

A Place for Undergraduate Public Administration Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the focus on graduate-level study in the field of public administration is largely due to the timing of the field's development and the state of American higher education after World War II. The rapid expansion of access to undergraduate education at a time when the role of government grew considerably to deal with pressing social concerns created both a market for and an interest in public administration in the 1960s and 1970s. It was natural for scholars and students to focus on the specialized, higher order skills provided through graduate education to the neglect of undergraduate education in public administration under such circumstances. Building on the field of curriculum development, it is suggested that sequencing of knowledge for cumulative and continuous learning as presented in Bloom's Taxonomy is key to properly placing undergraduate programs in the field.

The undergraduate experience has become a staple of educational attainment in the United States over the past 50 years. In many cases, the fields students study as undergraduates provide a clear precedent for study at the graduate level as business students are good candidates for the Master of Business Administration (MBA), social work students prepare for the Master of Social Work (MSW), and so on. Unlike many disciplines, the role of undergraduate programs in the field of public administration is unclear for a number of reasons.

Many directors of undergraduate programs have expressed serious concerns over their place within the field at recent National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) meetings. Three primary concerns have been noted annually. First, some suggest that NASPAA is generally unsupportive and occasionally antagonistic to undergraduate education in public administration, despite at least 71 of its member institutions offering an undergraduate degree in public administration or policy.¹ This lack of support is largely due to the organization's almost exclusive focus on the Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree

(Henry, 1995). Until 2010, the NASPAA website included language that suggested undergraduate education in public administration and affairs was inappropriate.² Second, undergraduate program directors note that most students have never heard of “public administration,” much less understand what it encompasses. Attracting students to the undergraduate and graduate programs can happen only if they know the programs exist. Finally, directors have reported that some colleagues simply refuse to teach undergraduate courses when asked, in part because they were trained and expect to teach at the graduate level in MPA programs. Some directors have encountered colleagues who question the value of, as well as have concerns about, how to bring the subject matter to an undergraduate audience.

The purpose of this manuscript is to explore this last concern through an historical review and then propose a pedagogical place for undergraduate programs in the field of public administration. The contention is that undergraduate education in public administration has not been given a clear place in the field, in part due to public administration’s growth during the late 1960s and the confusion of its many bases of knowledge. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the technical focus of public administration as it is taught at the graduate level runs counter to the philosophical base provided by a wide-ranging liberal arts undergraduate degree (Ventriss, 1998). Using this as a base, I then draw on the field of curriculum design and the concept of sequencing to offer a proper place and guide future undergraduate offerings. The hope is to provide general guidance on public affairs and administration instruction appropriate at the undergraduate level.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION IN BRIEF

Undergraduate public administration education has historically been difficult to place within the broader field, for a number of reasons. One primary reason seems to be an issue of timing. Raadschelders (1998) asserts that all early theories of administration were public due to the role of the state in the High Middle Ages and mercantile eras, and institutions of higher education reflected that in their curriculum. The increased access to undergraduate education after World War II and focus on specialized skills necessary for public agencies to tackle complicated problems, combined with increased research and service requirements for faculty, created a market for graduate programs that had not previously existed. This led to a focus in public administration on the MPA degree and faculty expectations (and training) to teach at the graduate level. In short, public administration truly coalesced into an academic field on university campuses at a time when colleges and universities turned their focus away from the traditional concern with undergraduate education (Thelin, 1996). Second, because public administration draws from many disciplines and prepares students to work in the wide-ranging areas of public service, this creates confusion for all involved. As a result, students are confused about what public administration is and faculty are unsure of how to present the field to an undergraduate audience.

Higher Education History and Public Administration

The issues of administering state affairs are an ancient concern, stretching before the biblical story of Jethro advising Moses on how to organize the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt (Shafritz, Hyde, & Parkes, 2004). Implementation of the state has never been an easy task. Public administrators throughout the ages have faced problems later identified as principal-agent concerns, improper organization structure, the existence of informal organizations and culture, and issues associated with top-down versus street-level implementation. As Raadschelders (1998) notes, these issues arise from a basis of law, political science, economics, and business administration. These many knowledge bases raise questions about what the field contains and how to teach basic principles, a discussion that has taken place almost exclusively at the graduate level. The exclusion of undergraduate public administration from these discussions may be due to timing and public administration's emergence as a self-conscious field of study during a transitional time in the history of U.S. higher education.

