Public Procurement: Public Administration and Public Service Perspectives

Keith F. Snider & Rene G. Rendon
Graduate School of Business & Public Policy, Naval Postgraduate School

Abstract
Why is public procurement not a major topic in public administration education programs? While many scholars and practitioners acknowledge its importance, most master’s degree programs in public administration do not. In this paper we document this discrepancy, investigate its causes, and provide two remedies to place public procurement more squarely in the educational mainstream. The first entails a description of public procurement from well-established public administration perspectives, which illustrates how closely public procurement is aligned with the field’s traditional functions and issues. The second analyzes public procurement in the context of the “public service values” orientation of NASPAA’s accreditation standards, which indicates the extent to which these values are inherently accounted for and manifested in agency procurement policies, processes, and practices. Thus, public administration might achieve a deeper and broader understanding of public service values by paying more attention to public procurement in its education programs. We conclude with recommendations for public administration schools that may want to (a) incorporate public procurement content in existing master’s degree courses; (b) add a public procurement course; or (c) adopt a public procurement concentration for the master’s degree.

Public procurement occupies a problematical position in American public administration. While its importance is evident both in practice and in the scholarly literature, schools of public administration largely ignore it; only a few offer any courses, much less programs, in public procurement. Roughly 30 years ago, Phillip Cooper (1980) noted this condition when he called public administration’s attention to the importance of procurement. Twenty years ago, MacManus and Watson (1990) called for procurement to be included explicitly in public budgeting and finance courses. Ten years ago, Khi Thai (2001) noted that, despite its importance, procurement content was not evident in public administration programs. Today, we observe similar conditions and make a similar call.
Table 1.
Count of NASPAA-Accredited Master’s Degree Programs (N = 165)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs with a Public Procurement-Related Concentration</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with a Public Procurement-Related Required Core Course</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(included in above count)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with Multiple Public Procurement-Related Electives (exclusive of counts above)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with Only One Public Procurement-Related Elective (exclusive of counts above)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with Public Procurement-Related Topics in Multiple Electives (exclusive of counts above)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with Public Procurement-Related Topic(s) in Only One Course (exclusive of counts above)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with at Least One Budgeting/Financial Management Course</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with at Least One Public Personnel Management Course</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with at Least One Information Management Course</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. During the period April 14–April 26 2011, we reviewed websites for each of the 169 master’s degree programs (e.g., MPA, MPP) on NASPAA’s list of accredited programs as of September 1, 2010. First, we reviewed degree program options for instances of procurement-related concentrations or specializations.

We then conducted word searches on course titles and course descriptions (typically contained in either Word, pdf, or html files) for required and elective courses in order to locate courses with content in budgeting/financial management, public personnel management, information management, and public procurement. The following search terms were used: (a) for budgeting and financial management—budget*, finance*, fisc*, fund*; (b) for public personnel management—personnel, human; people; (c) for information technology—information; computers; technolog*; and (d) for public procurement—procu*, contract*, purchas*, outsource*, privat*, project manag*. Four programs did not have web pages that listed either course titles or course descriptions.

For public procurement-related courses, each time one of the search terms was located, we reviewed the course description to judge the extent to which the topic was addressed (either a course dedicated to procurement or a course that included a procurement-related topic among others) and to ensure the topic was indeed addressed. We did not count those where the context was not appropriate (e.g., a hit of “contract” in a course dealing with public employee union labor contracts was not counted as an instance of a course dealing with public procurement).

We recorded simple counts of programs with courses in budgeting/financial management, public personnel management, and information management. We recorded counts of programs with (a) procurement-related concentrations/specializations; (b) a procurement-related required core course; (c) two or more procurement-related elective courses; (d) one procurement-related elective course; (e) courses with procurement-related topics.

We recognize that most programs incorporate advanced seminar courses (e.g., advanced topics, contemporary issues, etc.) in which the course focus is determined by the instructor. While some offerings of these courses no doubt cover public procurement-related topics, we do not include them in our counts.
In this article we analyze this problem and provide recommendations for resolution. In describing public procurement as a critical administrative activity, we document several reasons why it is often neglected, including perceptions that public procurement lies outside the mainstream of public administration. As correctives, we describe public procurement in ways that locate it more squarely in the mainstream. We analyze its features first, in terms of David Rosenbloom’s well-known “management-politics-law” framework (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2008), and second, in terms of the “public service values” from the 2009 National Association of Schools for Public Administration and Affairs (NASPAA) accreditation standards. The intent of this analysis is to present public procurement in a way that makes it more familiar and accessible to public administration educators. We conclude with recommendations for educators who may wish to add varying levels of public procurement content to their academic curricula.

