Status of the Discipline: A Report of the ACSP Review and Appraisal Committee, Fall 1999

Planning As Science
Engaging Disagreement

Lewis D. Hopkins

If we agreed about everything, one of us would be unnecessary.
—source unknown

If we disagreed about everything, communication and thus collaboration would be impossible.
—corollary

Abstract

Planning scholarship will benefit from research conversations focused on cumulative knowledge about how planning works and how urban settlements work. Our everyday decisions present opportunities. (1) Initiate and sustain conversations through conferences. (2) Referee papers to encourage cumulative scholarship. (3) Cultivate funding sources. (4) Establish awards that recognize contributions to conversations. (5) Hire faculty with scholarly conversations in mind.

▶ Claims for Improved Planning Scholarship

We can plan for planning scholarship by intentionally and thoughtfully taking advantage of our disagreements, our different knowledge, and our different skills—by agreeing to disagree productively and thus to engage our disagreements rather than shy away from them. We have made great strides in doing this, but we can be even more effective in building planning scholarship to learn how human settlements work and how planning works. The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) provides important forums for our roles as "scientists of planning." These forums create the formal contexts and implicit expectations that shape what research we do and how we do it. What might we do to improve the effectiveness of these forums in advancing our science?

Neither my premises nor my recommendations are new. I (Hopkins 1984b, 1995) and others (Bryson 1991; Goldstein 1997; Stiftel and Connerly 1995, 1997) have made similar arguments before. Articles in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (*JPER*) and the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (*JAPA*) have small numbers of citations to previous articles in the same journals or even other planning journals. Concerted efforts to test conventional planning wisdom empirically are generally lacking. Small increments of cumulative work are given less credence than integrative, pedagogical articles that present, albeit more effectively than before, what we already know. To use Boyer's (1990) categories, I am not arguing that the scholarship of teaching or the scholarship of synthesis is unimportant. I am arguing that the scholarship of discovery is underserved in the planning discipline.

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I take planning as science to focus on scholarship that expands our set of explanations about how the world works to increase our capacity to cope with the world. My perspective is based largely on Miller (1987). Explanations are causal mechanisms sufficient to make sense of observable phenomena in relation to other observable phenomena in ways that are useful in dealing with the world. At any given time for any given field of inquiry, there must be agreement on a core of relevant causal mechanisms, agreement on stopping rules about what depth of explanation is sufficient, and agreement on criteria for better or worse explanations. This view of science is a kind of middle ground between positivist science and hermeneutic interpretation. It does not assume universal predictive statements based on deduction or induction, but it does assume that explanations can be found that are useful and reliable for dealing with particular situations in the world. Reaching disagreement—agreeing to engage in particular, bounded disagreements—is fundamental to pursuing such explanations.

We can advance the discipline of urban planning through additional, intentional efforts to develop threads of cumulative work. First, I describe four stories about threads of planning scholarship to illustrate the range of ways in which we work. A communicative planning practice thread and an urban land use modeling thread have yielded cumulative work but have occurred in very different relationships to the activities of ACSP. The question of urban sprawl and the question of whether plans work are two areas in which we have been less successful in constructing cumulative threads, but repeated efforts at the latter, usually published in core planning journals, suggest an opportunity for ACSP. What can we learn from these examples and their differences?

After considering these examples, I will argue that we could become more effective planning scholars by committing collectively to expectations that would change some individual behaviors and thus increase our aggregate effectiveness in developing cumulative threads of scholarship. I see opportunities in our everyday decisions: organizing conference sessions, refereeing papers, funding our research, recognizing through awards, and hiring faculty. My image of success is that we will become so confident of our roles as scholars of planning that we will be confident in collaborating with scholars from other fields as equals for mutual benefit.

▶ Stories of Planning Scholarship

Planning scholarship has made progress and includes intentional action to frame scholarship, as shown for example by Teitz (1996). The importance of these stories here, however, is not the substance accomplished but how it was accomplished. I am using these stories to frame recommendations, not to report history. The four stories are not intended as good versus bad examples but as indications of the range of how things happen and thus the possibilities for intentional efforts to improve our performance.

