

Policy Research and the Academic Community in Canada

Report prepared for the Policy Research Secretariat

by

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I Introduction

What is the role of the Canadian academic community in policy research? How can this role be enhanced in the making of federal policy?

The following discussion addresses these questions by offering an overview of the people, processes, and structures characteristic of the policy research capacity of Canadian universities.

Specific attention is paid to the strengths and weaknesses of universities in terms of their connection to federal government policymaking. It should be noted at the outset that this report does not deal with "contract" research in which university researchers are engaged to complete specific projects defined and directed by the terms of a contract with an agency outside the university; rather, the focus is on research conducted within the ongoing educational activity of universities.

This discussion draws upon the insights of leading Canadian scholars and administrators, and is informed by the experience of selected examples of innovative efforts to advance policy research. In the concluding section, the report recommends elements of an action plan for enhancing university policy research capacity especially with respect to connections to the federal arena. In this way, the following analysis attempts to contribute to a better understanding of how the federal government can foster a well-connected, collaborative and effective policy research community in Canada.

II Towards a New Paradigm

Contradictions characterize the role of the academic community in policy research. An understanding of these contradictions is essential in analyzing both the current state and the future prospects of the policy research capacity of Canadian universities.

Contradiction #1: Academic Cultures vs. Policy cultures

University researchers and policymakers characteristically agree that the academic community can and should play a larger role in policy research. However, both groups similarly agree that there are major obstacles arising out of the distinct "cultures" of the two sides (often created and maintained by the researchers and policymakers themselves). These obstacles prevent university researchers from playing the desired large role in policy research.

In general, informants emphasize that "neither side necessarily understands the other," and that, as a result, "overcoming these cultural divides is not an easy task."

#### Contradiction #2: Horizontal vs. vertical

In the late 1990s, there is now widespread consensus on the importance of "horizontal" connectedness and integration across disciplines within the campus, and between the campus and the larger community including the policy forum. However, the institutional structures of universities, governments, and community groups remain predominantly "vertical" in keeping with their nineteenth-century origins.

University leaders admit that "too often we talk to ourselves. We do need to find ways to talk to each other within the academy and with our fellow citizens beyond the walls."

#### Contradiction #3: Simplicity vs. Complexity.

The value and importance of collaboration and partnerships in the defining of policy research questions and in making the link between research results and effective policy are now well-recognized by university researchers as well as policy-makers. However, the complexity of such collaboration is rarely appreciated; indeed, simplistic notions characterize the predominant image of the relationship between research and policy.

In the words of one informant, "we generally have a very simplistic view of policy relevant research - we tend to see it as information for a civil servant. I think we need to get debate going much more on the policy process and therefore on what kind of research can influence the process." Moreover, this debate needs to focus on how the different participants define the objectives; "policy" research which on the face of it looks like an obvious category is actually rather complex. To improve it and expand it I think it needs to be deconstructed by all involved to examine expectations."

#### Contradiction #4: Disciplinarity vs. Interdisciplinarity

The current "vertical" structures within which researchers attempt to advance knowledge include disciplinary boundaries and specializations. However, there is general agreement that the major policy questions cut across disciplines and call for transdisciplinary/interdisciplinary analyses.

University leaders recognize that "the tendency for scholars to be isolated within the academic institution is not easily overcome. Our merit and tenure and promotion processes encourage isolation and specialization. At conferences we also listen to our own disciplinary colleagues and rarely attend plenary symposia."

In the same way, those interested in using results for policy-making rarely promote interdisciplinary approaches; indeed, one observer reported that, "from the last conference I didn't really get the impression that the big push for interdisciplinarity was coming from a need for policy research. It should be, I think, but the reality I saw was rather more fragmented - economists doing research for economic policy etc."

#### Contradiction #5: Short-term vs. Longer-term.

The timeframe within which policy is developed, debated, and approved characteristically is no longer than a few years. In contrast, researchers generally focus on medium and longer-range time periods.

Informants perceive that "many federal bureaucrats and decision-makers see policy-related research as providing them with policy options and choices that could be implemented within a short period of time. University-based researchers view policy research from a more critical perspective with a longer time horizon." The link between policy-making and the political context is seen to be direct; "many public policy-makers do not look forward beyond the immediate short term needs of the department and the current government."

#### Contradiction #6: Research-based vs. Politics-based

No one disputes that research results should be the basis for the formulation of policy. However, policies will usually be established in keeping with public opinion which may or may not be consistent with research results.

Informants use the example of research on young offenders (which emphasizes the negative outcomes of significant

incarceration) and public opinion on young offenders (which often demands that such youth be treated as adults).