We note at the outset of this paper that we do not see public procurement as a specialty area of public administration like emergency, homeland security, environmental, or health care management. Rather, we take it as axiomatic that public procurement—like budgeting, financial management, and public personnel administration—is a core administrative function that virtually all public organizations (as well as not-for-profits) at the national, state, and local levels must accomplish.

DEFINITIONS

As used in this paper, the term public procurement includes a variety of means by which public agencies and organizations acquire supplies and services from outside sources. This agrees with the “umbrella” usage of the term in the inaugural issue of Journal of Public Procurement (JoPP), in which “procurement” encompasses acquisition, contracting, buying, renting, leasing, and purchasing, to include functions such as requirements determination and all phases of contract administration (Thai, 2001, pp. 42–43). The range of relevant topics (e.g., outsourcing, privatization, public-private partnerships) and activities is also indicated by the objectives of JoPP and the biennial (since 2004) International Public Procurement Conference, both of which seek to “further the understanding of [public procurement’s]:

• Functional areas, including but not limited to procurement policy, procurement strategic planning and scheduling, contract formation, contract administration, evaluation, and procurement methods and techniques;
• Substantive areas such as government procurement laws and regulations, procurement economics and politics, and procurement ethics; and
• Topical issues such as e-Procurement, procurement transparency, and green procurement.” (International Public Procurement Conference, 2011)
This usage is also consistent with that of several practitioner organizations (e.g., National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO); Universal Public Procurement Certification Council (UPPCC); National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP; motto: “Excellence in Public Procurement”).

With Khi Thai (2001, pp. 42–43), we recognize the lack of agreed-upon definitions. In the private sector, the term *purchasing* has been traditionally used; it appears in titles of textbooks and journals (see, e.g., *Purchasing and Materials Management* (Lee & Dobler, 1977), *The Purchasing Handbook* (Cavinato & Kauffman, 2000), and *Journal of Purchasing and Materials Management*, published by the National Association of Purchasing Management (NAPM). Purchasing has recently given way to the broader term *supply management*, which emphasizes the boundary-spanning roles of today’s private sector purchasing managers. Recent titles that demonstrate this shift include *The Supply Management Handbook* (Cavinato, Flynn, & Kauffman, 2006), *Supply Management* (Burt, Petcavage, & Pinkerton, 2010), and *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, published by the Institute for Supply Management (formerly NAPM).

In the public sector, *procurement* and *contracting* are commonly used: *procurement* in the broad sense as the process of acquiring property or services, beginning with determination of a requirement and ending with contract completion (Nash, Schooner, O’Brien-DeBakey, & Edwards, 2007); and *contracting* as narrower in scope, including description (but not determination) of a requirement, solicitation and selection of sources, and contract administration. See, for example, *Contracting for Public Services* (Greve, 2008), *The Responsible Contract Manager* (Cohen & Eimicke, 2008), and *World Class Contracting* (Garrett, 2011). Thus, we define contracting as a subset of procurement.

We do not attempt in this paper to resolve these definitional ambiguities. Rather, our concern is the general lack of attention within public administration education programs to *any* procurement-related topic. Thus, if the paper leads to increased coverage of any such topics—whether broad or narrow—in public administration programs, it will have accomplished its purpose.

**BACKGROUND**

*Procurement in Public Administration Scholarship*

Many scholars have noted the importance of public procurement, approaching it from a variety of directions, for example, the “contracting out” of public functions and its implications (Fitch, 1988; Gibson, 2004; Michaels, 2010; White, 2009); social equity and minority contracting (Collins & Gerber, 2008; Martin, Berner, & Bluestein, 2007; Rice, 1999); and the unique challenges of contracting for public services (Fernandez, 2007; Shick & Weikart, 2009; Van Slyke, 2002). They recognize that it is a critical administrative function (Gordon, Zemansky, & Sekwat, 2000; McCue & Gianakis, 2001; Snider, 2006; Thai, 2001) and that achievement of many public policy objectives
(e.g., supporting domestic suppliers or local economic development; remedies for historically disadvantaged groups; “green” procurement) depends substantially on procurement’s effectiveness (Arrowsmith, 1995; Bolton, 2006; Knight, Caldwell, Harland, & Telgren, 2003; Knight et al., 2007; ).

