

# Advanced scholarship

## Interdisciplinary research at the science–policy interface

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### 6 Introduction

7 How can we better organize and publish meaningful research to help us better understand and  
8 respond to the global environment problems we face? This chapter provides suggestions for suc-  
9 cessful interdisciplinary research on international environmental politics, based on a review of  
10 published and unpublished works in the field. Usable science and knowledge is essential for  
11 devising effective environmental policies to address major global environmental threats, includ-  
12 ing climate change (see Chapter 28). Most policy analysts believe that better public discourse  
13 and elite deliberations require reliable knowledge that is accurate and socially legitimate (Haas  
14 2004; Mitchell et al. 2006). Accurate knowledge in the environmental domain must be inter-  
15 disciplinary in order to capture the complex array of interactions between social and physical  
16 activities that give rise to global environmental threats. Legitimate knowledge must enjoy a  
17 social pedigree, which in practice is often the peer-review process. For example, the  
18 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) requires that all information that it pres-  
19 ents be published or accepted in peer-reviewed journals and books. While this requirement  
20 leads to a lag in the dissemination of scientific knowledge to policy making, it does enforce the  
21 legitimacy of the knowledge that is being presented. Consequently, despite efforts by “climate  
22 denialists” to delegitimize climate change science over the last several years in the United States  
23 and the United Kingdom, the integrity of the climate change science was ultimately upheld by  
24 the courts and high-level oversight panels in each country.

25 Many scientists are frustrated that their work is not readily recognized in the policy  
26 community (Hulme 2009; Schneider 2009; Bradley 2011). One recent approach to science  
27 communication focuses on the rhetorical presentation of science and the psychological factors  
28 that influence its reception (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Leiserowitz et al. 2006; Boykoff 2011).  
29 Others look at the political constraints operating on governments that impede the reception of  
30 new information which may require costly new measures (Hulme 2009), or from entrenched  
31 domestic interests in the United States (Oreskes 2007; Schneider 2009; Oreskes and Conway  
32 2010; Bradley 2011). In this chapter we focus on the instrumental means by which usable  
33 knowledge is generated and circulated (see also Chapter 17). Elsewhere Haas has argued that  
34 credible science is provided by epistemic communities (Haas 2001, 2004, 2004, 2007). Here we

1 focus on the published medium by which epistemic communities may better make their voices  
 2 heard in the public discourse. We draw largely on experiences from published and unpublished  
 3 manuscripts from the MIT Press series on Science, Politics and the Environment, which has  
 4 published 18 edited and multiauthored interdisciplinary volumes on climate change.

## 5 **The need for interdisciplinary knowledge about global environmental** 6 **threats**

7 Although the causes and effects of global environmental problems tend to be multidisciplinary  
 8 and interdisciplinary, modern scholars too often are disciplinary. The complexity of environmen-  
 9 tal issues – in terms of the number of and interactions among variables, the length of causal  
 10 chains, and the extent of interactions across time, space, and scale – requires insights from mul-  
 11 tiple disciplines to capture accurately the extensive and multiple understandings of their causes,  
 12 causal mechanisms, and effects (Price 1992; Jacobson and Price 1990; Wiman 1991; Consortium  
 13 for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) 1992; National Research  
 14 Council 1999a; Brewer and Stern 2005; Biermann 2007). Despite this, most scholars are trained –  
 15 and often continue to think – in ways that are strongly disciplinary. As Gary Brewer cleverly  
 16 quipped, “the world has problems, but universities have departments” (Snow 1962; Brewer 1999:  
 17 328). Addressing this disconnect between the problems we face and the solutions we offer is akin  
 18 to reconciling different “epistemic cultures,” i.e., the habits and beliefs associated with different  
 19 academic disciplines (Knorr-Cetina 1999). Given this, how can we better organize and publish  
 20 meaningful research to help us better understand and respond to the global environmental prob-  
 21 lems we face? (See also Chapter 5.)

