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## COMMUNICATION OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH TO MAKERS OF EDUCATION POLICY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the process of policymaking as it is affected by the research of social scientists. The specific case of economists doing policy related education research is focused upon. The various types of researchers are identified, the channels through which their finds are communicated are discussed, and the policymakers to whom the research is communicated are also listed. An idealized form of such a communication structure is presented for comparison with the existing system. Policy suggestions for reducing the differences between the real and the idealized systems of communication are then presented. The main thesis of the paper is that incentives must be provided to researchers if better communication is desired.

# COMMUNICATION OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH TO MAKERS OF EDUCATION POLICY

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## 1) Introduction

Presently the executive branch of the federal government appears to be in the midst of an enthusiastic attempt to diminish the importance of social science research. Traineeship and research grant money losses suggested in the new budget would do much to begin the complete destruction of social science research at the nation's universities. The forthcoming battle in the Congress with regard to this attempt by the executive will do much to call to the nation's attention the question of the correct role of the social sciences in public policymaking.

Other recent events have also pushed the social sciences into the public spotlight. In the field of education we have on one hand a group of social scientists and lawyers pressing in the courts for "equality of educational opportunity", while other groups are at the same time attempting to catch the public's fancy with social scientific evidence that education expenditures do little to reduce income inequality. Such questions as how to bring social science knowledge to the attention of the relevant policymakers, and how policymakers can decide which social science evidence to believe obviously must be addressed by those social scientists involved in policy relevant research. Are we having the maximum possible impact for good, or are our efforts being used inefficiently or not at all? Can we come up with direct policy suggestions designed to add to the efficiency of the communication of social science knowledge to policymakers?

In this paper I discuss the impact of social science research upon policy decisions from the viewpoint of economists working in the area of the economics of education. It is obvious, however, that much of the discussion from this narrow viewpoint is easily generalizable to all social science research knowledge and to policymaking in general. I will examine present policymaking by contrasting various types of researchers and decisionmakers and their methods of conveying findings and obtaining information for making decisions. This is mainly an attempt to analyze the system that exists for communication of social science findings to decisionmakers. After this descriptive effort I present an "ideal" system for comparison with the already described reality. The contrast between reality and perfection serves as an indication of the important weaknesses of our present communication system. These weaknesses of the actual system are the focuses of proposals for additions to our system of dissemination of the findings of education economists. These proposals are designed to attack the faults of the present system by providing not only communication devices but also incentives for utilization of the communicated findings. It is not enough simply to say, "communicate," there must be incentive of some kind for the relevant communicators.

## 2) Origins of Education Research

The first question to be addressed is, where does economic research knowledge related to education finance originate? The answer is that it comes from various directions, but mainly from universities, from private research organizations, and from researchers employed within the various branches of the federal, state, and local governments themselves. Little important research knowledge in the economics of education comes from individuals not affiliated with these types of organizations.

3) Incentives to Education Research

Perhaps the logical next query is, "what are the incentives that lead researchers at these types of institutions to examine the relevant questions?" In the case of economists at universities, the incentive is probably a combination of professional rewards for research, a pure desire to obtain self-satisfaction by providing answers to important questions in their fields of specialization, and the rewards of power, esteem and money that tend to accrue to those who have the attention of important policymakers. The desire for peer rewards of academic economists tends to work at cross-purposes to the desire for "important policymaker" rewards because of the types of research that tend to be most favored by those who bestow the rewards in these two categories. The type of abstract theoretical research most favored by the elite of the economic hierarchy is obviously not the same research as that most relevant to policymaking in the real world. Each policy oriented academic economist makes a choice as to the relative emphasis to put upon the two types of research, based upon his/her relative desire for the two types of rewards and the constraint determined by her/his relative ability to do the two types of research. Even though the academic world is obviously not as simple as described here, and research obviously falls along a spectrum from least to most policy relevant, I believe that a bipolar model such as that implied above captures much of the essence of the quandary of policy oriented economists in the present academic world. So much for academics' incentives.

