

# A Profile of Villanova University's Partnership with Local Government Managers

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## ABSTRACT

In this case study, we describe and assess how the Villanova University Master of Public Administration (MPA) program involves practitioners in local government management education. We present student and faculty views on the effectiveness and quality of the university's one-credit courses on different topics taught by local government managers and the three-credit course on effective city management team-taught by three township managers. We also review the contributions of municipal internships to Villanova MPA students' education and career trajectories. Finally, we explain the curriculum featured in the university's Graduate Certificate in City Management program and stress the advantage of offering the certificate to pre-master's and post-master's students, as well as to MPA students choosing to specialize in city management. Data from a 2009 survey of program directors from National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) member schools indicate that the combination of Villanova's practices is unique. Because the students and faculty believe this approach is an effective one, we offer the university's model as one way for full-time faculty to partner with local government professionals to help recruit and educate the next generation of city and county managers.

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The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and its state affiliates are working to attract college students and recent graduates to enter the local government management profession. Master's degree programs in public administration have a long history of involving practitioners in a variety of ways (e.g., Zody, 1977; Denhardt, Lewis, Raffel, & Rich, 1997; Spoormans & Vanhoonacker, 2005; Paules, 2007; Milam, 2003; Smith, 2008). As Posner

(2009) wrote, "The world of practice serves as the center point of the academic compass for most professional programs" (p. 13). Thus, a foundation exists for public administration programs to partner with professional local government managers to form a mutually beneficial relationship. Over the years, variations on these relationships have been discussed and debated, especially within the context of larger conversations about public service pedagogy, the importance of connecting theory with practice, and recruiting the next generation of public servants (Denhardt, 2001; Friend, 2004; Franklin & Ebdon, 2005; Posner, 2009). In this case study, we explain and assess Villanova's partnership with Pennsylvania local government managers and discuss how some of our curricular features compare with those in other programs.

Villanova's approach, which has expanded over time, builds on an effective reliance on local government managers as a source of programmatic advice, career advice to our students, and internships. Beginning in the Fall 2001 semester, we expanded our partnership with local government managers beyond these conventional practices to include regular graduate teaching of one-credit courses focusing on local government topics. Then, in the Spring 2005 semester, three managers began team-teaching a new three-credit course, MPA 8500 Effective City Management. Finally, our partnership with local government managers enabled us to establish a Graduate Certificate in City Management as a specialization in our MPA program, beginning in the Fall 2005 semester.

Offering one-credit courses, practitioners that team-teach, and a graduate certificate, along with treating the local government internship as an employment relationship, have attracted Villanova students to the local government profession. Data from a 2009 survey of program directors from NASPAA member schools indicate that the combination of our practices is unique. Because our students and faculty believe this approach is an effective one, we offer our model as one way for full-time faculty to partner with local government professionals to help recruit and educate the next generation of city and county managers.

#### PRACTITIONERS' TEACHING

Recent issues of *PM* magazine and attendance at teaching workshops held at the ICMA annual conferences indicate that city and county managers are welcoming the opportunity to move into the classroom as instructors. Vanacour and Denhardt (2005) attribute this trend to a variety of factors, including the desire of managers to give back to their profession, a passion for educating the next generation of leaders, and the sheer enjoyment and intellectual challenge of being in the classroom. There is variation, however, with respect to the amount and degree to which practitioners are teaching in public administration, policy, and public affairs programs (Apfel, 2008). For example, Garris, Madden, and Rodgers (2008), in a sample of 16 schools during the Spring 2006 semester,

observed that private schools and schools located in a metropolitan area are more likely to utilize practitioners in the classroom.

Concerns about the time commitment, course design, and teaching practices, however, may seem daunting to local government managers (Vanacour & Denhardt, 2005). For example, Cox, Kevin, Banovetz, and McDowell (2007) identified a number of questions that practitioners consider when deciding whether or not to venture into the classroom:

- What am I really qualified to teach?
- Do I have the time and energy to devote to a second job?
- How will the city council react? The community?
- Where do I get help writing a syllabus, picking textbooks, developing audiovisual aids, grading? (p. 5)

Our experience recruiting and retaining practitioners as teachers certainly reflects these concerns. Some of our nonprofit and local government practitioners were wary of teaching a three-credit course. Our approach at Villanova is to have the practitioners with these concerns teach our one-credit elective courses and/or team-teach some of our three-credit courses. One-credit courses and team-teaching address the concerns local government managers may have about teaching, and offer a creative way to introduce our students to men and women in the profession of local government management (Wheeland, Canavan, Comunale, & Olpere, 2007).

