

Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere

APSA Council Report—March 2012

Written by Jeffrey C. Isaac, Editor in Chief, with the assistance of James Moskowitz, Managing Editor

I am happy to report that *Perspectives on Politics* continues to thrive. In the roughly two and a half years since we assumed editorial control of the journal, in June 2009, I believe that we have succeeded in strengthening journal operations and procedures and in projecting a new excitement about *Perspectives* and the role it can play in contributing to the invigoration of the discipline. At the heart of this has been the quality of the scholarship we have published and the way we have worked to present this scholarship in each issue.

We have a highly talented, energetic, and well-organized staff, and we have instituted a fine set of procedures for dealing with authors, reviewers, and each other. As a consequence we have been able to work efficiently and stay on production schedule with Cambridge and the printers. I have received a great deal of positive feedback from authors and from readers about the journal, its quality, and its accessibility and responsiveness. More importantly, we continue to receive a steady flow of manuscripts of an increasingly high quality, from “major” scholars eager to place their work in our journal and from more junior scholars who regard *Perspectives* and its mission as hospitable to their view of political science. Indeed, in the past year we have published a wide range of authors from a variety of institutions.

In 2011 *Perspectives* published the APSA presidential address, ten articles (with 21 authors and co-authors combined), four reflections essays (one with responses by four other scholars), nine review essays, six book symposia (with 29 contributors), nine critical dialogues between book authors, and 320 book reviews. We thus published the work of more than 400 political scientists. If you add to that the number of manuscript reviewers with which we have corresponded, in 2011 the journal networked with 675 political scientists. Our first two issues of 2012 have already matched the number of research articles published in 2011, and we expect this tendency to continue. At the same

time, we will continue to work with a very large number of colleagues. Through our extensive and substantive correspondence, and through the product of that correspondence—the journal itself—we believe we are succeeding in our goal of fostering a **political science public sphere**.

In the summer of 2011 a Performance Review committee appointed by APSA President Carole Pateman reviewed the performance of our editorial staff. The committee’s report, made available to the Council in summer of 2011, unanimously and strongly endorsed our work and recommended an extension of our contract for an additional two years. This recommendation was apparently unanimously approved by the Council. The document produced by the committee, and the association’s decision to renew our contract, stands as an important “report” of our recent activities.

The Appendix to this Report includes some basic publication and production data. Of particular note is a slight decrease in the number of manuscripts declined upon the first set of external reviews (and a corresponding increase in the number that receive a “major revision”). We believe this is a reflection of a deliberate choice to work with more authors over a longer period of time with the hope of developing the full potential of manuscripts. We will be happy to answer any questions about this data to the best of our ability.

In what follows I would like briefly to outline a range of accomplishments worthy of note, which together help to explain our success thus far.

1. *Perspectives* is a collaborative effort, and the journal works well because it has a terrific staff. James Moskowitz is an exceptional Managing Editor. He combines business experience, strong communication and computer skills, a real aesthetic sensibility, and the scholarly perspective of an advanced and published political science PhD student. James has contributed immeasurably to the success of the journal along every dimension,

from the efficient operation of the Editorial Manager system to the journal’s terrific new design, and he is responsible for the extraordinary covers we have featured in the past year. James works full-time on the journal. In August of 2010 Margot Morgan became the full-time Book Review Managing Editor. Margot has worked with me (along with James) on the journal since I first became Book Review Editor seven years ago, and she had been serving as the point person regarding copy-editing and production of the Review section. When she received her PhD from Rutgers in 2010 she was promoted to a full-time position, enabling me to focus more attention on further improving the “front end” of the journal (and also to return part-time to the classroom, as per my agreement with IU).

