

Never Too Early to Start: Training Graduate Students for Policy Work

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Research can be used to develop empirically informed policy solutions to our most pressing public problems. However, research is all too often left out of the public policymaking conversation. Researchers can change this, by learning how to engage and collaborate with policymakers. In this article, we present and adapt a conceptual framework from the field of community psychology—Kelly’s (1971) “Qualities for a Community Psychologist”—to provide insight into training graduate students for policy engagement.

Public Policy Relevance Statement

Public policy can and should be informed by the most up-to-date, relevant social science research. To help ensure science informs public policy, researchers should be trained in how to engage with policymakers. This article provides a framework for training graduate students for policy engagement.

Public policy refers to what a government does or does not do in response to a presented public problem and can be thought of as a problem-solving, or perhaps more appropriately, problem-responding enterprise (Birkland, 2015). Research can be particularly useful in designing responses to social problems by describing the scope and nuance of a problem, exploring what contributes to or mitigates the problem, and even explaining the cause and effect of the problem. This information can be used to develop empirically informed strategies and solutions that have a greater chance of successfully preventing or lessening the impact of the problem as presented.

However, producing insightful research does not guarantee its use in public policy. Too often, good science sits collecting dust and is never introduced into public policymaking conversations. This can happen for myriad reasons. In the most traditional form of the science-practice gap, policymakers may not know the research exists, or may not fully understand its implications and applications (Gupta, 2011; Kazdin, 2008; Rogers, 2003; Saul et al., 2008; Wandersman, 2003). Of course, this is due in part to researchers, who all too often lack critical skills in communicating to and with policymakers about their research. Even when policymakers are aware that there may be research evidence on a given topic, they may not have the time or resources to cull the research prior to making a policy decision (Gupta, 2011; Rogers, 2003; Weiss, 1973). As Weiss (1973) explained it, policymakers “want to make a record before the next election. . . [and] when decisions on funding levels have to be made within twelve months, there is little time to gather evidence” (p. 99).

Assuming policymakers are not up against such knowledge, analytical, or time constraints (Gupta, 2011), they may face

cultural or ideological constraints; they may believe the research is not applicable to their context, or that the suggested changes do not align with dominant cultural values (Bishop, Vicary, Browne, & Guard, 2009; Gupta, 2011; Kazdin, 2008; Miller & Shinn, 2005; Nelson, 2013; Rogers, 2003; Wandersman, 2003; Weiss, 1973). Policymakers may also face legal, political, or institutional constraints as they anticipate legal challenges in implementing the changes suggested by the research, worry that acting on the research will alienate some of their constituents, or are concerned that recommended changes will put too much strain on existing partnerships (Bishop et al., 2009; Gupta, 2011; Wandersman, 2003; Weiss, 1973). As Weiss (1973) reminded us, policies are “proposed, defined, debated, enacted, and funded through political processes” and thus “remain subject to pressures—both supportive and hostile—that arise out of the play of politics” (p. 94). Additionally, policymakers may face financial or economic constraints as they may not be convinced that the benefits of implementing recommended changes justify the associated cost (Gupta, 2011; Wandersman, 2003; Weiss, 1973). And, in the end, policymakers may just have more pressing

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matters that demand their attention (Miller & Shinn, 2005; Weiss, 1973).

To address these barriers and promote the use of research in the public policy process, a burgeoning literature on the use of research evidence underscores the importance of facilitating research evidence use through intentional and structured engagement among researchers and the intended users of the research findings (e.g., see Langer, Tripney, & Gough, 2016). In the public policy enterprise, this means that researchers must learn how to work collaboratively with policymakers. In this article, we propose that researchers do not delay, and begin to learn how to engage policymakers early on in their career—in graduate school.

The Role of Graduate Students in Facilitating the Use of Research in Public Policy

Researchers may choose to engage in policy work in many different ways, as such efforts vary in nature and scale. This can include developing research agendas based on policymakers' explicit informational needs, or developing research agendas that speak to important policy issues and conversations, even when policymakers have not (yet) explicitly identified the gap in knowledge as an informational need. Policy work also includes getting a seat at the table with policymakers to help ensure science and research, whether produced by you or others, play a role in the policy development and decision-making process. This may involve active outreach and deliberate dissemination of research findings to policymakers, as well as engaging with policymakers to ensure they understand the implications of research findings and how to use them. Finally, policy work can include advocacy and organizing efforts. Public policy refers to what a government does or does not do in response to a presented public problem. Thus, policy work frequently requires working with other individuals and groups to develop an organized plan for bringing a particular problem, opportunity, or solution into public policy conversations.

