The Mentoring Column

Editor's Note. As part of our mandate as the Task Force on Mentoring (hereafter the TF), we sent a questionnaire to all the living past presidents of the APSA, asking them if they would care to write something about their own experience. Several past presidents already have responded, and we hope to receive more responses from other presidents in the near future. (Eventually, we hope to be able to publish these, along with the other *PS* columns on mentoring, in a volume.) We are publishing Ted Lowi's response here, both for the insight it provides into Lowi's own professional and intellectual development and for its particular advice to others.

One of the most important things the TF has learned is that mentoring is an on-going process. There is always more to learn and we all have something to give to others as we grow intellectually and professionally. Mentoring is not simply for the young and inexperienced. There are always gaps in our knowledge, and there are always new challenges and new positions in to which we can grow. (What skills are needed as we become departmental chairs? Deans? University presidents? APSA officers? Move into jobs outside academia? Think about retirement issues?) We encourage an approach to mentoring, then, that recognizes the mutuality of the experience, as each of us is both a mentor and a mentee.

As illustration of the above, I received Lowi's response just as I was trying, with little success, to finally relinquish a book manuscript to my patient publisher. I felt the manuscript was not good enough; it needed more changes, did not adequately convey the richness of the material, and did not do justice to the people interviewed. Most of us know the refrain. Lowi's point # 3b, on the greatest of all scholarly fears, was just what I needed to hear at that particular moment. So, my personal thanks to Ted for his candor, his wisdom, and his generosity in taking the time to complete our TF questionnaire. I hope others will enjoy this piece as much as we on the TF did.

Kristen Monroe, for the Task Force

TO: The APSA Task Force on Mentoring
FROM: Theodore Lowi
DATE: May 6, 2003
RE: Response to Questionnaire on Mentoring

I will follow your format, treating the items as a questionnaire. One caveat: I can deal with "professional development" but not with "success," because I cannot make a judgment of success until my life is over—*which it is not*.

1. Critical Factors:

a. Shame as an Alabama teenager in 1948, in response to Dixiecrat rebellion and reading Truman Committee Report, *To Secure These Rights*.

b. A band director who prepared me for a music scholarship at Michigan State.

c. A highly professional department of political science at Michigan State.

d. Yale, before it became #1, and a cohort of amazing graduate students.

e. Early escape from New Haven to New York, with Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman.

f. First job, at Cornell (1959), where I learned how to make teaching and writing compatible.

2. Critical Mentors:

a. Glendon Schubert—first experience with teacher as genuine intellectual.

b. Joseph LaPalombara—first to demonstrate the promise of political science as a profession.

c. Robert Dahl—introduction to the value of synthesis (a word I prefer to theory) and the generosity of a teacher who can give you to yourself: "I take it, you mean . . . ."

d. Herbert Kaufman—first to treat me as a peer.

e. James Fesler—model of gentlemen and scholar.

f. Edward Levi—model of greatness of mind and modesty of conduct.

g. My graduate cohort at Yale, who know who they are.

h The senior faculty, Cornell Government Department, models of keeping scholarship and teaching together.

3. Advice to Younger (and Middle and Older) Scholars:

a. Teach what you write and write what you teach.

b. Whatever is worth writing is worth writing badly—the quest for perfection is snobbism at its worst, or an excuse for not writing. The greatest of all scholarly fears is *fear of finishing*.

c. From Thurber: "Don't get it right, get it written."

Lowi corollaries:

(1) Let your readers and editors catch what's wrong; (2) praise them; and (3) then revise your own way.

d. Live by the confession of W. Somerset Maugham: "I am in the very front rank of the second raters."

Lowi corollary:

What I produce contributes to the base out of which the one *first rater* of my century might emerge. That is not humility but the ultimate ambition.

e. Be generous with the hours you devote to teaching but very selfish with the time you have for writing.

Corollary:

Don't try to do serious reading or writing in your office. Stay home, or get a library study, or work in a hotel lobby.