James and Margot are a terrific team, and I could not do the job that I do without their active involvement. They are joined by five equally terrific editorial associates whose contributions far exceed the 20 hours of work per week that their assistantships entail. Hicham Bou Nassif and Beth Easter work on the journal’s front end, reading every article submitted for publication, and participating with James and I in weekly “conference reviews” where we decide which pieces to send out for external review. They then divide up labor to find reviewers for the manuscripts and to stay on top of all communication with reviewers. They also work closely with James to prepare for publication those articles eventually accepted for publication. Emily Hilty, Adrian Florea and Rafael Khatchaturian work with Margot on the Review section, helping me find reviewers for each book, corresponding with reviewers, and working to move all reviews to publication. The staff works very well together. We meet weekly to discuss all aspects of the journal, to prepare manuscripts for copy-editing, and to plan ahead. We also typically have lunch (supplied by me). It is a very upbeat work environment. All editorial assistants are encouraged to take initiative and to make

sure that their work on the journal complements their academic work and long-term scholarly plans.

Much of the work of academic journals is done by staff, almost all of whom are graduate assistants. I am very proud of my staff, and proud of the work environment we have cultivated in our office. I believe this environment has contributed greatly to our success thus far with the journal. I also think that our discipline in general could do more to recognize the contributions of graduate assistants and to foster work environments that help these assistants do their work in a way that also contributes to their professional development. I am thus pleased to note that in 2011 two of our recent editorial assistants (Katie Scofield and Carolyn Holmes) received Fulbright dissertation travel grants, two others (Adrian Florea and Beth Easter) were awarded Indiana University dissertation fellowships, and a fifth, Rebekah Tromble, completed her PhD and took a position as an Assistant Professor at Lieden University. I believe this is strong evidence that we recruit top graduate students and that their work with us contributes to their professional development and success.

2. The journal has a terrific editorial board. We stay in fairly regular communication with the board as a whole, and communicate very often with individual board members, to consult on difficult decisions and to seek reviews of manuscripts when this becomes necessary. Board members have been very responsive and helpful, and many of them have been proactive in encouraging authors to submit their work for review. I believe that a journal like *Perspectives* can only succeed if a diverse group of excellent and highly respected political scientists are willing to make a commitment and to link their credibility to the credibility of the journal. Sustaining this kind of connection has been an important accomplishment and it remains an ongoing commitment.

When we assumed leadership of *Perspectives* we instituted a policy of prohibiting board members from publishing research articles in the journal. We did this to avoid any appearance of conflicts of interest. As far as I am aware no other major journal has such a policy, and the willingness of board members to serve in the face of this limit is a sign of their sincere dedication to the journal. This year we decided to rescind the prohibition. We did this for three reasons: (1) we believe we have demonstrated the seriousness and professionalism of our peer review process,

and are confident that we can handle board member submissions in the same way as all other submissions, and equally confident about the credibility of our efforts among colleagues in the discipline; (2) the policy has deprived the journal of some terrific opportunities to publish exactly the kinds of work we wish to publish, and now that the policy has achieved its goals, we wish to be able to review this work and consider it for publication; (3) we value our board members and are pleased that the entire board remains intact, and we believe that the prohibition unnecessarily limits our board members from appropriately participating in the journal to the fullest extent possible.

3. We have excellent working relationships with APSA (especially Michael Brintnall and Polly Karpowicz), Cambridge University Press (especially Mark Zadrozny, Susan Soule, and Jonathan Geffner, who is the Cambridge point person on all production issues), Beljan (printers), and AIRES, which runs the *Editorial Manager* system. James has done an excellent job in staying in touch with all of these people, being responsive to their concerns, and obtaining their help when it is necessary. I can't say enough about the synergy between Cambridge and APSA and how essential this kind of relationship is to the success of the journal. We are also fortunate to have the help of two excellent copy-editors: Linda Lindenfesler, who worked with Jim Johnson when the journal was at Rochester, and Maurice Meilleur, a published young political scientist currently working at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While we do some copy-editing in-house, we have budgeted to have almost all of it done externally by experienced professionals. This is important for a journal in which broad intelligibility, and thus excellent prose writing, is essential.