22 Since environmental problems emerged on the scholarly agenda in the 1970s, academics  
 23 have debated the proper way to analyze their causes and effects. Alvin Weinberg, in 1972, called  
 24 for “transdisciplinary” work that went beyond single discipline studies of environmental issues  
 25 (Weinberg 1972). Others promoted the virtues of multidisciplinary work that drew on various  
 26 disciplines. Tribe and colleagues noted that variation in analyses of a given environmental prob-  
 27 lem was likely to reflect, in large measure, the disciplinary values and perspectives of the analysts  
 28 rather than real variation in the problem unless an interdisciplinary approach was used to help  
 29 those from different disciplines converge on common values and methods (Tribe et al. 1976).  
 30 Integrated assessment modelers, particularly in Europe in the 1990s, frustrated by their lack of  
 31 influence on policy-makers, argued for interdisciplinary work that included policy-makers and  
 32 stakeholders at the outset. Indeed, some have argued that environmental complexity exceeds the  
 33 limits of traditional policy analysis and can only be meaningfully addressed through dialogues  
 34 among such diverse groups (Ravetz 1986; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1991, 2001; Kasemir et al. 2003).

## 35 **Training environmental scholars**

36 Views about the proper training of environmental scholars have changed significantly over time,  
 37 with corresponding changes in terminology from “generalists” to “multidisciplinary,” “interdisci-  
 38 plinary,” “transdisciplinary,” and “sustainability” scientists. During the 1960s and 1970s, people  
 39 sought to help graduate students become *generalists* by training them in several aspects of the  
 40 multiple fields needed to meaningfully contribute to our understanding of a problem. This  
 41 approach ran into two problems. First, were institutional incentives: universities lacked tenure  
 42 track jobs for such individuals, either failing to hire them or placing them in programs (rather than  
 43 departments) in which they trained few if any graduate students who could reproduce, develop,  
 44 and refine their ideas. Second, were individual capacities: as the number, magnitude, and technical

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1 nature of environmental problems grew over time, it soon became clear that few individuals could  
2 master the array of tools and scope of knowledge to conduct environmental research.

3 By the 1980s, *multidisciplinary* had become the professional mantra, largely in response to the  
4 institutional incentive and individual capacity problems ~~mentioned~~ above. This approach saw the  
5 answer as building teams of scholars from diverse *social science* disciplines who individually could  
6 receive tenure and promotions within existing university structures but who collectively could  
7 shed better light on the complex environmental problems in question (Keohane and Ostrom  
8 1995; Young 1997, 1999; Miles et al. 2002; Young et al. 2008). It was hoped that teams com-  
9 posed of individuals well versed in their own disciplines but interested in working with those  
10 from other disciplines could generate better insights by creating analytic synergies and identify-  
11 ing and removing disciplinary blind spots.

12 During the 1990s, this multidisciplinary perspective transitioned into an *interdisciplinary* one  
13 that sought to bridge the disciplinary chasm that traditionally divides the social sciences from  
14 the natural sciences and engineering (Social Learning Group 2001a, 2001b; Miller and Edwards  
15 2001; Schellnhuber et al. 2003; Jasanoff and Martello 2004) This shift urged greater collabora-  
16 tion across this chasm in an effort to progressively remedy the problem that social scientists often  
17 got the natural science wrong and natural scientists and engineers often got the social science  
18 wrong, with either error posing the risk that the science would be wrong and/or irrelevant to  
19 policymakers.

20 Throughout this period and into the 2000s, policymakers demonstrated an increasing desire  
21 for “usable” science that was not only ecologically sound but was also politically, economically,  
22 and sociologically informed while scholars demonstrated an increasing desire to contribute to  
23 policy debates and a frustration that their work so rarely did ~~so~~. Both as a reflection of, and  
24 contributor to, these trends, increasing attention was paid to those who were calling for *transdis-*  
25 *ciplinary* work. Such work sought to generate new theoretical frameworks for understanding  
26 social–ecological relationships rather than, as earlier work was accused of doing, simply trying to  
27 better understand the causes and effects of particular social–ecological problems (Jasanoff 2003,  
28 2004; Kasemir et al. 2003; Brewer and Stern 2005). Such an approach aspires to forging a new  
29 theoretical framework for understanding environmental complexity that is drawn from a hands-  
30 on dialogue between practitioners, civil society advocates, and ~~active~~ scientists across the full  
31 spectrum of natural and social sciences and humanities. It also cautions against the hubris of a  
32 physics–based nomothetic approach to knowledge cumulation, ~~rather~~ focusing on deeper under-  
33 standings of specific important problems through participatory learning.

