

**Editor's note:** This article was written on the occasion of the launch of a new cover design and layout for the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in a volume co-edited by Professors Paul Rich and David Merchant on the future of higher education. Professor Rich, a long-time supporter and member of the Academy of Political and Social Science, was a strong proponent of these changes and others that the Academy plans to make in the years ahead as it pursues its mission to promote the progress of the social sciences.

## The American Academy of Political and Social Science in the Twenty-First Century

*By*

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Learned societies date to the seventeenth century and there are examples of very old organizations like the Royal Society of Arts in London that have been able to reinvent themselves, and which continue to play a significant role in the modern academic world. However, a lack of resources has prevented the growth of such groups in many countries, so that the responsibility for an entire discipline on a global scale often rests with American scholarly associations. Whether they can overcome their national origins and be truly representative of a worldwide constituency remains to be seen. As it

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reorders its priorities, the American Academy of Political and Social Science is not alone among associations facing the new century with uncertainty

Gone is the bright orange cover. Readers of the *Annals* will be startled and perhaps even shocked by its new appearance. Is nothing sacred? Actually, the Academy in its long history has on occasion been almost revolutionary. In 1889, when it was organized, the idea of women participating in an academic society on equal terms with men would have been more upsetting than a cover change to some, but the Academy welcomed women. In fact, the founders emphasized that members were welcome either “high or humble”. As for topics, there was no inclination to avoid controversy -- the annual meeting in 1901 was on America’s race problems.

Any organization that has been part of three centuries has to occasionally take stock, and that has been happening. The American Academy of Political and Social Science is one of the oldest of American *learned societies* -- which are defined as “nongovernmental, not-for-profit organizations aiding the promotion or performance of basic research and the advancement of knowledge in one or more of the broad areas of knowledge, such as the humanities, physical/biological sciences, and social sciences.”<sup>1</sup> One of the great resources in the United States is the abundance of these associations.<sup>2</sup>

The antecedents of American learned societies such as the Academy are in Europe,<sup>3</sup> and there are formidable learned societies there. The late 1600s and the 1700s saw the development of many voluntary associations, often meeting at the coffee houses and pubs that were so common in the period. These groups had lively discussions and were important to their members, but their liking for conviviality and drink has made scholars suspicious of their intellectual influence:

Even the box clubs and friendly societies that increased rapidly in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were sometimes of doubtful benefit to their members owing to the dominance of the publican. These clubs, like the purely convivial ones, were held in public houses. Such friendly societies were not a new development in the eighteenth century. Apart from the friendly society functions of the early guilds, often continued in their later phase as city companies, box clubs and benefit societies are to be found in the seventeenth century. As the eighteenth century went on they multiplied.<sup>4</sup>

Admitting to a rogue on one’s family tree can be embarrassing. Still, the academies and associations that now are an important part of higher education really began then, and might serve as a reminder that sociability is not antagonistic to scholarship. That was a long time ago, and those organizations like the Academy that are still with us have had to reinvent themselves in order to survive. If they do, they have every prospect of continuing to be useful. An outstanding example of an eighteenth-century learned society that has smoothly managed the transition into the twenty-first century is The Royal Society of Arts<sup>5</sup> in London -- founded by William Shipley, Viscount Folkestone, and Lord Romney in 1754. It was one of the first organizations ever set up in Britain to benefit art and science. The society retains its original magnificent Georgian headquarters on the Adelphi but it has all the attributes of a modern learned society – one of its many activities has been a successful system of examinations and awards that have a great influence on industrial design as well as general educational competence, and it now has chapters in all parts of the world.

The variety of learned societies is quite amazing. Even those of us in academia find the subject confusing. For example, the academic honorary societies like Phi Beta Kappa or Phi Beta Delta exist in such a variety and are so easily confused with the Greek social fraternities that there are not many who can describe them accurately. Yet academic honorary Greek fraternities are important in their fields, and many North American institutions of higher education wait for years to gain admission to Phi Beta Kappa -- having a chapter is regarded as a sort of superior form of accreditation.

The names of other scholarly groups can be as challenging as the names of honorary Greek societies. The Royal Asiatic Society and the Royal Society for Asiatic Affairs are both in London. Both have journals and both maintain libraries. There is a difference, as the RAS is regarded as paying more attention to problems of language, -- and has affiliates in Hong Kong, India, and Malaysia. The RSAA has a contemporary and political bias. Membership in The American Academy of Arts and Sciences is one of the highest academic honors in the United States, while the American Academy of Political and Social Science and the New York-based Academy of Political Science have a more inclusive membership policy.

