

“The Certainty of Uncertainty”

I am honored to assume the presidency of NASPAA. I am humbled by the opportunity afforded me to help steer us through the challenging process of considering the goals of public affairs education as we revise our standards. The challenges that will be presented to the public sector in the future are unknowable. To assure that future generations can meet tomorrow’s challenges, I believe that we must refocus our attention on the analytic skills and the fundamental values that are essential for democracy – values such as empathy, equity, fairness, and accountability.

As I consider our task, it seems appropriate to reflect upon how the context in which we operate has changed and continues to change, and how we must change in response. In my own case, it has been twenty-five years since I joined our profession, so I have chosen that time frame to chronicle how the environment in which NASPAA operates has changed.

How has the social, political and economic environment changed over the past 25 years?

First, our American workforce has changed. As Figure 1 illustrates, the proportion of women in the workforce has increased. Colleges and

universities, as well as professional schools including our own, are welcoming classes that typically have more women than men. Women are more likely to make it to the executive suite than ever before, though many professional women struggle with the conflict about working full-time while raising children, a situation experienced by many of our students and alumni..

The complexion of our workforce has also changed over the last 25 years. Official figures on immigration show some volatility in the number of immigrants the U.S. has welcomed during the last 25 years, as seen in Figure 2. Between 1990 and 2000 we experienced what some have called “The Second Great Wave of Immigration” in American history. Our immigrant population grew by 57% during that decade while our native-born population grew by 9%. By 2000 1 in 5 children were the children of immigrants.

As Thomas Freidman recently pointed out in his book, The World is Flat, scientists and engineers from other countries are most likely to get desired visas to join us, since we so desperately need them, but others face a rising wall. (2005) Patterns of immigration, of both documented and undocumented immigrants, have contributed to the changes in the work force.

The relative proportions of White, Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans in our country has been changing, as Figure 3 illustrates. And our multi-lingual population presents new challenges in public service, raising the need for cultural competency in our public servants to new levels!

Representation of minorities in public service employment has not kept pace with the changing demographics of the American public. Focusing on some available public workforce data, in the federal government, the proportion of minorities hired into government service has not matched the changes that have taken place in the larger society (as Figure 4 demonstrates).

The set of the work skills required in the “weightless economy,” as Alan Greenspan termed it, has changed. The proportion of Americans with a college degree – the ticket into professional careers in our society -- has increased in the past 25 years, although the proportion of minorities graduating from college has consistently lagged behind that proportion for the majority as seen in Figure 5. Changes in our economy have clearly affected the number and types of jobs available to non-college graduates, as well. Over the past 25 years, the value of a college education has increased, but the knowledge acquired there has an increasingly short shelf life.

Second, our nation's economic well-being has changed over the last 25 years.

First, inflation-adjusted Gross Domestic Product GDP was 5.3 trillion in 1981, and in 2005 it was 11.1 trillion. So, the economy just about doubled in size over this period., as shown in Figure 6. In 1981, about 22.2 percent of the output of goods and services in the economy came from government at all levels, and of this total, defense accounted for 5.2 percent. In 2005, the corresponding statistics are 20.1 percent and 4.0 percent. The production and provision of government services grew with the overall economy, although not quite as fast.

Although the economy has grown, the benefits of economic growth have been distributed unevenly. The median income in constant dollars has grown, as seen in Figure 7. However, inequality in the economic conditions of Americans has also increased markedly over this period. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, adjusting for inflation, the average income of the richest Americans doubled over the past 25 years, while the income of middle-class Americans increased by only about 15%. (Piketty 2006)

As Figure 8 shows, the percent of the nation's wealth controlled by the 10% richest Americans has increased from 33% to 43% over this period.

And we still have a significant number of Americans, including many children, living in poverty, as seen in Figure 9. There are other data suggesting an increasing economic insecurity for Americans. Jacob Hacker has noted the upward trends in the number of personal bankruptcies, mortgage foreclosures, and Americans without health insurance over the last 25 years. Insecurity for those least well off in our society persists, and as Hacker argues, insecurity for the middle class has increased. (Hacker 2006)

Third, with globalization our nation's role in the "flattening" world has changed quite substantially in the last 25 years.

