On NASPAA Accreditation: Fred Was Right...But for the Wrong Reason

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ABSTRACT
The debate over accreditation is far from over. Forty years ago, Fred Thayer feared that complying with the standards of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) would rigidify and stultify academic training. Today the opposite threatens. Under mission-based standards, Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs can teach whatever they can justify, even if the content has little or no connection with public administration. The MPA is in jeopardy of becoming little more than a Master of Arts that teaches students about public service–minded values. We argue that standards for MPA programs should be sufficiently content-based that the degree represents a common understanding of career preparation. One way to expedite the return to the MPA’s roots is for NASPAA to link arms with the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) to ensure that public administration education remains focused on advancing the enterprise of public administration.

KEYWORDS
MPA accreditation, NASPAA standards

The pages of JPAE are filled with excellent suggestions for how to improve public affairs education, how to embrace the diversity that comes with globalization, and how to accommodate the needs of programs that specialize in public administration, public policy, and/or nonprofit management. In an attempt to offer one set of standards for all, however, the heart of public administration has been eroded. Linguistics matter, as Lewis Carroll (1871) implied:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “Sir,” said Alice, “Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called ‘Jabberwocky’?” “Let’s hear it,” said Humpty Dumpty, “I can explain all the poems that were ever invented.” … This sounded very hopeful, so Alice repeated the first verse: “T was brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe.” … “That’s enough to begin with,” Humpty Dumpty interrupted, “there are plenty of hard words there. ‘Brillig’ means four o’clock in the afternoon—the time when you begin broiling things for dinner.”
Humpty Dumpty’s insouciance with words has found a modern-day home in the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration’s (NASPAA) mission-based standards built to accommodate a polyglot (31 different degrees) of related perspectives on public service. Here are five points that would cause Humpty to reach for his thesaurus: (1) current standards make it possible to avoid teaching administration to public administration students; (2) because there is no requirement that Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs teach students to organize, staff, and budget, employers cannot expect graduates to have administrative skills; (3) those who graduate without sufficient understanding of constitutional premises, intersectoral relations, and administration amplify the mismatch between what public service organizations need and what they get; (4) without public administration content in the MPA curriculum, there is no unifying conception of what it means to be a public official; and, finally, (5) why bother to train future public servants if the MPA can mean anything? More precisely, if there is “no there there,” why go there? Before elaborating on these points, we turn first to the genesis for the accreditation of MPA programs.

THE DEBATE ABOUT STANDARDS
When he was editor of *Public Administration Review* (*PAR*), Dwight Waldo kept a file labeled “Fruits and Nuts,” filled mostly with correspondence from one person, Fred Thayer, who wrote lengthy, largely incomprehensible critiques of each *PAR* issue. Fred was the field’s resident gadfly, and he held forth with opinions on everything, whether requested or not, mostly negative and, after a while, mostly ignored. One missive, however, caught many scholars’ attention: “The NASPAA Threat,” a 1976 essay that argued that the self-study approach NASPAA was developing would impose rigid, uniform teaching standards on MPA programs and therefore posed a dangerous threat to academic freedom and creative innovation.

At the time, most pooh-poohed the notion and joked that the essay, described as “Fred’s Threat,” was merely a figment of his overheated imagination. At the time, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the accrediting body for business schools, was aggressively moving toward encompassing public administration programs under its official power to accredit. An intrusion into “our turf” was the last thing the public administration field wanted, especially in terms of business schools’ being in charge of accreditation. AACSB’s rigidly uniform standards were a threat because the organization brooked little compromise on what it regarded as “the one best way” to teach administration, whether in business, government, or nonprofit settings. AACSB’s membership was over three times as large as NASPAA’s and AACSB had considerably more resources and influence, so the group was a threat to the growing autonomy of the field of public administration.

