

Looking Forward from *JPAE's* First 15 Years: Some Questions for the Profession

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Heather Campbell, the current editor of the *Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAE)*, invited former editors of the Journal to write a brief piece commenting on the Journal's accomplishments and status after its first 15 years of publication. In prior issues of volume 16, Danny Balfour highlighted the challenges and excitement that accompanied the creation and early development of *JPAE*, and Jim Perry charted the institutionalization and maturation of the Journal over the first 15 years of its existence. They did this so admirably that I have only two observations to add regarding the development of the Journal. I will then suggest a couple of developments that are worth exploring.

One of the big problems readers and contributors faced during *JPAE's* development is that it was not an accessible journal. Significant numbers of copies were distributed to the faculties of National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) member programs, but the base of library subscriptions was quite small, and the Journal was not available electronically. This meant that the readership was less than it could be, and authors preparing manuscripts were often unaware of previously published work on a particular subject. NASPAA addressed this by making a limited number of articles available through the association's Web site and eventually made entire issues available this way. Just having the Journal available through the NASPAA Web site is an enormous advance that will further the accumulation of knowledge in public affairs education, but the real key is to make it available through international indexing and subscription services that are accessible through university libraries and elsewhere.

JPAE has been quite successful at examining trends in public policy and administration and exploring the implications of those developments for public affairs education. A variety of papers in the Journal have analyzed the transformation of governance practices, and examined how public affairs education is responding to that transformation, and suggested how it should respond to that transformation. A prime example of this is the attention that

journal authors have given to nonprofit management in this era of third-party government. This is a widely remarked, highly significant development, and it is critical that the primary vehicle for writing about public affairs education has been attentive to it.

Given this chance, let me suggest two topics that should receive considerable attention in *JPAA* in the coming years. One of these is to examine the impact and place of public affairs education. When NASPAA first moved to mission-based accreditation standards some years ago, it brought attention to the outcomes of our educational enterprises. Programs, of course, have struggled to find ways to demonstrate the outcomes of their efforts. Despite progress on that score, our programs seldom produce the kinds of assessments that are demanded of public agencies in an era of results-based governance. More importantly, we've done little to document and assess the collective effects of our efforts.

When public administration education developed in the twentieth century, the goal was to transform the administration of government by professionalizing the public service. The initiation and growth of policy analysis programs in the latter part of the twentieth century was supposed to transform the decision basis of governance. There can be little doubt that government has professionalized in a wide variety of ways. It is also abundantly clear that the information base for decision making has improved. Focusing on evidence and results are hallmarks of these changes. What is less clear is the degree to which our programs have been central to these changes.

The question is whether the Master of Public Affairs (MPA) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) degrees have acquired the kind of professional legitimacy that would make them the preferred pathway into public policy and administration. An important current indicator that they have not is found in the Presidential Management Fellows Program, where graduates of law schools now dominate placements. In 2010, the top 102 law schools averaged 2.66 finalists each; the top 97 schools of public affairs averaged 1.37 finalists each (Drake, 2010). Why has this happened, and what does it tell us about the market for our degrees?

The second topic that needs more attention is the transformation of our degree programs. Two types of change are noteworthy. One is the proliferation and fragmentation of public affairs degrees into increasingly specialized areas. The second is the expansion of PhD education.

Public affairs educators have shown considerable creativity in developing joint degree programs and new specialized degrees. The creators of MPP degree programs started this process of differentiation 4 decades ago. This was followed most notably by the initiation of nonprofit management degrees. Now our schools offer degrees in health administration, environmental management, and a variety of other specialized fields. It is not hard to imagine future offerings of a Master of Public Financial Management, Master of Emergency Management,

or a host of other specialized offerings. What are the costs and benefits of this kind of proliferation? What are its consequences for our students, our programs, and the profession? Does it really make a difference? Hur and Hackbart's analysis in the Fall 2009 issue of *JPAE* suggests, for example, that the differences between MPP and MPA degrees are significant, although other studies have noted a convergence in the offerings of the programs. Will that be the case with the other specialized offerings? Will a common sense of purpose animate these diverse enterprises? Does it matter what the degrees are called?

A second important change has been the growth in PhD programs in public affairs education. There has been a significant expansion of PhD offerings in public affairs. It is likely that many programs are not preparing their graduates primarily for careers as university professors, although many of the graduates may well end up as adjunct faculty members in public affairs programs while pursuing their primary careers as managers and specialists. In the 1980s, NASPAA adopted a policy position asserting that the doctoral degree in public affairs is a research degree, whether it is labeled a PhD or a DPA. Is that the reality today? Why have PhD programs proliferated? What recruitment and placement markets do they serve? How do they differ in purpose, focus, content, and pedagogy? What impact are they having?

Addressing these developments in public affairs education will enhance our understanding of the profession and the contributions it makes to enhanced governance and the preparation of students for careers in public service.

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