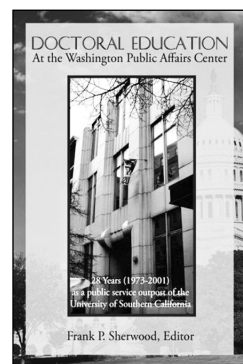


Review of: *Doctoral Education in Public Administration at the Washington Public Affairs Center: 28 Years (1973-2001) as an Outpost of the University of Southern California*

Review by Mark Speicher
*Arizona College Of Osteopathic Medicine,
Midwestern University*

Sherwood, Frank P.,
Ed. (2008). *Doctoral
Education in Public
Administration at the
Washington Public
Affairs Center:
28 Years (1973-2001)
as an Outpost of the
University of
Southern California.*
Bloomington, IN;
iUniverse.



The Washington Public Affairs Center was a doctoral program that existed from 1973 to 2001 and was designed for professionals working in public service. The program was affiliated with the University of Southern California (USC) and located in Washington, DC. *Doctoral Education in Public Administration at the Washington Public Affairs Center: 28 Years (1973-2001) as an Outpost of the University of Southern California* chronicles the development of this pioneering program that sought to combine adult-centered learning models (based on Knowles' (1980/1970) theory of adult learning) and praxis-based education in the ostensible heart of public administration — the nation's capital. The book then describes how eventual concerns about fiscal and faculty resources and the value of the Doctor of Public Administration (D.P.A.) degree to a research-intensive University like USC ended with the termination of the program.

About halfway through *Doctoral Education in Public Administration at the Washington Public Affairs Center*, two questions are obvious. First, if USC's Washington Public Affairs Center (WPAC) had students so satisfied with the program, why did the school close the program? Second, given claims that the program was groundbreaking in its goals and approach, why haven't some of the innovative aspects of this program been implemented by other programs? While the book is eventually somewhat successful at answering the first question, it makes no serious attempt to answer the second. Some reasons why important elements of the program have not been introduced elsewhere are discussed below.

The book includes overviews by Chester Newland (a former full-time professor at the WPAC) and Frank Sherwood (WPAC's founding Director) on the WPAC's development and accomplishments throughout its history. Sherwood focuses his initial overview on two of the program's most notable

graduate, Ambassador Edward Perkins, former Director General of the U.S. Foreign Service and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. The second overview by Sherwood discusses the informal manner in which the WPAC was founded and its founding principles: (a) that it be supported by tuition, (b) that it concentrate on the application of public administration theory into practice, and (c) that it focus on adult learners and their needs. This begins the heart of the book — essays by 23 of the program's 192 graduates on the contributions of the WPAC to their learning, to their careers, and to their lives. Essays by former faculty (Larry Kirkhart, Beryl Radin, and Ronald Stupak) bridge to a discussion of the WPAC's demise amid changes at USC and in the D.P.A. degree.

Sherwood places the program's closing within the context of the conflict between the research and service missions of research-intensive universities like USC, and fits the D.P.A. degree and its decline squarely in the midst of this conflict. The reliance of the center on tuition funding is identified as another weakness, especially as more doctoral programs at other universities, especially public universities, could compete with the USC-WPAC D.P.A. degree at lesser cost. He also points to the Maxwell School at Syracuse University and the Cooper Center at the University of Virginia as examples of programs that have not abandoned training those who will serve in the public sphere in favor of those who will serve in the academy.

The WPAC program was an original one, designed to capitalize on the experiences and knowledge of the students, in addition to the faculty's academic backgrounds, and to adopting an adult-learner model for courses and schedules. The program began for all students with a 100-page Autobiography Learning Plan (ALP), which served as a "mission statement" for the D.P.A. program, and provided students and the faculty with information about individual students' potential gains from the program, their potential contributions to the program, and their abilities successfully to complete the program. The WPAC's coursework was organized in intensive semesters. These semesters began with pre-course reading and included four-day intensive seminars. This schedule allowed students to maintain work schedules, as well as spend enough time in discussions to fully engage the material and to make the connections between literature and theory, and between implications for self, practice, and public organizations. This schedule was designed to integrate the WPAC's central tenets of praxis and "andragogy," or adult-learning theory.

The WPAC dissertation was generally on a public-management topic with which the doctoral candidate was very familiar, often a specific question or problem at the candidate's workplace. The dissertation proposal was reviewed in a structured way by both faculty and students in the program. This active involvement of peers and feedback from the entire learning community, not just the faculty, were two other hallmarks of the program described by both faculty and students.

The 23 graduate-essayists showed a high level of agreement on the characteristics of the program that they found contributed the most to their personal and professional development. The most-mentioned characteristic of the WPAC was the rigor and substance of the program. Graduates cited the utility of having a good grounding in theory as important for their practical success as administrators and problem-solvers. The program sessions were described as challenging, intensive, and pragmatic, and the essayists credited faculty who knew how to transmit the understanding of theory and the application of theory as particularly important to the students' learning.