John Thelin (1996) provides a useful history of higher education in the United States that can be transposed over the formal study of public administration. He notes that colleges and universities were overwhelmingly focused on the undergraduate experience in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Thelin (1996) argues that efforts to organize colleges during colonial and state building periods focused on producing "gentlemen scholars." Getting a college education was seen "as a civilizing experience that ensured a progression of responsible leaders" (Thelin, 1996, p. 6). Those gentlemen scholars operated in a society where public and private interests were not as clearly distinguished as they have become. College grads were expected to be leaders in business, government, and civic affairs, and a college degree simply confirmed or ratified their social standing.

By the time Wilson wrote "The Study of Administration," "going to college" had gained in popularity as an ideal (Thelin, 1996). For those who had the opportunity, a college degree "lifted one to a social standing that had both prestige and 'scarcity value'" (Thelin 1996, p. 11; citing Canby, 1936). The focus of the late 1800s and early 1900s was on undergraduate study with few colleges offering study at the graduate level. As late as 1940, most American colleges and universities had fewer than 5,000 students and offered very few graduate degree programs. During the period of orthodoxy in public administration theory, the academic audiences of Goodnow, Taylor, Gulick, Folett, and Barnard were primarily undergraduates or practitioners with no more than a bachelor's degree.

Higher education historians call the period of 1945–1970 the "golden age" of higher education in the United States (Thelin, 1996). Colleges and universities expanded rapidly as the GI Bill sent veterans from World War Two as well as the Korean and Vietnam wars to campuses. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and federal loan programs also made access to a college degree easier for a wider audience. More college graduates rapidly increased the market for graduate programs at a

time when many campuses developed into “mega-universities” with enrollments of 20,000 or more students. Citing Kerr (1963), Fuhman (1997) highlights the changing expectations on faculty, particularly increased emphasis on research and service. These large research universities depended much more on “soft money” from research grants and subsequently, faculty required the support of graduate students with the skills necessary to support their research and service agendas.

This was also an exciting time for public administration as an academic and applied field. Increased regulation of industry in the area of consumer safety and the environment, the space race, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Great Society programs and subsequent efforts at urban redevelopment brought about great interest in and large numbers of students to the field. Describing the environment surrounding the founding of NASPAA in 1970, Henry (1995) writes:

The activities of NASPAA and its constituent university programs, and their environment in higher education, in turn were set in a dynamic context of changing American society, politics, public events, and public policies. The era studied stretched from post–World War II through Watergate. It was marked by persistent Cold War and the crises of Korea and Vietnam; political regimes symbolized by the likeable Ike, the New Frontier, the Great Society, Nixon and Watergate, and the fall-out from Watergate, such as congressional and Democratic party reassertiveness while Ford struggled to restore stability and civility. The period experienced explosive economic and population growth; suburbanization and urban crises; demands for civil rights and equal opportunity; marches in the streets and demonstrations on the campuses; energy crises and episodes of recession and inflation. The public environment was, to put it mildly, superheated, with profound effects on the attitudes of university leaders, faculty members, and students; not least of these was a heightened appreciation of the importance of politics and public service.

As all of these events took place, universities were shifting focus and resources toward graduate education. Furthermore, the skills necessary to serve the public in such a “superheated” environment were thought to be best presented at the graduate level, thus the field’s focus on master’s programs to the benign neglect of undergraduate studies (Thelin, 1996; Ventriss, 1998).

UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION—AN UNCERTAIN PLACE

The most notable issue with undergraduate public administration education in the United States is the lack of attention it has received in the literature. A broad search of the literature revealed only a handful of scattered articles that mention undergraduate programs over the past 25 years. Many of those articles

were in response to NASPAA's internal debates about the admissibility of undergraduate programs to membership in the organization, their number, and their curricular components (Henry, 1995; Keller & Laudicina, 1982; Paulsen, 1974; Sweet, 1998; Ventriss, 1998). A few focused on specific teaching practices in undergraduate settings (Carver, 1996; Harrington & Sundeen, 1998; Milam, 2003). Two articles dealt directly with recruitment of minority students to graduate programs through undergraduate programs (Lee & Cayer, 1987; Theony, 1993). Still, program directors at the 2010 NASPAA Committee on Undergraduate Education meeting noted that relatively little is known about undergraduate public administration programs, including basic information such as how many programs exist, what they teach, and who teaches them. Even less is known about what students do with the degree once they complete the undergraduate programs.