What Planners Do: Critical Theory and Communicative Planning

Interpreting what planners do as communicative action, an example of scholarship about how planning works, has reached the status of a claimed paradigm shift (Innes 1995). One window into this story is recounted in Charles Hoch's (1994) Acknowledgments in *What Do Planners Do?*

> The idea for this book emerged from breakfast conversations with John Forester and Howell Baum that started in 1980 in a Cincinnati restaurant. We talked about studying planners and planning. Several years later, Howell initiated an informal study group of planning analysts at the annual meetings of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. We shared notes, criticisms and questions.
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> In 1987, John Forester obtained grant funds to bring together a portion of this group (Sy Adler, Linda Dalton, Norman Krumholz, Howell, and me from the United States, and Judith Allen and Patsey Healey from Britain) to review and comment on early drafts of *Making Equity Planning Work*, which he wrote with Norman Krumholz. John's agenda was much more ambitious than Howell's. He asked us each to spend a day with a practicing planner and report what we found. He hoped our conversations would stimulate a research agenda on planning practice tied to the sort of participant observation he favored. I dutifully fulfilled my obligation and was hooked. The meetings inspired Linda Dalton to conduct a pathbreaking survey of the research literature (Dalton 1989), while Patsy Healey published her detailed account of one planner's work day in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*(Healey 1992).

The preface in Forester's earlier book (1989) provides preceding parts of this story. Evidently, one way to learn how scholarship works is to read prefaces and acknowledgments. This group may have formed more easily because some of the key players already shared a common scholarly heritage from the University of California, Berkeley. It was successful in part because they discussed and agreed on a set of important questions and about methods of inquiry and because they were persistent in cultivating the conversation over a period of ten years. They agreed about certain things to productively engage disagreement about others. The important observation for present purposes is that the nurturing and cultivation of the conversation was at least in part intentional, not accidental.

For the critical theory and communicative practice conversation, *JPER*, *JAPA*, and ACSP conferences were significant, though specialty conferences and *Planning Theory*, a specialty journal edited by Luigi Mazza, played a role. Teitz (1996) argued that this scholarly conversation occurred in the mainline journals because of its evident relevance to practice and the accessibility of the form of its arguments, which apparently could be understood without mathematical analysis or previous participation in the conversation itself. Other conversations, though organized in similar ways, may not share these other characteristics and thus will not and perhaps should not occur in these same forums.

Urban Land Use Modeling

Land use and transportation modeling, an example of scholarship about how human settlements work, has generated several scholarly conversations over the past forty years, but these conversations occurred largely outside the core journals and conferences of planning scholarship. *JAIP/JAPA* has provided intermittent glimpses of this conversation in special issues and symposiums. Comparing the May 1965 issue of *JAIP* edited by Britton Harris and the Winter 1994 symposium in *JAPA* edited by Richard Klosterman suggests changing roles. To oversimplify, in 1965 the modelers reported their work in a way relevant to other modelers. Britton Harris provided a "gloss on lacklustre terms" for the uninitiated, confirming at least a dual purpose of the special issue, but these articles were and remain the references of record for the models reported. In 1994 modelers wrote for an audience presumed to be nonmodelers and about work already published elsewhere. There are of course many reasons for this, but for present purposes it illustrates a changing venue for a particular scholarly conversation.

At least two interpretations of this difference come to mind. Perhaps the progress in urban models is no longer comprehensible to the *JAPA* audience, as it was in the 1960s, because the level of mathematics and the amount of cumulative knowledge required have increased or because the readership of *JAPA* has changed. Or perhaps *JAPA* has changed its strategy from publishing a range of work, each piece of interest and accessible to only a segment of its readership, to a strategy of publishing only work of interest and accessible to all of its readership. Either explanation is sufficient; neither is necessary. Even if some conversations become esoteric to many readers, we can still make choices about what strategies our journals use and in which conversations they engage.

I am not advocating the return of these urban modeling conversations to our core journals. Urban modeling has several "specialty" journal outlets and other formal and informal conferences in which to conduct its conversations. Very few participants in these conversations attend ACSP conferences or publish in *JPER* or *JAPA*. We should, however, select which conversations to engage in to enhance the planning discipline. We should engage several conversations, not just one or two. We should also acknowledge that some conversations are really occurring elsewhere. In such cases we should not publish such work in *JPER* or *JAPA*, except for review articles (scholarship of synthesis or teaching), because we are not sufficiently involved in the conversation to judge whether a paper constitutes a contribution. In sum, we do choose how our journals work and we should make these choices to enhance planning scholarship.