#### *Teaching One-Credit Courses*

Because exit surveys completed by our graduates indicated a desire for a wider array of electives, we added to our curriculum several one-credit courses taught by practitioners, beginning in the Fall 2001 semester. We first offered courses on volunteer management, grant-writing, and land use and zoning. The land use and zoning class was the only one of the three taught by a local government manager. Since 2001, we added one-credit courses focusing on local government topics that were based on suggestions from local government managers advising our program, as well as on ICMA's list of practices for effective local government management. The list of courses now taught includes the following:

- Land Use and Zoning (taught by a township manager),
- Debt Management (taught by a township manager),
- Economic Development Strategies (taught by a township manager),
- Labor Relations (taught by a township manager),
- Program Evaluation (taught by a nonprofit manager),
- Performance Measurement (taught by a township manager),
- Governmental Financial Reporting (taught by a local government finance director),

- Effective Public Affairs (taught by a public affairs consultant/former manager), and
- Emergency Management (taught by a city of Philadelphia police captain).

We usually offer two one-credit courses during the summer semester, and three one-credit courses during the fall semester and spring semester. The class size for the one-credit courses ranges from 4 to 12, with an average enrollment of 7. Students take three one-credit courses to count in place of a three-credit elective course. Although the one-credit courses are optional for MPA students, students specializing in city management typically take at least three one-credit courses.

### *Course Design*

The MPA Director helped the instructors design their courses. The MPA Director met several times with each instructor to discuss reading material, writing assignments, projects, teaching techniques, grading practices, and general course management practices. The MPA Director also reviewed and approved the syllabus for each course.

In general, we estimate that a one-credit course should require about one third of the workload expected of students in a three-credit course. Each one-credit course meets on three Saturdays, from 8:45 a.m. to noon. Although the specific assignments vary, all of the instructors require that students read the material, participate in class discussions, submit some form of written work, and complete projects that demonstrate they have learned to use a particular skill. The instructors are paid one credit-hour for teaching.

The primary goals of the one-credit courses are to have a practitioner teach skills to our students and for the students to use those skills in the course. We intentionally shift the emphasis from learning theory and practice, which is an important goal in our three-credit courses, to learning how to apply a skill. Consider these two examples: (1) In Land Use and Zoning, students learn the basics of Pennsylvania planning and zoning law and then learn how to take a project through a simulated zoning hearing, and (2) in Labor Relations, students learn the basics of Pennsylvania labor law and then participate in a simulated police arbitration hearing before a panel consisting of two labor lawyers appearing in class as guests of the instructor.

In summary, we think one-credit courses have enriched our students' education in the following ways:

- Expanding the electives in our program,
- Providing skill-oriented instruction by practitioners, and
- Introducing students to a variety of local government practitioners.

In addition, one-credit courses allow practitioners to balance their time commitments to work, family, and teaching.

*Student Feedback*

Students complete a form to evaluate each course. The MPA Director designed the form in 2001, based on the one Villanova uses for three-credit courses.<sup>1</sup> Students use a 5-point scale to measure effectiveness, with “1” indicating *very ineffective* and “5” indicating *very effective*. The course evaluations completed by our students suggest that the one-credit courses are effective. For example, the data from academic year 2008-2009 presented in Table 1 concern two topics: The quality of instruction and the overall value of the course. The data presented in Table 1 are the mean ratings on the 5-point scale. We also report the number of students completing each form (e.g.,  $N=9$ ). All of the students enrolled in the one-credit courses completed an evaluation form.

Table 1.  
*Student Views of One-Credit Courses (2008-2009)*

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<b>One-Credit Course</b>	<b>Quality of Instruction</b>	<b>Overall Value of Course</b>
Government Financial Reporting ( $N=9$ )	4.6	4.4
Economic Development ( $N=3$ )	5.0	5.0
Performance Measurement ( $N=8$ )	4.8	4.6
Emergency Management ( $N=7$ )	4.6	4.2
Land Use and Zoning ( $N=7$ )	5.0	5.0
Program Evaluation ( $N=7$ )	4.8	4.8
Debt Management ( $N=6$ )	5.0	5.0
Labor Relations ( $N=4$ )	4.8	5.0

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Students' written comments on the form also affirm the quality of the learning in the one-credit courses. A few examples of these comments from academic year 2008-2009 are provided in Table 2.