Much of what we know comes from earlier surveys of undergraduate offerings. Keller and Laudicina (1982) reviewed NASPAA members' undergraduate programs and noted that fewer than a third of the public administration degrees granted in 1979 were to undergraduate students. Evidence exists that undergraduate course requirements have remained consistent over time; courses in general public administration, public personnel, organization theory, public budgeting and finance, and ethics make up the undergraduate core (Keller & Laudicina, 1982; Paulsen, 1974). An informal review of six NASPAA members' undergraduate programs suggests that this programmatic core has not changed substantially in the past 30 years. Table 1 shows that public administration, personnel, finance and budget, research methods, and policy process and/or analysis were most common to core requirements among the six schools.

An interesting note is that undergraduate core courses mimic core requirements at the graduate level. Cleary (1990) describes an "inner core" of MPA courses that consist of public administration, research methods, public finance, policy analysis, personnel, and political institutions and processes. Averch and Dluhy (1992) reviewed core courses among NASPAA and APPAM graduate programs and identified three types of graduate programs in the field:

- (1) Traditional public administration, oriented toward producing competent lower-level managers who will implement the wishes of superiors in a timely and efficient manner;
- (2) a hybrid form where administration concerns are central, but with a secondary emphasis on solving higher-level resource allocation questions;
- and (3) a classical public policy and management form oriented toward producing analysts capable of illuminating issues and alternatives for high-level decision makers through the use of analytical techniques, primarily quantitative ones. (p. 542)

Table 1.
Undergraduate Public Administration Core Course Requirements

	Auburn	Cal State, Fullerton	Central FL	Kean	Pitt	UT Dallas	Sum
Public Administration/ Management	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Personnel	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Finance/Budget	1		1	1	1		4
Research Methods		1	1	1		1	4
Policy Process/ Analysis	1		1	1	1		4
Organization Theory	1		1			1	3
Ethics	1				1	1	3
State & Local Government	1	1		1			3
Public Law	1					1	2
Computer/ Information Technology				1	1		2

* American Government and Economics were often required in school-wide general education mandates.

The core curriculum evident in undergraduate programs is almost identical to the “inner core” identified in Cleary’s work, and both are closely aligned with the traditional public administration model identified by Averch and Dluhy. The similarities between undergraduate core courses and those in traditional public administration graduate programs suggest two important issues. First, there seems to be a level of consensus on subjects basic to traditional public administration education at any level, an important aspect of curriculum planning. Consensus also raises a question that has not been answered in the literature: How is and/or should core content that has been developed primarily with graduate education in mind be delivered to undergraduate students? In other words, how do we avoid offering an “MPA lite” instead of a thoughtful curriculum appropriate to undergraduate education?

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

Unlike many fields, graduate programs in public administration are not built on a base of undergraduate study in the field. Economics, social work, engineering, and others assume entering graduate students have substantial knowledge bases when they begin their graduate studies and require remedial coursework for those who do not have that base. Likely due to the field's multidisciplinary nature and a sense of public service commitment, MPA programs take strong students from almost any prior field of study, resulting in many who are not adequately prepared for the public aspects of public administration (Light, 1999). What remedial coursework that is required tends to focus on building skills in research methods and/or economics, not public service (Light, 1999; Wechsler & Baker, 2004). Wechsler and Baker note that fewer than a third of students at the University of California–Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy majored in a discipline closely related to public administration, namely political science or economics. A review of the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs public administration students in 2010 reveals about 32% majored in those traditional fields, and only four of the 93 students majored in public administration or policy. The list of majors ranged from architecture and classics to engineering, English, and medicine—none of these programs are designed to prepare undergraduates for entry into graduate study in public administration.