Graduate students may be hesitant to engage in such policy work, as they believe they are not yet ready for it. They may think they are not qualified or do not have nearly enough experience to make a meaningful contribution to the public policymaking process, and the faculty training and supporting

them may agree. Such hesitation may be justified. Although some graduate students receive formal, programmatic training in policy work or have the opportunity to train with specific faculty members already engaged in policy work, many graduate students receive no such training or exposure. When students fall into the latter category, we must consider how graduate training can be improved to ready students for engagement in policy work. Fortunately, we do not have to craft approaches and strategies for training graduate students for policy work from scratch. We can turn to disciplines and programs already engaged in this work, then adapt and adopt their promising processes.

One such discipline that can provide insight into training graduate students for policy work is community psychology. Community psychology focuses on promoting individual and community betterment by developing a critical understanding of how individuals, communities, systems, and social structures relate to one another in context and by engaging with communities to develop and implement empirically informed strategies and solutions that are responsive to communities' most pressing problems and that help support individuals and communities to reach their full potential (see Bond, Serrano-Garcia, & Keys, 2017; Kelly, 2006; Trickett, 2009; Trickett, Kelly, & Vincent, 1985). The field of community psychology can provide tools for training graduate students for policy work because community psychologists frequently engage in policy work themselves (e.g., see Maton, 2017). In addition, the field of community psychology places a great emphasis not just on what is done, but how it is done (see Kelly, 1979; Trickett, 2009, 2011). This perspective, that "the process of our work is as fully important as the content," means that the field of community psychology has developed and made available many models, frameworks, and tools focused on how we engage with communities (Kelly, 1979, p. 245). Though many of these models and frameworks were not designed specifically for engaging with policymakers, they can be readily adapted to training for, and engaging in, policy work.

A Framework for Training Graduate Students for Policy Work

James G. Kelly helped establish the field of community psychology, and in 1971, he

introduced "Qualities for a Community Psychologist." Kelly wrote this piece early in the emergence of the field of community psychology to offer possible definitions and distinguishing features of this new area of inquiry within psychology. Kelly presented a set of guiding principles, or key qualities, that define the community psychologist, and that "can make a difference in how the community psychologist behaves in carrying out community work" (p. 897). Kelly's seven qualities for the community psychologist were not initially intended to guide community psychologists' work in the policy arena. However, they can be revisited, reconsidered, and adapted to inform our conceptual thinking about how to train scholars—at all stages of their careers—for policy work. Indeed, the three authors of this article are trained as community psychologists, and though we are at different places in our professional careers today (i.e., Feeney is a graduate student, Shaw is an early career researcher/professor, and Campbell is an advanced career researcher/professor), we each began policy work while in graduate school and have found these qualities to be helpful in developing our skills in policy work. As such, we believe these qualities can provide a useful framework for supporting training in policy engagement. To demonstrate how these qualities can be applied to preparing graduate students for policy work, we present each one, along with an example of how it might be integrated into graduate school training. We then present a specific case study example of our own experience training for and engaging in policy work, highlighting aspects therein that relate to the qualities discussed here. In so doing, we hope to present and illustrate an application of a framework for how to train scholars for engagement in policy work, starting in graduate school.

A Clearly Identified Competence

Community work most often entails responding to and developing solutions for community problems. To solve such problems, it is necessary to have a recognizable competence. As Kelly (1971) explained it, you "must do at least one thing clearly and well" (p. 899). Kelly was not overly prescriptive in defining what the competence may be—one may "be able to be therapeutic with individuals, organize a community ser-

vice, study a complex social problem, or create a community for others” (p. 899). The point is that one must acquire and be able to execute well a technical skill or competence that is of value to a community. Once a competence has been clearly identified, one can seek out settings in which that competence can be put to use, share that competence with the new setting, and begin working to develop new ones. Kelly introduced this quality first as it is the quality upon which all others are built. Put simply, you must have something to contribute to a community if you are to pursue community work.

