

# Sectors and Skills: Career Trajectories and Training Needs of MPP Students

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## ABSTRACT

Public policy programs have come to attract students with increasingly diverse backgrounds and career aims, but curricular changes have been modest. Using a data set on MPP alumni from Harvard's Kennedy School, we analyze career trajectories through different sectors and specializations, examining relationships among trajectories, perceptions of public service, and particular skill needs. Although government remains an important destination, we find a predominance of idiosyncratic paths and a diversification of employment trajectories over time. Perceptions of employment as public service and reports of skill use vary significantly by sector. Although certain general skills (communication, systematic thinking about problems, and workload management) are widely used, there are notable differences in other skill areas (policy design and political analysis are more used by government and nonprofit workers; economics is more used in the private sector). Programs may want to consider these differences in skill use in prioritizing what is taught, and how.

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## KEYWORDS

MPP, career trajectories, public service

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several universities established graduate training programs in public policy intended to equip students with the analytical skills believed necessary for improved public problem solving. Expectations that government should address large, complex societal problems had increased but confidence in public sector capacity was declining as a result of the disastrous war in Vietnam, ongoing concerns about international security, and the apparent failure of the Great Society programs to address poverty, urban decay, and racial strife. "In the face of these problems," wrote Harvard President Derek Bok, "universities have a major opportunity and responsibility... What is needed is nothing less than the education of a new profession" (Bok, 1975, p. 8). Not all policy programs were founded with the same vision of what graduates

would do: Bok envisioned "educating those who will occupy positions of authority in public institutions" (Bok, 1975, p. 21), whereas Aaron Wildavsky of UC Berkeley expected that policy schools would "produce students to colonize the bureaucracies to criticize what those bureaucracies were doing, and, in a modest way, to set things right" (Wildavsky, 1989, p. xxv). Wildavsky also imagined that policy graduates would work both inside and out of government, though in the latter circumstance, they still would be focused on critiquing and improving public sector action.

Even with some differences in long-term vision, the programs for master's degrees in public policy (MPP) were very much alike in their core curricula—combining a quantitative analytical core of statistics and microeconomics

(sometimes supplemented by operations research) with some training in politics and organizational behavior. Graduates would be prepared to evaluate programs and to advise policy makers, ensuring that decisions were well informed and dollars well spent. In time, some would come to direct programs or agencies themselves—drawing on their policy training along with the practical lessons of government service.

But over the last four decades, as policy programs have multiplied and grown, they have come to attract students with much more diverse backgrounds and career aims (Chetkovich, 2003; Light, 1999a) at the same time as government opportunities have diminished, especially at the federal level. In particular, as Paul Light's (1999a) survey of public administration and public policy students revealed, the proportion of graduates entering government on graduation has diminished greatly over successive cohorts—the decline is steepest among public policy students but also found among those in public administration (MPA) programs. Additionally, the proportion working in government as of his survey date was lower among later cohorts, and sector switching had become more common. Light found that despite differences in work sectors, MPP and MPA graduates generally expressed a desire to have an impact on local or national issues, and he asserts that the multi-sectored destinations of these graduates represent a “new public service.” Furthermore, he argues that the traditional policy analysis curriculum that dominated policy schools but had also become common in many top public administration programs does not suit the needs of this new public service, and evidence from the survey suggests that there is a gap between alumni-reported skill needs and the focus of the traditional curriculum—particularly for those working in the nonprofit and private sectors.

Light's is the most comprehensive study to date, but others have reported diminished interest in government work among policy and public administration students (Adams, 2000;

Chetkovich, 2003; Marshall & Reed, 1999; Steinberg, 2012) and among college students more generally (Adams, Goldsmith, McKenna, & Rosse, 2000; Council for Excellence in Government, 2002—though this report indicates slight improvement since a poll in 1997). In an investigation of sector switching among graduates, Tschirhart, Reed, Freeman, and Anker (2008) found that MPAs are much more likely than master of business administration (MBA) graduates to switch sectors as well as much less likely to report a strong sector preference at the time of graduation.

By comparison with the changes in student aims (and the context of the policy world),<sup>1</sup> the changes in MPP curricula have been rather modest. Although schools have increased elective offerings and some have differentiated themselves by emphasizing certain aspects of the training, the analytical core has not been significantly altered. If both graduate destinations and the context of public service work are changing, is the basic public policy curriculum still a good fit for the professionals being educated in MPP programs? Does the curriculum work better for some career paths than others? Are there ways of adjusting the curriculum in light of multiple paths and sector switching among graduates?

We provide additional insights by working with data from more recent graduates, by analyzing career trajectories in different ways, and by investigating the relationship between skills (on a list that more closely resembles MPP learning objectives) and career sectors, as opposed to current jobs. For this article, we analyzed an extensive data set on the careers of alumni from the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS), in which we focused intentionally on graduates of the MPP program.<sup>2</sup> The HKS survey data allow us to follow the career trajectories of MPP graduates through different sectors and specializations, and to relate those trajectories with perceptions of public service and the use of particular skills and knowledge areas. Because the data are from a single institution, we must be cautious about generalizing, but that institution does house

one of the original MPP programs and the largest one in the country. Harvard's alumni are a significant proportion of all MPP graduates, and their curriculum is not unrepresentative of the field, as explained in greater detail later.

In the following section of the paper, we describe the survey from which our data are taken. Subsequent sections report on a detailed analysis of career trajectories, the relationship between sector of employment and public service content of the work, skill use by career paths (including single- and multi-sector careers), and training effectiveness for specific skills, again by career path. We conclude with some observations about curricular content in today's MPP programs.

### THE SURVEY

In 2004–2005, an HKS Teaching Programs Review Committee conducted a survey of alumni in all of the school's master's degree programs, including MPPs, mid-career MPAs, and MPAs in International Development. In this article, we are focusing on the MPP alumni because the curriculum of this program makes it more comparable to other MPP programs than would be the case for any of the school's MPA programs, which tend not to closely resemble MPA programs at other schools. At the time of the survey, the HKS MPP program included the following requirements: a two-semester sequence in microeconomics; a two-semester sequence in statistics/quantitative analysis; a course in ethics; a course in public management; a module (previously a full course) on political action; a module on financial management; and three courses in the student's chosen substantive policy area, one of which would be a seminar preparing students for the capstone "Policy Analysis Exercise" project, a separate course. The remainder of the 18 required credits consisted of electives in additional policy or methodological training. According to an internal report done at the time of the curricular review, the core elements had changed little over the school's history, except for the addition of ethics and politics in the early 1980s and the merging of material from a separate policy analysis sequence into

other core courses along with a dedicated "spring exercise" at the end of the first year, which occurred in 1997–1998. The same report surveyed core requirements at competitive schools, but not all were MPP programs. All programs required statistics, microeconomics, and management; most included politics and a policy analysis capstone; but they varied in their inclusion of ethics, a separate policy analysis course, financial management, and concentration requirements.

Other surveys have found substantial similarities in the core requirements of public policy programs, and over time, some overlap between public policy and public administration programs, also suggesting that the HKS curriculum is not unusual. Ellwood (2008) reports that his 1983 analysis of public policy and administration curricula found key distinctions between the two types of programs. Policy programs required a "lockstep" curriculum that centered on a full year of economics and quantitative methods, along with at least one course in politics and/or management and a workshop project for a client. By 2006, the public administration programs had begun to include more economics and policy analysis, and the policy programs had moved to include more of a management curriculum although there were still distinctions by type of degree. Light's (1999a) inventory of core courses did not distinguish public policy and administration programs, but overall found a heavy emphasis on microeconomics, policy analysis, and quantitative methods, followed by organization theory/management, public budgeting/finance, the policy process, ethics, a general introduction, and leadership. Countering those who argue for a growing similarity between public policy and public administration programs, Kretzschmar (2010) examined representative programs of different types and found distinctions between the two types of programs and similarities within type. The policy programs continue to include a core of microeconomics, statistics, policy analysis, political and organizational analysis, an applied exercise, and often either ethics or law. In summary, as Lynn (2001) observed:

Of particular note is the arguable fact that the public policy curriculum has become an example of institutional isomorphism. Even though public policy programs at many universities exhibit distinctive normative environments, the core structures of these curriculums are, despite local variations, quite similar. (p. 162)

The HKS survey was distributed by mail to all of those for whom the Alumni Office had street addresses, some 12,700 people. In addition, the office provided e-mail addresses for approximately three quarters of this group, and electronic surveys were also distributed to those alumni. Over 2,000 of the electronic mailings were returned as undeliverable, and it is not known how many of the street addresses were invalid because the survey was sent via bulk nonprofit mail, and undeliverable mail was not returned. After initial outreach (by mail or both mail and e-mail) and multiple reminders, the school ultimately received 4,763 responses.

