

Task Force to Set Agenda for Civic Education Program

Editor's Note: The Task Force on Civic Education for the Next Century was established by the APSA Council in Fall of 1996 at the request of then-President Elinor Ostrom in order to initiate a civic education program in political science. This report summarizes Ostrom's initial statement about the need for and objectives of a civic education program. The full statement was published in the December 1996 issue of PS: Political Science & Politics (755-58).

The APSA Task Force on Civic Education for the Next Century has been discussing the objectives and projects for an APSA civic education program. In March 1997, Task Force members, joined by APSA President Elinor Ostrom and APSA President-Elect M. Kent Jennings attended a retreat hosted by the McHugh Family Endowment and the Colorado College at the College's Baca Campus. At that retreat, a statement articulating the need for an initiative on behalf of political education was prepared by Lief Carter and Jean Elshtain. The statement appears on the facing page for reference and comment by Association members and *PS* readers.

At the Baca Retreat, participating Task Force members developed working papers identifying civic education activities in undergraduate education and pre-college education. In email exchanges and a meeting on August 30, 1997, the Task Force agreed to specify a plan for a civic education program that incorporates the following attributes and activities.

Research and Communication

To encourage the conduct of new research, the examination of current research, and the exchange of opinions and information on civic trust, civic engagement, and civic education, the APSA will establish a discussion list. To call attention to other civic education projects and resources, the APSA will develop the civic education section of its web site.

Electronic communication is important for linking interested and knowledgeable scholars/teachers. National networking can inform and facilitate the adaptation of useful practices and the exploitation of valuable resources, while at the same time ensuring that exemplary work receives proper recognition.

References and Guides

The Task Force is developing a project to produce a collection of papers, highlighting current research on levels of and associations between civic trust and

participation and the roles, practices, and impact of the various agents responsible for civic attachments knowledge and behavior. The collection will conclude with recommendations about strategies for enhancing political education in the future. The proposed collection will be shaped through presentations and discussions at political science meetings.

The core, introductory courses in political science will be a major focus of attention. The American politics and government courses is a requirement for high school graduation in 17 states and for college graduation in half as many states including California and Texas, and is often recommended for undergraduates wishing to satisfy a social studies distribution requirement. The preparation, collection, and distribution of exemplary course syllabi and teaching strategies for introductory courses, and particularly for the American government course, is a major recommended activity.

Another initiative addresses precollege education, because high school teachers are an important constituency for the civic education program, the Task Force members are developing in-service workshops for teachers and devising ways to provide assistance to political science programs interested in organizing workshops on political education. The Task Force will promote the importance of political science training in the preparation of high school civics and government teachers.

The Task Force is also interested in producing guides and resources for teachers at all levels of education to help

link their experiences in volunteering, participating in civic associations, and service learning to democratic principles and the value of political participation. Also being considered is the production of guides that connect service learning projects in other disciplines to civic engagement drawing upon the literature on current political science service learning and experiential education programs.

The Task Force anticipates making all of the materials that are collected and developed for the civic education program available on the Internet to facilitate the widest possible use. Selected materials such as monographs or guides for students will also be published.

Workshops and Short Courses

The Task Force will sponsor short courses and workshops for political science faculty at the Annual Meetings of the APSA and of the regional and state political science associations. In these sessions, faculty will hear presentations and exchange ideas about resources and strategies for addressing student cynicism and encouraging political deliberation and participation.

The Task Force is developing a detailed plan to implement a civic education program. Its members recognize that many political science faculty have experience planning and leading projects that can be incorporated into a plan and that many faculty are interested in participating in a civic education initiative. The Task Force welcomes information and suggestions.

Task Force on Civic Education for the Next Century, 1998-99 Members

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Suggestions for the Task Force and descriptions of relevant activities, including course syllabi, service learning and experiential education curricula, and/or workshops for high school teachers can be sent to: Sheilah Mann, APSA, 1527 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, DC; Fax: (202) 483-2657; E-mail: cived@apsanet.org.