

Reflections on the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* at 15: Changing NASPAA and the Field

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Looking back fifteen years at this stage of life is long enough to tax my memory (but I am comforted in knowing that I am probably not alone). I had the good fortune of saving past issues of the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* (*JPAE*), and the double good fortune of remembering where I put them, because now I need them as a memory aid.

This reflection recounts developments in the second phase of *JPAE*'s evolution — immediately following its founding. It also shares observations about the substantive impacts of the journal on the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), and the field.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

I succeeded founding editor H. George Frederickson as Editor-in-Chief and started with Volume 4, Issue 1 in January, 1998. My term as Editor-in-Chief spanned three years, and ended with Volume 6, Issue 4 in October, 2000. Just as Dan Balfour (2010) characterized the first three years of the journal as exciting, my term as Editor also was eventful.

The events that shaped my term as Editor began in 1996, almost two years before I got the position. I was a member of the original Board of Editors for the earlier *JPAE* incarnation, the *Journal of Public Administration Education* (abbreviated *JoPAE* here to differentiate it from *JPAE*), and also contributed to Volume 1 (Perry, 1995), so I was familiar with the journal. In 1996-'97, I chaired the NASPAA Research Committee. One of our most time-consuming topics was NASPAA's sponsorship of a journal. NASPAA Executive Director Michael Brintnall and the NASPAA Executive Committee expressed strong support for a journal. The responsibility for assessing the feasibility and form of such an enterprise fell to the NASPAA Research Committee.

The NASPAA Research Committee subsequently recommended *JPAE* as the association's flagship journal. By fall of 1997, George Frederickson graciously agreed to transfer to NASPAA the journal he founded. In the later stages of negotiation, I competed for the Editor-in-Chief position and was selected to serve a three-year term, starting in September, 1997.

As part of its assessment, the NASPAA Research Committee proposed, and the Executive Committee endorsed, several changes to *JPAE*. These included the following:

- Renaming it as the *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, which reflected the breadth of NASPAA's mission and increased the journal's appeal to groups such as the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM);
- Publishing quarterly rather than three times a year, which increased the journal's attractiveness to libraries and expanded publication opportunities; and
- Using an "8 ½ x 11" format and adding historic photos to the cover, from Charles Goodsell's extensive collection.

One aspect of the journal that remained constant during the transition to NASPAA ownership was Dan Balfour, who I recruited to continue as the Managing Editor. I was fortunate to draw upon his experience and support for three years in a close-knit, working partnership.

JPAE MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR NASPAA AND THE FIELD

Although I cannot step forward with rigorous research to make my case, and must instead rely on impressions formed during the past 15 years, I believe *JPAE* had two primary effects on NASPAA and much of the faculty who identified with public affairs. One effect was how NASPAA was perceived by rank-and-file faculty (who, per the parlance of our field would — in other contexts — be called street-level bureaucrats). The other effect involves legitimizing the scholarship of teaching.

I attended my first NASPAA annual conference in 1977 in Colorado Springs, CO, when the self-study process was first approved. I became quite familiar with the self-study process and, later, with peer review and accreditation, and also with NASPAA as an organization. I had become quite aware of the wide gap that many of my colleagues around the country perceived between their needs and interests, and the activities of NASPAA. Regardless of its reality, NASPAA was perceived by many faculty as a distant, "deans' club."

NASPAA's acquisition of *JPAE* made a big difference in how it was perceived by faculty. Although NASPAA's members are schools, rather than individuals, faculty at these schools now can see NASPAA's tangible connection to what they do, whether they administer a program, or teach as an adjunct faculty member. *JPAE* helps support and inform the activities of many faculty who otherwise would have no connection whatsoever to NASPAA's activities. In this respect,

it is an important bridge to faculty — the key stakeholders in our education institutions. Thus, *JPAE* is yielding important dividends for NASPAA.

The second difference involving *JPAE* was helping to legitimate the scholarship of teaching. As a refereed journal, *JPAE* provides an outlet for thoughtful faculty to make a public case about their pedagogies, experiences, and insights. The journal has helped elevate the status of scholarship about teaching and other facets of public affairs education. More importantly, *JPAE* makes the scholarship of teaching more public, more transparent, and more accessible to all in the profession. In my view, this is an extraordinary change for our field, and a notable step forward.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

I want to conclude my reflections with an observation about *JPAE*'s substance. Having been involved with the journal since its founding, I would categorize this observation as a "pleasant surprise." The pleasant surprise is how diverse the editorial content of *JPAE* has become, while, simultaneously, there has been a growing volume of manuscripts. In Dan Balfour's reflection from the Winter 2010 issue of *JPAE*, he recounted the significant uncertainty that surrounded us, while we wondered whether there would be enough manuscripts to sustain the journal over time. As he noted, only three peer-reviewed articles appeared in the first issue. Much of Volume 1 contained invited contributions that appeared in the Special Issues feature section. This uncertainty about the supply of quality content did not dissipate, even by the time I concluded my term as editor. I regularly editorialized about the content I wanted to see and we regularly signaled our editorial interests in particular submissions, by using calls for papers on specific symposia topics and other editorial devices, as a way of sustaining our supply of manuscripts. The expansion of the journal to four issues annually also created a need for more manuscripts.

As I look at the nine volumes of *JPAE* that were published following my term as editor, I marvel at how diverse the content has become. Volume 15 contained a total of 30 articles — more than three times the content of Volume 1. Even more impressive is the diversity of its subject matter. I never envisioned some of the topics that now appear in the pages of *JPAE*. In my view, this more diverse content does not reflect a turn toward more esoteric topics, but rather it shows the willingness of scholars to step forward and address a wide range of issues that are important to faculty, administrators, students, and other stakeholders in public affairs education.

Neither the increase in *JPAE*'s quality content, nor its diversification, were foregone conclusions when the journal was founded. The expansion and heterogeneity of *JPAE*'s content testifies to the power of need and opportunity. As a former *JPAE* editor, I am grateful that so many of my colleagues from around the world responded to George Frederickson's vision for advancing substantive dialogue about public affairs education.

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