2012 Public Policy Yearbook: Evolving Scholarship in Public Policy

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The Public Policy Yearbook is now in its fourth iteration and continues to serve as a useful tool for examining recent changes in public policy scholarship over the past several years. The Yearbook itself has changed considerably over time: in addition to providing a detailed international listing of policy scholars with contact information, fields of specialization, research references, and individual scholars’ statements of current and future research interests, the September 2011 Yearbook made its debut online as a versatile web-tool. The Yearbook’s content is now accessible, in searchable form, via the Internet—providing links to scholars’ bios, articles, abstracts, and review articles. Individuals can now search for a scholar’s profile according to name, geographic location, institution, or research interests. The online Yearbook also includes retrospective research reviews for specific theoretical and substantive policy subfields. These peer-reviewed articles summarize the most recent developments (primarily over the past two years) in scholarship in specific policy subfields. The online Yearbook allows for in-text citations to be activated, taking readers directly to scholars’ bios and provides listings of additional scholars with similar research interests. By providing a snapshot of scholarship in particular domains, the Yearbook provides a quick and accessible reference to the current state of scholarship on all aspects of public policy, as well as indications of future research directions. This allows public policy scholars to gain visibility and it facilitates networking within the policy research community. The contents of the latest edition are summarized below.

Methodology and Characterizing Yearbook Public Policy Scholars

Since the Yearbook’s inception in 2009, we have employed a convenience and referral sampling strategy. One of the difficulties with identifying the field of “public policy scholars” lies in the multidisciplinary nature of the field. Policy scholars work and operate within a wide range of institutional settings, making it difficult to identify the ideal sampling frame that captures the full population. Our sampling frame came from the listed members of the American Political Science Association.
Association APSA Public Policy Section and the Policy Studies Organization. In 2012, we sent out 4758 invitations. In addition, we sent out invitations to 358 public policy and public administration departments across the United States, asking the head of each department to forward the invitation to public policy faculty members, graduate students, or affiliates. Last, our member updating system allows for current and new members to offer contact information for fellow colleagues and graduate students that should be included. Due to challenges with accurately accounting for inoperable emails, duplicated contacts, and mass-department invitations, it is impossible to calculate a precise response rate. The 2012 Yearbook has 662 members, giving us a tenuous response rate of 14%. As will be shown, we expect this sample to represent a decent representation of public policy scholars, particularly those active in the United States. But we are less confident about the validity of the sample of scholars outside of the United States. Although this sampling strategy depicts an incomplete picture, the documentation of trends spanning four years makes significant headway in characterizing the policy field as a whole. Furthermore, many of the research trends in the 2012 Yearbook parallel research patterns found within the publications of the Policy Studies Journal between 2004–2009 (deLeon, Gallaher, Pierce, & Weible, 2010).

Our recruiting effort took place in September 2011. Scholars received invitations to join the 2012 Yearbook by email. To become a member, individual scholars were asked to complete an online form that collected a broad range of information including: their contact information and institutional and departmental affiliation; three of their most recent publications; a brief paragraph that summarized their current and future research agenda; scholars’ self-categorizations of their research interests according to five theoretical and eleven substantive policy subfields; and a few descriptive statistics such as gender, years of experience as a scholar, and official job title.

The 662 public policy scholars from the 2012 Yearbook reside in 28 countries across the globe, including: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and the United States (see Figure 1). Since 2010, the number of international scholars has more than doubled, but approximately 80% of current members reside within the United States (see Figure 2). Twenty-eight percent of Yearbook members are female and the average reported years of experience in policy research was 20 years. Figure 3 shows self-reported job titles from Yearbook members. Most listed scholars identified as full professors.

Policy Scholarship: New Developments, Snapshots and Trends

The Yearbook provides users with several different indicators for evaluating current trends in policy scholarship. This includes two-year retrospective research reviews, as well as descriptive indicators reported by individual scholars that summarize and characterize their evolving research agendas. Scholars were asked both to provide a detailed summary of their research agenda and to self-identify their research according to five theoretical categories and eleven substantive focus
areas. These indicators provide us with an interesting snapshot of recent research developments.