As a percentage of all alumni, this number represents 32.5%, but it would be inappropriate to consider this the response rate, because it was not possible to attempt to contact all alumni. As a proportion of attempted contacts, the return for MPP graduates was 41.5%. (The figure for MPPs includes the small number of students obtaining an MPP with an urban planning concentration, the MPP-UP.) If the total number surveyed is adjusted to account for an estimated 16% undeliverable mail—based on the Alumni Office experience with mailings and the “bounce back” of 20% of the attempted electronic survey, the response rate for MPP alumni actually receiving the survey was 52.7%. There were slightly more female respondents in most program categories than there were women in the school’s alumni for those programs, but on other basic demographic dimensions the respondents resembled alumni as a whole.

### CAREER TRAJECTORIES

The survey data allow us to track different dimensions of the MPP graduates’ broad career

trajectories for up to 15 years following the completion of their degree. In this section, we identify the most striking patterns in MPP career paths. We also analyze the relationship between employment sectors and self-reports of public service work. In the following section, we relate predominant employment sectors to the graduates’ reports of the skills they use in their careers.

### Trajectory by Sectors

MPP graduates were asked to indicate in which of several sectors they were employed at specific times (before enrolling and 1, 5, 10, and 15 years after graduation), as well as how many years they spent in each sector over their entire career to date. In our analysis, we have grouped these into four major sectors: government, nonprofit, for-profit, and other. Within the for-profit sector, we can distinguish respondents employed by firms primarily serving public sector or nonprofit-sector clients (e.g., in consulting)—referred to hereafter as “public-serving for-profits,” versus other for-profits—referred to hereafter as “strictly private for-profits.” The “other” category includes self-employment as well as employment with international non- or quasi-governmental organizations (e.g., the United Nations or World Bank).

To identify patterns of change over time, we also group respondents by graduation cohorts, which are five-year blocks of dates: 1976–1980, 1981–1985, 1986–1990, 1991–1995, 1996–2000, and a final, four-year block, 2001–2004. More recent cohorts are disproportionately represented in the survey data, although the final cohort is not as large as the preceding one, as shown in Table 1.

**Are there modal trajectories?** We began our analysis with an understanding that single-sector careers would not be the rule, but we thought we might be able to identify a limited number of common trajectories, even among those crossing sectors. Instead, we found a predominance of very idiosyncratic paths, along with movement in a variety of directions from one time period to the next. Figure 1 illustrates this flux, displaying the percentage of

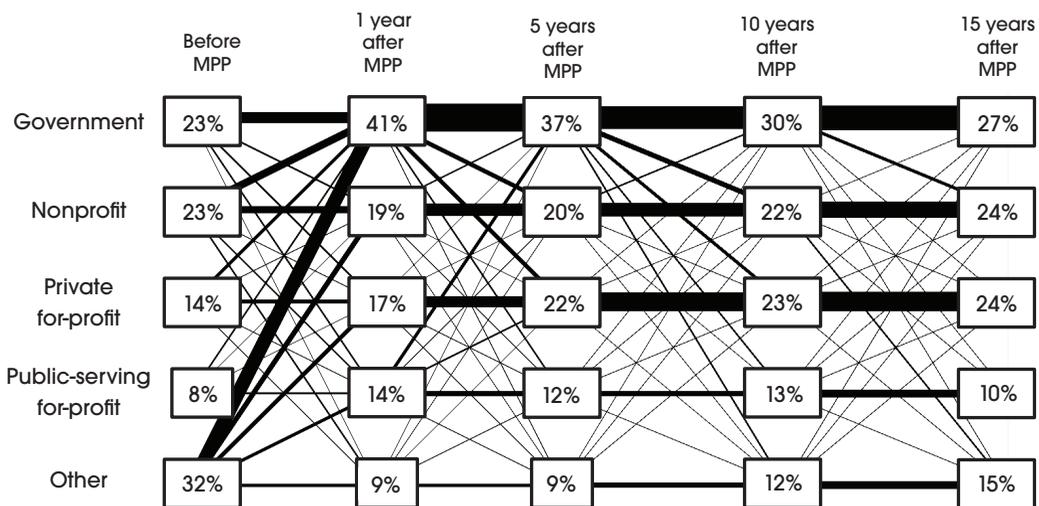
graduates in each sector immediately before starting the MPP program and at 1, 5, 10, and 15 years after graduation. Lines show, proportionally, the percentage of respondents continuing in or switching sectors between

those dates. We should note that the flow map actually understates the degree of sector shifting, because it does not capture movement in and out of sectors between the five-year points.

**TABLE 1.**  
**Previous Employment Sectors of Students Entering the MPP Program:**  
**Percentage by Graduation Cohort**

Prior Sector	Graduation Cohort						Overall
	1976-80	1981-85	1986-90	1991-95	1996-2000	2001-04	
Undergraduate education	68.9	38.0	27.8	26.1	16.3	9.5	23.9
Nonprofit	2.7	19.8	13.1	19.7	28.6	32.6	22.8
Government	20.3	20.3	23.7	24.5	22.2	23.1	22.8
Private for-profit	4.1	9.6	15.1	16.8	16.6	13.5	14.3
Public-serving for-profit	0.0	6.4	10.6	4.8	10.5	10.2	8.3
Other	4.1	5.9	9.8	8.1	5.9	11.1	8.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of responses	74	190	249	311	406	343	1,573

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Percentage of Graduates by Sector Before and 1, 5, 10, and 15 Years After Graduation**



Note. Line weights are proportional to the percentage switching sectors between years.

Given the apparent absence of modal trajectories, we began to think about career patterns in other ways: What did the initial transition (from previous employment to the first postgraduate job) look like? What portions of their careers had respondents spent in the different sectors? Were those in particular sectors more or less likely to be found in the same sector at the next reporting period? What proportions actually do have single-sector careers, and how do the proportions in such careers vary by sector? And have any of these patterns changed over time?

**Prior work to first postgraduate job: Starters, boosters, and changers.** We look first at the relationship between prior experience of entering public policy students and initial postgraduate employment, because some research suggests a connection between past work, educational choice, and subsequent work sector (Tschirhart et al., 2008). Table 1 shows the previous sector of employment, by the student’s graduation cohort. Overall, we see that earlier classes had a much larger proportion coming directly from undergraduate degree programs than did later classes. The percentage coming from government employment has not changed much (remaining in the low 20s); but the proportion coming from the nonprofit sector has significantly increased over time (albeit with some fluctuation) to become the

largest source in the most recent cohort, and proportions coming from the two private sector segments have grown as well (taken together, these equal the proportion coming from government). Thus we see a diversification of employment backgrounds over time, and government is a somewhat less predominant source, given the diminished proportion coming directly from undergraduate education.