Many essayists also cited the two-way learning that happened between the students and the faculty as particularly important. The learning community that developed as a result of these rigorous, intensive sessions provided honest and immediate feedback to all students. These learning communities were of almost universal value to the graduate-essayists.

The ALP and the dissertation are cited by many students as accomplishments in and of themselves, and as roadmaps for continued personal and professional learning and development. Even the ALP did not escape the praxis model of the WPAC. The process of writing the ALP was one of goal-setting informed by self-understanding, and the selection of theories or models to explore as a part of the program. The dissertation was the culmination of the seminars, and therefore was each individual student's attempt at applying theory to a particular problem. The focus of the dissertation on praxis further emphasized the program's commitment to the rigorous application of theory to actual public-service issues and problems. The dissertation defense was not so much an examination of the candidate, but a celebration of accomplishment, because the learning community already had critiqued the dissertation during its development. The completion of a dissertation was the sign of another success of the WPAC: another "praxis-titioner" returned to the public sector at a level of competence previously unavailable to the public, the organization, or the servant.

But these successes were inadequate to keep the program running. As the WPAC's D.P.A. had to compete with more Public Administration doctoral programs (most of them Ph.D. programs capable of training both academics and practitioners), its dependence on tuition and its shoestring budget became more of a liability, because many of the other programs charged public-college tuition. The intensive semester structure allowed faculty from USC in Los Angeles and from other institutions around the country to teach in the program, but to a large extent prevented the development over time of a school of ideas surrounding the WPAC. The return of graduates to Federal or state public administration careers meant that they often were lost to any meaningful conversations on the praxis they had spent so much time learning. This lack of an ongoing community of ideas meant that there was no real constituency, save the few full-time faculty in Washington, to defend the center. Additionally, the

lack of program graduates in the conversation about public administration, about praxis, and about effective education in public administration doctoral programs meant that it was up to the faculty on loan to the WPAC to return to their home programs and implement the program characteristics. This has not happened to any real degree, indicating either that the faculty did not find the structure as valuable as the graduates, or that there was significant resistance to changing program structures in doctoral programs in public administration.

Throughout the book, Sherwood discusses the importance of the public-service focus of public administration programs, and the importance of a doctoral degree for practitioners of public administration. Other faculty mourn the loss of the public-service focus of USC and the treatment of its School of Public Affairs — and the WPAC in particular.

The D.P.A. essayists in this work share a great deal in common with current and recent D.P.A. and Ph.D. graduates in public administration programs around the country. Most doctoral students want a deep understanding of the main theories of public administration gained through rigorous individual and group learning, to have their beliefs and experiences questioned, and to learn, and later work, among a community of learners while maintaining individual interests. Students at this high level would benefit from having a plan that evaluated their strengths and weaknesses in coming to the terminal degree, and a plan for the degree's completion. Further, whether experienced or not, all students would benefit from andragogically competent teaching methods and the development of ongoing feedback from faculty and students in a constructive way.

This alignment of values and education goals between Ph.D. and D.P.A. students further blurs the distinctions between the degrees, which is noted in other discussions in this journal (e.g., Brewer, Facer, O'Toole & Douglas, 1999), and is noted by Sherwood — along with increased focus on research in public universities — as a cause of the decline of the D.P.A. In the end, then, this work is valuable less as a celebration of the degrees conferred by the WPAC, or the contributions to public service of the graduates, and more as a celebration that the WPAC was able to create, for however short a time, a learning community that met the personal and academic needs of its students in a way that made a real contribution to their success. Perhaps a change in focus by the WPAC to research-oriented degrees would have kept the program alive, perhaps resources for a small program thousands of miles from its sponsoring university never would have been adequate. At any rate, the book serves as an inspiration to educators and practitioners that creating an excellent learning community in a rigorous public administration program that is accessible to adult learners is not only possible, but also valuable to its faculty, to its students, and to society as a whole.

Review of: *Doctoral Education in Public Administration at the Washington Public Affairs Center: 28 Years (1973-2001) as an Outpost of the University of Southern California*

REFERENCES

- Brewer, G.A., Facer, R.L. II, O'Toole, L.J., Jr., & Douglas, J.W. (1999). What's in a name? Comparing D.P.A. and Ph.D. programs. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 5(4), 309-317.
- Knowles, M.S. (1980/1970). *The modern practice of adult education. Andragogy versus pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.
- Sherwood, F.P. (Ed.).(2008). *Doctoral education in public administration at the Washington Public Affairs Center: 28 years (1973-2001) as an outpost of the University of Southern California*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.

Mark Speicher, Ph.D., is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine, Midwestern University, in Glendale, AZ. He received his Ph.D. in Public Administration from the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University in 2009.