American Journal of Political Science

Mid-Year Report to the Executive
Council of the Midwest Political
Science Association

August 30, 2019

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Introduction

On June 1, 2019, we began a four-year term as editors of the *American Journal of Political Science.* As we stated in our proposal, our goal is to maintain the status of *AJPS* as the premier journal in the discipline while simultaneously modernizing the journal's processes, providing more transparency to the user community, and working to represent the diversity of the discipline in its many forms. This report summarizes our goals for the term and reports on basic editorial activities, policies, and office operations from January 1, 2019 through August 17, 2019. Given that the new team has been in place for less than three months, we urge caution in making comparisons over time as well as across editorships.

Vision and Goals

We assumed leadership of the journal during a difficult period of transition. Certainly, the interim editorial team weathered a lot of the storm. But envisioning the future for *AJPS* and how it can best reflect top scholarship and move the discipline forward will fall largely to us, as we serve a full, four-year term. In thinking about that full term, we identified a clear set of goals:

- Maintain the journal's position as the premier outlet in political science.

- Publish groundbreaking and boundary-stretching scholarship that engages important questions and methods of inquiry.

- Continue to lead the way on verification policies to assure transparency and open access.

- Institutionalize the current professional and personal Conflict of Interest policy.

- Require all researchers who submit work based on human subjects to confirm IRB approval from their institutions.

- Undertake efforts to maintain excellence while diversifying all aspects of the journal – from the leadership team, editorial board, reviewers, and pool of submitting and published scholars to the representation of subfields and methodological approaches of submitted manuscripts.

- Cultivate a culture of civility in the journal's submission and review process.

Our editorial team (see Appendix) embraces four core values to achieve these goals: (1) instituting better practices; (2) providing transparency; (3) supporting diversity; and (4) communicating openly.

Instituting Better Practices: We have assembled an energetic and experienced editorial team that distributes responsibilities across individuals and institutions. The team approach has many advantages. It creates an efficient system for processing manuscripts. It facilitates the ease with which reviewers can be identified. It gives each subfield a dedicated person who is motivated to solicit manuscripts and fill *AJPS* with the best work in that subfield. And it protects the journal and

the Association from an overreliance on one individual or one academic institution for success. This isn't reinventing the wheel; this structure has become a best practice at the other top journals in the discipline.

Providing Transparency: We're committed to managing a process that maintains transparency and academic rigor. We will accomplish this, in part, by maintaining the current system of data verification and the professional and personal conflict of interest policy. We will also require authors of work based on human subjects to confirm institutional IRB approval of their projects at the time a manuscript is submitted for consideration. And we'll be vigilant about ensuring that authors are authorized to use – at the time of submission – all data included in their manuscripts.

Supporting Diversity: As scholars of gender politics, we are well aware of the ways in which top journals do not always represent the diversity of a discipline. Indeed, from January 2017 to March 2018, only 24% of submitting authors to *AJPS* were women. Roughly 19% of the papers published during those 15 months had at least one female author. The data for race are more difficult to come by, but are likely just as lopsided. In putting together our team of Associate Editors and our Editorial Board, we have intentionally worked to represent race, sex, subfield, rank, institutional, and methodological diversity. It is our hope that the presence and work of these leaders sends a message to the discipline that we value all work and the work of all.

We want to be as clear as possible here that our plan to diversify the works and the scholars represented in the journal in no way compromises our commitment to identifying and publishing the best political science research. Indeed, we believe that attempts at diversification will actually increase the odds of identifying the best and most creative work. Many members of the discipline may not see *AJPS* as open to them or their research because of what they see when they look at each issue's table of contents. We do not suggest that the current underrepresentation of women, people of color, or scholarship of diverse methods of inquiry is a result of intentional bias in the editorial process. But perceptions matter. And if the journal is perceived by some as the venue for the "usual suspects" – scholars from R1 institutions who do largely quantitative work – then it wouldn't be surprising for submissions to follow those patterns. If, in fact, there is a problem of self-selection away from *AJPS*, then the journal misses the opportunity to consider the broadest range of work submitted by a diverse and representative group of scholars.

Communicating Openly: The journal's success is contingent on the editorial team, authors, reviewers, and the user-community working together. Better and more regular communication to the user community about our commitment to being a venue for the best scholarship from all scholars and all corners of the discipline can result in a more diverse pool of manuscripts submitted. To that end, we are hosting "Meet the Editor" coffees at APSA (at the Wiley booth) and MPSA. In addition, we are working with our Associate Editors to ensure representation on panels at other major conferences across the various subfields. The editorial team's presence at these meetings, along with our initiative in hosting these panels, will allow us to share with the user community our editorial vision and plans for the journal.