The U.S. trade deficit has tripled in the last 25 years, as shown in Figure 10. Freidman, for example, notes that the U.S. role in the world's economy has changed dramatically due to open-sourcing, outsourcing, insourcing, offshoring, and supply-chaining. (2005) As a consequence of growing interdependence, we must acknowledge that the problems of the world can no longer be treated as distant concerns: they affect us in important ways. This is a challenge that only began to emerge 25 years ago.

Fourth, the nature of governance in the United States has changed rather dramatically. We now speak less about government and more about governance by networks. The trend in public sector employment has been to

hire fewer full-time federal employees, as seen in Figure 11, and instead to contract out government jobs to the private sector. As Paul Light alerted us, “the shadow government” continues to grow because our governments hire more and more contractors (Light 2006). Figure 12 provides some data on the number of contract jobs in the federal government. As of 2002 the number of contractors was double that of full-time federal employees. “Doing more with less” frequently means doing more with contract employees for whom we do not need to pay benefits. Government services are delivered in complex networks involving for-profit, non-profit and faith-based providers. And these complicated delivery systems make ensuring accountability for both process and performance more difficult.

And while the complexity of governance has grown, so have the costs of governance. The federal government has increasingly spent more than it takes in, as seen in the increasing federal debt shown in Figure 13. The Congressional Budget Office’s most recent long-term budget outlook suggests that a continuation of current policies—principally driven by the future increase in costs for Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security—will result in a doubling of federal debt as a percentage of GDP in 20 to 30 years. (CBO, 2005)

Finally, another interesting piece of contextual data pertinent to governance in the U.S. concerns the trust that citizens have in their government. Figure 14 shows the percentage of Americans who express trust in government from 1958 to 2004; and, despite some fluctuation, trust in government has declined. The numbers may be even lower this month as a result of the recent “Foley-gate” Congressional fiasco. It is also worth noting that Americans have been encouraged to mistrust government by political leaders for much of the last 30 years. Yet, while Americans express distrust in their governmental institutions, they continue to expect myriad services from them.

Despite the low levels of trust in government, many young people still choose public service careers. Throughout this 25 year period, professional public affairs education has grown, adapted, and added considerable value both nationally and internationally. We have witnessed a steady number of students choosing public affairs programs (as shown in Figure 15), public affairs programs joining NASPAA and APPAM (Figure 16), and programs accredited by NASPPA (as shown in Figure 17). While not all schools offering public affairs degrees are NASPPA members, the vast majority have joined. During the last five years a significant number of colleges and universities outside the U.S. have started offering public affairs degrees,

most notably master of public administration degrees. Dozens of new MPA programs in China and the UK, for example, have been developed in the last 5 years. Increasing interest in public affairs education is a response to a recognition of the new knowledge and skills required to lead the complex governance networks emerging across the world. A number of the PA programs in other countries have recently asked NASPAA to consider them for accreditation. We have been reticent thus far, wondering if we are up to the task.

As we ponder the future, I suggest that the immediate social and economic environment needs to be examined. What might we expect in the coming decade as we reconsider NASPAA's role in public affairs education?

I offer the metaphor of churning waters ahead for public service. It is likely that the workforce, the economy and the complexity of government will continue to evolve in unexpected ways in the coming years. The challenges future generations of students will face are not predictable in subject-matter, timing, or magnitude. In the coming decades, several ongoing political and economic realities will make the environment in which public service is practiced unstable and unpredictable.

Consider just a few of the challenges that we face.