The significance of the above contradictions (as well as others discussed below) indicate that a profound paradigm shift is occurring both among researchers and policymakers. The policy research landscape is being reconfigured. The current contradictions are leading to the development of new structures, new perspectives, and new approaches affecting all those involved in policy research process.

University leaders emphasize the importance of encouraging the emergence of the new paradigm. Otherwise, "the same players will continue to dominate the field and will provide government with the traditional types of policy research and 'evaluation.' In effect, the old approach excludes many scholars whose views would be important to policy development if both sides understood the process differently."

How to move forward may not always be clear but the stakes are high for all those involved; "the task is actually more daunting than it may first appear but success in this area would lead to better research, better policy, and better universities."

As a way of analysing the characteristic features of the new paradigm that is currently emerging, the following discussion draws upon the experience of five key examples of innovative policy research-related activity. These examples illustrate both the challenges and possibilities for universities to play an enhanced role on the policy research landscape in Canada.

After providing brief descriptions of each example of innovation, this report then incorporates specific insights from them in the subsequent discussion of people, process, and structure.

### III) Examples of Innovation within the Emerging Paradigm

#### i) The Data Liberation Initiative

Launched by the Social Science Federation of Canada in 1990, the Data Liberation Initiative proposed a new framework for access to Statistics Canada data for research purposes. The established framework had called for a cost-recovery approach in which data files were sold to individual researchers. The main result was that Statistics Canada files were not used as extensively as warranted especially within universities. For example, most students in Canada still learned research methods using data from the United States (often available for free). In

turn, Statistics Canada had difficulty pricing their "products" since the "market" could often not be predetermined.

The new DLI framework proposed a system of institutional subscription to Statistics Canada files for universities as well as government departments. In this approach, each university pays an annual subscription for access to all Statistics Canada data for all professors and students. The result is enormously enhanced access for all university researchers in Canada, and financial stability for Statistics Canada in terms of the research market.

The key challenge in getting approval for the DLI was to achieve horizontal collaboration ranging from Statistics Canada to various government departments to the universities. Indeed, it took four years of intensive activity involving working groups, lobbying, and personal intervention (organized by the Data Liberation Army supported by the Social Science Federation and Statistics Canada) before all the different groups committed themselves financially to the new structure.

Now that the data have been "liberated," the impact on research in Canada has been dramatic. One illustration is the fact that, as a result, university students in research methods courses in 1998 are now characteristically learning by using Canadian data.

#### ii) The Community Research and Information Crossroads Project

Based on the Dutch "Science Shops," the Community Research and Information Crossroads Project proposed a new way to connect university campuses to their host communities. Developed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada in 1996, the CRICs proposal called for the establishment of centers in which community groups and researchers would come together to explore research topics of mutual concern and for their mutual benefit. In ways somewhat analogous to "tech transfer" for the sciences and engineering, the CRICs project was designed to promote interaction among professors, students, and community groups in keeping with the metaphor of "crossroads."

In October 1998, the CRICs proposal was approved for funding as a new and unprecedented research pilot program at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Re-titled as "The Community University Research Alliances," SSHRCC is seeking to put the "expertise of university researchers in easier reach of community needs." The program anticipates that "teams of professor and students plus teams of practitioners and decision-

makers from the community will jointly define research, training and dissemination activities." SSHRCC expects to receive applications in research areas such as youth, poverty, social justice, culture and the arts, population aging, sustainable development, religion and society. The anticipated results of the CURA projects include "theoretical and practical knowledge of benefit to researchers and communities, unique learning opportunities and improved employment prospects for students, [and] ongoing collaboration between universities and the communities they serve."

### iii) Eco-Research Strategic Programme

Developed in the mid-1980s and launched as a Tri-Council Initiative (NSERC, MRC, and SSHRCC) and as a Strategic Theme of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Eco-Research Programme supported multi-disciplinary and multi-centred research projects designed to advance our understanding of key environmental issues in Canada. The philosophical underpinnings of the initiative rested on the conviction that questions of the environment inevitably cross disciplinary boundaries and, indeed, intersect all fields of knowledge.

One illustration of this programme was the Eco-Research Project based at Memorial University under the leadership of Rosemary Ommen, Gregory Kealey and other scholars interested in fish, fishers, and rural communities. This project brought together diverse scholars ranging from natural scientists (such as biologists and marine scientists) to social scientists (such as anthropologists and historians). The project sought to integrate the research results and perspectives of these different scholars in order to provide a firm evidentiary base upon which the severe social, economic, cultural and political challenges of many rural Newfoundland communities could be addressed. In this sense, the project aimed to link research results to policy debate, and thereby to enhance the prospects of those affected by the changing fish economy.