We are also very fortunate to have the exceptional support provided by Indiana University, its College of Arts and Sciences, and its Political Science Department. IU provided course release for me and support for graduate assistance for the four years of my tenure as Book Review Editor. It also housed our editorial office and furnished state of the art computer support. It is committed to continuing this support for the duration of my tenure as Editor in Chief of the journal (the only change is that IU has tripled our office space since we took over the entire journal). This means that for ten years IU will have supported and housed the journal. This support, and the scholarly and collabora-

tive spirit in which it is provided, has been indispensable to the success of the journal. In an age where such support is increasingly hard to come by, this is worth noting.

This summer the journal will be moving into a terrific new office space in Woodburn Hall, the current site of the department's data lab. We will also be getting upgraded computers. This is an exciting development that will enhance our work.

4. We have maintained excellent and efficient communication with authors, reviewers, and people in the field more generally. We try—and almost always succeed—in completing our internal review of each submitted research article within 10 days of submission. We move promptly to identify external reviews for all suitable manuscripts. I also write substantial and constructive letters to every author whose paper we decide not to send out for review, and I try to send these letters within 10–14 days of submission. I have received a great deal of appreciative feedback from many of the authors whose papers we choose not to send out for external review. We also stay in close touch with authors through the publishing process, from external review through revision through preparation for publication. I write careful, clear, and substantive letters to each author offering guidance. If there are delays we write to authors explaining them. I write follow-up letters to authors from whom we really wish to see a revised paper, encouraging prompt revision and resubmission. I also write often to scholars in the field, inquiring about interesting-sounding conference presentations, and inviting article submissions. I am especially interested in cultivating connections to junior scholars whose work has merited official recognition or seems particularly interesting. We are always looking to reach out to new authors and readers, and to attract new and exciting work for review and publication. At the same time, all research articles are subject to our strict, double-blind external review process.

As a matter of general policy, we prize efficient, prompt, and kind communication. Every letter is an opportunity to explain the journal's distinctive mission and to make a friend for the journal. We also keep excellent records of all communication. Every official letter is sent through Editorial Manager, and copied to the *Perspectives* e-mail account and my own e-mail account, and all letters are backed up.

Last spring I made every letter available to the performance review committee, and

was proud to do so, so that our operations remain fully transparent.

5. **New Editorial Philosophy and Policies:** The March 2010 issue contained a special section featuring an Editor Statement on Philosophy and Policy (included here as an Appendix). This text, and revised policies, have also been posted online at the *Perspectives* website. We are doing everything possible to rationalize and to clarify journal policies and to publicize these policies. This is in tune with our decision to “brand” the journal as *A Political Science Public Sphere* (itself explained in the Editor Statement).

6. In particular, we continue to work very hard to make clear to all readers that every single research article published in *Perspectives* has been through a demanding blind internal review process and then a double-blind external review process. Our review process—which includes careful editorial selection of reviewers and directions to all authors regarding revisions, and also includes very careful line editing of every sentence by the Editor in Chief, followed by equally careful copy-editing by a professional copy editor—is as serious, if not more serious, than that of any other peer-reviewed political science journal. I am happy to report that we are receiving a healthy and constantly growing number of excellent article submissions, many of which, it turns out, are authored by top scholars in the field. By being very serious about our review process, we hope to increase the number of truly excellent articles submitted, and over time to enhance the journal’s reputation as a peer-reviewed journal, so that increasing numbers of junior colleagues think of *Perspectives* as a first option for their best work when this work is framed broadly, and so that departmental personnel and tenure and promotion committees will accord peer-review research articles published in *Perspectives* the measure of recognition they are due. Along these lines, I am particularly pleased to note the number of up and coming junior colleagues who have recently submitted research articles for consideration, for this is a sign that our journal is regarded as a major outlet by people who also publish in other top journals.