Scholars have also documented the expansion and increasing complexity of public procurement since 1990 (Brown & Potoski, 2003; Ni & Bretschneider, 2007; Romzek & Johnston, 2005). Aspects of “Reinventing Government” and the New Public Management (NPM) revised traditional buyer-seller relationships between public and private sector entities through means such as outsourcing, public-private competitions, and public-private partnerships (Gansler, 2003). Several (e.g., Matthews, 2005; Rendon, 2005; McCue & Gianakis, 2001) see this trend as elevating public procurement to a strategic level.

**Procurement in Public Administration Practice**

Public procurement’s importance in practice is evident in many ways. First, with 83,000 separate procurement activities and offices in almost all U.S. federal, state, and local government agencies (Thai, 2001), its influence is ubiquitous. Public procurement professionals at the local, state, and federal levels number more than 500,000, and the membership of the largest public procurement professional association, the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP), includes 2,600 U.S. member agencies and 16,000 individual members (NIGP, 2011).

Further, public procurement accounts for a wide range of products, from municipal services (Fernandez, 2007) to major weapon systems for national defense (Rendon & Snider, 2008). For each of these, public procurement provides the means for determining price, delivery schedule, and quality standards. The degree to which public procurement operates effectively thus determines the effectiveness of its products and services.

As mentioned earlier, public procurement is often used to accomplish specific policy objectives; but in a sense, each individual procurement decision (e.g., a decision to privatize; a contract award decision) entails politics, representing as it does an “authoritative allocation of value” (Easton, 1953). Thus, even relatively junior procurement officials engage in “street-level” policy making (Snider & Rendon, 2008).

Further, the sheer magnitude of resources devoted to public procurement compels attention. Most nations spend about 20% of gross domestic product (GDP) on public procurement (Callendar & Mathews, 2000; Carter & Grimm, 2001), and developing nations spend up to 50% (Schiavo-Campo & Sundaram, 2000, p. 315). In the United States, federal public procurement during 2009 accounted for over $534 billion (Federal Procurement Data System, 2011) and over 13% of the total federal budget; of the U.S. states’ annual budgets, roughly half goes toward goods and services procured from the private sector (Knight et al., 2003). In response to the recent economic crisis, public procurement accounts for about one third of Recovery Act spending (Bartha & Snider, 2010).
Public procurement failures often attract attention from the media and other watchdog groups. For example, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) perennially cites defense contracting as a “high risk” area (Hutton, 2008; Walker, 2005) and has weighed in with critiques of reconstruction contracting in Iraq (GAO, 2007) and in Hurricane Katrina relief (Woods, 2006).

Finally, recent surveys reveal practitioners’ views of public procurement’s importance. Lazenby’s (2010) analysis of local government manager competencies indicates that procurement-related topics such as privatization, public-private partnerships, and project management (which includes procurement management; see Project Management Institute, 2008) all received the same “important” rating as budgeting, human resources management, and strategic planning. (The lower rating of “useful” given to the topic of contract management may reflect its limited definition as a technical activity under our broader definition of public procurement.)

A recent survey of National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO, 2009) indicates that public procurement is growing in importance. Officials report that they are no longer “relegated to a tactical role of buying what the customer wanted” but rather now “often lead the strategic procurement planning process for major initiatives” (p. 1). All reported that the role of the state central procurement officer in strategic planning sessions with the governor on issues such as emergency planning, preference policies (e.g., small business preferences), and “green procurement” had increased during the past 5 years. Most reported increased use of cooperative purchasing (where two or more public entities combine procurement requirements for efficiency purposes) and strategic sourcing (which entails systematic analysis of requirements, suppliers, market, and environment as well as historical spend analysis; NASPO, pp. 5–8).

Procurement in Public Administration Education

The discussion to this point not only reinforces earlier calls (like Cooper’s) for public administration to pay attention to public procurement, it shows that public procurement has increased in importance since those calls. Yet few schools of public administration acknowledge this increase.

