of divisiveness, competition, and the accentuation of differences instead of commonalities. These outcomes, obviously, are not conducive to developing and maintaining a sense of belonging."

Townsend and LaPaglia (2000, 42) further wrote that "Four-year faculty dominate the academic power structure that sets research agendas, privileges research over teaching, and values a cosmopolitan orientation over a local or institutional orientation. As a consequence, two-year college faculty are implicitly marginalized and devalued within academe." One survey respondent confirmed this perception, stating, "I don't consider APSA to be supportive of community college professors. Unlike other disciplines, there is abysmal outreach to us. Only the TLC [Teaching and Learning Conference] made any attempt to address community college faculty. I came to the conclusion that the APSA is an elitist organization that ignores the most democratic part of American higher education." This sentiment was echoed by another respondent, who stated, "[M]any political scientists look down on community colleges; too many elitists." The APSA 2020–2022 Strategic Plan identifies one of the core weaknesses of the organization as the lack of a welcoming culture to faculty and students from community colleges (APSA 2020).

The disparities between full- and part-time faculty further exacerbate this sense of disrespect. Of the part-time faculty who completed the survey, 41.6% of respondents stated that they were not in their position by choice. In the survey's open-ended questions, respondents offered additional perspective: one cited their part-time status as the major source of dissatisfaction in their work and said, "[T]he pool of part-time/adjunct positions is ever-growing, and class assignments are becoming less. I am lucky to teach just three classes per semester. I feel like I am freelancing and not gainfully employed. It seems like full-time or lecturer positions rarely open; meanwhile, full-timers seem to have more opportunity for advancement in tenured positions." Another respondent wrote, "As an adjunct, I feel somewhat disconnected and because I teach at multiple schools, I do not feel I am fully vested in any of them."

Although community college faculty and administrators believe that community colleges are "held in low regard within the academic community" (Townsend and LaPaglia 2000, 41), this perception does not align with how faculty perceive themselves. As discussed in part 1 of this article in this issue, many community college faculty understand their job as a calling and believe that they have specialized expertise. Weisman and Marr (2002, 101) noted that numerous studies documented that community college faculty generally experience high levels of job satisfaction. Our experience conversing with community college faculty is that the majority view their career at a community college as a conscious choice they are glad they made and that they enjoy and value their career as a community college political science professor.

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However, the fact that both full- and part-time community college faculty feel disengaged from their field is problematic because community college faculty undoubtedly play an important role in the current and future health of the political science discipline and its professional association.

WHY APSA SHOULD BRING IN MORE COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY

As APSA increases attention on the scholarship of teaching and learning—focusing on equity, diversity, and inclusion as well as the need to know more about how to deliver political science in an online classroom—community college faculty are well positioned to bring value to the organization. Teaching is precisely what community college faculty do and excel in—and especially teaching diverse communities of students. Furthermore, most community colleges have been offering online courses since the early 2000s; therefore, this is a prime opportunity for APSA to draw on the expertise of community college faculty in this area of teaching to enhance the entire profession.

More intentionally incorporating community college faculty into the political science profession also presents numerous opportunities for APSA to support its institutional goals. Community college faculty educate a substantial percentage of undergraduate students who are future political science majors and members of our profession. As many community college faculty have said to their four-year colleagues, "Our students are your students." Community colleges provide an academic foundation in the field and prepare students to transfer. Thus, including community college faculty in the life of the professional association enhances the profession in the long term.

Furthermore, APSA has a stated mission to support "…excellence in scholarship and teaching and informed discourse about politics, policy, and civic participation. The Association promotes a lively, diverse community of scholars, teachers, students, and practitioners who bring wide-ranging interests, methodologies, and perspectives to the analysis and conduct of government and politics…It enhances the capacity of political scientists to conduct research, improve teaching, develop professionally, and communicate their ideas within the discipline and to wider publics" (APSA 2020). However, despite this mission statement, there is too little collaboration between community colleges and universities—but so much opportunity. APSA began to facilitate relationships between community colleges and four-year institutions under previous APSA president Rogers Smith's P4 initiative.[2] This initiative partners two- and four-year faculty members teaching at institutions in the same metropolitan area to develop curriculum that can be used at both types of institutions to facilitate teaching of the most recent political science research. However, more work in developing these relationships remains.

