

# American Psychological Society: Off and Running

October 01, 1988

The fledgling American Psychological Society — not quite a month old as this is being written — is off to an auspicious start. Beginning with a nucleus of loyal ASAP members and swelled by several hundred other individuals who joined the Society during the APA Convention in Atlanta and immediately thereafter, the membership continues to grow at a rate that makes our aspiration of having several thousand members by the end of the fall a realistic goal. The substantial number of APA Divisions and other psychological organizations that have chosen to become affiliates of APS is also highly gratifying.

Plans for the first year of APS are proceeding apace. As described elsewhere in this issue, arrangements are well underway for a convention to be held next June 9-11 in Washington, D.C., and discussions are being held with publishers about producing the Society's journal, *Psychological Science*. These and other activities and organizational issues will be topics at a meeting of the Society's officers and Steering Committee to be held at the end of September.

The amount that has been accomplished in so short a time is heartening and is due to the enthusiasm and devotion of a number of volunteers. But many challenges remain. Most prominent among them is membership recruitment. If the Society is to provide the kinds of membership services and to support the kinds of activities on behalf of academic and research-oriented psychology that we envisage, and if it is to become a credible, influential organization on the national scene, APS needs a large number of members drawn from the entire spectrum of psychological science, basic and applied.

A formal membership recruitment campaign, which is aimed primarily at members of academic departments (where the bulk of potential members are located) is being coordinated by the APS temporary Logistics Center headed by Logan Wright. Our most effective recruiters, however, will be you. We count on you to spread the word about APS to your colleagues. If you need brochures or other assistance, or if you just want to volunteer to help, call 1-800-950-4APS.

Our goal is to attract both members and non-members of APA. According to recent reports, more than 60% of eligible academic and research psychologists do not currently belong to APA. Quite a few of this large group were once members but resigned in the belief that APA does not adequately represent their interests or values. Substantial numbers of our more junior colleagues have failed to join, never having been expected by their seniors to do so.

Many now recognize, however, that the specialized organizations to which they belong, such as Psychonomics, Neuroscience, or SRCD, are not prepared to conduct a number of important activities on behalf of academic and research-oriented psychology, such as representing our interests before Congress and federal granting agencies.

We hope to persuade these colleagues that APS is designed to take on these functions in support of scientific psychology as a whole and that it is the responsibility of all of us to support these efforts. The

symbolic importance of having an organization representing all of academic-research psychology in maintaining our identity as members of a single scientific discipline should also not be underestimated.

Ironically, the importance of preserving the unity of psychology as a research-oriented discipline has made a number of loyal APA members distressed about the establishment of APS. Many are unaware, or find it too painful to acknowledge, that the old APA is moribund. In the words of Executive Officer Goodstein which appeared in the APA Monitor (and have quickly been taken up by leaders of the health-provider professional wing) APA is in the midst of “an orderly transition” from a learned to a professional society. The transformation is coming about not only from the sheer force of numbers. Attempts to preserve unity by granting the academic and scientifically-oriented constituencies some autonomy in conducting their own affairs were vehemently opposed by an influential group of professionals, largely private practitioners, whose explicitly stated goal has been to “take over” and dominate the Association. The numbers are on their side and events within the Association are moving in their direction. If there is to be organized unity among academic and research-oriented psychologists and tolerance of our diverse needs in the protection and advancement of science, scientifically-oriented practice, and public interest, it will have to be outside of APA. APS is intended to provide this unity.

The transition to a professional association is not yet complete, however. The academic-research community still has a presence in APA affairs and resources are still devoted to science, advocacy and relevant activities. Some colleagues have expressed reluctance to support APS because of fears of jeopardizing what support academic and research-oriented psychology now gets. Our aim in recruiting members for APS does not include encouraging individuals to drop out of APA. Some may choose to do so, but others, particularly “scientist-practitioners” with both professional and scientific interests, may elect to belong to both. As the “orderly transition” of APA to a purely professional organization progresses to support of research-academic psychology will almost surely dwindle and as recent actions of the Council of Representatives illustrate, in a financial crunch, the science budget is most vulnerable. If some elect to remain in APA and slow the pace of change (as well as joining APS!), bravo.

In light of events, it seems necessary to state that APS was not conceived as a competitive organization to promote conflicts with APA. Nor does APS demand a loyalty oath of its members (as some members of APA’s Council of Representatives are attempting to do by proposing, so far unsuccessfully, that anyone active in APS be barred from holding any official position in APA). Rather, APS will devote itself to advancing the interests of academic and research-oriented psychology, both basic and applied. As such it will complement and supplement the activities of APA. As APA moves towards becoming a professional association, it would be tragic for the discipline if there were no organization in operation to replace the old APA and what it once represented.

Your help in conveying these messages to potential APS members will be invaluable in achieving our goals.