Balancing the Four Es; or Can We Achieve Equity for Social Equity in Public Administration?

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Abstract
Although social equity was brought to the table in the New Public Administration of the 1960s and named the fourth pillar of public administration by the National Academy of Public Administration near the turn of this century, it still struggles to find its place as an equal among the traditional public administration values of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. The question to be addressed here is, “How do we elevate social equity to equal playing status with the other pillars of public administration?” In addressing this question, three key areas are examined: definitions, measures, and curriculum. By examining how we currently define, measure, and teach about the values of public administration, including social equity, this paper provides ideas for “imagining and improving the future” so that social equity becomes an equal among its peers and becomes a standard of practice as opposed to a stand of courage among public administrators and policy makers.

In 1968, a group of young public administration scholars gathered in Minnowbrook, New York, to discuss a new direction for the study and practice of public administration. Rejecting the traditional ideas of a politics-administration dichotomy and public administration practiced by neutral competents, these young scholars argued that public administration by its nature cannot be neutral; it must consider the values of American society, including responsiveness, public participation in decision making, social equity, citizen choice, and administrative responsibility (Wooldridge & Gooden, 2009).

One of the strongest advocates of the need to practice a “new public administration” was H. George Frederickson. Frederickson argued at the time, and still does, for the inclusion of values in the practice of a new public administration, especially the inclusion of social equity as a key component. His passion for this issue is illustrated in his 2005 reflection on the state of social equity in American public administration:
But in public administration I insist that we engage with the problem of inequality, that we dirty our hands with inequality, that we be outraged, passionate, and determined. In short, I insist that we actually apply social equity in public administration. (p. 35)

Over 40 years after the first Minnowbrook conference and the call for adding values to the practice of public administration, social equity—while named the fourth pillar of public administration by the National Academy of Public Administration in 2005—still struggles to find equal footing with its partners, economy, efficiency and effectiveness. As Wooldridge and Gooden (2009) have argued, it is the rare public administrator who has the courage to make social equity the primary goal of policy. The question for this work is, “Can we achieve equity for social equity among the pillars of public administration?” The argument to be made here is that how we define and measure the pillars matters and that a lack of a clear definition and measures of social equity are largely responsible for its struggle. To change this, we must clearly define social equity; develop clearer measures for it; and, most important, educate public administrators to include equity at the same level of consideration as economy, efficiency, and effectiveness when developing and implementing public policies.

Defining, Measuring, and Practicing the Four Pillars

Economy

Of the four pillars of public administration, economy is arguably the one most scrutinized by the public. When it comes to spending public dollars, especially in times of tight budgets, the expectation is that public services will be provided in the most economical manner possible. In general, economy is thought of as the careful or sparing use of resources. Frederickson defines economy in public administration as the “management of scarce resources and particularly with expending the fewest resources for an agreed upon level of public services” (2010, p. xv). In practice, economy in public administration often involves such things as getting the lowest bid on contracts for agreed-upon services or materials, outsourcing or privatization of public services, using network governance to partner across sectors in providing services, and generally figuring out how to do more (or sometimes less) with fewer resources.

It should not be difficult to convince students and practitioners of public administration of the need for economy in providing public services. Economy is an objective concept, and good stewardship of the public dollar is a long-held principle. Economy can also be easily measured through evaluation of expenditures, calculating cost savings, and monitoring the inputs to a program compared to the stated goals or agreed-upon level of service.
Economy is most often considered in the short term, that is, by looking at immediate cost savings in providing services. However, given sufficient short-term resources, public administrators are sometimes willing to sacrifice economy in the short term to gain efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in the longer term. For example, governments will invest larger sums to develop technology, data systems, or computer applications that are expensive to build in the short term but expected to create money-saving efficiencies in the longer term. This willingness to sacrifice short-term economy for longer-term gains in efficiency or effectiveness is not usually shared when it comes to increased short-term investments that are expected to provide long-term gains in equity.

