

# THE POLICY STUDIES FIELD WITHIN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION/POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSION

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to describe briefly the general nature and background of the new policy studies field within public administration/political science, the institutions of the field, its substance/process/methods, and its future.

### GENERAL NATURE AND BACKGROUND

The field of policy studies can be broadly defined as the study of the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies for dealing with specific social problems. Some people in the field prefer to emphasize policy effects and evaluating or optimizing those effects. Others prefer to emphasize causal determinants and processes. Those emphasizing prescription, however, recognize that one cannot prescribe policies without an awareness of what policies are likely to be adopted and effectively implemented. Likewise, those emphasizing causes recognize that the effects of policies are often an important causal factor in shaping policies.

Policy studies is closely related to both public administration and political science. With public administration it shares a concern for the effects of public policies, as contrasted to the political science emphasis on the formation of public policies. With political science it also shares a concern for establishing cause and effect relations on a more general level than public

administration tends to emphasize. Policy studies thus serves as a useful bridge between the more pragmatic aspects of public administration and the more theoretical aspects of political science. Policy studies also differs from public administration by emphasizing legislative and judicial sources of policy rather than just administrative. Policy studies not only serves as a bridge between political science and public administration but also as a bridge between the classical concern for the good society and the more recent behavioral concern for using quantitative methods.

Although political science has played an important part in the development of the field, policy studies is truly interdisciplinary. Political science and public administration contribute a concern for the political and administrative feasibility aspects of alternative public policies. Economics contributes a concern for benefits, costs, and maximizing benefits minus costs, with an emphasis on deducing prescriptive conclusions from given goals and intuitively or empirically accepted relations. Psychology emphasizes the relevance of rewards and punishments in motivating people to do right and provides a research paradigm emphasizing pretests and posttests of experimental and control groups. Sociology is concerned with social problems, social classes, and social statistics. Anthropology, geography, and history provide broadening perspectives across places and times. Natural science contributes a concern for physical and biological factors which are often important in such problems as energy and health. Mathematics provides quantitative tools for measuring, analyzing, and evaluating the effects of alternative public policies. Philosophy shows a special concern for the values toward which public policies are directed and the ultimate logic of policy analysis.

The policy studies field and orientation have grown tremendously since 1970, as indicated by the increasing list of relevant journals, organizations, articles, books, book series, convention papers, conference themes, courses, schools, grants, academic job openings, and government job openings. What has caused that growth? One early stimulus was the general public's concern for civil rights, the war on poverty, peace, women's liberation, environmental protection, and other

social problems in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The scholarly implementation of those concerns among academics was facilitated by the development of new statistical and mathematical methods, the spread of computer software, and the development of relevant interdisciplinary relations. The relative attractiveness of the government as an employer and research sponsor also increased as the role of universities in employment and research decreased. A more recent stimulus has been the concern for obtaining more government output from reduced tax dollars. In that regard, government retrenchment has decreased government prosperity but has increased the prosperity of policy analysts.

## **INSTITUTIONS OF THE POLICY STUDIES FIELD**

The basic institutions of an academic field include training programs, research centers, funding sources, publishing outlets, associations, and placement opportunities. Training programs associated with policy studies can be classified in various opposing categories, but it is quite possible to have programs that are in more than one category. The categories include whether the program is emphasizing (1) graduate or undergraduate work; (2) training for government or teaching; (3) multiple disciplines or one discipline; (4) methodology or substance; (5) classroom or field experience; (6) university budget money or grants and contracts; (7) policy processes or evaluation of policy alternatives; (8) federal or state and local; (9) cross-national or national; and (10) questioning general societal goals or accepting them.

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of various programs relevant to the interests of political scientists is whether they emphasize a political science approach as in the Berkeley Graduate School of Public Affairs, an economic approach as in the Harvard Kennedy School, or a social-psychological approach as in Northwestern's Evaluation Research Program. Those diverse orientations are increasingly coming together in recognition that each has a unique and valuable emphasis to contribute. Political science emphasizes process and feasibility; economics deduction and optimizing;

and social psychology experimentation and attitudes.

