

Specializing in Psychological Science as a Whole

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As my term as President ends, I have been reflecting on why I participate in APS and believe it is such an important organization for our field. APS is the main organization committed to the science of psychology in all its aspects. There are other organizations devoted to specialty areas, but only APS includes all areas of scientific psychology, and only APS is devoted solely to the science. Another distinguishing feature is that APS is an advocate in Washington for the science of psychology, while other groups have explicitly decided to stay out of lobbying.

APS's Washington agenda focuses on the science of psychology, not the various practice-related issues, which makes it a particularly effective advocate for us, and also allows us to be seen in Washington as a scientific group on a par with, and often bonding on issues with, other scientific organizations. This has had concrete beneficial effects in terms of increased funding for the science of psychology and has also increased the awareness in Washington of scientific psychology.

But there are other characteristics that make APS so effective and enjoyable. One is that it has not become so large as to be unmanageable. For example, the convention is in one hotel and doesn't have huge numbers of parallel sessions. Every year, the APS Board discusses the possibility of changing the convention. But parallel tracks tend to produce specialization of tracks, which in turn means people go only to their own specialization, which leads to further specialization and fractionation of the field. To avoid that, and promote connections between specialties within the field, the APS convention intentionally limits its concurrent sessions, and offers a variety of plenary sessions that everyone can attend. Having said that, however, the Board also recognizes that it is important to showcase the best science in specific specialty areas as well. That's why the convention's morning sessions are devoted to specialty-based programming. But the hallmark of the convention is that we also offer programs with cross-cutting themes, hot topics, and topics of importance to all of us, regardless of our specialization. It's the only convention where you can easily interact with psychologists in all areas of scientific psychology in a manageable forum.

Similarly, APS' journals have also intentionally remained unspecialized. If we had specialized journals, only those in the specialty would get the journal and read the articles. And while that is fine, the unique contribution of APS is to encourage the integration of the field. Articles in APS' journals are written so that you do not need to know a specialized lingo to follow them. Articles are chosen for their importance and relevance for the entire field, they are written well, and are not too long. The readership is larger than in specialized journals and gives us all an opportunity to bridge across psychology with our own work.

Psychological Science has the best of current research in all of psychology. The existence of that journal and its wide readership does much to help us all do better research. It helps those who study human cognition to know what is going on in animal cognition, and vice versa.

It helps those who study the psychobiology of memory to know what the phenomena of memory are that they are seeking to understand. It helps those who study only one age to see what changes with development, and it helps those of us who use one animal at a time to remember that social processes are key in the actual environment.

APS also remembers that teaching is a fundamental aspect of the science of psychology. The journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science* helps us prepare lectures as well as giving us perspective on the field. The Teaching Institute that accompanies the convention does much to improve teaching. Another wonderful aspect of APS is its fulfillment of the commitment to be “lean and nice,” our informal motto from the beginning. There is no huge bureaucracy associated with APS; it has only the minimal number of staff necessary to run the organization and they all do a terrific job. The pressures to increase bureaucracy are enormous because having additional staff does of course help. But APS has resisted this tendency and kept the number of its staff small, while increasing productivity and effectiveness each year.

APS has maintained its academic approach. When you think of APS you don’t think of an APS credit card, an APS rent-a-car number (even though we have both) or an APS magazine program. APS focuses on scientific psychology and issues of importance. The *Observer* exemplifies this approach with its analysis of current issues of relevance to scientific psychology, its job advertisements, and its non-glitzy appearance. All of this is why I love APS and have enjoyed tremendously my year as president. It’s a great organization.