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f. Cultivate the reputation of being a good colleague and a terrible committee person.

g. Do what I didn't do but what Marty Lipset did: Compile a large mailing list of scholars who share or might share your interest—and use it! Don't assume the journals distribute your work to the right people, and don't wait until your article is published before you circulate the version to be published.

h. Engage vigorously in APSA, regional and international (IPSA, ISA) associations. Professional socialization is not a one-time thing. The distribution of recognition and reward is basically just. And as a trade union, you can't beat it.

4. Critical Scholarly Choices:

a. Said No to Budget Bureau job (1961).

b. Said No to political staff and ghost writing work after one part-time experience with RFK (1964).

c. Said Yes to any chance to spend time abroad—*especially* because I was trained as an Americanist.

d. Said Yes to representing APSA at IPSA and 12 years of dealing with great foreign scholars.

e. Discovered (to my satisfaction) "Lowi's law" which holds that "policies cause politics;" and have stuck to it for over 40 years.

f. Learned to write with a dictaphone—and got secretarial help!

g. Chose to be an author of an American government textbook, and have stuck with that commitment since the early 1970s, because, like my teaching, it feeds on my other scholarship.

5. Prepare for Leadership—I Did not Prepare for Leadership Because that was not my Goal in the Profession. I Embraced two Other Goals:

a. Influence: The particular influence I sought was to shape the terms of discourse in political science and politics, to lift the discourse from objective knowledge toward synthetic argument, and to re-direct the argument toward more normative consequences.

b. Immortality: In the minds of at least some of my students, the footnotes of the publications of my peers, and, above all, in the card catalogs and Web sites of the world.

6. Changes to be Sought in APSA—I have no Changes to Offer in Matters of APSA as an Organization.

My main complaint is and has been that there is too much consent and not enough dissent. But I have already shot my bolt on this in my 1991 presidential address, "How We Become What We Study," and in my forthcoming piece on Perestroika, "Every Poet His Own Aristotle."

7. What Would I do Over? I've had a Great Run, and it Ain't Over, Thanks to Freedom from Compulsory Retirement. But to Satisfy the Intent of the Question, I'll Identify Some Items of Regret:

a. I should have tried harder to become truly bilingual in French.

b. I should have read more legal and economic history for my work.

c. I should have pulled together a number of pieces (some published, some not) into two books I had intended to complete. I am doing that now, with the help of two former students (now senior people) but it won't be quite the same.

d. I should have been more explicit about my debt to all my mentors, my colleagues, and especially my students.

8. How to Deal with Being a Senior Scholar:

a. Since writing has never been easy for me, I've been more aware of writing problems and have developed good advice for others who have writing difficulties but suffer from thinking they are alone rather than typical. I am like the second-rate athletes who make good coaches.

b. Unlike math and the sciences, I truly believe that the best work in the social sciences and humanities is done as one ages. I also believe that the older and more senior and more experienced people are best at teaching the intro and survey courses. I am not at all embarrassed to reveal that I have taught the Introduction to American Government course every year (that I'm not on leave) for 45 years. And I plan to continue for a while longer.

c. I handle being senior fairly well because I don't see myself as old as I grow older. In fact, I often think of myself as younger than my biologically younger colleagues, who seem to act too damned old for their age. I call myself a "transcronal"—a young person trapped in the body of a septuagenarian.

d. These responses should satisfy also #10, because my major psychological problems have been associated with trying to live up to my own expectations.

9. Dealing with the Tension Between Professional and Personal Life:

a. I never thought of work *versus* family. Since most of my writing has always been done in my study at home, and since I have always lived walking distance between home and campus, I have been present when everyday tensions arise—which I think is wholesome even when inadequate.

b. I've never had two careers, since I see teaching and writing as consonant and mutually productive. I often repeat to myself two clichés I recommended earlier to younger and older scholars: "Teach what you write and write what you teach;" and "Whatever is worth writing is worth writing badly." The more academic and specialized and systematic one tries to be, the more one needs to *teach it* so that the discourse is lifted above the narrow confines of analysis and reasoning as well as the private languages of the members of one's specialty.

11. How I Would Like to be Remembered:

As one who had a passion for political science and an ambition to shape the terms of discourse.

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