

Editorial

We are the new editorial team for the *Journal of Public Policy (JPP)*, having started in October 2011. We are excited about our role and feel privileged to be doing it, particularly because this long-standing journal is one of the few that can claim to be about public policy generally. Under the long editorship of Richard Rose, latterly joined by Ed Page, *JPP* has published some of the most important and defining papers in the field.¹ We believe that *JPP* holds a unique place among public policy journals and we aim to strengthen it.

In preparing for the editorship, we spent a lot of time thinking about the field of public policy. This is not a straightforward task, partly because of the all-embracing nature of the subject matter. Public policy is about public decision-making, its processes and consequences. Scholars study topics broadly relating to the regulation of public life. The field encompasses the operation of political institutions and the behaviour of decision-makers and their publics. It aims to be generic rather than to focus on specific topics and problems, such as the macro-economy, housing and the environment, whilst encompassing contributions from those fields when they address general issues as well. *JPP*'s attention to wider questions about public policy distinguishes it from more specialist outlets and gives it a unique status and appeal.

Even though the study of policy – and hence *JPP* – has long been associated with political science, many disciplines, such as economics, sociology and social psychology, as well as professional fields, such as law, business, social work, public administration and medicine, actively contribute to the knowledge base. We deeply respect the broad range of scholarship that is needed to make *JPP* second to none in our field. We recognise and intend to celebrate the heterodox nature of the subject. Boundary spanners often produce public policy's most excellent and relevant research and scholars apply different approaches. Each of the contributing disciplines has particular assumptions and theories; different methods prevail, both quantitative and qualitative; and questions of theory, both empirical and normative, are important. No particular national context is superior and comparative work is highly valued. Our editorial policy will uphold and reinforce these traditions so scholars do not see the journal as the province of a particular discipline, national orientation or one network of researchers. We will work diligently to foster pluralism, both in theory and method. Moreover, the editors will welcome contributions from new entrants to the field as well as established researchers. The generic nature of public policy and its broad

character means we are particularly interested in the contributions of political scientists in institutional impact studies, of economists in the areas of policy evaluation and of economists and social psychologists in behavioural contexts. We believe that a general and inclusive approach to the selection of content will interest a wide potential readership.

Our editorial contribution is to ensure *JPP* publishes pieces of wide significance and to present them at the highest standard of scholarship. We will pay particular attention to the clarity of the style of writing and will encourage authors to avoid jargon and heavy prose to ensure the broadest possible scholarly audience for the journal. Members of different disciplines should be able to read *JPP* issues in their entirety. Our approach is to stress clarity of theory and transparency of method in the study of public policy, which we will trust will become watchwords for the journal. *JPP* will aim for quality rather than advocating a particular approach to public policy. The papers we publish should have a clear statement of theory, and empirical contributions need to exhibit methodological rigour, whether using quantitative or qualitative methods.

In fact, when we came to review the notes for contributors as one of our first editorial tasks, we found not much need to change them because they already reflected our ambitions for the journal:

To understand public policy it is necessary to relate ideas to concrete problems of government. This journal therefore publishes articles that use concepts derived from any of the social sciences to analyse a significant problem facing contemporary governments. Good ideas, like the problems of the contemporary world, admit no boundaries. Articles that make explicit comparisons across nations are particularly welcome. The problems of the contemporary world unite what academic disciplines and national political systems tend to keep apart. Substantive concerns come first. Methodology and concepts should be instrumental in achieving analytic purposes, and concepts and theories should be grounded in an awareness of the problems of government.

As well as reflecting the diversity and comparative nature of the field, we believe *JPP* can help define it as well. Unlike political science or other disciplines, there is less institutional apparatus to help define the field, such as comprehensive associations, large numbers of academic departments, and clear intellectual boundaries and communalities of thinking. In *JPP*, there is a home for general papers about the nature of public policy, the challenges of studying, new findings and theories. We would hope that scholars who are making new ground and challenging conventional wisdoms would wish to send papers to *JPP* first, so that we as editors may encourage innovation and reflection.

The two of us do not constitute the full team at *JPP*. A part-time managing editor, Aubrey Hicks, works from the USC Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California. Her primary tasks

are to process submitted and accepted papers, to liaise with the editorial board and Cambridge University Press (CUP) staff, and to perform general administrative tasks. Aubrey comes to us with significant experience in publishing, having worked for Elsevier Journals and Cornell University Press. She will be assisted by two Price School doctoral students who will, among other duties, act as the eyes and ears of the journal, scrutinising the academic world and its gatherings for reviewers and interesting papers. We also will actively engage with our editorial board and have recruited several new members who will be announced in the frontispiece to our next issue.

Changes to the format of *JPP* are also coming soon. The journal will also have a new section for commissioned field essays. Field essay submissions are refereed through the normal process. We will have a complete redesign of the look of the journal beginning with our next volume. This will include changes in the cover design, typeface and layout.

Whilst we are excited about the changes we have in store for *JPP*, we are likewise enthusiastic about the articles in the current issue. Soo-Young Lee and Andrew Whitford provide quantitative empirical support for the interesting claim that democratisation affects elite perceptions of government effectiveness in a non-linear way. Elites perceive government effectiveness as being high in autocratic as well as democratic governments. Olivier Nay qualitatively examines the UNAIDS Secretariat as policy entrepreneur. While hampered with limited resources, the Secretariat honed its idea dissemination capacity to forge bureaucratic autonomy. Peter Grossman offers a conceptual model to understand legislator behaviour in the presence of shocks having significant macro-level consequences. He applies his model in the context of energy shocks in the United States.

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NOTE

1. The outgoing editors selected many of these classic pieces for re-publication in the previous issue of the journal (31.3).