

Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)

Dimensions of Faculty Public Service: A Policy Science Approach to Questions of Information Provision

Author(s): Kathleen M. Heim

Source: *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Centennial Issue - I (Winter, 1986), pp. 154-164

Published by: Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40323237>

Accessed: 03-12-2023 15:30 +00:00

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*

Dimensions of Faculty Public Service: A Policy Science Approach to Questions of Information Provision

KATHLEEN M. HEIM

Research is accepted as a primary activity of library and information science faculties but the link between research and public policy is underdeveloped. In this light association activity largely fails to fulfill public service responsibility. The need for a qualitatively different approach to faculty public service along the lines of the policy sciences is proposed and barriers that may affect realization of this approach are identified. Escalating concerns that cluster around information policy are seen as catalysts for the identification of policy-relevant public service as a replacement for aimless professional association participation.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE role of library and information science faculties is a theme in search of a program. Twenty-five years ago the same might have been said of the research component just then being widely adopted by library and information science faculties. Today the research orientation in library and information science has been established, albeit somewhat disparately, across the whole teaching profession. The emergence of the research mission has, of course, affected the preparation of practitioners. It also casts an interesting and even unexpected light on the public service dimension of faculty professionalism in library and information science.

Heim is Dean, School of Library and Information Science, Louisiana State University, 267 Coates Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. *Mss. received 12/85; accepted 2/86.*

Dimensions of Faculty Public Service

As faculty research gains in substance and techniques of greater applicability are refined, the links between faculty and the field of practicing librarians and information specialists should increasingly reflect the investment of faculty expertise in research. The idea of library and information science faculties as a resource *because* of their research activities is ripe today for contesting traditional conceptions of library and information science faculties as “merely” academic, distracted practitioners, valued for their preparation of professionals, but remote from developments in the field. Faculties themselves (not withstanding exceptional contributions from time to time) have been slow to establish a clear orientation for public service. Faculty public service, at best a hodgepodge of activities, has yet to be firmly anchored in the research agenda of the library and information science discipline.

Since the stated missions of most large universities, especially those with land grant status, is “research, teaching, and public service” it would seem that public service would be valued by administrators. However, an analysis of university presidents’ attitudes at major land grant institutions and research universities designated by the Carnegie Commission found their highest priorities were funding and basic research. Public service activities that were ranked highest were those of applied research, followed by technical assistance. Insofar as public service was valued, it was valued primarily as it related research to the field.¹

One very pragmatic approach to the value of public service taken by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign seeks to relate public service to the promotion and tenure review process.² In Illinois’ “Faculty Guide,” which outlines guidelines for evaluation of public service, this activity is viewed as contributing to scholarly stature only when it is reported or cited in scholarly publications, has an impact on public policy, or demonstrates innovative breakthroughs in linking theory with practice.

Given these perceptions of the role of public service it is incumbent upon faculty to assess the quality of their public service contributions. To date the majority of library and information public service has been through professional associations. In her survey of the evaluation of library and information science faculty performance Kingsbury found professional association activity rated fifth after teaching, quality of publications, personal qualifications, and research activity. Consultation to government ranked twelfth.³ Association work, as measured by university administrators, is most valuable when it provides a vehicle for faculty to demonstrate the application of their basic research on matters of policy or technological innovation. Wilson asserts that “library school faculty carry professional association work to an extreme; some of them develop what amounts to a second career line working for the professional

associations."⁴ It is Wilson's contention that association work is a manifestation of goal displacement on the part of faculty that has actually deflected them from research and publication.⁵

There are many reasons for this tendency but essentially demands from the field for "job-ready" graduates and a professorate until recently comprised largely of experienced practitioners rather than researchers with earned doctorates combined to defer acceptance of university norms on the part of faculties.⁶ Most doctoral programs require some professional service as an entrance requirement. Thus, as Wilson points out, faculty socialization has been to the field of professional practice rather than to academic norms.⁷

There is little deference on the part of practitioners to faculty expertise because most practitioners' contact with the faculty has been at the master's level in connection with courses heavily loaded toward technical skill development. Though faculty who provide students with drills on search protocols for online searching or classification problem sets may indeed be engaged in research, their research agendas are not usually apparent to their students. On the contrary, graduates feel that faculty have been out of the field too long to supply them with requisite "job-ready" skills. This difference in perception stems partly from the lack of major research enterprises within schools of library and information science. Research conducted by library and information science faculty, in the main, is not apparent to students. Thus when the two meet on the neutral ground of the professional association, faculty are remembered for their remoteness from "real" experience rather than for their research competence.