Graduate students’ hesitancy in pursuing policy work is likely due in part to their concern that they do not have the necessary qualifications or competences to contribute. Kelly reminded us, though, that to engage in communities, we do not need a plethora of competencies and expansive expertise when we first embark. Rather, we can start with one clearly identified competence and build from there. To begin policy work, it is not necessary to be an expert in policy making, but it is necessary to be an expert in something that will contribute to the policymaking process. In preparing graduate students for policy work, it is critical to help them identify and develop a competence, and learn how to describe it in a way that appeals to policymakers without relying upon academic jargon. For example, one competence that many graduate students learn to master, or have already mastered, is an ability to synthesize an abundance of information and provide the key takeaways. Although this is a necessary skill for graduate students to develop throughout their studies, this is an invaluable competence for policymakers who do not have access to, or the time or skill to comb through, hundreds of datum. A graduate student who can relatively quickly and systematically scan an area of research or database and produce the key findings will likely be a welcomed addition to a policymaking conversation. Thus, one can present this competence to engage policymakers, and open up lines of communication for possible collaboration between a graduate student and policymakers. Indeed, all three authors of this article—Shaw, Feeney, and Campbell—frequently present this as a key competence when entering a new community and attempting to build new relationships. We frequently explain that we produce information in a systematic, stream-

lined way that can aid in critical decision making to improve policy and practice: “If you only knew X, then you could Y. What is the X? What information do you need to know to make your job more efficient or more effective? That is what I do—I bring X to the conversation.” We must help graduate students to clearly identify their competence(s) and how to succinctly and clearly explain them to policymakers.

Creating an Eco Identity

Successful community work depends on knowing the community itself and establishing an identity within it. To do this, one must learn who the key players are in the community and where the key spaces are in the community. One must also learn about specific subcommunities within the larger community, politics, and resources that govern community processes, and how all these elements relate to one another. Only in understanding the history, intricacies, nuance, and interrelatedness of a community and its component parts will one be in a position to understand and attend to community problems. According to Kelly (1971), our direct engagement and professional role within communities defines who we are, and establishes our identity within a given community—our eco identity—allowing us to “move about easily . . . see the locale from various perspectives,” and “accelerate the type of involvement” we have in communities to diagnose and respond to community problems (p. 899).

Kelly posited that it is critical to know key community players, spaces, groups, and processes to engage in community work. For policy work, then, is it critical to know key policy players, spaces, groups, and processes. Thus, to prepare graduate students for policy work, it is important to provide them opportunities to interact with and establish an eco identity among policy players, spaces, and groups (i.e., policy settings) relevant to their phenomenon of interest. Graduate students may not know how to even begin making the necessary contacts to learn about their policy setting. Thus, providing students the opportunity to interact with and establish an eco identity in their policy setting also requires providing students with some instruction or mentorship on how to engage key players, spaces, and groups, and a venue to discuss their successes and challenges. Such opportunity, instruction, and

discussion space can be provided in a formal way, perhaps in the form of a semester-long or year-long practicum in which students are instructed to learn about their phenomenon of interest in the local policy setting, develop a project in collaboration with a local partner, and come together to discuss their process. For example, each of the authors completed a year-long practicum in the first year of their graduate program, in which the first semester was specifically dedicated to going out and learning about their substantive area of interest in their new community. With this approach, we were able to spend an entire semester learning about the key players and organizations, current initiatives, historical context, and nuances unique to our setting. Emphasizing the process of getting to know a setting before focusing on the development of a particular project and product underscored how the former is just as critical as the latter. Importantly, we all feel that this approach has helped us gain critical experience and skills related to making entry into new settings that we have since drawn upon later in our careers (e.g., when Shaw started a new faculty position in a different part of the country). Of course, such opportunity, instruction, and discussion space alternatively could be provided on a more individual basis, as faculty advisors supervise their individual advisees in this process. We must provide formal or more ad hoc opportunities, instruction, and discussion space for exploration of the local policy setting for students’ phenomena of interest.