Many universities could develop interdisciplinary training programs by simply cross-listing courses, faculty, and students. Benefits from developing a policies studies program include increased job opportunities, grants, program funding, intellectual stimulation, policy relevance, publishing opportunities, enrollment, faculty recruitment, and the opportunity to build on relevant departments and people. The incremental costs of a policy studies program are quite low given the existing people and facilities at nearly all universities. What may be especially needed is to get university administrators to show more recognition of the opportunities that exist if they can just pull together some of their existing resources in a coherent policy studies training program.

Non-governmental research centers in the policy studies field can be divided into those that are at universities (such as the Yale Institution for Social and Policy Studies or the UCLA Institute for Social Science Research) or those that are not at universities (such as Brookings, Abt Associates, Urban Institute, Mitre, and the American Enterprise Institute). Like training programs, research centers can also be classified in terms of quality but that is much more difficult to do. There does seem to be some consensus that university research centers are good on general principles and creativity but non-university centers are generally better on following detailed specifications and meeting time-constraints. What may be needed are more research centers that can draw upon academic creativity while still being effective in responding to government requests for proposals.

Funding sources in the policy studies field include both government agencies and private funding sources. Leading government sources with a broad orientation include the National Science Foundation (especially the Division of Applied Research and the Division of Policy Analysis) and the National Institute of Mental Health. Virtually every government agency has the authority to issue a purchase order to buy research products relevant to the interests of the agency, including Defense, Energy, HUD, HHS, Justice, USDA, Transportation, Commerce, Labor, Education, etc. Leading private sources with

a broad orientation include the Ford Foundation (especially the National Affairs Division and the Committee on Public Policy), Rockefeller, and Russell Sage. Numerous private foundations have specialized interests in various policy problems as indicated by the Foundation Directory.

On the matter of publishing outlets, there are a number of new journals in the field including Policy Analysis, Policy Sciences, Public Policy, Public Interest, and the Policy Studies Journal. Although there is substantial overlap among these journals, they each have a somewhat separate focus reflected in their titles. Policy Analysis is especially concerned with the methodology of policy studies with an emphasis on economic reasoning in program evaluation. Policy Sciences is also especially concerned with methodology but with more emphasis on operations research, management science, and cross-national authors. Public Policy has had more of a focus on substance than method but its former political emphasis is moving toward economics. Public Interest is mainly concerned with substance and values, particularly from the perspective of non-mathematical sociology. The Policy Studies Journal tries to combine substance and method, although mainly with a political science orientation and a symposium format.

Other general policy-oriented scholarly journals include: Evaluation Quarterly; Journal of American Institute of Planners; Journal of Social Issues; Journal of Urban Analysis; Law and Contemporary Problems; Law and Society Review; Policy and Politics; Public Administration Review; Public Choice; Social Indicators Research; Social Policy; Social Problems; Society; Socio-Economic Planning Sciences; and Urban Affairs Quarterly. Disciplinary social science journals like the American Political Science Review are increasingly publishing articles with a policy orientation. A number of scholarly publishers have established a book series or a set of books that deal with policy studies. These include: Lexington, Sage, Ballinger, Duxbury, Elsevier, Goodyear, Marcel Dekker, Pergamon, Praeger, St. Martin's, and Academic Press. Some of the better known series include: the Sage Yearbooks in Politics and Public Policy; the Sage Policy Studies Review Annual; the Lexington-PSO series; and the Elsevier Policy Sciences Book

Series.

There are now a number of new associations in the policy studies field. Like training programs and journals, they can be partly classified in terms of whether they are associated with political science, economics, or sociology-psychology. The Policy Studies Organization (founded in 1972) is especially associated with political science. The Association for Policy Analysis and Management (founded in 1979) is especially associated with economics, although so is the more mathematical Public Choice Society. The Evaluation Research Society (founded in 1977) especially represents psychology and sociology and is in the process of merging with the Evaluation Network and the Council for Applied Social Research. Psychologists and sociologists are also represented by units within the APA and ASA, namely the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues and the Society for the Study of Social Problems. There may be a need for more interaction and coordination across these associations in order to promote more interdisciplinary projects such as joint symposia, publications, research, convention panels, legislative testimony, and other activities.

Placement opportunities include the training programs and research centers previously mentioned. For many academic fields, placement opportunities include private business. The counterpart in policy studies is mainly government agencies. They represent the heart of policy studies since there would be no government policies without government agencies. In other words, they not only represent an outlet for placing students and placing ideas but also a reciprocal source of ideas relevant to improving the work of the training programs and research centers.