**Efficiency**

To many, efficiency in public administration might seem an oxymoron. After all, the stereotype of a public servant is not of one who is productive, well organized, and works to get the best outcome with the least amount of wasted effort or expense. However, in practice efficiency is a key pillar in public administration. Frederickson defines *efficiency* as “achieving the most, the best, or the most preferable public services for available resources” (2010, p. xv). Weimer and Vining define *efficiency* as “maximizing the total value to the members of society obtained from the use of scarce resources” (2009, p. 1). In practice, efficiency in public administration is often thought of in terms of process efficiencies reflected in measures such as timely plowing of streets, short turnover times on applications, and short lines at government offices. It can also be reflected through reduced waiting times for trials, faster responses from emergency services, and “one-stop shopping” options for social services. Tied to this, however, are economic considerations. All of these services must be provided at minimum cost and using a balanced distribution of resources.

As with economy, it is relatively easy to get agreement on efficiency as a key value of public administration. Despite stereotypes to the contrary, most governments strive to provide services in the most efficient manner possible. Ironically, efficiency is often reflected in the lack of attention paid to government. When things work well, people don’t complain or think much about government’s role in providing services that affect their daily lives. It is only when things go wrong—streets aren’t plowed, days are spent in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles, or Public Works employees are caught taking too many breaks—that attention is paid to how government is working. While inefficiencies are put in the spotlight, efficient operations are rarely recognized or publicly praised.

Increasingly, public administrators are using practices such as Balanced Scorecards, LEAN processes, customer satisfaction surveys, and process and output evaluation to measure how efficiently services are being provided. These measures are concrete and provide objective information on the efficiency of services. As defined here, efficiency, like economy, is also considered mostly in
the short term; but administrators are often willing to invest resources to develop systems that are assumed to improve process efficiencies in the longer term.

**Effectiveness**

Simply put, effectiveness is being successful in producing a desired result or accomplishing set goals. As a pillar of public administration, effectiveness became more prominent with increasing calls for accountability that began with the National Performance Review in the Clinton administration and continued through the George W. Bush administration (Gormley & Balla, 2008; Kamarck, 2007; National Performance Review, 1993). While government may operate in an economical and efficient manner, it is also important that it is doing what it set out to do in the first place. In the practice of public administration, effectiveness is reflected in such things as reduced welfare roles, increased employment rates, improved test scores, lower crime rates, better roads, improved water quality, reduced pollution, and the like. Effectiveness is usually considered in the short term, especially when renewing budgets. Policy makers’ patience for long-term outcomes is often limited by election cycles. Results that need to be proven within a 2- to 4-year time frame make it harder to propose investment in longer-term programs and services that may not show clear results for several years.

While there is not always agreement on which outcomes should be used to define effectiveness, it is not difficult to find objective ways to measure outcomes for many public services. Common tools include tracking of outputs, program evaluations, pre- and post-tests, client follow-up, economic indicators, report cards, and benchmarking. Some outcomes are less tangible and thus harder to measure than others, and often costs of data collection can be prohibitive. In times of budget shortfalls or decreasing revenues, program evaluation is often one of the first items cut; many times, it never makes it to the table when programs are initially established. However, when desired public agencies have a wealth of tools available to help them measure program effectiveness.

Like its partners economy and efficiency, effectiveness is not a hard sell as a value of public administration. It is a concrete concept with proven tools for measurement. Few, if any, would argue that public services shouldn’t be effective. The main arguments arise when defining what the final goals should be and then what variables serve as clear measures for the given outcomes. A key example of this is the debate in the past several years over standardized testing as the best way to measure educational effectiveness under No Child Left Behind.

**Social Equity**

In calling for the inclusion of social equity as a pillar of public administration, the scholars at Minnowbrook argued that it is not sufficient to have economical and efficient government services if we don’t also consider who is being served at the same time. As Frederickson wrote in an essay almost 10 years after the first
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Minnowbrook conference, “the most productive governments, the most efficient governments, and the most economizing governments can still be perpetuating poverty, inequality of opportunity and injustice” (2010, p. 48). However, part of the challenge in raising equity to a level playing field with economy, efficiency, and effectiveness is that it is a normative concept that lends itself to debate over what it looks like and what the proper role of government is in establishing it once defined. While economy, efficiency, and effectiveness deal with how government operates, equity delves into questions of for whom government operates. In Frederickson’s words, this is the debate over “for whom is the organization well managed? For whom is the organization efficient? For whom is the organization economical? For whom are public services more or less fairly delivered?” (2010, p. xv).