<u>The incentives for employees of private research organizations are very similar to those for academics.</u> Publications in academic journals enter the objective function, probably with less weight, while monetary rewards and promotions within the organization are perhaps more heavily weighted. In this case there are also tradeoffs between the types of research most relevant for obtaining the two types of rewards. To what degree the research most relevant for the two objectives differs is to a major extent a function of the goals of the research organization itself. Some such organizations are very professional-economist-peer-group-reward oriented while others tend to emphasize the rewards flowing from having impact with policymakers and government organizations (of course the same is true of universities). To the extent the latter is the case policy related research will be emphasized by the organization and the monetary and promotional rewards will tend to be positively related to performance in carrying out such research.

The incentive system confronting government employed researchers appears to be very different from that facing the other two types of researchers. Government research employees tend to spend much time working on short-term assignments to provide quick answers to policymakers who must make quick decisions, not on the basis of all knowledge, but on the basis of what can be drawn together given the time constraints. It is difficult if not impossible to do long-term research projects under such conditions; and, therefore, it is difficult to produce research of the type published in academic economics journals. Moreover, there is little or no incentive to do so. Rewards generally go to successful decisionmakers, not abstract thinkers. <u>In short, there is both little incentive and even less opportunity for these researchers to carry out studies of major consequence.</u> There is also in general little opportunity for such employees to keep abreast of the rapidly changing state of economic knowledge in their areas of specialization, in order to be able most efficiently to do their "firefighting." The significance of this situation can only be grasped when it is realized that it is often these same government employees who have the power to determine which social science findings come to the attention of legislators, congressional committees, governmental agency policymakers, and executive branch policymakers and their aides. But more will be said about this below.

4) Reception of Education Research

Having identified the three major points from which education finance research emanates it is logical to list the policymakers to whom research findings should be conveyed. There is, indeed, no single group of "policymakers" but rather a number of levels of policymaking and policyenforcing persons. Because of the great number and diversity of these policymakers the communication network through which they are informed must be complex.

A) Legislative Branch

One critical audience to whom research findings need to be communicated are members of the legislative branches of government at the federal, state, and local levels. Legislators theoretically desire to pass legislation which helps to solve the problems of society and, as a result, gains votes for its supporters. These legislators are extremely busy with campaigning, attending meetings, reading and discussing proposed legislation, and attempting to solve short-run everyday problems of constituents! Their opportunities for spending large amounts of time reading economic research findings are few, even if they have the technical competence to do so. Members of committees most directly concerned with education legislation may be necessity spend time with the literature on the economies of education, but even these members have extremely strong alternative demands for their scarce time. It appears, therefore, that in most cases it will be legislative aides rather than legislators themselves who read research findings in areas of interest to their employers and distill for presentation to their employers the material that they consider relevant. The most evident potential shortcomings in this process are a result of the lack of any incentive for aides to keep abreast of areas and even specific literature not directly assigned them by the legislator, the lack of incentive for legislators to attack problems that are not already at or near the critical stage in the eyes of the public, and the simple fact that most legislative aides have little expertise in economics. Thus, they typically are unable to interpret economic research and to separate the strong research from the weak.

B) Executive Branch

The executive branch comprises a second obvious set of clients for economic research findings. In this branch, also, scarcity of time pushes any attempt to be knowledgeable about social science research upon aides and employees of executive branch agencies. In many cases, however, the social science resources of the executive appear to be greater than those of the Congress. The President has many advisors on economic affairs who in turn have relatively large staffs of professional economists to call upon for analysis. While the Congress does have the Joint Economic Committee Staff, the Executive has the staffs of the Council of Economic Advisors, the Treasury, the Bureau of the Budget, and various other agencies such as OEO, the Office of Education, and the newly established National Institute of

Education. These agencies also tend to have greater incentive to remain in contact with the latest research. Not only is it to the benefit of the agency to keep itself visible by suggesting programs and policies, but many members of the staffs do original research--many with the objective of publishing enough to retain the option of entry or reentry into the academic economic community at some future date. This is simply not the general case for aides to Congressmen.