Beginning in 2011, the *Yearbook* editors sought advanced graduate students working with leading public policy scholars to write review essays that characterize the recent scholarship in selected theoretical and substantive domains. Previous essays covered topics including: agenda setting (Pump, 2011); policy analysis (Carlson, 2011); policy history (deLeon & Gallagher, 2011); policy process theories (Nowlin, 2011); public opinion (Mullinix, 2011); defense and security (Ripberger, 2011); education policy (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011); and governance (Robichau, 2011). These essays synthesize published work, interpret how the literature is developing over time, and postulate on future research trajectories. While public policy

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Figure 1. A Global Map Indicating the Residence of *Yearbook* Members.

Figure 2. Distribution of U.S.-based *Yearbook* Members.
scholars are actively producing a broad array of new and innovative research each year, this special issue contains key developments from four substantive domains, which include the following:

- **Comparative Public Policy:** Kuhika Gupta (2012) discusses recent efforts among policy scholars to use the comparative method to analyze how and why policies differ across countries. Furthermore, scholars are utilizing comparative strategies to evaluate and improve leading policy process theories. Perhaps most importantly, comparative public policy scholars are investigating how the competing process theories differ across institutional configurations.

- **Economic Policy:** Barry Pump (2012) reviews recent scholarship on American economic policymaking, summarizing the literature on income inequality, the impact of economic conditions on electoral outcomes, and institutional responses to economic developments. Pump also discusses pathways for economic policy research that may be of particular interest to policy process scholars.

- **Environmental Policy:** Meredith Niles and Mark Lubell (2012) review current scholarship in environmental policy, focusing specifically on environmental policy tools. Flexible market-based instruments, voluntary agreements, and information provision tools are being utilized for resolving current environmental issues. Niles and Lubell also discuss how scholars are adopting multidisciplinary approaches to better explain environmental outcomes.

- **Health Policy:** A timely piece given the recent changes in health policy, Simon Haeder (2012) summarizes current developments in health policy scholarship. Health policy scholars have utilized several frameworks, including pivotal politics, path dependence, and multiple streams, to explain the enactment of health reform. In his review, Haeder also discusses challenges for implementation regarding state-federal relations and cost containment.
Each of these articles (published in the Policy Studies Journal, as well as online in the Yearbook) will be updated (though with different authors) every three years to assure continuity in tracking the evolution of policy scholarship. Prior years’ review articles are accessible directly from the online Yearbook.

A quite different way to illustrate current trends among policy scholars’ work is to scan the “current research and future directions” summaries in the Yearbook entries. When updating their profile information, Yearbook scholars are asked to provide a short paragraph that details their current research agendas and future research projects. Scholars may be as brief or as specific as they choose. For example, sample entries included:

- “Scott W. Allard is Associate Professor in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. His primary research interests are in social welfare policy, poverty, and nonprofit organizations. To better understand the contours of social service provision in the U.S., a sector with about $200 billion in annual expenditures, he recently completed two surveys of more than 2,000 governmental and nonprofit social service providers in seven urban and rural communities. Complementing this work, Professor Allard has several projects exploring the changing geography of poverty in America and the evolution of the contemporary safety net.”

- Ann Bowman’s entry included: “My substantive policy interests include environmental protection, economic development, and land use. Most of my work has focused on subnational levels of government. If viewed in terms of the policy stages framework, my research typically involves the adoption and implementation stages.”

By using these summaries of public policy scholarship as data, we can track current and over-time variations in the substantive and theoretical work, as well as methodological approaches to public policy scholarship. Figure 4 below captures the primary words employed in the summaries of current research for the 2012 Yearbook.

The public policy word cloud highlights the popularity of research interests in the environment, governance, health, management, and science, as well as in analysis and process-oriented research. These trends are reflected more broadly in scholars’ self-identifications across 16 subfields of public policy. The five theoretical categories include: policy process theory; policy analysis and evaluation; agenda-setting, adoption, and implementation; public opinion; and policy history. In addition, scholars are asked to self-identify their research interests across eleven substantive categories, which include: comparative public policy; defense and security; economic policy; education policy; environmental policy; governance; health policy; international relations; law and policy; science and technology policy; and social policy.

