



IN MEMORIUM—Peter DeLeon (1943–2020) “Standing on the Shoulders of a Giant: The Sagacity of Peter deLeon’s Policy Sciences”

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About 70 years ago, Harold D. Lasswell created what has been termed the policy sciences, a new academic discipline dedicated to informing government decisions in the pursuit of better democracies and for a greater realization of human dignity (Lasswell 1949, 1951a). While Lasswell gave the policy sciences direction and momentum, many have contributed to the discipline.

One such contributor was Peter deLeon.

In his career, deLeon served as chief editor of the *Policy Sciences* (1981–1984) and co-editor of the *Policy Studies Journal* (2008–2012). He co-developed and promoted a more direct translation of Lasswell’s decision functions (1956) in the policy cycle (Brewer and deLeon 1983; deLeon 1999a). He offered a historical account of the discipline’s foundations and sources of its ongoing development (deLeon 1989). Possibly, his most focused area of study dealt with issues of democracy (deLeon 1990, 1992a, 1994a, b, 1995; see also Ingram et al. 2016) that culminated in *Democracy and the Policy Sciences* (1997). Over the course of his career, deLeon provided regular commentary on the growth and status of the policy sciences (deLeon 1984; deLeon and Martell 2006; deLeon and Vogenbeck 2007). A survey of his scholarship shows deLeon making empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of policy formulation (deLeon 1992b), policy implementation (deLeon 1999b; deLeon and deLeon 2002), policy evaluation and termination (deLeon 1978, 1983), comparative public policy (Cyr and deLeon 1975; deLeon and Resnick-Terry 1998), and political corruption (deLeon 1993). As the discipline developed and diversified, deLeon (1994b) critically analyzed seminal works of *Discursive Democracy* (Dryzek 1990), *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (Forrester and Fischer 1993), *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning* (Forrester 1993), and *Policy Change and Learning: Advocacy Coalition Approach* (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993) and to *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy* (deLeon 2005; Schneider and Ingram 2005a, b). This tribute does not offer the ecumenical of Peter deLeon’s scholarship—as if anything could. Instead, I glean some of the sagacity of deLeon’s policy sciences to draw lessons for us all.

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The policy research community has the professional obligation to examine itself and its implements as closely and dispassionately as it scrutinizes various problems and programs. ... Failing to perform these self-audits with both intellectual and professional integrity and diligence, as well as on a consistent basis, could lead to another disheartening canon of inflated promises and dashed expectations, situations which absolutely serve nobody's purpose (deLeon 1990, 31).

One fault found in the policy sciences is to treat it statically or Lasswell's words sacredly. Of course, we should continue to interpret and learn from Lasswell (notably Torgerson 2017), but we are better off viewing the evolution of its course and cover as constantly being created and discovered by those who teach it, research it, and practice it. This requires, as exemplified by deLeon, consistent and conscious scrutiny, reflection, and, possibly, recommendations for adaptation and refinement. While Peter kept faith in the policy sciences, he also kept it in his line of fire throughout his career.

[T]he quotidian policy sciences have become an elite, sequestered activity, one whose services to democracy seemingly come as an afterthought to their primary fealty to their governmental agencies (deLeon 1997, 65).

deLeon criticized the policy sciences for losing its democratic lodestone and opposed what was coined the "policy sciences of tyranny" (see also Lasswell 1951b, Dryzek 1989). The policy sciences of tyranny refer to using knowledge or policy analysts' information for undemocratic purposes. It happens when experts wield their craft and science to inform the government and dominate or exclude ordinary people through privileged knowledge and access. Instead of serving society, the policy sciences threaten its democratic ethos.

deLeon did not take an anti-science stance or argue that science was somehow inappropriately biased or tainted. Rather, he argued that the various miens of expertise represented a mobilization of particular value orientations; for example, the science of economics and science ecology each bolster different ideological proclivities. Moreover, knowledge accepted within these expert communities and by governments tended to favor some forms of knowledge over others. Knowledge then became a source of power that separates the haves (being a part of the community of legitimate knowledge) and the have-nots (being a part of the community of illegitimate knowledge). This then results in policy decisions and outcomes exacerbating economic, societal, and political inequalities and inequities.

[T]he day-to-day policy sciences (especially under the rubric of policy analysis) have largely abandoned their democratic charter defined by Harold Lasswell and adopted an expertise, whatever the discipline, based on positivism, "instrumental rationality," the "rationality project," and technocracy (deLeon 1997, 98).

deLeon (1997) blamed positivism for many of the disappointments in the policy sciences and for the diminishing democratic ethos in society (see also Torgerson 1985; Dryzek 1989). Positivism can be thought of as the classic textbook approach to science that emphasized observation, refutation and verification, causation, prediction, and generalization. As argued by deLeon and others, positivism's penchant for objectivity detached it from people and values and, hence, politics, thereby making it less relevant and more rigid. Moreover, positivism's emphasis on rationality and efficiency (as found in benefit–cost–analysis) spurned the human side of governance and often obfuscated fundamentally normative conflicts for technocratic ones. One result in politics and governance was the elevation of a kind of scientific knowledge as truth and a demotion of other knowledge forms.

The curative for deLeon was post-positivism, an approach to science that emphasized context and less generalization, embraced complexity over reductionism, and incorporated multiple perspectives and forms of knowledge into its analyses. It also built into its science normative orientations and values, broader patterns of meanings, and sometimes sought to mollify deprivations and imbalances of power.