Finally, on a more pragmatic note, APSA—like many other professional organizations—faces a declining membership. Thus, it is unwise for the organization to ignore the potential for new members that could be gained through intentional inclusion of and attention to community college faculty in the association.

What can APSA do to reach out to this critical constituency? In the survey of community college faculty, numerous barriers to APSA membership were identified: cost of membership, irrelevance of the national conference, negative attitudes toward community college faculty, and unawareness of the organization. APSA must take steps to address each of these concerns if it wants to have more community college faculty involved in the association. The following sections offer suggestions on the topics of outreach, teaching focus, and structural changes to the organization to better include community college faculty in APSA.

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OUTREACH

Almost 77% of survey respondents indicated that they are not a member of APSA. Respondents cited a lack of knowledge about the organization's existence and the lack of outreach aimed at community college faculty as reasons why they are not a member. Furthermore, respondents reported barriers—financial, geographic, and time related—to participation in APSA in traditional ways. Thus, we recommend increased outreach by APSA to increase familiarity and to allow for innovative participation to offset financial and geographic limitations faced by many community college faculty. These proposals include the following:

1. *Engage in intentional outreach to community college faculty.* Many survey respondents stated that they had never heard of the organization. This is "low-hanging fruit." APSA should consider different means for reaching out to this population while continuing to use APSA Connect and other communication channels to engage in intentional outreach and strategic marketing to community college faculty. APSA should use current association members who are community college faculty to assist with this outreach. APSA already has compiled a list of political scientists at community colleges nationwide; this list can be a useful starting point for more intentionally engaging in this outreach.
2. *Address the cost of participation in both APSA and conferences.* The high cost of membership and conference participation is problematic for not only community college faculty but also for faculty across the discipline: 28.6% of respondents specifically cited the high cost of APSA membership as a reason why they were not a member.
3. *Use technology (e.g., Zoom) to facilitate online conferences and workshops* to increase outreach to place-bound and/or financially limited faculty—especially around issues specific to teaching-focused faculty at both community colleges and four-year institutions. The 2020 Annual Meeting, which was fully virtual, and the 2021 Annual Meeting scheduled to be both virtual and in person, could serve as a model on which to base future conferences.

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4. *Facilitate networking among community college faculty.* Many community college faculty are in a small department with only one or two other faculty members and who often are geographically isolated. APSA has the opportunity to help these faculty connect outside of their institution using technology that has become widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic. The desire for and need to connect with political scientists at other community colleges was identified by many respondents as something they want the organization to provide. This could be as simple as providing a platform for a weekly brown-bag conversation on a pedagogy topic or making the list of faculty who teach at schools in the same general area available to members so they can reach out and connect on their own.
5. *Identify a point of contact in each two- and four-year institutional political science or similar department* who is willing to be a connector/networker for all political scientists. This can facilitate relationships between two- and four-year institutions for the purpose of discussing curriculum, student transfer, and the discipline as a whole.
6. *Make the discipline aware of community colleges as an educational institution type* and describe what they do and are. As discussed in part 1 of this article, the discipline as a whole is not fully versed in the challenges and opportunities for community college faculty. Highlights about community college institutions, faculty, and students in prominent APSA publications is another step in achieving this goal.
7. *Partner with regional organizations to facilitate outreach and professional development* for many faculty who are geographically place bound. In partnership with APSA, the Western Political Science Association has sponsored a community college mini-conference, held concurrently with its Annual Meeting, since 2017. The mini-conference encourages participation by individuals who traditionally do not participate in conferences, and it provides an avenue for community college faculty to address issues of special and unique importance to two-year institutions. The two-day 2020 and 2021 conferences were held via Zoom, which greatly expanded participation. We encourage APSA to use this model to form partnerships with other regional associations.
8. *Use connections with students while they are in graduate school to keep track of them after they take a faculty position at a community college*, and be intentional about keeping them engaged with APSA. By speaking with numerous graduate students over the years, we have found that graduate departments are not (or at least are not perceived as being) supportive of those who pursue a community college career.[3] Those faculty who may have been an APSA member in graduate school but then take a position in a community college are likely to lose touch with the organization as they become engaged in the vast and self-contained community college network—which does not necessarily encourage or reward academic disciplinary connections.

