

The History of APS

August 01, 2008

In a room decorated with a brilliant timeline of APS's history and photos of all the APS Presidents, Robin Cautin of Manhattanville College welcomed the audience to her talk, "The Founding of APS: A New Voice for Psychological Science." APS is a prominent organization today, boasting almost 20,000 members, more than 3,300 attendees at its annual meeting, and four of the most widely cited journals in the psychological science field. However, it took a group of extremely dedicated people to start this organization from scratch.

To understand the origins of APS, Cautin went back (way back) to the founding of the American Psychological Association in 1892. From its founding, APA provided a valuable service to its members with its annual meeting and acted as a "center of gravity for the discipline," Cautin explained.

With a mission to "advance psychology as a science," APA's membership tripled between 1920 and 1930. During World War I, psychologists demonstrated the validity of psychological testing, and the academic standing of psychologists improved as the country saw an increase in jobs, students, and resources at universities.

WWI contributed to psychology's progress as a science *and* as a profession.

As tension began to arise between the organization's subsets of members, Robert Yerkes, APA President at the time, capitalized on the national atmosphere during World War II, urging academic and applied psychologists to work together toward a sweeping reorganization of the association in 1945. "This reorganization represented a turning point in the association," Cautin reported. "From there we can see a major shift in the balance of power between the association's scientists and its practitioners." The reorganization of APA led to a complex governance structure, something that continued to be a concern through the discord that led to the founding of APS.

As World War II ended, the number of casualties suffered during the war created an unprecedented need for psychological services. What would occur in the next 20 to 30 years was a rapid professionalization of psychology. By 1962, nonacademic psychologists outnumbered academic psychologists within APA's membership for the first time in the organization's history.

Furthermore, the 1970s marked what Cautin described as a "Golden Age" for practitioners. As new degree programs offering PsyDs, doctoral degrees focused on providing clinical services rather than research, and an increasing number of professional schools of psychology popped up throughout the country, APA's activities reflected this shift in the discipline.

In response to several initiatives forming outside of APA, "The Dirty Dozen," a self-named group of practitioners, started a no-holds barred campaign to elect a professional psychologist as president of APA. In 1977, they succeeded, marking the first time that a private practitioner, Theodore Blau, had

been elected president of the Association. “These developments impacted the scientific community for what it meant practically, but more so for what it meant symbolically,” Cautin explained.

A steady loss of scientific members from the organization coupled with a sense of abandonment by APA led to several unsuccessful attempts to reorganize the association., in 1985 the Task Force on the Structure of APA (TFSAPA), chaired by Jack Bardon, kick-started a serious campaign for a new organization. The group authored the “Bardon Plan” proposing two to five separate assemblies at the core of APA and dissolution of the central legislative body.

This plan was defeated in the APA Council, but not by an overwhelming number. After the defeat of the Bardon Plan, about 40 scientifically-oriented psychologists got together and formed the Assembly for Scientific and Applied Psychology (ASAP) to sort out a way to address the needs of both scientists and scientist-practitioners. They held the first official meeting in 1987, bylaws were written, an agenda was developed, officers were elected, and a formal membership drive was slated for the fall. ASAP members arrived at the APA convention in August with 20,000 brochures, 5,000 member applications and 5,000 stickers.

ASAP’s campaign for reorganization (namely for the passage of a reorganization plan developed by the Group on Restructuring of APA) gained momentum. Soon, the group boasted 500 members and began sending out its own newsletter. In May 1988, ASAP revised its bylaws and elected new officers: Janet Spence, President; Charles Kiesler, Past-President; Steven Hayes, Secretary-Treasurer; Milton Hakel, Member-at-Large; Virginia Leary, Member-at-Large. On August 12, ASAP became APS, the American Psychological Society. A whirlwind of firsts followed. In October 1988, APS held its first executive meeting and the APS newsletter debuted. Almost a year later in August 1989, Alan Kraut was appointed executive director and the first APS office was established. Also, in 1989, the first annual APS convention took place in Arlington, Virginia. APS held its second Summit on Scientific Advocacy in 1990, which led to the Human Capital Initiative and a Behavioral and Social Science Directorate at the National Science Foundation. In 2006, APS became the Association for Psychological Science, reflecting the organization’s emphasis on extending its membership internationally and fostering the goals of academic psychologists and researchers across the globe.