

Organized Sections in APSA: A Status Report*

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Organized sections became a formal component of the American Political Science Association in 1983. Since that time, membership, numbers, and the role of sections in the APSA have grown steadily. This overview reports on growth and involvement of organized sections within the Association.

There are 27 approved organized sections. The newest, the Organized Section for a New Political Science, was approved in May 1991. Forty-five percent of all APSA members (5,434 people out of 12,022) belong to at least one section, and half of these belong to more than one section. Combined memberships in all of the sections total 10,798.

Growth has been steady; sections are not just getting more numerous, they are also getting bigger. Figure 1 shows combined memberships in all sections since 1984 have grown at a linear rate, and that after absorbing several new sections in the mid-1980s, the mean number of members per section has also grown to over 450 in 1991.

There are many reasons for the strong appeal of organized sections. Contributing factors are likely the accessibility allowed by their scale, the opportunities for leadership, their efficiency in leading members to colleagues with similar interests, the low dues, and the forum they provide members to provide greater definition to their fields within the discipline. Almost all sections prepare an informal newsletter for their members and provide mailing lists of members, and some are exploring new modes of electronic communication through computer networks. Many also have established annual awards for work within their fields. Perhaps the most important activities of organized sections have been their involvement in planning aspects of the APSA annual meeting, which is discussed further below.

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Section Membership

Sections have been formed in almost all fields of the discipline. The largest section is one of the newest—the Comparative Politics Section with 869 members, established in 1988. Figure 2 shows current membership for all sections.

The membership of organized sections tends to be composed more of people holding academic positions than of students or applied political scientists. Fifty percent of APSA members in colleges and universities belong to organized sections, compared to 42 percent of APSA student members and APSA members in the government. Among academic members, associate professors are most likely to join sections—56 percent at that rank belong to at least one section, compared to 50 percent of assistant professors, and 49 percent of those with full professor rank.

On a chronological basis, members earning their degree in the 1970s are most likely to be section members—at a rate of 53 percent. Only a third of those earning degrees in the 1950s hold a section membership. Retired members are far less likely to join sections than other association members; only 21 percent of the retired members hold a current section membership.

Section members are not separate from those people active within the Association as a whole. Among APSA leaders, defined as members holding seats on the APSA Council or any of its standing and special purpose committees, 61 percent belong to organized sections.

Section Leadership

One feature of organized sections is the number of leadership opportunities they provide. In total, organized sections provide 233 leadership positions, counting their officers, board members, newsletter editors, and annual meeting program organizers—filled this year by 217 people. This compares with 174 leadership positions within APSA itself, filled by 154 people.

Section leadership is not evidently any more or less representative than the leadership of the Association as a whole, if gender can be used as an