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Educating Policy Analysts

by Hindy Lauer Schacter, New Jersey Institute of Technology

This article explores the role of political science in educating people who perform policy analysis in public bureaucracies. Policy analysts are defined as applied scientists who study the nature, causes and effects for alternative public policies, using relevant academic disciplines, theories and methodologies to choose optimal policies to achieve a given aim.¹ Typically, analysts evaluate enacted policies but occasionally they compare hypothetical alternatives.

The education of policy analysts is similar to the education of engineers. Both draw on several basic sciences for information to solve real-world problems. However, greater consensus exists on which sciences are important for engineers. Their key science is physics although engineering education also uses insights from chemistry, geology and biology.

No consensus exists on which science optimally undergirds policy education, but increasing evidence suggests that in actual practice, economics has the lion's share of the educative role. A study of federal sector analysts find that a plurality have the bulk of their professional training in economics.² A *New York Times* survey noted that graduate policy courses lean heavily on the work being done in business schools, with economics providing the major theoretical rationale and criteria for evaluating policy.³

Of course political scientists consider policy analysis a major component of the discipline but, as Wildavsky observes, "back at the school, it is necessary to push harder for attention to political and organizational variables."⁴ The political component of analysis has to be made more credible to future professionals because at present "although students love to talk about politics, they apply economics."⁵ This link to economics occurs even though some public administration scholars see

policy analysis as public administration in new "scientific" clothing with both disciplines originally offshoots of political science.⁶

The question of disciplinary connection is not simply an exercise in scholarly classifying. Disciplines differ in their central concerns and orientations. Policy inquiry that relies too heavily on the paradigms of any one discipline runs the risk of being narrow, missing interesting and important variables. For example, a recent analysis of diffusion innovation research finds that political scientists and sociologists concentrate on a number of vital areas that economists neglect including personal traits of potential adapters, social relationships among innovators and imitators and the relative importance of different communication channels.⁷ The author concludes that innovation research conducted solely by economists would "have little to offer to the policy makers."⁸

Policy analysis today is often criticized for being technically proficient but politically naive, for doing "much less to improve the quality of public policy making than public officials had once hoped."⁹ The argument of this article is that concentration on criteria and issues central to economics is one factor that has led to a problem of underuse whether we define "use" as specific input into current legislation or diffuse influence.¹⁰ Dominance by one discipline has led to overnarrow concentration on problems and criteria central to that discipline. It minimizes the analysis of consequences outside economic's traditional purview. Political naivete emerges because economically-oriented analysis tend to downgrade the importance of process although "political scientists have long argued that . . . process is more important than individual outcomes."¹¹ Less useful analysis results because economic analysis lauds efficiency as

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Training Administrators To Use Microcomputers

by Robert H. Rittle
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Some are born to computer literacy, while others have literacy thrust upon them! Students who comprise the next generation of political scientists and public administrators will, in many cases, fall into the latter category. This article concerns the role of university training programs in meeting the increasing demands for microcomputer skills.

The January, 1984 issue of *Public Administration Review* included five articles concerning microcomputers in local government. These articles anticipate "major changes in the way local governments organize and the means by which they carry out operations," as a result of microcomputer technology. Predicting a significant impact of microcomputers in local government, the International City Management Association has also published a major monograph on microcomputer use (Griesemer, 1984).

Given these trends, recent graduates who are not computer literate may soon encounter the suspicion that they actively avoided computer training. Likewise, academic programs which fail to provide microcomputer skills will be suspect in terms of their ability to offer state-of-the-art training.

An additional reason for providing a computer literacy course concerns the recruitment of new students. Students, and particularly the better-qualified students, are apt to expect computer training within their major field of study. The availability of computer coursework can be an asset in attracting well-qualified students to programs in political science and public administration.

Responding to these considerations, a course on microcomputer skills was introduced in the Spring of 1984 at the Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. One purpose of this article is to indicate that

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