

**CANONS OF PRACTICE FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH
AND EDUCATION WITHIN THE
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, HUMAN, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENCES¹
AND
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

I. Introduction and Purpose:

By definition, public policy issues² are controversial or they would not be “issues.” Because people have different values and are affected differently by policy decisions, they disagree - sometimes heatedly - about the nature of the issues, what should be done to resolve them, and what constitutes a more desirable state of affairs or “improved quality of life.”

Context³

In those situations wherein viewpoints become polarized, when formerly private issues become public ones, and when public policy issues tend to harden into divisions between economic, social, and political groups, the Land-Grant University has both an opportunity and a challenge to educate the public in the interest of achieving, where possible, collective agreement on how to progress. In doing this type of work it is imperative that appropriate philosophical principles guide our work. The principles refer to standards of conduct that indicate how one should behave (what ought to be done) based on professional standards and responsibilities. In the arena of public policy, those engaged in policy research and education (hereinafter referred to as educators and researchers) must follow several philosophical principles or standards, including:

- * Science cannot be used to identify the most appropriate set of values. Even an undisputed fact may be viewed quite differently by different interest groups.
- * The public policy researcher and educator does not possess the wisdom (by virtue of superior education or scientific knowledge) to decide what is best for the public.
- * A democratic system of government places high priority on the right of individuals to choose for themselves among alternative solutions to public issues.
- * The capacity of citizens to make decisions about public issues is increased by education about both the issues and the decision-making processes.

Purpose:

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²For purpose of these canons the term public policy is used interchangeably with the terms public issues or public policy issues.

³Adapted from “Foreword” in Stevens, Georgia and Kendra Vance, Co-Editors, *Inservice Guide - A Supplement to Public Issues Education: Increasing Competence in Resolving Public Issues*, NPPEC, September 1995.

1. *Rationale*

As responsible researchers and educators it is our intent to specify in the following **Canons of Practice** that which underlies our professional activities. This is being done so Land-Grant University administrators, colleagues, and the public, with whom we work, will understand the roles we play as researchers, educators, facilitators and mediators in controversial public policy issues affecting our communities.

The purpose of this statement is to clarify responsibilities of three sets of participants in public policy education: researchers and educators, administrators, and the public. This clarification: a) defines for the WSU Extension and the College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (hereinafter referred to as Extension and the College, respectively) employees (administrators, researchers and educators) the expectations with respect to their roles in public policy research and education; b) informs the public of the University's role with respect to its land-grant mission of providing research and education associated with issues that affect the public; and c) serves as the basis for addressing any complaints that the University may receive from members of the public regarding Extension's or the College's involvement in issues that affect them. The **Canons of Practice** outline Extension's and the College's expectations concerning three mutually supporting sets of reciprocal relationships between: a) administrators and researchers/educators; b) researchers/educators and the public; and c) administrators and the public.

2. *Types of Activities that the Policy Addresses*

Public policy education is an activity in which research and scholarship are applied to issues of broad public concern. The principal objective is to encourage citizens to make informed policy decisions. These activities include content and process. The content role involves generating and providing knowledge about the substantive issues and about group methods and educational interventions that are useful to reach informed public choices. The process role includes convener, facilitator, program developer, promoter of dispute resolution, and mediator.

3. *Statement of Applicability*

The **Canons of Practice** apply to faculty, professional staff, graduate student employees and administrators in Extension and the College. **The Canons** are applicable to the extent they do not conflict with WSU policy and applicable law.

4. *Public Policy Education and Research is Part of WSU's Land-Grant Mission*

In furtherance of its land-grant mission, Washington State University conducts research and education to help groups and communities solve their public problems. It is the responsibility of educators at the University to provide unbiased information about matters relevant to the welfare of the people. The University, as an educational institution, advocates no substantive position on policy or scholarly issues. Public policy education programs will be implemented as outlined in these **Canons of Practice**. These programs will be well-planned, balanced and based upon science or best practices and will facilitate collaboration among citizens of diverse interests and values. In addition to the principles in these **Canons**, Extension and the College will affirm:

- a. The principle of the objectivity and value neutrality of scientific and scholarly research and education and, more generally, the principles of scientific methods and scholarly work.
- b. The principle of academic freedom whereby the University, as an institution, houses scholars, scientists, and educators holding different views.
- c. The principle of tenure which protects the individual scholar and educator from firing because of the individual's unpopular positions on academic issues.

