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## ***Introduction. Situating the sub-disciplines in the Australian Journal of Political Science***

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The Editors of the *Australian Journal of Political Science* (*AJPS*) are pleased to publish a series of articles by distinguished scholars, each of whom was asked to reflect on a particular strand of the discipline through its representation in the journal over the past 50 years. Each scholar was invited to consider *inter alia* the volume of material, any discernable trends over time, any significant omissions and opportunities for the future. In the March issue, these contributions were envisaged as 'snapshots of the distinctive role of the journal in contributing to the discipline in Australia' (Simms and Stokes [2015](#): 5) – and as complementing (and potentially updating) other recent reviews of the discipline in Australia. The authors have done more than provide simple snapshots of the journal's history, as they have engaged in analysis and critique of their sub-disciplines and with one another.

The strands or sub-disciplinary streams and authors included in this issue are: comparative (Rod Pitty); electoral (Ian McAllister); gender (Carol Johnson); Indigenous (Will Sanders); international relations (William Tow); political theory (Lisa Hill); public administration (John Halligan) and public policy (Alan Fenna). The Editors also invited Greg Melliush to contribute an overview of the treatment and coverage of Australian politics in the journal, drawing from these essays and providing his own critical reflections, especially concerning the relative lack of defining narrative(s).

That the Australian discipline of political science is widely seen as containing clear sub-disciplinary strands on the one hand; and as both eclectic, diffuse and diverse on the other presents something of a potential paradox, which will be discussed in this introduction. Evidence for the former is to be found in the willingness and enthusiasm of these busy scholars to contribute to this project. No one demurred about the editors' categorisation system – although naturally enough all were keen to define their parameters, often in respect of the other sub-disciplines. We also reassure the readership that the very idea of sub-disciplines is a venerable one in Australian political science circles: instance the call for papers for the APSA (Australasian Political Studies Association) conference of 1977. There were six categories, designed to ensure 'a reasonable balance among the various areas in the discipline' (Australasian Political Studies Association [1976](#): 128). The 'categories' were: political theory; political behavior/sociology; public policy/institutions; approaches/techniques/teaching; international politics; and comparative and area studies. Five have remained, or six, if we assume that public administration was included in the 1977 public policy/institutions category. Three new areas have emerged, namely: Australian; gender and Indigenous. The approaches/techniques/teaching category has, perhaps disappointingly, subsequently disappeared. Turning to the APSA (Australian Political Studies Association) conference of 2014, the streams were Australian and Indigenous; comparative; environmental; international relations; political theory; public policy and 'open'.

In other words, more recent APSA conferences have explicitly embraced Australia as a separate stream as compared with Australian papers being streamed by methodology as they were at the 1977 conference. This is very interesting given the journal's early and explicit emphasis on 'Australiana' (see Simms and Stokes [2015](#)). The APSA Directory (1977–78), which was included as a flyer in the journal in 1977, allowed members to select three 'main fields of interest' from 13 'categories', and invited them to 'specify' their interests within those 'categories'. Interestingly, 'Australian politics' was a separate category. The *AJPS* (established in 1990) divided the book reviews section into 'Australian politics'; 'comparative and international politics'; and 'political theory and methodology'. This type of streaming continued until the book reviews section was replaced by 'review essays' in 2013.

Ian McAllister's ([2015](#): 639) point about the 'focus on electoral politics' in the journal as 'highly appropriate for a country that has maintained, by international standards, a complex set of electoral arrangements' is apposite here. He notes that: 'These arrangements have differed between the state

and federal government, and by the level of government. Coupled with frequent elections and compulsory voting, electoral participation in Australia is easily higher than that of any other advanced democracy' (McAllister [2015](#): 639). Electoral politics/political behaviour were so self-evidently about self-examination as to require no specific delineation as Australian. He notes that compulsory voting may have masked the lack of interest by the young in formal politics, leading in international terms, to a potential research deficit.

The more recent emergence of Indigenous and gender studies within the journal and at APSA was less surprising to the Editors. Will Sanders ([2015](#): 679) comments in this special issue that: 'Writing on Indigenous issues in the journal ... has been slow to emerge.' While the volume of material has increased, especially since the millennium, the involvement by Australian Indigenous scholars has been minimal. This raises questions as to why cognate disciplines, for example, sociology and law, and their journals, have been more attractive to Indigenous Australian researchers than political science and the *AJPS* have been. We note, however, that articles on Indigenous topics, for example Macoun's ([2011](#)) article on 'Aboriginality and the Northern Territory Intervention', have continued to be amongst the most read articles in the *AJPS*.