In 1977, despite Fred’s reservations, NASPAA’s member institutions voted to adopt a program of voluntary peer review as well as standards for professional master’s degree programs in public affairs, policy, and administration. Six years later, in 1983, the membership voted to graduate from the peer review process and for NASPAA to become an accreditor of programs. The accreditation process combines self-study, review by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), and a 2- to 3-day campus visit by a COPRA-appointed site-visit team (NASPAA, n.d.). The accreditation standards have been periodically revised since their early days, and recent iterations allow more latitude for accreditation of programs in other nations and for accreditation of nonadministrative programs, such as Master of Public Policy (MPP) programs. The strength of mission-based standards is that they allow each program to state its purpose and then describe how it achieves its goals. The downside is that it is easier and cheaper to mount nonadministrative programs; and, without a firm standard requiring MPA programs to teach basic administrative skills, curricula can drift away and come to resemble public policy programs more than public administration programs.
NASPAA Standard 5.1 stipulates these universal required competencies for graduates of all public administration programs:

- to lead and manage in public governance;
- to participate in and contribute to the public policy process;
- to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions;
- to articulate and apply a public service perspective; and
- to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry. (NASPAA, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, 2014)

Clever wordsmithing and outcomes measures designed to ensure positive findings can qualify most social science programs in these competencies, even those beyond the bounds of public service education. How did we get to this erosion of the MPA degree? To answer this, a look at the accreditation industry is instructive.

In the accreditation hierarchy, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has oversight over academic accrediting bodies, of which NASPAA is one. As CHEA changes its standards to keep up with the changing higher education environment, so must NASPAA. Those who finance tuition costs want to make sure that degrees are worth the investment. To that end, outcomes measures became important for all institutions and for the accrediting bodies that review them. But outcomes are only meaningful in the context of purpose, so an articulation of mission is the first step in setting goals and shaping their consequences. To comply, NASPAA moved from a process-based to mission-based approach with its 2009 standards. They emphasize the connection between mission, competencies, and outcomes. The broad wording that NASPAA adopted has the added advantage for NASPAA of making non-MPA programs easily accreditable, along with MPA programs in foreign countries whose curricula and resources may be substantively different from those of U.S. programs.

Mission-based standards allow maximum flexibility because programs can emphasize unique strengths, or overcome limitations, of their design, faculty, location, student market, resources, and/or employer needs. With the net cast so broadly, the advantage for NASPAA is that such standards accommodate the inclusion of a broad range of programs, because more can meet the requirements. With requests coming to NASPAA for accreditation of foreign programs, and with the desire of MPP programs to gain an accreditation imprimatur, loosening the standards and expectations expanded NASPAA’s market reach, protected it from competition with other accrediting bodies, built its number of accredited programs, increased its revenue stream, and raised its stature within the accreditation industry. But look at the cost.

The weakness of NASPAA’s content-neutral standards is that they are so broad that there is no differentiation between MPA, MPP, and Master of Public Affairs degrees. Standard 1.1 states,

The Program will have a statement of mission that guides performance expectations and their evaluation, including its purpose and public service values, given the program’s particular emphasis on public affairs, administration, and policy; the population of students, employers, and professionals the Program intends to serve; and, the contributions it intends to produce to advance the knowledge, research and practice of public affairs, administration, and policy. (NASPAA, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, 2014)

Touting itself as “the global standard in public service education,” NASPAA now grants accreditation to anything that resembles public service mindedness. The terms public service programs and public service education are frequently synonyms in NASPAA documents, merging their meaning, content, purpose, and outcomes (see, e.g., www.naspaa.org or Camacho, 2014). Apparently, the name of the degree is irrelevant. The identity of the MPA is thus obliterated. In its annual summary, NASPAA presents
data about the number of students applying to NASPAA member programs, number of faculty, graduates’ employment, and so forth but gives no information about the degrees that are accredited and their numbers (Camacho, 2014). A bit of sleuthing is required to find data specific to different degrees. It is available, however, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 shows enrollment by degree and employment of graduates by sector, based on data from the 2012–2013 academic year. To read NASPAA’s literature, one would not be aware that there are five times as many MPA graduates as there are MPP graduates. Whether there is a purposeful intent to exaggerate the prevalence of degrees other than the MPA is not the issue of this argument, but that possibility should raise eyebrows.