II. Parameters Prescribing “When and How” Researchers and Educators will become involved in Public Policy Education:⁴

Researchers and Educators in Extension and the College should be expected to answer each of the following questions in the affirmative before actually committing to a public policy education or research process. *If affirmative responses to all questions are not forthcoming, then researchers and educators should interact with the involved parties to remedy the situation before proceeding - or, decline to participate.*

- 1. Is this an issue that affects the larger community interest rather than a dispute between two individuals or interest groups?
- 2. Are diverse and multiple affected stakeholders⁵ to be involved in a manner that encourages open, empowered dialogue and does not compromise the public trust role of the Land-Grant University?
- 3. Is the research and educational activity being conducted in a manner that recognizes that policy is driven by the stakeholders' decisions in the appropriate political venue and that the role of policy research and education is to inform, not influence policy decisions?
- 4. Have ground rules been developed and approved by the group itself to assure a fair and equitable process?
- 5. Has the role of researcher or educator been clearly distinguished and communicated to the participants to avoid any appearance of unfairness or loss of fairness by those affected by the dialogue?
- 6. Has the process assured that a shared information base has been provided in a fair and

⁴Adapted from the draft document "Best Practice for Using Mediated Approaches to Develop Policy Agreements: Guidelines for Government Agencies" prepared by Greg Bourne and Chris Carlson, Critical Issues Committee Co-Chairs of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR), October, 1996, pg. 13.

⁵Stakeholders are defined as individuals or interest groups that are affected by or put at risk by a decision or action, such as a proposed change in a public policy.

unbiased manner? Do any research and information components of the program provide for timely input by, and notification of, affected parties? Is provision made that any research components will be reviewed following proper scholarly practice and the rules and regulations governing the policy process for the issue at hand?

7. Does the process encourage and facilitate a shared understanding of the dispute and participation by all affected stakeholders?
8. Does participation in this public policy issue reflect a high level of individual and institutional professionalism and public trust?
9. Does the process include an ongoing evaluation and implementation strategy to involved emerging stakeholders, assure equity of representation, provide support for those who may have been traditionally excluded from public decision-making, and outline an ongoing strategy for relationship building and adaptation?

III. Canons of Practice for Public Policy Research and Education:⁶

The following guidelines will govern the conduct of Extension and College employees involved in public policy education and research activities:

1. Employees will not knowingly participate in any process that is misrepresented as to its purpose or that is intended to circumvent legal requirements.
2. Employees who take on the role of facilitator or mediator will serve as advocates for the principles that underlie collaborative decision-making processes, including structuring and managing the process to assure representation and effective participation by all key stakeholders, whatever their cultural, racial, religious or economic backgrounds.
3. Employees will not be advocates for any participant's point of view or any particular outcome on any substantive issue. Employees will act to assure their activities are not, and do not appear to be, biased towards particular participants as a result of their political position, financial connection to the University, or other invidious bias.
4. Employees will, to the extent allowed by law, protect the confidentiality of private communications with any of the participants or stakeholders.
5. Employees who take on the role of facilitator or mediator will need to gain the agreement of all participants to the ground rules or operating principles of the process and to any subsequent modification to them. Once the ground rules have been mutually agreed upon, facilitators or mediators will enforce them impartially. If they believe a party is not acting in good faith, is inhibiting their ability to communicate or manage communications with

⁶These policies are based on the draft *"Best Practice for Using Mediated Approaches to Developing Policy Agreements: Guidelines for Government Agencies"* prepared by Greg Bourne and Chris Carlson, Critical Issues Committee Co-Chairs of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR), October 1996.

participants, or is otherwise not abiding by the ground rules the facilitator or mediator will discuss it with the party.

If the educator feels he or she must withdraw from the process because ground rule issues cannot be resolved satisfactorily, the educator must inform the participants why such intervention withdrawal is being considered. Participants will have a chance to respond and negotiate with the facilitator or mediator. Educators who take on the role of facilitator or mediator will withdraw from the process if the educator's continued involvement is not acceptable to the group.

6. In order to avoid conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest, employees will not engage with any of the parties to carry out other kinds of activities at the same time they are under contract or have an agreement, either verbal or written, to conduct research or facilitate/mediate an agreement-seeking process or processes. Such individuals should disclose whenever they have continuing or frequent contractual relationships with one or more of the participants.⁷

IV. Expectations of the Public:

This section outlines Extension and College educator expectations of citizens and stakeholders who are participating in or have an interest in Extension and/or College public issues education, policy and/or research activities. The basis for these expectations is the belief that to make a democracy work, the citizens must accept responsibility and be able to make sound decisions about what is in the public interest. Therefore, Extension and the College place a high priority on the public's right to choose from alternative options when they have had time to learn about and analyze the options. And Extension and the College place a high priority on the right of individuals to participate in public issues education, public issues dispute resolution, and public policy education and research activities without fear of negative consequences. The following are expectations that Extension and College educators have of individuals who participate in or have an interest in public policy education, facilitation, mediation and/or research involving a public issue and Extension or College staff:

1. The Public will understand that people working together are capable of producing ideas of extraordinary value.
2. The Public will understand that good faith and honesty are essential for effective, sustainable outcomes in public policy education and research processes including dispute resolution.
3. The Public will understand that representation of all significant interests is important for effective, sustainable solutions of public policy issues.
4. The Public will understand that rules of procedure ("ground rules") agreed upon by all

⁷ As pursuant to the WSU Faculty Manual B particularly Sections II-D (Ethics in Public Service) and IV-E (Extended Professional Activities) regarding ethical behavior and conflict of interest.

participants prior to deliberating a difficult issue will help ensure an effective public policy education and research process.