Table 2.  
*Written Comments About One-Credit Courses (2008-2009)*

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<b>One-Credit Course</b>	<b>Sample Written Comment</b>
Government Financial Reporting	The course/instructor focused on real world examples and information, which is great because it balances much of the theory learned in other classes.
Economic Development	The instructor is direct and to the point with lessons. This helps learn about the subject. Also, we related all material to actual/real cases. This also is effective.
Performance Measurement	Good materials. Professor relates materials to students' personal work experiences. Great amount of material to come in a short time. Very understandable.
Emergency Management	Blended practical and theoretical aspects well.
Land Use and Zoning	[Simulated] zoning hearing board presentation was very effective way of learning about the process.
Program Evaluation	[The instructor] is extremely organized, extremely kind and understanding, and treats students with respect. He is very knowledgeable and effective in teaching material.
Debt Management	I will be able to immediately apply learning to daily responsibilities in the work environment. Very valuable information.
Labor Relations	Very good course. Very informative. I will be able to use this knowledge and resource material in my daily duties. Highly recommended

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As is true of all MPA faculty members, the MPA Director reviews their course evaluations and discusses the results with the instructors. The ongoing effort to mentor part-time faculty helps ensure a quality experience for instructors and students.

#### TEAM-TEACHING MPA 8500 EFFECTIVE CITY MANAGEMENT

In the Fall 2004 semester, our MPA Director invited three township managers (Chris Canavan, Larry Comunale, and Daniel Olpere) to teach as a team a new three-credit course, MPA 8500 Effective City Management. The MPA Director recruited these three managers to teach because they had MPA degrees and possessed the following qualities:

- Were leaders in the Association for Pennsylvania Municipal Management (APMM) and active in ICMA,
- Were effective guest lecturers in our MPA courses,
- Were effective mentors for our students doing internships,
- Were helpful as advisors to our program, such as suggesting one-credit course topics, and
- Two (Canavan and Olpere) effectively taught some of our one-credit courses

The MPA Director guided the team in designing and managing the course, settling on grading practices, and determining teaching styles, but he did not participate as an instructor. They taught the course for the first time in the Spring 2005 semester. We continue to offer the course each spring semester.

During the Fall 2007 semester, Canavan decided to stop teaching MPA 8500 in order to spend more time with his family and focus on teaching three of our one-credit courses. When we offered MPA 8500 in the Spring 2008 semester, township manager Stephanie Teoli joined the team in place of Canavan. We recruited Teoli because she had an MPA degree, was active in APMM and ICMA, and brought gender diversity to the course.

From the Spring 2005 semester through the Spring 2008 semester, the team used two ICMA books as the foundation for the course: *The Effective Local Government Manager* and *Managing Local Government: Cases in Decision Making*. In the Spring 2009 semester, the team began using ICMA's new case study text, *Managing Local Government: Cases in Effectiveness*, in place of the older case study book. Reliance on ICMA's books ensures that the course covers ICMA's list of practices for effective local government management.

The course meets once per week for 2 hours in the evening (a standard schedule for a three-credit course at Villanova). The instructors teach the course primarily as a seminar rather than in a lecture format, with ample opportunity for students to discuss the case studies.

Each week students read all or part of a chapter from *The Effective Local Government Manager*, along with one case study compatible with the topic of the chapter. This active-learning approach, using cases, matches well the managers' acumen and ability to apply ideas to solve problems. As Olpere explains,

Case studies help the students focus on real life decision-making scenarios that promote discussion and learning. The case studies help students to understand these complex interrelationships that often lead to ethical and personal challenges. We discuss them together and work through the best and worst case scenarios for the individual case studies (Personal communication, November 20, 2009).

#### *Addressing the Time Constraints*

To address the time constraints facing each manager, we created a division of labor as we arranged teaching schedules for the 14 weekly classes. All three managers teach the first class (the subject is the profession of local government management) and the 14th class (the life of a local government manager). The remaining 12 classes are divided into three groups of 4 consecutive weeks. Each practitioner therefore teaches four classes alone. Villanova pays part-time faculty per credit-hour, so the division of labor allows each manager to be paid for one credit-hour.

Dividing the labor achieves an acceptable balance for each manager's obligations to local government work and quality family time. Canavan notes, "Team teaching allowed me the flexibility of teaching a three-credit course as an adjunct instructor by sharing the class responsibilities with my fellow instructors so that the time commitment did not impinge on my day job" (Personal communication, November 20, 2009). Students also benefit by learning from three managers with unique career paths and personal approaches, rather than learning from one manager. As Larry Comunale comments,

I think team teaching gives students exposure to differing styles of management. My experience is that we differ very little in our overall approach to the profession, especially our core beliefs. However, how we translate and communicate those basic principles of our profession and how we react to situations in our communities may be different due to our diverse professional profiles (age, gender, background). I think that gives the students the benefit of seeing different styles of management (Personal communication, November 20, 2009).