Figures 5 and 6 show the number of scholars in each of these subfields over the past three years. Scholars can be represented in more than one category. The total number of scholars in the 2012 edition (662 individuals) has grown by 22% since 2011 (545 individuals). Although there was overall growth in frequencies across all five theoretical areas, the largest growth was in scholars that study policy analysis and
evaluation. Furthermore, the largest growth over the past three years in substantive fields was in the areas of governance, comparative public policy, and health policy.

Another revealing way to characterize patterns in public policy scholarship is to analyze the combinations of substantive and theoretical foci pursued by policy scholars. Figure 7 is a bubble plot that analyzes the proportion of scholars that chose
certain substantive areas in addition to each theoretical area. Because scholars can choose more than one substantive area, the columns do not add to 100%. Furthermore, for clarity, the graph only specifies percentages greater than 20%. For example, of the 278 scholars who study policy process theory, 55.8% (or 155) also study governance, 44.6% (or 123) study science and technology policy, and 42.1% (or 117) said they study environmental policy. The lighter shaded bubbles show the combination of theoretical foci and substantive area with the highest frequency of responses.
Looking across all the theoretical areas, the largest proportion that also studied comparative public policy was within policy process theories. By contrast, scholars who study economic or education policy most frequently cross-selected policy analysis as a theoretical focus area. Perhaps of particular interest are the gaps evident in Figure 7; the smaller “bubbles” indicate relatively unpopulated areas of research in public policy.

Expanding the Scope of the Yearbook and Scholar Updates

Our intent is to continue to broaden participation in the Yearbook to ensure that it remains the most broadly representative source for information on current policy scholarship across the globe. As editors of the 2012 Public Policy Yearbook, we are grateful to all of the respondents who took the time to respond to several emails and persistent prodding to update their entries for the 2012 Yearbook. To ease the process of updating profiles, scholars will now be able to access their profiles directly and make changes by visiting the Yearbook website. These changes will be incorporated into the full content (after editorial review) on a quarterly basis. In September of 2012, we will mount a full campaign by sending invitations once again to current and new policy scholars to update their entries in the Yearbook. Furthermore, we hope Yearbook membership continues to grow as current members provide referrals for colleagues, practitioners, and students who engage in public policy scholarship. We will continue our efforts to include faculty from public policy schools and departments across the globe, as well as reaching out to graduate students and post-docs in public policy that make up the next generation of leading public policy scholars. We ask that current members assist in this effort by forwarding our invitations to affiliate policy scholars and graduate students.

The design and production of the Yearbook could not have been accomplished without the help of many hands. We would like to thank Matthew Henderson for the design and implementation of the online survey that is essential for data collection, as well as the online website, web-tools, and data graphics. In addition, we thank Savannah Collins for her assistance with checking and editing entries, and Tom Rabovsky and Joe Ripberger for their assistance on data analysis and the production of graphics. Furthermore, we extend particular thanks to David Merchant and appreciation for the people at Wiley-Blackwell, especially Kivmars Bowling, Joshua Gannon, and Kris Bishop. Finally, we are especially grateful for the continuing financial support and encouragement by Dr. Paul Rich, President of the Policy Studies Organization.

We hope that you will find the 2012 Yearbook to be a useful resource in your work on public policy, and that you will continue to update your entries for publication in future issues. We apologize for any errors that may have escaped our quality control processes.5

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Notes

1 Please note that while entries were reviewed for apparent errors, scholars' publications are listed as the participating scholars provided them.

2 These data show trends in the research of public policy scholars who participate in the Yearbook, rather than the universe of policy scholars. The geographic and demographic changes in Yearbook scholars were described above, in the methodology section of this article.

3 This word cloud was constructed using the R-package "wordcloud" (accessed at: http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/wordcloud/index.html). We included the complete text from each of the "current research and future directions" paragraphs from all 2012 Yearbook profiles. The relative size of each term represents the frequency with which that term appeared. For the final analysis, we excluded non-substantively relevant words; for example, “Dr.”; “professor”; “significantly”; “currently”; etc.

4 When updating their profiles, scholars are asked to check off as many categories as they choose to describe their research agenda.

5 Such errors are undoubtedly the result of an international conspiracy that, incidentally, should be the focus of a future review article. Potential authors should contact the editors.

References