34 Some recent scholars have called for interdisciplinary, international research teams that  
35 encompass not only academic researchers but also policymakers under an umbrella of  
36 Sustainability Science (Gallopín 2006; Kates et al. 2001; see Chapter 15). In this view, for inter-  
37 disciplinary research to be successful, it must involve individuals from a range of disciplines, each  
38 of whom is well trained in their own discipline; has some familiarity with the core concepts of  
39 other relevant disciplines; and is skilled in making the core concepts of their discipline accessible  
40 to other scholars, policy-makers, and stakeholders. Assembling teams of such scholars is thought  
41 to promote progressive research that generates new knowledge and new frameworks of under-  
42 standing that could not, or would be unlikely to, emerge from a single discipline’s perspective.

43 The US National Academy of Sciences, in a series of reports initiated in the early 1990s,  
44 proposed a division of labor for socio–ecological research. In the National Academy’s rubric, the  
45 social sciences can help explain the causes (or driving forces) of human behaviors that lead to  
46 global environmental change. The social sciences can also help explain the process by which  
47 societies and decision-makers respond to identified threats and thus help better understand the  
48 likelihood, means, and conditions that foster or inhibit alternative collective responses. The

1 natural sciences can help explain how problems unfold and identify goals for sustainable  
2 responses. In turn, different disciplines can contribute in ways that relate to their core concepts:  
3 power and institutions from political science, markets and price signals from economics, public  
4 opinion and social attitudes from sociology and political science, local knowledge and organiza-  
5 tion from anthropology, issues of law and enforcement from legal scholars, and the like. Similarly  
6 distinct fields of natural science can contribute insights into the behavior of different types of  
7 ecosystems (Rayner and Malone 1998; National Research Council 1999b; Biermann 2007).

8 Such calls for interdisciplinarity, of whatever sort, complement rather than replace more  
9 traditional disciplinary efforts. A full understanding of socio-ecological systems will always  
10 require the deep disciplinary research that stays within more traditional disciplinary boundaries.  
11 For instance, in political science, *Institutions for the Earth* (Haas et al. 1993), a team-based project  
12 undertaken by political scientists, looked at the question of how international institutional  
13 design can improve the management of shared ecosystems, as well as some international public  
14 goods (see Chapters 8 and 9). It found that institutions that enhance cooperation, concern, and  
15 capacity were more likely to yield beneficial results than those without. Other groups of political  
16 scientists have confirmed that regimes with organized scientific involvement (epistemic com-  
17 munities) yield more comprehensive regulatory commitments and also better environmental  
18 outcomes than those without (Andresen et al. 2000; Miles et al. 2002; Haas 2007; Biermann and  
19 Pattberg 2012; see Chapter 17).

## 20 **Conducting effective environmental policy research**

21 How can effective research on global environmental issues be conducted? A key conclusion  
22 from this review of the philosophy of science for socio-ecological research suggests at the very  
23 least that meaningful work is best performed by teams of scholars. Several recent books have **also**  
24 tried to develop some heuristics for effective environmental policy research (Benda et al. 2002;  
25 Bergmann et al. 2005). Our judgments are based on our experiences as authors, as participants  
26 in interdisciplinary research projects, as editors of journals and book series, and as peer reviewers  
27 for journals, publishers, and foundations.

28 For present purposes, we consider research as effective when it provides new insights into the  
29 causes or consequences of global environmental problems in ways that foster, in the short or  
30 long term, human society's ability to mitigate or adapt to those problems. Achievements in this  
31 realm can be observed (if not measured) by reference to the degree that research:

- 32 • is published in peer-reviewed journals or with university presses,
- 33 • trains new scholars,
- 34 • leads policy-makers and stakeholders to accept new understandings of a problem and  
35 respond in more effective ways to mitigate or adapt to those problems.

36 The results of most past collective research projects in the global environmental politics arena,  
37 usually published as edited volumes, have tended to involve multiple chapters written by differ-  
38 ent, often multiple, scholars from various disciplines and countries. Such volumes often include  
39 authors at different career stages, from graduate students to senior professors. Building on our  
40 distinctions above, we distinguish two classes of research: interdisciplinary projects involving  
41 scholars from distinctly different disciplines including both social and natural scientists; and mul-  
42 tidisciplinary projects involving scholars from a single discipline or a narrow range of cognate  
43 disciplines within the social (or natural sciences), such as political science, sociology, law, and  
44 economics (Choucri 1993; Winter 2006).