Perhaps the most important resource an editorial team has at its disposal is the reputation of the journal. *AJPS* is widely valued and successful and we do not propose radical or wholesale changes in approach or perspective. Instead, we see our role as editors as being responsible for maintaining the excellence of *AJPS*, while improving its practices and goals to better represent the discipline in the current world.

Journal Performance

Like previous editors, we strive to maintain and enhance the journal's outstanding reputation, both in terms of visibility and impact. Although we cannot yet report on citations and impact of our term, we are happy to report that the journal we inherited is going strong.

Both the Thomson Reuters/JCR Impact Factor and the Google Scholar h5 Index are solid. More specifically, the two-year impact factor score held relatively steady – it was 5.22 in 2017 and 4.354 in 2018. The five-year impact factor increased from 6.287 in 2017 to 7.324 in 2018, making *AJPS* the top ranked journal in political science. The 2019 Google Scholar h5 Index score increased to 69, compared to scores of 68 in 2018 and 64 in both 2017 and 2016. As a point of comparison, the h5 Index score for the *American Political Science Review* is 58. It's 48 for the *Journal of Politics*.

We should also note that our social media visibility continues to rise. As of August 20, 2019, *AJPS* had 10,838 Twitter followers, which represents a 7% increase from last year at the same time. We also have 5,196 Facebook followers, which represents an 11% increase from last August.

Journal Operations

The basic responsibilities of the editorial team include ensuring that submissions are processed quickly, reviewed fairly, and verified carefully. Below, we include basic metrics by which to assess performance from submission to final disposition.

Submissions and Turnaround Time

From January 10, 2019 to August 17, 2019, we received 773 submissions – an average of 3.53 submissions per day. As usual, Comparative (37.5%) and American politics (31.5%) dominated the submissions. Political Theory (9.4%), International Relations (10.3%), and Methodology (8.4%) lagged behind. In the short time we've been editors, however, we've seen an uptick in both theory and IR submissions, so we are confident that we will strike more of a subfield balance as the term goes on.

As indicated in Table 1, this submission rate represents a 47.5% increase over where the journal was at this point in time in 2017, and a 20% increase from the first eight months of 2018, which was previously the year that received the most submissions.

Despite an increase in submissions, the mean turnaround time (from date of submission to first decision) has not taken a hit. Roughly three days of this review time is taken up by authors needing to correct submissions because of failed technical checks.

Table 1. Manuscript Submissions and Turnaround Time		
Year	**Submissions**	**Turnaround Time**
2000	530	46
2001	586	39
2002	657	51
2003	803	36
2004	783	36
2005	691	41
2006	694	67
2007	583	130
2008	531	118
2009	479	113
2010	760	101
2011	665	91
2012	750	107
2013	696	93
2014	874	73
2015	876	45
2016	928	54
2017	906	54
2018	1,035	55
2019	773	43

Note: 2019 data reflect submissions from January 10 through August 17.
Turnaround time is reported in days from initial submission to initial decision.

Editorial Decisions

The overall acceptance rate at *AJPS* remains low: 7.6% from January 1 to May 31, 2019, and 7.2% from the time we became editors on June 1. (Both rates increase to 10% if we remove desk rejects from the denominator.) Almost three-quarters of manuscripts are sent out for review, making our desk rejection percentages consistent with other top journals in the discipline. At this point, most desk rejects are the result of a bad fit for the journal or an obvious lack of a theoretical or empirical contribution. Now that we are well-situated, and seeing an increase in submissions, we will likely increase the share of substantive desk rejects. The team believes that we should not burden reviewers with a manuscript that has virtually no chance of receiving an invitation to revise and resubmit.

Table 2. Editorial Decisions, 2019			
	Initial Decision	**First Revision**	**Second Revision**
January 10 – May 31			
Desk Reject	28.1 %		
Reject	62.7	19.7 %	
Revise and Resubmit	9.2	42.6	
Accept	0.0	37.7	100.0 %
N	466	61	23
June 1 – August 17			
Desk Reject	27.4 %		
Reject	65.7	12.5 %	
Revise and Resubmit	6.9	20.8	None yet
Accept	0.0	66.7	
N	248	24	

Reviews and Reviewers

From January 10 to August 17, 2019, the editors sent 2,963 reviewer invitations and received 1,418 reviewer reports. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the invitation, roughly 78% completed a review or have a review in progress; the other 22% were "uninvited" because we were able to dispose of the manuscript with two reviews. To decline, we require two reviews. To extend an invitation for a revise and resubmit, we require at least three. In general, the reviews were lengthy, detailed, and professional in tone. The mean number of days between sending out a reviewer invitation and receiving a review was 34.7 days.

The reviewers' recommendations were largely consistent with manuscript decisions. Roughly half recommended an outright rejection; one-third supported an invitation to revise and resubmit; and the remainder support publication of the initial submission. It's important to be cautious when considering these proportions, though, as reviewers often click "R&R" despite the fact that the substance of their review points toward a clear decline.

