

**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.