Urban Sprawl

Urban sprawl is again, and perhaps more than ever, a hot topic of public discussion. Much of the current discussion is very familiar from at least the 1960s and, for those older than I, probably from several previous iterations. The recent article on sprawl in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (21 May 1999) confirms its salience but is less than flattering about planning scholarship. Can we learn anything from the lack of progress in the past thirty years so that we can take full advantage of the current interest?

One of the most visible recent arguments on sprawl was the "Point and Counterpoint" between Gordon and Richardson (1997) and Ewing (1997). This exchange generated the largest number of letters to the editor in *JAPA* in recent memory. A key point of these letters was that *JAPA* had staged a debate—a marshalling of available evidence to persuade others of a given point of view. The exchange did not contribute new knowledge. The letters pointed out that there was little consideration of what we know, what we don't know, and how we might learn more (see especially Crane 1997). The debate was largely about whether regulations should be imposed to achieve compactness (with different meanings for compactness), but this is almost certainly too broad a question on which to focus a research conversation directly. Debate is not an appropriate means of reaching disagreement to launch scholarship.

Research questions might focus on whether land use patterns affect travel behavior, whether development patterns that people would choose are available in the market, or what portion of suburban location choice is explained by racism. There should undoubtedly be several scholarly conversations active on questions related to sprawl, and perhaps the breakfast tables have been active. For at least some of these conversations *JAPA* and *JPER* are publishing and should continue to

publish small increments of empirical work in addition to debates.

One interpretation of our lack of progress on urban sprawl is our lack of disciplinary infrastructure to engage major research conversations. Cumulative work will not result from a few large comprehensive attempts to synthesize what we know or organize the current debates. Rather, several prolonged conversations on fairly specific questions with sufficient agreement on questions and validity of possible explanations will be necessary to sustain productive disagreement. The scope of such conversations will be ten years, not two; twenty people, not five; many distinct projects, not one; and millions of dollars of research funding for empirical investigation of explanations.

Effectiveness of Plans and Plan-Making Procedures

A long time ago at a university far, far away, I submitted a dissertation proposal to assess the effectiveness of a combination of human and computer plan-making techniques. My dissertation committee informed me that neither they nor I were part of such a scholarly conversation. If I wanted to do such research I would have to take some more courses in psychology and construct a different committee. I would have to gain entrance to that conversation. I followed the committee's advice, changed the focus of my proposal, earned my Ph.D., and have generally been on the fringes rather than at the cores of scholarly conversations ever since. For a few brief intervals I have engaged scholarly conversations about the effectiveness of human-computer interaction in making plans. These conversations were at the intersection of psychology, operations research, and planning based on course work and dissertation committees across these fields (Brill et al. 1990; Lai and Hopkins 1995; Lee and Hopkins 1995; Trybus and Hopkins 1980). Some of what we want to know should involve collaboration with other disciplines. We should not try to do everything within the planning discipline.

Similarly, multiattribute evaluation is frequently applied in planning, but the scholarly conversation in which these techniques have progressed is almost entirely outside the planning literature. We have been unable to sustain a large enough and diverse enough group of conversants within planning to contribute to the larger conversation beyond planning. These examples illustrate that some scholarly conversations of interest to planning and to individual planning scholars cannot be sustained within planning scholarship. We must be careful in such situations not to create a second-rate literature within planning. It is better in such cases to acknowledge our collective and individual limits and to develop applications for planning based on the larger literature rather than to try to contribute to the scholarly conversation directly.

Many planning scholars have taken stabs at assessing the effectiveness of plans or planning procedures (Alterman and Hill 1978; Bryson, Bromiley, and Jung 1990; Burby et al. 1997; Helling 1998; Hopkins 1984a; Johnson 1996; Knaap, Hopkins, and Donaghy 1998; Mastop and Faludi 1997; Talen 1996a, 1996b). This list is far from complete. Suffice it to say that these articles show a wide range of different conceptions about how to decide whether a plan or planning procedure is effective. There is little evidence, however, of commitment to "agree to disagree" in focused ways so as to make concerted progress. The amount of activity argues that this question is ripe for additional, intentional scholarly conversations and the places in which it has been published suggest that it can occur within the planning literature. Some of us should get together for breakfast literally—or figuratively on the Internet.

