

11.800, Knowledge in the Public Arena: The Uses and Abuses of Research
Professors Xavier de Souza, Frank Levy, and Martin Rein

Session 1

- I. Course Overview
 - a. Course Structure
 - i. Designed to enable students to address own interests relating knowledge to impact/action; e.g.:
 - 1. Research knowledge embedded in policy making (how law making institutions work/lobbyists, etc.)
 - 2. Knowledge diffusion – transmission of knowledge along networks or through institutions (individual as policy-maker)
 - ii. Students asked to outline a problem statement of what they would like to work on during the course
 - 1. This is intended to connect the content of the lecture with the writing component of the course.
 - 2. In past years, a wide variety of questions have been examined, e.g.
 - a. What drives education reform?
 - 3. Students receive feedback on this assignment to guide their work in the course.
 - iii. Readings
 - 1. The reading load is heaviest during the beginning of the course.
 - 2. After the exam, the reading load is much lighter, and class time focuses on the cases students are working on.
 - iv. Guest Lecturers
 - 1. Larry Susskind: Joint Fact Finding, Science-intensive disputes
 - 2. Jal Mehta, Harvard: Education Reform
 - 3. Jeffrey Liebman, Harvard: Moving to Opportunity experiment
 - b. Responding to Student Interests
 - c. Questions
- II. Opening Lecture – What is knowledge?
 - a. History of Course
 - i. Course began as Sociology course at Harvard Kennedy School, joint with public policy/planning at MIT
 - ii. What is the relation between planning, public policy, and urban studies?
 - iii. Historically, people in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning clearly saw themselves as planners.
 - 1. 30-40 years ago. Lloyd Rodwin, Dept. Chair: need to intellectually invigorate planning to contribute to the relationship between planning and the field of public policy
 - a. Invited scholars from other fields (economics, sociology, etc.) to teach at the department to build a department that would deal with the sociological aspects of planning.
 - b. For planners, the closest substitute field is the field of public policy

2. Schools of public policy require a degree in another field as well as public policy (public policy does not have academic standing in its own right).
 - a. This is now beginning to change.
- b. Knowledge Utilization (Supply Oriented View)
 - i. Does knowledge get used or not?
 - ii. Long tradition of empirical studies on research utilization
 1. Flourished in Europe and the US in 1960s
 2. Office of research utilization in Washington, DC
 - a. Actually a report generator
 - iii. What are the channels through which knowledge passes?
 1. Public debate about whether the political right is better at disseminating knowledge and mobilizing it for public policy
 - a. Exploiting scientific uncertainty
 - b. Advocacy research – “point-of-view” research or “knowledge for hire.”
 - c. Inquiries on this subject determined
 - i. The political right chose a small number of issues and put lots of money toward research that would support their positions
 - ii. The political right invested heavily in media work
 - iii. Liberal researchers tend to be more tentative about their findings.
 2. Policy making doesn't prefer nuance
 - iv. Core Assumptions:
 1. Knowledge is good
 2. More is better
 3. Use is measurable (turns out to be tricky/debatable)
 - a. What is the process through which knowledge gets understood/incorporated/influences decision-making
- c. What Types of Knowledge are Needed (Demand Oriented View)
 - i. Rise of the “rational model” of planning or policy
 1. Modernist school of planning (post-enlightenment premise that scientific knowledge can be used to improve productivity and efficiency in human affairs)
 - a. Planning arose during this intellectual and social movement
 - ii. Part of the answer:
 1. Research knowledge, empirical evidence
 - iii. Knowledge for decision making
 1. Expert Knowledge
 - a. Science is critical to improving decision-making – bound up with a set of professions
 - i. Social Work
 - ii. Law
 - iii. etc.
 2. Local/Situated Knowledge
 - a. Knowledge that is not derived by external standards

- b. Experientially, informally produced
 - iv. To what degree should expert knowledge vs. local knowledge be employed in decision-making
 - 1. Local knowledge is critical to planning
- d. Institutional Context
 - i. NAACP litigating a case in Baltimore, MD
 - 1. Looking for “experts,” defined in the legal realm as someone called to offer testimony
 - a. This is a questionable and risky role
 - b. Legal system is adversarial
 - c. Experts hired by both sides to give informed opinions
 - d. In many cases, experts drafted reports on issues asked to give informed opinions about
 - e. Opposing sides’ experts prepare drafts to counter the drafted reports
 - f. Deposition: opposing side council looks for anything to use against your opinion in the courtroom.
 - i. Information can be distorted
 - g. Can be decided solely by a single judge.
 - 2. Power of individuals’ stories to attract attention
 - ii. Changing what is on the agenda vs. Responding to what is on the agenda
 - 1. Agenda is whatever policymakers and policy actors have on their minds at a given time.
 - a. Attention is key
 - 2. Affordable Housing in Massachusetts
 - a. Report issued while attention was on Iraq.
 - 3. Strategies for getting on the agenda
 - a. Link to something already on the agenda
 - i. E.g. Linking affordable housing to public health
 - 4. Caveat: there is a temptation to exaggerate findings to attract the attention you think they deserve.
 - a. If your work is important, the agenda will probably eventually shift to include it, so patience can be very important
- e. Bundling Knowledge
 - i. Most problems demand bundling many forms of knowledge
 - ii. Academia not suited to this; emphasizes specialization
 - 1. Critical decision-making not about specialization
 - iii. Example: “Boston Miracle” – decline in youth homicide
 - 1. Achieved very low youth homicide
 - 2. Expert on deterrence involved in the effort to reduce the youth homicide rate
 - a. Critical elements to winning the effects included 14 academic subspecialties from organizational behavior to psychology of decision-making to network analysis.
 - b. It is impossible to master that array of fields within academia.