In 2000 when the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) established the Standing Panel on Social Equity, it put forth the following definition for social equity in public administration:

The *fair, just and equitable* [emphasis added] management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; and the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote *fairness, justice and equity* [emphasis added] in the formation of public policy. (National Academy of Public Administration, n.d.)

This definition clearly dismisses the idea of public administration as the neutral implementation of public policy by calling for fairness, justice, and equity in the provision of public policy. However, unlike the relatively objective nature of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, the terms *fair, just, equitable, and equity* are highly normative and make it more difficult to reach agreement on what they mean and how they are incorporated in practice. The combination of highly normative concepts along with the lack of a clear and applied definition of social equity exacerbates the struggle in raising the status of equity as a pillar of public administration. As Svara and Brunet noted in their 2004 article examining coverage of social equity in introductory public administration texts, it is a “skeletal pillar” that needs to be filled with more solid definitions and measures.

This confusion over just what social equity is and what the appropriate role of government is in implementing it makes it harder for public administrators to advocate for social equity as an equal to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, much less for them to have the courage to argue that trade-offs with short-term economy or efficiency can lead to long-term gains in equity. The remainder of this article looks at ways to better define and measure equity, its relationship with the other pillars, and ways to educate public administrators so they can be courageous advocates for social equity.
Refining the Definition of Social Equity

To help start the work of assessing social equity in public administration, the NAPA included with its definition a set of criteria for measuring achievement. These criteria include

- **Procedural fairness**—under which due process, equal protection, hiring, promotion, awarding of contracts are all guaranteed.
- **Distributional equity**—assures equal access, targeted intervention, and commitment of resources to achieve fair results.
- **Process equity**—guarantees consistency in the level of service delivery regardless of distributional criterion used, and
- **Outcome disparities**—probe for reasons why disparities may still exist as a result of policies and programs that may in fact meet all input criteria (www.napawash.org/aa_social_equity/index.html).

Given all of these criteria, the reality may be not that social equity has no clear definition but instead that it has too many. The argument here is that in practice, social equity in public administration has three major aspects:

1. Simple fairness and equal treatment
2. Distribution of resources to reduce inequalities in universal programs and services
3. Redistribution of resources to level the playing field through targeted programs

All three of these factors have in common an end of goal of either maintaining or creating a “level playing field” or equality of opportunity.

For example, simple fairness and equal treatment are core concepts in public administration. In the daily operations of government, such practices include due process, procedural fairness, equal access to government services, and fairness in hiring and promotion. Often in developing rules and implementing programs addressing these issues, equity is considered to be equality; that is, everyone is treated equally or given the same access to services. In this case, equality of opportunity is maintained. That is, all constituents have access to services. If they are already on a level playing field, then they are all treated the same. If some are disadvantaged, then extra help or consideration is given to create equality of opportunity in receiving the services. For instance, with today’s increasing use of technology and e-government, agencies must consider how to provide equal access to services for those without computers or Internet access. When applications must be completed online, are there public computer kiosks available for the community to use? Are spaces held in park and recreation programs for people unable to register online? Such policies help assure fairness...
and equal access to government programs and services; that is, equal opportunity to participate and receive services.

These types of policies are considered good practice in administering public services. They can also be easily measured. Simple data collection on clients served can provide measures of access. Evaluation of application and other system processes can determine procedural fairness and due process. This is the simplest form of social equity and yet the type of service least closely associated with it. Clearer recognition of the role of due process and equal access as key aspects of social equity, defined here as maintaining or creating equality of opportunity, may be a stepping stone to building greater acceptance for the role of government in providing equity.

The next two forms of social equity in public administration are more closely related to distribution and redistribution of resources to create equality of opportunity. Such policies get at the heart of John Rawls’s arguments involving social justice and the distribution of resources in a society. Social equity scholars often cite Rawls’s work in A Theory of Justice (1971) as setting the context for establishing equity in the distribution of public resources. Rawls argues that in a society, all members have the same basic rights of liberty and thus resources should be distributed to provide the greatest benefit to the least advantaged. We do this, according to Rawls, not out of altruism but out of interdependence. As Frederickson notes, Rawls argues for justice not because it is good or right, but “because there is an increasing importance to the interdependence of persons that make notions of advantages and disadvantages less and less acceptable” (Frederickson, 2010, p. 45).