▶ Capacity of the Discipline

Does the discipline have the capacity to sustain more conversations and more productive conversations than are currently occurring? Consider the following numbers. There are approximately eight hundred faculty associated with ACSP member planning programs as measured by capitation receipts for *JPER*. Many of these faculty are focused on other modes of research, in conversations well served in specialty journals and conferences, or in conversations conducted largely outside of planning. To avoid overestimating capacity, assume one-fourth of these faculty participate in scholarship of discovery within planning, and each faculty scholar sustains participation in only one conversation at a time. These assumptions yield two hundred faculty involved in such research conversations in planning. If each conversation involved twenty faculty, there could be ten distinct scholarly conversations in progress. I am hard pressed to identify ten such conversations currently that have sufficient coherence of focused effort to yield progress. It is at least plausible that, if we take collective action to encourage such conversations, we can increase the contributions and impact of the planning discipline on research on planning and human settlements.

▶ Opportunities

In *Writing for Scholarly Publication*, Anne Sigismund Huff (1999) premised her advice on the idea that scholarly writing depends on understanding which conversation you are

participating in and what questions are currently salient in that conversation. In deciding what to write, she recommends asking the following questions:

> Which conversations should I participate in?
> Who are the important "conversants?"
> What are these scholars talking about now?
> What are the most interesting things I can add to the conversation? (P. 9)

The crucial point is that effective scholarship, not to mention scholarship likely to be published and to make a contribution, is almost always part of an identifiable conversation. Conversations occur through conference sessions, shared paper drafts, submission of articles to journals in which a conversational thread is emerging, refereeing papers with respect to contributions to particular conversations, and face-to-face talk. Participating in a conversation does not mean agreeing with what is being said. It does mean engaging questions in ways that respond to the work of other scholars by disagreeing within a common framework (or metaframework if the disagreement is about frameworks) or by adding evidence for agreement.

Huff gave excellent advice to an individual scholar on how to participate more effectively. I turn, therefore, to what we as planning scholars might do collectively to increase our individual effectiveness. Top down, formal setting of an exhaustive research agenda does not work. We can, however, collectively encourage individuals to initiate intentional scholarly conversations by the expectations we set and the opportunities we provide. We should not attempt to agree as an organization on a research agenda or priorities, nor should we try to organize everyone into conversations. People will generally find conversations that interest them, but there are collective action hurdles to initiating new conversations. It is also pertinent that the prior social affinity that tends to overcome collective action hurdles exacerbates de facto exclusion of people who are junior, graduates of other universities, women, African Americans, or otherwise different in irrelevant ways. The following recommendations elaborate ways in which we can be collectively more intentional in our efforts to create conversations.

1. Initiate and Sustain Conversations through Conferences

Conferences serve many functions. One should be to encourage the initiation and sustaining of intentional scholarly conversations. Key interactions often occur over breakfast and are largely independent of any formal aspects of the conference. Invite someone new to your conversation by inviting him or her to breakfast. Set up a small, focused listserve.

Ideally, conference sessions are conversations rather than staged debates or collections of papers that do not engage each other even if they appear to be on the same topic. That such sessions are an ideal means most sessions will not be, but more can be if we keep trying. Track chairs have sufficient knowledge of the conversations in their track that, with a few consultations but without refereeing of abstracts, they can create some sessions that are clearly venues for particular conversations. Citations, as now requested with abstracts, help in placing papers in the appropriate conversations by identifying what previous scholarship a paper builds on. Citations also remind scholars that if they don't know what conversation they are in, they should spend some time and use Huff's advice to figure it out. Refereeing abstracts is at best marginally productive and takes so long that abstracts must be submitted long before papers are written or work even undertaken. We should shorten the conference lead time: abstracts by mid-April, organized into sessions by June. The planning discipline will be strengthened if we can increase the number and effectiveness of scholarly conversations sustained in significant ways through the ACSP conference.

Rewards for participation in conversations will also be useful, as exemplified by the continuing funding from Fannie Mae for sessions on housing and community development. Opportunities to attract funds for other conversations should be pursued.