C) Judicial Branch

Moving from the legislative and executive branches we note that there are also extremely important consumers of social science findings in the judiciary. The process of a filtering of input by aides tends to be similar, but the incentive structure undoubtedly different. Judges respond to the demands of interpreting the evidence in specific cases. If lawyers introduce research findings the judges must examine this evidence, and economic research evidence is becoming much more common in the briefs presented to the various couts of the land. <u>The judicial policymakers most open to economists' findings may, therefore, be the lawyers who decide which social science findings to introduce as evidence</u>. If social scientists desire an input to judicial decisions the most promising route appears to be through lawyers themselves. Here again we note an obvious communication problem. <u>Few law firms depend upon economists for analysis of economic arguments</u>. Lawyers and their aides tend to do a reasonable job of interpreting findings, but cannot be expected to be able consistently to evaluate economic arguments, much less keep abreast of new economic knowledge. There does seem to be some growth in the number of economist lawyers, however, and as economic analysis becomes more judicially acceptable we will probably see a much stronger tendency for lawyers to hire social scientist aides. For both lawyers and their aides the incentives for communication with researchers will be large since the obviously important incentive of winning cases will exist. It must be noted, however, that lawyers have incentive to pursue cases based upon social science findings only to the extent that the monetary or professional-stature payoffs are high. But lawyers may be relatively open to new social science findings because winning important social cases brings much peer group stature (probably more than suggesting policy and doing policy research brings to economists). For this reason we are beginning to see lawyers contracting with economists for new research relevant to judicial action.

D) Critical Period

One exceptionally important period in the communication process for all elected officials (whether legislative, executive, or judicial) appears to be the recurring periods of campaigning for reelection. It is at this point that the public seems to put a premium on (and therefore to promise rewards for) the suggestion of new "politically feasible" programs. Suggestion of answers to present or future social problems often gains for the candidate, not only publicity, but also an image of being imaginative and intelligent. Thus, election time in democratic societies may provide social scientists with the opportunity to bring their findings to a more willing group of elected policymakers.

E) Education Administrators

All education finance policymakers are not located within the three branches of local, state, and federal governments. Another audience who could utilize properly-communicated scholarly research consists of professional educators. Through their supposed expertise in educational matters they have a strong influence upon government policy. Many of these individuals and groups have the ability to make policy within institutions and school districts and also to influence strongly the public. It is of utmost importance that economic research findings be communicated to professors in schools of education (some of whom are economists or have some training in economics and are teaching courses in such areas as education finance), to superintendents of school districts, to principals of schools and to teachers in the public schools. The filtering-through-aides process is not of importance in the conveyance of information to these decisionmakers. Efforts are required to bridge the communication gaps that prevent direct communications between researchers and these groups.

F) General Public

Perhaps the most important audience to whom findings relevant to policy must be carried is the general public. These are the people who put pressure upon legislators, vote in fund-raising referenda, bring the great majority of law suites before the judiciary, and determine the issues of national prominence at any given time. To report findings to the public direct communication links must be utilized also.

G) Business Sector

The business community, because of concentrated resources and strength of interest in various issues, may have an extremely strong influence upon education policy. For example, if the question is raised as to whether commercial and industrial property is to be taxed for school purposes by the state rather than localities it is obvious that firms will take vigorous part in the debate. It appears that the main incentive for business leaders to accept economic findings regarding education is negative rather than positive. By their very nature as private profit-making organizations firms tend to ignore nonprofit oriented economic findings, unless the findings are threatening and may be accepted by others. An obvious exception to this rule is that firms will obviously notice and make use of (and often in fact contract and pay for) favorable findings. Because of the very nature of business it is naive to expect business policymakers to make policy on the basis of social science findings which either are inimical or neutral to the goal of profit maximization. For this reason we should expect businessmen to be receptive only to narrow ranges of economic findings, and to tend both to discover and accept those which are most favorable to profits and the image of business. Whether social science knowledge can (or realistically should) be expected or desired to change behavior of firms is questionable. On questions in which business is involved, perhaps our most optimistic realistic expectation would be that the government correctly interpret knowledge and make correct decisions on financing education regardless of the positions taken by business.

