

# THE FUTURE OF EXTENSION PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION

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One way to look at the future is to prophesy, but to do this well, I would need to have a direct line to some generally accepted higher authority. The futurists have another method of viewing the future, but I find I do not understand their methodology well enough to use their technique. Still another way of looking at the future is projection and extrapolations of trends, but this is difficult to apply to something as complex as public policy education.

Thus, the framework for my analysis is a basic concept of economics—supply and demand. I seek to answer questions like the following: What are the forces that create a demand for extension public policy education? How are these forces changing? What determines the supply of extension public policy education? How does the supply response function change over time? How are supply and demand brought into balance? This framework, in its present stage of development, is like a sketchy road map showing only one or two main highways. Such a map is not too helpful in finding a specific street address.

## AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Society and individuals want public policy education only if it is of value to them. The value of public policy education has to be determined from the perspective of the learner, not the teacher. Since public policy education, by its nature, involves group or society decision making, I focus on value to society. To provide a better explanation and prediction, the analysis would have to reflect the reality that different groups have different interests and varying degrees of power.

The success in measuring the returns to society from increases in knowledge in the agricultural production sciences is creating a demand for more precise evaluation of the returns from social science research and education, including public policy education. But the returns to investment in public policy education are more difficult to measure than returns to investment in production research and education.

The first step in an attempt to value public policy education is to

identify the sources of demand for that education. The demand for public policy education and in the other social sciences, as well as in related professions such as law and business, is derived from a demand for improved institutional performance. Both institutional innovation and institutional efficiency are included in institutional performance. Institutional innovation refers to the development of new institutions, for example, the development of individual property rights. Institutional efficiency is concerned with making present institutions operate better, for example, with a given set of property rights, improving the operation of the land market.

The demand for improved institutional performance may arise from a wide variety of changes in the social or natural environment. For example, Douglass North and Robert Paul Thomas have attempted to explain the economic growth of Western Europe between 900 and 1700 primarily in terms of innovation in the institutions which govern property rights. A major source of institutional innovation was, in their view, the rising pressure of population against increasingly scarce resources. Theodore W. Schultz, focusing on more recent economic history, has identified the rising economic value of man during the process of economic development as a primary source of demand for institutional innovation.

The North-Thomas and Schultz models of the demand for institutional innovation suggest the possibility of a theory of induced institutional change similar to Yujiro Hayami and Vernon Ruttan's theory of induced innovation in agricultural production. This approach also might lead to more precise identification of the link between the demand for improvement in institutional performance and the demand for public policy education. Advances in public policy education, in response to the demand for more effective institutions, would reduce the costs of institutional innovation, just as advances in knowledge in the biological sciences and in agricultural technology have reduced the costs of technical innovation in agriculture.

The supply of public policy education is a function of advances in knowledge useful for policy making in the social sciences and related professions (law and business). A second factor affecting supply is the amount of resources devoted to public policy education. The available resources depend upon the view of the demand for public policy education by administrators and public officials who allocate or appropriate funds for public policy education.

Administrators play a major role in balancing the supply and demand for policy education. They interpret signals given by soci-

ety and groups which desire public policy education and allocate resources for the delivery of public policy education.

#### **SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN EXTENSION PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION**

The demand for Cooperative Extension public policy education is derived from a perceived need for institutional change. The demand for extension public policy education may be inhibited by a belief that extension is not capable of delivering useful public policy education in a specific area. Extension has long delivered useful education in agricultural policy. Recent extension efforts in community and rural development are providing evidence of extension's ability to deliver on a broader range of issues.

Extension was concerned with institutional innovation as early as the thirties and even earlier decades. The formation of many of the general farm organizations and commodity groups as well as cooperatives was largely due to the efforts of extension. However, the early extension workers were advocates of farmers rather than educators in the current mode of public policy educators. The issues-alternatives-consequences style has demonstrated its usefulness for educational work on farm policy and community development.

“Effective” demand for extension education in general has usually come from groups rather than individuals. It seems to me that the genius of extension has been its ability to respond to the educational needs of individuals in a group setting. Where groups did not exist, extension organized them, for example, cooperatives, home demonstration clubs, 4-H Clubs, and many others. Thus, on issues where groups or power clusters with a concern for the issue are lacking, “effective” demand for extension policy education is limited. Examples include consumer interests, marketing, and broad environmental concerns.