Although designed with policy implications in mind, the Tri-Council Eco-Research Programme did not include in its structure effective ways to actually link research results to the policy-making process. Some effort was made by researchers to bring their results to the attention of those involved with policy but such efforts were ad hoc, and not part of a systematic strategy to take part in policy debate. Similarly, policymakers did not put effective mechanisms in place in order to tap into the research results of the various eco-research projects. In this sense, the 'research receptor capacity' of the policymaking

process was very low. By the mid-1990s, it was clear that the research results of the Eco-Research initiative were not easily crossing the bridge from the campus to the implementation of policies, practices and services in Canadian communities. In this sense, observers note that, although "projects such as the Tricouncil EcoResearch programme do a lot to break down old divisions," they also reveal the complexity of horizontal collaboration and interaction.

#### iv) Metropolis

Developed in the early 1990s and now well-established, the Metropolis project in Canada is part of an international research initiative focussed on the social, economic and cultural aspects of immigration, and the needs of immigrants in education, housing and health care. Metropolis includes four centres of excellence in Canada involving fifteen universities and one research institute.

This project is innovative in the social sciences in two significant ways: its multi-disciplinary, comparative, and multi-centred approach; and its determination to make sure that the research results are used to improve the immigrant experience by way of better policies and services. A key strategy of Metropolis involves the active role of community groups throughout the research process. Not only do researchers collaborate with community representatives in defining research questions but also they also work together to review research proposals. Similarly, the project calls for direct interaction between researchers and policymakers in an effort to ensure that the impact of Metropolis is felt in political debate and in the bureaucracy.

It is also noteworthy that the Metropolis project is attempting to contribute to public debate about immigration issues through the media including radio and television. For example, Metropolis researchers are contributing to a radio series diffused in Ontario, and are frequently interviewed by both the local and national press.

#### v) Breakfasts-on-the-Hill

In 1993, the Social Science Federation of Canada (now part of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada) developed the "Breakfast on the Hill" series as an innovative way to bridge policymaking and the research frontier. Each "Breakfast" begins at 8am on Parliament Hill (usually in the Parliamentary Restaurant) with a 45-minute presentation by a leading Canadian scholar. Each presentation seeks to provide an

overview of the latest research questions and findings within a specific field of inquiry that is related to a topic of current political debate. Following the presentation is a 45-minute discussion period during which those in attendance ask questions, make comments, and analyse the policy implications of the researcher's overview.

In developing the Breakfasts-on-the-Hill series, the Federation anticipated that perhaps twenty-five civil servants and politicians could be attracted to this kind of event. In fact, the series has consistently drawn over one hundred individuals including dozens of MPs, Senators, and senior civil servants. Speakers have addressed topics such as youth and violence; ethics and the new reproductive technologies; the meaning and consequences of an aging population; cultural policy; and aboriginal issues.

In order to build on the success of the Breakfasts-on-the-Hill series, the Federation has now added a second "breakfast" meeting the morning following the main event. At this second meeting, the invited scholar engages those civil servants involved specifically in policymaking activities in order to pursue detailed questions and challenges. These closed-door working sessions (usually including about a dozen individuals) offer the opportunity for direct interaction between a leading researcher and the key participants in the policy process

#### IV) Current University Research Capacity in Canada

The appropriate point of departure for analyzing the role of universities in policy research is the question of larger question of the current state of Canadian higher education. This question is important in light of the decreasing research capacity of the federal government (with the exception of those such as the labour economics group at HRD). Government departments are increasingly looking to universities, and thus it is essential to examine what they will find at the present time.

Specifically, both official policy debate and public discussion have been examining three fundamental questions during the 1990s:

- Who should go to university?
- Why should they go? and
- Who should pay?

Although no consensus has been reached on the answer to any of these questions, the contours of the debate and their

implications for the policy research landscape can be summarized in the following ways:

1) Who should go to university?

At one end of the spectrum, proponents have suggested that universities should be now considered extensions of provincial school systems. In other words, while most youths a century ago finished their formal schooling after the elementary years, and those of later decades after high school, the young adults of today should be expected to continue into universities. This view emphasizes the historic pattern of longer and longer school attendance in light of the changing social and economic demands of developed countries like Canada.

At the other end of the spectrum, some opinion leaders have argued that universities should have a much more limited role in society. Rather than expecting increasing proportions of high school graduates to seek admission for diverse educational reasons, universities should focus on the education and training of a minority of students especially in specialized high-tech and professional fields.