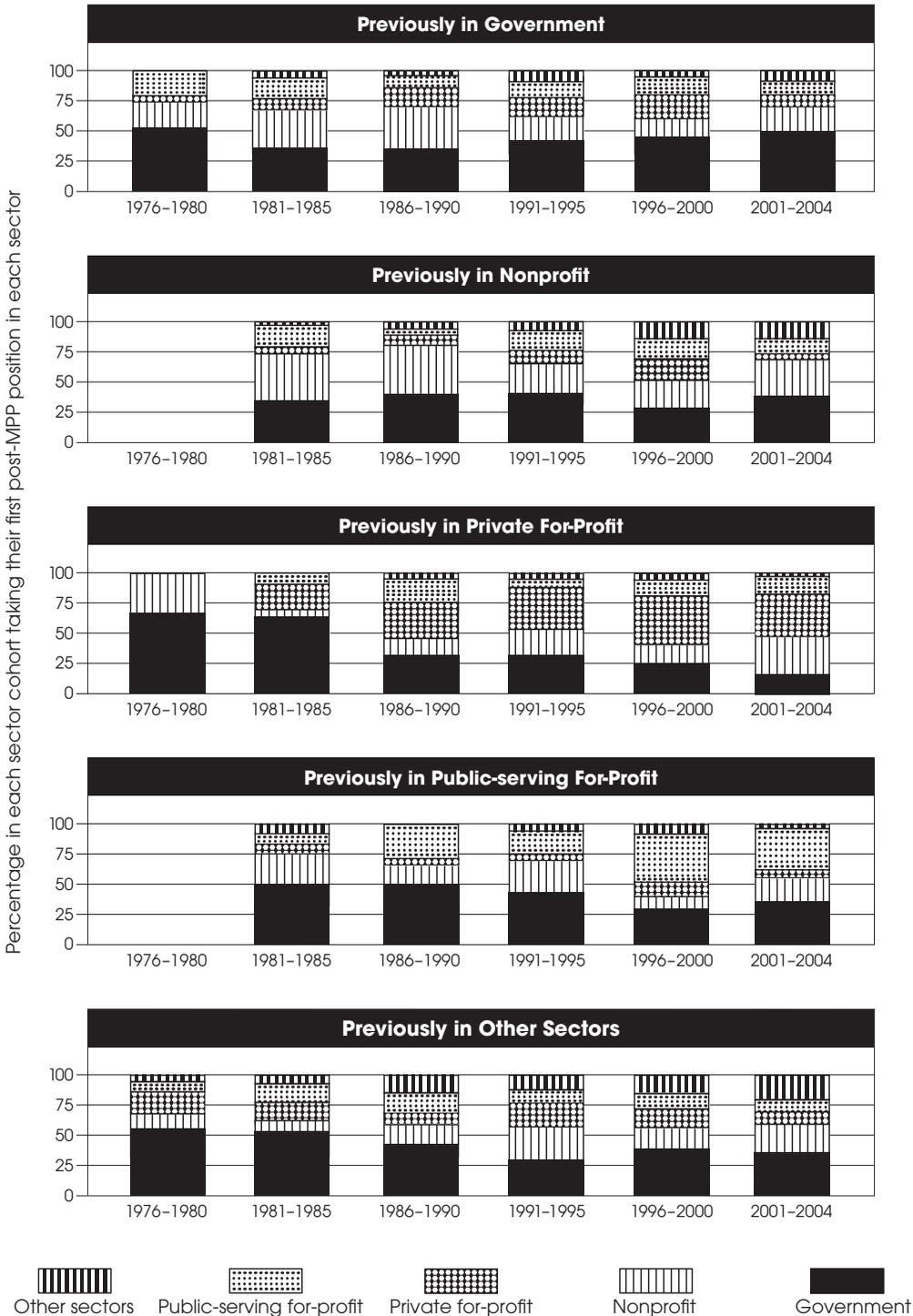
Focusing on sector changes from immediately before to one year following the MPP degree, we can categorize the initial trajectories of graduates as career starters (coming without substantial prior work experience), career boosters (those returning to the sector of prior experience), and career changers (those moving to a different sector after graduation). Overall, changers make up the largest initial trajectory with 45% of graduates; the remainder is split approximately equally between starters and boosters. Looking at trends over time, as noted earlier, the proportion of starters has declined steadily, from about 69% in the classes of 1976–1980 to under 10% in the latest cohort; conversely, there have been consistent increases among both boosters (rising from 14% to 30%) and changers (from 18% to 55%).

Upon students’ graduation, as seen in Figure 1, government has been the largest destination for all cohorts combined, but it attracts more

**TABLE 2.**  
Employment Sectors Destinations of MPP Graduates: Percentage by Prior Sector

Prior Sector	First Sector After MPP					Total
	Government	Nonprofit	Private for-profit	Public-serving for-profit	Other	
Government	49.6	15.0	15.0	14.1	6.4	100.0
Nonprofit	33.8	30.8	10.0	14.4	11.1	100.0
Private for-profit	30.5	17.5	35.0	12.6	4.5	100.0
Public-serving for-profit	38.2	16.0	9.2	30.5	6.1	100.0
Other (including students)	41.9	18.1	14.9	11.8	13.4	100.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**FIGURE 2.**  
**Employment Sectors Immediately Following MPP, by Prior Sector and Graduation Cohort**



starters or boosters than changers from other sectors—a somewhat surprising finding, given that these students have left another sector to come to a school of government. Government remains the most popular sector for first jobs across cohorts, but the percentage entering government has declined from over 50% to less than 40%, a finding similar to that reported by Light (1999a).

How do the tendencies to stay in a sector (between pre- and postgraduate jobs) vary by the sector that students come from? In Table 2 we see that overall, of people coming from government, about half return to government in their first postgraduate job. This is higher than the proportions coming from either nonprofits or for-profits and returning to their earlier sector. However, those coming from the strictly private sector are somewhat more likely to return to that sector than to go either to government or to nonprofits. In contrast, those coming from nonprofits are slightly more likely to go into government than to return to the nonprofit sector, and they are unlikely to enter the strictly private sector.

Figure 2 shows the first destination of people coming to the MPP program from five different employment sectors, by graduation cohort. (Note that only three prior sectors were represented in significant numbers in the 1976–1980 cohort.) The return-to-government rate for different cohorts has fluctuated: It was over 50% in the first three cohorts and then reached a low of 42% in the early 1990s before recovering to 50% by the early 2000s. For those coming from nonprofits, the proportion entering government upon graduation has also fluctuated, but for most cohorts the rate is at or slightly above the proportion returning to nonprofits. The return-to-nonprofit rate peaked at 41% in 1986–1990 and dipped to 23% ten years later, when a much higher than average proportion (18%) entered the private for-profit sector.

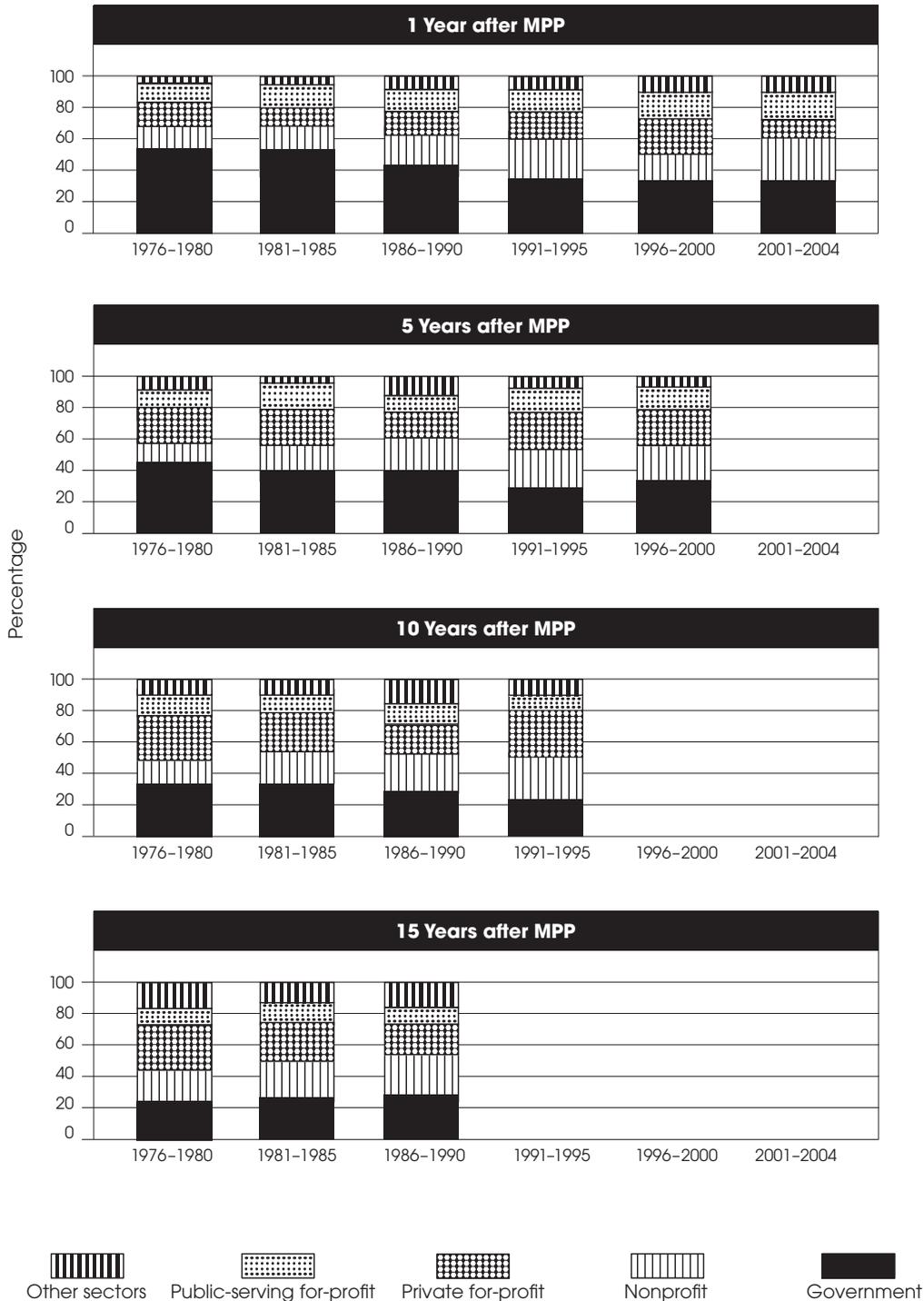
Among those coming from strictly private for-profits, the top postgraduate destination for all cohorts combined is for-profits, followed

closely by government (35% vs. 31%)—but the proportion entering government has been dropping over time (over 60% in the earliest cohorts to 25% in the late 1990s and 16% in the early 2000s). For those coming from public-serving for-profits, the most likely destination for all cohorts combined is government, followed by the public-serving for-profit sector (38% vs. 31%); relatively few (9% overall) take a job in the strictly private sector. Here also the proportions entering government have dropped somewhat over time, from 50% in 1981–1985 (the earlier cohort included no students from this sector) to 30% and 35% in the last two cohorts.

