

*The Need for Professional Training in Public Policy for Global Environmental Sustainability*  
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<https://home.uchicago.edu/~rmyerson/globalenvironment2023.pdf>

Economic theory teaches us to appreciate the modern market economy as a powerful mechanism for communicating information about what consumers want to buy. Through a global corporate network, suppliers throughout the world learn how much we are willing to pay for them to exploit their local resources to help make things that we want.

But while a modern market economy is very good for communicating how much we are willing to pay for private consumption goods, it is not so effective at communicating how much we value public goods, like a stable global climate and a healthy diversity of ecosystems. These qualities of the environment are vital public goods which all of us should value, but which each of us could hope to enjoy for free if others will pay for them; and if others will not pay for them then why should you and I? Such public goods cannot be maintained without organizations that can mobilize collective action for shared goals, including charitable and religious organizations and, most importantly, governments, in which our political leaders wield powers to tax us and regulate us for public purposes.

So the global environment needs to be protected by public policies, and every country in the world must be involved. But these policy decisions must be made independently in every sovereign nation, and decisions about how to balance national economic interests against global environmental values should be based on the best scientific expertise on these complex issues. Thus, the power of the modern market economy to communicate consumers' demand needs to be balanced by some mechanism for communicating good scientific understanding of our global environmental problems to people and their leaders in every country. But local public policies cannot be dictated by outsiders, and so the ability to follow research on environmental questions should not be limited to scientists in a few rich countries. Every part of the world will need certified experts whom its people can trust to guide their public policy-making with relevant information from the best current research on global environmental problems.

On the question of where people around the world might find such a global supply of certified experts to guide their local public policies for environmental sustainability, let me suggest that this is where Harvard could make a most important contribution.

Public policy-making for global environmental sustainability needs to be guided by a general understanding of the physics and chemistry of our atmosphere and oceans, and of the biology of healthy ecosystems, along with some appreciation of the economics and politics of public policy-making itself. And we need experts in this area to share a commitment to the norms of scientific debate, where the essential goal of promoting a better understanding of vital problems must never be compromised by narrow political concerns. To bring so many strands together in a coherent masters program or doctoral program will take a lot of careful thought, and these programs must then recruit outstanding students from every part of the world and every major cultural or religious tradition. This is the kind of academic leadership that the world expects from Harvard University.

Harvard was founded in the 17th century to train congregational ministers for guiding the communities of New England. Now in the 21st century, Harvard should take the lead in training experts who can guide public policies for global environmental sustainability in every part of the world.