Some government agencies, however, are more actively involved in planning and evaluating alternative policies than other agencies. Federal agencies are especially active but state and local agencies are becoming more so with the passage of legislation requiring more evaluation and the need to stretch tighter budgets. Among federal agencies, the planning and evaluation units at HUD, HHS, Labor, and Defense are generally well-regarded, along with executive office agencies

like OMB and the Domestic Council. In doing policy evaluation, Congress has the help of the General Accounting Office, Congressional Budget Office, Office of Technology Assessment, and the Congressional Reference Service. In a survey of political scientists in government, they mentioned the need for more policy research by academic political scientists, more exchange of information between academics and practitioners, and more training on how government agencies actually function.

## **SUBSTANCE, PROCESS, AND METHODS**

Core courses in policy studies programs generally cover substance, process, and methods. A key issue in discussing policy studies substance is determining the social problems that are important to policy studies training and research. The answer is generally those social problems on which governments devote a substantial amount of resources in order to resolve or lessen the problems. This is a descriptive approach to clarifying policy studies substance. A prescriptive approach attempts to answer the question by pointing to the social problems on which governments should devote a substantial amount of resources, regardless whether they do. For example, is family policy a subject for active government involvement with regard to husband-wife relations and parent-child relations? Is religious policy such a subject, with regard to facilitating parochial schools, contributions to religious institutions, and some forms of religious behavior? Closely related is the question of the relative importance of different policy problems in a policy studies program.

Another key issue in the realm of policy studies substance is how to classify substantive policy problems. One approach classifies problems in terms of the disciplines with which they are most often associated, i.e., problems especially related to political science (e.g., civil liberties or defense); economics (e.g., economic regulation or taxing-spending); sociology-psychology (e.g., race relations or population); planning (e.g., land use or transportation; and physical or biological science (e.g., energy or health).

Key issues in discussing the policy process include the

following:

1. Are policies made more by rational analysis of the relations between alternative policies and goals or more by incremental trial and error?
2. In studying policy adoption and implementation, how much emphasis should be placed on process analysis as contrasted to the determinants and effects of policy variation?
3. In policy studies training, how much emphasis should be placed on process as contrasted to methods and substance?
4. To what extent does the process change when we talk about different substantive issues like crime policy versus environmental policy?
5. How does the policy adoption and implementation process differ across levels of government, branches of government, and across nations?
6. To what extent should the process be an evaluation goal in itself with regard to such matters as public participation, fair procedure, openness, and predictability?
7. To what extent should policy analysts consider political and administrative feasibility in evaluating alternative policies?
8. What is good policy process in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, and equity on such dimensions as federalism, separation of powers, judicial review, the two-party system, and majority rule with minority rights?

Some issues in discussing policy analysis methods include:

1. How is policy analysis similar to and different from business analysis?
2. How to make policy analysts more sensitive to social values and more questioning of goals when evaluating alternative policies?
3. How to be able to predict the effects of alternative policies as contrasted to reacting to policies that have already been adopted?
4. How to take goals as given and attempt to determine which policies will maximize them rather than take policies as



given and merely attempt to determine what their effects are?

5. How to provide analysts with a good grounding in social science research methods including a concern for meaningful measurement, sampling, determination of relations, and causal analysis?
6. How to provide analysts with a good grounding in both finite math and calculus-oriented marginal analysis?
7. How to keep analysts from going overboard in seeking precision methods when less precise techniques give the same results, or from suffering the opportunity cost of not taking advantage of precision that might be easily available?
8. How to get analysts to be more sensitive to the subject matter with which they are working as contrasted to using mechanical quantification without thinking through the subject matter implications?
9. How to get analysts to analyze questions that have relatively broad significance rather than unduly narrowly focused questions?

## **RELEVANCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

The field of public administration has long been concerned with how to administer policies more effectively in order to achieve given goals. Also relevant is the interest of public administrators in developing government structures that can produce a greater degree of goal achievement. The budgeting field within public administration has become particularly important as an area focusing on how to explain and evaluate alternative allocation decisions. Contemporary public administration discusses the improvement of public administration not in terms of intuitive clichés about the need for hiring more competent people and spending money more efficiently. It has also moved beyond the institutional description of hiring rules and budgetary procedures. Instead, there is now an emphasis on the psychology of organizational behavior and allocating in accordance with a combination of incrementalism, functionalism, and management science.