Organizing groups for extension policy education presents a problem. Due to value positions or satisfaction with present policies, there may not be much support for, and on occasion opposition to, education on certain issues by individuals or members of a power cluster. However, little will be accomplished on issues where there is no demand for policy education from established groups or from newly formed groups.

The amount of resources committed to public policy education and extension is difficult to determine. It cannot be measured by the number of people with public policy in their title. Carroll Botum pointed out in his 1975 fellows lecture at the American Ag-

ricultural Economics Association: "The citizen today not only wants to know the consequences of various solutions on equity and efficiency but also on supply, and environmental programs, security and freedom, or how much regulation will be involved. This makes it mandatory that the policy analyzed bring in the contributing disciplines." Public policy education can and is being done by home economists, 4-H workers, and area agronomy specialists as well as public policy specialists.

One of the methods of increasing extension public policy education is pointing out opportunities for all extension workers to assist society in analyzing the consequences of alternatives and providing training to help them. Although much effective training for other extension workers has been and is being provided by policy specialists, many other opportunities still remain.

Extension administrators play a major role in balancing the supply and demand for extension agricultural policy education. The demand for extension public policy education by various groups is rarely consistent or clearly discernible. In allocating resources, the administrator must interpret often conflicting and fuzzy expressions of need. No one individual in the extension system makes all the decisions. Decision makers include administrators at the county level, district supervisors, assistant directors and directors of state extension services, and administrators of the Extension Service of the USDA. This process is sometimes affected by legislators at the state and federal level and officials in the USDA and the universities.

The mechanism for balancing supply and demand of extension policy education may itself require institutional change. More precise knowledge of costs and returns to society of extension public policy education would be helpful to the balancing process.

#### **THE FUTURE OF EXTENSION PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION**

We need to keep in mind that institutional innovation is different from institutional efficiency.

Looking toward the future, we find significant evidence that society will increase its demand for public policy education about institutional innovation. Robert Heilbroner's book, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*, is an eloquent statement of the need for institutional innovation. The need for institutional innovation has been a recurring theme in the writings of Harold Breimyer during the last few years. A number of the presentations at this conference have focused sharply on the need for institutional innovation.

It is difficult to tell from the felt needs expressed by society whether the situation calls for improvement of institutional efficiency or for institutional innovation. If the public policy educator focuses on "fine tuning" of institutions, that is, improving institutional efficiency, he is accused of trying to patch up the major problems of society with "band aids." If on the other hand, he strives for institutional innovation, he is accused of being a radical. This is likely to become a growing dilemma for the extension public policy educator in the future as the need for institutional change increases the demand for public policy education.

An additional source of demand for improved institutional performance, and thus induced demand for extension public policy education, is the growing interdependency of the world's economies and societies. Communication technology and mass distribution are important contributing factors. This growing interdependency leads to questions about the adequacy of governmental and market institutions.

As Don Paarlberg has instructed us, the policy agenda for agriculture no longer is determined by the old agenda committee. The power cluster for agriculture now includes consumer organizations, labor organizations, environmentalists, and others. Thus, to obtain agricultural policy that benefits society and farmers, public policy education must be provided for groups which have not been in the traditional audiences of extension policy educators.

Let me close this discussion by making a series of brief statements about what I think will be a productive state policy education program in the next decade. Such a program will:

1. Be responsive to educational needs, both recognized and still unrecognized by existing audiences.
2. Be responsive to the educational needs of nontraditional extension audiences and perhaps organize new groups of individuals in such audiences.
3. Provide education, not services or political action, for both new and old audiences.
4. Provide leadership for policy education in all extension programs, including training of field staff and other specialists in the subject matter and methods of policy education.
5. Point out what difference the program has made.
6. Identify needs for new knowledge in such a way that researchers will be more willing to do the research.

7. Contain policy education about institutional innovation as well as institutional efficiency. This implies educational efforts to increase public awareness of institutional innovation as an alternative to improving institutional efficiency.

8. Be evaluated against the criterion of citizen educational needs, not the policy education programs of other states.

9. Be viewed by extension students, administrators, and disciplinary co-workers as filled with scholarship. It is said that what the world needs is love. I agree. But since the history of mankind reveals that there has never been enough love, perhaps scholarship will help.