Engage Diversity

Kelly (1971) used the word *diversity* to refer to diversity in ideas, perspectives, and resources, rather than diversity within and between individuals on the basis of aspects of their group identity (e.g., race, age, gender).¹ He elaborated on differences in perspectives by noting that you are likely “to meet many variations in how people express kindness and how they respond to strife” and how “persons cope with tragedy, how they confront social inequities, initiate legal

¹In “Qualities for the Community Psychologist,” Kelly (1971) termed this quality, *tolerance for diversity*. Since this article was published, conversations related to diversity have evolved, moving away from “tolerating” diversity, to celebrating and engaging it. We have changed the label for this quality accordingly.

action, and celebrate good times” (Kelly, 1971, p. 900). These varied ideas, perspectives, responses, and use of resources may appear contradictory or inconsistent. Kelly maintained, though, that it is critical to grapple with such inconsistencies; to allow them to coexist; to search actively for the historical and social contextual elements that contributed to such differences; and to explore how these different perspectives may impact the community moving forward. By committing to the axiom that “there is something valid in each example, yet something incomplete in all of them,” it is possible to use the diversity in ideas, perspectives, responses, and resources to develop and implement effective plans for the future (Kelly, 1971, p. 900).

In public policy, competing and contradictory perspectives abound. Graduate students who engage in policy work must learn how to operate in environments that bring together different disciplines with different ideas and approaches. It is important for graduate students who hope to engage in policy work to learn how to navigate complex and even adversarial spaces while remembering why they came so as to ensure research and science is a part of the policy-making process. To help prepare graduate students for success in policy work, they should be exposed to multidisciplinary settings in which different ideas, approaches, and values are presented and must be considered during decision-making processes. For example, if faculty serve on multidisciplinary committees, taskforces, or working groups outside of the academy, students could be given the opportunity to attend as observers. Prior to entering such spaces, faculty should brief students on emerging challenges, conflicts, or controversies, the perspectives that are most likely to compete with one another, and why. Afterward, faculty can debrief with students, discussing how the event transpired, climactic moments, what was said and what was intentionally not raised during conversations, and how the student might have conducted themselves were they participating in the process. Indeed, Campbell routinely uses this approach in training graduate students. Shaw and Feeney were or currently are such students, and have benefitted tremendously from such experiences as they were invited to observe meetings among policymakers and practitioners grappling with challenges related to system responses to sexual as-

sault. Graduate students must be exposed to settings in which participants share diverse and conflicting perspectives that require reconciliation during a decision-making process.

Coping Effectively With Varied Resources

To be effective in your community work, Kelly (1971) said that you must be able to strategize and make the most use of varied community perspectives and resources so as to minimize negative and maximize positive contributions to the community. No community is perfect. Each has its shortcomings and requires those who want to contribute to the good of the community to make do. One must be able to assess individuals in their natural settings, relate to them, consider the skills and talent they bring, and determine how such resources can be used most effectively. Kelly reminded us that we can “not be stopped by the defensiveness of persons” and that we must “recover from social slights, brush-offs, stalls, confrontations, flatteries, and payoffs, and keep going on to the location of talent” (p. 901). Just as critical in understanding the limitations of others and what they can contribute is knowing your own limitations and “when to call for help, when to request rest and rehabilitation, and when to disengage from combat” (Kelly, 1971, p. 901).

When first trying to gain entry into policy work, graduate students may be discouraged by the lack of response from policymakers. When phone calls and e-mails are not answered, graduate students may think they are not welcome or that those in the policy world do not care about or value the graduate student’s contribution enough to invite them in. This may be true. Alternatively, policymakers may have much more pressing matters that are consuming all of the policymakers’ available resources (i.e., time and energy). In training graduate students, it is important to help them understand that all individuals and agencies in the policy and practice world have limited resources. Furthermore, there are a limited number of individuals and agencies concerned with a specific substantive area (e.g., substance abuse) or population (e.g., crime victims) in any given community. As more initiatives are developed in response to a specific substantive area or population (e.g., a graduate student research project), the same agencies,

