

# Report of the Editor of the *American Political Science Review*, 2004–2005

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This completes my fourth year as editor of the *APSR*. The main theme of last year's annual report was continuity from the previous year in the flow, processing, and variety of the papers that we received and the articles that we published. That theme dominates this year's report as well, for only a glance at the tabular data reported below will be needed to establish the incremental character of the year-to-year changes that we experienced in the number and diversity of the papers that we received, the time it took to process them, and the outcomes of our review process. Having said that, I hasten to add that this year we have devoted extensive time and energy to an exciting new project, which I will discuss at the end of this report.

Before proceeding any further, I must extend a warm thanks to those who contributed to the operation of the *APSR* during the past year, including: Assistant Editor Elizabeth Cook; Editorial Assistants Jennifer Deets, Beth Franker, Lee Michael, and Jennie Schulze; the members of the *APSR* Editorial Board, bolstered during 2004–2005 by the additions of James Adams and Daniel Treisman; staff members too numerous to list at the APSA office, the George Washington University, and Cambridge University Press; the authors who submitted their papers; and the reviewers who donated their time, expertise, and good will to assessing these submissions (and who will be acknowledged by name in our November issue).

## Submissions and Processing

### *The Number of Papers Submitted*

During my first year as editor, 2001–2002, submissions skyrocketed, rising by 44% overall and by 56% for new manuscripts, compared to the preceding year.<sup>1</sup> The next year, they spurted by another 9% and 7%, respectively. Since then, they have reverted, more or less, to their first-year levels. To judge from the numbers shown in Table 1, the norm for the *APSR* appears to have settled in at 500 to 550 “new” submissions per year and more than 600 in all. Thus, the 2004–2005 numbers bear out my conclusion in

**Table 1**  
The Number of Papers Submitted

Year	Number of Submissions	
	Total	New
2004–2005	623	538
2003–2004	611	523
2002–2003	672	546
2001–2002	615	509
2000–2001	427	327
1999–2000	461	346
1998–1999	536	393
1997–1998	537	411
1996–1997	540	391
1995–1996	533	420
1994–1995	495	NA
1993–1994	480	NA
1992–1993	487	NA
1991–1992	479	NA
1990–1991	438	NA
1989–1990	428	NA
1988–1989	447	NA
1987–1988	391	NA
1986–1987	427	NA

last year's report that we had reached a new equilibrium in terms of submissions and that submissions would probably continue to hover around their current level.

### *Turnaround Times*

One of my initial goals as editor was to speed up the review process. During my first two years as editor, even as the flow of submissions was rising dramatically, we compiled faster processing times than had been achieved in the past by the *APSR* or, for that matter, by other

major political science journals. As explained in last year's report, during 2003–2004 we deliberately slowed down the review process in some instances, and our median turnaround time (the elapsed time between the day a paper arrive in our offices and the day I sign the decision letter) rose from 39 to 43 working days. During 2004–2005, our review process continued at the same pace as in 2003–2004 (See Table 2). We *could* go a little faster, but the effort that would be required to do so would strain our capacity and the steps that would be required (e.g., rejecting more papers without sending them out for review) would engender a loss of good will among authors. Some other journals are now touting turnaround times that are a bit faster than ours, but such claims warrant close scrutiny<sup>2</sup> and, in any event, the pace of our review process continues to be highly acceptable.

### *The Mix of Submitted Papers*

Categorized according to primary analytical approach and disciplinary subfield, the distribution of submitted papers remained virtually identical in 2004–2005 to the pattern that has become familiar in recent years (See Table 3). Again in 2004–2005, most *APSR* submissions were quantitative and/or formal, and about one in four (predominantly but by no means exclusively normative theory) was classified broadly as “interpretive/conceptual.” We continued to receive very few “small-N” papers. American politics-focused submissions continued to outpace submissions in other subfields, followed by comparative politics and, more distantly, international relations and normative

**Table 2**  
Elapsed Time (Median Number of Workdays) in the Review Process

Phase of Review Process	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004	2004–2005
From receipt to reviewer assignment	1	1	1	0
From assignment to last review	39	40	43	43
From last review to decision	0	0	0	0
From receipt to decision	39	39	42	42

**Table 3**  
Distribution of Papers Submitted (%)

Year	Approach					
	Formal	Quantitative	Formal and Quantitative	Small N	Interpretive/Conceptual	Other
2004–2005	13	52	6	1	27	1
2003–2004	11	51	8	2	26	2
2002–2003	9	50	10	5	25	1
2001–2002	17	45	7	1	29	2
1995–2000	13	48	7	2	30	0

  

Year	Field					
	American Politics	Comparative Politics	International Relations	Normative Theory	Formal Theory	Methods
2004–2005	38	26	15	14	4	4
2003–2004	32	30	16	12	1	9
2002–2003	34	26	16	13	6	6
2001–2002	30	25	14	17	8	6
1995–2000	38	23	12	18	6	2
1991–1995	35	22	12	21	10	0
1985–1991	41	17	10	19	13	0

theory. I am reluctant to attribute much meaning to year-to-year fluctuations in these figures, and longer-term comparisons indicate changes of quite limited degree.