### ***Sector patterns by career stage and cohort.***

The graphs in Figure 3 show, for each reported career stage (the job held at 1, 5, 10, and 15 years after graduation), the distribution of employment by sector for each five-year cohort of MPP graduates. The top graph shows the dramatic decline of government from over half to one third of the postgraduate destinations by the fourth cohort (rising to 37% in the final cohort), the general growth in nonprofit employment at this career stage, and the fluctuations in private sector employment. One noteworthy finding is that even in the earliest classes, at least a quarter of the graduates were entering the private sector (either public-serving or strictly private) at this stage in their careers. The number grew as high as 38% in the mid-to-late 1990s, but then dropped again in the latest cohort. The proportion going directly into strictly private for-profits has not reflected monotonic change; it dipped slightly between the first two cohorts, then increased steadily in the period of the late 1980s to the late 1990s (the time of greatest government bashing and reduced size) and decreased again in the early 2000s. Not surprisingly, two of the drops in strictly private sector employment between cohorts occurred at times of economic contraction (1981–1982 and 2001). The proportion going directly to nonprofits has generally grown from one cohort to another, except for a dip in 1996, and the proportion going directly to public-serving for-profits has been relatively similar across cohorts.

**FIGURE 3.**  
Participation in Employment Sectors by Cohort: 1, 5, 10, and 15 Years After Graduation



In looking at each subsequent career stage (5, 10, and 15 years postgraduation) by cohort, we see a general trend of declining proportions in government with each successive cohort, with the following exceptions: At 5 years out, the proportion in government is slightly higher in the final cohort than the preceding one, and at 15 years out, the proportions in government rise very slightly with cohort. At 5 years after graduation, the proportion in the nonprofit sector rises with cohort, and the proportion in the two private sector segments together goes up and down with cohort. With the decline of the proportion in government, however, by the later cohorts (1991–1995 and 1996–2000), the proportion working in for-profits at 5 years out is greater than the proportion working in government.

A decade after graduation, the proportion working in for-profits is greater than the proportion working in government, for every cohort. For the most recent cohort (1991–1995) at this career stage, the proportion working in nonprofits is also slightly greater than the proportion in government. As noted, at 15 years after graduation, the proportion in government rises slightly by cohort, but for each of the three cohorts, the proportion in the two segments of the private sector exceeds the proportion in government.

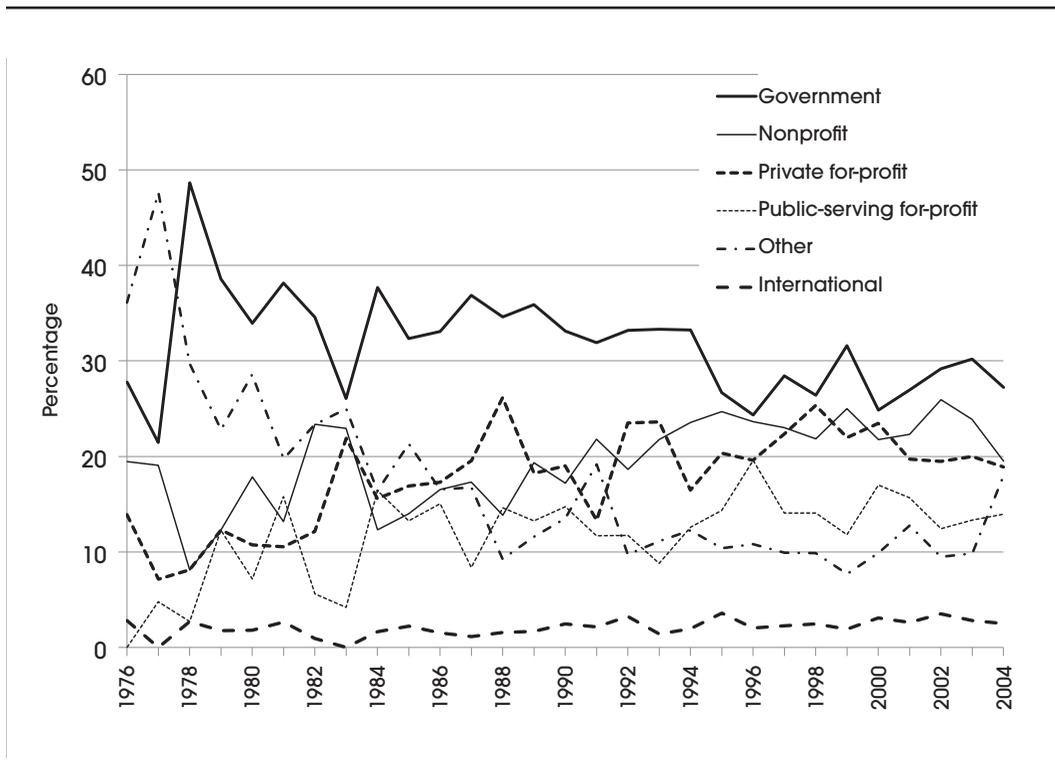
Looking across stages within each cohort, we see a decline in the proportion working in government as careers progress, for almost every cohort, and in no cohort do the proportions working in government rise over time. The trends for nonprofit and private sector employment are uneven; the proportions fluctuate but not with any obvious pattern when cohorts are compared.

**Years in various sectors.** The survey questions about sectors of employment at different points in time may miss some switching between those dates. The separate question on how many years of work were spent in each sector provides information on the proportion of alumni spending some time (and how much) in each sector, and it provides some idea of how much switching is missed in the periodic reports. For example, of those who reported themselves to be employed by government at each point in time for which an answer was given (i.e., jobs at 1, 5, 10, and 15 years after graduation), about 18% also reported—in response to the question regarding number of years per sector—spending some time in one or more other sectors. For those reporting employment in nonprofits at each date, the disparity was higher: About 24% reported having spent time in other sectors. And for those whose point-in-time trajectories appeared

**TABLE 3.**  
Participation in Employment Sectors

Employment Sector	Percentage spending at least some time in the sector	Percentage spending 100% of work years in the sector
Government	59.1	2.3
Nonprofits	42.7	11.6
Private for-profit firms	33.9	11.1
Public-serving for-profit firms	12.5	2.4
International agencies	6.0	1.7
Public-serving self-employment	8.2	0.4
Other self-employment	7.2	0.7

**FIGURE 4.**  
Percentage of graduates reporting employment by sector in each year, 1976–2004



to be entirely in the strictly private, for-profit sector, the proportion who actually spent some time in other sectors was about 25%. Only for those whose trajectories appeared to be solely in the public-serving for-profit sector did 100% report all of their work years only in that sector.

According to responses to the question about how many postgraduate years have been spent in various employment sectors (see Table 3), most alumni have spent at least some time in government, and about two fifths have spent some time in nonprofits. About one third have spent some time in strictly private for-profit firms, one eighth in public-serving for-profits, and smaller numbers in pursuing self-employment. For single-sector careers, government again claims the largest proportion, at 22.3%; nonprofits and strictly private firms follow at 11.6% and 11.1% of the responding graduates.

Participation in employment sectors has changed over time. We can combine reports from each MPP class about their employment at 1, 5, 10, and 15 years postgraduation to compute the distribution of employment among sectors in each calendar year, as seen in Figure 4. (Thus the values for 2000 reflect the class of 1999 in their first year after graduation, combined with the class of 1995 after 5 years, the class of 1990 after 10 years, and the class of 1985 after 15 years.) In this analysis, the proportion of graduates in government has been declining since the late 1970s, while the proportion in the strictly private sector has been rising, and the proportion in nonprofits has been rising slightly as well.

**Staying or switching sectors.** Overall, approximately half of all respondents reported working in two or more sectors. This figure likely underrepresents the frequency of sector

switching, however, because the survey had a relatively high proportion of responses from more recent alumni, who have had less time to switch sectors. In looking at the three cohorts for 1981 to 1995, it is clear that the rate of sector switching is remarkably constant: 35–40% stay in one sector, 38–39% spend time in two sectors, and 18–24% spend time in three or more sectors.