This lack of preparation is not a public administration problem alone. Numerous articles in fields such as economics, law, and business administration bemoan the poor preparation of undergraduate products as being unready for graduate courses (Donald, 1996; Kasper, 1991; Krueger, 1991; Zhang, 2005). The primary complaints are a lack of competence in mathematics, basic science, research methods, and policy analysis. Others complain of poor teaching and advising at the undergraduate level (Gallo, Skinner, & Goettle, 1976; Walstadt & Becker, 2010). Building strong undergraduate programs in public administration can avoid many of these concerns and strengthen our graduate programs, but only if there is a clear place and/or role for undergraduate education in the field.

Interestingly, Ventriss (1998) sees the diversity in background of graduate students in public administration as an argument against undergraduate degrees in the field. He argues that the breadth of other undergraduate majors, particularly those associated with a classical liberal arts education, is an important hallmark of the field at the graduate level. Furthermore, introducing undergraduate students to the structured, technical aspects of public administration may rob them of the myriad perspectives available in other fields. One of Ventriss's central tenets is "the need to keep undergraduate education in public affairs multidisciplinary," but he downplays the multidisciplinary nature of the field itself with its bases in political science, economics, management, and law (1998, p. 228). Instead, he emphasizes his fear that the technical, problem-solving, and instrumental rationality-based curriculum rampant at the graduate level will be presented to

students earlier in their education, thereby stifling the normative, philosophical base necessary for wise public service.

Ventriss's perspective raises two important issues germane to this paper. First, his argument sounds similar to that reported by undergraduate program directors and verifies the existence of some opposition to undergraduate public administration degree programs. Second, and more important, Ventriss's fear of exposing undergraduate students to public administration too soon seems to assume that the subject matter would be presented to undergraduates in a similar fashion as it would to graduate students. His other thoughtful arguments notwithstanding, Ventriss provides further evidence that undergraduate public administration has not found a proper place in the broader field.

CURRICULUM DESIGN

One useful approach to finding a proper place for undergraduate study in public administration is to draw on the field of curriculum design. Curriculum design has both technical and informal aspects whereby the formal focuses on articulating plans of study (which courses and subjects to teach) while the informal considers learners' existing knowledge levels, learning styles, and the types of information and techniques used to build upon those existing bases (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). In short, a consideration of both subject matter and types and levels of information appropriate to undergraduate and graduate students in public administration should be considered.

Curriculum scholars propose a number of sources and design dimensions when developing curriculum. Sources include science, society, a field's collective knowledge, and learners (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). Science as a source develops curriculum around student learning of scientific methods and the information students observe and discover through its use. Society as a source draws on Dewey's (1900) assumption that education institutions are agents of society and curriculum should be designed (and students learn best) when educators present academic information within society's current context. Organizing curriculum around a field's collective knowledge begins with the question, "What knowledge is of most worth?" within a discipline and presents the most valuable information within the plan of study. Finally, learner-based curriculum design puts primary emphasis on students' learning styles and interests and filters content through that lens.

Two curriculum design dimensions, society and the field's knowledge base, seem the best fit for public administration. There are numerous examples of programs responding to society's needs, including the recent expansion in MPA programs that focus on disaster management and intelligence studies after 9/11. However, using society as the primary source is temporally limited in that it prepares students for today's environment (or perhaps last year's environment) instead of focusing on basic information that prepares them for the current and

future environment. Leaning heavily on the field's knowledge base as the best source for designing curriculum in public administration allows us to first determine the information that is of most worth and then present that information in ways that highlight the use of rigorous methods, are responsive to societal trends, and consider students' interests and learning styles.

Using the field of public administration's knowledge base as the primary source of curriculum design choices is not without its own concerns. Curricularists note that fields of study are either disciplined or undisciplined. Ornstein and Hunkins (1988) describe the differences as follows:

Disciplined knowledge has a particular structure and a particular method or methods by which its scholars extend its boundaries. Undisciplined knowledge does not have unique content, but has content that is "clustered" according to the focus of the investigation. Physics has a unique conceptual structure and unique process. But home economics is undisciplined in that its content is not unique to itself but is drawn from various other disciplines and adapted to a special focus. (p. 167)

Public administration is clearly undisciplined in this respect, drawing from multiple other fields to focus on administrative institutions, management, and policy in public settings.