Conflicts of Interest

Since January 2019, authors have reported a conflict of interest with the editorial team on 32 manuscripts. On an additional 40 manuscripts, a member of the editorial team spotted a conflict.

Of the 72 (9.3%) manuscripts that involved conflicts, all but one involved authors who are colleagues at the same institution, current collaborators, or are/were involved on a dissertation committee with one or more of the editors. In those cases, a different editor was assigned to shepherd the manuscript through the review process. Only one manuscript identified a potential conflict involving harassment, assault, or discrimination with one or more of the editors. But when approached by the MPSA Publishing Ethics Committee, the author indicated that he had unintentionally checked off the box. There was, in fact, no conflict.

Plans for the Next Year

As we move forward, our top priority will remain encouraging and processing submissions that represent the top work across the discipline. In the first few months of our term, however, it has become clear that we need to consider a few specific aspects of the publication process:

Proprietary Data: It has become increasingly common for authors to rely on proprietary data. This has implications for the verification process as well as the post-publication data-sharing we support. We are in the process of modifying the Editorial Manager interface so that authors can verify that they do, indeed, have permission to use the data included in their analyses, as well as describe any potential limitations to making it publicly available should the manuscript be published.

Workshop Section: Guidelines for what constitutes a "Workshop Article" are fuzzy at best. The editorial team is revising how to use this section so that it can (1) provide a venue for important methodology-related debates and discussion in political science; and (2) serve as a space for pieces that provide important methodological discussion, but also contain novel insight, perspective, or advice suitable for the broad audience of a top general journal – pieces, in other words, with the potential to shape the way scholars practice political science.

Ethical Breaches: Most of the time, when we think about publishing ethics, we think about plagiarism or conflicts of interest. But in just the last few months, we've encountered additional types of "bad behavior" – unauthorized use of data, resubmission of a paper declined by a previous team, reviewer recommendations that pose a conflict to name just a few. We need to consider how to handle these cases and whether there should be consequences for authors.

Over the course of the next few months, we will be in touch with the Board to address these issues, solicit their feedback, and propose ways of dealing with them.

Thank Yous

The transition has been seamless because of all the people who work so hard to make *AJPS* operate at a top level. We thank the Selection Committee, the MPSA Leadership and Staff, the Associate Editors, the Editorial Board members, the Managing Editor, the Editorial Assistants, and the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and the University of Virginia. We are also grateful to the production team at Wiley, the staffs at the Odum Institute and QDR, and the interim *AJPS* editorial team that served before us.

Appendix: Editorial Team

Co-Editors in Chief (and Field Editors for American Politics):

- Kathleen Dolan, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
- Jennifer L. Lawless, University of Virginia

Associate Editors:

- Political Theory: Elizabeth Cohen, Syracuse University
- International Relations: Rose McDermott, Brown University
- Comparative Politics: Graeme Robertson, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Methodology and Formal Theory: Jonathan Woon, University of Pittsburgh

Editorial Board:

Antoine Banks, University of Maryland
Brandon Bartels, George Washington University
Shaun Bowler, University of California – Riverside
David Broockman, Stanford University
Sarah Brooks, Ohio State University
Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, University of Chicago
Michael Colaresi, University of Pittsburgh
James Druckman, Northwestern University
Leonard Feldman, Hunter College
Richard Fox, Loyola Marymount University
Bernard Fraga, University of Indiana
Kim Fridkin, Arizona State University
Timothy Frye, Columbia University
Scott Gehlbach, University of Wisconsin
Hahrie Han, Johns Hopkins University
Danny Hayes, George Washington University
Sunshine Hillygus, Duke University
Magda Hinojosa, Arizona State University
Mala Htun, University of New Mexico
Valerie Hudson, Texas A&M University
Susan Hyde, University of California – Berkeley
Robert Jervis, Columbia University
Kristin Kanthak, University of Pittsburgh
Kimuli Kasara, Columbia University
Joshua Kertzer, Harvard University
Jack Knight, Duke University
Sarah Kreps, Cornell University
Mona Lena Krook, Rutgers University
Ashley Leeds, Rice University

Anthony Lopez, Washington State University
David Lublin, American University
Ellen Lust, University of Gothenburg
Elizabeth Markovits, Mount Holyoke College
Rahsaan Maxwell, University of North Carolina
Alison McQueen, Stanford University
Ken Meier, American University
Terry Moe, Stanford University
M. Victoria Murillo, Columbia University
Zoe Oxley, Union College
Efren Perez, University of California – Los Angeles
Jeremy Pope, Brigham Young University
Markus Prior, Princeton University
Molly Roberts, University of California – San Diego
Melvin Rogers, Brown University
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David Siegel, Duke University
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Michael Tomz, Stanford University
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