The division of labor allows the students to meet all three managers in the beginning, and again at the end. The challenge of using a division of labor is to provide continuity from one instructor to the next, which the team accomplished by carefully planning the course in advance and keeping each other and the students informed by e-mail.

### *Evaluating Student Work*

In a team-taught course, it is difficult to evaluate student work consistently. George and Davis-Wiley (2000) identify three main alternatives for a team of instructors to share grading the students' work:

- Divide the class, and each instructor is responsible for only the students assigned to them,
- Take turns grading a student's work throughout the semester, or
- Each instructor grades all the papers, adding comments and suggested grades for each assignment (p. 77).

Our approach requires students to prepare assignments for each instructor (option 2, above) as well as instructors coordinating the standards they apply when grading assignments.

First, students write one memorandum of approximately 500 words for each instructor. Students choose one of the four case studies taught by each instructor and answer one of the discussion questions featured in the case study. The instructors use the same guidelines to teach and grade the memoranda, a practice that establishes consistency across instructors. Each student has grades from all three instructors on the memoranda, and the instructors simply average the grades to determine the final grade for the memo assignments.

Second, beginning in the Spring 2009 semester, students also complete three assignments that count as part of their participation grade:

- For Comunale, students write an analysis of a news article on a local government story.
- For Olpere, students write a critique of an article on community and economic development provided by the instructor.
- For Teoli, students attend a local government board or council meeting and report to the class on an issue discussed at that meeting.

Finally, after the 14th class, the team distributes a take-home final exam that requires students to answer all of the questions at the end of a case study. The instructors read and grade the take-home exams, with each instructor grading the same sets of questions for each student and then averaging those grades to determine the final exam grade.

The course grade is determined as follows:

Attendance and Participation	25%
Memoranda	45%
Take-Home Final Exam	30%

### *Student Feedback*

Students in MPA 8500 complete Villanova's Course and Teacher Survey (CATS) in order to evaluate the course and teacher. To complete the CATS form, students read a series of statements and indicate their strength of agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale, with "1" indicating *strongly disagree* and "5" indicating *strongly agree*. The data presented in Table 3 are the means on the 5-point scale. We also report the number of students who completed the CATS in the course (e.g.,  $N=6$ ) and the percentage of students enrolled in the course who completed the CATS. Villanova generally expects means above 4.0 and emphasizes the pattern over time, rather than a score in particular semester. Villanova does not make the CATS data public, so the instructors gave us permission to publish their data.

The data indicate our students thought highly of the course each time it was taught. The mean for all but one question is above 4.0 each semester. In addition, the means are generally equal to or above the university graduate course mean for each question. The Spring 2008 semester is the only exception, although the means are still above 4.0 (except for one question). CATS are anonymous, so we cannot know which students completed the forms. We surmise that the 3.8 mean for whether the course was "intellectually stimulating" in the Spring 2008 semester is a result of having several students enrolled who were not specializing in city management. We were pleased to see the means in the Spring 2009 semester match the pattern prior to the Spring 2008 semester.

In addition to using the 5-point scale, students can also write comments on the CATS. The large majority of comments over the years have been positive. For example, one student noted, "Having the class team taught by real-world city management professionals was an excellent way to teach this material. All three professors brought different styles and insights to the material." Some comments offer suggestions for improving the course, such as "The case studies were the most valuable tool in the class. The textbook should not be given as much time in class due to the length of time for the evening class."

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT INTERNSHIPS

There is much documentation about the importance of an internship in educating the next generation of public servants (Jordan, 2002; Holzer & Lin, 2007; Garris et al., 2008). Donovan (2002) identified four reasons for an organization to consider hosting an intern—succession planning, low-cost

Table 3.  
*Student Views of MPA 8500*

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Spring 2005 (N=17; 100%)</b>	<b>Spring 2006 (N=9; 100%)</b>	<b>Spring 2007 (N=7; 100%)</b>	<b>Spring 2008 (N=6; 86%)</b>	<b>Spring 2009 (N=6; 100%)</b>
Organizes and plans course effectively	4.7*	4.9*	4.7*	4.5*	4.7*
Makes the goal of the course clear	4.6*	5.0*	5.0*	4.1	4.8*
Is clear about instructions for assignments	4.8*	5.0*	5.0*	4.2	4.6*
Explains course material clearly	4.6*	5.0*	4.8*	4.6*	4.8*
Grades student work fairly	4.8*	4.9*	4.8*	4.2	4.5
Employs relevant tests and assignments	4.6*	4.9*	5.0*	4.3	4.9*
I found the course intellectually stimulating	4.2	4.8*	5.0*	3.8	4.6*
I learned a great deal in this course	4.6*	5.0*	4.8*	4.1	4.6*
Overall quality of instruction	4.4*	4.6*	5.0*	4.3	4.8*
Overall value of the course	4.4*	4.9*	4.8*	4.1	4.9*