At the moment, the most characteristic answer to the question of university attendance involves a profound contradiction. Public opinion surveys as well as actual admission patterns indicate that there is widespread support among parents and young adults for university education as a common step after high school. In contrast, however, official policies have decreased funding for universities, and have encouraged young adults to consider other post-secondary options especially community colleges. The result in universities has been an increasingly unfavourable professor-student ratio, and a deteriorating research environment particularly in certain fields. Federal programs, especially the Canada Foundation for Innovation, are improving the research infrastructure of the natural sciences, engineering and the bio-medical fields but, elsewhere in the university, most indicators suggest that research capacity is deteriorating.

Implications for the policy research question: Since universities are currently struggling to come to grips with enrollment pressures and declining official support, some informants wonder about the current research capacity of Canadian universities especially in fields connected to social, cultural, economic, and political questions.

2) Why should individuals attend university?

At the risk of considerable simplification, the debate on this question can be summarized in terms of a single issue: the link between universities and the job market. Is the primary role of universities to prepare students for the job market? Those who agree emphasize the need for universities to offer appropriate training so that students can respond directly upon graduation to the needs of employers. Those who disagree stress the importance of university in terms of an education that provides general and long-term competencies for diverse reasons including citizenship and critical thinking as well as employability.

Implications for the policy research question: If the role of universities is to train students for employment, informants emphasize that it is less likely that questions of public policy would be an important focus of the curriculum or research activity. On the other hand, an explicit emphasis on general education might similarly work against serious consideration of contemporary policy issues. Thus, informants indicate that the most favourable (with respect to policy research) justification for university attendance would be a combination of both short-term employment-related objectives, and longer-term general educational objectives. Informants are not sure if and when such a balance will be reached.

### 3) Who should pay for university attendance?

Until recently, Canadian university attendance has been primarily (roughly four-fifths) financed by public funds. The underpinning philosophy defined such attendance in terms of the public good. However, both popular opinion and official policy has been moving toward a view of university attendance as an individual benefit. Thus, students are now being required to pay an increasing proportion of the cost of their education based on the assumption of their greater career earnings. In certain fields (e.g. medicine), the link between individual benefit and university attendance is considered to be very close (and therefore, students are being increasingly required to pay all or most of the cost) while in other fields (e.g. the humanities), the link is still considered weak and thus tuition remains a much smaller part of the actual cost.

Moreover, universities are being encouraged to attract an increasing proportion of their financing from the private sector. Especially by way of partnerships with industry, universities are developing new relationships affecting both teaching and research. In general, these relationships are designed to respond to the needs of the private sector.

Implications for the policy research question: The question of the financing of universities is significant since policy research involves the "public" rather than the "individual," and involves the possibility of social benefits more than individual benefits. Informants suggest that a concern with the individual (as potential employees) and the private sector (industry partners) may discourage universities from focusing on the social and the public.

#### V) Policy Research and the Academic Community

This section of the report analyses policy research and the academic community by focusing on three themes: people, process, and structure.

##### i) People

The established strength of universities is their ability to educate individual students within single programs each working on his or her own well-focused topic. In other words, in terms of the people involved, two key characteristics of the university research landscape are individualism and disciplinary specialization. Indeed, the entire Canadian educational system encourages the development of an individual identity within a specific discipline.

##### a) Disciplinary focus:

Since at least the 1960s, the importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarship has been repeatedly emphasized. In practice, however, the metaphor of an educational pyramid (in which specialization increases with educational level) remains the dominant image of university curricula. With some noteworthy exceptions, vertical structures still characterize university organization. The exceptions include interdisciplinary programs especially area studies and collaborative graduate programs (such as in Ontario). Although such efforts have met with some success, they remain exceptions and are associated with certain difficulties. For example, graduates of area studies programs are often discriminated against if they attempt to pursue their studies within disciplines (for example, a student with a baccalaureat in Canadian Studies would have difficulty gaining direct admission to study Canadian sociology in a Master's program in Sociology). Similarly, there has been some tendency for programs that were initially developed from an interdisciplinary (horizontal) perspective to turn into (vertical) disciplines of their own.

The current university environment works against multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary activity in a wide variety of other ways. Financial pressures can make disciplinary departments reluctant to encourage students to take courses elsewhere since the number of course registrations in disciplines has become a key "performance indicator". As one informant emphasized, "clearly, university structures interfere with it [interdisciplinarity] as Departments are extremely jealous of their resources in the current economic climate.

Similarly, mobility among professors who might be academically well-positioned to participate in more than one discipline is rarely facilitated (only a small minority of professors are cross-appointed) since their salaries and career evaluations are usually departmentally based.