Globally, we see:

1. severe and widespread poverty in many parts of the world that will continue to produce intractable health and environmental problems;
2. persistent animosities, distrust, and violence in many parts of the world—Iraq and elsewhere-- with seemingly intractable ethnic and religious differences;
3. emerging markets and changing economic systems in countries throughout the world—most notably in China and the former Soviet Union—which confront challenges of governance for which the traditional labels of “communist” and “democratic” are no longer instructive or relevant; and
4. proliferation of non-governmental actors – many of whom are hostile to the U.S. and other developed nations – who will continue to use “terrorist” tactics in order to advance their causes.

And in the U.S., we face:

1. persistent social and academic problems in public schools, for which there are both insufficient political will and

resources to address, and that produce increasingly dire social problems at the neighborhood level;

2. continuing debate about how to cover the rising costs of the medical and social security benefits to the elderly while at the same time keeping government financially solvent;
3. volatility in the trust Americans have in the ability of their government to address all of the above;
4. frustrations within a multi-sector workforce that needs to work cooperatively despite differential incentives and conflicting organizational cultures;
5. steep learning curves for the new hires taking over from retiring baby boomers; for example, 51% of the CIA's employees have worked at the agency for 3 years or less, a situation that is soon likely to characterize many other government agencies as well;
6. a continuing high demand for data documenting persisting problems and suggesting new solutions; for example, there is currently a nine-month backlog of requests for data at GAO from the 88 different Congressional committees with interests in Homeland Security; and

7. continuing demands to evaluate the performance of government programs and agencies—a task that is made more complicated by the myriad cooperative arrangements used to deliver services, and the immense difficulty of devising appropriate measures for the success of many government activities.

Although the challenges are imposing, I am optimistic.

Twenty-five years ago the President of this body could have listed many national and international challenges that faced public policymakers at that time (stagflation and the Cold War come to mind). It is unlikely that 25 years ago anyone could have foreseen that the largest re-organization in the history of the federal government (the creation of the Department of Homeland Security) would be precipitated by an attack on the world's only remaining superpower by a non-state organization based in Afghanistan. Although we cannot know with great precision what the future holds, we can nevertheless prepare for the “certainty of uncertainty.” In public affairs education, this means that we must better prepare public policymakers to be flexible and nimble.

Public services are now provided by a more diverse set of actors than ever before. The quick turnaround in which issues can absorb attention offers more potential to distract public servants than ever before. However, by focusing on the fundamental democratic values of fairness, equity, and accountability we can prepare for whatever the future brings. These core values can provide the normative foundation for good government that is essential for public servants who must stay focused as they navigate through churning waters.

What might we provide our students to lead in the new public service? Because the distinction between public policy making and policy execution has now blurred almost to the vanishing point, graduate programs in public affairs need, increasingly, to see their principal goal as training "thoughtful generalists" who can contribute to both the formulation as well as the management and implementation of public programs and policies. This requires people who are comfortable working with the results of policy analysis (if not necessarily contributing to it themselves), and with the complexities of implementing policy in a multi-sector world. Anyone who seeks to be a well-rounded public affairs professional needs to have, at least to some degree, the skills and competencies that, 25 years ago, would have been taught in policy analysis programs, as well as those traditionally

associated with programs in public administration. Master of public policy programs, that is, need to address management; and master of public administration curricula need to include economics and other analytical tools coursework. Perhaps the very distinction between policy and administration degrees now requires fundamental reassessment, one that might well be an outgrowth of the growing collaboration between APPAM and NASPAA.

The boundaries between sectors have also blurred. Our students are likely to work in many sectors during their careers – even if they stay in one service or policy issue area! Disciplinary boundaries are blurring as well. What public affairs professionals need to know to uphold such values as privacy and transparency of governance draws from both technical disciplines, such as information technology, as well as the more philosophical, such as ethics and constitutional law.

Many faculty members have provided helpful guidance on these issues. Collaborative governance has become even more challenging as the diversity of stakeholders in the governance process has increased. Terry Cooper's work on local governmental collaboration with citizens, for example, is at the leading edge of research in this area. Leading people in an increasingly uncertain and diverse world requires new and different skills—now variously labeled “emotional intelligence” or “social intelligence”—in

order to develop caring, emphatic leaders who steward people and resources with vision and integrity.