Public administration's undisciplined nature has direct influence on curriculum design, the process by which relationships among curricular elements and components are organized for learning. Design dimensions include scope (what clusters in public administration are most important), integration (how to combine components from law, political science, economics and management), and sequence (what levels of information are appropriate for differing levels of students). Questions of scope and integration traditionally occur in field-wide forums through NASPAA's accreditation process and decisions about what is accepted in journals and textbooks that affect both graduate *and* undergraduate curricula. The limited analysis of core course subjects presented earlier suggests a high level of agreement about the scope and integration of public administration materials in undergraduate and graduate programs. However, we cannot expect undergraduate students to do graduate work they are not prepared for, nor can we ask graduate students to sit through and remain interested in course materials more appropriate for undergraduate education. Sequencing, then, holds the key to providing an appropriate place for undergraduate programs in the field of public administration.

Ornstein and Hunkins (1988) highlight the importance of the sequence dimension of curriculum design, stating that sequence requires educators to "deal with the curricular elements so that the curriculum fosters cumulative

and continuous learning” (p. 169) both within programs and across levels of education. Taba (1962) noted long ago that failure to properly consider sequence leads to poorly articulated differences among levels of schooling. The inability to clarify how to bring public administration to an undergraduate audience is a common concern voiced by members of NASPAA’s Committee on Undergraduate Education. I argue that issues of sequence are vital to proper placement of undergraduate education in public administration. NASPAA’s 2009 Accreditation Standards implicitly support this argument with the statement:

Graduate competencies equip the student to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that is founded upon, extends and enhances that typically associated with the Bachelor’s level, and provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and applying ideas.

What we have failed to do to date is provide guidance on the “knowledge and understanding...typically associated with the Bachelor’s level” (NASPAA, 2009).

BLOOM’S TAXONOMY AND UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

As just noted, sequencing occurs both within a particular degree program when faculty delineate prerequisites or recommended programs of study and at different levels of education. The literature uses a number of metaphors to describe this cumulative process, but scaffolding and spiral metaphors are most common (van Lier, 2004). Scaffolding assumes educators purposefully build a framework of knowledge that allows students to grasp and use higher order concepts once they have mastered simpler concepts. The spiral metaphor uses different modes of learning while widening students’ overall levels of understanding. While first-graders learn to recognize fractions and write them in proper notation, third-graders learn to add and subtract fractions with the same denominator, and fifth-graders learn to multiply and divide fractions and find common denominators. This simple example exhibits both metaphors: scaffolding occurs when each level adds to students’ existing knowledge of fractions; the spiral metaphor is assumed in that students leave fractions to learn addition and subtraction, come back to apply that knowledge to fractions, and leave again to learn multiplication and division, only to return and apply those skills to fractions yet again. In public administration, we may begin by reviewing basic institutions and the role of public employees, then spend time focusing on public personnel or full cost accounting, only to return to institutions to discuss how legislators and executives work to budget and staff agencies to bring their policy goals to fruition. Again, both the scaffolding and spiral metaphors are present.

Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) is widely used to consider sequencing in curriculum design and includes both scaffolding and spiral concepts. While it is typically used by course designers to help faculty prepare specific courses, it

is particularly useful for the purpose of this manuscript. The taxonomy divides information and conceptual understanding into six levels that range from basic knowledge of facts and ideas to critical analysis and praxis (see Table 2). The six levels include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Students at the graduate level are assumed to have greater mastery of the tools and concepts of administration in public settings than would be expected of undergraduates. Standard 5 of the 2009 NASPAA Accreditation Standards defines graduate-level outcomes in public administration as accomplishing the last three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, stating:

[Graduate] Students should be able to apply their knowledge, understanding and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader or multidisciplinary contexts related to public affairs, administration, and policy. They have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity. For example, they can formulate judgments with incomplete information, including reflection upon social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments. (NASPAA, 2009)

The accreditation standards for graduate programs clearly frame the goals of graduate public administration study in terms of the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

It follows, then that undergraduate programs in public administration should focus on valuable ideas on the lower end of the spectrum. This should not be seen as demeaning undergraduate public administration programs. Instead, it builds on the scaffolding metaphor in curriculum development whereby a structure is provided for students to build a solid base from which they may achieve higher levels of understanding (van Lier, 2004). The first level of understanding is knowledge of ideas, phenomena, or facts within a field of study. Key operational terms would include requiring students to identify, describe, define, or list ideas or facts. Students might be asked to define the field of public administration, identify the concepts behind the acronym POSDCORB, or list the players in policy subsystems.