On a more general level, public administration may be especially relevant to clarifying alternative administrative arrangements for implementing government policies. For example, in the field of housing policy, economists in the late 1960s often recommended government programs designed to convert poor people from tenants to homeowners. In theory, the idea sounds fine. By becoming homeowners, poor people would have a greater stake in their dwelling units and thus take better care of them. They would be especially unlikely to burn them down as they were sometimes doing during the 1960s. By becoming homeowners, poor people might acquire a more positive self-image and a more favorable attitude toward society thereby becoming better citizens in ways other than just taking better care of their homes.

Partly in reliance on that kind of economic analysis, the Nixon administration pushed a homeownership program for the poor that would involve government-guaranteed mortgages with low payments per month compared to what the Federal Housing Authority for years had been providing for middle-class people. The program turned out to be a rather dismal failure. Homes were sold to poor people at inflated assessments often as a result of sellers bribing government assessors to exaggerate the value of the homes in order to increase the government guarantee. Homes were also sold to poor people without their being adequately informed of the expensive maintenance costs and defects in the plumbing, heating, or electrical systems.

As a result, maintenance and repair costs often were too high for poor people to handle and they used the mortgage payments for repairs thereby incurring foreclosures. Some of those foreclosed houses exchanged hands more times than a repossessed used car since houses are normally more durable than cars. The program was wracked with the same kind of supplier fraud as the Medicaid and Medicare programs, with doctors, dentists, pharmacists, optometrists, nursing-home owners, and others overcharging for services rendered and not rendered.

What may have been needed in designing the program was more concern for the effects of alternative administrative systems. Perhaps a big mistake of the Nixon homeownership program

was that it involved government funding of the private sector real estate system. An alternative way of administering or delivering the program would be for salaried government employees to sell homes to the poor that the government would have previously obtained by tax foreclosures, government purchases, or government construction. Salaried government employees, selling government-owned housing to poor people, would have no incentive to inflate the assessed valuation of the property or to withhold information on likely maintenance or repair costs.

An analogous government program is the Legal Services Corporation which consists of salaried government attorneys providing legal services to the poor. No attorney from the Legal Services Corporation or its predecessor, the OEO Legal Services Agency, has been involved in any scandal related to overcharging the poor for actual or fictitious services. Such a system would be administratively feasible for selling houses or supplying medical services to the poor. However, the system might not be politically feasible for medical services, given the fear of the American Medical Association that such a system would lead to socialized government medicine for the total population. There is no likelihood that the government is going to go into the real estate business for the total population and thus having salaried government homefinders for the poor might be politically feasible.

The negative income tax experiments represent another related sample where the economic modeling may have missed some important insights by not adequately considering alternative administrative systems. Families were randomly assigned to various income-receiving groups. One group may have received enough money to satisfy only about 33 percent of minimum needs, as is done under the Mississippi welfare system; a second group may have received income at the 66 percent level, which corresponds roughly to the Texas welfare system; and a third group may have received income at the 100 percent level, which is what most northeastern states provide.

Conservatives hypothesize that, as welfare payments go up, ambition to get a job goes down because the welfare recipient has less need for a job. Liberals hypothesize that, as low welfare

payments go up, ambition to get a job may also go up because the welfare recipient may have his or her appetite whetted and expectations raised. The true relation might involve job getting going up to a point and then going down. The expensive experiment, however, shows a rather flat relation between job getting and welfare payments within the monetary range of the experiment.

Perhaps, however, a much steeper relation might have been observed if the families had been randomly assigned to alternative delivery systems as well as, or instead of, alternative welfare amounts. The basic alternative delivery system consists of the compulsory caseworker, as exists under the present aid-to-dependent-children system, or the check in the mail which is associated with the negative income tax system that seeks to minimize administrative interference in the lives of the poor. On the one hand, perhaps the compulsory caseworker stimulates job getting by informing the welfare recipient about available jobs or by harrasing the welfare recipient into taking a job. On the other hand, perhaps the compulsory caseworker lowers the self-esteem of the welfare recipient and makes him or her more dependent than would be the case in the absence of a caseworker. Unfortunately, that kind of alternative administrative hypothesis was never tested, possibly because of a lack of participation by public administration people in the negative income tax experiment.