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1 To date, most published work has been multidisciplinary. Interdisciplinary work is more dif-  
 2 ficult to achieve, as discussed below, because of the difficulties in spanning disciplinary cultures  
 3 and vocabularies. In general, while these efforts highlight insights from individual disciplines  
 4 about a problem they fail more generally to integrate them into a more coherent picture or even  
 5 clearly to articulate the compatibility or tensions between different approaches (Cebon et al.  
 6 1998; Social Learning Group 2001a, 2001b). In short, truly interdisciplinary work remains in its  
 7 infancy with considerable room for improvement. To foster progress in that venture, the fol-  
 8 lowing section reflects our thoughts for improving, and publishing, both multidisciplinary and  
 9 interdisciplinary work on global environmental problems. While successful multidisciplinary  
 10 and interdisciplinary work may generate new integrated wisdom, it may also reveal uncertainties  
 11 and fundamental differences in understanding between actors and disciplines.

## 12 Applications of interdisciplinarity

13 Here we provide two exemplars of interdisciplinary books whose findings exceed the conven-  
 14 tional views of single disciplines. *Changing the Atmosphere* (Miller and Edwards 2001) has ten  
 15 chapters written by nine authors, ranging from PhD candidates to full professors. The authors  
 16 come from information sciences, philosophy, social studies of science, biology and climate sci-  
 17 ence. The research was well supported by a variety of grants. This collection was one of the  
 18 earlier ~~social science~~ investigations of the production and use of climate science for policy. Thus  
 19 it had a comprehensive introduction providing an overview of the critical social studies of sci-  
 20 ence literature, but lacked a concluding chapter. The empirical chapters demonstrate the greater  
 21 role of interpretation and uncertainty associated with scientific advice and the IPCC than was  
 22 generally recognized by hard scientists and policy analysts (see Chapters 17 and 18). It developed  
 23 the finding that science and science policy does not directly mirror the natural world, but rather  
 24 that it interprets the world for policy and political consumers in ways that are socially and  
 25 politically shaped. Thus the effective provision of scientific information requires political and  
 26 social inquiry about the frames and context with which policy-makers solicit and understand  
 27 scientific advice. Policy studies need to better understand the degree of distortion involved in  
 28 the knowledge being delivered, and to focus on the political processes by which choices about  
 29 knowledge claims are made and the knowledge is itself interpreted by less technically trained  
 30 policy-makers.

31 More recently, *Reflexive Governance for Global Public Goods* (Brousseau et al. 2012) provides  
 32 an interdisciplinary investigation of global public goods; an analytic category that includes cli-  
 33 mate change. *Reflexive Governance* has 15 chapters as well as an introduction and conclusion,  
 34 written by 21 international contributors, drawn from research fellows, assistant professors to full  
 35 professors, and one government official. Substantively, they range from economics, ecological  
 36 economics, philosophy, politics, and interdisciplinary training in environment change. The  
 37 interdisciplinary approach to global public goods complements conventional studies of interna-  
 38 tional public goods that seek to internalize the costs of environmental degradation through  
 39 hierarchical controls, market arrangements to internalize costs, or institutional arrangements to  
 40 concentrate the environmental consequences. By studying a number of public goods occurring  
 41 at different scales and with different participants, the authors find that the provision of organized  
 42 scientific knowledge is capable of educating political actors to change their behavior and take  
 43 account of environmental externalities which remain economically low cost. In this regard the  
 44 volume is “reflexive” in documenting knowledge about how knowledge may be usefully inte-  
 45 grated by national-level decision-makers to learn about climate change, and to embark on new  
 46 policies that are more sustainable. Such collective reflection requires democratic participation,

- 1 scientific information, and a lengthy social process of deliberation (Dedeurwaerdere et al. 2012:
- 2 316–17; see Chapter 26).

