According to the American Association of Community Colleges, there are currently 1,123 community colleges in the United States serving 46% of all undergraduates currently enrolled in college.\(^1\) As the cost of higher education rises, more students are choosing to begin their post-secondary education at the community college. Furthermore, a spotlight has been shone on community colleges through President Obama’s focus on these institutions and his proposal to make 2 years of college free. Altogether, this means that faculty teaching at 2 year institutions are touching, and have significant potential to continue to connect with an increasing number of undergraduate students, many of whom will transfer to four year institutions to continue their education. Even if students choose not to continue their education at a four-year institution, political scientists teaching at community colleges provide students with the skills necessary for citizenship and competent participation so vital to our democracy. Furthermore, community college faculty are serving an important role in both recruiting majors and teaching political science students in their introductory courses. Given this role, we would expect community college faculty to be significantly involved the American Political Science Association as a means for keeping current with the discipline and for networking with other political scientists. This, however, is not the case.

**Current issues for community college faculty in APSA**

At present, APSA identifies only 133 people out of approximately 13,000 members who are community college faculty. However, this number is an inaccurate reflection of the number of community college faculty who are members of the organization and reflects an issue for 2 year faculty and APSA. When joining APSA, faculty must indicate their institutional affiliation and rank or position. The current options available in this portion of the registration are not applicable to most community college faculty as most of the ranks from which individuals can choose are not ones used at community colleges. Alternatively, a faculty member can indicate that they are a community college faculty/graduate student suggesting that community college faculty are no different than graduate students which is problematic. Community college faculty may also be misidentified because the name of their school does not include the term “community college”. For example, the chair of this ad hoc task force was not listed as a community college faculty member because her institution recently removed “community” from its name. The inability to identify as a community college faculty is a problem that several community college faculty who are APSA members have identified – their institution is simply not listed as a community college. This is one of several reasons why a standing committee on the status of community college faculty is needed – to identify membership options that accurately reflect the status and affiliation of all members.

In addition, some political science faculty at community colleges have reported both anecdotally and in response to a recently conducted survey, discussed below, that the inability for members to indicate that they are community college faculty without being lumped-in with graduate students is a turnoff. To some, this is perceived as a subtle way the APSA suggests that community college faculty are less-than their counterparts at 4-year institutions and are thus less valued by the organization. Determining causes of and solutions for this perception both by

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community college faculty and other members of the organization is another important reason why a standing committee on the status of community colleges is necessary.

A third reason to include a standing committee on the status of community colleges in APSA is that there is demand for services tailored specifically to community college faculty. For example, when the APSA Teaching and Learning conference introduced a track specifically devoted to community college faculty members in 2012, attendance by community college faculty at this conference increased. The American Political Science Association includes amongst its core objectives a stated goal of serving faculty who are focused on teaching rather than research as the association wants to “promot[e] high quality teaching and education about politics and government.” Doing so means that the association has both an incentive and responsibility to serve and engage with community college faculty who are overwhelmingly teaching introductory courses that may be a student’s only exposure to the field of political science and civic engagement.

Survey results and implications

A survey of 175 community college faculty nationwide was conducted during June and July of 2015 resulting in 48 responses to the 40 question survey. The sample included current APSA members as well as other community college faculty identified by members of this ad hoc committee. That only 48 individuals, most of whom were APSA members, responded, suggests that there is a disconnect between APSA and community college faculty that a standing committee could begin to address.

The survey asked about what political science courses are offered at the respondent’s institution, state requirements both curricular and in terms of transferability for political science courses, characteristics of faculty teaching at community colleges in terms of minimum educational requirements required, full time versus part time faculty make-ups, as well as sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. While the following is by no means a comprehensive summary of the survey’s findings, it highlights the most striking points that speak to the need for a standing committee on the status of community colleges in APSA:

- 46 respondents indicated that American Government is taught at their institution every term. This speaks to the role that community college faculty play in introducing students to political science and potentially being the only connection students have with both the discipline and concepts surrounding citizenship and civic engagement. These educators can and should be included in our professional community as important participants. Community college faculty are also teaching State and Local Government (19 responses), Introduction to Politics/Political Science (17 responses) and International Relations (14 responses) every academic term. Clearly, there are several core political science courses that are touching a large number of students at community colleges; the faculty teaching these courses should have access to research, resources and networking to allow them to teach these introductory courses in the timeliest fashion. That American Government courses are often the focus of the Core Curriculum and General Education track at the Teaching and Learning conferences also speaks to the need for APSA to delve further into the pedagogical and discipline issues of these courses and community college faculty are

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well poised to play an important role in that conversation. A standing committee could help to facilitate this conversation.