and often the same individual people, are called upon to participate, spreading their limited resources ever thinner. It is important for graduate students to learn alternative strategies for gaining entry into policy work so that do not rely too heavily on agencies or individuals that do not have the resources to spare. For example, if phone calls and e-mails go unanswered, graduate students could attend open meetings and public events to increase their visibility, become a fixture in the community, and eventually get connected to critical agencies and individuals. In addition, each of the authors has come early or stayed late at countless meetings to help set up chairs, pass out agendas, or pack up snacks as a way to demonstrate their commitment to an organization or initiative and its overall cause. This additional person-power is a light load to bear for the graduate student, but can make a substantial difference for relationship building and the daily operations of a community organization. Faculty should remind students that policy work is not a sprint, but a marathon, and one that sometimes involves helping make copies. It takes time to gain entry, to build relationships, and to influence policy change. We must help develop a repertoire of strategies for initiating and developing relationships with key individuals and agencies, and train them to consider routinely how varied resources among individuals and agencies will impact their level of engagement.

Commitment to Risk Taking

Risk taking, according to Kelly (1971), “refers to being an advocate for a real cause and helping the community move beyond its present steady state” (p. 901). This does not mean that one acts impulsively or on a whim, rather it indicates that he or she is willing to take a position on a controversial issue or to participate in community endeavors that might fail. Kelly recognized that risk taking “is particularly troublesome for most professionals,” as it means “putting aside the need achievement of the professional” in favor of participating in “community work when the rewards are indefinite and when there may be a loss of group affiliation when projects fail” (pp. 901–902).

Policy work sometimes involves taking positions on controversial issues or putting effort into a less-than-straightforward process that may fail and not produce any out-

put in the end. Thus, policy work has the potential to be troublesome at any stage in a professional's career, and perhaps even more so during graduate school as students must progress through their training programs in a timely fashion. The sometimes ambiguous nature of policy work may be a primary reason that graduate students shy away from it. To encourage graduate students to engage in policy work, we must put mechanisms and plans in place to help mitigate risk associated with partaking in sometimes ambiguous and less-than-straight forward processes. For example, when Shaw and Campbell were in discussion regarding Shaw pursuing policy work for her dissertation, Campbell made clear the risk in pursuing such a project, and assisted in developing contingency plans should specific components of the project, or the entire project, have become unviable at any time. Indeed, learning to identify potential pitfalls, risks, and obstacles in implementing policy-relevant, complex projects is an invaluable skill to learn early on in one's professional career as a researcher. We must train graduate students to identify potential pitfalls and risks, strategies for mitigating risks, and contingency plans for each research project they design or on which they work.

Metabolic Balance of Patience and Zeal

Being helpful to communities requires patience to pursue long-term goals, as well as zeal to achieve short-term objectives. Kelly (1971) explained that a metabolic balance between patience and zeal "is not simply a matter of being able to be fast or slow" (p. 902). A balance between patience for the pursuit of long-term goals, and zeal for accomplishing short-term objectives, requires an understanding of how different objectives and goals relate to one another, how to move from one to another, and which specific goals and objectives to focus on at any given time. This balance also requires an understanding of what types of resources are needed, and available, to attend to a problem at a particular time. Thus, "knowing when to mobilize and when to lay back" can be quite complex (Kelly, 1971, p. 902).

The metabolic balance between patience and zeal is particularly important when graduate students are attempting to gain entry into the policy arena for the purpose of research. In this context, gaining entry is

frequently seen as an obstacle that must be overcome as quickly as possible so that data collection can commence. However, gaining entry to a community, and the policymakers within it, is no easy feat. It is not a short-term objective that requires only enough ambition and a willingness to act, but instead it is more of a long-term goal that necessitates patience. The metabolic balance of patience and zeal, as Kelly (1971) reminded us, is much more than just the ability to go fast or slow, but knowing what to do, when, and why. In training graduate students, it is important to help them understand which aspects of their work require quick mobilization, which aspects call for patience, and which aspects could be done quickly but would benefit from a more patient approach. Indeed, you could be zealous and ask a policymaker if you can join his or her special taskforce the first time you meet, though chances of success would be slim. Thus, faculty should encourage graduate students to slow down, particularly as they develop a plan and their strategy for engagement in the policy arena. Graduate students can be trained in how to develop a timeline that maps out absolute deadlines, and then 'walks backward' to see when specific milestones must be met. Graduate students can then plan accordingly. Indeed, this is one reason that the authors advocate for integrating graduate students into the policy process early. Because Campbell introduced Feeney and Shaw to policy partners very early on in their graduate training, Feeney and Shaw were able to develop relationships with policymakers gradually (i.e., "patience"). Then, later on in their graduate careers, they felt comfortable advocating for unique research and policy opportunities as they arose in real time (i.e., "zeal") as our policy partners knew and trusted them from years working together. Students must be encouraged to slow down, and develop plans and strategic approaches that provide adequate time for tasks that necessitate patience, and that map onto important deadlines.