Public officials who exemplify these qualities already abound among our alumni. One, about whom I have direct and personal knowledge, is Admiral Thad Allen, a George Washington University MPA graduate, who directed the federal effort in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. When the U.S. Coast Guard secured residents stranded by the hurricane, Admiral Allen expressed his philosophy in stating “I told my men and women to treat every citizen they helped as if they were a family member.”

We know that our students need to develop more complex and nuanced analytical skills. Sensemaking in policy and management areas characterized by radical uncertainty is the new reality in the public sector. As Louise Comfort has recommended that in the area of homeland security, public servants need to be skilled in “auto-adaptation.” (Comfort 2002) Comfort’s focus on the necessity to develop skills in assessing risks; estimating consequences, capacities, strategies; and redesigning actions is relevant in most policy arenas. Interestingly, leading effectively in the public sector continues to be more challenging than in the private sector. We have even more to consider as we rethink our standards than our Business school counterparts.

Teaching our students to focus on the fundamental values, to lead with integrity and kindness, and to reflect and adapt quickly when assessing risks is what our schools do well. Recent political proposals to establish a Public Service Academy, much like our existing armed service academies, to my mind, have missed the point. We already have superb public service academies in most of our state capitals, and in small and large communities across the country—from Lawrence to Pittsburgh to New York City (and I can't neglect to mention my home town, Washington D.C.). What we do need is more support for public service education within our existing public service "academies." I believe an ROTC-like model for both graduates and undergraduates in public affairs to support our students, wherever they study, would be more valuable and feasible.

Conclusion

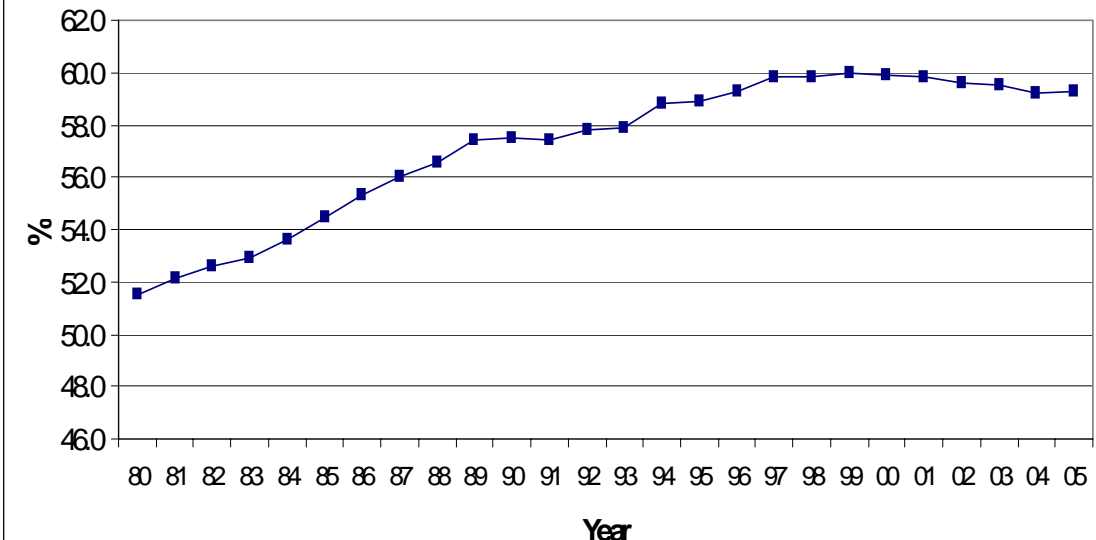
In light of the new environment of public service, my belief is that our community needs to focus on how we can exert a positive influence on the quality of public affairs education across the globe. We need to collaborate with our international colleagues and domestic stakeholders to:

1. Clarify core values in public service;
2. Envision and articulate a comprehensive skill set for our students;

3. Challenge our students to expand and embrace skills and solution sets from outside our disciplines; and
4. Challenge our researchers to examine, explore and evaluate new programs and processes to enhance the knowledge set available to public servants worldwide.