Table 1 shows the extent to which NASPAA-accredited master’s degree programs incorporate public procurement and related content based on a review of course titles and descriptions. Only 25 of 165 programs (15%) offer at least one elective course, and 117 of 165 (71%) offer no course with a procurement-related topic. For comparison purposes, the table also shows the numbers of programs offering at least one full course dedicated to the following topics: public budgeting/financial management, public personnel management, and information management. Clearly, most public administration educators do not view public procurement as a topic worthy to be addressed in their curricula.

A JPAE-published analysis of public administration financial management courses (Moody & Marlowe, 2009) reinforces the conclusion that the level of
pedagogical attention to public procurement falls well short of its importance. Surveys revealed that, when compared to other topics, public procurement ranked very low in the amount of course time and material (52nd and 53rd, respectively, of 64 topics). Yet it ranked much higher (32nd of 64 topics) in terms of its perceived importance. Other contributors to this journal have commented on this issue, proposing improvements (specifically, addition of various procurement-related content) to public administration courses and curricula (Forrer, Kee, & Gabriel, 2007; Kennedy, 2010; Purtell & Fossett, 2010; Smith, 2008; Tang & Buchan, 2008).

**Procurement in Business Administration Education**

In contrast to schools of public administration, business schools devote significant attention to procurement; almost all schools offer multiple courses in topics like purchasing, logistics, and supply management (Rendon & Snider, 2010). These courses are supported by numerous textbooks, scholarly journals, learned societies, and professional associations, all of which approach procurement from the business perspective.

This traction in the business world is due to the well-documented relationship between procurement and a business’s financial position and bottom line. Procurement activities, especially purchasing and contracting, affect sales and total ownership costs, thus having a major impact on an organization’s return on investment (ROI) and bottom line. Business textbooks thus reflect the “profit-leveraged effect” and the “return-on-assets (ROA) effect” that the purchasing function has on the company’s financial position (Burt, Dobler, & Starling, 2003; Burt, Petcavage, & Pinkerton, 2010; Leenders & Fearon, 1997).

**Why Is Procurement Missing from Public Administration Education?**

Some of this neglect of procurement is no doubt due to the problematic nature of American public administration itself, characterized as it is by multiple and conflicting views of its own identity, legitimacy, and proper role (see, e.g., Waldo, 1978). Multiple bases for administrative decision making are in play: In the managerial view, decisions may be taken on a rational economic basis (e.g., cost-benefit analysis); from the political perspective, decisions might be made incrementally; from the legal view, precedents may rule (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2008). NPM brings in a business-like approach to governing with values such as cost effectiveness, responsiveness to the citizen as customer, market preferences (e.g., competition among public entities), and performance measurement (Barzelay, 1992; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). There are no well-defined, agreed-upon strategic success factors for public procurement; rather, there are multiple goals and perhaps some vague notion of the public interest (Cohen & Eimicke, 2008, pp. 23–25; Schiavo-Campo & Sundaram, 2000). Essentially, public administration as an academic field lacks the sort of
unifying perspective and value structure that, in contrast, business possesses in the perspective and value of profitability. Business has worked out how procurement contributes to profitability, and business academic programs reflect this relationship. Considering its diverse and competing approaches, public administration has been unable to follow suit.

Another reason is found in the traditional view of public procurement as a subfunction under public financial management. A mid-twentieth-century textbook, *Municipal Finance Administration*, states that “purchasing may be properly classified as a fiscal function” (p. 367) in its chapter on “Purchasing and Storing” (Institute for Training in Municipal Administration, 1955). According to the organization of the Bureau of the Budget prior to formation of the Office of Management and Budget, the “Property and Supply Management Branch,” which was responsible for “property management, including purchasing and contracting” (p. 54), was under the “General Government Management Division,” along with other branches such as data processing and personnel management (Brudge, 1970). This view persists today: A prominent financial management text, *Public Budgeting in America* (Smith & Lynch, 2003), devotes only a couple of pages to purchasing and procurement under the heading of “Property Management” in its final chapter.

In this traditional view, budgeting and finance activities accomplish the planning function for public agencies and organizations, while procurement activities entail the execution function. Budgeting and finance have a strategic focus (and elevated status) on public ends, while procurement serves as a routine or clerical means to accomplish those ends (Snider, 2006). Procurement thus has been perceived as not meriting significant treatment as a topic of interest or study. Of course, the earlier discussion on the contemporary importance of public procurement suggests that public administration should jettison this traditional view.