Among graduates reporting time in two sectors, it is most common for government to be one of the sectors. Of all respondents, 10.9% report all of their work years in a combination of government and nonprofit sectors, and 8.0% report all of their work years in a combination of government and strictly private for-profit sectors. Other combination-sector careers are less common: 3.6% report all of their work years in a combination of nonprofit and strictly private for-profit sectors, while 3.1% report all of their work years in a combination of government, public-serving for-profits, and nonprofits.

Most other paths, including strictly self-employment or international sectors, are each reflected in fewer than 3% of cases—except for an “other” combination category, which captures 16.9% of respondents’ experience. Almost three quarters of this group (and 13.3% of the total) consists of respondents with some experience of self-employment in combination with work in other sectors.

Though we do not have continuous data on jobs, when we compare reports of sector locations for specific times (1, 5, 10, and 15 years after graduation), we find that MPPs are likely to report being in the same sector for any one of these dates and the next, but they are most likely to do so if they are in the strictly private for-profit sector (74% of all those who report being in this sector at one date also report it for the next date). This is true for approximately 62% of both government and nonprofit employment, but slightly less than half (49.2%) of graduates working in the public-serving for-profit sector are still working in that sector by the next survey date. (These

movements are represented by the horizontal flows from date to date in Figure 1.)

Those who do switch sectors from one date to the next (represented by the diagonal flows in Figure 1) are most likely to report moving to the strictly private for-profit sector (26.2%), followed by those moving to nonprofits (25.2%). Switching to government was only the third most prevalent path, occurring 21.7% of the time, outpacing the public-serving for-profit sector (at 18.7%). The single most common switch, accounting for 13.4% of all switches between dates, was from government to the nonprofit sector, followed by 12.2% switching from government to the strictly private for-profit sector.

**Retention by original sector.** How likely are those who enter government in their first postgraduate job to stay with government for their careers? And how does this proportion compare to the stayers who start in other sectors? Table 4 shows that just under half (45.8%) of those who take first jobs in government stay in government. That is comparable to the proportion of those starting and staying in the strictly private sector (45.2%) and in nonprofits (43.9%). By contrast, those who enter the public-serving private sector are much less likely to stay there (13.6% do so).

The table also shows that the likelihood of staying in each of the different starting sectors varies by cohort. The most recent cohort shows the highest likelihood of staying for most sectors, but this is also the group with the least time for switching. In looking at the three older cohorts, we see that the strictly private sector in general appears to have the greatest career-long retention, followed by government and then nonprofits. The starting sector with the lowest career-long retention rate is public-serving for-profits.

Where do graduates leaving the public-serving for-profits tend to go? Students who are contemplating entering firms that do public sector consulting sometimes indicate that they plan to use the knowledge gained in these

**TABLE 4.**

**Graduates Remaining in Their First Employment Sector Through the Survey Period: Percentage by Graduation Cohort and Sector**

First Employment Sector	Graduation Cohort				Overall
	1981-1985	1986-1990	1991-1995	1996-2000	
Government	28.0	33.6	35.5	59.6	45.8
Strictly private for-profit	31.8	36.1	44.4	38.2	45.2
Nonprofit	27.6	26.1	31.2	43.3	43.9
Other	36.4	15.8	14.3	23.8	26.8
Public-serving for-profit	23.1	11.1	7.3	11.9	13.6

positions to move into higher-level government positions. Is this what happens? Table 5 indicates that this group is likely to cross multiple employment sectors: 24.7% move to government by their 5th year, 22.3% are in the strictly private for-profit sector by their 10th year, and about a fifth are in nonprofits or other sectors by their 15th year after graduation.

#### Issue Area Specializations

Some have suggested that today's students are more interested in issue area than in sector, and because many issue areas engage multiple sectors, alumni may find themselves crossing sectors throughout their careers even as they remain in a particular field. The HKS alumni survey asked graduates to identify whether the positions they held at 1, 5, 10, and 15 years

postgraduation entailed one of 12 topical specialties, or if they considered themselves "generalists" in the positions held at those times. The responses constitute four general trajectories: "Career specialists" (47%) identify one topical specialty area throughout their reported employment history, "career generalists" (16%) identify themselves consistently as generalists, and the remaining either are "serial specialists" switching among multiple specialties (17%) or have moved between specialist and generalist positions (20%) over the course of their careers. Both career generalists and career specialists were actually likely to report employment within the same sector for each point in time (65% and 62%, respectively), while only 33% of serial specialists and 29% of mixed generalist-specialists did so. Overall,

**TABLE 5.**

**Employment Sectors of Graduates who Started in the Public-Serving For-Profit Sector: Percent by Year after Graduation**

Employment Sector	Years After Graduation			
	1	5	10	15
Public-serving for-profit	100.0	39.9	32.0	27.7
Government	0.0	24.7	19.4	16.9
Private for-profit	0.0	19.7	22.3	16.9
Nonprofit	0.0	9.6	17.5	18.5
Other	0.0	6.2	8.7	20.0

graduates who switched specialties and/or spent some portion of their careers as generalists slightly exceeded the number of career specialists.

### **Predominant Patterns**

Government employment remains important in the careers of public policy graduates: It is still the primary initial destination, and well over half of all graduates spend at least some of their careers in government—which cannot be said for any other sector. For reports of employment at all given dates combined, more alumni report working in government than in any other sector. Government claims the largest proportion of single-sector careers. At the same time, the private and nonprofit sectors are also well represented in public policy alumni careers and appear to be increasing in importance. The proportion of alumni taking a first postgraduate job in government has declined substantially over time, and the proportions working in government at the subsequent reported career stages generally show declines within and across cohorts. Ten years after graduation, a higher proportion of alumni in every cohort report working in the private sector (the two segments combined) than report working in government.

Sector switching is common. Half of all respondents report working in more than one sector, and if we exclude the most recent cohort (which has had limited time for switching), the proportion is much higher. Fewer than half (46%) of those who take first jobs in government stay there, similar to the proportion staying in strictly private for-profits (45%) or nonprofits (44%).

In terms of substantive specialization, consistent with the MPP design as a program that offers training that can be applied across substantive policy areas, we find that a slight majority (53%) of respondents report working in a variety of substantive areas across time, or mixing specialist and generalist positions, while 47% are career specialists who report working in the same substantive field at each point in time (though it should be noted that this is not inconsistent with generalist training, because those career specialties are highly varied).

### **IS IT PUBLIC SERVICE?**

This diversity of destinations—and particularly the difference between current employment trajectories and those envisioned at the outset of policy programs—raises questions about the relevance of the curriculum today. At the same time, presumably some career destinations should be given more weight than others in thinking about curricular design. Policy programs are schools of public service; how concerned should such programs be about meeting the needs of students with highly diverse career trajectories if some of these are not really public service? Before we look at the reports of alumni skill use by career trajectory/sector, we should ask if some trajectories or sectors can be more clearly defined than others as public service.

Paul Light (1999a) and others have argued that public service is not identical to government employment. Those in the nonprofit and even private sectors may provide public services through contracts, and they may help improve direct government performance through research or consulting services. (And some may argue that government work is not always in the public interest.) To help distinguish public servants among private sector workers, Light's survey included questions about whether respondents worked for private employers who received government funding and what proportion of their own work was spent on government-funded projects. It is not clear, however, that all private sector work paid for by the government is public service, so the HKS survey—as noted earlier—distinguished instead between those who worked in private firms “serving primarily public or nonprofit clients” and those working in other private for-profit settings. In addition, both surveys asked respondents if they themselves saw their work as “public service.”

For each time period, HKS respondents were asked if they considered their work to be public service. Overall, about two thirds (66%) of respondents (adding up responses for all time periods) said yes, just under a quarter (23%) said no, and 11% said maybe. When looking

across time periods, we see that those in their first job were most likely to say yes, and least likely to say no or maybe; over time, the proportions saying yes decline somewhat (to about 60%), and the proportions saying no or maybe increase. (Light found such a decline primarily for private sector jobs—first jobs in the private sector were much more likely than current jobs in the private sector to be characterized as public service.)

More important for our analysis, these perceptions vary substantially by sector. Overall, 98% of those working in government say their work is public service, compared to 83% of those in nonprofits, 49% of those in public-serving for-profits, and 8% of those in strictly private for-profits. The percentages vary slightly by cohort, but the basic ordering remains constant. Interestingly, a very high proportion (78%) of those in strictly private for-profits say their work may be public service, so that the combination of those saying yes plus those saying maybe is actually substantially higher among those in the strictly private for-profits than in the public-serving for-profits (85% vs. 73%). Both are still lower than the proportions for government and nonprofit respondents.