2. Referee Papers to Encourage Cumulative Scholarship

The expectations we set as referees play a major role in what gets published and therefore in what gets written and eventually in what research gets done. We should ask first: To what scholarly conversation does this article contribute? Am I an appropriate referee for this conversation? Is this conversation sustainable in this journal for this audience? If this conversation has not been published in this journal in the past, is it worth an attempt to bring it into this journal? Is this article written for the participants in that conversation, and does it make a contribution to that conversation?

Such refereeing (and corollary modifications of submission guidelines) will encourage submission of highly focused, shorter articles, closely linked to previous work. Such articles need be only three to five pages when printed instead of the currently typical ten pages or more. A few citations will suffice to place such articles in the particular scholarly conversation. The primary audience will be regular readers of the journal and in particular people who are already familiar with the conversation, both substantively and methodologically. If two or three

such articles are substituted for one article of current average length, we can increase the number of contributions published per year without increasing the pages in our journals. Or, rather than the sixteen pages recently added to each future issue of *JPER* allowing for one or at most two more articles per issue, they could allow four short articles—sixteen more per year. Short contributions can be framed more easily as increments, submitted earlier and more frequently during the research effort, and published more quickly—within one year of initial submission rather than two years. This approach makes our work more visible more quickly, which is advantageous in assessing faculty for promotion and tenure and in demonstrating our accomplishments to our campus administrators and funders.

Such articles should be refereed to the same high standards and by the same processes we use for other articles, and they should not be distinguished in print from other, longer articles. That is, they should not be labeled in a way that would allow anyone to discount their value. Such opportunities will encourage cumulative work responsive to related work by others and in sufficiently timely fashion to be a viable and visible medium of interchange and recording of planning scholarship. This strategy should not be taken to mean that *JPER* could or should sustain all conversations. It should, however, sustain several conversations of cumulative scholarship of discovery rather than publishing mostly articles that stand alone outside any conversation, articles that integrate research really reported elsewhere, and only one or two sustained scholarly conversations.

Such a mix should increase the value of *JPER* for tenure-seeking faculty. Even though an increase in articles focused on particular conversations will compete with articles of other types, being recognized as a journal of record for some research conversations will make publication in *JPER* more valuable to tenure-seeking faculty in major research institutions. Such recognition will increase the prestige of all articles published in *JPER* and thus also benefit even scholars who are not part of a focused conversation.

We should encourage other journals to provide such opportunities as well. Then we must demonstrate that we believe this is appropriate by writing such articles, encouraging others to write such articles, and evaluating the contribution and impact of the work reported rather than the number of pages.

3. Cultivate Funding Sources

Planning scholars have been wonderfully inventive and surprisingly successful in gaining research funding. Grants for Community Outreach Partnership Centers, the long string of funding from the Natural Hazards Division of the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Fannie Mae funding for ACSP conference activities come to mind. Without discouraging any of these ongoing efforts, we should take advantage of the current political salience of urban planning issues to raise the visibility of planning scholarship at the NSF and elsewhere. Some of our colleagues were involved in early meetings that led to the creation of the NSF Urban Research Initiatives program, and others received funding under this program. This program is another indication that the timing is opportune to enhance the image of planning scholarship. Starting from "Anchor Points for Planning's Identification" (ACSP Strategic Marketing Committee 1997), we should organize a lobbying effort to get planning research explicitly recognized by the NSF. Planning should be added to the name of a section, or at a minimum questions in planning research should be explicitly included in the descriptions of one or more sections. We should also make sure that the review panels include planning faculty and that planning faculty submit proposals.

This recommendation does not contradict my claim that we cannot and should not try to develop an exhaustive collective statement of research priorities. NSF funding is one opportunity among others and should be pursued in terms of particular research questions likely to yield success in the particular forum of the NSF. Other opportunities should also be pursued. Fannie Mae funding is again a good example of an opportunity taken for one research area without precluding others or imposing participation. To seize such opportunities requires persuasive presentation of illustrative, timely, researchable questions, not an exhaustive research agenda.

Some of our scholarly conversations will require and can justify large amounts of funding. Significant empirical work with respect to sprawl is an obvious and timely opportunity. We should not be afraid to pursue large initiatives. Such efforts are likely to be joint efforts of the NSF and mission agencies analogous to collaborations of the NSF and the EPA on environmental research. A collective voice is needed to achieve such levels of funding.