### 3 Improving interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research

- 4 In our view, conducting and publishing effective research requires that the scholars design the
- 5 research in ways that meet ~~the three criteria delineated.~~

### 6 *Selecting participants*

7 The first step in developing successful interdisciplinary research is the selection of the research  
8 team. Individuals should be chosen on the basis of their depth of disciplinary expertise and their  
9 ability to communicate clearly about their discipline with those from other disciplines.  
10 Individuals also should be chosen to create an “expert team” rather than a “team of experts.” An  
11 expert team consists of a set of scholars who have individual skills but also, collectively, represent  
12 the range of disciplines necessary to accurately evaluate and analyze the environmental problem  
13 in question and who also have the interpersonal skills that help a team run well. These include  
14 the ability and willingness to provide honest yet constructive feedback to others, to listen and  
15 respond quickly and well to such feedback from others, and to contribute to the project’s over-  
16 all goals, especially when that means altering individual research approaches and processes to  
17 foster those goals.

18 In addition, several benefits arise from having multiple ranks represented within a team.  
19 Junior scholars benefit from the explicit and implicit training and mentoring from more senior  
20 scholars with more extensive and varied experience who can demonstrate various solutions to  
21 the inevitable problems that arise in collective research. Senior scholars benefit from the intense  
22 exposure to and interaction with those trained in the most current research and methodological  
23 developments and by being challenged to respond to, rather than merely read about, alternative  
24 perspectives on various issues. Such interactions may help overcome the theoretical myopia that  
25 can develop in senior researchers who have worked within their own traditionally defined  
26 boundaries for most of their careers (see Chapters 3 and 4).

27 There are several obstacles to building such a team. One is that most networks of scholars are  
28 built within rather than across disciplines. Most scholars’ networks include those who went to  
29 graduate school together and those who meet by going to the annual conventions of their own  
30 discipline. Institutional incentives reinforce the need to write papers that will be published in  
31 one’s own discipline’s journals and to “build a reputation” in that discipline and discourage the  
32 time “wasted” going to conferences, engaging in collaborations, and networking with those  
33 from other disciplines. The challenge is to identify and recruit people who either have found  
34 ways to achieve traditional measures of disciplinary success while retaining both the time and  
35 inclination to engage in interdisciplinary work or have found less traditional research trajectories  
36 in places such as the Santa Fe Institute.

37 We believe that policy-makers and stakeholders can make significant contributions to inter-  
38 disciplinary research teams. One useful model involves having policy-makers and stakeholders  
39 involved in initial research project meetings to ensure that the research questions are framed in  
40 ways that promote salient research results that stand some chance of contributing to upcoming  
41 policy decisions in ways that are sensitive to existing political, financial, and social constraints  
42 and perspectives (Mitchell et al. 2006). Briefing these policy-makers and stakeholders at regular  
43 intervals during the research process also allows for “course corrections” that can improve the  
44 “uptake” of the ultimate conclusions without making them susceptible to the influence of these

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1 groups. An obstacle that may need to be overcome exists in the relatively brief job tenure and  
 2 demanding time schedule of individual policy-makers and civil society members. Thus involv-  
 3 ing individuals in such an enterprise runs the risk of discontinuities as members drop off and  
 4 replacements bring in new agendas. Having briefing sessions with a broader community at the  
 5 beginning and end of the research process, rather than relying directly on a cadre of individuals,  
 6 offers an alternative solution.

7 Finally, we believe there is a “Goldilocks” problem in terms of team size. Interdisciplinary  
 8 teams, to be successful, must contain sufficient expertise to address the array of perspectives and  
 9 disciplines that can contribute to analyzing the problem in truly interdisciplinary ways. At the  
 10 same time, teams that exceed 10 to 15 individuals can present a range of cost and logistical prob-  
 11 lems that can prove challenging for the organizers and can undermine team members’ sense that  
 12 their contributions are crucial to the team goals.

### 13 *Building a team*

14 Once participants have been selected, the next step in effective interdisciplinary research is  
 15 building a team. Perhaps most important to doing so is the need to develop effective commu-  
 16 nication among team members, taking time to understand both the terminology and perspec-  
 17 tives of the other scholars involved. Different disciplines can use the same word or phrase to  
 18 mean completely different things and, at times, can use different words or phrases to mean the  
 19 same thing (consider the difference in what a “climate regime” means to an atmospheric scien-  
 20 tist and a political scientist). Equally important, but often harder to get at, are the more subter-  
 21 ranean assumptions, methodologies, and “ways of thinking” that are deeply embedded in each  
 22 discipline. Without intending to stereotype, economists may be more comfortable monetizing  
 23 certain human values; physicists may see the world in more mechanistic terms; anthropologists  
 24 may be less comfortable generalizing across different cultures, etc. Mutual understanding of and,  
 25 equally important, respect for, these “cultural differences” requires an ongoing process that tends  
 26 to require considerable in-person interaction and may take a year or more. Open and explicit  
 27 discussions of disciplinary semantics and methodologies can help identify often broad and deep  
 28 divergences in outlooks and approaches. Such efforts are crucial to development of a common  
 29 but integrated understanding of the environmental problem that the scholars seek to understand.