Public service through professional associations presents a peculiar dilemma for the faculty member. Involvement is important because it is in this arena that faculty stay in touch with practice, but the kind of involvement is often no different than it is for the practitioner. In fact the faculty member may be somewhat an anomaly in association life where status is conferred largely on the basis of size of library and administrative position. Many faculty have yet to forge a role in professional associations based upon their expertise in research and evaluation methodologies.

Some faculty have succeeded in this. Outstanding examples include work on standards committees where faculty provide an analytical historical perspective; on evaluation of service committees where faculty have tested new models of group interaction; or on collection evaluation committees where faculty-tested bibliometric techniques can be applied to assessments of collection adequacy. However, for every one of these examples where research is actively applied to problems of the profession there are many more examples of faculty who serve on by-law or mem-

bership committees — intrinsically “good” work but work that serves to level the relationship of practitioner and faculty member.

Faculty who have earned the doctorate and honed research skills have much to offer the field. If, however, in the area of intersection with practitioners the faculty role is no different than that of the practitioner faculty fail to establish themselves as experts. This result not only negates the contributions faculty might make to better professional practice through their skill in research it also flouts university demands for quality public service.

Toward a Policy Science Dimension of Public Service. Faculty public service must take on a qualitatively different tenor if it is to be meaningful to the profession, the university and society at large. Essentially this service must be activated to diffuse research findings and techniques to the profession and to decisionmakers who determine public policy. The first step toward this higher level of public service is to identify meaningful research. There are two major streams of library and information science research — social scientific and scientific. The former is characterized by studies of user behavior, organizational analysis, sociological structures, or historical inquiry. The latter, especially in the information science specialization, seeks to explain the effect of applied technologies on the development of information provision but often with a decidedly social scientific caste.

Examples of user behavior research include analysis of communication patterns, faculty use of academic libraries, search assessment characteristics of students, use of information by scientists and engineers, the effect of computer assisted instruction on library skills, or information needs of the urban dweller. Organizational analysis research includes studies of cooperation, studies of conflict, co-option and adoption, the relationship between management and collective bargaining units or managerial influence on personnel procedures. Historical research provides a better understanding of underlying influences on the field today. Examples of such studies are the effect of federal funding on the American academic library, or an historical analysis of OCLC.

Information science related research includes bibliometric examinations of literature, modeling of retrieval time to assess database structures, thesaurus dynamics or entropy measures for journal evaluation. Simply put, however, most ‘information science’ studies are the application of scientific techniques for better understanding of factors influencing information provision.

Taken as a whole library and information science research is widely divergent in focus and purpose. Uneven quality — sometimes weak methodologies and inapplicability from the specific to the general — fairly characterizes it. Understandably, faculty are reluctant to invest

professional identity in a less than coherent enterprise. But this self-critical attitude inhibits the diffusion of those results that are meaningful. Powell rightly points out that the idea of library-related research is young.⁸ Given that it is barely ten years since even half of the faculties held an earned doctorate it is not at all peculiar that the corpus of research is yet unconsolidated.⁹

Generally, however, the discipline is directed toward the facilitation of information provision. Studies that examine computer applications to cataloging and classification, studies that analyze information-seeking behavior of the unemployed, studies that identify the best organizational structure for efficient document-delivery systems, and studies that seek to isolate the historical precedents for cooperative arrangements are all different approaches that can be applied to the refinement of information provision.

The study of information provision might be viewed as an aspect of policy science in much the same way as the study of social welfare provision. Just as isolated research on the effect of block grants for the poor, housing vouchers, or youth employment programs add empirical knowledge to sociological inquiry so might isolated research on the impact of online searching, the distribution of patent depositories, or information-seeking behavior of single-parents add empirical knowledge to information provision inquiry. Since the data accumulated in either discipline could be used for social policy both, in effect, could contribute information needed for governmental action. Reynolds has suggested the the policy scientist is free to choose any set of values as the object of policy concern.¹⁰

If the body of research in library and information science, uneven though it might be, is viewed as an aspect of policy science *then the public service role of library and information science faculty might be refined to be the diffusion of the results of research to practitioners and decisionmakers*. This role would at once accommodate the norms of the university and establish the appropriate faculty relationship to the field. It encourages the transmittal of refinements of technique only insofar as these refinements are grounded in research. Some examples will serve to clarify this role.

