

# The Teacher

## Political Scientists Examine Civics Standards: Introduction

Sheilah Mann, *APSA*

“World Class Standards” in core academic subjects was the first objective of the Accountability Package of *AMERICA 2000: An Education Strategy*, the long-range plan announced in 1991 by the Bush administration to achieve national educational goals endorsed by President Bush and the states’ governors in 1991. *AMERICA 2000* cited five subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. Civics and government were not listed even though the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship were a specific goal.

In response to presentations from teachers’ organizations and civic associations about the importance of education for citizenship, the Department of Education and the Pew Charitable Trusts awarded grants in 1992 to the Center for Civic Education to develop standards for teaching civics and government in grades K–12. The Center for Civic Education had produced *Civitas: A Framework for Civic Education* in 1991, and it has been conducting annual national competitions among high school students on U.S. constitutional history and principles since 1987.

The Clinton administration continued to support a national strategy to enhance education, reshaping the program under *GOALS 2000: The Educate America Act*, which provides funding to support efforts by states to develop their individual standards in the academic subjects. Consequently, states are able to use any of the “national standards” developed for civics and government as a re-

source and reference. The APSA, which has been monitoring the federal education policies and the subject area standards projects, decided not to participate as an association in the preparation and endorsement of the K–12 education standards for civics and government for these reasons:

- The Association has resisted placing its name, as an imprimatur, upon any specific curriculum standards or textbooks since 1975.
- As a profession, political science now encompasses a wide array of fields of inquiry, and as a collectivity, political scientists have differing views about the content of the precollege curriculum on government and politics as well as about the values and objectives of political socialization, making it unlikely that the Association could present a consensus about the curriculum.
- As a subject of study in elementary and secondary schools, civics and government are not synonymous with the array of research topics and methods employed by political science as a discipline. Democratic theory, constitutional democracy, constitutional rights, and U.S. government and politics are the major subjects of most precollege curricula in civics and government. Civics and government topics are taught, most often, in history and social science classes, even in high schools. Currently only 21 states offer separate high school courses in American government.

While the APSA does not have an organizational affiliation with the

civics and government standards, the APSA encourages individual political scientists to be involved in developing national and state content standards in civics and government. I was a member of the Steering Committee and National Advisory Committee to develop the Civics Standards, along with other political scientists, historians, curriculum specialists, and teachers. Political scientists and political science departments can make important contributions to deliberations about the content of precollege education on civics, government, and politics and to the training of precollege teachers.

Articles in this issue of the “Teacher” section offer differing interpretations and criticisms of the *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education 1994). A limited number of copies of the *National Standards for Civics and Government* are available from the APSA, and political scientists who review these civics and government standards are welcome to send comments for publication in a future issue of *PS*. Comments about the involvement of political science in precollege curriculum development are also welcome.

An overview of the history of the Association’s involvement with precollegiate citizenship/civics education tells the story of the evolution in the position the professional association now holds with respect to precollege education. The founders of the APSA and first generations of its members declared that the discipline had two distinctive education missions—citizenship and public service. A major

justification for separate political science departments was the need for all college students to learn about American government to ensure their support of democracy. This concern about citizenship education led political scientists to become involved in projects for secondary school instruction and teachers.

A standing committee on teaching political science was appointed in December 1903 at the meeting that established the American Political Science Association. The committee was replaced by a section on Instruction in Political Science in 1904. William A. Schaper, University of Minnesota, was appointed section chair. His report, "What Do Students Know About Government Before Taking College Courses in Political Science?," was presented at the 1905 APSA Annual Meeting and led to the Association's consistent active involvement with secondary school education until World War II (Schaper 1905, 207–28). From then on, the Association established committees, subcommittees, and task forces, and held conferences, which examined curricula, instructional materials, and teacher training, and made recommendations about the need to require instruction on civics and government in middle schools and high schools and to train teachers for these courses, to prepare course outlines, and to recommend materials and teaching techniques (Prifold 1962).

Among the education activities in these early decades of the century were:

- Conferences, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, where administrators, teachers, college and university political science faculty met to discuss instruction about government in the schools.
- Collaboratives with the National Council for the Social Studies and the American Historical Association: joint panels at the Association's meetings and joint committees that produced teacher guides on issues, such as democracy and international issues.
- A series of radio broadcasts pro-

duced by the Subcommittee on Civic Education by Radio and the National Council on Radio Education. The series called, "You and Your Government," with accompanying course guides for schools and civic organizations, drew a considerable audience from 1932 to 1936.

Both the radio series and the Committee on Policy ended in 1937 when external funding was exhausted (Prifold 1962, 5). These activities resulted from the Committee on Policy chaired by Thomas H. Reed. The committee's philosophy of promoting a political science clearly attached to American institutions and their operations came under criticism from Charles E. Merriam and other political scientists who sought to pursue a scientific inquiry into politics. Nonetheless, Merriam recommended that political scientists contribute to civic education. He gave a presentation entitled, "The Goals of Civic Education in the United States," at the 1933 Annual Meeting where an entire section was devoted to "Government and Education." Merriam proposed that scholarly analysis determine which social attributes contribute to the strength of democratic institutions (Prifold 1962, 4).