Implications for the policy research question: For various theoretical and practical reasons, universities are not only vertically structured according to discipline but also, and despite various exceptional efforts, the current trends do not suggest that these structures will change soon. Thus, while informants consistently emphasize the increasing requirement for multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary approaches to policy research, such approaches need to develop ways to overcome current structural obstacles in universities. Valuable examples of such approaches include the Eco-Research Programme and Metropolis.

b) Individual research, team research, multi-center research

Individualism is the dominant characteristic of the student experience. Despite the significant movement to promote teamwork and collective research, students are still identified as individuals and are characteristically evaluated as such.

Across the campus, the relative importance of individualism varies significantly. In the natural sciences, engineering and bio-medical fields, most graduate students work within larger research projects and almost always publish co-authored works. While students in some disciplines in the social sciences and humanities share this experience, most students in the liberal arts see their research topics as their "turf" and they are not encouraged to work in collaboration with others.

Despite these disciplinary differences, however, students are characteristically encouraged to see themselves as individuals, and only in certain fields (such as MBA programs) are they given much chance to work in teams either within the

campus or with outside partners. Students have individual thesis topics and defend their work as individuals (very, very few co-authored theses, for example). Moreover, students are given little formal help in learning how to interact with others especially those outside the campus such as government agencies or community groups.

Similarly, universities do not provide students with curriculum material on managing collaborative relationships. As a result, students and professors who do begin working with community groups, for example, are not always well-equipped to play an effective role in the relationship. Informants remark that researchers generally think they go into the community with expertise; in contrast, community groups worry that researchers come with preconceived ideas unrelated to the community.

Implications for the Policy Research Question: More more attention needs to be paid to the complexities of the horizontal collaboration inherent in scholars from different disciplines working together with those from other universities and from community groups or outside agencies. In particular, this attention needs to be built into the curriculum (especially at the graduate level) and into the work of offices of Research Services in universities. A great deal about these complexities can be learned from the experiences of the Eco-Research Programme, Metropolis, and the reports prepared for the Community Research and Information Crossroads Project.

#### ii) Processes:

Within the contemporary university, it is widely acknowledged that the image of an "ivory tower" is mythical. Academics are, themselves, members of the larger society, and what they choose to study and how they do so, is inevitably affected by social trends and public debate. Indeed, research in the sociology of knowledge consistently emphasizes the connection between scholarship and society; for example, the new fields of women's studies and ethnic studies clearly reflect larger social phenomena.

At the same time, it is also widely recognized that the connection between the campus and the larger community is not direct or simple. In fact, universities do have specificities that define them in distinct ways. With respect to policy research, two of the most important of these specificities involve temporality and knowledge synthesis.

#### a) Temporality:

One key distinction between university researchers and those outside the campus is that academics tend to be interested in longer time-frames while those outside tend to focus on short time-frames. For scholars, an historical perspective usually goes back centuries if not millenia; in contrast, public debate is rarely situated in a context older than a year or two. Similarly, scholars are often more comfortable analysing the next century than they are predicting the next six months. In contrast, policy-makers feel the need to act now to address issues of immediate concern. These two distinct senses of time have a major impact on the role of academics in policy research.

One scholar explained that "university faculty, while willing to engage in a process by which they survey the past, current and future public policy issues and generate scholarly papers and technical reports on the successes or failures of past and current government policy and propose a theoretical and practical basis for proposing future policy directions, are not usually willing to engage in research that has a short time horizon (for them) and that addresses pressing policy needs of public decision-makers."

Part of the reluctance of scholars to focus on policy research relevant to the immediate future is based on the real difficulties of a forward-looking orientation. One major difficulty is illustrated by the recent attempts to predict social and economic trends based on demographic extrapolations. The enormous popularity of books such as Boom, Bust and Echo is based on the apparent certainty of predictions based on our aging population. However, demographic structure has meaning within a cultural context - and cultural patterns can change quickly (which is why, of course, that Malthus' dire predictions were wrong). So, for example, golf may well become increasingly popular but only if current cultural choices continue to characterize our society (and the past indicates that it is highly unlikely that they will do so). For such reasons, policy research that is relevant to the immediate future is exceedingly difficult and provisional; the implications for policy-making are rarely straightforward.

The reluctance of scholars to focus on specific immediate issues of policy concern is practical as well as substantive. Since the topics and interests of policy debate are volatile and rarely endure for long, scholars are cautious about investing themselves in an area that may quickly drop off the public agenda. As one researcher explained, "policy work can be transitory and have a 'flavour of the month' character which means individual researchers can face high costs in tooling up to deal with a new policy issue."