It is argued here that this conception of justice supports the definition of social equity as policies and the distribution of resources that provide equality of opportunity. That is, each person being guaranteed the same basic rights in society receives the resources and support necessary to provide the same opportunity to participate in the public sector and provide for their basic needs. Under such a definition, outcomes may be unequal; but everyone will have the opportunity to have their basic human needs and rights met at a minimum.

Building on this argument, the second form of equity in public administration of the three listed earlier involves distribution of resources to reduce inequalities in universally available services. These types of programs can be controversial and often involve normative arguments over the proper role of government in correcting what might otherwise be considered a problem of the marketplace. Rawls’s arguments regarding justice and the distribution of resources in society counter such arguments, and constitutional rights that guarantee equal access to public services can usually support implementation of such policies. For example, to alleviate disparities in education funding caused by variance in the local property tax base, states may develop funding formulas for K–12 education that provide a set amount of money per pupil, regardless of location or ability to levy
local taxes. Another example are the local government aid programs that provide additional state support to local governments to help them cover the cost of basic services such as public safety and libraries that might not otherwise be affordable given the local tax base. Such programs create equity by reducing disparities in services that are provided on a universal basis and provide equality of opportunity for members of society to access and benefit from these public goods.

The final form of equity in public administration and policy listed earlier involves providing service to targeted populations to help level the playing field and increase equality of opportunity in specific service areas. As Mitchell Rice notes, “social equity can also be a value commitment that may involve implementing targeted programs as a way of bringing about equality of results (outcomes) as opposed to input equality—that is, treating every resident, consumer or client the same” (2004, p. 144). In other words, some groups are given extra benefits in order to correct for past discrimination or to reduce risk factors that might keep individuals from participating as productive citizens. A classic example of such programs is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under this legislation, individuals with disabilities who might otherwise not be able to participate in the marketplace or community are provided with benefits that help level the playing field, ranging from things as simple as cutouts in sidewalks for wheelchairs to complex systems of adaptive education technology. Programs that provide scholarships to low-income families to pay for quality child care in order to support school readiness or that provide medical insurance to the otherwise uninsurable are other examples. These targeted programs redistribute funds by providing extra resources to specific populations versus providing more equal levels of universal services such as described previously. While not guaranteeing equality of outcome, targeted programs are designed to at least try to provide equality of opportunity, thus getting at the heart of how social equity is defined here.

These last two forms of equity in public administration are the most complex and raise the most consternation over what the appropriate role of government is in reducing inequity. The normative nature of the debate over who is deserving of more or better services may cause administrators and scholars to shy away from focusing on these types of equity. Such programs are also often criticized due to the difficulty in providing clear measures of results. In part this difficulty stems from the fact that often the returns from such programs are not recognized in the immediate term. As noted earlier, the long-term nature of these results conflicts with the immediate need of policy makers to show results in time for the next election or for administrators to argue for continuation or increases in the next budget cycle. Because of the difficulty in showing immediate results, investments in social equity often fall prey to debates over what is the “right or moral” thing for government to do versus what provides the best return on investment. Without clear and immediate results, it is difficult to build support for programs that are designed to reduce inequity and argue that they are economical, effective, or
efficient. In fact, it is most often assumed that there is a trade-off between equity, economy, and efficiency.

While more difficult, however, it is not impossible to provide measures of results for social equity programs that redistribute resources or level the playing field. As with programs aimed at due process, equal access, and procedural fairness, some of the results can be measured using benchmarks, surveys, statistics on participation rates, and the like. For example, since implementing ADA regulations, have the number of people with disabilities in the workplace increased? Has the number of people needing public assistance decreased as they have been able to access more education or technology that allows them to participate in the workforce? If states provide local government aid, they could then look at measure of such things as library materials or hours per capita, number of public safety personnel per capita, crime rates and emergency response times, and miles of road maintained. All of these—if compared over time, including pre- and post-program investment—can provide measures of effectiveness for programming related to reducing inequity.