30 The success of “team-building” also requires explicitly and directly addressing the task of  
 31 designing an internally consistent framework that accurately and usefully integrates the different  
 32 disciplines and perspectives of the scholars involved. When such efforts are undertaken and  
 33 succeed, truly interdisciplinary work can emerge that creates synergies from the contributing  
 34 scholars. When such efforts fail, edited volumes whose chapters nominally address the same  
 35 problem may prove quite non-cumulative, with insights from many chapters being ignored,  
 36 misunderstood, or not taken advantage of with the result that meaningful communication across  
 37 disciplines fails to emerge.

38 Overcoming these problems often benefits from strong editorial leadership that develops  
 39 support for, and if necessary imposes, a common framework for analyzing the problem, either  
 40 with all contributing scholars applying the same framework or each scholar accurately using  
 41 their own disciplinary tools to contribute to the overall framework. Procedurally, this often  
 42 requires frequent face-to-face meetings throughout the course of the research project – and  
 43 often more meetings than seem necessary – to develop a coherent common framework, to  
 44 ensure collective understanding of that framework, to foster consistent application of that frame-  
 45 work within individual chapters, and to develop careful cross-chapter insights as the project  
 46 moves toward conclusion.

### 1 *Developing coherent and collective findings*

2 To ensure a project generates strong interdisciplinary insights and presents them in a coherent  
3 manuscript requires iterative interactions among those contributors analyzing the individual  
4 cases and the editors developing the collective conclusions. Reinforcing the need for “strong  
5 leadership” noted above, the need for a strong leader or team of leaders becomes particularly  
6 important as a project moves to completion. These individuals must, from the outset, clarify  
7 both the standards and deadlines they will use for including or excluding chapters in any final  
8 published manuscript. Projects are too often delayed by one or two scholars who deliver their  
9 manuscripts late or provide manuscripts of demonstrably lower quality than others planned for  
10 inclusion. Although telling a team member that their contribution will not be included is  
11 unlikely to be pleasant for either party, they are easier when the criteria for such a decision have  
12 been delineated and understood at the outset. Letting a project be held hostage by those who  
13 miss deadlines or fall short of the group’s agreed-upon standards does a disservice to all the other  
14 team members. In case honoraria are involved, payments should be staggered to ensure success-  
15 ful iterated editing of drafts.

16 Beyond these logistical points, the editors of collective volumes owe an obligation to their  
17 contributors to engage in the careful cross-case comparisons that are necessary to identifying  
18 common patterns and themes and to deriving both ~~backward-looking conclusions and forward-~~  
19 ~~looking conjectures~~. Editors should plan on blocking out the requisite three to six months of  
20 time needed to carefully read the contributed analyses, identify and write up interesting patterns,  
21 analyze the comparisons carefully, have their findings reviewed by ~~all~~ contributing authors, and  
22 revise the conclusions and introduction so that they simultaneously meet the goals of abstracting  
23 from the individual cases ~~without doing injustices~~ to the empirical evidence from those cases.

### 24 *Training scholars*

25 Beyond their intellectual benefits, interdisciplinary research projects that contain both senior and  
26 junior scholars provide excellent opportunities for mentoring. In-person interactions as well as  
27 those by phone or email, provide excellent opportunities for senior scholars to advise junior schol-  
28 ars on “threading the needle” of conducting research that is publishable in disciplinary journals and  
29 fosters professional advancement, that contributes to interdisciplinary understanding of important  
30 environmental problems, and that helps stakeholders and policy-makers improve human responses  
31 to the environmental problems being studied. Equally important, relationships that develop over  
32 the two- to ten-year timelines common to such projects provide the basis for respected senior  
33 scholars to write compelling letters of recommendation for interdisciplinary junior scholars  
34 seeking jobs or promotion in a world that remains, unfortunately, highly disciplinary.