It should also be emphasized, however, that the significant distance between the topics of scholarly research and the subjects of policy debate can, in fact, be very helpful to the policy-making process. Since researchers largely define their own projects, their work often anticipates questions of public policy. For example, researchers had begun developing the fields of gay and lesbian studies long before policy makers began overhauling the established approach to homosexuality.

In this sense, informants stress the importance of keeping the research frontier ahead of policy debate. If researchers are simply encouraged to react to public debate, their work will inevitably be "too late" whereas if they are supported in pursuing questions that they deem to be important (and which inevitably arise out of the larger society in which the researchers live), it is more likely that policy-makers will always be able to quickly draw upon an already established expertise.

b) Knowledge synthesis:

University researchers are often criticized for over-specialization and the fragmenting of knowledge. It is often said that there is not sufficient value placed within the academy on the synthesis and integration of knowledge as a way of generating new understanding about complex social and economic phenomena. However, as one informant explained, "it is somewhat inevitable that the focus of scholars is depth rather than breadth. It is incorrect to state that all or most university faculty are overly specialized. Many do have clearly identified research foci. But these foci are not isolated from the breadth of the discipline or the academy or the society."

In addition, informants point out that there are, indeed, some efforts made within universities to encourage knowledge synthesis. For example, a key step with doctoral programs is the comprehensive exam which is taken at the beginning of dissertation research. This exam is generally designed to oblige students to bring together the various parts of their knowledge into more general analyses of "big questions." Similarly, researchers are now developing the field of meta-analysis in which they systematically examine the reported data of disparate research projects in an attempt to arrive at overall conclusions.

Nonetheless, informants agree that, in general, there is, indeed, a scholarly bias against activities of synthesis. In fact, works of synthesis are characteristically placed quite low in the hierarchy of research activity. At the top of this hierarchy in many disciplines is the original research article reporting on a discrete topic, published in a peer-reviewed and

specialized scholarly journal. All other forms of research activity and dissemination are usually viewed as being second-class. "For instance," as one university leader remarked, "the much higher weight given to peer-reviewed journal articles compared to book chapters does not encourage, to my mind, the kind of building an interest in an area that is related to policy." Similarly, books have the highest status in many disciplines of the humanities (in history, for example) but elsewhere in the social sciences, for example, books have a much lower status than journal articles.

Since books usually synthesize various research results (often previously reported in scholarly journals), the scholarly bias against books in many disciplines helps undermine the policy research process. Indeed, there is an inverse relationship between the accessibility of reports of research results and their status on campuses. For example, journal articles (at the top of the scholarly hierarchy) can be very difficult to find especially for those outside of the university research environment. On the other hand, books (at the bottom of the scholarly hierarchy in the social sciences, natural sciences, engineering and the bio-medical fields) are often publicized by publishers and may be the object of book reviews in non-specialized publications including magazines and newspapers.

For these reasons, university leaders feel that the key issue of process with respect to the policy research landscape is less related to research conceptualization and actual research results than it is to the ways in which these research results connect, or more likely, do not connect to the policy process. Informants consistently stress that, currently, research results often remain unknown to policy-makers or are presented in ways that do not contribute to policy debate. Rarely is there an attempt to distill complex, and often competing, research findings into understandable, digestible and relevant implications for policy.

Indeed, little thought appears to have gone into developing effective strategies for communicating the potential policy implications of research to policy-makers. Although academic leaders generally believe that researchers should be encouraged to contribute research findings to the policy development process, the mechanisms for doing so are not yet in place in Canadian universities. Such mechanisms would be essential since, as one academic emphasized, "I don't think we can depend on researchers to be the best communicators of their research results."

For these reasons, one informant addressed the question, "Does the University community generate research for the purposes

of public policy development?" by replying, "The answer is YES. Are we effective in translating this policy in forms that are accessible to the public and to policy makers? Not entirely." It should be noted that this informant also explained that "the problem is not solely with the university" but also with those in the policy process who operate in a different "culture." Taken together, this informant observed, "government bureaucracies and universities have two very different cultures."

At the same time, it should also be noted that, within the emerging "horizontal" paradigm, the challenge of synthesis is seen quite differently from that in the "vertical" paradigm. In particular, scholars are now much more comfortable dealing with contradictions, ambiguity, fragmentation, unintended consequences, and other features of research results that now are central to scholarly debate (chaos theory, fuzzy logic, complexity studies, deconstructionism, etc.). In this sense, the work of synthesis must not be seen as the construction of a coherent, master narrative, in which all features of the research topic can be put together in a "logical" order appropriate for everyone. Similarly, of course, it is now recognized that policies must be flexible and complex in order to meet the needs of a highly-differentiated and diverse population.

