

# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (APS)

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## AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (APS)

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Psychology, Scientific Psychology, Applied Research, Behavioral Science

### 1. Core Definition and Founding

The **American Psychological Society (APS)** was established in 1988 as a leading professional and academic organization dedicated exclusively to the advancement, protection, and promotion of scientific psychology across both basic and applied domains. While initially founded as the American Psychological Society, the organization later formally adopted the name **Association for Psychological Science**, retaining the widely recognized APS acronym. This entity emerged during a period of significant institutional tension within the broader field of psychology, representing a clear articulation of the interests of research-focused psychologists--including experimentalists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, and those specializing in quantitative methods. The creation of APS marked a pivotal moment, providing a dedicated institutional home for researchers whose primary objective centered on empirical discovery and the rigorous application of the scientific method to understand behavior, cognition, and human well-being.

The core mandate of APS is to foster an environment where scientific inquiry in psychology can thrive, ensuring that the development of psychological knowledge is rooted firmly in empirical data and reproducible results. Unlike other professional organizations that might balance research interests with extensive clinical or practice-oriented concerns, the APS structure, governance, and activities are overwhelmingly geared toward supporting academic psychologists, research scientists, and educators. This dedication is manifested through its influential publications, annual conferences focused on cutting-edge research, and its robust advocacy efforts aimed at securing federal funding and recognition for psychological science as a core discipline within the sciences. The organization actively engages with policymakers and the public to ensure that scientific findings inform societal decisions, ranging from educational practices to public health policy.

From its inception, the founders envisioned APS as a platform that would not only encourage high-quality research but also safeguard the integrity and status of psychological science within the larger scientific community. This objective was essential for ensuring that psychology retained its footing among established sciences, particularly concerning securing grants and positioning research programs within universities. The organization strives to enhance the visibility of psychological scientists and their contributions, promoting the view that understanding human behavior and mental processes requires the same level of methodological rigor and experimental control applied in fields like biology or physics. Consequently, the definition of APS is intrinsically tied to its commitment to empirical methodologies and the cultivation of research excellence among its diverse membership of students, teachers, and seasoned professionals.

## 2. Historical Context and Establishment (1988 Schism)

The genesis of the APS in 1988 is best understood within the context of a long-standing, often acrimonious, institutional schism within American psychology, primarily stemming from the divergent interests between scientific researchers and clinical practitioners who dominated the governance of the **American Psychological Association (APA)**. By the mid-20th century, the APA, originally conceived as an organization for research scholars, had grown increasingly centered on professional practice, licensure, and applied clinical concerns, particularly following the post-World War II boom in clinical psychology. This shift led to a governance structure and resource allocation model within the APA that many academic researchers felt marginalized their interests, reduced funding opportunities for basic research, and diluted the emphasis on empirical standards.

Academic psychologists, particularly those involved in experimental and cognitive branches, increasingly perceived the APA as failing to effectively champion the needs of science. Concerns included the underrepresentation of research interests on governing boards, the relative lack of focus on basic scientific journals compared to professional practice publications, and a perceived reluctance to advocate strongly for government funding targeted specifically at psychological science. This growing frustration culminated in the formation of a breakaway group. Key figures within the research community argued that the sheer size and bureaucratic complexity of the APA made it impossible to serve equally the disparate needs of practitioners, who sought professional standards and ethical guidelines, and scientists, who required research advocacy and academic infrastructure support.

The founding of the APS was therefore an act of institutional realignment, designed to create an organization where the scientific mission was paramount and uncontested. This new body immediately set out to advocate for science-based studies, approaches, and the subsequent enhancement of human well-being through validated knowledge. The establishment of APS was not merely a reaction against the APA's governance but a proactive move to ensure that psychological research maintained a dedicated voice in national policy debates, university curricula, and publishing standards. This historical split profoundly reshaped the landscape of American psychology, forcing both organizations to clarify their missions--APA focusing heavily on practice and applied ethics, and APS becoming the definitive champion of the psychological research enterprise.

## 3. Core Objectives and Mission

The mission of the American Psychological Society centers on three foundational pillars: encouragement, safeguarding, and development. Specifically, the organization is committed to encouraging high-quality scientific research by providing platforms for dissemination and

collaboration, safeguarding the interests and intellectual freedom of psychological scientists, and furthering the developmental trajectory of the field by promoting innovative, science-based approaches. This tri-part mission ensures that the organization's efforts are consistently directed toward enhancing the empirical foundation of psychology, emphasizing that valid psychological knowledge must stem from rigorous methodological processes.

A primary objective is to maintain and elevate the visibility of psychological science as a legitimate and essential scientific discipline. This involves intensive advocacy work directed toward federal funding agencies, such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), arguing for the inclusion and robust funding of psychological research alongside biological, physical, and medical sciences. By positioning psychological research within the broader scientific ecosystem, APS ensures that funding streams recognize the critical role of understanding behavior and cognition in areas ranging from mental health to educational outcomes and economic decision-making. The organization publishes position papers, hosts briefings for policymakers, and coordinates lobbying efforts to achieve these advocacy goals.