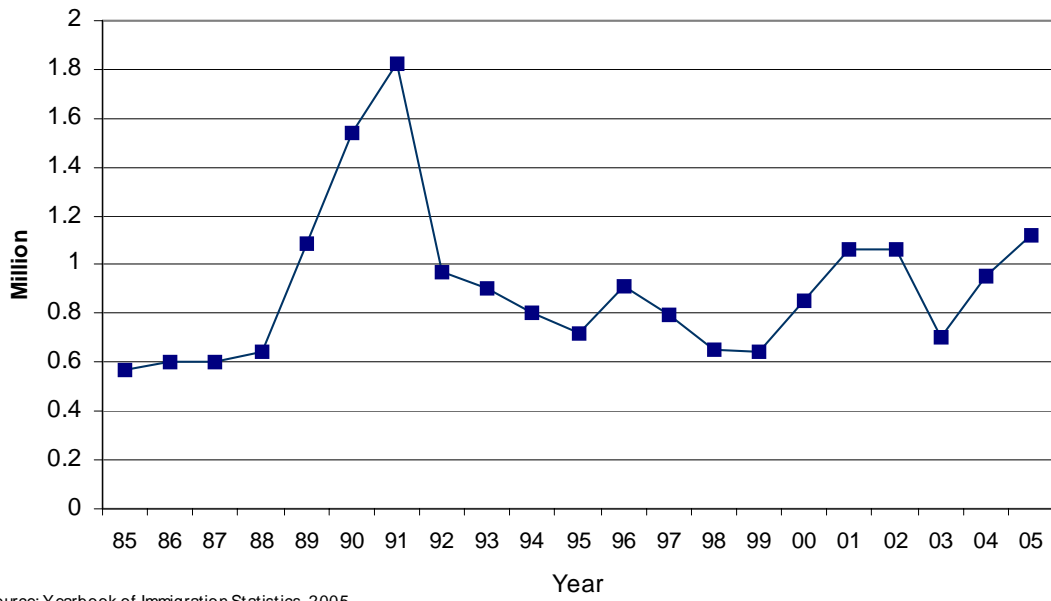
As the old Arabic saying goes, the only thing certain in this world is change. To recreate education for the public service in order to meet the challenges of tomorrow we must embrace and prepare for change by equipping our students with the moral sense and the analytic skills they need to adapt. By preparing future generations to meet challenges that we cannot yet imagine we will have left a great legacy, the capacity for democratic self-governance. That is our purpose and that will be my goal as NASPAA president.

Figure 1 - Women Labor Force Participation Rates, 1980-2005



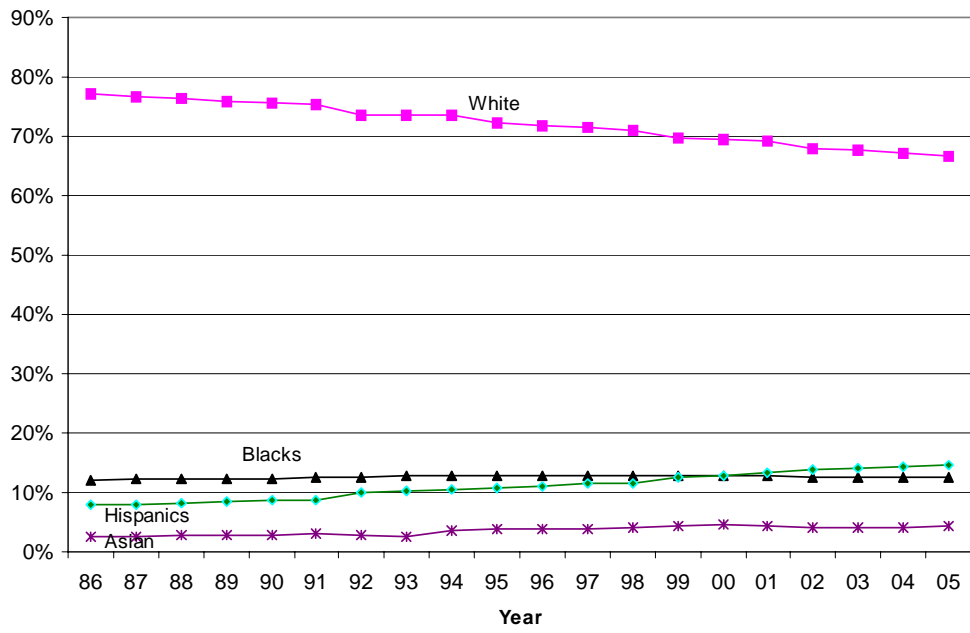
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 2 - Immigration to US, 1980-2005