These reasons help explain the neglect of procurement in public administration education, especially when compared to business education. In contrast to business procurement, public procurement is not perceived to contribute to any strategic criteria of success. Thus, procurement continues to be perceived mainly as a routine, tactical function and unworthy of treatment at the university level. Despite the importance of procurement in practice, the voices of external stakeholders such as procurement practitioners are apparently not yet numerous nor strong enough to influence public administration educators to pay much attention. Thus, curricula continue to reflect the views of its academic members, the great majority of whom do not view procurement as an important or interesting subject.

**Public Procurement as Public Administration**

In this section, we discuss public procurement using concepts and language that should be familiar to public administration educators. The intent is to portray procurement as a mainstream administrative activity.
**Rosenbloom’s Management-Politics-Law Framework**

David Rosenbloom’s *Public Administration: Understanding Management, Politics, and Law in the Public Sector* ranks unquestionably as one of the field’s leading textbooks; seven editions (variously coauthored with Deborah Goldman, Robert Kravchuk, and Richard Clerkin) appeared between 1986 and 2008. Each edition has employed the same management-politics-law (MPL) intellectual framework that Dwight Waldo termed “both an excellent analysis and an excellent prescription” (in Rosenbloom & Goldman, 1992, p. xix). Each of the three approaches or perspectives reflects the predominant set of values or repertoires from each of the three branches of the U.S. federal government (i.e., managerial-executive; political-legislative; law-judicial). While the unique features of and distinctions among the three serve useful analytical purposes, Waldo noted that public administration entails “varying mixtures of these three approaches…. It is not just undesirable, it is impossible to narrow the concerns of public administration to any one of them. Our task is to find the proper way to put the three together” (p. xix).

In Part Two of the textbook, Rosenbloom devotes a chapter to each of five public administration “core functions” (organization; personnel administration; budgeting; decision making; and policy analysis and implementation evaluation, all of which are of course usually taught in public administration curricula) and describes each function using his MPL framework. Table 2 offers a summary of the main points of this analysis from the chapters on personnel administration and budgeting.

### Table 2.
**Public Administration Perspective: Personnel and Budgeting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach Objectives</th>
<th>Public Personnel Management</th>
<th>Public Budgeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>Topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managerial</strong></td>
<td>• Merit</td>
<td>• Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Selection</td>
<td>• Political Neutrality</td>
<td>• Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pay/promotion</td>
<td>• Performance appraisal</td>
<td>• Pay/promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Performance appraisal</td>
<td>Performance appraisal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td>• Spoils</td>
<td>• EEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsive</td>
<td>• Patronage</td>
<td>• Affirmative action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Representative</td>
<td>• Preferences</td>
<td>• Schedule C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rotation in office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal</strong></td>
<td>• Employee rights, privileges</td>
<td>• Political activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Constitutional integrity</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Labor relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individual rights</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equal protection</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Grievances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Due process</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Whistleblower protections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The narratives in Rosenbloom’s chapter provide much rich descriptive detail. An example regarding personnel administration is how the managerial approach’s concerns with economy, efficiency, and effectiveness are reflected in personnel concerns with merit, which shapes important personnel topics like recruitment and performance appraisal. Similarly, the objectives of politics and law reflect different concerns that shape different personnel topics. Considering each approach separately allows for in-depth understanding of the details of each topic, while considering the approaches together enables a rich appreciation for the core functions’ complexities and the challenges faced by those who administer them.

Public Procurement in the MPL Framework

Table 3 illustrates how the MPL framework may be applied to public procurement. Managerial objectives are reflected in concerns for “best value” (Cooper, 1999), emphasis on contract performance (i.e., costs or prices, timeliness of deliveries, and the quality of delivered goods or services; Fernandez, 2009), and performance-based contracts (Boykin, 2005). Project management tools and techniques are increasingly employed in procurement (Morroig, 2006). These managerial concerns lead to emphasis on topics such as process efficiency (Sherman, 1991); strategic long-term buyer-seller relationships for low prices (Rendon, 2005), determining optimal relationships in public-private arrangements (Bloomfield, 2006), procurement official professionalism (Snider, 1996; Kelman, 1990), and agency capacity (Schooner, 2004). Also of interest is the unique nature of the public procurement “market” and how economic efficiencies may be achieved within it (Kelman, 2006; Lamothe & Lamothe, 2009, 2010) through mechanisms such as auctions (Byrd, 2001).