TEACHING FOCUS

Community college faculty spend the majority of their professional life focused on teaching. Our survey identified professional development around teaching as a service that community college faculty desire: 21% found the APSA Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) valuable and 13% stated that they want to attend workshops for educators. Because APSA identifies teaching as a core value of its mission, this seems like a natural collaboration in which community college faculty have something to gain and something to give. We offer the following recommendations:

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1. *Engage in professional -development opportunities that focus on the unique challenges that community college faculty face*, including:
    a. *Teaching diverse student bodies* with widely varying levels of academic preparation, goals, and backgrounds.
    b. *The need for professional development to support introductory courses.* Community college faculty become experts by repeatedly teaching introductory-level courses, thereby making their specialty "introductionists."[4] Repetitively teaching an introductory course presents challenges for faculty to keep both the course material and their teaching approach fresh. Two-year faculty could benefit from professional-development opportunities around these challenges and also could be a good resource for new faculty in how to approach an introductory course for the first time. Furthermore, APSA should recognize this focus as a specialty and make it an option for faculty to select it as their focus in their membership.
    c. *Opportunities for community college faculty to benefit from their four-year colleagues' specialized research* to stay current on developments in each subfield. This already has begun on a limited basis with the P4 initiative previously discussed and should be instituted and encouraged on an association-wide basis.
    d. *Address academic isolation.* Many community college faculty are the only or only one of two or three political scientists at their institution. Using technology, APSA is in a position to serve as a hub connecting these faculty to facilitate collegiality and opportunities for professional development. As the COVID-19 crisis has shown, virtual meetings can be a useful tool for facilitating connections among colleagues. APSA

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could sponsor virtual brown bags, happy hours, and professional-development seminars. More simply, it could maintain a database of contact information that faculty can search to find others who also are interested in connecting.

2. *Restructure the Annual Meeting to make it more useful for teaching-focused faculty.* Only 14.2% of respondents to the APSA survey of community college faculty identified the Annual Meeting as a valuable resource. This suggests that the current dominant conference model focusing on the presentation of specialized, niche research is not useful to community college and other teaching-focused faculty. Thus, we recommend the following:

   a. *Restructure the conference to include workshops and other similarly structured sessions* that allow for focused time to discuss pedagogy, curriculum, and other relevant pedagogical topics, much like what occurs at the standalone TLC.
   b. *Encourage more short courses* aimed at community college and teaching-focused faculty that take place throughout the Annual Meeting.
   c. *Introduce a community college track at the annual TLC* and reintroduce a community college track to the standalone TLC. The standalone TLC used to have a track dedicated to community college faculty; when that track was present, community college faculty had the highest rate of participation in the conference. We predict that including a standalone track for community college faculty at the TLC will have the same result.

3. *Utilize community college faculty to help APSA further its mission to support and enhance teaching practices.* There is evidence that—enculturated in an environment that prioritizes teaching and obligated to engage in professional development focused on teaching—community college faculty are more attuned to the needs of students and "hold particularly high standards regarding teaching performance and related behavior" compared to faculty members in research universities and comprehensive colleges (Bayer and Braxton 1998, 201).We view the pedagogical expertise of community college faculty as untapped potential for our colleagues in the political science community across institutions. When we want to turn to the knowledge experts in a subfield of political science, we turn to the preeminent scholars. As APSA focuses concerted efforts to enhance and support teaching practices, we should identify and rely on the preeminent practitioners in community colleges. Furthermore, because students at community colleges more accurately reflect American diversity than four-year universities, they are excellent sites for teaching and learning research.