The American Council of Learned Societies provides some guidance about scholarly organizations and includes some of the most respected associations in the United States, although it is by no means inclusive. The interests of its members include an amazing diversity of topics such as linguistics, medieval history, and even the study of proper names.

An appreciation of the variety of scholarly groups in another country can be had by considering the Canadian learned societies that meet every year in May. They have an interesting tradition of bringing many of their societies together in a sort of festival every late spring. That would not be practical in the United States, but looking at the Canadian event one can get an appreciation of the number of societies that even a relatively small population supports.

Scholarly organizations can be devoted to a single topic such as harp music or to a wide-ranging topic such as in the case of the Academy with its broad interest in social and political science. Globalization has not left them untouched. Many of these societies are actively seeking overseas members. They increasingly see themselves as worldwide fellowships. In fact, one function that they have taken on as an international duty is protecting the right of expression of scholars, especially those living under authoritarian regimes. The Middle East Studies Association has been active in this regard. Unfortunately many countries that are studied by its members or have overseas members are not hospitable to academic freedom, and the Association frequently initiates letter-writing campaigns to help academics who are imprisoned for their outspoken views. That is meritorious, but it underscores the point that American-based associations increasingly take on global responsibilities.

Not all learned societies are expansionist. Probably one of the most famous is the French Academy, established by Cardinal Richelieu, the so-called forty immortals who amongst other duties decide on the official French dictionary and admit new words to the French language.<sup>6</sup> These larger than life intellectuals get to wear a special costume and a sword, and they certainly are not interested in having a larger membership, let alone a global one!<sup>7</sup>

Membership in some learned societies is a restricted honor with prestige similar to receiving an honorary degree from a university, and conferring the right to have initials after one's name, just like Ph.D. This is more often the case in Europe than in the United States and the more selective nature of many European learned societies has inhibited their growth. In England one can be FRS for the Royal Society and FRNS for the Royal Numismatic Society and FRAS for Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. Our own Academy now has fellows, distinguished savants appointed in small numbers each year.

Some of the societies bestowing honors are these days becoming international, though historically based in a particular country. They are in effect a validating system for a particular discipline, attesting to the stature of someone in a field. As a global view of higher education becomes more of a reality, the networking and validating function of such honors-oriented learned societies is becoming more important in some cases, but it does not in general nurture the large memberships and large budgets that characterize American associations like the American Political Science Association or the American Sociological Association, groups which do give honors but have far more activities than that.

The selectivity of societies as far as membership varies, and one of the questions one has to ask is whether learned societies in the future should be exclusive or inclusive. The decision to be selective is also a decision to limit global growth. Obviously the direct influence of the French Academy when it comes to networking or validation is limited by its exclusivity. Other learned societies, once elitist, have elected to become more inclusive. For example, the designation of FRGS for Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in London was a distinction in the time of explorers like Burton and Livingston, but now almost anyone with a geographic interest can join. Indeed, the RGS recently merged with the Association of British Geographers, a sign that it is seeking even a larger constituency.

In answer to this dilemma of combining honors with other purposes, societies have sought to have a two or even three-tiered system of membership so they could have the advantages both of exclusivity and inclusiveness. Another British organization, The Royal Society for Literature, has both Fellows and Members, so that there can be singling out of literary merit but also a broader-based constituency for its projects.

From this rich and long history emerge many possibilities for the future of the Academy. Will we have committees to discuss the future curriculum that will best serve the social sciences? Will our conferences use distance education techniques? In some cases a learned society has developed a program directly benefiting universities. For example, the American Archaeological Association in addition to having chapters in many cities sponsors public lectures on campuses. Other learned societies such as the Organization of American Historians also sponsor campus lectures. The Popular Culture Association is in the midst of an endowment drive to fund visiting chairs. A list of the good things that learned societies do for education would include providing journals where work can be published, subsidies to book publishers, special meetings on subjects of current interest to academia, providing a place where young graduates can network in order to find appointments, and lobbying for government consideration of matters important to the profession.