4. Establish Awards That Recognize Contributions to Conversations

There are two central questions in evaluating research: (1) What is the contribution? and (2) What is the impact of this contribution on the field? We should establish one or more awards based on these criteria. Our current awards consider careers—for example, the Distinguished Planning Educator Award—or specific products—for example, the Chester Rapkin Award for Best Article in *JPER*. An award for making a contribution with impact is likely to be based on more than one article but less than a career. Like a Nobel Prize, such an

award should identify the contribution for which it is given. Unlike a Nobel Prize, our award should be based on a few years' work at any stage of a career, the earlier in a career and the more quickly the work is recognized the better. Such an award would at least sometimes recognize collaborative contributions—intentional efforts by a group of scholars to cumulate knowledge on a particular question.

I was once embarrassed when asked by the wife of a provost, "What are the most exciting questions being talked about at this conference?" For most planning conferences I have attended, it is hard to answer this question off the cuff. It would be great to answer by having in mind who recently won such an award and for what contribution, or who were likely competitors for the next award and for what. Such awards shift the focus from the artifact of reporting (article, book, or presentation) to the substance of the work. It shifts the focus from a one-off success out of context to cumulative work, albeit work that may have impact precisely because it challenges embedded conventional wisdom or conventional wisdom about research design or method.

In creating such awards, we might substitute them for existing awards that require submission of particular artifacts—a paper, a book, a dissertation—because some of these awards have not attracted sufficient submissions. The point is not that we need more awards but that we need awards that focus on contributions to conversations that have impact on the field.

5. Hire Faculty with Scholarly Conversations in Mind

Deciding which faculty to hire has a tremendous impact on what a department becomes and in aggregate on what the discipline becomes. Whether crafting a department from the perspective of the department or crafting a discipline from the perspective of ACSP, the actions that matter most are the same—each decision whether to hire or tenure an individual faculty member. These decisions are made by department faculties. From either the department's or the discipline's perspective, however, it makes sense to consider what scholarly conversations a particular candidate is prepared, likely, and able to participate in and contribute to over the course of a career.

Faculty must cover the scope of teaching required for a planning curriculum, and faculty may engage in different types of scholarship. Nevertheless, faculty are most likely to contribute to the discipline if they are able to participate in at least one (and no more than a few) scholarly conversations both locally and nationally.

Therefore, choose and nurture faculty who can provide instructional scope and for whom scholarship communities can be created within planning or in association with other disciplines. Think about how a given candidate can gain entry to such conversations and what the department will need to do to achieve this. Ask yourself, Did the candidate's dissertation research engage a significant scholarly conversation? Is that conversation sustainable on your campus either within the planning program or across other campus units? Is that conversation sustainable nationally given your expectations about the conferences the candidate should attend (and will be supported to attend) and the appropriate journals or book publishers? Is it feasible in the department's overall strategy if these conversations are outside of planning? Tell candidates how you see the range of possible strategies that will be available to them. Is this conversation happening sufficiently within planning scholarship at a critical mass sufficient to sustain significant contributions in the planning literature or only to report progress occurring in some other literature? Will the candidate succeed in publishing in that other literature? Will the candidate be adaptable as conversations evolve and have the grounding to move on to other conversations?

It does not help the discipline of planning if we hire faculty who are isolated from others doing related work either because the planning scholar is unable to engage a specialist literature sufficiently to really contribute or is unable to find a meaningful conversation within the planning literature. We can build the discipline with faculty who are successful in engaging conversations within and outside the planning literature, but we should be aware of the balance between these two avenues.

▶ Agree to Engage Disagreement

My grandfather's approach to ending arguments among his children was to suggest that they agree to disagree—peace through *dis*engagement. Our collective efforts to enhance planning scholarship should turn this on its head. We should modify the implicit and explicit incentives of our disciplinary culture of scholarship to encourage efforts to reach disagreement. Reaching disagreements that are sufficiently specific to pose researchable questions is hard work. Agreeing to disagree in some mutually meaningful way, however, is essential to identify an unanswered question in a framework in which it might be addressed. Articulating researchable questions is fundamental to establishing productive scholarly conversations.

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