35 These training and mentoring benefits can be fostered, especially for junior scholars, by devel-  
36 oping a common team identity. This can be promoted by having a central institutional home for  
37 the research team, with a critical mass of PhD candidates, post-docs, and faculty that can interact  
38 regularly over the course of two or three years. Where such intensive interactions are not possible,  
39 ensuring that dedicated research team meetings are combined with more ad hoc meetings  
40 involving those team members that happen to be at annual conventions, particularly when team  
41 findings are presented at those meetings, can help considerably. Annual “retreats” at relatively  
42 isolated locations can also improve team esprit de corps and promote possibilities for following  
43 up themes more carefully than can occur in ~~briefe~~ more structured settings and can also facili-  
44 tate more serendipitous interactions with benefits in terms of concept formation, analytic  
45 insights, and development of future collaborations.



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### 1 *Crossing the academic–policy divide*

2 A crucial aspiration of many scholars involved in studying socio–ecological systems is to have  
 3 their scholarship contribute to the mitigation and resolution of specific environmental problems  
 4 and, more generally, to the improvement of the relationship humans have with the natural  
 5 world. Yet understanding the conditions under which and processes by which good scholarship  
 6 becomes usable and used knowledge remains a poorly understood element of socio–ecological  
 7 work (Mitchell et al. 2006). Indeed, the current popularity of Sustainability Science reflects, at  
 8 least in part, an effort to improve the ways socio–ecological scholarship is produced and pre-  
 9 sented to make it more usable and thereby overcome existing political disinterest and resistance  
 10 that fail to lead to usable knowledge actually being used.

11 In the short term and at an initial level, scholars can increase the contribution they make to  
 12 policy by self-consciously attempting to understand, and conduct their research in ways that  
 13 reflect and respond to, the political and policy opportunities and constraints that often are the  
 14 cause of scholarly irrelevance. Research often fails to be “salient,” in the sense of being relevant  
 15 to current policy decisions – it comes in before the policy recommendations being offered have  
 16 any chance of success or after the policy “window of opportunity” has closed (Kingdon 2003;  
 17 Mitchell et al. 2006). Equally important, scholars often confuse what “should be” the constraints  
 18 and opportunities with what are those constraints and opportunities. In this vein of “small  
 19 changes,” it certainly also makes sense for scholars to carefully develop “summaries for policy-  
 20 makers,” to provide policy briefings to those working on the issue, and to entertain the wide  
 21 range of other opportunities to communicate with and provide inputs to policy-makers and  
 22 decision-makers. Dual conclusions, aimed at academic researchers and policy-makers, also seems  
 23 like an imaginative technique (Miles et al. 2002).

### 24 **Conclusion**

25 The ability for scholars to have a larger and more long-lasting influence with policy-makers and  
 26 stakeholders requires a deeper change in how research is conducted. Notions of “co-production” of  
 27 knowledge and of “adaptive management” involve ongoing interactions among scholars (both natu-  
 28 ral and social scientists), policy-makers, stakeholders, and resource managers (Jasanoff 2004). In this  
 29 model, the sequestered generation of knowledge by scholars that is published and handed off to  
 30 policy-makers and others in policy briefings is replaced by efforts to build social institutions that  
 31 involve relatively frequent interactions over several years in which trust and understanding can  
 32 develop in ways that are designed to avoid political pressures influencing scientific findings while, at  
 33 the same time, ensuring that political constraints are recognized as creating important boundaries  
 34 within which policy recommendations must fall (even if, over the longer term, those boundaries  
 35 themselves may be subject to change). Such co-production institutions allow policy-makers and  
 36 stakeholders to realize the value of, and better understand natural and social science insights; provides  
 37 managers with better insights into novel techniques for addressing their day-to-day problems; and  
 38 helps scholars have a better sense of existing policy constraints and opportunities and why they exist.

39 These approaches are likely to be more challenging, more time-consuming, and slower to  
 40 “bear fruit” than more traditional strategies of publishing scholarship and hoping it has influ-  
 41 ence. But they offer the promise of allowing scholars to have significantly more influence than  
 42 they would otherwise. Such strategies also require scholars to think carefully about how they  
 43 maintain their scientific impartiality and credibility while improving their policy-relevance,  
 44 what Stephen Schneider has called the “double ethical bind” of being politically effective while  
 45 being scientifically accurate and honest (Russill 2010).

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