The amalgamation of all public service degree programs accredited by NASPAA obfuscates the major role of the MPA and confuses issues that do not need to be confused. From an employer’s perspective, public service organizations are not well served when graduates assume that by studying policy, they know how to plan, organize, staff, and budget. As Table 1 shows, 79% of graduates are employed in public service organizations and of these, two-thirds work in government and one-third in nonprofits. Administration is important. Raffel (2009) argues that the current NASPAA standards “will accentuate the unique commitment to public service that our diverse set of master’s programs has developed. It will position NASPAA schools, in the increasingly crowded landscape of professional graduate programs, as distinctive institutions committed to public policy and administration” (p. 143). Claiming ownership over all public service programs has the consequence of blurring if not obliterating the differences between MPA, MPP, and Master of Public Affairs degrees.

It is time to give the MPA the preeminence it deserves. MPP programs are more variable, and so the current “anything goes” standards embrace them well. For the MPA, however, where there is a clearer expectation for the skills a degree holder has, mission-based standards will work but the competencies should be specific to the expectations for the degree. NASPAA’s Standard 5 lists the competencies required of all graduates of public service programs: leading and managing in public governance; participating in and contributing to the policy process; analyzing, synthesizing, thinking critically, solving problems, and making decisions; articulating and applying a public service perspective; and communicating and interacting productively with a diverse citizenry (NASPAA, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, 2014). There is nothing wrong with these general competencies. The question is whether or not they are sufficient to ensure that a student is prepared and that an employer is well served.

The obfuscation of the MPA was foretold in the debates leading up to the adoption of the 2009 standards. One report noted that “changes have worked to diminish both the understanding and appreciation of a public administration career’s unique importance as the grounding for public service—regardless of the sector where that service is performed” (Henry, Goodsell, Lynn, Stivers, & Wamsley, 2009, p. 120). The authors argued that glossing over the differences between the MPA and the MPP reflected confusion about “public service degrees,” as NASPAA had begun calling them. Henry et al. (2009) also argued that

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**TABLE 1.**
**NASPAA Data, 2012–2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment by Degree</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>12,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPP</td>
<td>2,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Public Affairs</td>
<td>1,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (28 different degree names)</td>
<td>1,514</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment of Graduates</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofits</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. A list of accredited programs is available at NASPAA (2014a). Source: NASPAA (2014b)
students should have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the political and economic context in which governance is practiced, and of public administration's place in society. They should engage in extended reflection on the ethical dimensions of governance. This extended and in-depth consideration of core values, the context and dynamics of governance generally, and of public administration specifically, is the foundation upon which students should build the development of specific technical skills. (p. 124)

In defense of the 2009 standards, and in response to Henry et al. (2009), Raffel (2009) offered this appeasement: “The foundation of NASPAA is the professional master's degree, and the MPA is the dominant NASPAA master's program” (p. 136). The centrality of the MPA is not obvious on NASPAA's website, however. Alumni of NASPAA programs are promoted as recipients of an MPA/MPP, as if the two degrees are interchangeable (see www.naspaa.org/alumni/index.asp). This is a dramatic distortion of the purpose of, and difference between, the two degrees.

THE TRIUMPH OF TECHNIQUES OVER PURPOSE

Fast-forward to 2015: Fred was right but for the wrong reason. Today, NASPAA is a threat to public administration, not because of imposing rigid, uniform standards, but precisely the reverse—requiring too few. To borrow from Paul Volcker's (2014) prescient remarks, “vision without execution is hallucination” (p. 440). Citing numerous management failures, Volcker chides graduate public affairs programs for focusing too much on “vision” skills and not enough on “how to do it” skills. NASPAA standards have become so flexible that programs can focus on leadership, visioning, collaboration, and so forth without first teaching the administrative skills upon which such important processes rest.

Definitive standards now enter the picture not at the input stage but at the outcomes stage, where competencies logically derived from a program’s mission statement are identified, described, and measured. The cart is before the horse because what is taught does not matter, but how it is defined and measured does matter. The link between mission, curriculum, and outcomes is an exercise in linguistics. Freyss (2015) argues that the operationalization of mission-based standards is too constraining for the careers that MPA graduates will have, but we argue that the constraint is at the wrong end of the equation. Instead of requiring that specific subjects be taught, specific measurements should be taken of whatever competencies a public administration program claims to teach. The mission-based approach has shown itself to be a promising idea whose intended consequences do not match its real consequences. The current NASPAA standards leave too much room for divergence in curricula, too little room for how to assess outcomes that matter, and too much latitude in terms of who teaches the courses.