7. **Journal Focus:** we are finding that it is possible to develop a reasonable publication schedule that provides a measure of focus to our planned issues. Our March 2011 issue highlighted the theme of environmental politics. The June issue highlighted the theme of the study of democratization, and

the September issue highlighted the theme of the politics of immigration. We are particularly excited about our next two forthcoming issues, which will feature the study of violence and war (June) and New Orleans and the challenges of urban reconstruction and development (September). The latter issue will be our journal’s tenth anniversary issue. It will be timed to come out prior to the APSA conference in New Orleans; it will include substantial essays by the journal’s founding editor, Jennifer Hochschild, and her successor, Jim Johnson; and it will be the basis for our journal’s special theme panel at APSA (and our anticipated tenth anniversary reception). Outlines of the contents of the June and September issues are in the appendix.

We are a general journal of political science, and the articles we publish represent the best of what is submitted to us that makes it through our review process. Each article is judged on its own merits and individually. But by thinking strategically about timing and production schedule, proactively soliciting “Reflections” essays, and developing special Book Review theme sections, we can also call attention to some of the “big topics” that touch on all areas of political science—as it is our mission to do. *I regard this kind of editorial “visioning” and planning as a central aspect of my job as Editor in Chief of this particular journal.* At the same time, I am always listening to and indeed soliciting feedback, from Editorial Board members and colleagues more generally, about what we are doing, about what themes to attend to, and about how we can do what we do better.

8. **Special Review sections:** *Perspectives* seeks to nurture a **political science public sphere** that allows scholars to move beyond their normal comfort zones and reach broadly, beyond conventional methodological and subfield divides, and to the discipline as a whole. Towards this end, in the past six years we have instituted a number of innovative formats to our Review section—book Symposia, Critical Dialogues, creative categorizing of certain books [the rationale for these changes was explained in my March 2006 “Statement from the Book Review Editor,” which is also included here as an Appendix, since our philosophy for the Book Review section has not changed, and indeed the perspectives laid out in that text anticipated what we are now trying to do with the journal as a whole]. Last year we added an additional innovation: each issue now contains, in addition to the “standard” four-subfield sections,

a special “theme” section highlighting books that address an important substantive theme irrespective of field or approach. Among the themes already featured or in production are the following: gender politics, the geopolitics of Asia, democratization, human rights, global climate change, the politics of immigration, violence and politics, and the challenges of urban reconstruction and development.

We regard this innovation as a crucial development. It is the outcome of conversations with scholars and leaders of APSA, as well as among ourselves, that have been going on ever since I became Book Review Editor in 2005. These conversations have focused on the intellectual and practical limits of the four-field framework that *Perspectives* inherited from the APSR [it is worth noting that this framework only evolved over time at the APSR], and whether or not *Perspectives* might and perhaps should reform this framework. This topic was discussed at my Editorial Board’s inaugural 2009 meeting in Toronto, and the Board expressed enthusiastic support for some sort of change. At our 2010 Board meeting in Washington, DC, the Board supported my proposal that the best way for our Editorial team to address this issue while still undertaking all the other changes noted above, would be for the journal to add a fifth section to the review, which would highlight a different substantive theme in each issue, rather than to modify the long-standing, inherited four-field format, which serves many functions in the profession.

It bears reemphasis that it is only through serious planning and a long-term perspective that we can try to offer some thematic focus and highlight particularly important broad political issues—the environment, immigration, etc.—while also fulfilling our central function of promoting a broader kind of research article and of publishing only the very best article submissions that make it through our internal review and then our rigorous system of double-blind external peer review. While all editors make decisions about production schedules and article placement, and while we treat our discretion in these matters as an opportunity to highlight broad themes and the ways that diverse scholars can speak to each other about these themes, it is also the case that each of these research articles stands on its own and speaks for itself.

GOING FORWARD

We are looking forward to the remaining three years of our term. While there will

inevitably be staff changes over this period, I am confident that the core staff, and the core staff structure, are firmly in place, and our new offices should further solidify what is already a first-rate operation.

As we look to the future we have already begun institute some changes in response to the Performance Review Committee's very helpful suggestions.

