

The Professoriate and Public Policy

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Contributions of Higher Education

The Starting Point:

- 1. Considerable body of research focusing on policy FOR higher education (HE governance, HE public policy); *Primary relations* between governments and HE**
- 2. Surprisingly little attention has focused on how HE (and the professoriate) contributes to public policy through a plethora of direct interactions with other government policy sectors; *Secondary relationships* between HE and governments**

Organization of Presentation

- 1. Review key concepts that provide a conceptual frame***
- 2. Discuss some of the direct roles that professors play in public policy processes***
- 3. Outline some key contributions and challenges***
- 4. Concluding observations***

Key Concepts

- ***Public policy process varies by jurisdiction and it is highly complex and specialized***
- ***Policy largely emerges from specialized sectors with distinctive relationships between policy actors, stakeholders and other interest groups (policy networks); consider agricultural policy, health care, transportation***
- ***Universities are complex, loosely-coupled organizations; most of the key activities take place on the ground-floor of the academic unit, organized according to areas of expertise***

Interface: Specialized policy processes and faculty expertise

The direct involvement of professors in policy takes place at the interface between specialized policy processes within government sectors and professors with specialized expertise

For example:

- ***Interactions involving a Department of Agriculture and professors with specialized expertise in agricultural science or economics***
- ***The development of expert advisory panels during COVID***

Advisors and Consultants to Government

Policy sectors engage faculty as advisors and consultants

Research literature on expert panels (e.g. in EU) and task forces

Other roles are frequently fluid and issue-specific (responding to requests for advice, consulting contracts, specialized research)

Studies reveal that civil servants value these professional relationships and access to expertise

Professors have a perceived legitimacy associated with their academic position, research experience in the field, and that they are commonly viewed as non-partisan and outside the political sphere

Advisors and Consultants to Other Members of Policy Networks

Professors are advisors and consultants to other actors within policy networks, such as political interest groups, stakeholder/advocacy associations

Providing expertise to contribute to evidence-informed policy discussions through advice, consulting, specialized research

Members of the Attentive Public

Professors may monitor and analyze public policy issues as a component of their research activities

They may submit briefs to government, respond to government requests for public input, or appear as experts in public hearings

In some fields there can be an almost symbiotic relationship between those who “make” policy and those who “research” policy

Contributions and Challenges

Professors play a direct role in contributing expertise to the public policy process

These relationships are frequently fluid and episodic

Selection bias (though who select experts, and those who choose to engage)

Requires trust on both sides (valuing expert knowledge, valuing public service and impact of research)

Challenges of academic communication/knowledge mobilization

Risks of politicization and co-option

Concluding Observations

Higher education contributes to public policy through the direct involvement of university faculty

Faculty play a unique role – they are normally outside the political process, they have positions and a track record that establishes legitimacy, the nature of their work allows for fluid participation/engagement

Many of these relationships are only visible at the local levels within government and universities – frequently invisible at the system level

Universities are a reservoir of expertise for public policy processes

A panoramic view of the Toronto skyline at dusk, featuring the CN Tower on the left and numerous skyscrapers with illuminated windows. The sky is a mix of light blue and grey, and the city lights are reflected in the water in the foreground.

THANK YOU!

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