H) Threatened Policymakers

With respect to all of the types of policymakers referred to above, we should recognize that social science findings are often threatening to their views--that is, research findings can threaten the very policymakers who must accept them and implement the policies they imply. The incentive for policymakers in most cases is to reject such research findings rather than see their positions of power and influence endangered. In some cases there may be greater rewards for accepting rather than rejecting such research findings, but this is not often the case. Perhaps the most common cases of such acceptance would be those in which the policymaker is aiming for a higher position and believes that his acceptance of findings tending to destroy his present position provide him with the useful image of one who is willing to harm himself for the public good. A postmaster general may be willing to recommend a private postal service run by a civil service administrator rather than a political appointee if he desires a higher government position or a return to private employment. He will be unlikely to do so if he foresees no alternative government or private position. In situations such as this the best strategy for the social scientist may be to influence others to accept the knowledge and to use it to put pressure upon decisionmakers. It tends to be much less difficult for a policymaker to change her/his views once a large segment of the public has made it known that their views differ from his/hers.

5) Channels of Communication

It is appropriate now to discuss the channels through which knowledge is passed from one group to the other. The means of communication from the various researchers to the several groups of policymakers differ considerably.

A) From University Researchers

University researchers tend to emphasize the writing of articles for publication in academic journals and the writing of books aimed specifically at the academic community. Certain research groups in universities do publish working (discussion) papers which are widely distributed. In general, however, little attempt is made to disseminate research findings directly either to the public or the government. A smattering of articles by academics appear in the popular press and a trend toward publications of this type seems to exist at present. But the general attitude--reflecting prevailing incentives--seems to be to publish for one's peers and <u>assume</u>

that policymakers will receive the knowledge. Few formal channels for disseminating academic findings beyond the ivory tower exist.

Other potentially important and sometimes used channels for dissemination of academic knowledge do exist, however. Departments, groups of departments, groups of scholars, and/or whole universities sponsor conferences in which policymakers from various areas are invited to participate. This participation of policymakers can vary from attendance at sessions in which academics give papers, to giving papers and participation, to actually working in research conferences from which consensus policy recommendations are produced by the combined academics and policymakers. Another way that information is sometimes transmitted from academics to policymakers is through the device of returns to campus by policymakers and/or aides for a year, a term, or a period of weeks. There have been various attempts in the past by both government and business to provide incentive and opportunity for individuals to return to universities for extended periods, but these attempts have usually been short-lived and/or half-hearted. Perhaps even more important, even when such programs have been adopted, there has been little or no attempt to sustain the relationship after the program has ended and the participants have left.

It is also important to note that much academic research is done at the request and with the support of government agencies and private foundations which desire policy oriented findings. When problems become visible policy issues there is often a heavy influx of funds designed to induce researchers to concentrate research on them. Such research is often initiated by such policymakers as the President or the Joint Economic Committee; or in a variant case, researchers are hired to work directly for such groups as the New York State Fleischmann Commission (which examined education finance). In these situations policy implications of research obviously can be conveyed directly to many important policymakers by researchers. It is just as obvious, however, that most of the initiative for such research lies with the policymakers themselves, and that this is true not only with respect to the type of research but also to the researchers chosen. Few commissions, agencies and/or institutes make special efforts to assume that all views are represented in commissioned research.