A faculty member conducting operational research on the effectiveness of manual versus online searching at a liberal arts college finds that document delivery systems cause systemic failure. The results of this research are transmitted to appropriate refereed journals but are also conveyed in a lucid report to the interlibrary loan department of the college and presented at a statewide meeting of academic librarians. Rather than volunteering to chair a state association committee that will

Dimensions of Faculty Public Service

seek to refine document delivery, the faculty member agrees to serve in an advisory capacity.

A faculty content analysis has determined that the economics of library funding in a given state are affected by poorly drafted tax laws. After developing a multi-jurisdictional analysis of funding alternatives the faculty member concurrently submits the results to a refereed journal and to the state's library development committee. Rather than agreeing to coordinate an action committee that will seek legislative correction the faculty member prepares a technical report for the action committee and agrees to testify at legislative hearings.

A youth services researcher has tested the effectiveness of summer library reading programs in raising school reading test scores of low-income children. The results are published in a refereed journal and presented at professional conferences of both librarians and reading teachers. Rather than agreeing to serve on the state task force to plan the next year's summer reading program the faculty member uses the results of the study to advise the task force on the programmatic structure which will maximize learning.

A faculty member works closely with a colleague from the law school to monitor international regulations intended to raise tariffs on transborder data flow. Together they develop a paper that identifies legal precedents in industrialized and third-world nations. Their paper appears in a journal of international law. The library and information science faculty member is called upon by the president of a national library association to represent the interests of libraries to an intergovernmental fact-finding committee.

Each of these varied approaches to the understanding of information provision can be viewed as having a policy dimension. It is potentially a most effective mode of professional service for faculty. It is paradoxical that the academic side of library and information science which has a long tradition of service to professional associations is not a recognized resource in matters that relate to the policy science component of information provision.

The extent to which faculty contributions to policy have been made is not known. However, it can be seen from a cursory scanning of the composition of association committees as published in handbooks and conference proceedings that general faculty involvement in associations is pervasive. The American Library Association (ALA) Council, for instance, has a high representation of library and information science educators among its ranks. The question that arises is what is the nature of such involvement? The many hours of Council deliberation at ALA Midwinter Meetings and Annual Conferences include some discussion of

substantive issues, to be sure, but as much time is certainly spent on association housekeeping. Given the fact that Council does grapple with policy issues to what degree do faculty Council members provide advice based on their expertise and research? Is their input to Council any different from that of the academic or public library administrator? At this writing these questions have not been addressed. Suffice it to say that for the most part faculty professional involvement in associations has been functionally separate from the central faculty concern which should be knowledge production through research. Linkages between faculty professional involvement (as it stands) and research activity are tenuous at best.

Given that current faculty association involvement has only indistinct impact on decisions that influence information-provision policy in general it should be noted that there are barriers to participation.

Barriers to the Diffusion of Research. Some faculty whose professional involvement is minimal but whose work-life more closely parallels that of the university norm, are simply disinclined to connect their research with public policy. Such introverted productivity is blind to the problems that agencies and decisionmakers have in finding research that would be useful for the establishment of public policies. A conscious assumption of the diffusion role on the part of faculty is a manifestation of discipline maturity that a “young” field, like library and information science, might be uneasy with. Glaser, Abelson, and Garrison have considered the role of university faculties as a source of knowledge and observed that sanctions in the university encourage the development of knowledge for its own sake and its publication as an end goal.¹¹ These sanctions, however, are breaking down to some degree in light of the technology assessment movement in the sciences¹² and the policy analysis movement in the social sciences.¹³

While the original purpose of social science research was to acquire knowledge to ameliorate social problems, methodological refinement and theory building took center stage for several decades as the social sciences concentrated on the development of scientific scholarship. It was not until the 1960s that social scientists as a group recommitted professional energies to use research findings for the solution to social problems.¹⁴ In much the same way library and information science research has shifted toward refinement of research technique with less recent emphasis on solving problems relating to the central concern of the discipline — information provision.

