Social Sciences and the Public Welfare

DANIEL T. LICHTER
CORNELL UNIVERSITY
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Outline

- Why social sciences matter?
- The role of the university
- The role of the social scientist (e.g., research, teaching, etc.)
- Final points
Why Social Sciences Matter?

- Today’s problems are often behavioral rather than technical. How do we change behavior?
  - Health
  - Teenage pregnancy
  - Poverty
The Role of the University

- The University as an engine of social change and economic development
  - In U.S., Land Grant Universities (e.g., Cornell) – Morrill Act of 1862: “Knowledge with a Public Purpose”
  - As New York State's land grant university, Cornell transfers and applies university-based knowledge for practical benefits and, as a major enterprise, contributes to the State's economic prosperity.
The Role of the University Professor

- Research
- Outreach
- Translation
- Evaluation
- Teaching
- Media relations
Research

• Applied versus pure research
  ○ Topics of research that matter
  ○ Advocacy research
  ○ Public sociology (or social science)

• Disciplinary versus multidisciplinary research
  ○ Big science
Outreach

- Educating the public and policy makers
  - Policy briefs
  - Webinars and videos
  - Public policy briefings
    - Government
    - Think tanks
    - Non-profits or community groups
  - Technical assistance
Translation

- Science-based practice – taking social science findings and applying them in the real world
Evaluation

- Applying scientific methods to evaluate effectiveness of interventions.
  - Randomized control studies (gold standard)
    - Moving to Opportunities
    - Abstinence education
    - Welfare demonstration projects
    - Early childhood education (e.g., headstart)
  - Observational studies (e.g., causal analysis)
  - Cost-benefit analyses
Teaching

- Educating the next generation of leaders and policy makers
Media

- Development relationships with University media relations
- Develop relationships with specific newspapers or reporters
- Write press releases to highlight important new findings
Final thoughts

- Learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable in marketing your work and expertise
- Administrators should reward faculty for outreach activities and public engagement