Political objectives related to representation and responsiveness are manifested in concerns such as socioeconomic preferences (Marran, 2010; Morand, 2003), transparency of procurement processes and awards (Arrowsmith, 2003; Trepte, 2005), and the accountability of procurement officials (Grant, 2002). Associated topics of perennial interest include procurement set-asides (Rice, 1992); earmarks (Kunz, 2009), including concerns with “pork” (Lazarus, 2010); fair and reasonable profits (Kaiser & Smith, 1980; Perine, 2007); probity in government-vendor relationships (Walton, 1996); procurement consolidation or “bundling” (Ireton, 2003; Nerenz, 2007); and privatization and outsourcing (Fitch, 1988; Hefetz & Warner, 2004; Van Slyke, 2003).

The approach of law leads to concerns with legal aspects of contracting (Arrowsmith, 2004) and related issues like disputes and their resolutions (Nagle, 2010) and wrongdoing by either vendors (Kelman & Schooner, 2006) or public officials (Schooner, 2005; McCampbell & Rood, 1997). Topics include statutory and regulatory compliance (Duvall & Yukins, 2006), bid protests (Clancy, 1999), and standards of conduct, including “revolving door” concerns (Cooper, 2005).
Most teachers of public administration are familiar with Rosenbloom’s text, the MPL framework, and their usefulness in presenting core administrative functions. These materials and concepts equip teachers, especially those in introductory or survey courses, to present these functions effectively, even without any special functional background. The preceding discussion indicates how the framework equips teachers who may not have a procurement background to begin presenting it in their courses as an important function of public administration.

Table 3.
Public Administration Perspective: Public Procurement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach Objectives</th>
<th>Public Procurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>Best value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost, schedule,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Socioeconomics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Contract Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adjudication/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Procurement and Public Service Values

Public sector management differs significantly from management in the private sector (Fry & Nigro, 1998). As previously discussed, these differences include the ambiguity of public organizational goals, the vagueness of the public interest (Cohen & Eimicke, 2008), multiple and intangible objectives (Fry & Nigro, 1998), and bureaucratic management. Accordingly, public management entails different values: Elmer Staats described public service as a “concept, an attitude, a sense of duty—yes, even a sense of morality” (in Perry, 1996). Public service implies that public officials “should place the best interests of their
citizens/customers first” (Cohen & Eimicke, 2008, p. 23) through values such as honesty, integrity, equal treatment, due processes, and transparency.

NASPAA identifies public service values in its accreditation standards as “pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust; and demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealing with citizens and public servants.” These values are similar to NIGP’s values of accountability, ethics, impartiality, professionalism, service, and transparency (NIGP, 2009).

NASPAA’s public service values can be analyzed in the context of public procurement, specifically looking at public procurement policies, processes, and practices (Rendon, 2008). U.S. federal procurement policies are embodied in the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). “Pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency” is supported in procurement policies such as ensuring that designated contracting officers are appointed in writing (FAR 1.602) and by publicizing contract actions (FAR 5.2). This value is also embodied in procurement processes related to agency review of contract documents, such as the justification and approval for sole-source (e.g., “no bid”) procurements (FAR 6), and public disclosure of solicitations (such as requests for proposals) and awarded contracts (FAR 5.3). Practices such as convening industry conferences to discuss future procurement projects and to solicit industry feedback also contribute to accountability and transparency.

The public service value of “serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity” is reflected in various federal, state and municipal policies related to education, training, and experience requirements for the procurement workforce (e.g., FAR 1.603) as well as in procurement reform legislation and initiatives. This value is also supported by procurement processes related to planning, source selection, and contract administration as well as through the practices of conducting adequate market research, evaluating proposals fairly and according to approved criteria, and awarding contracts based on “best value” (Rendon, 2008).

“Acting ethically, so as to uphold the public trust” is expressed in procurement policies related to standards of conduct, conflicts of interest, and revolving-door restrictions (FAR 3.1). This value is also reflected in the procurement processes that promote impartial contract negotiations and awards as well as in practices such as conducting cost-price analysis to determine fair and reasonable prices, and conducting contractor surveillance to ensure compliance with contract requirements.