*Note.* \*Indicates class mean is equal to or greater than the mean for all university graduate courses on that question.

temporary labor, the ability to form relationships with academic institutions, and the learning experience possible for both the intern and the “regular employees” (p. 13). There also has been much discussion about best practices to ensure a successful internship experience for both the student and the placement organization. For example, Cupps and Olmosk (2008) suggest, “[B]roadening the range and significance of the tasks given to interns [at the internship site] will motivate and challenge them while also serving agency needs” (p. 310). Also, they think it is important to connect “the intern quickly to important agency employees and decision makers and...the full range of agency activities, meetings, and strategy sessions” (p. 310). On the academic side, Cross and Grant (2006) discussed the implementation of “reflection in practice,” while Harris and Emerson (2001) offered a model for students to link their internship practice with broader theoretical concepts.

As is the case at other universities, Villanova’s MPA program uses internships to provide students with an opportunity to integrate the knowledge they have learned in their courses with work experiences in public or nonprofit organizations. The past and present MPA Directors at Villanova have established long-term relationships with a number of local municipalities in the metropolitan Philadelphia region willing to host paid interns each year. The partnerships forged with the administrators in these boroughs and townships have proven to be a critical means of not only involving professional managers in the MPA program, but also of encouraging students to consider a career in local government management. As one of our current interns recently reported, “I would describe my municipal internship experience with one word, invaluable. The internship experience not only allowed me to get my foot in the door with local government, but solidified my decision to pursue a career in city management.” A manager at one of our internship placements echoed a similar sentiment about the value of his own internship as part of his educational experience and career development. He said,

I have always felt that participation in an internship program is a very worthwhile experience.... My own internship experience in a city manager’s office exposed me to city management as a career possibility.... Had I not had such a positive experience during my internship, I’m not sure what I would have spent the last 35 years doing!

#### *The Student Perspective on the Internship*

Our approach to the internship is one of partnership. We strongly emphasize the internship as an employment relationship, while also stressing the importance of connecting practice to the theories and concepts learned in academic classes. Students work part-time in their internship positions, usually

over the course of 1 to 2 years. We require a minimum of 300 hours of experience annually to earn three credits; however, students are encouraged to remain in their placements for as long as possible. For all interns placed from 2004 through 2008, the total number of hours worked, on average, was approximately 700.

The MPA Director meets with all potential interns in order to determine the ideal placement based on his/her long-term career objectives. The MPA Director then contacts the potential internship host and provides the student's resume. We view the internship as an employment relationship. Students interview for the positions and the placement supervisors have the option to not hire the intern if they feel that he or she is not a good fit for the organization.

Once placed in their internships, students work closely with the township or borough manager, assistant manager, and various department heads. A primary focus of the experience is to gain exposure to the mission and work processes of the municipality, as well as the mentor's particular responsibilities. For example, in a memo to the MPA Director, one student reported the following activities, which are typical examples of an intern's experiences:

- Attended a "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)" certification workshop.
- Observed administration/department head meetings concerning a 5% budget freeze.
- Observed negotiations with the police union.

The specific projects to which interns are assigned give students a variety of managerial and administrative experiences. Specific examples of some of the tasks that student interns have worked on over the years include the following:

- Assisting the finance director in completing the final budget presentations that were submitted to the board of supervisors,
- Editing the township's monthly newsletter,
- Organizing all aspects of a township academy for residents,
- Organizing a health and wellness fair for employees,
- Reviewing and updating the township Web site,
- Researching information for police contract arbitration,
- Managing the permit process,
- Creating new performance evaluation forms,
- Developing a timeline for implementation of a township "green" policy, and
- Assisting with fundraising for initiatives for a parks and recreation department's "Concert Under the Stars" program.

The MPA Director is responsible for coordinating and reviewing the academic component of the internship experience. Once the internships

begin, every 3 weeks interns send to the MPA Director a one- or two-page memo in which they describe their work assignments. At the completion of their internships, interns write a 12- to 15-page essay in which they apply some of the theories, concepts, approaches, and techniques from courses to their work experiences.