- 43% of survey respondents indicated that their institution requires political science courses as part of a student’s general education requirements and 36% of respondents indicated that their state requires students to take a political science course – overwhelmingly American Government – as part of their general education. As more states consider mandating curriculum fostering the engagement of community college faculty will position APSA to drive these conversations rather than be dictated to by state legislatures.

- 83% of respondents further indicated that their state requires that courses be transferable to 4 year institutions. This suggests the need for community college faculty to have a place where conversations between 2 and 4 year faculty about what they teach in their courses to ensure consistency and transferability of those courses. APSA, through a standing committee on community colleges, would be the logical body to facilitate those conversations.

- Most of the respondents to the survey indicated that they are the only full time political scientist on faculty and while a few schools, for example large community college districts in Texas and California among others, had a significant number of adjuncts, most full time faculty have only one or a few part time colleagues. APSA could play an important role in facilitating creation of academic community among those faculty who are often isolated at their institution and who are often also teaching outside their area of expertise and training. A standing committee on community colleges could help to further identify and specify these needs and make recommendations for how to best facilitate this networking.

- A few institutions in the survey had very large numbers of part time faculty. Community colleges are often heavily reliant on part time faculty and determining how to incorporate those individuals into the discipline is critical.

- Many respondents to the survey indicated that while they have monetary support for professional development, that amount is not significant enough to facilitate travel to conferences, especially on a regular basis, and/or that access to those funds are competitive. Further, respondents stated that they want more opportunities to talk about pedagogy and political science education particularly as it pertains to community colleges which presents an opportunity for APSA to act as a professional development hub for 2 year faculty. A standing committee on community colleges could help to identify and specify these needs and make recommendations for how to best address these concerns.

- Several survey comments concern respondents’ perceptions that community college faculty are not valued by the discipline nor by the organization and are therefore not recognized as full-fledged members of the profession. Some respondents went so far as to say that APSA is biased towards four year institutions, citing the irrelevance of the annual meeting to faculty at teaching institutions as an example. The survey demonstrates the desire by some respondents for more pedagogical resources, workshops, and networking specifically aimed at community college faculty – beyond that which is available at the Teaching and Learning conference. Most significantly, respondents indicated a desire for an organized section for community college faculty.
What can a standing committee on the status of community colleges do?

The previous section highlighted several areas where the establishment of a standing committee on community colleges can strengthen APSA organizationally as well as meet the needs and concerns of faculty teaching at 2 year institutions. The following is a list of additional tasks for a standing committee undertake:

1. Work with APSA staff to streamline membership options and the membership database to better identify community college faculty.
2. Build a database of community college faculty teaching political science and identify courses and types of programs currently being offered.
3. Work with APSA staff to identify current services offered by APSA that are in alignment with needs identified by community college faculty to facilitate recruitment of new members.
4. Partner with community college faculty to identify programs and services desired in order to make recommendations to APSA for programs that would facilitate increased membership in the organization by 2 year faculty.
5. Work with the political science education section leadership and Teaching and Learning Conference program committee to facilitate identification of opportunities, programs and resource as well as networking with community college faculty nationwide.

APSA has a lot of work to do in terms of identifying community college faculty who can and should be full and participating members of our professional organization and gearing the organization toward the kinds of programs and services that will encourage both community college faculty members to join as well as benefit APSA's existing members. This is a daunting but not impossible task. The need to create a better database of community college faculty and the need to better understand the status of political science at community colleges necessitates the establishment of a standing committee.

We, the ad hoc committee on community colleges, strongly recommend establishing a standing committee on the status of community colleges.

This committee’s initial survey research makes it clear that there are three reasons that APSA will benefit from a standing committee on the status of community colleges:

1) Community college faculty say they are viewed as lesser members of the discipline. While some maintain membership in the organization because of the ability to access journals and thus keep current on scholarship in political science, the potential for active and engaged members of APSA is greatly reduced. Establishing a standing committee on the status of community college faculty, much as APSA has done in establishing committees on women and minorities in the profession, would raise these issues to the fore and demonstrate a commitment by the association to the work being done by faculty at two year institutions.
2) Community college faculty are interested in additional programming and services. Determining what these services and programs are and creating a sustainable plan for implementing those services has the potential to increase membership in the association amongst community college faculty and perhaps faculty at other teaching focused
institutions as well. In other words, the work that this committee will do will have benefits across the association and can increase membership overall.

3) Creation of a committee on the status of community colleges will demonstrate commitment by APSA to their stated mission to “promote high quality teaching and education about politics and government.” This is precisely what community college faculty do, and the organization can acknowledge that by establishing a standing committee.

The ad hoc committee thanks the APSA council for their consideration of this report and its recommendations. We have only just started to understand this group of faculty and their importance within the discipline. We have much further to go to assess the needs of community college faculty and how to best be responsive to those needs. This is important for both APSA's continued success as a professional association and for the political science discipline as a whole. We welcome any questions or further discussion on the matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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