## FUTURE OF POLICY ANALYSIS

As for the future of policy studies, the direction is likely to be toward more growth or a stabilizing at a high level of academic and government activity. The growth is likely to continue since the causal forces responsible are still continuing. Those causal forces include the public concern for important policy problems, although the nature of the problems keeps changing. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the problems related to civil rights, poverty, Vietnam, women's liberation, and environmental protection. Now they relate more to inflation, energy, and the Middle East. The causal forces also include improved quantitative methods, increased attractiveness of government as a social

science employer and research sponsor and increased government concern for trying to stretch its scarce resources.

Deeper causal forces relate to factors that explain increased government involvement over the past 80 years. Those factors are of three kinds. First, there are socio-economic forces such as (1) the increased severity of world conflicts; (2) the growing importance of public education; (3) the growth of large interstate and multi-national business; (4) the growth of big labor and other pressure groups that seek aid and require regulation; (5) increased urbanization and the resulting loss of self-sufficiency; (6) increased severity of periods of inflation and recession; (7) competition with foreign ideologies; and (8) the fact that regulation and government activity generate more regulation and activity.

Second, there are certain enabling factors such as: (1) expanded sources of government revenue necessary for carrying on increased government programs; (2) improved managerial techniques for handling large-scale government operations; and (3) changing constitutional interpretations. Third is the ideological shift from a prevailing attitude favoring minimal government towards an attitude that government has many positive responsibilities.

Within the field of policy studies, one might predict more specific increases in:

1. Training programs (undergraduate and graduate, disciplinary and interdisciplinary, and academic-oriented and practitioner-oriented).
2. Policy research centers (university, governmental, and non-university private).
3. Funding sources (government line agencies like HHS, government research agencies like NSF, and private foundations like Ford).
4. Publishing outlets (both journals and book publishers).
5. Policy-oriented scholarly associations (disciplinary, interdisciplinary, professional, and problem-focused).

Within the social sciences, one might predict increases in:

1. The percentage of social scientists identifying with policy studies.
2. The emphasis on policy evaluation and implementation rather than just explaining variation across decisions.
3. The use of micro-economic reasoning rather than just statistical data processing.
4. The concern for a wider range of policy problems.
5. The concern across subfields within each social science discipline for the nature, causes, and effects of relevant public policies.
6. The synthesis between the traditional philosophic concern for normative evaluation and the scientific or behavioral concern for quantitative analysis.
7. The interaction between social science academics and practitioners in training programs and in government.
8. The reaching out to other disciplines in view of the inter-disciplinary nature of policy problems.

In general, policy studies seems to be a boom industry as a subdiscipline of both political science and public administration, as a discipline in itself, and as an inter-discipline drawing upon people, courses, and ideas from other disciplines. Policy studies also seems to be providing some new vitality to political science and public administration and vice versa.

## NOTES

For further details on these subjects, see S. Nagel (1980). *The Policy Studies Handbook* (Lexington, Heath). Books that deal with relations between public administration and policy studies tend to be of three types. One type might be called the hortatory book since it represents a call to public administration to show more concern for the prescriptive orientation of policy analysis. There are good chapters of that nature in Robert Golembiewski (1977). *Public Administration as a Developing Discipline* (New York, Marcel Dekker) and George Frederickson and Charles Wise (eds.) (1977). *Public Administration and Public Policy* (Lexington, Heath). A second type attempts to describe the extent to which evaluation and optimizing models are used by public administrators and is well represented by Arnold Meltsner (1975). *Policy Analysis in the Bureaucracy* (Los Angeles, University of California Press) and Michael White, Michael Radnor, and David Tansik (eds.) (1975). *Management and Policy Science in American Government* (Lexington, Heath). A third type is the undergraduate or graduate public administration textbook that shows an above-average interest in management science, program evaluation, and related prescriptive methods, such as Nicholas Henry (1975). *Public Administration and Public Affairs* (New York, Prentice-Hall, or Barry Bozeman (1979). *Public Management and Policy Analysis* (New York, St. Martin's Press).