The student's final grade for the internship is determined by both the MPA Director and the on-site supervisor. The supervisor completes an evaluation form, assessing the intern on 18 different categories, including appearance, creativity, maturity, flexibility, ability to work independently and with others, decision-making skills, leadership, and oral and written expression. The supervisor also writes a brief narrative, and then recommends a letter grade. The MPA Director evaluates the written work completed by the student (the memos and the final paper) and decides whether to add a plus or minus to the final grade.

The essays submitted each year consistently point to the great value of the intern experience as a complement to coursework. For example, students wrote the following:

- My administrative internship...demonstrated the concepts of citizen participation, community building, communication practices, and understanding a community's political landscape in a progressive local government organization.
- The internship...afforded me the opportunity to not only learn how the township government operates, but also how certain functions relate directly to what I have learned at Villanova.... The internship...gave me the opportunity for firsthand observation of the practical application of theories.... It is one thing to read a case about budget preparation, but to actually participate in that process is a great learning experience.
- Working at [the township] provided me with a fine opportunity to see government at the local level. Working with the residents and other staff members alike taught me a great deal about everything from constituent relations to sewer system management.... Perhaps most importantly, it provided a working observatory for me to see the lessons of the MPA program in a practical setting. There is no doubt the entire experience will aid me for years to come....

Our exit survey offers another evaluative mechanism for the internship experience. In general, 72% of graduates who worked at an internship over the past 10 years report they had a "very valuable" experience, and another 17% indicate they had a "valuable" experience.

*The Manager's Perspective on Internships*

The feedback about internships from our municipal partners is thoroughly positive. Students produce valuable work for the municipality and gain from the experience as well. As a result, we have secured long-term relationships with numerous municipalities.

We recently interviewed some of these individuals to garner specific comments about their experiences in hosting interns at their municipalities. The managers focused on a variety of themes, including the importance of exposure to multiple departments, learning about different management styles, and working on important projects. Additionally, many highlighted the specific contributions interns have made over the years to the workings of the municipalities.

For example, the Assistant Manager in Upper Merion Township focused on the participative management style to which interns are exposed. The interns regularly meet all of the department heads, and “learn how leadership plays a vital and important role in the day-to-day management in local government” (Judith Vicchio, Personal communication, June 5, 2009). The Assistant Manager of Easttown Township similarly emphasized the depth and breadth of the internship experience, with respect to introducing students to all aspects of local government management. He reported that

Villanova interns are placed in positions that provide immediate and consistent challenges through direct contact with management, residents, and elected officials. [They] have had full involvement in the building, zoning and land-development processes, leading to the development of skills that are easily transferable to most municipalities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (David Burman, Personal communication, June 10, 2009).

The Lower Gwynedd Township Manager (Larry Comunale, Personal communication, June 9, 2009) commented on the lasting impact interns have had on township operations. For example, a few years ago an intern built a spreadsheet to track the township's capital assets as required by the Governmental Accounting and Standards Board (GASB), and the spreadsheet is still used. The Human Resources Manager in Radnor Township, the home township of Villanova, spoke to long-term contributions from another angle—the career trajectories for students afforded by the internship experience, since a number of interns from Villanova secured permanent positions in the township. She reflected that the internship program “afforded the community of Radnor the opportunity to benefit from employees who are bright, eager to learn, and highly prepared for the many complex challenges and rewards that an individual is faced

with when working in local government” (Amanda Ostrander-Serock, Personal communication, June 12, 2009).

Finally, the Manager of Middletown Township, speaking to the teaching and learning that the internship experience affords (and both echoing and complementing the ideas offered by the other managers), said,

For the intern's benefit as well as ours, we expect the internship to generate a needed work product at the end of the internship period.... In all cases, the work product has been something used as part of our ongoing operations. Our current graduate intern is performing a variety of duties at the level of a full-time staff assistant or analyst. Aside from the direct benefits of the work product actually produced by our interns, I have also observed that our staff seems to welcome the idea of working with and mentoring students, and at the same time, the diversity of ideas and interests brought by each intern has also been a positive experience for our staff as well. We have found that as the students progress through their internships, they will develop a much better understanding of the types of work that are done at the municipal level and an appreciation for the various factors and issues that need to be considered as part of the decision-making process, both at the legislative and the administrative levels.... This has helped our interns progress to the point that they become capable of taking on several general assignments, determining what needs to be done and where to find the resources for each, assigning priorities and then completing the tasks (Bruce Clark, Personal communication, June 11, 2009).

