OBITUARY

William Newlin Dunn (1939–2022) "The truest measure of an academic pillar"

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Introduction

For nearly fifty years, his lectures were filled with anecdotal stories of the great pillars of public policy science whose names today litter required reading lists in university courses worldwide. While most academics could only refer to their work, he would speak of these distinguished theorists with the kind of familiarity that only comes from a lifetime of collegiality and friendship. So many scholars, including Lazarsfeld, Campbell, Caplan, Cook Simon, Weiss, Sabatier, and DeLeon, inspired his work and challenged his perspectives on theory. Now, like them, his work will be assigned to history.

William 'Bill' Dunn was one of the last of an inspired generation of policy scientists whose work continually evolved policy theory, discourse, and practice. For decades and into the future, Dunn's work reinforces the theoretical structure of our discipline. His legacy builds upon the 75-year-old foundation of Harold Lasswell (1949/1951).

After earning a PhD from Claremont Graduate School, in 1969, Dunn joined the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public & International Affairs, where he retired as Professor Emeritus, in 2021. Receiving various teaching awards, Dunn chaired and supported over 70 PhD dissertations and mentored the development of hundreds of junior faculty members. He upheld Robert Merton's *Matthew Effect,* as the mark of any true mentor to nurture the intellectual potential of PhD students (Merton, 1988). Dunn was devoted to his students. As a mentor, none can compare. He often claimed that teaching was his proudest contribution to our science.

In his long academic career, Dunn published over 100 works, including peer-reviewed research, theoretical critiques, chapters, and books. His scholarship has received numerous distinctions, including Policy Studies Organization's Donald T. Campbell Award for methodological innovation in policy studies, the Aaron Wildavsky Award for best published book, and in 2014, he was elected a Fellow of National Academy of Public Administration. His most recognized scholarly contribution to the field remains *Policy Analysis: an Integrated Approach.* Completing the 7th edition even while battling cancer, Dunn produced the most widely cited book, to date, in policy science. It is translated into seven languages and read in classrooms around the globe. His aim in writing this book was "to produce a critical synthesis of the field, while at the same time offering students, instructors, and

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practitioners a body of knowledge and skills that is applicable to real-world problems" (Dunn, 2015, xvii). In every edition since 1981, Dunn attributes the inspiration for his work to his mentors, Paul Lazarsfeld and Donald Campbell, enthusiastically reiterating that good policy science transcends disciplines, "unconstrained by obsolescent philosophies like logical positivism" (Dunn, 2015, 4).

A dedicated Lasswellian, Dunn's work heralds the call for policy science to be a problem-solving discipline that employs multidisciplinary frameworks to find solutions to practical issues. Policy should address those problems that diminish the quality of life of individuals who are marginalized, or whom are made vulnerable due to political instability, systemic discrimination, poverty, or hardship. Policymaking should seek to bridge gaps in political, economic, and social institutions and systems that expedite inefficiencies, magnify injustice, or led to negative impacts on society. Moreover, policy analysis as a methodology should be devoted to espousing human dignity, democracy, and freedom through the rigorous pursuit of truth.

> [P]olicy analysis is methodologically eclectic; its practitioners are free to choose among a wide range of scientific methods, qualitative as well as quantitative, as long as these yield reliable knowledge. In this context, policy analysis includes art, craft, and reasoned persuasion, all of which are scientific to the extent that they succeed in producing reliable knowledge (Dunn, 2015, 3).

Dunn held that truth emerges from scientific inquiry, often placed at the heart of not only introspective inquiry or deduction, but often through *abductive* approaches. Using commonsense, interdisciplinarian approaches to policy sciences provides wider insight into policy matters, avoiding the disintegration of what Lasswell termed a *worm's eye view of policy matter*. Instead interlacing multiple disciplinary approaches together allows policy analysis and implementation to be adaptive and effective (ual) (Lasswell, 1971). In recent years, Dunn authored various works expanding our insight into Lasswell's theoretical contributions to policy, including contemplation of the policy stage theory the substantial link to the work of John Dewey and other fellow pragmatists from the University of Chicago (Dunn, 2018a, 2018b).

> Characteristics of the policy sciences include orientations that are normative, policy-relevant, contextual, and multi-disciplinary. These orientations originate in pragmatist principles of the unity of knowledge and action and functionalist explanations of action by reference to values. These principles are central to the future development of the policy sciences (Dunn, 2019, 3).

The purpose of policy is to find meaningful solutions which may be effective in specific contexts, spaces, and timeframes. While his writing often critiqued theoretical interpretations of other Lasswellians, Dunn recognized the vital need for healthy academic debate. One cannot talk about Dunn's scholarship without reflecting on his interactions with those around him.

In one breath, Dunn might disagree with Sabatier or DeLeon on a theoretical stance, and in the next, he would celebrate their brilliant contributions to upholding Lasswell's bequest for the science (Dunn, 2018b). He sought to continually debate, question, consider, and learn from his colleagues.

> I have been fortunate to meet and work with colleagues who changed my mind about many things, including the important role that philosophy and sociology of science play in the applied social sciences (Dunn, 2015, xix).