B) From Private Research Organizations

The findings of private research groups are communicated in much the same manner as are the findings of university based researchers. The main difference is that private groups tend to do much commissioned research relative to that which is internally generated. While much university research is externally supported, many of the research topic choices are made by academics who submit proposals for support. Often, however, private research organizations are commissioned to do research on a specific topic chosen by the external commissioner. Thus, while both types of researchers carry on research based on internal as well as external initiative, it is reasonable to assume that the relative mix differs. Private research groups may produce more research reports (i.e., in-house published discussion papers) while universities produce more academic journal articles and books. Private research groups would be expected to hold few conferences including nonacademics (there would be obvious exceptions to the rule in the case of certain well-known and highly-endowed organizations), and to provide virtually no opportunities for policymakers to spend extended periods in the institutions learning of new social science findings. Logical models of rational behavior would tend to lead to the conclusion that much more private institute research could be expected to be biased toward the desires of the fund grantors. This would be true if only for the reason that, at the margin, a grantor tends to judge research proposals closely aligned with his own views as being more intelligent and worthy of support. This tendency toward bias should also appear in university research to the extent that it is funded by outside agencies having vested interests in the results. The continuation of university provision of untied basic research funds for faculty, therefore, should have a high priority in any program designed to increase the efficiency of the process of providing social science inputs for policymaking. More analysis concerning the effects on university research of various types of outside support would be extremely worthwhile because of our lack of knowledge on this subject.

C) From Government Employees

Government researchers tend to communicate through academic journals and/or other public media less frequently than the other two groups. The basic functions of such researchers is to pursue research and analysis that is of value to their employers. The incentives to such research are large therefore, and the channel for communication of findings generally is through internal documents. The government, however, does publish large volumes of these essentially internal research documents. It is mainly through publication that such findings make their way from one agency or branch to another, as well as to the public and nongovernmental policymakers. Much such research is not published, however, especially if the findings either are contrary to the desires of the governmental agency for which the research is done or are politically controversial. Thus, the general problem of information flow exists even within government, and between the government and other policymakers, as well as between government and the academic community.

The federal government makes a strong effort to distribute government research widely; and, in truth, probably does a much better job of publicity and distribution than do universities or private research organizations. Government documents are widely available at small cost. Because of their availability it may be the case that government researchers' findings have more influence on policy, both through government and the public, than do the findings published by academics and private researchers. That such documents reach very wide audiences of policymakers, in government, in business circles, and among the public, but are not subject to screening by referees is a notable matter. We must recognize that government publication and distribution provides an advantage for such research findings in the market place for ideas which may lead to policy results less optimal than would result if the government either did not publish research or published private and university research on the basis of the same quality criteria existing for publication of within-government research. The idea that getting more information to policymakers and the public is always good may not be valid in an imperfect world. The reality that much information from certain sources is not well publicized may create a situation in which preferred outcomes result from similar constraints being placed upon more widely available (i.e., more highly subsidized in the communication process) information from other sources. This possibility is particularly worthy of consideration with respect to social science findings because the information distributor with whom universities and private agencies must compete for the attention of policymakers is the federal (and often the state and/or local) government whose source of funds is noncompetively-obtained tax dollars. <u>It would seem that research into the question of optimal levels and standards for government publication of research findings is called for</u>.

It may turn out that the system is such that even inferior products of government researchers are often able to dominate the findings of private and university researchers. (Similar ability to sell inferior products may be present when book companies back policy-oriented manuscripts with large publicity efforts.)