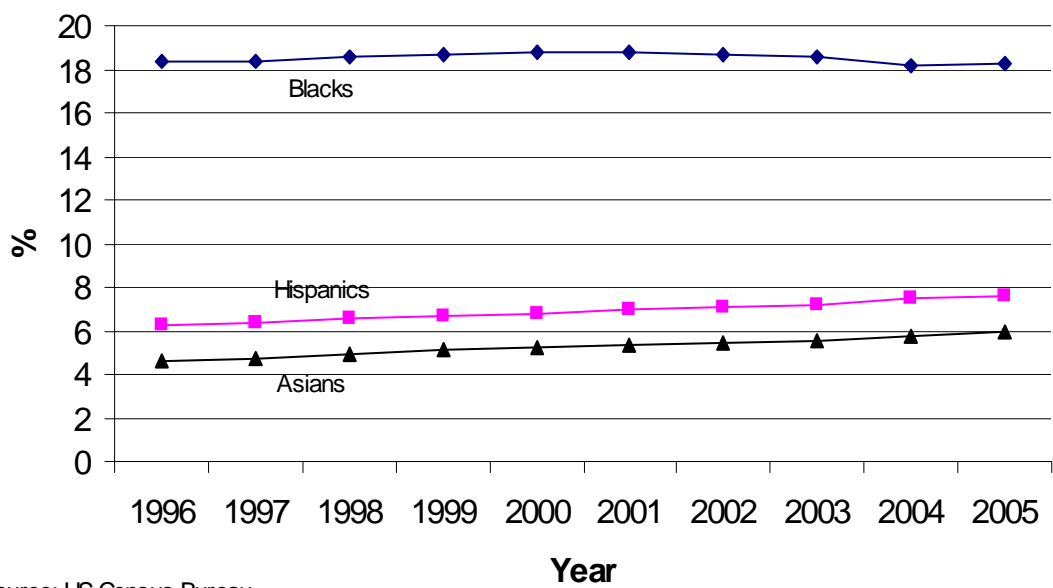
Source: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2005