**Outcomes**

From the perspective of outcomes as well as submissions and processing, 2004–2005 amounted to more of the same, i.e., a continuation of trends documented in my prior annual reports. Once again, 88 of every 100 of my first-round decisions were rejections based on the recommendations of reviewers. Another 1% (“incorrect” submissions) occurred because the authorship of a paper had not been rendered sufficiently anonymous, the paper far exceeded our length limit, or its formatting was wildly at variance with our guidelines; in each such case, the author was invited to fix the problem and submit a corrected version of the

paper. Another 4% of my decisions were to reject a paper without review because in my judgment it was so inappropriate for the *APSR* that no purpose would be served by sending it out for review; this was a higher proportion than in past years, reflecting encouragement from the editorial board to make selectively greater use of this expedient. Only 7% of my first-round decisions were “positive,” in the sense of inviting an author to revise a paper for further consideration or accepting it subject to some final conditions; one paper was unconditionally accepted in the first round. (See Table 4.)

I also continued to make very sparing use of “revise and resubmit” invitations and to resist the temptation to pile one such invitation on top of another. The great majority—75–80%—of revised-and-resubmitted papers were ultimately accepted.

Of the papers that were accepted during 2004–2005 for publication in the

*APSR*, 59% were classified as formal and/or quantitative, less than the proportion of such papers that we received during the year (71%). On the other hand, 38% of the acceptances were for interpretive/conceptual papers, which accounted for 27% of our submissions. Across fields, acceptances roughly mirrored submissions. As in past reports, I want to caution against overinterpreting differences implied by comparing the figures in Tables 2 and 5; Table 5 is based on a small number of acceptances, and the categorizations on which both tables are based are rough-and-ready at best.

The articles that appeared in the *APSR* during 2004–2005 represented a wide variety of theoretical, analytical, and methodological approaches and a rich array of subject matters; and although only time will tell whether it will emerge among the most important articles the *APSR* has ever published, one article in particular—Alford, Funk, and Hibbing’s “Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?”—has set a new standard for political science in terms of the media attention and public discussion that its publication has provoked.

**Special Centennial Issue**

In November 2006, we will publish a special issue on “The Evolution of Political Science.” The November 2006, issue will launch the 100th annual volume of the *APSR*, and a special centennial issue devoted to analyses of the evolution of the discipline over the years seems highly appropriate as a means of commemoration. I am co-editing the special issue with M. Elizabeth Sanders, a member of the *APSR* editorial board.

During the past year, we put out a call for submissions for the special issue. In doing so, we emphasized, among other things, that (1) papers must be brief (no more than 15–17 pages) so that we can accommodate as large and diverse an

**Table 4**  
Outcome of the First Round of the Review Process (%)

Outcome	2004–2005
Reject, incorrect submission	1
Reject without review	4
Reject	88
Invite revise and resubmit	6
Conditional accept	1
Accept	0

**Table 5**  
Distribution of Papers Accepted, 2004–2005 (%)

Approach					
Formal	Quantitative	Formal and Quantitative	Small N	Interpretive/Conceptual	Other
13	38	8	0	38	3

  

Field					
American Politics	Comparative Politics	International Relations	Normative Theory	Formal	Methods
33	21	23	15	3	5

array of perspectives on the discipline as possible; (2) prospective authors should begin by submitting a brief prospectus; (3) all submitted papers will undergo a full peer-review process and we can offer no *a priori* assurance that a paper, once submitted, will be accepted for publication; and (4) the deadline for receipt of papers is January 2, 2006.

We undertook this project with a mixture of enthusiasm and trepidation. We had no idea of whether it would spark much interest. Nor did our normal procedures seem entirely appropriate in this instance; for example, in receiving paper proposals and providing authors with detailed feedback on them, we are func-

tioning more in the mode of *Perspectives on Politics* than of the *APSR*.

Happily, the call for submissions has produced an outpouring of proposals far exceeding our most optimistic expectations. Building on preliminary contacts from more than 120 prospective authors, we have received roughly 75 full-blown proposals along with another 15 or so indications that proposals may be forthcoming. For each such contact, we have tried to provide constructive criticism and advice. Based on our feedback, some authors have decided not to proceed, but the great majority have expressed their intention to follow through by submitting a paper. I am not exactly certain *how* we

will manage this paper flow in addition to our “regular” review process, but we *will* manage it. (A nightmare scenario is that a large van will back up to our building one day in early January and dump 75 centennial submissions on our doorstep.) Many procedural details remain to be worked out. In any event, the proposals that we have received promise to bring an extraordinary diversity of perspectives to bear, and based on what I have seen so far the publication of the centennial issue should greatly enhance our understanding of the history and evolution of our discipline and may even heighten our sense of intellectual community.

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## Notes

1. As in previous reports, for “total submissions” successive resubmissions of the “same” paper are counted separately. For example, a paper that was submitted, revised and resubmitted, and then finally resubmitted following its conditional acceptance pending final changes would count as three submissions, not one. In terms of assessing the workflow for our office, this counting rule is reasonable, for in the exam-

ple just given, several separate review processes would have been conducted. For “new” or “original” submissions, by contrast, that sequence would be counted as a single submission, not three.

2. For example, I reject very few papers without review, and putting papers through a full-scale review process obviously takes longer than rejecting them out of hand. Moreover, many

journals—but not the *APSR*—cease operations and “stop the clock” for a month during the summer. That is, they do not count days spent at the beach as “working days” for purposes of calculating turnaround times; thus, 43 working days at the *APSR* may well pass more quickly, in real time, than, say, 38 working days at another journal.