### *Student Profiles*

Students who complete a municipal internship in our program typically fall into one of two groups. The first group consists of those students coming straight from their undergraduate institutions. Although some of these individuals enter the MPA program with the explicit career goal of working in local government, others have yet to determine their long-term professional objectives. Nonetheless, students of both persuasions consistently laud the internship experience. The comments below are taken from two recent interns who match these differing profiles:

- *Student 1:* The internship has been particularly valuable to me because it is my first experience working in local government. I had the opportunity to work with township employees in each department, affording me firsthand experience into the wide

array of services the township provides. The internship provided me the latitude to work independently as I worked on three major projects. Through these projects, I was able to obtain a perspective on the practical side of a career in local government, expanding upon the theoretical base I had been building throughout the year in class. The opportunity confirmed my aspiration to pursue a career in local government management.

- *Student 2:* I had no local government experience going into my internship, and so it was a completely eye-opening experience. I never realized how intricate the relationships between municipalities, businesses, and citizens formed, or were sustained. The most valuable part of the experience was being a part of the day-to-day functions of government... Between corruption scandals and questionable agenda setting in high level government positions, it was a nice reminder to see how government does and can work to create, implement, and sustain positive impacts on a community, especially on ordinary issues such as revising a township recycling committee.

The second group of our interns consists of individuals who enter the program looking for some sort of career change. In recent years, many of these students have ultimately decided to pursue a career in local government management, and credit their municipal internship and the mentoring received there as the impetus for their decision. We see this as one of the greatest strengths of our internship program. A current student intern pursuing a career change commented about the importance of the practitioner connection to his educational experience. He said,

[W]orking with a mentor who is not only a leader in the township/city management field but who is also willing to freely discuss local governmental trends and issues is the type of experience that cannot be attained in the classroom alone.

Three recent “career changers” offer notable successes with respect to a career in local government management. Prior to entering the program, these women worked in the nonprofit field and the for-profit sector. Their original objectives after graduation from the MPA program were to continue their careers with nonprofits, or pursue some sort of Federal government work; local government management was not on their radars. However, they all completed internships with local municipalities, and “got the bug,” so to speak, with respect to city management. The knowledge, mentoring, and experience they received as part of their internships, as well as the professional networks they developed,

helped each of them secure positions in local government after graduation from the MPA program. As one of these recent graduates who made the transition to a career in local government management noted, "The internship was very valuable. I left my full-time job to intern and do not have any regrets. The internship allowed me to 'get my feet wet' in many areas of government and open[ed] the door to other opportunities."

#### GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN CITY MANAGEMENT

Offering courses on city management and involving local government practitioners as teachers and internship mentors are useful initiatives to recruit and educate students for local government careers. Creating a specialization in city management enhances the students' experiences, by establishing a curriculum that ensures they will cover the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be successful. As of May 2009, among 264 member programs of the NASPAA, there were 46 programs with a specialization in city, local, urban, or municipal management, and there were more than 40 additional programs with specializations relevant to local government, such as urban affairs or urban policy.<sup>2</sup> The curricula featured in these specializations vary.

In consultation with three managers teaching MPA 8500, we began offering our students a 15-credit Graduate Certificate in City Management in the Fall 2005 semester. The managers helped to identify the courses that should be required to earn the certificate, as well as elective courses. There are three required, three-credit courses: MPA 8003 Financial Management, PSC 8250 Urban Politics and Government, and MPA 8500. The remaining six credits are electives and may be completed by taking some combination of three-credit courses and one-credit courses from a list of courses specifically included in the certificate program. The certificate's curriculum covers the topics found in the ICMA's inventory of practices for effective local government management and therefore assures local government employers that students have the knowledge needed to pursue a career.

Students may earn the certificate as a specialization within the MPA, as a pre-master's certificate, or, if they already have a master's degree, as a post-master's certificate. In the latter case, we have had students who already had graduate degrees in political science, criminal justice, educational leadership, and business administration earn certificates. By moving beyond the conventional specialization within the MPA to award pre- and post-master's certificates, we enhance the qualifications of people interested in local government careers who otherwise might not have pursued graduate coursework.

Although students may enroll in the certificate program as a pre-master's certificate, a specialization with the MPA program, or as a post-Master's certificate, the majority of our students complete the certificate as part of their MPA degrees. As of May 2009, 20 students have earned the certificate. Our

certificate program represents the culmination of the partnership between full-time faculty and the local government practitioners teaching as our part-time faculty. Students learn the theory and practice of local government management from academics and practitioners while completing a curriculum designed to meet professional expectations.