Figure 3 - Racial Composition of US Population, 1986-2005



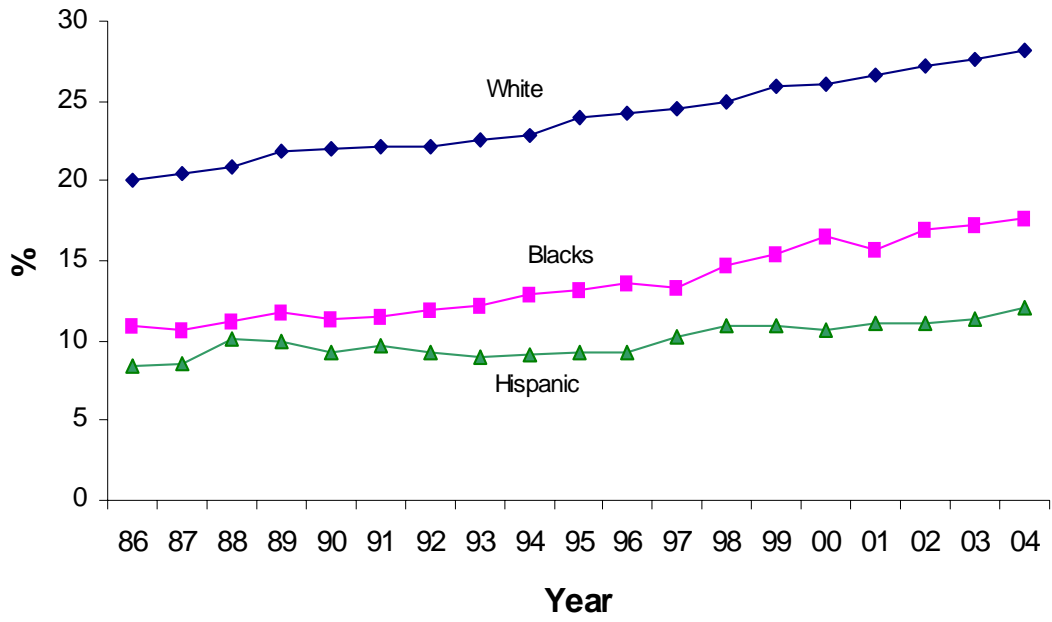
Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 4 - % of Federal Employees, 1996-2005



Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 5 - Share of College Graduates, 1980 - 2004