Cost-Benefit Analysis and Social Return on Investment

While the measures just discussed are helpful, only some may be available in the immediate term. There is still the issue of longer-term results from investments in social equity. Along with the recognition that the payoffs for social equity are often long term, there is also a growing recognition that the effects of investments in equity can fall outside of the issue area where the immediate investment is made. One of the most prominent examples of this is the increasing amount of research done that shows the long-term return on investment for programs that provide high-quality early education to children considered to be at risk for failure in school.

For years, advocates for early childhood education argued that investing in high-quality preschool experiences for children was not only the morally right thing to do but also that it would save money in the long run through such things as a decreased need for special education, reduction in juvenile crime and welfare roles, and increased graduation and employment rates. However, the evidence for these claims was merely anecdotal and often dismissed by policy makers. Over the past decade, however, an increasing amount of work has been done by economists and policy analysts that shows concrete evidence of long-term social returns on investment of between 9 and 16 percent for every dollar invested in early childhood education for children considered to be at risk of school failure (Kirp, 2007; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003, 2007a, 2007b). Through cost-benefit analysis, these studies have shown that the savings or social return on investment (SROI) to the public for these programs comes in the form of long-term reductions in educational remediation, juvenile crime, and welfare roles as well as increases in graduation rates, higher education attainment, and
productivity in the marketplace, among other things (Reynolds, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Thus the payoffs for these programs spill over into several issue areas other than Pre-K–12 education and immediate school readiness. The challenge for advocates of such investments is that many of these broader payoffs often come 5 to 20 years or more after the initial investments, well outside the range for policy makers needing proof of effectiveness and efficiency. The question then is, in what time frame do we demand to see results of investments that reduce inequity?

A Second Look at the Efficiency-Equity Trade-Off

As noted earlier, Vining and Weimer define efficiency as “maximizing the total value to the members of society obtained from the use of scarce resources” (2009, p. 1). The key question, however, is when the return to society is measured, particularly when looking to counter the assumption of an equity-efficiency trade-off. In the field of economics, efficiency is often described using the concept of Pareto optimality. Under such conditions, the distribution of resources in a society is considered efficient when at the balancing point where you can’t make one person better off without making someone else worse off (Ackerman et al., 2000; Marglin, 2008; Nas, 1996). It is realized that in reality, however, few redistributions of resources in society can occur in a Pareto optimal way; that is, at least one person is made worse off in the transaction. It is even more challenging to argue for redistributions of resources if it is not clear that those intended to be made better off actually are, at least in the short run.

As a way of looking at the distribution of resources a bit differently, Nicholas Kaldor and John Hicks, two economists, postulated that an exchange could still be considered efficient if those made better off could eventually compensate those made worse off (Nas, 1996). Kaldor-Hicks efficiency, as it is referred to, opens the door to justifications for investments in social equity by allowing for those benefiting from the exchange to pay back society in other ways in the future.

Growing Use of Cost-Benefit Analysis

The use of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to show social return on investment is a growing field and one that can help respond to criticism over the lack of measurements available to show improvements in social equity, particularly in the long run. While more complex and requiring longer-term investments in data collection, CBA applied to social investments provides a means of measuring the efficiency of programs that reduce inequity by comparing the cost of such programs to the broader societal benefits the programs provide. As Wiemer and Vining note in Investing in the Disadvantaged (2009):

concerns about efficiency, equity and the trade-off between them are central to a wide range of social policies that involve investments in
individual's human capital: the stocks of knowledge, skills, experience and health that enable them to participate fully in economic, social and political life. (p. 3)

This expanded sense of the relationship between equity and efficiency in the longer term also indicates that perhaps just as important as clarifying the definitions of social equity in public administration is a redefining of efficiency as it applies to public administration. Beyond the most, best, or most preferable services for the given resources often related with process efficiency, efficiency as it relates to social equity needs also to include an assessment of the broader payoffs to society, as in Kaldor-Hicks efficiency. This approach incorporates a broader economic angle to our considerations of efficiency. This is where using CBA greatly enhances the ability to assess the efficiency of social policy, especially as it relates to equity.