Operating under the post-positivist approach, deLeon argued for changes in the operations of government and the practice of the policy sciences—both of which would be more inclusive for regular people and accepting of different forms of knowledge. Thus, a “participatory policy analysis” would include stakeholders in designing and implementing public policies through deliberations. The means by which this might happen varied and included citizen panels and other processes, which mirror the various manifestations of deliberative democracy (e.g., Dryzek 2002) and collaborative governance (e.g., Emerson and Nabatchi 2015).

[T]he positivists and postpositivist approaches have a place under the research sun. However, this global consensus should not suggest that some very serious differences ... still exist and cannot ... be resolved easily or quickly (deLeon 1998a, 112).

While Peter argued against the power and privilege of positivism in policy sciences, he stood against discarding positivist-based research and recognized its benefits to society. For deLeon (1998b), “it would seem foolish to set the two concepts at odds, in a zero-sum game, as opposed to using them to inform and support one another.” He advocated for a multiplicity of approaches within the policy sciences and, in his own fashion, continued to scrutinize both. To deLeon (1997), post-positive approaches, as found in today’s critical policy studies and interpretive policy studies, needed more transparency and consistency in the rigor of their methods. Positivism, better termed today as mainstream policy studies, needs to attend to its value deficiencies and methodological narrowness. The foundational underpinnings of deLeon’s policy sciences would then be multi-ontological, multi-epistemological, and multi-methodological—all of which would be unified in contributing to the continued evolution of the field toward its missions (see also Durnová and Weible 2020).

In short, before we discard a useful friend—in this instance, the ... policy stages framework—we need to make sure, first, that it really does warrant a place in the dustbin of abandoned paradigms... (deLeon 1999a, 29).

As the policy sciences emerged as a conscious research area so did the need to establish the scope for the discipline. What surfaced was the policy cycle that came in part from Lasswell’s decision functions (1956) and that provided an easily understood and communicated depiction of the policy process (Brewer 1974). Along with Garry Brewer, the deLeon published the definitive work on the policy cycle in *The Foundations of Policy Analysis* (1983). If Lasswell, Brewer, deLeon, and the like championed the policy cycle as the policy sciences’ thesis, Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith championed the discipline’s antithesis in their arguments for its displacement (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). What then emerged was an ongoing tussle about whether the policy cycle belonged in what deLeon described as the “dustbin of abandoned paradigms.” If there has been synthesis to this debate, it would be one a curbed and cautious acceptance of the policy cycle as a simple yet still useful lens to view the policy process, but it is by no means the only or even the most important lens to do so.

Politics will dominate analysis. Period (deLeon 1989, 106).

One of the charges in the policy sciences is to inform government decision making and the policy process. Unsurprisingly, Peter's sharpest criticism of the policy sciences is its lack of observable and consistent influence on government and society (deLeon 1989, 1997; deLeon and Weible 2010). This limitation has been attributed to poor quality or irrelevance of many analyses and, of course, politics, wherein values, passions, and interests always dominate and, in many cases, probably should.

One way to find some resolution to this issue is to consider two overlapping worlds in the policy sciences and deLeon's contributions in them. The first involves those policy analysts actually working in the public sector who frame and shape problems and agendas, specify the tradeoffs in policy alternatives, engage the public and represent them politically, evaluate public programs and policies, and so on. Some of these policy analysts have no or little influence, but others have considerable influence, which possibly contributed to the policy sciences of tyranny. The second involves the policy sciences in academia, which includes professors, researchers, and students. While some of these policy scientists practice scholarship that directly engages communities, others do not. With the exception of time early in his career with the RAND Corporation, most of deLeon's contributions came in this second world of academia. As an academic, deLeon's biggest contributions were probably less through his written scholarship and more through his mentored and instructed students (see also DeWind 2020). Peter worked with hundreds and possibly thousands of graduate students many of whom went into the public sector. This, then, provides the principle way in which most policy scientists in academia fulfill Lasswell's charge: Their influence in policy processes is indirect through mentoring and instructing those who are or may become participants in public service, government, and politics.

The question facing the policy sciences, then, is not so much one of survival, but survival in what form and in what direction (deLeon 1989, 1).

If we stand on the shoulders of Peter deLeon what do we see? We gain a perspective of an evolving policy science wherein we, as its current contributors, build on the Lasswell's original vision while continuously revising it in response to changes within the discipline and external to it. We gain a greater realization of values for shared power and democratic ethos in governments and politics, for a multiplicity of approaches, and for remembering the past while moving forward into the future. We broaden our horizon of what it means to contribute to society that seeks to inform public policy decisions and policy processes through scholarship and through instructing and mentoring students, who then become the next champions in supporting democracy and greater human dignity for all.

The world is a better place today with the contributions of Peter deLeon, who passed away on May 19, 2020. I imagine Peter would say that I missed (at least) one important point. He would remind me, and all of us, that he developed his scholarship by standing on the shoulders of other giants and by collaborating with many more, some of whom are cited herein. On this point, we might find the last keepsake from deLeon's career: Our ideas emerge and develop through the intermixing of intellects with both our associates and antagonists. Thus, as we venture on, taking moments to honor those who had a hand in developing the policy sciences can remind us of our shared community and help us understand a bit more about how we got here, on where we should go, and how we should get there.

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