Building on this first level of knowledge, undergraduate courses can move to the next level of understanding, that of basic comprehension. Comprehension requires that students be able to translate, interpret, or extrapolate on knowledge. In translating, they might be asked to restate or compare and contrast key ideas. Interpreting knowledge requires that students relate facts or ideas to the real world or their own experiences. Extrapolation forces students to project, propose, or calculate how outcomes might change if key variables were different. Examples might include asking students to restate Wilson's policy-administration dichotomy in their own words (translation), inferring how a rigorous attempt to follow the

Table 2.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Human Thinking Skills

<p>Knowledge: remembering or recalling appropriate, previously learned information to draw out factual (usually right or wrong) answers. Use words and phrases such as <i>how many, when, where, list, define, tell, describe, identify</i>, etc., to draw out factual answers, testing students' recall and recognition.</p>
<p>Comprehension: grasping or understanding the meaning of informational materials. Use words such as <i>describe, explain, estimate, predict, identify, differentiate</i>, etc., to encourage students to translate, interpret, and extrapolate.</p>
<p>Application: applying previously learned information (or knowledge) to new and unfamiliar situations. Use words such as <i>demonstrate, apply, illustrate, show, solve, examine, classify, experiment</i>, etc., to encourage students to apply knowledge to situations that are new and unfamiliar.</p>
<p>Analysis: breaking down information into parts, or examining (and trying to understand the organizational structure of) information. Use words and phrases such as <i>what are the differences, analyze, explain, compare, separate, classify, arrange</i>, etc., to encourage students to break down information into parts.</p>
<p>Synthesis: applying prior knowledge and skills to combine elements into a pattern not clearly there before. Use words and phrases such as <i>combine, rearrange, substitute, create, design, invent, what if</i>, etc., to encourage students to combine elements into a pattern that's new.</p>
<p>Evaluation: judging or deciding according to some set of criteria, without real right or wrong answers. Use words such as <i>assess, decide, measure, select, explain, conclude, compare, summarize</i>, etc., to encourage students to make judgments according to a set of criteria.</p>

dichotomy might change an existing policy (interpretation) or to propose an alternate basis for implementing public programs (extrapolation).

Application of knowledge is the third level of Bloom's Taxonomy and likely the highest level of understanding that should be crucial to undergraduate education in public administration. Bloom's Taxonomy describes application as "the use of abstract forms in particular and concrete situations. The abstractions may be in the form of general ideas, rules or procedures, [or] generalized methods" (Bloom, 1956). Case studies can be particularly useful at this level, requiring students to use what they know in several areas to find solutions to problems or deal with unusual situations. Even the simplest case studies in public administration ask students to make use of financial or human resources, mobilize community or

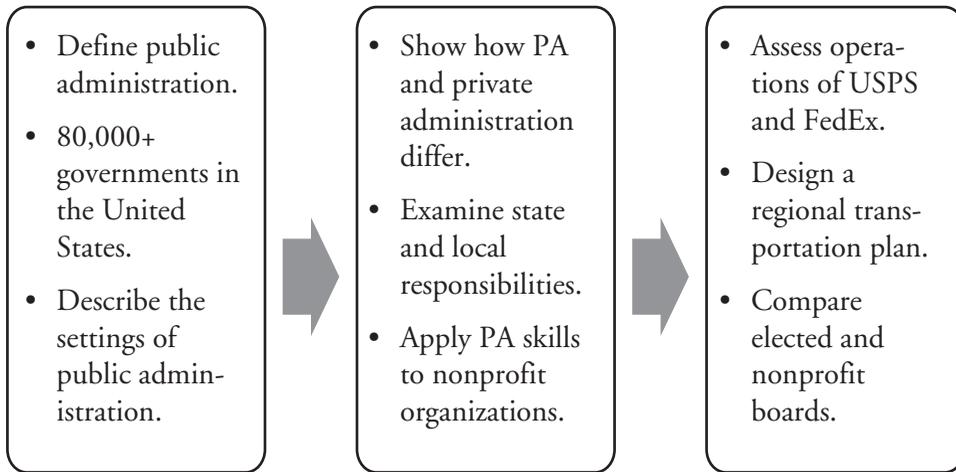
political support for policies, develop creative solutions, or diagram alternative administrative processes or institutions.

