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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