

Message from the ISPP President to Early Career Scholars

Dear ISPP Early Career Scholars,

I write during this terrible Covid-19 pandemic to check in and offer some thoughts about the current state of the academe and our corner of it in particular. As young scholars, whether you are in graduate school, post-doctoral or other research positions, or assistant professors, now is a very anxiety inducing moment for many reasons. I would like to talk about the professional concerns many of you may have.

The academic job market in political science and psychology, already fragile before 2020, now seems to hold nothing but uncertainty. As a tenured faculty member in a fine university, one might suppose I would have some trouble understanding the personal struggles you are facing. Forgive me for trying to take your perspective, and for presuming mine might offer you some hope right now. My own young colleagues, students, and even family members face this downturn in the academy. While they and you are helping each other, you also help us older members of the community understand the specific challenges ahead. Please keep the line of communication open with leaders at ISPP so we know how to help.

First, at this point we all have become accustomed to hearing how “unprecedented” this situation is, as it disrupts nearly every aspect of our lives and puts so many of our loved ones at significant risk. It is worth remembering, however, that there have been times like this before even if lesser in scope and severity. The 2008 financial crisis led many universities to freeze hiring and promotions, and some of our colleagues were paid with IOU’s. Our colleagues in Europe and other parts of the world, perhaps more accustomed to austerity practices to begin with, suffered even more.

The academy survived that downturn, and we will survive this one. Universities will hire. Moreover, they will hire you. The basic science you are doing in political psychology will be vital for understanding the myriad human, economic, and political consequences of this pandemic. Many of us were worried about backsliding in democracies both new and old before this shock, and now we see a flood of worried speculation about whether those processes will be accelerated. But of course that is not the only possible outcome. Worldwide tragedies do not always lead to the disintegration of economic, political, and cultural bonds. Sometimes such moments strengthen our commitments to each other. Political psychologists are at the very intellectual core of understanding and explaining what has happened and what will happen next.

All this is to say that you are doing the work that will matter the most in the coming years and decades, and the students of the future will need you. Universities will need you. ISPP will need you. This crisis will surely change many plans, and this will be a difficult professional time, but I want to express my deep respect for all of you in the sacrifice you are making for your work and for the field. My hope is that regular tenure track hiring will not be suspended in many places, but if it is, post-doctoral and other temporary posts could serve as a useful and productive safe haven. I suspect many universities will be attempting to expand such opportunities in the absence of longer budgetary time horizons.

The bottom line is that ISPP is here for you. If you have any concerns, or if we can help in any way, please ask. We greatly value all of you, and we will get through this together.

Best,
Nick Valentino
President, ISPP