There is some difference in the responses by point in time. Among those reporting strictly

private sector work, the proportion saying yes rises from those in the first job to those in the job held at 15 years after graduation (5% to 13%), the proportion saying no also rises (9% to 19%), and the proportion saying maybe declines (86% to 68%) but is still quite high. (Note that this pattern is somewhat different from Light's results, reported earlier, perhaps in part because the private sector jobs here exclude the public-serving for-profits.) Among those reporting nonprofit jobs, the proportions change only slightly, reflecting a very small downward trend. Proportions among those reporting public-serving nonprofit jobs show little difference from early to later jobs. Among government respondents, there is almost no difference between early and late reports: Close to 100% report the work to be public service at all points.

The HKS survey also asked—with respect to current employment—if the respondent believed he or she was “‘making a difference’ in terms of advancing the public interest.” Interestingly, in comparison to their responses to the public service questions, here the public sector respondents were slightly less likely to say yes (and more likely to say maybe), whereas the private sector respondents in both categories were more likely to say yes, as were nonprofit workers. The yes responses are still greater among government

**TABLE 6.**

Responses to the Question “Do you believe you are ‘making a difference’ in terms of advancing the public interest?” (percentage by sector)

Sector of Current Employment	Yes, I think I am having an impact	Maybe	No, not really
Nonprofit	87	10	3
Government, all levels	77	20	3
National government	78	19	3
State/provincial government	73	21	5
County/city government	80	18	2
Public-serving for-profit	66	26	8
Strictly private for-profit	37	28	35

than for-profit employees, but the gap is much less than it is in response to the question about public service, perhaps reflecting both questions by government workers about their efficacy and the belief by private sector workers that what they do helps society even if it is not, strictly speaking, public service. Table 6 summarizes the responses to the question about making a difference in one's current employment.

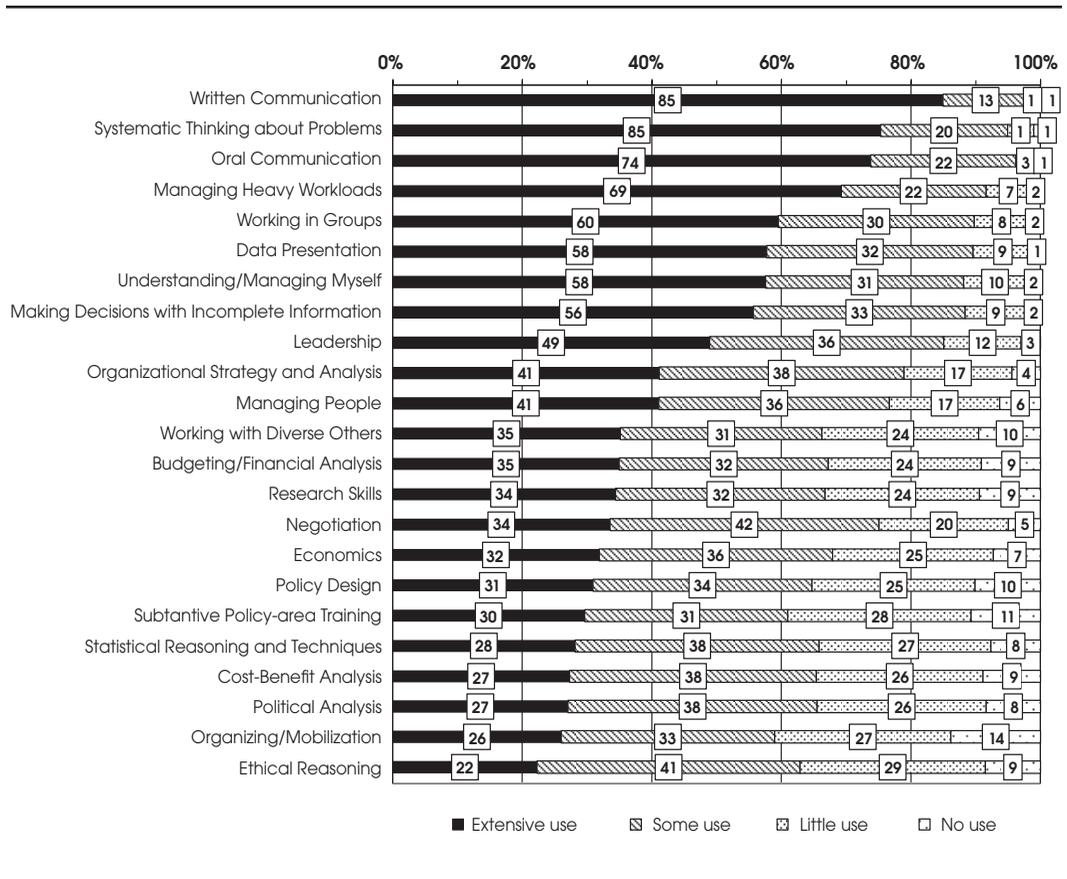
In the following section, as one way of understanding what elements of training may be particularly relevant, we discuss alumni reports of skills or knowledge they found most useful in their careers. Given the sectoral variation in public service work reports found here, and the fact that policy training is designed to prepare students for public service careers and to some degree for work in the

public sector, the following analysis reports overall results as well as responses by career sector (for those in single-sector careers).

**SKILL USE**

Alumni were given a list of 23 skill and knowledge areas related to aspects of the curriculum and expected to be relevant to professional work. For each item, they were asked to rate how extensively they had actually used the skill/knowledge area in their own career, on a scale of 1 = extensive use to 4 = no use. Among the MPP alumni as a whole, the skill/knowledge areas with the highest average scores for use included written and oral communication, systematic thinking about problems, managing a heavy workload, and group work (see Figure 5 for proportions reporting different levels of skill use). The least extensively used skill/

**FIGURE 5.**  
Use of Knowledge and Skill Areas



knowledge areas included ethical reasoning, organizing/mobilization, political analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and statistics (all had less than 30% reporting extensive use). There are some similarities here with Light's (1999a) findings, but also some differences: His respondents rated leading others and maintaining ethical standards at the top of the list of skills needed for job success. Note that both the list of skills and the form of the question differed between the two surveys. For example, HKS respondents might have said that maintaining ethical standards was very important at the same time as they did not report making extensive use of ethical reasoning skills.

### Skill Use Within Sectors

Does reported skill use vary substantially by the predominant sector of work? We do not have a way to link skill ranking with specific sectors for those who have changed sectors over their careers, but we are able to look at the reported skill use for those whose careers have been entirely in one sector and to compare those responses across sectors. As explained earlier, the survey asked respondents to provide the number of work years spent in each of a list of sector categories; here we consider four groups among those who responded to this question: those who had spent all of their work-years in government ( $N = 306$ ), those working only in nonprofits ( $N = 159$ ), those only in for-profits serving public or nonprofit clients ( $N = 32$ ), and those only in other (strictly private) for-profits ( $N = 152$ ).

In this analysis, we looked at both how the mean score for reported use of each skill varied by sector and also at how the sorting of skill areas according to average score produced different rankings of skills by sector. In comparing the rankings, we found that four skills were consistently in the top four slots, albeit in varying order (these were written communication, oral communication, systematic thinking about problems, and managing a heavy workload). Farther down the list, however, there were notable differences with respect to several skill areas, both in rankings and in comparisons of average use score across sec-

tors. Table 7 summarizes the major differences, showing where these skill areas ranked in relative importance for those in the different sectors and noting where differences in mean scores for use (by sector) reflected statistical significance at the .05 level.

As shown in Table 7, skill areas relating to policy and politics tended to be ranked more highly by those in government and nonprofit employment than those in the private sector groups (especially the strictly private for-profit group). The reported-use score for the skill of policy design was 11th among the 23 skill areas for those with careers in government, but 17th or lower for the other three groups (the strictly private group was last at 23rd). Political analysis was 14th for those in the government group and 15th for the nonprofit group, versus 21st for both of the for-profit groups. Substantive policy-area training was most highly ranked by the nonprofit group (14th) followed closely by government (15th), then the public-serving for-profit group (17th), and ranked next to last (22nd) by the strictly private group.