Although the 1960s caused the library profession to question its mission and modes of service delivery, no concomitant change of direction took place in the research arm of the profession — probably because at that

time the research base of the field was still largely confined to a very small number of scholars. Today, however, escalating technological change in communications and information access mechanisms is causing a crisis between the information rich and poor, a crisis that may well redirect library and information science research in the manner that social science research was redirected in the 1960s. The nexus of this problem is information policy — a catch-all term for a bewilderingly complex set of regulations, rules, and laws — which requires input for rational development on the part of those conducting information-related research.¹⁵

Information policy questions pervade all branches and agencies of government at international, national, and local levels. As governments thrash out their policies on freedom of information, telecommunications, privacy regulations, and transborder data flow, it is clear that it is time for information researchers to interact with decisionmakers. Nagel sees stimulation to policy research on the part of academics in universities as deriving from new methodological tools, the stimuli of social movements, interdisciplinary relations, grants, and a saturation of non-policy relevant topics.¹⁶ These same influences can be viewed as affecting library and information science researchers. Adoption of methodological tools from the social sciences and refinements of field-specific techniques such as bibliometrics; the identification of the social and economic importance of information; cross-disciplinary investigations; federal and foundation grants; and a surfeit of parochial case-studies necessitate a new orientation for research.

Also, in the fact of continuing federal intentions to fund library-related programs at the zero-level, it is time for the results of research to be transmitted to policy makers. However, even given a desire on the part of library and information researchers to interact with policymakers — a desire that is not yet articulated — there are many barriers to this interaction.

The first barrier is the complex nature of knowledge diffusion. Lucas has characterized public policies as “soft innovations” which are collections of ideas about how to solve public problems, allocate public resources, and organize public institutions.¹⁷ As such, diffusion of public policies differs markedly from diffusion of technological innovations due to their value-laden and subjective nature. Take, for instance, the implementation of library systems, an innovation requiring adoption by many levels of local decisionmakers. The idea that shared resources would result in better access for all was incrementally adopted after long-term development, trial adoption, adaptation to local requirements and integration into extant patterns of service. While this idea seems to

have arisen from professional consensus rather than research it is a representative concern that is not simple to convey.

Nathan has suggested that a deep understanding of the real-world nature of public activities is required before applying sophisticated quantitative models to behavioral problems.¹⁸ He supports research that straddles the boundary between quantitative and qualitative studies. Problems with the diffusion of research often come about due to the complexity of concepts conveyed, lack of susceptibility to replication, and incompatibility with the organizational goals of policymakers.

Another barrier to utilization of research is the "two-communities" perspective of relations between researchers and policy-makers.¹⁹ This perspective views the two groups as divergent in goals and understanding. Acceptance of innovation is based to some degree on homophily, or similarity of characteristics between the two groups. In the case of research to be conveyed to the professional working through the association, homophily is high; in the case of research to be conveyed to government agency representatives it may be quite low. However, Emmert has pointed out the fact that failure of social scientists to value the ordinary knowledge of decisionmakers mitigates against decisionmakers' acceptance of policy research.²⁰

A third barrier to the diffusion of research is lack of access to decisionmakers. The process by which researchers gain a hearing by those in power is extremely complex and requires specialized study for any given discipline. For library and information science researchers access to federal or international governmental decisionmakers is usually brokered by professional associations. Contact is typically through the Washington Office of the American Library Association or through the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. This brokering factor requires that the library and information science researcher reconsider the issue raised earlier in this discussion about the quality of interaction with professional associations. Unless research findings have made an impact on associations which largely control access to policy makers it is unlikely that the connection between research and national information policy will be made.

At state and local levels faculty have been disinclined, except in a few states, to interact through state agencies that would provide access to policy-makers. This may be a missed opportunity.²¹ Horowitz has stated that the policy agenda for the social sciences should include local community, city, and state constituencies.²² From successful interaction on more localized policy issues the skills can be gained to interact at higher decisionmaking levels.

Dimensions of Faculty Public Service

In spite of the barriers to activation of research — the complexity of the diffusion of knowledge process, the “two communities” perspective, and lack of access to decisionmakers — it is appropriate that library and information science researchers transform their public service style. This transformation would include a reassessment of the role of public service and the conscious acceptance of library and information science research as contributing to important policy decisions regarding information.

