

Against Academic Elitism

I must take issue with Stephen Bennett's characterization of me as a "graduate school dropout" in the June 2002 issue of *PS*. I have a master's degree in political science, as well as a law degree. I am glad my mother and children did not see Professor Bennett's screed against me and others who chose to take issue with the direction of a field that we love. I chose not to pursue my Ph.D. in political science in large part because the field is dominated by number crunchers who—while quite good at math and statistics—have little influence on the understanding of politics. I noted that I would rather not pursue my doctorate if it required mastering quantitative methods.

If deciding not to pursue a particular degree amounts to dropping out, then I fear we are all drop outs of something. More importantly, I wrote to praise Professor Libby's criticism of the fact that American political science is too focused, indeed dominated by, quantitative research. That criticism should be taken to heart by the members of APSA. I know few, if any, political leaders, government officials, or others involved in public affairs who take the field of political science seriously. They know that all of the calculators in the world cannot explain the essence of politics.

I love to study, debate, and write about politics. But politics has little to

do about understanding chi squares and everything to do with understanding the human condition. If that makes me a Perestroikan—so be it.

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P.S. I am glad Professor Bennett did not find out that I teach as an adjunct professor. Surely adjuncts—like alleged drop outs—must reside near the bottom of the quasi academic barrel.

NSF Funding Unbiased, Necessary for Political Science

A recent article in *PS* (December 2002) by Canon, Gabel, and Patton (hereafter, CGP) purports to assess the utility of external funding for research in political science. Briefly summarized, CGP report that fewer than 30% of published articles in prominent journals acknowledge external support, and only about half of those acknowledge National Science Foundation support. They conclude from this that, "Unlike the natural sciences, political science does not require any significant funding—or even any funding—to conduct valuable research and publish it in the highest quality journals" (748). CGP further report that NSF funding appears to vary by subfield and methodological approach in ways the authors attribute to "NSF bias in the early 1990s favoring quantitative, rational choice, or formal theory approaches and support for American politics research" (749). These charges are not only unjustified by the available evidence, they are irresponsible. The authors have done an injustice not only to the political scientists who served as Program Officers at NSF, but even more to the many distinguished political scientists who have served on the program's review and oversight panels, to the hundreds of scholars the program called upon to assist in evaluating proposals, and to those scholars who received NSF grants during this period whose success CGP denigrate as the product of biased assessment. Moreover, if CGP's charges were to be accepted as true within NSF and Congress, they could jeopardize future funding for political science at NSF.

As NSF Political Science Program Officers from 1990–1994, we take these charges very seriously and welcome the opportunity to set the record straight by correcting the serious errors in analysis and inference committed by CGP.

CGP examine the extent of external funding from all sources (NSF and otherwise) for articles published in eight journals and find that the pattern of NSF-funded publications differs that of non-funded articles and of articles funded by other sources including the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, among others. Despite their judicious caveats regarding alternative interpretations for their findings and the limits of their analysis, CGP very injudiciously and wrongly conclude that their data suggest NSF bias. This charge not only is untrue, it also is unsupported (indeed, it is unsupportable) by their data. As they admit in the course of the analysis, CGP have no information whatsoever on the pool of proposal submissions to NSF (or to most of these eight journals or to any of the other funding sources) with which to calculate relative acceptance rates across subfields. They also have no information whatsoever regarding the merits of the submitted proposals or the reviews of these proposals by others working in the relevant fields. They have no information on the distribution of NSF-funded research reported in other outlets (e.g., books and other journals). Their conclusion of NSF bias is dependent in part on their using other funding agencies as a baseline for comparison, but these

other agencies (which include the SSRC, NEH, and USSR Academy of Sciences!) have their own biases, some of them explicitly so (such as SSRC and NEH). CGP's conclusions in these regards are reckless. Based on what they have presented, it is impossible for the authors to know (or even speculate in an informed way) about NSF bias and it is irresponsible to draw the conclusions that they have.

The claim that NSF is biased is one of the oldest canards in the profession and has repeatedly been tested and disproved by NSF data (Mishler 1984; Sigelman and Scioli 1987). It also has been examined and rejected in periodic evaluations, both quantitative and qualitative, of the Political Science Program by oversight committees, whose distinguished members, unlike CGP, have access to all of the reviews and proposals including those that were not funded. The report of the 1998 Committee of Visitors is online at www.nsf.gov/sbe/ses/polisci/cov_report.htm. Based on their extensive, two-day review the Committee concluded:

There was no detectable bias in the reviews. Most notably, there was no evidence of an "Old Boy's Club" or "invisible college" that favored some people, topics or approaches over others. Indeed, we were struck by the overwhelmingly professional nature of the reviews; only an exceptionally few deviated from this norm and they were so apparent that they had a virtually self-negating character.