This all sounds so worthwhile that it seems churlish to interject any doubt, but a concern, somewhat ignored in the literature, and one that echoes many other problems

with globalization, is that so many of the learned societies are so North American. This means that American influence on world higher education is bound to increase, because the likelihood of learned societies in Africa or Latin America or Asia having the staffs, congresses, Internet presence and other attributes of a major American society is unlikely. Everyone connected with international education is aware of the problems resulting from the vast difference in resources between countries.<sup>8</sup> What we have is not only “brain drain” when foreign students never go home, but the prospect of a new cultural imperialism, albeit unintentional.

Why does this difference in resources occur? Frederick Rudolph, the intellectual historian, has this to say about the American situation: “While stewardship as a religious duty in America was as old as the first English settlements, it now also received a secular definition, and benefaction became the obligation of those who were the fittest in society, those whose special aptitudes and talents had made them the winners in the struggle of life...the gospel of wealth stated the responsibility of wealth to mankind, and it prompted much of the benefaction that underwrote the university era.”<sup>9</sup>

The United States recently passed through an era, present recession or not, which has strong resemblances to the earlier Gilded Age when robber barons could endow vast charities. Just as the earlier era saw great benefactions such as Stanford University, the Carnegie libraries, and the almost endless Rockefeller gifts, we have enjoyed a time when Gates replaced Duke or Newbury or Huntington as a by-word for munificence. This recent affluence has enabled voluntary groups to secure endowments previously only dreamed about.

Globalization has made overseas academics mindful that American learned societies should be thought about in terms of more than being local institutions; with their growing strength they increasingly are a global resource. They truly are international societies with a membership of people from all over the world. To some extent this is simply a reflection of the considerable economic strength of the country in which they have their roots, the single superpower. But this is also a reflection of successful American *attitudes* towards organization. The question of how foreign researchers and academics are going to come to terms with the situation becomes ever more pressing as globalization further lowers the barriers to communication between the educated of the different nations.

A major difference between the countries is not just the monetary resources but that United States fosters a culture that produces those resources. The budgets of the American learned societies reflect the attitudes of their supporters. The culture of philanthropy has helped to create societies of a size and significance far beyond anything found elsewhere, equipped to take advantage of the opportunities that globalization presents, but of course somewhat shaped by the donors. In many cases it can be misleading to compare American associations with foreign ones, so considerable is the difference in the scope of operations.

There is a real problem to American hegemony as far as academics in developing countries are concerned. Technological research and innovation being dependant more than ever before on resources,<sup>10</sup> the concentration and growth of wealth (in terms not only of bricks and mortar but of people and associations) in the academic sector in the United States means that future progress in many areas may well be expected to be dominated by the United States.

Looking ahead, the computer revolution<sup>11</sup> means that the American learned societies are particularly positioned to take advantage of the coming years, to the disadvantage of other countries.<sup>12</sup> The economic base and the cultural attitudes that have contributed to that base will permit these associations to take advantage of opportunities that associations elsewhere cannot.<sup>13</sup> Their research and development activities are an embodiment of Moses Abramowitz's generalization about technical advance: "...the effectiveness of technological effort in many fields has become scale dependent."<sup>14</sup> This however raises troubling questions about disparity: "Globalization is inseparable from the sense of a closure. With no more 'open' territorial land to conquer and colonize, imperialist expansion reached a dead end after the Second World War. [However] The age of neoimperialism was inaugurated by the development of digital technologies and computers, which invented time as a new frontier."<sup>15</sup>

Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace warns that, "...most of the new transnational civil society actors are Western groups projecting themselves into developing and transnational societies. They may sometimes work in partnership with groups from those countries, but the agendas and values they pursue are usually their own. Transnational civil society in thus 'global' but very much part of the same projection of Western political and economic power that civil society activists decry in other venues." He adds, "...transnational civil society is much like domestic civil society in its essentials. It has been around for a long time but is now growing quickly, both feeding and being fed by globalization...one must not oversell its strength or idealize its intentions."<sup>16</sup>

Foreign academics frequently remark that one of the things that they find immensely appealing about American education is the ambition to be *best*. An aggressive cultural attitude has an influence on the hundreds of American associations that think of themselves as future major players in academia and research.<sup>17</sup> Some of these will make the grade thanks to the American tradition of philanthropy.