Too much like Humpty Dumpty's accommodation, making words mean what he chooses them to mean, programs wordsmith competencies and pat themselves on the back when graduates, who are too green to know the difference, score the program highly on their exit surveys. The outcomes measures make Humpty proud, although they perplex Alice. The following points elaborate on the shortcomings that result.

1. Current standards make it possible to avoid teaching administration to public administration students. To Volcker’s point, the looseness of the NASPAA standards bring many MPA programs close to product mislabeling. The knowledge and skills necessary to maneuver the labyrinth of politics, management, and law do not have to be taught. When content matters little, the real outcome—contrasted with eloquently described but superficial statements of competencies—is that graduates find themselves at a competitive disadvantage in the job market vis-à-vis those who possess such expertise.

2. From a prospective employer’s viewpoint, producing MPA graduates without administrative skills leads to confusion about what the degree stands for. Without at least some consistency in educational content, how can those who hire MPA graduates be sure what
talents they are purchasing? Employers should be able to expect that when they hire an MPA graduate, they are hiring someone who has at least passing familiarity with organizing, staffing, and budgeting. But unfortunately, MPA programs are being accredited that do not equip students with the skills that many employers expect them to have: the ability to craft a budget, familiarity with administrative law and human resource processes, an awareness of organizational strategies, the tapestry created by intersectoral relations, the importance of engaging citizens in decision making, the knowledge to build and manage large databases, an awareness of constitutional constraints—in other words, to “do” public administration, whether working in government or a non-profit organization.

3. MPA graduates without sufficient understanding of constitutional premises, intersectoral relations, and administration amplify the mismatch between what public service organizations need and what they get when they hire such graduates. All levels of government, along with the nonprofits that deliver public services, are brimming with specialized expertise in every conceivable field, from health care, economics, and military affairs to policy analysis. But what is most needed, as Paul Appleby (1962, p. 177) pointed out long ago, are men and women who can make a “mesh” of things, or in other words, who can see the big picture, coordinate the specialized parts, and integrate them into a whole in order to move initiatives forward. Publicized government breakdowns in recent years range from the response to Hurricane Katrina, to the regulatory failures that brought the near collapse of the banking system, to the faulty implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Such failings can often be traced to ignoring Appleby’s prescription to have experts on tap but not on top—meaning that generalists should be in charge, not experts, whose narrow focus obscures their view of the larger context.

4. Without public administration in the MPA curriculum, there is no unifying conception of what it means to be a public administrator. Generalist administrative skills are necessary for MPA graduates’ careers and public service organizations’ needs. Without MPA programs’ regularly scheduling courses that teach such skills, students graduate with an illogical hodge-podge of classes on their transcripts instead of with a coherent education for public service. Nor does the hodge-podge connect students with the professional identity of their future calling or its demands for ethical responsibility to the public interest. The pages of Public Administration Review and other leading journals are filled with a wealth of first-rate administrative knowledge that can be applied to solving urgent public affairs problems. Connecting with this impressive literature is a must for any up-to-date, well-educated public service professional.

5. An MPA minus the PA (public administration) destroys the MPA’s fundamental rationale for existence. Why bother to train future public servants if the MPA can mean anything, or more precisely, its content can include anything? If there is “no there there,” then why go there? Why ask students to pay tuition for two years in order to earn the degree? As the English monarch James I saw the inescapable and inseparable link between church and state when he cried, “No bishop, no king!” so too NASPAA should acknowledge, “No public administration, no MPA!” In other words, without content there is no legitimate rationale to sustain the degree or the institutions that teach and accredit it.

MPAs Without PA
To summarize these points, misrepresenting the MPA matters for students, public service organizations, the public interest, research/application connections, and indeed, for sustaining the raison d’etre of the educational enterprise. And here is why the NASPAA standards are critical: if accreditation is merely a pro forma exercise, without teeth or substance, it grants only illusory “by the book” credibility and respectability. To be sure, “by the book” is how the accreditation process appears on the surface. It requires a solid year of preparation and results in the voluminous presentation of data and prose about the applicant program, students, teachers, classes, curriculum, competencies, outcomes, and more. The exercise culminates
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in a site visit by a team of two academics and one practitioner, who meet with administrators, faculty, students, staff, and others to confirm the self-study findings and prepare their report for COPRA.