The public service value of “demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealing with citizens and public servants” may be seen in procurement policies on preferred sources of supply (such as National Institute for the Blind and
National Institute for the Severely Handicapped, socioeconomic requirements (e.g., contract award preferences for small and disadvantaged businesses), and requirements for promoting competition in contracting. This value is also supported by processes related to procurement strategy planning (such as sole source versus open competition) and determining a contractor's eligibility to bid on a procurement action. It is embodied in practices such as negotiating contract modifications in good faith and in prompt processing of contractor payments. Table 4 summarizes our discussion on how public service values are inherent in public procurement policies, processes, and practices.

Table 4.
Public Service Values and Public Procurement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Service Values</th>
<th>Public Procurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing the public</td>
<td>• Appointing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interest</td>
<td>contracting officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accountability</td>
<td>• Publicizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transparency</td>
<td>contract actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving professionally</td>
<td>• Education/train-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ing requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for procurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Procurement reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>legislation/initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting ethically</td>
<td>• Standards of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uphold the public</td>
<td>conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust</td>
<td>• Conflict of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Revolving door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating</td>
<td>• Preferred sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of supply (NIB/NISH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Socioeconomic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promoting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

This section presents brief recommendations for those who may wish to include procurement in their public administration courses or programs. Space limitations preclude extensive recommendations; shown here are only sketches and samples intended to indicate possible areas of emphasis and direction. Because a “one-size-fits-all” approach would not be useful, considering the present diversity of programs, three levels of engagement are offered (see Table 5): (a) low level—adding procurement content in existing courses; (b) moderate level—adding a procurement course; (c) high level—adding a procurement concentration.

Low Level—Adding Procurement Content

Adding procurement-related content to existing courses represents, in our view, a minimal level of engagement appropriate for smaller, more constrained programs or as a first step for any program that does not currently cover public procurement. In this approach, discussions of procurement are woven into existing courses, which might include policy, management, or “context” (e.g., public administration theory or history) courses. Possible topics might include procurement policy (e.g., for minority set-asides); procurement processes (e.g., transparency in contract awards); outsourcing issues (e.g., inherently governmental determinations); the economics of contracting (e.g., transaction costs); agency theory (e.g., the principal-agent problem); local services contracting (e.g., in achieving social equity); and federal contracting (e.g., for defense and homeland security). Procurement content might also be integrated into concentration courses, for example, contracting for health care services or for information technology services.

Moderate Level—Adding a Procurement Course

Devoting an entire course—whether core or elective—signals a higher commitment to procurement in a public administration curriculum; it also clearly requires a higher commitment of resources (e.g., a qualified instructor). While specific course content and structure would obviously depend on its desired purpose (e.g., is it intended as a course about public procurement or a course on “how to do procurement”? and context (e.g., is the course one in a curriculum focused on health care administration, or on homeland security, or on policy analysis?), certain topics would likely be included in almost any public procurement course. These topics are listed in Table 5 along with textbooks that, given their acceptance in the procurement realm, deserve consideration for adoption.

High Level—Adding a Procurement Concentration

Creating a public procurement concentration obviously entails significant resource investments and would be undertaken only by those schools that can attract sufficient numbers of students. As with adding a single course, determining the specific courses to be included in the concentration depends on the curricular focus. Regardless, the conventional wisdom about what constitutes the public procurement
“body of knowledge” (see for example, websites for NIGP [www.nigp.org] and the National Contract Management Association [NCMA; www.ncmahq.org]) leads educators to consider courses in procurement policy, procurement management (including organization, personnel, and financing), and procurement law.