#### Implications for the Policy Research Question:

At the present time, the policy research process is far from being smooth, coherent or effective. Special efforts are required by all those involved (both within and outside universities) to develop strategies and mechanisms to facilitate the horizontal connectedness required for an effective policy research process. Successful examples of such strategies and mechanisms include those used in the Data Liberation Initiative, the Breakfasts-on-the-Hill Series, Metropolis, and the new Community University Research Alliance pilot program.

#### iii) Structures

The vertical structures characteristic of the organization of universities (similar to the vertical organization of government) is based on distinctions among disciplines. University observers emphasize that the relationship between the different disciplines and the public policy process varies considerably. As one scholar noted, "whether or not university-based researchers devote attention to understanding and identifying societal trends and doing policy work depends largely on their specific discipline. One cannot expect sociologists and Latin scholars to be on the same field here."

On the other hand, it would be wrong to categorize certain disciplines as simply being disconnected from policy questions. For example, "it is possible for a scholar of poaching in 16th century England to draw on that scholarship to reflect on current practices of policing or homelessness." In this sense, the key factor is not the focus of the discipline but rather the willingness of those in the discipline to use their knowledge to the benefit of present-day debate.

Beyond the orientations of certain disciplines, therefore, is a larger attitudinal question. Many university leaders point to a tradition of scholarly criticism to explain why researchers do not play a more active role in the policy research process. In the words of one researcher, "humanities scholars would have to expand upon their traditional disposition to criticize and to embrace the opportunity to try and shape society and issues."

Interestingly, though, even in those fields usually considered to be quite active in policy research, there are structures working against the active participation of scholars in the policy process. For example as one observer noted, "in economics, the last 25 years has seen the policy role of economists weakened in part because the profession has made its reward structure focus on theoretical and technical work. Much of the policy work in economics is now being done by business economists or think tanks rather than university based researchers. The view of many university economists is that policy work is being done by 'lower level' people which disparages work that could contribute greatly to society."

Part of the explanation for the low ranking of policy-related activity within the hierarchy of scholarly work may involve the challenges of horizontal collaboration especially with those outside the academy. Since the vertical structure of disciplines as well as of the organization of external groups does not enhance collaboration, problems of vocabulary and language can become real barriers to effective interaction. As one scholar noted, "[collaborative] projects often require a team-based approach and many scholars may have difficulties dealing with those outside their own fields of specialization. As an example, I recently became involved in a regional sustainable development conference. My definition of sustainable regional development was quite different from that of the social workers involved."

Thus, despite the fact that an increasing number of scholars are interested in becoming part of the policy research process and are engaging in horizontal activities, structural obstacles often face them. As one observer concluded, "my experience with the policy research fund of Status of Women Canada is that

collaboration - in this case government, university and community based groups - is very difficult but very exciting."

In addition to problems of communication, horizontal collaboration can also raise questions of "objectivity" even in cases where the collaborators often work with each other. One university leader cites the example of the field of co-operative studies (research on credit unions, farm co-operatives, etc.); "co-op studies, by its nature, is usually tied into contemporary issues. It traditionally involves associations between academe and the co-operative sector, typically on issues of mutual interest. To my knowledge, no major request for support from the federations from co-operatives studies people has ever been funded. The only criticisms that have been raised have been that the proposals are too close to the sector, meaning, one suspects, that the fear is that impartiality is lost. I suspect that is a common problem when researchers try to get support for partnerships and if we really mean what is said that kind of criticism needs to be thought through more carefully."

University leaders also emphasize that not all institutions have the same structural relationship to the larger society. For example, "At Ryerson there is a strong commitment by scholars to involve researchers from outside of the university, especially in policy related research focusing on children and the family, social services, health care, and urban vitality. Ryerson's applied research and education tradition has promoted such integration with the community. At more traditional universities, the undervaluing of research and non-traditional forms of dissemination discourages this involvement."

In addition, different provincial policies affect the extent to which scholars become engaged across institutional structures. The most noteworthy force in favour of horizontal collaboration is Quebec's Fonds pour la formation des chercheurs et l'avancement de la recherche (FCAR). This research funding agency encourages team research (especially across disciplines) and the development of partnerships between university scholars and those outside the campus. At least partially as a result of this encouragement, Quebec university researchers are more active in the policy research process than scholars in other parts of Canada.