Carol Johnson ([2015](#): 695) makes the interesting point that the 'feminist' works published in the *AJPS* 'reveal the increasing influence of the women's movement'. So the real world of Indigenous politics and policy has influenced the *AJPS* indirectly at best and in a limited way, but the opposite is the case for gender. Perhaps this is another example of Marian Sawer's commentary on women's 'long march through the institutions' ([1989](#): 427).

Sub-disciplines in this collection, however, also appear as porous, due to a range of factors, including scholars publishing in different sub-disciplinary schemes, and/or co-publishing with colleagues from different streams. For example, political theory scholars have successfully applied their concepts to a range of empirical topics and political problems that would normally be seen as belonging to another strand, such as electoral politics (i.e., compulsory voting) or public policy (i.e., should prisoners vote?). In this vein, Lisa Hill ([2015](#): 655) includes in the reach of her article on political theory those articles that use theory to assist in understanding both 'methods' and 'practical problems'. William Tow and Roderick Pitty agree that regional studies (as in Asia/Africa and so forth) researchers publish on international relations problems, and *vice versa*, and at times have published on theoretical issues (see Mack [1977](#): 167).

New sub-disciplines emerge, such as public policy (initially bracketed with political institutions in the 1977 APSA conference), and subsequently distance themselves from their origins, in this case the formal study of institutions which is retained by public administration. Australian federalism is a good example of the distinctive treatment of a topic by different sub-disciplines. Scholars of Australian federalism from the early years of the journal debated whether federalism was an example of a particular 'institution' or a 'form of government', or perhaps it was both? (Peachment [1972](#): 93). Alan Fenna and John Halligan effectively agree that the study of federalism in the journal has been framed in both ways. It has thus been studied by both public policy and public administration academics – see Fenna's and Halligan's contributions in this special issue. Halligan ([2015](#): 709) discusses federalism's treatment in the journal in the 1970s as an 'institution' or 'structure'; and as a continuing theme, befitting its position as a 'core component' of the Australian political system. Fenna ([2015](#): 619) discusses federalism rather as a form of government, whereby its 'divided jurisdiction' can improve policy-making and policy outcomes for 'reformist politics'. While Melluish ([2015](#): 721) notes that scholars of Australian politics viewed federalism through the responsible government lens.

The *AJPS* editorial team encouraged such conversations by circulating the drafts amongst the contributors, and inviting them to present their drafts, after a reviewing process, at two special sessions of the APSA conference, 2015, hosted by the University of Canberra. This demonstrates the significance of the strong relationship between APSA and the *AJPS*. Several contributors refined their drafts subsequently in the light of the feedback from those present, including the other contributors. A degree of policy-learning had already occurred with contributors following Fenna's lead in graphing the number of articles over time.

Some present at the APSA sessions were concerned that political science in Australia (and internationally) has become over-specialised and fragmented. Several sub-streams also align with other journals. At APSA 2015 we heard from Will Sanders that while he publishes the political science aspects of Indigenous politics in the *AJPS*, he writes on more administrative/institutional topics for the *Australian Journal of Public Administration (AJPA)*. For the study of gender, *Australian Feminist Studies* and *Politics & Gender* (produced by the Women and Politics Research Section of the American Political Science Association) have been important outlets. Halligan and Fenna agree that public administration and public policy academics have published in the *AJPA* and a number of international journals on topics of great relevance to Australian political scientists, such as 'managerialism'. Edited volumes and series of volumes, such as by Brian Head and Alan Patience (1989), and Aulich (2014; also Aulich and Evans 2010), amongst others, have also been important outlets for work on the public policies of successive Australian governments. For international relations and comparative politics, the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (formerly *Australian Outlook*) has published significant contributions by Australian political scientists.

Of the 'stayers' in the *AJPS*, notably electoral politics, international relations and comparative politics there have been significant trends over time. McAllister charts the impact of the Australian Election Study (established by McAllister with a small team in 1987) as a source of new data and materials since its inception. Tow (2015: 628) notes the emergence of new theoretical debates, and perspectives notably constructivism that have arisen to challenge the traditional 'realist' approach often known as the 'Australian school'. In his words: '*AJPS* provided a voice for the revisionist schools of thought but still orchestrated a delicate co-existence between the rationalist guardians and reflectivist pacesetters to ensure that a flourishing debate on IR was achieved.' Of the three, comparative politics has been most influenced by the real world of politics, and Pitty charts the rise and fall of Soviet Studies.

The evidence represented in this selection of articles is that while sub-disciplinary streams are a reality there is nonetheless a degree of overlap or even commonality between them in terms of similar methods, and even common topics, questions and concerns. The Editors hope that the critiques made by these authors will provoke political scientists to respond.

## Disclosure statement

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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