4. *Ensure that resources such as APSA Educate have sections specifically devoted to community college faculty and two-year institutions.*
5. *Use community college faculty, whose focus is almost exclusively teaching and best pedagogical practices, as resources to facilitate pedagogical training for graduate students* pursuing jobs at teaching-focused institutions. Much has been written about the failings of doctoral programs to adequately prepare future professors to excel in teaching (Dolan et al. 1997; Rothgeb, Spadafore, and Burger 2007). APSA identified this need and developed resources to address it.[5] As is well documented in the literature, the competition for tenure-track positions continues to increase and, as it does, having a strong teaching portfolio can help a candidate stand out to a hiring committee. Research programs would serve their graduate students by providing access to teaching preparatory professional development.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO APSA

APSA has made progress in the past five years to make community college faculty feel welcome in the organization. The creation of the Status Committee and the presence of a community college faculty member on APSA's governing council are steps in the right direction. However, the reality is that APSA's membership is overwhelmingly dominated by particular types of institutions. Survey respondents stated the perception that APSA is not supportive of or relevant to community college faculty, the association does not benefit community college faculty, and there is too much focus on research that is not relevant to the teaching focus of community college faculty as reasons why they are not an APSA member. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they found little benefit to membership, especially given the cost. We offer the following recommendations for continuing the shift in APSA's institutional culture to be more inclusionary of all institution types:

1. *Ensure institutional diversity representation in APSA at all levels of governance* from the council to ad hoc boards. Every time a committee, review board, or ad hoc or any other type of committee is formed, APSA should strive for institutional diversity. There should be a reserved seat on APSA's Council for community college faculty. Only by including representatives of all types of institutions where political science faculty teach can we ensure that the interests and concerns of all political scientists are considered by the association.
2. *Reinstate the annual standalone TLC conference.* This historically has been the conference with the most community college faculty participation and was identified as the conference that is of most value to them.
3. *Reconfigure membership benefits to make them appealing to community college faculty.* Our survey results indicate that

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community college faculty do not see value in the current benefits offered by APSA. Namely, access to the journals (a primary benefit)—other than the *Journal of Political Science Education* and certain facets of *PS: Political Science & Politics*—does not justify the cost of membership. APSA should consider including other benefits that are directly related to teaching and professional development aimed at teaching-focused faculty. These benefits (e.g., access to members-only professional development and networking) would be an incentive for community college faculty to join the organization.

4. *Explicitly incorporate mentorship opportunities for those interested in pursuing community college positions* in the APSA Mentor program.
5. *Partner with the Political Science Education (PSE) section to welcome community college faculty into APSA.* This section is focused on best practices in the teaching of political science and would be the natural home for community college faculty. Assisting the PSE section in identifying and connecting with new community college faculty APSA members will help to retain them.

There is tremendous growth opportunity for APSA regarding community college faculty. We believe that these recommendations, if implemented purposefully by APSA, will lead to more community college faculty engaging with the organization. That engagement will serve to enhance the vibrancy and longevity of APSA.

CONCLUSION

There is still much that we do not know about political science faculty who teach at community colleges; however, this survey and its findings is a first step in creating a more inclusive organization. We encourage APSA to implement these recommendations and to assess the impact of doing so. Is community college faculty membership increasing? Is participation in the APSA TLC increasing? Are there more community college faculty engaged in governance positions at APSA? Is APSA demonstrating commitment to its stated values in its communications, strategic and financial planning, and events?

More important, implementation of these proposals will benefit all faculty committed to teaching in our discipline. APSA places teaching as a core value in its mission statement. We call on APSA to demonstrate its commitment to that mission by making changes that will lead to greater involvement by faculty teaching in our discipline. ■

NOTES

1. For additional details about this survey and data collection, see "A Call to APSA Part 1: Learn about Community College Faculty" in this issue.
2. See https://connect.apsanet.org/centennialcenter/2019/08/22/apsa-task-force-on-new-partnerships-launches-six-new-initiatives.
3. Two of the authors regularly participate in a job and career session held at the national APSA conference for graduate students interested in a community college career. Students have told us that they do not feel like they can ask their advisors questions about community colleges or express their interest in community college positions.
4. Ryan Emenaker at College of the Redwoods in California is credited for the creation of this term. He argued that community college faculty, because of the excessive focus on teaching introductory courses, are "introductionists."
5. See APSA (2004) and APSA Pedagogy Workshops (https://connect.apsanet.org/apsa2018/workshops), which provide opportunities for advanced PhD students to prepare a teaching portfolio.

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