

Introduction—Methodological Pluralism in Journals and Graduate Education? Commentaries on New Evidence

To what extent are graduate curricula and the leading general and specialty journals of the discipline characterized by methodological pluralism? The two studies that begin this *PS* symposium, “Do We Preach What We Practice? A Survey of Methods in Political Science Journals and Curricula” by Andrew Bennett, Aharon Barth, and Ken Rutherford and “Is This the Curriculum We Want? Doctoral Requirements and Offerings in Methods and Methodology” by Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, present systematic evidence for addressing this question. We began our research projects independently but each was motivated by a sense that the passionate debates over methodology would be enhanced by an infusion of new evidence on the issues. Discovering one another’s studies, Schwartz-Shea and Bennett joined forces to recruit diverse commentators to help assess the new evidence.

The purpose of this symposium is to first take stock by painting a systematic, contemporary portrait of the discipline on these two issues and, then, more importantly, to move these ongoing, sometimes tired, debates forward by promoting meaningful dialogue across meth-

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odological divides. The differences between the conceptualization of the Bennett et al. and Schwartz-Shea studies point to some of the complexities that stymie understanding. Bennett et al. begin with the assumption that the three leading methods in the discipline are formal modeling, statistics, and qualitative, case study research and they exclude the field of political theory from their analysis. Schwartz-Shea makes no *a priori* judgements about “leading methods” but instead examines course offerings in quantitative-statistical analysis, game theory, philosophy of science, and qualitative methods (understood more broadly than case study methods) and she explicitly challenges the reification of the political theory/empirical fields division of labor.

Similarly, the four commentators read the studies from quite different perspectives. Bear Braumoeller takes issue with the interpretation

of the empirical evidence of both studies, suggesting that Bennett et al.’s conclusions about pluralism are more optimistic than the data warrants and that Schwartz-Shea’s comparison of the ratio of quantitative to qualitative courses misunderstands key issues of pedagogy. Dvora Yanow reads the two studies as evidence of disciplinary practices, emphasizing the fragmentation of the discipline in terms of possible reading habits of specialists and the lack of a “discursive core” in graduate training. Rogers Smith owns up to the need for those researchers practicing qualitative research to offer graduate courses in this area and, then, asks the reader to think about how the shape of the discipline (in terms of the complex interactions between graduate curriculum, publishing patterns, and hiring practices) might be reconfigured with changes in field definition. James Morrow sees few problems in the curricular status quo or in the publishing practices of journals, arguing that methodological specialization by department and by journal promotes pluralism at the disciplinary level.

The *PS* symposium reader will be rewarded with a panoply of substantive issues: (a) What is methodological pluralism, should we promote it, and if so, how? Does methodological pluralism inevitably lead to an “anything goes” nihilism, or does it fruitfully contribute to problem-driven research programs? (b) Is there a dysfunctional gap between the proportion of time we spend teaching graduate students alternative methods and the proportion of research published with each method? (c) How has the proportion of journal articles using each method changed in the decades after the “behavioral revolution?” How has the mix of methods varied by journal and by sub-field? (d) What is understood as “qualitative research” in graduate education and in journal publishing? Are case study methods what most would recognize under this rubric or a range of possibilities recognized as appropriate for empirical research—including interpretive methodologies? (e) How can and how should editorial practices be changed and challenged? Should editorial discretion be privileged or should readers and contributors initiate change? (f) How should departments confront the trade-offs necessitated by time limits on graduate education? Is specialization by department

defensible or should departments strive to *legitimize* the full range of methodologies used in the profession?

One can easily imagine debates on these issues quickly becoming mired in the tired, petty jealousies of fields and the defensiveness of researchers enamored of their own pet methodologies. For discussion of graduate curriculum, Braumoeller provides one test for sniffing out such attitudes: "Are we more prone to argue that a methods requirement would detract from students' substantive education when the method in question is not our preferred one? If so, the objection to trading substance for method sounds more like prejudice than principle" (389). Smith's suggestion for reexamining current field structure provides an avenue for moving these debates in a yet more productive, substantive direction because this task asks us to shift our gaze outward, putting intellectual questions at the forefront of our concerns; in other words, departments and the discipline should focus on the pressing substantive issues societies face over the next 50 years, re-shaping our field structures, journal content, and graduate curriculum accordingly.

The timing of the symposium is fortuitous. Significant changes began in the late 1990s with debate over the content

published in the *APSR* and the subsequent appointment of Lee Sigelman as an editor committed to promoting methodological diversity within the flagship journal of the discipline. The appearance of the Perestroika letter in October 2000 then provided an email forum for ongoing discussion of methodological issues, among others. Perhaps most significantly, the events of September 11, 2001, rightly promoted considerable reflection on the adequacy of disciplinary practices, from the degree of language training to the relevance of the substance published in leading journals. Most recently, the publication of a new association journal, *Perspectives on Politics*, the appointment of a Task Force on Graduate Education (with the report due in December 2003), the creation of a new Organized Section in Qualitative Methods (for APSA 2003), and the formation of an inter-university Consortium on Qualitative Research Methods that has held two annual training institutes all speak to action within the discipline on issues relevant to this symposium. The contributors hope this *PS* symposium contributes to constructive dialogue and action to promote methodological pluralism appropriate to the challenges of the new millennium.

SYMPOSIUM AUTHORS' BIOS

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