According to Vining and Weimer, the purpose of CBA is to find the most efficient policy or the ones that get the most value from the resources available. In relation to social equity, this value includes the larger returns to society through reduced costs for programs and services that may be indirectly accrued through investment in social policies. As Vining and Weimer argue:

efficiency concerns the allocation of resources to generate the largest aggregate value, as assessed by summing individual variations across all members of society. A policy is efficient if no other policy can be identified that offers a larger excess of benefits over costs. (2010, p. 1)

For policies addressing social equity, the broader benefits to society may include things such as cost savings due to reduced crime rates, reduced welfare roles, increased tax bases due to higher employment or greater productivity, decreased costs for education remediation, and the like. The main challenge is figuring out exactly what these broader payoffs include and then assigning a value to them.

The basic steps for conducting CBA related to SROI are

1. Specifying a complete set of possible policy alternatives including the status quo
2. Determining whose costs and benefits should be counted in the analysis
3. Cataloging all the possible impacts of the alternatives
4. Projecting the impacts over time
5. Applying a value to the impacts or monetizing them
6. Converting the determined costs and benefits to present values
7. Computing net present values
8. Performing sensitivity analysis and
9. Identifying the most efficient choice (Weimer & Vining, 2009)
This is a complex and time-consuming process often found more in the realm of economists than public administrators or public policy analysts. However, it is one of the most promising ways of getting at the true value and outcomes of investments in social equity in the long term.

Developing ways of measuring and monetizing the broader impacts of social policy is one of the largest obstacles to wide use of CBA in social policy, but a growing number of sources address this issue. Economists are working to develop what are referred to as shadow prices for variables such as the value of schooling, IQ points, moving individuals and families out of poverty, social cost of crime and drug consumption, and the value of volunteer time (Weimer & Vining, 2009). As economists work to develop these shadow prices, public administrators have a role in helping to identify outcomes that need to be monetized and determining the relationships between specific program investments and broader payoffs to society. In a related issue, public administrators and policy makers must call for calculations of SROI as a core part of evaluating social policy. In doing so, they promote a broader definition of efficiency that eliminates the traditional assumed trade-off between efficiency and equity in the short term and allows for analysis of the efficiency of equity in the longer term. This is not a perfect science, and challenges arise in determining outcomes, finding measures of them, and discounting dollars appropriately. However, these challenges exist for using CBA in any context. While potentially more challenging in social policy, such analysis still provides great possibilities in showing the return to society of investments in equity.

Educating Courageous Public Administrators

As stated at the beginning of this article, to create equity for social equity among the pillars of public administration, we need to more clearly define and measure social equity. Moreover, we must educate public administrators to value equity as much as economy, efficiency, and effectiveness and to summon the courage to make equity a priority. With a refined definition of efficiency to include long-term payoffs to society and increased use of SROI calculations along with other measures of all three types of social equity, it should be easier for administrators to create equity for social equity. However, this cannot be done unless they are educated in the definitions and measure for all pillars of public policy. While public administration programs rarely have separate courses in economy, efficiency, or effectiveness and instead ingrain these values across all courses, social equity is often seen as a stand-alone subject to be taught only in selected courses that are also often related to diversity or poverty. For equity to achieve its due place as an equal among the four pillars, it too must be incorporated across the curriculum in public administration programs. Discussions of equity must be as common as those focusing on the values of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in every course from foundations to human resources, ethics and
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budgeting. By using readings, case studies, role-plays, guest speakers, movies, in-class and online discussions, and writing assignments, it is possible to incorporate discussions about the value and role of equity in public administration in every course. Table 1 gives some brief examples of how equity can be included in the typical core courses of a public administration program. More detailed examples for some of the courses typical to an MPA program follow.