Table 5.  
Adding Public Procurement to Public Administration Curricula: Three Levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Engagement</th>
<th>Possible Syllabus Topics</th>
<th>Possible Textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adding Procurement Content to Existing Courses</td>
<td>• Procurement Policy&lt;br&gt;• Contracting Processes and Practices&lt;br&gt;• Economics of Contracting&lt;br&gt;• Government Contract Law&lt;br&gt;• Contract Administration&lt;br&gt;• Contract Pricing and Negotiations&lt;br&gt;• Managing Procurement Projects</td>
<td>• The responsible contract manager: Protecting the public interest in an outsourced world (Cohen &amp; Eimicke, 2008)&lt;br&gt;• Introduction to public procurement (Thai, 2004)&lt;br&gt;• World-class contracting (Garrett, 2011)&lt;br&gt;• Governing by contract: Challenges and opportunities for public managers (Cooper, 2003)&lt;br&gt;• Procurement &amp; public management: The fear of discretion and the quality of public performance (Kelman, 1990)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderate Engagement</th>
<th>Possible Syllabus Topics</th>
<th>Possible Textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adding a Procurement Course</td>
<td>• Procurement Policy&lt;br&gt;• Contracting Processes and Practices&lt;br&gt;• Economics of Contracting&lt;br&gt;• Government Contract Law&lt;br&gt;• Contract Administration&lt;br&gt;• Contract Pricing and Negotiations&lt;br&gt;• Managing Procurement Projects</td>
<td>• The responsible contract manager: Protecting the public interest in an outsourced world (Cohen &amp; Eimicke, 2008)&lt;br&gt;• Introduction to public procurement (Thai, 2004)&lt;br&gt;• World-class contracting (Garrett, 2011)&lt;br&gt;• Governing by contract: Challenges and opportunities for public managers (Cooper, 2003)&lt;br&gt;• Procurement &amp; public management: The fear of discretion and the quality of public performance (Kelman, 1990)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Engagement</th>
<th>Possible Course Titles and Textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adding a Procurement Concentration</td>
<td>• Introduction to Public Procurement—Introduction to public procurement (Thai, 2005)&lt;br&gt;• Government Contract Law—Formation of government contracts (Cibinic &amp; Nash, 1998)&lt;br&gt;• Contract Negotiations and Pricing—Guide to contract pricing (Murphy, 2009)&lt;br&gt;• Supply Management—World class supply management (Burt, Dobler &amp; Starling, 2003)&lt;br&gt;• Public Procurement Policy—Government procurement management (Sherman, 1991); Government by contract: Outsourcing American democracy (Freeman &amp; Minow, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers for Public Procurement Courses

For schools that wish to add public procurement to their course offering, the problem of finding instructors deserves attention. Since so few schools of public administration teach procurement, they are poor sources for qualified graduates of either master's or doctoral programs. More likely, instructor recruitment will focus on procurement practitioners. Potential sources include professional associations like NIGP and NCMA, both of which offer job search and recruitment services for their members, local and nationwide conferences for interview opportunities, and professional publications in which teaching positions could be advertised. NASPO represents a network of senior, knowledgeable, and experienced practitioners. (Each of these associations also produces applied research and training documents that may be useful course materials.) Another possible source would be federal, state, and local agencies (e.g., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; state departments of transportation; municipal public works departments) with procurement offices staffed by procurement professionals. Finally, faculty colleagues at the four NASPAA-accredited schools mentioned earlier that offer concentrations in public procurement are well positioned and would no doubt be willing to provide suggestions on how to address such resource issues as well as other pedagogical issues related to public procurement.

Conclusion

While to some, much of this article may seem like an elaboration of the obvious—that public procurement is an important function of and may be taught as public administration—that obvious point has not led most schools of public administration to treat the topic in any meaningful way. If however, as some of the research cited in this paper suggests, public procurement is increasing in importance, then the need to begin teaching it takes on greater urgency. As public administration educators, we fail to serve our students well when we fail to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to serve the public well.

References


K. F. Snider & R. G. Rendon


K. F. Snider & R. G. Rendon


Keith F. Snider is associate professor of Public Administration and Management in the Graduate School of Business & Public Policy at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA. He received his PhD in Public Administration and Public Affairs from Virginia Tech. His teaching and research interests lie in the areas of defense acquisition policy, project management, public organizations, and public administration theory and history. His recent journal publications appear in Armed Forces & Society, Business and Politics, Journal of Public Procurement, and Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management. Dr. Snider can be reached at ksnider@nps.edu.

Rene G. Rendon is associate professor of Acquisition Management in the Graduate School of Business & Public Policy at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA. He received his DBA from Argosy University, Orange County, California. His teaching and research interests lie in the areas of contract management, purchasing and supply management, and project management. His recent journal publications appear in Journal of Contract Management, Journal of Public Procurement, and Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management. Dr. Rendon can be reached at rgrendon@nps.edu.