Support for many aspiring institutions is one of the principal strengths of North American volunteerism and contrasts with the situation in many parts of the world where philanthropy and therefore volunteerism is circumscribed. Will American scholarly societies be able to divorce themselves from nationalism and become truly global in attitude? <sup>18</sup> For the American Academy of Political and Social Science, there has been and is no lack of topics to consider. Today our cover is different, but our task of extending knowledge through reasoned debate remains the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph C. Kiger, "Preface", *Research Institutions and Learned Societies*, ed. Joseph C. Kiger, Greenwood Press, Westport (Connecticut) and London, 1982, xi.

<sup>2</sup> The international nature of these groups is often unreservedly acclaimed: "Modern communications and the creation of many international scientific societies have largely ended the nationalism which plagued science and scholarship in the past. A good example is the disagreement about the peopling of the Americas by trans-Pacific migrations. French anthropologists have long supported that theory, but American anthropologists like those I knew at Berkeley ridiculed the idea. I knew Thor Heyerdahl,

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had cast an amateurish look at his books and heard him address an international meeting in Buenos Aires. Americans there dismissed him as simply wrong, but he impressed me very well and thought he deserved a fair hearing. “ Date: Mon, 19 Feb 2001 07:22:24 – 0800 From: Ronald Hilton [hilton@stanford.edu](mailto:hilton@stanford.edu) To: MEMBERS OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES. Subject: GLOBALIZATON: The Globalization of science and scholarship.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of some antecedents in the United States, which as in Great Britain have strong connections with Freemasonry, see Jack L. Anson and Robert F. Merchesani Jr., *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities*, New York, 1991. Robert Nelson Current, *Phi Beta Kappa in American Life: The First Two Hundred Years*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990. Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*: Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey), 1984. Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, William Morrow, New York, 1988. S. Brent Morris, “Why Another Research Organization?”, *The Scottish Rite Research Society Newsletter*, 1991, No.1. Norman D. Peterson, “Scottish Rite Research: Conjectures, Ambitious Proposals, and The Third Millennium”, *The Plumline*, Scottish Rite Research Society, 1993, Vol.2 No.4. Roberts, Allen E. Roberts, *Freemasonry in American History*, Macoy Publishing, Richmond (Virginia), 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Penguin Books, London (1925) 1987, esp. 292-293.

<sup>5</sup> See its history *passim* at <http://www.rsa.org.uk/rsa/history.asp>

<sup>6</sup> For a list of the current 63 members or “immortals” see <http://www.acls.org/lsc-cao.htm#socs>

<sup>7</sup> The history of the establishment of the French Academy is at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/facademy.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Thomas L. McPhail and Brenda McPhail. “The International Politics of Telecommunications: Resolving the North-South Dilemma”, *International Journal*, Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Vol. XLII No.2, Spring 1987

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University*, Vintage Books/Random House, New York, 1965, 425.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Barglow, *The Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information*, Routledge, London, 1994. Patricia Gomez Bustamante, “Tecnología y Educación”, *Información Científica y Tecnológica*, Vol.15 No.205, October 1993. Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985. See also and *cf.* Wesley Cohen and Richard Florida with W. Richard Goe. “University-Industry Research Centers in the United States”, CEPR/AAAS conference “University

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Goals, Institutional Mechanisms, and the ‘Industrial Transferability’ of Research”, Center for Economic Policy Research, Stanford University, 1994.

11. Duscoulier, Nathalie. “Databases and Data Banks”, Ines Wesley-Tanaskovic, Jacques Tocatlian, and Kenneth H. Roberts eds., *Expanding Access to Science and Technology: The Role of Information Technologies*, The United Nations Press, Tokyo, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> See particularly Martin Carnoy, *La educación como imperialismo cultural*, Editorial Siglo XXI, México, D.F., 1985, 289-322.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Phyllis Franzek ed. *Technology, Scholarship, and the Humanities*, The American Council of Learned Societies and the J. Paul Getty Trust, New York, 1993.

14. Moses Abramowitz, *Thinking About Growth*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 36.

15. Mitsuhiro Yoshigimto, “Real Virtuality”, Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake eds., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1996, 112.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Carothers, “Civil Society – the Key to Political, Economic and Societal Success?”, *Deutschland*, No.5/2000, October/November, 17.

<sup>17</sup> “The sources of economic growth spring at bottom from a social climate...The social climate of a time and place shape the political and economic institutions that are among the underlying determinants of technological progress and economic growth.” Abramowitz, 69-70.

<sup>18</sup> Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985, 164-165.