Furthermore, APS is dedicated to promoting the dissemination of scientific findings to the public and across disciplinary boundaries. This objective is crucial for bridging the gap between academic discovery and practical application. By emphasizing the publishing of high-impact journals and organizing conferences that prioritize methodological transparency and empirical rigor, APS strives to ensure that the scientific literature is both reliable and accessible. The mission also encompasses the enhancement of human well-being, recognizing that the ultimate value of psychological science lies in its capacity to generate knowledge that can be effectively utilized to solve complex human and societal problems, always guided by objective, scientific evidence rather than unsubstantiated claims.

#### 4. Key Activities and Publications

A central function of the American Psychological Society is its role as a premier publisher of scientific literature, significantly influencing the direction and standards of research across the discipline. The organization publishes three highly influential, scientific peer-reviewed journals, which serve as the primary conduits for disseminating cutting-edge findings and methodological advances. These journals are recognized globally as essential reading for academic psychologists, researchers, and advanced students, setting the pace for scientific discourse in the field.

Key publications include:

**Psychological Science:** Considered the flagship journal, it is a leading empirical journal in the field, publishing short, high-impact articles covering the entire spectrum of psychology. Its focus is on timely, methodologically sound research that often challenges existing paradigms or introduces novel approaches to complex problems.

**Current Directions in Psychological Science:** This journal publishes concise, authoritative reviews of research spanning all of scientific psychology. It aims to inform readers about the latest developments and emerging trends, offering critical synthesis rather than original data, making it invaluable for both researchers and educators keeping abreast of fast-moving areas.

**Psychological Science in the Public Interest (PSPI):** This unique journal publishes comprehensive, scholarly reports on topics of significant relevance to the public interest. PSPI applies scientific findings and methodologies to major public policy issues, aiming to provide balanced, science-based reviews that can inform legislation, public opinion, and societal interventions.

Beyond publishing, APS organizes the annual **APS Convention**, which has become one of the most important international gatherings for psychological scientists. This convention is distinguished by its emphasis on research presentations, methodological workshops, and symposia dedicated to interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, APS engages in extensive programs dedicated to training and mentorship, including initiatives designed to support early career researchers, promote diversity in science, and encourage pedagogical excellence in the teaching of scientific psychology at the university level. These activities collectively underscore APS's commitment to advancing the research infrastructure of the discipline.

## 5. Membership Structure

The membership structure of the American Psychological Society is designed to be inclusive of all individuals committed to the scientific foundation of psychology, spanning various stages of professional and academic development. The organization explicitly grants membership to **students**, **teachers** (academics and instructors), and **professionals** in the psychology field, ensuring a broad and robust community united by a commitment to empirical excellence. This inclusivity is vital for nurturing the next generation of researchers and maintaining a continuous pipeline of scientifically trained psychologists.

Membership categories are typically tiered, reflecting the member's career stage and contribution level. Full membership is often held by senior researchers, tenured faculty, and established scientists who are actively publishing and contributing to the field. These members play a critical role in the governance of the organization, serving on editorial boards, review committees, and the main Board of Directors. Associate membership is frequently available for professionals in adjacent fields who utilize psychological science but may not identify as primary psychological scientists themselves, such as statisticians, philosophers of science, or neuroscientists.

Crucially, the large number of student and early-career memberships highlights the organization's foundational role in psychological education. Students, from undergraduate through doctoral levels, gain access to specialized resources, mentorship opportunities, and reduced rates for the annual

convention, fostering early integration into the scientific community. By providing resources tailored to the academic career path--including grants for dissertation research and advice on navigating academic job markets--APS reinforces its identity as the central professional home for research-oriented psychologists, clearly differentiating its services from those provided by practice-focused associations.

## 6. Significance and Impact

The establishment and continued operation of the American Psychological Society have had a profound and transformative impact on the discipline of psychology, both domestically and internationally. Its most significant contribution is the successful institutionalization and strengthening of **scientific identity** within psychology. By creating a distinct organizational entity, APS provided a singular, focused voice for researchers, ensuring that empirical standards and research advocacy could not be overshadowed by the growing demands of professional licensure and practice management. This separation helped clarify and solidify psychology's status among the natural and social sciences.

The impact of APS is highly visible in academia. The organization's aggressive advocacy for the scientific model has influenced how university psychology departments are structured, often promoting a stronger emphasis on quantitative methods, experimental design, and integration with neuroscience and cognitive science. Furthermore, the high impact factors and rigorous peer-review standards of its journals, particularly *Psychological Science*, have raised the overall bar for scholarly publishing in the field, pressuring all researchers to adhere to stronger methodologies and more transparent reporting practices. This push toward methodological rigor is central to the ongoing efforts to address issues such as the replication crisis in psychological science.

In the public sphere, APS has significantly enhanced the influence of psychological science on policy and public understanding. Through publications like *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, the organization ensures that evidence-based conclusions are accessible to governmental bodies and the media, leading to more informed policy decisions related to education, criminal justice, and mental health services. By consistently championing the cause of science, the APS has cemented its role as the authoritative voice for psychological research, ensuring that the foundational work of its members contributes directly to the betterment of human society and the rigorous understanding of the mind and behavior.

## Further Reading

[Association for Psychological Science \(APS\) Official Website](#)

[Association for Psychological Science - Wikipedia](#)

[Psychological Science Journal](#)