

FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE PRESIDENCY RESEARCH GROUP

The notion that a community of scholars dedicated to studying the American Presidency was in the process of emerging and was ripe for institutionalization no doubt has occurred to countless of the members of our new-born organization.

The first evidence that we were not imagining a need was the uniform agreement of over a dozen students of the presidency to have a planning meeting for such a group at that summer's Annual Meeting. Out of the planning meeting emerged the Presidency Research Group panels and organizational meeting of the 1979 APSA meeting. With no more than a few notes in P.S., membership in the still informal group began to increase and proposals for panels and papers poured in. In the event, the 1979 meeting had what surely is an all time record of Presidency panels. Two sessions of the official program were devoted to papers on the presidency. All remaining open slots were filled with the papers sponsored by PRG, under the Affiliated Groups heading of the Annual Meeting Program. Further, there was a round table business meeting/cocktail hour in which many of us met face-to-face for the first time and in which a set of operating rules were passed and officers were chosen.

This issue of the Newsletter--the first since we, as it were, legalized our name--should help expand the process of making explicit the "covert" network of scholarship on the presidency. Please note that Dorothy James will coordinate PRG panels and set time for a social and business gathering. Finally, all our names are appended. You will have colleagues and students who may want to join. On this matter, the buck stops with you; please encourage them to do so.

Soon the number of possible paper givers and the number of other reasons for getting together around common interests will exceed the time openings at the Annual Meeting. One way this organization can help you is by providing--through the newsletter and by other means--a way for initiating the "jungle telegraph." Suppose, for example, that several of you would like to think out loud about the status (or lack thereof) of knowledge about the President's influence on the Executive Branch. With the help of a notice in the newsletter and a voluntary coordinator, you can arrange to get together informally at the Annual Meeting.

I myself will offer one network service. From time to time people in our field seem to want to learn how their colleagues elsewhere are teaching the presidency, whether to undergraduates or graduate students. Most of us have, or can produce, extra copies of our course syllabi. If you want to see the syllabi of other teachers in this field and would send copies of your own to these people, drop me a note (Dept. of Politics, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. 08540). By (say) late January, I

will mimeograph the names of those of you so interested and send you each the list. Then, like an inbred chain letter, each of us will receive back copies of our colleagues' syllabi.

This is my first and possibly my last editorial. The test of our enterprise won't be PRG presidential rhetoric, but genuine stirrings of inquiry and communication. Even in our pre-natal stage much has happened to indicate that the test is one we are going to pass and surpass.

Fred I. Greenstein
Princeton University

NEWS AND NOTES

Since the last issue, many new members have joined us. A list of our total membership is appended to this issue. We would like to invite each new member to send to the editor a brief statement of your research interests and activity. It enables those who share common interests to communicate with each other. Please write to me at the American Enterprise Institute for public Policy Research, Lester G. Seligman, 1150 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In March 1980 Greenwood Press will publish Harold F. Gosnell's TRUMAN'S CRISES: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF HARRY S. TRUMAN. This book covers Truman's early development and his entire political career. It is divided into three parts: From Lamar to the White House, Accidental President, and President in His Own Right, thus covering the years, 1884-1953. It deals with Truman's decision making processes, staffing, relations with top officials and legislators, his economic, social and foreign policies, budget making, management practices, speech making, relations with the mass media, and his techniques of winning elections.

Stephen A. Shull, University of New Orleans, recently had a companion reader to his Presidential Policy Making, published by King's Court, Inc. The reader, entitled The Presidency: Studies in Public Policy, of which Lance T. Le Loup is co-editor, includes sixteen selections, most of which are original.

Benjamin B. Tate, Macon Junior College, is conducting research on the Tyler presidency (1841-45).

The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) has launched a major study of the management role of the President. A panel of distinguished Americans, including several former cabinet secretaries have been selected. They will issue their report late in 1980. The research is being directed by Hugh Heclo of Harvard University and will concentrate on the history of presidential management. For further details, please write Ms. Helen Sitz, NAPA, 1225 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., phone: 202/838-6561.

NEWS OF THE REGULAR AND PRG PANELS AT THE NEXT CONVENTION

Just before we went to press, John Kessel advised that he had already received enough proposals to fill the places on his four panels. He wished to thank all those who submitted proposals and invites members who wish to serve as discussants to write to him at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

From Dorothy James, Chairperson of the PRG panels:

As program coordinator, I am working closely with John Kessel. When his plans are clear in early December, we will develop panels that are supplementary and complementary so that there will be a strong overall effort in the area of Presidential studies at our next meeting. Please submit your proposals to me now for panel papers. My address: Dorothy B. James, Dept. of Political Science, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061.

In hopes that our discussions can continue throughout the year and not just at convention panels, I invited George Edwards of Texas A&M to abstract his stimulating convention paper on quantitative aspects of the Study of the Presidency and Dom Bonafede, whose insightful reporting on the White House in the National Journal is familiar to all of us to give his assessment of neglected areas of presidency research. The two selections follow. Reactions from members are cordially invited and will be included in the spring issue of the PRG Newsletter. As editor, I have the opportunity to observe the range of research interests of our members. It is clear that these are broad, if not diffuse. Perhaps a concern with identifying underlying foci and tacit paradigms might sharpen preceptions of our common interests.

Lester G. Seligman

THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY

George C. Edwards III
Texas A&M University

Research on the presidency often fails to meet the standards of contemporary political science including the careful definition and measurement of concepts, the rigorous specification and testing of propositions, the employment of appropriate quantitative methods, and the use of empirical theory to develop hypotheses and explain findings. It is almost as if the behavioral revolution passed by presidential scholars, leaving them to rely upon historical anecdotes.

While we have innumerable descriptions of the institution and its occupants, we have a fundamental lack of understanding of why things happen as they do. We have generally not focused on explanations, i.e., the relationships between two or more variables. Instead, we have usually examined only one side of an equation. This presents a striking paradox: The single most important institution in American politics is the one that political scientists understand least.

I propose that we add some new questions to the traditional literature. We want to know not only the boundaries of constitutionally acceptable behavior and what behavior occurs, but also why the public, the Congress, the White House staff, and the bureaucracy behave as they do towards the President and what difference it makes that the President behaves as he or she does. Reconceptualizing the study of the presidency into a set of relationships leads us to develop and test hypotheses which attempt to explain the causes and consequences of the behavior of those who compose the institution of the presidency and those with whom they interact.

To increase our understanding of the presidency we must move beyond the description of the institution and its occupants and attempt to explain the behavior we observe. In addition we must seek to reach generalizations rather than discrete, ad hoc analyses. To explain we must examine relationships, and to generalize we must observe these relationships under many circumstances. Quantitative analysis can be an extremely useful tool in these endeavors.

There have been three principal constraints on using quantitative analysis to study the presidency. The first, the frequent failure to pose analytical questions, has already been discussed. The second has been the small number of cases, i.e., presidents. Viewing the presidency as a set of relationships, however, helps to overcome this problem. Although they may be few presidents, there are many persons involved in relationships with each president, including the entire public. It is on these relationships that we ought to focus, and because so many people interact with the president in one form or another we are no longer inhibited by the small universe of presidents.