Table 1.
Examples of Social Equity Across the Curriculum

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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td><em>Defining the four Es</em>—economy, efficiency (short and long-term), effectiveness, and equity as the pillars of public administration*</td>
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<td><em>Value trade-offs</em>—case studies and practical examples of situations in which public administrators must consider the trade-offs among these and other public administration values*</td>
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<td>Defining the social good in social equity. Is it a public good?</td>
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<td>Cases and discussions involving debate between the public and private sector roles in reducing inequity.</td>
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<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Equity in the treatment of various populations</td>
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<td><em>Defining</em> fair, just, and equitable</td>
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<td>Is it ethical to give some populations more?</td>
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<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Does the organizational mission and vision include social equity as a goal or value?</td>
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<td>Theory</td>
<td>Organizational values overall</td>
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<td>Equity in the management structure</td>
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<td>Procedural fairness and inclusion in decision making</td>
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<th>Course</th>
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<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>Measuring equity, benchmarks, data collection, statistics</td>
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<td>CBA and SROI calculations, present value, and shadow pricing</td>
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<td>Outcome assessment, program evaluation, and the validity of data</td>
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<td>Human Resources</td>
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<td>Hiring, firing, and promotion</td>
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<td>Public Fiscal Policy</td>
<td>Tax policy— regressivity vs. progressivity</td>
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<td>Redistribution of resources, from who to whom</td>
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<td>Funding formulas</td>
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<td>Budgeting— budgets as moral documents</td>
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<td>Targeted vs. universal programming</td>
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<td>Balancing the four $\bar{E}$s in the budget</td>
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<td>Administrative Law</td>
<td>Defining and administering fairness and justice</td>
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<td>Procedural fairness and due process</td>
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<td>Equal access</td>
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As what is usually the first course taken by students in public administration, a Foundations or introductory course is a crucial venue for introducing students to issues of social equity in public administration. Discussions would likely begin by defining the four Es: economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. Students can be asked to consider examples of each of the values: What do they look like in practice? How might they conflict? How are they related to concepts of public good? What are the potential trade-offs between these values and other public administration values? Are they correctly identified as pillars? Are there other values that are more important? Cases and examples that raise the debate over the definition of public good and public versus private sector responsibilities in reducing inequity are also good exercises to get students thinking critically about the role of the public sector in reducing inequity. This is particularly helpful when considering the three different types of equity discussed here: (a) simple fairness and equal treatment, (b) Distribution to provide universal services, and (c) Redistribution to targeted populations. Students can consider what the public sector responsibility is

Table 1. Continued

<table>
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<th>Course</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Policy Analysis | Public administration value trade-offs  
Determining outcomes and measures of SROI  
Social equity in policy formulation  
Public vs. private sector role in reducing inequities  
Distributive and redistributive policies |
| Capstone | Recapping the four pillars  
What is the public administrator’s role in providing equity?  
How is social equity reflected in the student’s workplace? |

Note. Examples were collected from a survey of faculty members, review of various syllabi, and paper presented by Heather Wyatt-Nichol at the 2008 NASPAA conference.
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in providing each of these forms of equity and for maintaining or creating equality of opportunity.

**Ethics**

At the heart of debates over social equity are questions about what is *fair*, *just*, and *equitable*. Ethics course easily lend themselves to discussions about these issues. How do we determine what is fair, just, or equitable in a society? How do we define these terms? Who gets to define the terms? It is also important to consider for whom policies are fair, just, and equitable. Other questions for consideration might include the following: What is the proper role of government in correcting injustice, particularly if the injustice was caused by public policies? Is it ethical to give some populations more in order to create equality of opportunity? What if policies created to help one group become detrimental to another? What are the ethics behind determining which groups deserve extra consideration or help through targeted programs?

**Research Methods/Program Evaluation**

As noted previously, how we measure economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity is a key part of their inclusion in public administration. Courses in research methods can serve as grounding in developing measures for the four *Es* and particularly for social equity. An understanding of the tools for data collection and interpretation is important to public administrators’ ability to measure equity and assess effectiveness of programs as well as any potential trade-offs with efficiency. Skills in critical analysis of research and data interpretation allow administrators to assess the validity of data collection and measures related to equity. Particularly important to the expansion of considering equity is the need to create measures that show results. Building skills in CBA and calculations of social return on investment will allow public administrators to look at the long-term payoffs for investments in equity and consider the broader returns to society for investments that are designed to provide equality of opportunity by reducing inequity and leveling the playing field.