Dunn recognized the lifelong path of learning to which all academics should aspire. He challenged his PhD students to follow the examples of scholars like Mitroff, Holzner, Weiss, DeLeon, and Sabatier, each of whom deliberately evolved their craft by learning from one another. Repeatedly, he remembered fondly the engaging debates with Sabatier over the years as he shifted from promoting top-down implementation (Sabatier & Mazmanian,1980; Sabatier, 1986) to his later work on Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier, 1987; Weible, Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Henry, & DeLeon, 2011). Dunn felt the loss of Sabatier in 2013- intellectually and collegially. They were often drawn to similar experiences. Both men served early in their careers in the Peace Corps, on the African continent. They both debated Lasswell, as well as advocated for environmental conservation. The real-world experiences of their youth fed into their core belief that policy theory and analysis should feed into practice.

Dunn regularly made his students digest the *Two-Communities* theory and knowledge utilization of Nathan Caplan (1979), sometimes jesting he had in fact helped inspire the concept during scholarly bantering with Caplan over the years. He celebrated the thoughtful wisdom that marked the evaluation research of Carol Weiss (1972/1999). He agreed with her perspective that evaluation "has much to offer to policy makers, but policy makers rarely base new policies directly on evaluation results" (Weiss, 1999, 469). Dunn continued to warn that policy analysts and decisionmakers fail to learn from the past to fix the future. He was a staunch champion for *policy utilization*, which often does not receive the attention it deserves in the policy process. He would argue that there is little sense in *producing knowledge* if it is not properly *disseminated* and *utilized* to affect meaningful change.

> An emergent social science of knowledge applications, drawing on a substantial multidisciplinary literature published over the past twenty-five years, signals an inversion of typical scholarly reasoning about the knowledge-society nexus… What must we examine in order to comprehend and consciously shape applications of scientific and professional knowledge to the manifold problems facing contemporary societies? (Dunn & Holzner, 1988, 3).

Like his predecessors, Dunn regularly vacillated between theoretical positions, philosophies, and epistemologies. His modeling of the policy cycle was always-changing with each new edition of his book. He often admitted in lectures that he couldn't decide between Campbell's (1988) *falsification* or Dewey's *pragmatism,* and of late, he hailed Bromley (2006)'s *volitional pragmatism* as hitting the mark. The timeline of his work indicates poignant theoretical shifts, catalyzed through engaging in rich interactions of his fellow researchers. In the end, Dunn asserts that the purpose of policy is not necessarily to resolve a public issue. Instead, policy problems often manifest over time in new forms, requiring new alternatives, or reiterations of past solutions modified to address the unique characteristics of this specific situation. Dunn's work stresses the need for policy analysts to consider wicked problems instead as potential ill-structured problems. In his modeling of the policy cycle, the wheel always cycles back to the *problem*.

> Standard methods of policy analysis mistakenly assume the boundaries of complex problems have been adequately defined prior to the analysis of potential solutions for these problems (Dunn, 1997, 277).

Building on Lindblom's (1990) concept of cognitive impairment, Dunn argues that there are worst errors in policymaking than Type I (false positive) or Type II (false negative) errors. In contrast, *Type III* is a fatal error of policy analysis that occurs when the problem is wrongly defined. Analysts must seek to validate problem-structuring through testing

rival hypotheses using falsification, and considering context validity as justified by *pragmatic eliminative induction* to lower the probability of Type III errors in policy analysis (Dunn, 2018c). A poorly defined problem sets the stage for inevitable limitations to policy impact and sustainability (Dunn, 2015). Dunn was notorious among his PhD students for making them reexamine and redraft their research questions and problem statement dozens of times, over many months, even years, before allowing them to defend their dissertation prospectus. He coached them through each rewrite, always offering words of encouragement and tender guidance.

His corner office at GSPIA is now closed. His library of policy books aged in the sun are packed away. The circular table where he met with his students, discussing research, counseling them on their life problems, and reading the works of his policy science colleagues stands empty. Yet the flame that he lit will never be extinguished.

At his funeral service, his colleagues shared stories of Dr. Bill Dunn. They laughed about how he could never seem to be on time to anything, even class. They reflected on his accomplishments, and how he would ardently write into the hours at dawn. And they chuckled at how he made them promise to always consider potential Type III errors in their research. Those who have read his work will remember Dunn for his scientific rigor and theoretical impact in the policy sciences. But for those who knew him well, he will be most remembered for his larger-than-life spirit, his kindness, and the passion that he inspired in so many to make a difference in the world through effectual policy research and authentic policy change.

After the bagpipes fell silent under a gray Pittsburgh sky, and his beloved family and friends exited the cemetery, a group of current and former students lingered behind. They laid their hands on his casket, some crumpling to their knees, unable to stand under the weight of his loss. Yet we, his mentees- PhD candidates, practitioners, researchers, and university professors, promise to take on his torch- the study of policy sciences, just as he carried on the work of his mentors nearly half a century ago. This is the truest measure of an academic pillar. This is Professor Dunn's legacy.

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