The focus on the lower end of Bloom's Taxonomy does not preclude inclusion of analysis, synthesis, or evaluative elements in undergraduate coursework. These levels of learning clearly have a place in upper-level and capstone courses. However, the primary focus of undergraduate public administration curriculum should remain at the knowledge, comprehension, and application levels. Graduate courses may begin with knowledge, comprehension, and application but quickly move on to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

A brief example may prove illustrative. I teach two survey courses in Public Administration, one at the graduate and another at the undergraduate level. The weekly syllabus headings indicate both courses cover similar material, but the exam questions, particularly short answer/essay questions, are quite different. While undergraduates may be asked to name different forms of local government, graduate students are asked to explain the pros and cons of strong mayor, weak mayor, and council-manager systems. Furthermore, graduate students are asked to synthesize what they know about each system and hypothesize what interactions between strong-mayor and council-manager governments might look like within a region. Similarly, public finance and budgeting questions range from identifying types of accounts and/or funds at the undergraduate level to evaluating the sustainability of fiscal systems at the graduate level. Clarifying the level of thinking skills appropriate in undergraduate and graduate coursework allows students and faculty to gradually build upon the field's knowledge base for greater comprehension. Figure 1 provides additional examples of increasing levels of understanding of basic concepts in public administration.

The proper place for undergraduate public administration should leverage the multidisciplinary nature of the field by presenting foundational concepts from the fields of law, political science, economics, and management at a level and in a way that is appropriate to the intellectual development of undergraduate students. Program directors and faculty should thoughtfully design curricula that focus on core concepts in those fields in an effort to build the philosophic base championed by Ventriss (1998) and avoid overly technocratic material. It is enough for undergraduate students to know basic information about public service, comprehend the importance of the information presented, and begin to identify situations where this knowledge might be applied. The technical aspects of PA should be presented in a way that emphasizes why these methods are important and how they fit into the field and that places much less emphasis on how to use them. Undergraduate programs developed in this way will not simply be MPA-lite degrees, but will be founded on our understanding of curriculum design, present our field at a level that is appropriate to undergraduate audiences, and prepare those students for study at the graduate level.

Figure 1.
Increasing Levels of Thinking Skills in Public Administration



CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the focus on graduate-level study in the field of public administration is largely due to the timing of the field's development and the state of American higher education after World War II. The rapid expansion of access to undergraduate education at a time when the role of government grew considerably to deal with pressing social concerns created both a market for and an interest in public administration in the 1960s and 1970s. It was natural for scholars and students to focus on the specialized, higher order skills provided through graduate education in such circumstances. The result, however, was a failure to clearly articulate the role of undergraduate programs in public administration.

Building on the field of curriculum development, it is suggested that sequencing of knowledge for cumulative and continuous learning is the key to properly placing undergraduate programs in the field. Bloom's Taxonomy provides a useful mechanism for identifying the types of learning and skills appropriate to undergraduate study and ensuring that basic knowledge of concepts, comprehension, and application are the focus of coursework in public administration at the undergraduate level. While analysis, synthesis, and evaluation can play an important role in undergraduate education, they are more appropriate as a focus of graduate-level study as inferred by the 2009 NASPAA Accreditation Standards.

Future consideration and work within NASPAA should provide basic information on and more concrete guidance for undergraduate public administration programs. This work is just beginning; the Committee on Undergraduate Education set a number of key goals during the 2010 meeting in Las Vegas. In addition to

building a data warehouse that includes information on the number and size of undergraduate programs, the committee should review course offerings and compare undergraduate and graduate syllabi to make sure undergraduate programs properly fit under the new accreditation standards. All of these efforts will allow us to clarify the role of undergraduate study in the field.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Keller and Laudicina (1982) report that 225 colleges offered an undergraduate degree in public administration as of 1979, and 67 of those were offered by NASPAA members. The *Princeton Review* currently identifies 218 institutions offering an undergraduate major in public administration.
- 2 Before adoption of the latest NASPAA Standards, the standards presented on the organization's website stated, "Specialized, professional education for local government management should be provided only at the graduate or master's level" (NASPAA, 2004).

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