
Harold Guetzkow's Legacy

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Abstract

Harold Guetzkow displayed great determination and a remarkable ability to push boundaries. In this article, I describe how these features have had an impact across generations, both in the social sciences and at Northwestern University. In so doing, I touch on the development of experiments in political science and the rise of political psychology.

Keywords

decision making, experiments, Harold Guetzkow, Northwestern University, political psychology

In many ways, Harold Guetzkow is my intellectual grandfather. He mentored my father's (Daniel Druckman's) graduate career and, as is the case with many advisors, held an important place in the life of his advisee and his advisee's family. My earliest recollection of Professor Guetzkow was hearing the story of my father's dissertation defense. Apparently my father had written such a striking dissertation (as indicated by its award-winning status) that when he entered the defense, Professor Guetzkow informed him that the assessors had little to ask about the dissertation. They thus were going to ask about other social science research topics. He survived with ambivalent feelings about the process. Interestingly, Professor Guetzkow was the first committee member to congratulate my dad and, even, proudly introduced him to the psychology faculty as Dr. Druckman. To me, this story indicated, first, that graduate school could be a scary place and, second, that Professor Guetzkow pushed boundaries as far as possible (see, e.g., Guetzkow, 1995).

Another feature that impressed me was Professor Guetzkow's obvious determination to address problems and use approaches as he saw fit. This is illustrated in a story told by Herbert Simon in his autobiography. Professor Simon (1991) explains that his

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old college friend, Harold, played an important role in the early work on decision making in organizations. As may have been evident at the time, this work went on to have a substantial impact throughout the social sciences. Yet Professor Guetzkow left the research group because “research on management had little direct relevance on Harold’s central concerns with peace and international relations. The position he took at Northwestern University permitted full-time devotion to the questions of peace and war” (p. 46). I imagine few scholars possess the commitment and determination needed to leave a pathbreaking and established research program to pursue questions that they view as more pressing.

These qualities—of determination and pushing boundaries—come through clearly in the work Professor Guetzkow subsequently carried out at Northwestern. He implemented simulation and experimental methods at a time when such approaches were seldom used in political science. The recent (re-)emergence of experiments in political science often points either to the early 1970s (with the briefly published journal *Experimental Political Science*) or to the 1980s (with the publication of some influential experimental work on public opinion) as the starting point for sustained experimental research programs in political science. This is obviously an inaccurate portrayal given the breadth and impact of Professor Guetzkow’s program of research. His research and that of his colleagues/students also promoted fruitful exchange between political science and psychology. Again, to me, this is not given due recognition in many histories of the rise of political psychology. I gather, however, that the lack of acknowledgment of his role in the work being done in experimental political science and political psychology, would not bother Professor Guetzkow. He was fully determined to use methods and approaches to answer important questions, and he and his collaborators clearly did this with astounding success.

This background leads up to Professor Guetzkow’s personal influence on me. I attended Northwestern as an undergraduate shortly after Professor Guetzkow retired. My dad told Professor Guetzkow that I would be applying to the university. He responded quickly, saying that, if accepted, I may want to serve as his research assistant. While that did not come to be, Professor Guetzkow was extremely welcoming. We met on multiple occasions, and he informed me of many opportunities on campus including the major in Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences (MMSS) that he had helped develop. I ended up majoring in MMSS, thanks in part to Professor Guetzkow’s suggestion and to my Dad’s advice and persistence. I will never forget the times that I ran into Professor Guetzkow and his wife around Evanston, particularly at a cafe that my (eventual) wife and I frequented.

He often would share his excitement about his ongoing work using computer simulations. His enthusiasm about this course of research was prophetic; I’m sure Professor Guetzkow would take comfort in the rise, over the last decade, of complex adaptive modeling and web-based experiments. Professor Guetzkow was always interested to hear how my work was going and what my future plans entailed.

In many ways, those future plans have been the result of the foundation he provided. I am currently a professor of political science at Northwestern where I work on

political psychology and experimental methods. Following in Professor Guetzkow's footsteps, my colleagues and I have set up an experimental lab in Scott Hall (just a stone's throw from the Inter-Nation Simulation lab that was in Kresge Hall). Our work focuses on a range of topics that cross disciplinary divides and, like much of Professor Guetzkow's work, decision making in various contexts is a thematic focus. This research is guided by the sorts of organizing or conceptual frameworks that were hallmarks of his synthetic approach to social science. The framework approach is also a vision of scholarship that we share with Professor Guetzkow.

Although my father was the central influence on the route that I have taken, Professor Guetzkow's direct and indirect impact may be the second most significant factor that led me to the place where I find myself today. As such, I view his determination and pushing of boundaries as qualities that I can only hope to emulate and pass along to students. One never knows if any of my students will one day have children who follow a similar path. Clearly, the impact of a scholar like Professor Guetzkow resonates for generations.

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