6) Goals Defined

In order to outline the optimal communication system linking policy researchers and those in positions to implement policy, we need an objective function--a statement of goals and their weights. The objective function in this case is something ambiguous like "correct policy decisions concerning economic issues in education." Economic research fits into the total model as one of the inputs to correct policy. It is desirable that information be supplied to policymakers and used by them to the levels at which the costs of added information outweigh the benefits. Benefits are the value of good policy resulting from information, while the costs are the direct costs of disseminating information, as well as the time costs of those receiving it (or passing it on to others). There are also costs and benefits of the filtering of information before it reaches policymakers. Because of time costs and the possibility of accepting incorrect information if it is provided, there are obvious benefits from developing efficient mechanisms for separating useful policy findings from the mass of research being produced. Of course there are obvious costs of this filtering process if "incorrect" choices are made as to what should and should not reach policymakers. Even though we can set up theoretical models, the implications of which will inevitably be that we should provide all information whose value is greater than its cost, this type of theoretical construct does not help us considerably for suggesting actual research communication methods. It is therefore suggested as a long-term goal that attempts be made to create a situation such that researchers (a) have channels available through which to communicate their findings, (b) that the scarce time of policymakers be economized by the introduction of mechanisms to filter and evaluate research--assuring high professional standards, and (c) that policy relevant research findings be transmitted in nontechnical language. The filtering should not consist of censorship of published materials, but should be designed to assure that poorly done research and/or research that is well done but open to question as to its validity for policy purposes be accompanied by and/or followed-up by criticism and analysis by others knowledgeable in the area. Publication of research findings by either journals or the government implicitly legitimizes the findings. For this reason any research should be refereed before it is included in such publications. In the case of government publications, it would be wise for an appeal procedure to be available to authors through which additional referees would evaluate manuscripts. Such an appeal process already exists with respect to private journals because of the large number of them to which an author can submit his articles. When aides are deciding what information to provide to their employers, however, "censorship" exists almost by definition. In such cases a reasonable goal would be a system in which these aides are reasonably well-versed in economics and capable of evaluating new research findings and separating the good research from the bad.

This set of goals is based upon the belief that the market works relatively well, and that a public and its policymakers provided with all possible information will make reasonable decisions. This belief is tempered by the understanding that time is a scarce resource and that important policymakers must depend on summarized and distilled knowledge in many cases. A close approach to a perfect communication system for education research findings of economists (given the constraints of the real world) would be one in which (a) economists have incentives to do policy research--that is, research framed in terms of real-world problems; (b) the economic research findings are disseminated widely among professionals for comment and criticisms; (c) the findings are translated into nontechnical language and made available via a variety of means, including written reports, meetings, etc.; (d) there are incentives provided for policymakers to make the "best" possible policies and therefore to use all knowledge at their disposal. Having thus stated my vision of the "perfect" system, I will attempt to discuss how present practices are less than optimal and some ways to improve these practices at their points of weakness.

## 7) Policy Suggestions

### A) Academic Research

There should exist a system through which good policy research is rewarded. In the university most reward comes from peers and is a result of publications in respected academic journals. Some relatively policy-oriented academic journals do exist, but most views of the hierarchical structure of economic journals do not place these journals near the top in prestige. That journals should publish the most academically competent research is granted, but that what is deemed most competent varies according to the priorities of the judges also is unquestionably correct. If policy-oriented researchers desire a greater number of policy-oriented articles in top journals perhaps efforts must be made to obtain editorial boards which are more heavily weighted than at present with economists who view policy research as equally important to abstract shows of virtuosity with mathematics, statistics, and pure theory. Perhaps what is needed is a "Policy Researchers Liberation Movement" to build up pride and a willingness to unashamedly demand deserved recognition.

It would also be useful for the purpose of influencing economists to engage in important policy decisionmaking as policymakers and aides if there were significant rewards within academic departments (in the form of tenure, promotion, and salary) for such activities as government service. If a year in a government agency were equally weighted to three good articles, good academics would take leaves to government (even young not yet tenured ones) and the government would be able to much more easily obtain the expertise necessary for judging the masses of economic research being produced. It would appear to be extremely difficult to bring about such attitude changes except through pressure within departments for such recognition and through such activities as research efforts to determine societal welfare values of government service, policy research, and less policy-oriented research. Attitude changes must come from within, and only when economists decide that policy research is important will the peer rewards for policy research and policy-making increase.