Giving Away the Byline

Kelly's (1971) final quality, giving away the byline, focused on what counts as success in community work. Kelly argued that we must "focus on the consequences of [the] work rather than the work itself" for "the criteria for success are not personal, but . . . refer to how work is received, what it con-

tributes to the locale, and how it leads to the evolution of the community" (p. 903). That is, it is not (only) the number of bylines one accumulates in the course of their community work that is the true testament to the value of their work. We are successful and our work increases in value when we work with communities as equals, share the byline, and produce deliverables that "lead to useful and real help" for communities (p. 903).

The notion of "giving away the byline" may seem to run counter to the world of academe, in which we are evaluated based on intellectual contributions. This principle, though, does not require one to relinquish all credit for their work, but instead to rethink how credit can be equitably shared and attributed to all involved, and to reconsider what constitutes important, useful work products. We should train graduate students to think deliberately about how they can share credit and responsibility for collaborative work with partnering policymakers. We should also train them to produce deliverables tailored specifically for policy audiences. For graduate students to engage in policy work, policymakers must be willing to invite graduate students into the policy world. By sharing credit with and producing deliverables for policymakers, graduate students return the favor and bring policymakers more fully into the world of research. This can help encourage policymakers to continue to partner with researchers for policy work in the long term. Graduate students may consider routinely publishing and presenting with their policymaker partners; the authors of this article routinely share the byline. Faculty can also encourage graduate students (and work within their home institutions) to allow policymakers to serve on (if allowed), or provide input and contribute to, students' thesis and dissertation committees; with leadership from Campbell, both Feeney and Shaw did just that. Finally, we can and should train graduate students to think of producing research products not only for the research and scientific community, but also for the policy and practice world. Although mentioned only briefly here, it takes great skill to package complex information in a way that makes it amenable to use, thus intentional training on this front is critical. Graduate students must be encouraged and provided with the means to coauthor peer-reviewed articles and presentations with policymaker partners, have

policymaker partners serve on or provide input to graduate student thesis and dissertation committees, and develop research products specifically for policymaker and practitioner audiences.

A Case Study Example

The Michigan Domestic & Sexual Violence Prevention & Treatment Board (“The Board”) was established through state legislation in 1978. The Board consists of seven Governor-appointed members and a staff housed within the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services. The Board’s role is to help focus state activity, including policy initiatives, on domestic and sexual violence (see https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71548_7261-,00.html).

Campbell has been working with the Board for over a decade on a range of research and evaluation projects, aimed at providing empirical evidence that can be used to inform public policy on sexual assault. Campbell invites her research team—her graduate students—to engage in such work, though does so in a structured, intentional way, taking into consideration students’ current and developing skills, the needs of The Board, and the political landscape within which each project progresses.

When Shaw began her graduate training in 2009, Campbell was leading the Sexual Assault Resource Analysis (SARA) Project. The SARA Project had been formed the year prior, with funding from the Michigan Department of Community Health’s Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC). The SARA Project was created as part of a broader set of new initiatives in Michigan, prompted by recent federal legislation regarding postassault services and care for sexual assault victims. Essentially, the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 prohibited states from billing sexual assault victims for medical forensic exams, and prohibited any requirement that victims participate in the criminal justice system in order to access such care. These federal legislative changes gave way to policy change in Michigan, and suggested the need for a systematic examination of Michigan’s services for sexual assault survivors. Thus, the SARA Project was born. Funded by CVSC, the SARA Project was created to provide state policymakers with information on the current state of services, recommen-

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- Shaw, J. (in press). How can research mediators better mediate?: The importance of inward-looking processes. *Evidence & Policy*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/174426416X14788873367067>

Suggested Websites

- Community Psychology, <https://www.communitypsychology.com/>
- Community Toolbox, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>
- Integration and Implementation Insights: Research resources for understanding and acting on complex real-world problems, <https://i2insights.org/>
- Society for Community Research and Action, <http://www.scr27.org/>

dations on improving services, and to act as a conduit between different state agencies—including The Board—and practitioners in the field.

