

LAND GRANT INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION

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If this title read: Does the Land Grant system invest in public policy education?

The answer would be no.

If the title read: Does the Land Grant system support public policy education?

The answer would be reluctantly.

If the title read: Does the Land Grant system get nervous with public policy education.

The answer would be yes.

If the title read: Should the Land Grant system support public policy education.

The answer would be a resounding yes.

What is Public Policy Education?

The Farm foundation web site states: Non-advocacy public policy education is an art, requiring a unique set of skills. The purpose of policy education is to establish fact, destroy myth and, in true Jeffersonian sense, respect the values of the citizenry. The role of public policy education is to define the problem, discuss the alternative solutions and their probable consequences backed by research and empirical observations, and then leave the decision to the body politic.

Many of you here are wonderful examples of and embrace this description.

Do the Land Grants invest in public policy education? In as much as the Land Grants invest in the Social Sciences, particularly Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, they do. Directly, no; indirectly, reluctantly.

Why reluctantly? In past times and perhaps today, Land Grant administrators are worried that clientele will be offended. We have all heard the stories of commodity groups asking administrators to fire a particular faculty or a dean. Most University's today can weather such challenges. At the county level it is more problematic. I want to focus my comments today on county faculty and local issues.

I would be remiss if I did not point out the great work and impact of a whole range of national and regional centers and institutes that are supported partly by the Land Grant system and by other entities. The regional Rural Development Centers are critical to and leaders of public policy education throughout the county. CARD, the Center for Ag and Rural development, Tom Johnson's center at the University of Missouri, the work of the University of Tennessee, Kettering, PEW, and the list goes on: great people, great programs, great resources.

But many of these regional, state and national centers do not provide SUSTAINABLE efforts at the local level. They help, advise, consult, plan, model, and map from afar. They can go home at night, removed from

their help, advise, plans, and models. County faculty provide sustainability to local issues and can be branded, for good or ill, with public policy educational efforts.

The regional, national and state centers and institutes are aware of the social, economic and cultural diversity. Often such diversity is built into plans, models, and recommendations. But diversity is hard to embrace and to live with at the local level. Diversity, including respect for and inclusion of a broad range of people, is a critical role and mark of local public policy education.

The point I want to make today is that Land Grants need to provide training and support for our county faculty so that they might be comfortable in public policy education. Loretta Singletary has an article in the Journal of Extension which points out the perceived skill level and needs of county faculty. It is my impression that county faculty and agents do think they have some of the skills. But many are uncomfortable with or feel unsupported in public policy education.

I see county supervisors and elected officials asking Cooperative Extension to address contentious issues. They ask Extension so that they are off the hot seat. But they also ask because of the non-advocacy reputation of Land Grants and the non-advocacy skills of faculty at the local level. This reputation is good. This role is why Extension still exists in virtually all counties through the United States. I believe the health and sustainability of Cooperative Extension is having faculty and agents living, working, and adding value at the local level. They make Science useful.

Briefly, I would like to indicate where the Land Grant needs to provide an atmosphere that encourages and supports public policy education. I will provide a brief sketch of seven components of public policy education that Land Grants need to enhance training, support, and sensitivity to create a positive program environment for work of our county faculty and agents.

First, county faculty need to be invited to address public policy issues. This requires sensitivity, trust, respect and tradition. How do we create a situation so that leaders look to Extension for leadership in addressing public policy issues.

Second, county faculty need the resources and skills to handle public policy education. Good resources are critical. Data, information, a broad interdisciplinary perspective, campus backup and involvement are paramount. Our challenge is to bring the latest science and information to the table.

Third, we need to be inclusive of all sides. We need buy in. Sensitivity to the diverse nature of local issues and people is critical. We need to know our audience.

Fourth, we need to be comprehensive in presentation of background information. We need to clearly define the issues and isolate extraneous elements.

Fifth, we need to stimulate dialogue – dialogue among the participants. This dialogue needs to be directed, facilitated and captured.

Sixth, we need negotiated accommodation. Principles need to be articulated. Roles defined. Responsibilities delegated. Futures shared. Some smaller contentious issues may need to be relegated for future work.

Seventh, we need written adoption and promulgation of agreements. We need to show impact.

The former Speaker of the House of Representatives Tip O'Neill noted: "All politics is local." And Berry Flinchbaugh has outlined "Who makes political decisions" in an insightful, colorful, and well articulated article on the JCEP (Joint Council of Extension Professionals) web site. Many resources are available. Top level Land Grant support is critical.

In conclusion, the Land Grant system needs to support public policy education. The people in this room need to define, adopt and lead this effort. I want to conclude with a quote most of you will recognize that relates to much of your work and the seven points I have summarized:

You have brains in your head
You have feet in your shoes
You can steer yourself
Any direction you choose.

So be sure when you step
Step with care and great tact
And remember that Life's
A Great Balancing Act.

Just never forget to be dexterous and deft
And never mix up your right foot with your left.

Dr. Seuss

Thank you.