B) Private and Government Research

Private research groups and government employees will probably continue to do more pure policy research than will academics. Only if there is a change in attitudes concerning the importance of good policy research relative to more abstract research will policy-oriented research jobs (which tend to lead to fewer "hard" academic publications) be able to attract the best new graduates from economics Ph.D. programs. Anyone who has interviewed job candidates in recent years can vouch for the fact that, almost without exception, the best students desire academic appointments in "good" universities. It is true, however, that as the job market tightens (and this is without doubt happening) more and more highly qualified and intelligent young economists will be attracted to positions in government and policy-oriented research institutions. For the long run, however, this will not change the fact that given present attitudes most such jobs will tend to be filled with those who are unable to obtain a desirable academic job. On a more hopeful note, however, it can be hypothesized that policy related economic research is just beginning to mature through the use of more sophisticated theoretical and statistical methodologies combined with the ever improving data sources; and that such research will inevitably command more respect within the economics profession as it becomes more rigorous and scientific. The more able we become to deal with the complexities of the real world the better will be our research; and the better our research, the better will be the young economists attracted into policy-oriented areas of the discipline. In the long run the only utility of economics is its ability to produce understanding of economic affairs and to lead to rational economic behavior in every sphere of life. The goal of economics should be usable policy prescriptions, not simple virtuosity with the tools for virtuosity sake. This is not to demean virtuosity, only to suggest that we attempt to adapt our virtuosity to real world problems as often as possible. A desire to upgrade the status of policy research should in no way be understood as a desire to downgrade the importance of pure economic and statistical theory; it is simply suggested that the relative importance of policy research is greater than is implied by its present status among academic economists and the rate of inclusion of policy-oriented articles in the journals.

C) Improved Channels

If we were to obtain good policy research and large numbers of competent economists desirous of policymaking positions, what else could we realistically do to improve the policymaking process? How could we open added communication channels? I will suggest a few things that might be attempted.

i) Seminars and Conferences

I believe that the universities fall far short of their capabilities in the area of educating nonstudents. It would be most useful if single or groups of departments within universities were to regularly hold seminars designed to summarize important recent findings in their areas. To these seminars would be invited state, local, and federal policymakers with an interest in the topics; as well as writers, columnists, the media, and nongovernmental policymakers. If a seminar on education finance were held, school administrators, education school faculty, school board members, etc. could be included. Perhaps, because of the large number of topics of importance to policy, a set of topics should be designated and the economics department of a different university given responsibility (and a grant from the government or some institute) for setting up and operating each such topic seminar. These seminars would provide a forum for papers prepared by experts with the explicit goal of communication with noneconomists. One possible structural setup would entail a national convention similar to the AER meetings but aimed at attracting and informing policymakers and the general public. Perhaps a set of regional meetings of this type would be more useful for attracting large numbers of the public and lower level decisionmakers. Thought and effort should be devoted to working out a workable approach to such meetings.

ii) Publications

In order to communicate effectively with educators and education administrators a direct effort on the part of economists is necessary. Researchers must publish articles in education journals. These articles should be written for the education audience, and should contain as little economic jargon and complex economic analysis as plausible. It may also be worthwhile to create new journals designed to present economic knowledge to the education profession (Economics and Education perhaps). Researchers can with a reasonable effort, rewrite policy relevant research findings for inclusion in such journals, even if essentially the same article appears in more technical form in an economics journal. Such a journal can also solicit review and survey articles from economists and/or educators.

iii) Education Renewals

Another approach to the expansion of communication is a program of returns to campus of government and business employees, teachers, education administrators, nonuniversity reseachers and others. Efforts must be made to provide courses at universities not only for participants desirous of obtaining more advanced knowledge and/or degrees but also for students who wish to learn what has happened in a given discipline in recent years. It must be possible for citizens to return to universities periodically to revitalize their knowledge (or simply to gain knowledge in new areas) in areas of importance to social policy. While such courses will entail much effort on the part of faculty, the returns will possibly be great. If "review and renewal" courses are widely available perhaps many more students will be attracted, and policymaking sectors of the society will begin to pressure their employees to renew their knowledge periodically.