#### COMPARING VILLANOVA TO OTHER NASPAA PROGRAMS

In order to compare the features of Villanova's partnership with local government managers to other graduate programs, we conducted a brief survey of all NASPAA member schools in the Fall 2009 semester, contacting the principal representative at each institution. Out of 254 individuals contacted, we secured responses from 157 (62%), and the summary results are presented in Table 4.<sup>3</sup> These findings indicate that Villanova partners with practitioners in a number of ways that distinguish it from other programs. In other words, Villanova is an early user with respect to many innovative practices and procedures in the area of local government education.

The survey indicates that one-credit courses are offered in only about 28% of responding programs and are most commonly taught by a combination of both full-time and part-time faculty (as opposed to exclusively part-time faculty, the practice at Villanova). Only 37% of programs utilize team-taught graduate courses; among these, only 28% involve a team of exclusively part-time faculty. For a course dealing with the topic of effective city management, only 5% reported the use of a part-time faculty team. With respect to the placement of interns, it is most common for students to find their own internship (31%), whereas the MPA Director at Villanova places students—a practice only 21% of programs use. Fifty percent of programs report the assignment of a letter grade for the internship. Of these programs, the most likely scenario is that either the program director or a designated faculty member exclusively assigns the grade, whereas Villanova's approach is one of partnership with the supervisor at the placement (only 11% of programs use such an approach). Finally, the large majority of programs award graduate certificates, although Villanova is among the 54% of programs that allow students to earn certificates as pre-master's students, post-master's students, and as recognition for earning a specialization while earning their master's degree.

#### CONCLUSION

There are a variety of ways to involve local government managers in graduate programs. We offer the one-credit elective courses and the team-taught MPA 8500 as one approach that meets many of the typical challenges confronting programs wanting to involve practitioners in the classroom-based education of the next generation of managers. We think our approach is a model that will be useful in many other universities.

Table 4.  
*Results from the Survey of NASPAA Principal Representatives*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Response* and N</b>
Offers graduate certificates in addition to a master's degree	56.1% (87)
Certificates can be earned as:	
- A pre-master's certificate	82.4% (70)
- As a recognition for a specialization while also earning the master's degree	75.3% (64)
- A post-master's certificate	69.4% (59)
- All of the above	54.1% (46)
Offers team-taught graduate courses	37.3% (57)
Team-taught classes are taught by:	
- A full-time faculty team	63.2% (36)
- A part-time faculty team	28.1% (16)
- A full-time and part-time faculty team	64.9% (37)
"Effective City Management" course is taught by:	
- A part-time faculty member	32.4% (24)
- A full-time faculty member	55.4% (41)
- A part-time faculty team	5.4% (4)
- A full-time faculty team	2.7% (2)
- A full-time and part-time faculty team	4.1% (3)
Offers one-credit graduate courses	26.7% (40)
One-credit graduate courses are taught by:	
- Part-time faculty	15.6% (7)
- Full-time faculty	24.4% (11)
- Both	60% (27)
Interns are placed by:	
- The program director	21.1% (31)
- A designated faculty member	25.2% (37)
- A professional staff member	22.4% (33)
- Students find their own internships	31.3% (46)
Students are awarded a letter grade for their internship	50% (73)
Interns are graded by:	
- The program director	25.4% (17)
- A designated faculty member	43.3% (29)
- The supervisor at the internship placement	1.5% (1)
- The program director and the supervisor at the internship placement	10.4% (7)
- The designated faculty member and the supervisor at the internship placement	19.4% (13)

*Note.* \*Number is percent "yes." Responses of "no" or skipped answers account for the remaining percentages.

Our internship program complements the learning provided in our classrooms. A well-designed internship program enhances the chances a student may decide to pursue local government positions, especially when practitioners are also involved in teaching students. We have found that students entering our MPA program become interested in a local government career because they learn both from local government professionals in the classroom and through an internship, and they interact with students in our program already working in local government.

Finally, by offering a Graduate Certificate in City Management that is consistent with ICMA recommended practices, we provide students with an education that integrates the various ways we introduce them to the local government management profession. As one current student observes,

I have learned from three managers in “Effective City Management.” I also have learned with numerous managers, assistant managers, and other local government employees currently enrolled in the program. Additionally, I have been an intern in a municipality for the past 8 months, giving me firsthand experience in the field, which I intend to pursue as a career.

As MPA programs explore ways to attract students to local government careers, our experience offers several effective alternatives to consider.

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FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In 2001, Villanova did not evaluate one-credit courses.
- <sup>2</sup> We thank Chris Hoffman, one our MPA students, for collecting the data about each program.
- <sup>3</sup> We were unable to secure reliable e-mail addresses for 10 principal representatives of NASPAA member schools.

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