**Public Finance/Fiscal Policy**

Of the three types of equity policies noted in this work, two of them, distribution of resources to provide universal services and redistribution of resources to provide services to targeted populations, are directly related to public finance and fiscal policy. When analyzing issues of distribution of resources, questions of from whom to whom are central. How do policy makers determine how to distribute and redistribute resources? The process of budgeting reflects the values of a society, and budgets are moral documents; thus, questions of equity are at the heart of the process. What does society value? Who is considered eligible for getting targeted services? Who pays for them? Taxation policy and
funding formulas reflect considerations of equity, economy, and efficiency. Administrators must also consider how the four Es are reflected in budgets. How do agencies balance economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in their budgets? All of these considerations are prime materials for course discussion, role-plays, and case studies in courses on public finance and fiscal policy.

Administrative Law

Fairness, justice, and equity are terms often associated with legal issues and thus find their way into courses on administrative law. Procedural equity in particular is an important consideration in administrative rule making, regulation, and enforcement. Courses in administrative law lend themselves to discussion: How do we define and administer fairness and justice? What is procedural fairness and due process? What does it look like? Does equal access mean everyone is treated equally, or are some groups given extra considerations to provide equality of opportunity to access services? Cases that raise questions about equal access and discrimination allow students to consider how equity is reflected in policies and procedures in the public sector. In addition to several courses already mentioned, administrative law courses must also emphasize considerations of how agencies balance economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.

Policy Process and Analysis

If, as argued earlier, budgets are moral documents, the policies behind them reflect the values of a society. Thus, courses in public policy and analysis are highly important in educating public administrators in the consideration of social equity. Perhaps the primary issue in this debate is consideration of what is public and what is private. That is, what is government’s role versus that of the private sector, particularly regarding issues of equity? If public policies reflect societal values, then how do they also reflect trade-offs among competing values? Can societies balance economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity? Should they balance them, or are there times when it is acceptable to value one over another? Questions may also be raised as to how we determine what is universal and when targeting of policies is appropriate. How do we determine who receives targeted services and when? What are the rights society deems should be available to everyone, and at what level? In looking at policy development, we must also consider evaluation and analysis of outcomes. Using role-plays or case studies, students can be asked to create benchmarks or outcome measures for policies regarding equity. What would success look like? How would we measure it in the short and long term? Again, consideration of social return on investment in such courses can get students thinking about the spillover effects of investments in the reduction of inequity.

Clearly, there is a place for discussions and teaching of social equity in every public administration course. By opening the conversation and providing tools
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to define and measure social equity in the classroom, educators can help provide public administrators with the skills and courage to make social equity an equal in consideration of values with economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Conclusion

Social equity among the values of public administration has gained ground in acceptance since the first Minnowbrook conference. But over 40 years later, it still struggles to gain traction as an equal among its partners economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. Despite continued scholarship, including this and other symposia in the *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, the work of the Standing Panel on Social Equity in NAPA and its annual Social Equity Leadership Conference, and the establishment of a Democracy and Social Justice Section in the American Society for Public Administration, the field of public administration has not fully accepted the role of social equity in public administration. In part, this is due to the lack of clear definitions and measures for social equity. It is argued here that social equity can be simplified to maintaining or creating equality of opportunity in the provision of public services and that it can take three different forms in public administration:

1. Simple fairness and equal treatment
2. Distribution of resources to reduce inequalities in universal programs and services
3. Redistribution of resources to level the playing field or increase equality of opportunity through targeted programs

It is also possible to measure outcomes for social equity in the short term given proper data collection, the setting of benchmarks, use of program evaluation, and similar tools. The difficulty is not in how to measure, but in clearly defining what to measure. A simpler and more applied definition of social equity should help.

Also important to creating equity for social equity is adjusting the definition of efficiency to look at longer-term, broad payoffs to society of investments in reducing inequity. Use of cost-benefit analysis to calculate social return on investment is a growing field and one where partnerships between economics and public administration need to be strengthened. Finally, public administration educators must be more forthright in discussions of social equity across the curriculum and not reserve such conversations for specialized electives taken only by a limited number of students. From the simple (procedural fairness and equal access) to the complex (targeted programs to increase equality of opportunity), social equity is essential to the practice of public administration. Educators and practitioners alike must do a better job of recognizing the role of government in providing social equity. We must also call for more measurement, particularly of long-term outcomes. Courageous educators who discuss equity
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on equal terms with other public administration values will lead to courageous public administrators willing to do the same.

References


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