Soon after Shaw arrived in the graduate program, Campbell invited Shaw to attend SARA Project meetings with state partners. Initially, Shaw’s role was simply to attend and observe. This allowed Shaw to learn who had a seat at the table and how these individuals, and the organizations they represented, interacted with one another. Shaw was able to observe and take note of who sat next to whom, and what topic areas were most important to which agencies, thus enabling her to engage diversity in perspectives across the different disciplines represented. Attending and observing such meetings also allowed such individuals and organizations to see and become familiar with Shaw, further contributing to the development of Shaw’s eco identity. As Shaw continued to attend such meetings, and new tasks were assigned to the SARA Project, Campbell made public note when Shaw would contribute to or take

a lead in completing requested tasks. In so doing, Campbell was providing the opportunity for Shaw to demonstrate a clearly identified competence.

As Shaw continued to progress through the graduate program, she was able to take on more leadership roles across a wide range of Campbell’s projects with The Board, allowing her to demonstrate additional competencies she could contribute to ongoing policy work. In one such project, Campbell provided Shaw the opportunity to help design and implement an evaluation of a pilot sexual assault kit, from which the evaluation findings were used to inform the redesign of a new official sexual assault kit for the state of Michigan. When it came time to publish what it was like to carry out this project in collaboration with state decision makers, Shaw and Campbell gave away the byline and coauthored the article with The Board, CVSC, and other critical community partners (Shaw, Campbell, Hagstrom, et al., 2016).

Later on in her graduate career, when Shaw began to generate ideas for her disser-

tation, she knew she wanted to pursue a research project that would have the potential to impact policy. With Campbell's guidance, Shaw requested a meeting with The Board. The plan was to inquire as to what they were currently working on, and ways in which Shaw might be helpful to them. Having worked with The Board for a few years helped Shaw understand how they, like most organizations and communities were coping with varied resources. Thus, it was important to not ask them to take on a new project, but instead offer to contribute to their ongoing efforts. Similarly, because Shaw had been working with The Board for a few years, being patient and building a relationship over time, she was able to be direct and act with zeal in asking The Board how she could get involved. Prior to the meeting, Campbell and Shaw also discussed how pursuing a policy-relevant project could be risky, as its political nature meant it could encounter additional obstacles, stretch out longer than initially anticipated, or become stalled altogether. Shaw entered graduate school with a plan to finish in five years; Campbell made clear that policy work requires a commitment to risk taking in an intentional way, and that such a plan may require modification. The meeting with The Board went well. They were open to working with Shaw, given their history of working together.

Shaw's dissertation research, conducted in collaboration with The Board, examined the police response to sexual assault in the context of unsubmitted sexual assault kits (Shaw, 2014; Shaw, Campbell, & Cain, 2016; Shaw, Campbell, Cain, & Feeney, 2017). Shaw's dissertation committee was chaired by Campbell, and had members from their academic institution, as well as the executive director of The Board (i.e., giving away the byline). Though it extended her time in graduate school by a semester, the risk paid off. The findings went on to inform and reinforce ongoing policy work in Michigan (see Campbell, Shaw, Feeney, & Cain, in press), as well as national public policy conversations, as Shaw was invited to present her research at the White House Domestic Violence Awareness Month Roundtable (Shaw, 2015) and at the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Roundtable on Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Policing (Shaw, 2016).

Conclusion

Research can provide much-needed insight into the most pressing problems facing

policymakers today, and into developing promising policy solutions. However, to ensure the use of research evidence in public policy, researchers must engage with policymakers. The sooner in our careers that we engage in policy work, the more experience we will gain, and the more effective we will be in ensuring research and science guides critical policy decisions made today that will have lasting impacts into tomorrow. We offer the framework, examples, and suggestions for further reading (See box) in this article to encourage training efforts in preparing graduate students for policy engagement.

Keywords: graduate school; policy; policy change; policy engagement; community psychology

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