The goal is to accomplish an objective, thorough, effective programmatic review. The reality is that very few programs are denied accreditation, so there is little threat of rejection and hence, little incentive to change a program’s status quo, no matter how poor the educational content may be or how limited the faculty resources. The heart of the problem is that defining competencies and identifying how they are taught and evaluated more often resembles an exercise in tautological reasoning inside an empty box. “Skills” can mean almost anything as long as they connect to the program’s mission. The resulting output measures, then, are outcomes of nothing at all.

For example, suppose that an MPA program requires a core class called “Reading Tea Leaves for Improving Public Policy Forecasting” (not as far-fetched as it may seem). Faculty choose from a lengthy list of optional skills to teach as part of this class, such as quantitative analysis, policy forecasting, conceptualizing program options, and so forth. Next, faculty assign output measures to each skill in order to judge—or justify?—how well students learn these skills, including tests, quizzes, simulations, and the like. Never mind that tea-leaf reading has nothing to do with the contemporary study or practice of public administration. Never mind that little attention is paid to how well or poorly that activity fits with other required classes or what value this course adds to the overall MPA education. Nor is any thought given to whether or not potential employers may urgently require greater accuracy in tea-leaf counting; or to what the present and future job market demands are; or even to what the chief competition, such as from MBA programs, may offer. Never mind that almost any output measure can be wordsmithed to validate results in order to judge whether students properly learned how to read tea leaves. If this entire exercise sounds like methodological madness, it is. To borrow Wallace Sayre’s (1948) apt phrase, it is “the triumph of techniques over purpose.”

NASPAA collects hefty annual fees from member schools, accredited programs bask in their glory, and this, in turn, helps to attract students who pay substantial tuition, believing that they are receiving an education that will prepare them for a career in public service. Employers then hire graduates, thinking them adequately trained and honestly credentialed. The hitch is, as Gresham’s Law tells us in economics, bad money drives out the good. So, too, does bad education drive out the good, or at least it drives education downward to its lowest common denominator—to its least challenging and most irrelevant. This risks driving the MPA out of existence entirely. Indeed, employers have told us that they do not hire MPA graduates because they lack administrative skills. Too often, this assessment is correct.

Today, the MPA can mean anything a program wants it to mean: a policy degree; a degree about leadership; a degree about management with little, if any, appreciation for democratic values. In effect, the MPA follows the Humpty Dumpty rule: “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” NASPAA ought to pay attention to Alice’s astute reply: “The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

What created this postmodern nightmare in which the Master of Public Administration lost its heart? And what can be done about it? The four-decade-old story of NASPAA’s shift from peer review as a defense strategy to its current approach warrants a book-length treatment to explain it comprehensively. But in a nutshell, this remarkable yet silent transformation began in the mid-1960s with the proliferation of policy schools. Flushed with the hubris of the 1960s infatuation with technocratic and quantitative policy making, public administration programs flourished on the premise that the best elite training was that which instructed students
in the analytic policy skills used to define public problems, identify policy options, and recommend optimal solutions. This view saw public affairs education, much like scientific management long ago saw public administration, as a simple bundle of neutral, objective, nonpolitical techniques that could be learned and applied to promote the public good. The policy schools’ approach reintroduced the politics/administration dichotomy under a popular new label of “policy studies,” which was swiftly adopted by schools from Berkeley to Princeton in the 1960s and 1970s. Public administration was deemed to be beneath what top-level policy mandarins should be bothered with.

Thus was reborn an ancient Platonic dream of putting elite intellects in charge, much like Plato’s philosopher kings, who would think and decide but leave to others the mundane tasks of doing. Ironically, these very same policy gurus by the mid- to late 1970s discovered implementation as “the missing link” that explained why their idealism failed to work in practice. Surprisingly, they were shocked that defining and analyzing issues, laying out options, and deciding on optimal solutions did not automatically translate into actually solving the problem at hand. Hence, the fascination with “implementation theory” began. This turned out to be little more than recycling public administration under a new label, but for several status and symbolic reasons, policy analysts could never admit nor see the connection between policy and administration.