After World War II, a new grant from the Carnegie Corporation in 1948 supported another education committee. This committee promoted the inclusion of the social sciences in the National Science Foundation, sponsored annual meeting panels, and devoted most of its resources to studies of APSA activities on behalf of political science education. A book based on the final report of the Committee for the Advancement of Teaching, *Goals for Political Science* (1951), emphasized the profession's special concern for citizenship education, both precollege and undergraduate. One chapter is devoted to examining how colleges and universities can assist secondary schools and teachers.

While *Goals for Political Science* was criticized by those political scientists committed to a more analytical, less normative approach to

the study of government and public policy and politics, activities on behalf of education continued to be pursued by the Association and recommended to its members in the 1960s and 1970s. Notable among these was a televised course on American government taught by Peter Odegard for the "Continental Classroom" series in 1960–61 which was viewed by over half of high school social science teachers as well as a half million other Americans (Prifold 1962, 8). Also, at that time, the "Report of the Special Committee on High School Instruction in Political Science" encouraged the APSA to "concern itself actively and persistently, in the years ahead, with the teaching of our subject in secondary schools" (Prifold 1962, 1) and to do so via summer seminars, graduate fellowships for high school teachers, pamphlets on topics in American government, distributing *American Political Science Review* to high schools, and working with other education and scholarly organizations and projects. Throughout the 1960s, the APSA continued to collect information about high school courses and sought support for projects to promote precollege political science education.

Grants to the APSA from the United States Office of Education (1970) and from the National Science Foundation (1972) provided funds for precollege and undergraduate education programs. The elementary and secondary political science education projects included teacher training, assessing the political science content in high school social studies curricula, and developing curricula and course outlines on specific subjects, such as urban politics and international conflict resolution. The "Pre-College Political Science Education Project" created a network of political scientists for these activities, conducted conferences to engage more political scientists in the precollege education effort, and disseminated findings about education research and practices to teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators. What is particularly notable about this effort is that it was dedicated to "political science edu-

education," not civic or citizenship education.

The 1971 report of the Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education criticized the lack of connection and communication between pre-college educators and political science faculty and the content of instruction about politics and government in elementary and secondary schools. Precollege courses were faulted for their lack of realism and comparative perspective on U.S. politics, for too much emphasis on institutions and legal aspects of government, and for a reliance on memorization and rote learning.

The Committee identified eight objectives for precollegiate political science education:

1. knowledge about the realities of political life as well as the cultural ideals of American democracy
2. knowledge about political behavior and processes as well as formal governmental institutions and legal structures
3. knowledge about other political systems and particularly about the international system
4. a capacity to think about political phenomena in conceptually sophisticated ways
5. understanding and skill in social science inquiry
6. a capacity to make judgments about political decisions and politics
7. an understanding of the social,

psychological, historical, and cultural origins of their own political attitudes and values and the capacity to critically analyze personal and social implications of alternative values

8. the skills to participate effectively and democratically in the life of society  
(Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education 1971, 434-37)

This education committee defined the profession's educational mission in terms of providing guidelines and resources about the analytical skills and subjects of political science rather than on the normative goals associated with citizenship education. Successive APSA education committees and projects have adopted the recommendations of the 1971 Education Committee report with respect to contents but have not implemented the recommendations for greater involvement with precollege teachers and students.

Recent precollegiate projects developed lessons for students and lesson plans for teachers, including *Lessons on the Constitution: Supplements to High School Courses in American History; American Government and Civics; Ideas of the Founders on Constitutional Government: Resources for Teachers of History and Government*; and "APSA Guidelines for Teacher Training: Recommendations from the American Political Science Association for Certifying Precolle-

gate Teachers of Civics, Government and Social Studies" (*PS: Political Science & Politics* 1994, 261-62.)

## References

- Brody, Richard. 1989. "Political Science" in *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century*. Washington: National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, 59-64.
- Center for Civic Education. 1991. *Civitas*. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civil Education.
- Center for Civic Education. 1994. *National Standards for Civics and Government*. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education.
- Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education. 1971. "Public Education in the Public Schools: The Challenge for Political Science." *PS* 4:431-58.
- Eulau, Heinz, and James G. March. 1969. *Political Science: The Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey Political Science Panel*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Priford, Cora. 1962. "A History of the American Political Science Association's Activities in the Field of Secondary Education in Government, 1906-1962." Washington: American Political Science Association. February 21.
- Report of the Committee for the Advancement of Teaching, American Political Science Association. 1951. *Goals for Political Science*. New York: William Sloane.
- Schaper, William A. 1905. "What Do Students Know About Government Before Taking College Courses in Political Science?" in *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, vol. 2. "Struggling for Standards: An Education Week Special Report." 1995. *Education Week*. April 12.

## Review of National Standards for Civics and Government

Murray Dry, Middlebury College

Should there be national standards for civics and government for students in primary and secondary school, and if so, what shall they be? Responding to a congressional declaration of national education goals in the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994*, the Center for Civic Education has developed a 179-page booklet entitled, *National Standards for Civics and Government* (1994).

*tional Standards for Civics and Government* (1994).

The Student Achievement and Citizenship goal of this legislation proclaims that "students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including . . . civics and government . . . so that they may be prepared for responsi-

ble citizenship, further learning, and productive employment" (preface, v). Consequently, after an introduction that makes the case for education in civics and describes goals, standards, and skills, this work lays out content and performance standards in an outline form for grades K-4 (13-40), 5-8 (43-83), and 9-12 (89-137).