On the other hand, the reported-use scores for the skills of quantitative analysis (which are prominent in the core of policy school curricula) tended to reflect higher ranking by the private sector groups than by those in government or nonprofits, with some variation in the pattern of responses. For those in strictly private for-profits, economics had a higher ranking (12th) than it did for those in public-serving for-profits (16th); its ranking was considerably lower on the list for those in government (19th) and next to last (22nd) for nonprofit workers. The statistics skill area also ranked low on both government (22nd) and nonprofit (20th) group lists, and higher for strictly private (15th) and public-serving for-profits (14th). The average use score for cost-benefit analysis was last among all skill areas for those working in nonprofits, but ranked much higher for both the private sector groups (14th and 15th for the strictly private and public-serving for-profit groups, respectively). In this area, the government ranking (18th) was in between.

**TABLE 7.**  
Significant differences in skill/knowledge area use among employment sectors

Skill/Knowledge Area	Level-of-use score ranking (out of 23 skill areas) by career employment sector				Statistically significant differences in mean scores for skill use between pairs of sectors					
	Govern- ment (G)	Non- profit (N)	Public- Serving For- Profits (S)	Strictly Pri- vate For- Profits (F)	G - N	G - S	G - F	N - S	N - F	S - F
Policy design	11th+	17th	20th	23rd-	•		•			
Political analysis	14th+	15th	21st-	21st-		•	•		•	
Substantive policy knowledge	15th	14th+	17th	22nd-			•		•	•
Economics	19th	22nd-	16th	12th+			•		•	
Statistics	22nd-	20th	14th+	15th		•				
Cost-benefit analysis	18th	23rd-	15th	14th+	•			•	•	
Research skills	21st-	13th	10th+	18th		•				•
Negotiations	12th-	18th	19th	11th+	•				•	

Note. + denotes group with highest ranking in each skill area; - denotes group with lowest ranking.

In two skill areas, reported use varied by sector of employment but not along the public/nonprofit versus for-profit spectrum. Use of research skills is highest among the public-serving for-profit group (10th on the list), followed by the nonprofit group (13th), but much lower for those in strictly private for-profits (18th) or government employment (21st). The opposite pattern is true for negotiation skills, which are used more often by both the strictly private and government groups (11th and 12th places, respectively) but less frequently for the nonprofit and the public-serving for-profit groups (18th and 19th places, respectively).

**Skill Use for Sector Switchers**

If skill use does vary to some extent by sector for those who stay in one sector, what about the skill needs of those who cross sectors? For this analysis, we designated as “switchers” those respondents for whom no more than 66% of their work years were in a single sector. For this group (N = 379), the top four most heavily used skills were the same as those reported by respondents who stayed in sectors (as reported earlier, though the ordering varies): written communication, systematic thinking about problems, oral communication, and managing a heavy workload.

We found some differences, however, in the rankings of certain skills by switchers versus different groups of stayers. In their relative ranking of use for political analysis and substantive policy training, switchers tended to fall—not surprisingly, perhaps—between government or nonprofit stayers on one side and private sector stayers on the other, and their use ranking was lower than the first two groups and higher than the second two. In relative rankings of policy design use, switchers are between government stayers (highest ranking) and nonprofit stayers, but higher than either of the private-sector stayer groups. This result suggests that switchers are involved in more policy-related work than those with strictly private sector careers.

For the quantitative skill areas of economics and statistics, the switchers again fell between government and nonprofit stayers (here, on the lower-use side) and private sector stayers (on the higher-use side). In a slight deviation from this pattern, switchers’ use rankings for cost-benefit analysis were lower than the rankings for private sector groups, but also slightly lower than the ranking among government stayers. Reported use remained lowest among nonprofit stayers.

In the case of negotiations, switchers look somewhat more like strictly private sector and government stayers (reporting higher use) than like stayers in nonprofits or the public-serving for-profits (reporting lower use). Switchers seem to use research skills less than public-serving for-profit stayers or nonprofit stayers, but more than strictly private sector or government stayers.

### **Skill Use by Specialization**

An additional dimension of career trajectories may influence skill needs: the level of substantive specialization. We do find a few differences in reported skill use among career generalists, career specialists, serial specialists, and those working both as generalists and specialists in their careers.

Not surprisingly, of the four groups, career specialists make the most use of substantive policy-area knowledge (39% say they “make extensive use” of it), followed by 33% of serial specialists, 20% of those with both generalist and specialist positions, and only 12% of career generalists). The average level-of-use score for this item also reflects highest use among career specialists and lowest among career generalists, and the difference in ratings between these groups is statistically significant. Not only do specialists report using substantive policy knowledge more often, but they also report higher ratings of the effectiveness of their training in this area. Interestingly, of all groups, the career generalists make the least use of policy design skills and also provide the lowest ratings of training effectiveness in this area.

### **Effectiveness of Training**

The HKS survey asked alumni about the effectiveness of policy school training in the same skill/knowledge areas for which they were asked to estimate use. We examined these responses to see how well the relative effectiveness of training in different skill areas maps onto the reported usefulness of the skills, overall and by sector. The training being assessed in this survey was of course at one particular school, but based on the training effectiveness reported in Light’s study (which included a

number of programs), the relative effectiveness for different skill areas at HKS seems roughly comparable to that at other programs.

Respondents could assess training as “effective” (noting that it was “excellent,” “provided solid grounding in basics, could do more,” or “provided some skill but not as much as should have”) or “less than effective” (specific options were “offered two few courses or too little training in this area,” “not well aimed toward practice,” or “not well taught”); respondents could also indicate they were unable to make the assessment because they had not chosen to take courses in this area. The data were analyzed in two ways: first, by coding responses into the categories of effective versus less than effective, and second, by looking at the level of effectiveness reported within the general effective range.

Overall, the respondents reported training in the large majority of skill areas to be generally effective: In only six of the 23 skill/knowledge areas did 18% or more of respondents say training was less than effective. The highest proportions of effective responses were given for economics, statistics, systematic thinking about problems, written communication, and policy design (in that order). Of these, systematic thinking about problems and written communication were among the top four areas of skill use in all sectors; none of the others were among the top 10 skills used. Economics and statistics were used most often by the two private sector groups, and policy design was used most often by the government group followed by nonprofit workers.

The areas where the largest proportions said training was less than effective included managing people (35%), organizing/mobilization (26%), leadership (21%), ethics (21%), understanding/managing oneself (21%), and financial analysis (18%). Looking at these results in terms of reported skill use, we see that at least some of the less effective training is in areas of heavy use, across sectors. Managing people was among the top 10 skills used by those in all sectors; for switchers it was num-

ber 11. Similarly, leadership was among the top 10 for all groups (including switchers) except the public-serving private sector, where it was number 11. Understanding/managing oneself was among the top eight for those in all sector groups and switchers. Light's (1999a) reported gap between skills that are important and those for which training is strong captures some of these same discrepancies, particularly with respect to some interpersonal skills.

There was variation by sector in the ratings of training effectiveness for different skill areas, but meaningful patterns with respect to specific skill areas were not found. We also saw no obvious relationship between any sector's reports of skill use and its ratings of training effectiveness, in either a positive or negative direction.

We did find, however, that among the single-sector groups, the strictly private for-profit group seemed overall the least positive about training effectiveness. In a comparison of scores reflecting the categorization of responses as generally effective versus less than effective, this group reported the lowest effectiveness scores for eight of the skill areas and the highest effectiveness scores for only two skill areas (by far the highest ratio of these two figures across all sector groups). Looking at level-of-effectiveness scores (within the effective range), for the strictly private for-profit group, 14 of the 23 scores reflect the lowest effectiveness rating per item, and only two are the highest. By contrast, those in the public-serving for-profits and in government tend to give high ratings of effectiveness much more often and low ratings much less often (they are the least dissatisfied of all groups). When adding the switcher group to the comparison, we find this group to be similar to the strictly private group in having far more of the lowest than highest ratings of effectiveness for the various skill areas.

Among specialization tracks, the serial specialists appear most satisfied and the career specialists least so, as regards the ratio of highest to lowest scores of effectiveness. This result is consistent with the idea that policy students

develop the ability to learn quickly about new policy areas rather than acquiring deep knowledge in one substantive area.

Finally, when respondents were asked whether there were other areas of training they wish they had pursued, the nonprofit group was most likely to say yes (at 77%); majorities of other groups agreed (62% in government, 65% in public-serving for-profits, 59% in strictly private for-profits, and 65% among those switching employment sectors.). In terms of the particular areas they wish they had pursued, most differences were relatively small; probably the most noteworthy was the higher proportion of those in public-serving for-profits than in other groups who felt they should have pursued more statistics and economics.

Regarding the reported effectiveness of specific areas of training, it does not seem that differences in effectiveness by skill area favor the skills used by any particular sector(s). At the same time, those in strictly private for-profit careers—and to a lesser extent, those who switch careers—tend to give more low assessments and fewer high ones, suggesting that they may be less satisfied with the training.