iv) Regularly Scheduled Small Groups

Another interesting approach to the dissemination of research findings is to hold regularly scheduled meetings of small groups of researchers and policymakers. The National Institute for Education or some such grantor could provide a meager amount of travel and research money for a selected small group of experts in education finance. This group would meet several times a year to have both informal discussion and formal presentations. The presentations should be on topics chosen by consensus of the group. Such papers could be prepared either by group members or invited outsiders. The members would tend to become acquainted and would come to understand (and hopefully trust) each other. These participants would be able to carry on an ongoing discussion of the topics of interest to policymakers and researchers. Each group should benefit from the views and expertise of the other. Perhaps a maximum life of five years should be set for such a group, at which time it would be disbanded and a new group formed in the same topic area.*

D) Recipient Aid

i) Topical Research Groups

Once such communication devices are provided can we do more? Perhaps we can also set up structures at the recipient end of the

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*Burton Weisbrod has suggested this format based upon his experience with a similar group composed solely of academics--the Committee on Urban Public Economics.

communications network. One idea is to initiate federally sponsored topical social science research groups in Washington having the function of keeping abreast of social science research, analyzing it, and translating it into usable form for policymakers. Any lawmaker, judge, and citizen should be able to obtain up-to-date information about policy-related social science topics from these agencies. This type of approach would not only make information less expensive to individual policymakers but also more readily available. Hopefully no longer would there exist such wide disparities in ability to obtain information as those which now exist between Congress and the President as a result of the sizes and abilities of their respective staffs. The research done by these new agencies would be made available to all and also be widely publicized. There should also be set up a system so that criticism of the research could be submitted and made available to the users of the service. Some system of this type would, therefore, provide not only information from the government researchers but also an opportunity for nongovernment researchers to reply and receive equal distribution of their replies. Obviously, however, not every reply could be published, so again we would have to apply judgment in the publication process. While this is in a sense unfortunate, perhaps a system could be worked out which would be reasonably equitable yet allow all sides of research questions to be aired. One possible means of accomplishing this would be to allow any other researchers in the agency the freedom to publish a reply to any research turned out. If the agency were of sufficient size and the employees were not so overburdened as to simply lack time for this activity, we could probably expect that few summarizations of relevant research would be released that did not present all sides of the issues, either directly or through the replies of other researchers having opposing views. Not only could an agency of this type be invaluable to government, but also to society's other policymakers, and perhaps especially to the interested public. A workable agency of this type would effectively provide social science information for all types of policymakers, and its creation would perhaps be the most important single step that could be taken toward providing better social science information to all policymakers. The cost would not be extremely great and the possible benefits are immense.

ii) Writers for the Public

Other ways of informing the public directly, besides the already mentioned provision of seminars, conferences, and returns to the classroom, are widely available and could certianly be used more extensively. Policy researchers themselves could expend more time and effort in writing books directed toward the general public. Perhaps a useful addition to our present communication network would be the provision by fund grantors of editors (or ghost writers) who, working with economists, would turn out more interesting prose than that which economists alone normally turn out.

iii) General Audience Targeted Media

Some popular press magazines have already begun to furnish education research knowledge directly to the general public. Researchers must recognize a responsibility to submit articles to such magazines. Efforts can also be made to have short pieces on policy subjects published in newspapers. If more such pieces are submitted perhaps newspapers and magazines will see fit to publish more of them.

There are also highly exciting possibilities for using television for communication with the public. Programs providing all views on relevant education finance questions can be produced and presented on public or commercial television. The real problem here is not lack of topics or ability to produce such programs, but of inducing the public to watch. Other than much publicity, I have no suggestions as to how to accomplish this capture of the public fancy.

8) Conclusion

While this limited effort to examine and suggest remedies for the difficulties involved in providing a useful social science input to policy has come up with no master plan for U.S. research policy, it has systematically pointed out many weaknesses and suggested a few possible methods for improvement. Researchers must have incentives to carry out policy research, channels must exist through which findings can be communicated to policymakers, policymakers must have the ability to evaluate the research for quality and applicability, and these same policymakers must have incentives for basing policy on social science findings. Those of us who desire to improve communications must make use of what resources we have to attempt to change each "must" in the previous sentence into a "do."

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