Regarding their concern about the balance between unsolicited and solicited material: we are developing a strong queue of unsolicited research articles, and plan to run at least five or six such articles in each future issue. Many of our "Reflections" essays also originate as unsolicited research articles that work better in the Reflections format, and they are the kinds of things that under the previous two editors often appeared as articles. We have been exceptionally scrupulous about what we are willing to treat as a "research article." At the same time, around 40% of each issue consists of "front end" material that could be considered unsolicited and that appeared as articles prior to our taking over. We feel comfortable with this balance, especially given the excellence of the review essays and symposia we have run in the journal's "back end." We would also be comfortable increasing the proportion of unsolicited material in the journal's front

end, and we are very proactive in encouraging anonymous article submissions. We expect that in the coming years the balance will move more towards 50/50. The key thing for us is that every single piece published anywhere in the journal be absolutely first rate.

In particular, the committee suggested that certain proactive efforts "may help secure submissions especially from up-and-coming early career scholars." We are pleased to note that we have undertaken such efforts—at the ISA, MPSA, Association for Political Theory, and APSA conferences—and they are already bearing fruit in terms of more submissions and publications by early career scholars. Our June 2012 issue will feature many pieces by such scholars.

With regard to the board: we have expanded the board, and also modified policies to encourage greater participation. In addition, we have instituted a system of minutes for meetings, and have changed our editorial board meeting times to lunch in the hope of encouraging greater attendance.

With regard to providing helpful data, we hope that this report's appendix is straightforward, clear, and helpful, and demonstrates our efforts to respond to the committee's concern. We include a full-volume table of contents for the year 2011 (in addition to other information), as we believe that the

product in the pages of *Perspectives* speaks best for itself.

With regard to financial accounting: this aspect of the committee report never made sense to us. We are in strict compliance with APSA accounting procedures; we submit quarterly statements as required; and our financial officer—the department's chief financial officer—is in regular contact with APSA. We are aware of no problems. And indeed, during the recently concluded discussions between APSA and IU regarding our contract extension, financial accounting questions never even came up. If APSA wishes to institute different or more rigorous financial reporting requirements, we will comply with them. But right now we are in full compliance with APSA expectations, we have never received a complaint from APSA staff, and things seem to be operating very smoothly.

SUMMARY

To sum up, the journal is thriving, due to the terrific work of many fine people and the support offered by APSA, Cambridge, Indiana University, and especially by the colleagues who, as authors, reviewers, and readers, are our primary constituency. ■

PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICS: APPENDIX

Table A1.

Space Allocation in Vol. 9 2011

TYPE	%
Editor's Introductions	2
Presidential Address	2
Research Articles	19
Reflection Articles	5
Review Essays	9
Review Symposia	10
Critical Dialogues	4
Book Reviews	50

Table A2.
Outcomes 2011(%)

OUTCOME	%	%	%
TOTAL			
Do not externally review	58		
Review externally	42		
FIRST DECISION UPON REVIEW			
Decline		57	
Major revision		27	
Minor revision		13	
Conditional accept		3	
FINAL DECISION TO DATE			
Accept			5
Do not externally review			58
Decline upon review			23
Revise			10
Under review (V1-R1)			2
With editor (R2+)			1

Table A3.
Outcomes 2010 and 2011(%)

OUTCOME	%	%	%
TOTAL			
Do not externally review	59		
Review externally	40		
FIRST DECISION UPON REVIEW			
Decline		67	
Major revision		19	
Minor revision		11	
Conditional accept		3	
FINAL DECISION TO DATE			
Accept			5
Do not externally review			59
Decline upon review			26
Revise			6
Under review (V1-R1)			1
With editor (R2+)			1

Note: A comparison of data from the last volume-year against the last two volume-years indicates a slight decrease in the number of manuscripts declined upon the first set of external reviews (and a corresponding increase in the number that receive a "major revision"). We believe this is a reflection of a deliberate choice to work with more authors over a longer period of time with the hope of developing the full potential of manuscripts. Other decision rates remain relatively steady. Total article submissions (2011 = 195) (2010 = 185).