5. The Public will understand that Extension and College educators have a neutral and objective role (as described under Section I, Purpose 4 - *Public Policy Education and Research is Part of WSU's Land-Grant Mission*) regarding the substance of a public policy education or research issue. The resolution of any issue under discussion is the responsibility of the participants, and not the responsibility of Extension or College staff.
6. The Public will understand that collaborative, consensus-based, and interest-based processes generally result in better public policy education and research decisions, more sustainable outcomes, and more effective working relationships among the stakeholders than non-collaborative decision-making processes.
7. The Public will understand that diversity among the participants in a public policy education and research decision-making process is important for effective, sustainable solutions. Diversity characteristics include gender, age, ethnicity, geographical location, and familiarity/experience with the issue and so on.

V. Administrative Response to Complaints:

As noted earlier, public policy research/education and dispute resolution are volatile arenas, wherein competing interests and values often collide. This being the case, it is incumbent upon Extension and College researchers or educators to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all time. It is expected they will follow the Canons of Practice whenever they are engaged in public policy research and education. In doing so, the opportunity for things to go awry will be minimized.

Nevertheless, given the nature of this work, complaints from stakeholders seem inevitable. It is also the case that complaints may often come to Extension or College administrators prior to reaching the involved faculty, professional staff or graduate student employee.

To deal with these realities, the principles and guidelines below have been developed. In no way are they to be construed as superseding existing Washington State University policies and procedures as outlined in the Faculty Manual or any other document. They do provide an approach that recognizes the professionalism of Extension and College educator or researchers, but at the same time are responsive to legitimate concerns voiced by stakeholders.

Whenever complaints arise about the public policy activities of Extension and/or College researchers, educators, or other employees, the appropriate administrator will immediately initiate a response guided by the following principles:

1. Administrators will grant a full, open, and respectful audience for the views of all sectors of the public and the University community with an interest in the point at issue.
2. Administrators will vigorously support the right and responsibility of researchers and educators to perform public policy research and education in conformance with the:
 - Washington State University Faculty Manual
 - mission of the Land-Grant University (as described under Section I, Purpose 4 - *Public*

Policy Education and Research is Part of WSU's Land-Grant Mission)

- principles of academic freedom, proper scientific methods, and the principles of policy research and education as outlined in these **Canons**
- and other professional codes of conduct.

In responding to complaints, administrators will inform the interested publics of these principles, rights, and responsibilities.

3. Administrators will inform employees immediately about concerns or complaints and consult with employees about resolution of such concerns or complaints. Where complaints or concerns are substantive and not resolved immediately, administrators will provide written notification of the complaint and keep the affected employees informed during all stages of the process. Employees will be provided with all relevant information on the complaint in a timely fashion according to written procedures. Employees will be granted an immediate opportunity to respond to the complaint.
4. Based on an initial evaluation of the complaint and following written procedures, administrators will determine which of the following response processes are appropriate to the complaint (these processes are not necessarily mutually exclusive):
 - a. Where the complaint is found to be prima facie without merit, provide the complainant and the affected University employee with a written explanation of this finding.
 - b. Where the complaint concerns the scientific or scholarly content of the work, refer the complaint to an appropriate avenue of scholarly review or advise the complainant of their right to do so.
 - c. Where the complaint concerns the professional conduct of WSU employees, provide an internal review of the matter following due process and written procedures.
 - d. Where the complaint concerns potential civil or criminal matters, refer the complaint to appropriate external authorities or advise the complainant of their right to do so.
5. Administrators will act to assure that responses to complaints are not, and do not appear to be, biased towards particular constituents based on their political position, financial connection to the University, or other invidious bias.

VI. Concluding Statement:

As a Land-Grant institution, Washington State University has a rich history of working with the public and their representatives in addressing controversial issues. The **Canons of Practice** have been developed by WSU educators, researchers and administrators in the spirit of guiding faculty and staff interactions with members of the public when engaged in the conduct of public policy-related research and education activities.

This document also provides an effective mechanism through which to educate the public about the scientific method, the nature of academic and scholarly work, and the mission of the Land-Grant University. The anticipated improvement in communication and understanding between educators/researchers and members

of the public should engender closer collaboration, more effective working relationships, and stronger partnerships among parties involved in public policy research and education activities in this state.