#### Implications for the Policy Research Question:

The conventional structures within which university researchers work do not favour their participation in the policy research process (with the partial exception of those in Quebec and in certain universities). Horizontal networking and interaction is encouraged in theory but often discouraged in

practice. The identity structures, reward structures, and the hierarchical structure of scholarly activity do not enhance the role of university scholars in policy research. However, the success of the innovative projects such as Metropolis and the enormous potential of new programs such as the Community University Research Alliance indicate that structural change is underway, and that the new horizontal paradigm is beginning to take shape.

#### Elements of an Action Plan:

Since the connection between research results and policy hinges on political debate, the challenge is not only to link research to policy development but also to connect research to public awareness; one connection will not work without the other. For this reason, ..

The synthesis and integration of knowledge needs to be more formally encouraged through special funding programs (such as those now taking place at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada).

In order to make partnerships effective, memos of understanding can be used to clarify from the start the expectations of each side in the relationship and to help manage its often complex components. Templates for such memos could be developed by the federal funding agencies who could also provide support to collaborators in finalizing such documents.

new paradigm= i.e. tri-council ethic policy

-new model= team-research, partners, multidisciplinary, and comparative [be careful of inventing a new orthodoxy]

receptor capacity= "capacity to connect with external players and communities"=NB=the word "connect" is very different from the word "receptor"= Need to shift the paradigm;

The well-established tradition in which small numbers of researchers spend time working in government departments must be complemented by programs in which policy-makers come to the campus.

The new information technologies can and must be used to enhance horizontal collaboration. For examples, listservs can effectively

maintain ongoing communication among researchers and policy-makers interested in a specific policy/research topic.

Regular informal, off-the-record meetings (quarterly?) could be held to offer researchers and policy-makers the opportunity to engage in risk-free debate about key questions of the policy research process.

While the research capacity of government has decreased substantially during the past decade, it must also be acknowledged that, at the same time, the research capacity of universities has deteriorated especially in the social sciences and humanities which do not benefit meaningfully from the new programs such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation. Thus, if the participation of university researchers in the policy research process is to increase, additional funding must be provided since the current weak infrastructural support encourages the old model of single researchers doing the best they can with very modest means within their own disciplines.

The development of innovative funding programs such as the Community University Research Alliance should be encouraged and extended as quickly as possible. As one informant recommended, "more effort should be made to develop relatively open networks of scholars, with some minimal level of support, to address policy research initiatives. SSHRC's RDI, Strategic Grants and Partnerships, and proposed CURAs could form a critical basis for encouraging policy-related research. Federal government departments could encourage and support such research by providing an extramural grants and contracts program (some departments retain the remnants of earlier research programs.) These programs do not necessarily need to be adjudicated through SSHRC but should have adequate peer review."

Senior academic administrators should be congratulated on efforts to encourage the exchange of ideas (e.g., L'Université d'Ottawa Conference sur les frontières de la recherche, Le 12 novembre 1998). These fora are too infrequent.

"I think the best way to encourage broad syntheses would be for the funding agencies each year to select a major, obviously important theme that would be the subject of a highly publicized event, involving the most distinguished of our colleagues, politicians, journalists and other opinion leaders. It would be developed so as to showcase our abilities and perhaps structured in such a way as to make major policy recommendations. To some extent, the Royal Society does this but one has to wonder at the impact. I wonder though why a carefully orchestrated approach, involving the CBC, national media, universities, private organizations and governments would not achieve results.

"It would be useful to have an inventory of policy and applied researchers which government and other groups wanting to do policy work could use to assemble "policy teams" to quickly provide advice on policy problems. In the longer term, such an inventory could be used to select researchers to do more detailed and comprehensive studies. The management of such an inventory of expertise for humanities and social science research could be under the auspices of the SSHRC or even the HSSFC. For these organizations, such an inventory could even be a source of revenue generation. For example, the HSSFC has already compiled a list of researchers working in various fields as part of its Challenge/Defi 98 project. Suppose a municipality needed policy work done on how to improve its downtown core or a provincial government wanted its welfare system independently reviewed. A team of respected scholars working on these types of topic could be assembled from the inventory with the financial aspects handled via the coordinating organization. This is a possibility that should be explored."

"The dispersed nature of research expertise:  
The modern university is a repository of tremendous human capital, expertise and analytical skill. However, that knowledge is spread out across many campuses and very often people seeking policy work may not even be aware of it. Some type of coordinating mechanism is also required to reduce the transactions costs of accessing policy researchers."

"There should be special recognition at the Learned's each year for academics who have had a significant impact on public policy delivered at the annual meeting of the appropriate society."

Similarly, researchers have considerable difficulty identifying who in government is working on specific policy questions at any one point in time. Thus, a complementary inventory of government participants in the policy process would be very useful to university researchers interested in contributing their own research results.