Next, fast-forward to 2007, which saw declining enrollments at policy schools, requests from foreign public administration programs for accreditation, and an economic recession that made it difficult for programs to afford the requisite number of tenure-track faculty. The pesky problem of standards that required “unfashionable” course requirements about organizing, budgeting, staffing, and so forth, coupled with the NASPAA requirement for tenure-track faculty actively engaged in research, made it difficult for programs to meet requirements for accreditation. Moreover, administrative subject matter challenges the lofty ideal of educating policy makers, instead deigning to teach about the peasant work of administration. Thus, a troublesome compromise was struck: omit the bothersome mentions of public administration in the NASPAA standards and adopt a nonspecific, outcomes-oriented model that would accommodate any public service–minded program that wished to come under the NASPAA umbrella. What could be more win-win? NASPAA gained institutional members while policy programs gained legitimacy with the NASPAA seal of approval. Thus we arrive at our present predicament: accrediting public administration programs minus public administration.

Some argue that mission-based standards without curriculum prescriptions accommodate a postmodern era, but in fact metamodernism is knocking at the door (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010). Accompanying it is the larger frame of reference within which public administrators must act: the public context is changing, flattening, interconnecting, and globalizing. Just as modernism and its reliance on reason gave way to postmodernism and its distrust of big narratives, metamodernism is marked by optimism and an acceptance of, if not boundaries, at least streetlights that illuminate the way forward. We believe that NASPAA standards for MPA programs should provide streetlights.

THE URGENT NECESSITY TO RETURN TO ROOTS

NASPAA’s attempt to embrace all public service–minded programs under one set of mission-based standards deserved a chance to prove itself, but the time has come to call the question. The resulting weakened public administration education is too large a price to pay. NASPAA’s standards for MPA programs do a disservice to public service. Two alternatives come immediately to mind: On the one hand, NASPAA could design standards specifically for MPA programs, and the current one-size-fits-all standards could be left to the 30 other degrees offered by NASPAA-member schools. On the other hand, NASPAA could return to its roots, found in its early days as an ASPA section on public administration education; in other words, NASPAA could rely on ASPA to assume the
accreditation responsibility for MPA programs. This would reassert the primary value and worth of public administration research and training for public service and would build communication between the academy and employers who rely on MPA graduates to staff their agencies. No longer would the policy science paradigm direct the accreditation process and allow for the “anything goes” approach. MPA programs would be encouraged to connect more closely with administrative science research, as well as with public service leaders from all walks of life and all facets of society.

When newly minted graduates express public service values but do not know the basics—how to manage people, finances, or information—their degrees have little more worth than a generic Master of Arts. MPA students assume they are gaining meaningful preparation for their careers when, in fact, that is not the case. And the ultimate, untoward outcome is that offices staffed with MPA graduates lack the expertise to tackle the thorny administrative issues that confront them. This, despite the fact that what President Kennedy said in 1962 is still true: most of the problems that come to government are administrative problems requiring sophisticated judgments on questions that are beyond the ken of most people.

More fundamental, integrating NASPAA’s work with the ASPA community would present a stronger, more united front for defending modern public service. Such a unified, larger association could speak with a louder, more persuasive voice against the constant assaults on the worth and value of public service. In short, reintegrating public administration accreditation with ASPA would reap many rewards: enhanced professional expertise through reconnecting administrative education to administrative research, promotion of a greater sense of corporate identity via linking administrative education with practice, and ultimately the advancement of sound standards of ethical responsibility and administrative skills so urgently needed.

Too many MPA graduates know too little about the basics of public administration. Surely, there is a golden mean where standards stand for something yet still provide enough flexibility so that programs can meet accreditation requirements.

Fred was prescient about the NASPAA threat almost forty years ago. We only regret that he is not around today to react to our proposal. But we have a hunch what his thoughts would be.

NOTES


2 We agree with an anonymous reviewer’s comment that “nothing in the standards prohibit the accreditation of programs in large animal veterinary care or automobile manufacturing. Programs can be governed by five professionally qualified faculty with no scholarship in public administration who teach no public administration courses.”

3 For a summary of how the model for higher education has changed, see Schultz (2013). For an exploration of the increased reliance on non-tenure-track faculty, see Institute for Research and Study of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (2014). For an explanation of how the accreditation industry developed, see Council for Higher Education Accreditation (1998).

REFERENCES


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