### **THE MPP CURRICULUM AND TODAY'S CAREER TRAJECTORIES**

The data for this analysis come from alumni of a single program, so we cannot draw conclusions about the experience of the MPP alumni population as a whole. Nevertheless, the basic shape of policy school curricula has not varied hugely from one program to another, and the trend among policy school graduates toward more diverse career trajectories has been reported for other schools (Light, 1999a). With appropriate qualifications, then, some observations of more general interest may be drawn from the analysis.

Among these alumni, although government remains an important employment destination—it is the primary initial destination, and a location of employment for well over half (59%) of all graduates at some point—government careers are uncommon. Close to

half (46%) of graduates spend some time in the private sector, and a similar proportion (43%) spend some time in nonprofits. Furthermore, greater proportions of students enter a sector other than government on graduation, and nontrivial proportions spend their entire careers outside of government. Graduates are also somewhat more likely to work across policy areas of specialization or as generalists than as career specialists.

Alumni reports of professional skills used in their careers reflect significant areas of commonality. Regardless of employment sector, graduates will be well prepared if they have developed skills in written and oral communication, systematic thinking about problems, and managing a heavy workload. Certain other skills, such as working in groups, are also highly relevant across sector, even if they do not consistently rank among the most frequent skills used. But there are other skill or knowledge areas where frequency of use varies significantly by sector of employment. Those in the traditional public service sectors of government and nonprofits tend to use more policy design, political analysis, and substantive policy knowledge, whereas those in strictly private for-profits tend to use more economics and cost-benefit analysis. Those in nonprofits tend to use more skills in the areas of research and working with diverse groups, in comparison to those in government, who report more use of policy design and negotiation. Not surprisingly, career specialists are

much more likely than generalists to make use of substantive policy knowledge.

How might policy training be altered if it were more targeted to reported skill use in particular sectors? If the mission of policy schools is focused more on training for public- and nonprofit-oriented careers than preparation for business, we may wish to consider the differences in skill use reported by those in government or nonprofits versus those in the strictly private, for-profit sector. Table 8 identifies the skills for which there is a significant difference in reported skill use by those in government and nonprofit careers (including those mixing these two sectors) versus those in strictly private sector careers. The table also shows the ranking of skill use for each of the two sectors.

The preceding analysis highlights skills in common use across government and nonprofit employment, but we can also identify differences in skill use between those two sectors. In eight of our 23 skill areas, there was a statistically significant difference in the reported level of use between those in government careers and those in nonprofit careers. Focusing on these skill areas, Table 9 shows how the curriculum might shift depending on the primary destination of graduates between these two sectors. Here the comparison of rankings suggests that although use score differences were statistically significant, the relative importance of the skill may not vary so much

**TABLE 8.**  
**Curricular Emphases by Sector(s) of Primary Destination: Government/Nonprofit Versus Strictly Private For-Profit**

If the primary destination were . . .		
	Government and Nonprofit	Strictly Private For-Profit
Curriculum might emphasize more . . .	Policy design (11 vs. 23)	Economics (12 vs. 19)
	Political analysis (14 vs. 21)	Cost-benefit analysis (14 vs. 22)
	Substantive policy knowledge (15 vs. 22)	
	Organizational strategy (10 vs. 13)	

Note. In each pair of rankings, the first ranking is for the sector(s) labeled at the head of that column.

(e.g., organizational strategy is more heavily used by nonprofit workers, but it still ranks 10th on the list for those in government). It is also important to keep in mind that these distinctions are drawn from responses to a list of professional skills relevant to policy careers that did not include items very specific to one sector, such as fund-raising or board development would be for nonprofits.

With respect to the skill needs of those who pursue single-sector careers versus those who switch (defined as those who spend less than two thirds of their careers in one sector), we find that for the skill areas in which there are different reports of use, switchers not surprisingly tend to fall between the public nonprofit groups and the private sector groups. This result suggests that at least in terms of the particular skills considered in this survey, perhaps the switching per se is not what matters, but the particular combination of sectors in the switcher's career. We must qualify this observation, however, with the reminder that the skill list used in this survey reflected traditional public policy training objectives. Thus the list may well be missing additional important skills that are particularly relevant to cross-sector careers.

Furthermore, the differences reported here are not so dramatic that they form an obvious basis for radical restructuring of policy curricula—and it is important to note that the differences

of emphasis do not necessarily mean the less-often used skills are unimportant (statistics ranks 22nd on the list for frequency of use by government workers, but 61% have made at least some use of this skill/knowledge area). Moreover, formal education may be better suited for some kinds of training, such as quantitative analysis (though there is room for debate here).

Rather than propose a different curriculum, we might think about more modest changes. For example, the finding that government and nonprofit workers make more use of policy design and less use of economics and cost-benefit analysis than do those in the private sector suggests that economics and cost-benefit analysis may need to be taught in a way that is more deeply grounded in both substantive policy and the role of government. It may strike some as odd that alumni report different levels of use for skills in policy design versus those in economics, but this result suggests that the two topics may need to be better integrated in the training. With respect to cost-benefit analysis, though it is undeniably relevant to public sector decisions, it is also less straightforward in the public than the private sector (where benefits can almost always be expressed in terms of the bottom line). Perhaps this tool would be more useful to public servants if it included—or were coupled with—more systematic attention to formal qualitative assessment.

**TABLE 9.**  
**Curricular Emphases by Sector of Primary Destination: Government/Nonprofit Versus Strictly Private For-Profit**

If the primary destination were . . .		
	Government	Nonprofit
Curriculum might emphasize more . . .	Policy design (10 vs. 17)	Working with diverse others (11 vs. 17)
	Negotiation (12 vs. 18)	Research skills (13 vs. 21)
	Cost-benefit analysis (18 vs 23)	Organizational strategy (9 vs. 10)
		Self-management/awareness (5 vs 8)
		Organizing/mobilization (19 vs 23)

Note. In each pair of rankings, the first ranking is for the sector(s) labeled at the head of that column.

Another possibility is to use these kinds of findings to inform the advising process on the subject of curricular choices—electives or choices among alternative requirements. Although career trajectories are not as predictable as they may once have been, students may still have a sense of the sectors in which they will spend a preponderance of their work years; thus, it may be helpful to know of particular skill or knowledge areas most heavily used by those with careers in those sectors. Those who expect to work both in nonprofits and public-serving for-profits may want to build more research skills, whereas those planning a combination of government and strictly private for-profit work may want to include training in negotiations, for example.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

The preceding discussion has focused on what can be learned from alumni reports on skill use, but this is of course not the only way to think about what diverse trajectories mean for the curricula of public policy schools (particularly when the skill list is based on traditional training). Quite a number of authors have noted that changes in alumni careers (increasing work outside of government, the trend toward multi-sector careers), along with the blurring of sector boundaries in the work of public policy, argue for curricular changes. The recommendations generally reflect two important concerns. First, many believe that traditional public policy or public administration curricula have not included content that is critical for working in multi-sector partnerships or within different sectors over time. The second concern is the need to emphasize training essential for the maintenance of a public interest ethic in professionals working in an environment of blurred boundaries.

Recommended areas of study for multi-sector work include contract and external accountability management, network leadership, knowledge of budgeting, personnel systems, and legal issues in different sectors (Forrer, Edwin, & Gabriel, 2007; Robinson, 2010). Maintaining a public interest ethic calls both for new content and a renewed emphasis on some traditional topics in public administration.

Relevant here are skills in democratic and collaborative governance, including citizen engagement; knowledge about the core values of public service, the legal framework in which public servants work and the constitutional principles they must abide by; and a grounding in public service ethics (Forrer et al., 2007; Leighninger, 2010; Perry, 2007). Finally, an understanding of sector ecology (the capacities and characteristics of the different sectors and their relationships) would be relevant both to managing across sectors and to understanding how best to meet the public interest in cross-sector initiatives.

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### NOTES

- 1 As graduate destinations have changed, so also has the environment for policy making and public action, so that even those who do pursue careers in government face a dramatically altered context. This article does not analyze the relationship between curriculum and contextual changes, but we do make note of the issue. The past four decades have seen an increasing pace of change in the delivery of public services and the process of policy making, with devolution of responsibilities, downsizing of public employment, increasing privatization of public services, pressures and opportunities of globalization, and an apparently lower degree of social consensus, at least as reflected in state and federal elected officeholders (Light, 1999b; Milward, Provan, & Else, 1993; Ott & Dicke, 2001; Qiao & Thai, 2002).
- 2 We acknowledge the generosity and assistance of David Ellwood, dean of the Harvard Kennedy School, and Suzanne Cooper, faculty chair of the MPP Program, in making available the survey data used in our analysis.

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