A New Direction for Faculty Public Service. To recapitulate, it has been argued that if faculty do take on public service responsibilities it must be public service that is grounded in their primary assignment — the production of new knowledge through research. Public service activities should be judged by the degree to which the expertise of the faculties in research methodologies are brought to bear upon the profession’s concerns. There is a need for faculty to establish their research expertise with those they teach and with those they interact with in professional associations. Through this establishment will come a recognition of the role that research can play in development of better services and policies that affect information provision.

Information provision has been characterized as a watershed concern for library and information science similar to the concerns of the War on Poverty for social science researchers. Recognition of this would require that faculties seek to intervene in the decisionmaking processes being brought to bear upon information policy in order to direct policies toward effective development and implementation.

Identification of the interaction of library and information science researchers and policymakers for rational development of information policy as a proper manifestation of the faculty public service role is still in the future. However, this interaction whether direct or brokered through associations, can be facilitated through an assimilation of discussions to be found in the policy science literature.²³ As library and information science faculty seek to clarify their contribution to the field, the application of research within the conceptual framework of the policy sciences offers a potent alternative to aimless participation in professional associations.

References

1. Dunn, D.D., Gibson, F.K., and Whorton, J.W.: University Commitment to Public Service for State and Local Governments. *Public Administration Review*, 45:505, July/Aug. 1985.
2. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Office of Continuing Education and Public Service. “Faculty Guide for Relating Continuing Education and Public Service to the Promotion and Tenure Review Process, Sept. 1981.” (mimeographed)
3. Kingsbury, M.: How Library Schools Evaluate Faculty Performance. *Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 22:224, Spring 1982.
4. Wilson, P.: Factors Effecting Research Productivity. *Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 20:13, Summer 1979.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. Heim, K.M.: The Changing Faculty Mandate, *Library Trends* (in press)
7. Wilson, ref. 4, p. 14.
8. Powell, R.R.: *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*. Norwood, N.J., Ablex, 1985, p. 9.
9. Heim, ref. 6.
10. Reynolds, J.F.: Policy Science: A Conceptual and Methodological Analysis. *Policy Sciences*, 6:2, Mar. 1975.
11. Glaser, E.M., Abelson, H.H., and Garrison, K.N.: *Putting Knowledge to Use: Facilitating the Diffusion of Knowledge and the Implementation of Planned Change*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1983, p. 362.
12. Ballard, S.C., and James, T.E.: Participatory Research and Utilization in the Technology Assessment Process. *Knowledge*, 4:409-427, Mar. 1983.
13. Nagel, S.S.: *The Policy Studies Handbook*. Lexington, MA, D.C. Heath and Co., 1980.
14. Finsterbusch, K., and Motz, A.B.: *Social Research for Policy Decisions*. Belmont, CA, Wardsworth Publishing, 1980, pp. 2-3.
15. Heim, ref. 6.
16. Nagel, ref. 13, p. 29.
17. Lucas, A.: Public Policy Diffusion Research: Integrating Analytic Paradigms. *Knowledge*, 4:379, Mar. 1983.
18. Nathan, R.P.: Research Lessons from the Great Society. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 4:423, Spring 1985.
19. Dunn, W.N.: The Two-Communities Metaphor and Models of Knowledge Use. *Knowledge*, 1:515, June 1980.
20. Emmert, M.A.: Ordinary Knowing and Policy Science. *Knowledge*, 7:97-112, Sept. 1985.
21. See for instance Schneider, M., and Swinton, D.: Policy Analysis in State and Local Government. *Public Administration Review* :12-16, Jan./Feb. 1979; or Mahajar, V., Haynes, K.E., and Kumar, K.C.B., Modeling the Diffusion of Public Policy Innovation Among the U.S. States. *Socio-Economic Planning Science*, 11:259-263, 1977.
22. Horowitz, I.L.: Social Science and the Reagan Administration. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 1:125-129, 1981.
23. See, for example, Etzioni, A.: Making Policy for Complex Systems. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 4:383-395, Spring 1985; Roberts-Gray, C., and Gray, T.: Implementing Innovations: A Model to Bridge the Gap Between Diffusion and Utilization. *Knowledge*, 5: 213-232, Dec. 1983; Scarpino, M., Dunn, N., and Mitroff, I.I.: Knowledge Acquisition for Policymaking: The Role of Conceptual Models. *Knowledge*, 4:335-355, Mar. 1983.