Source: US Census

Bureau

Figure 6 - US Real GDP, 1980-2005

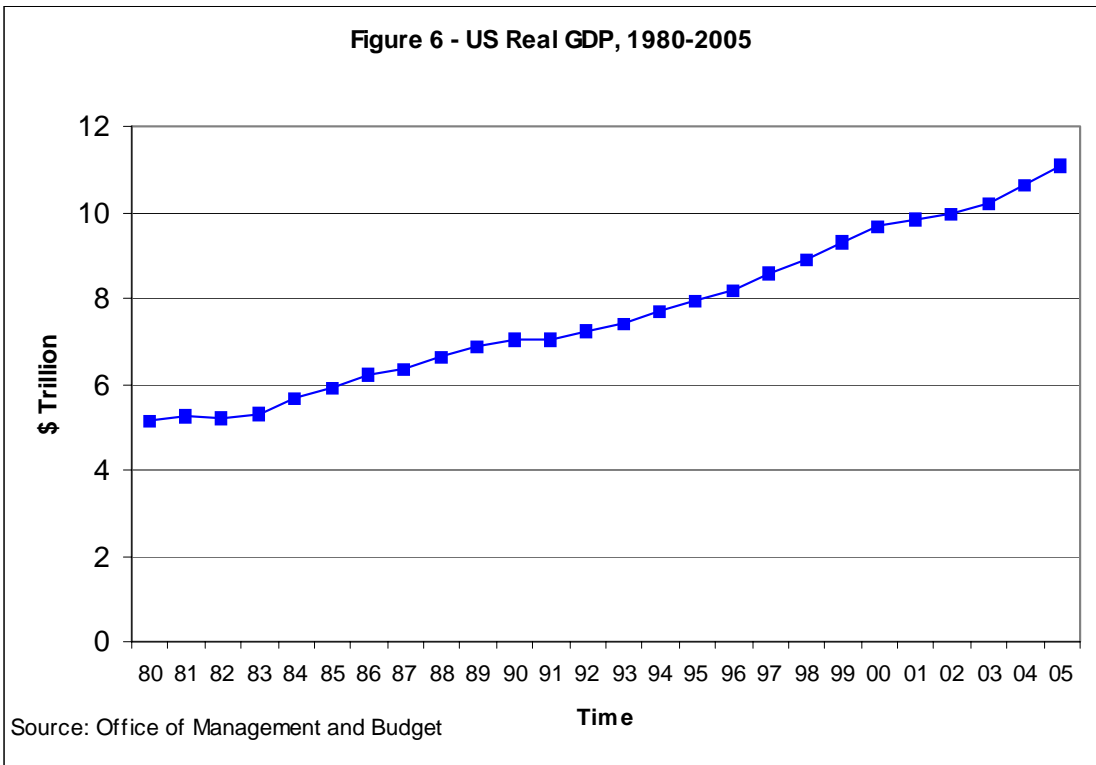
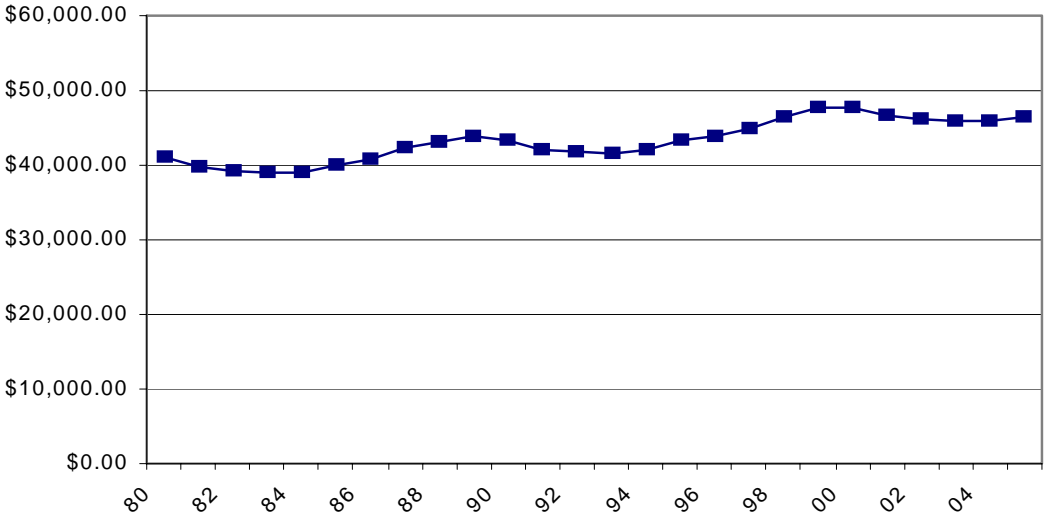
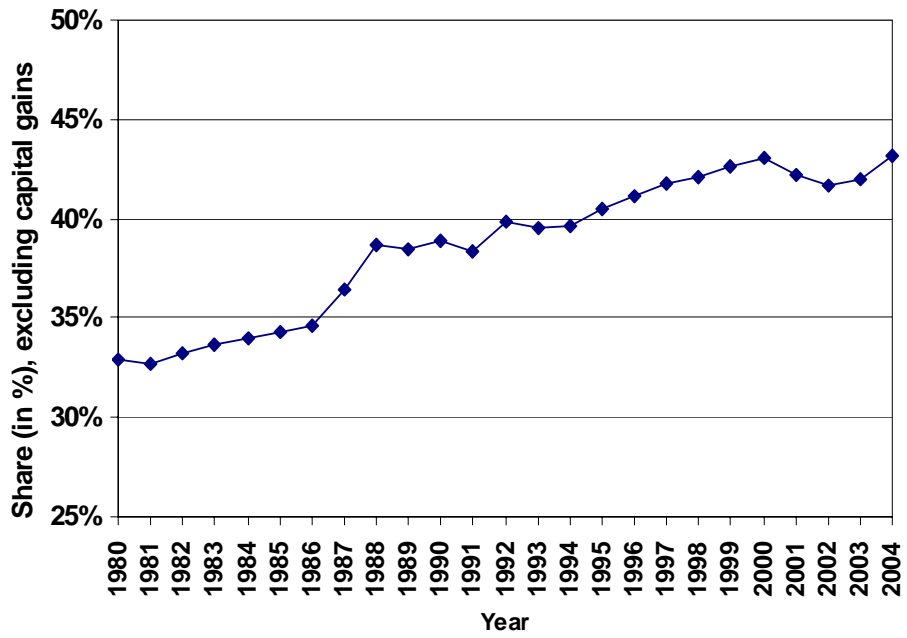


Figure 7 - US Median Income, 1980-2005



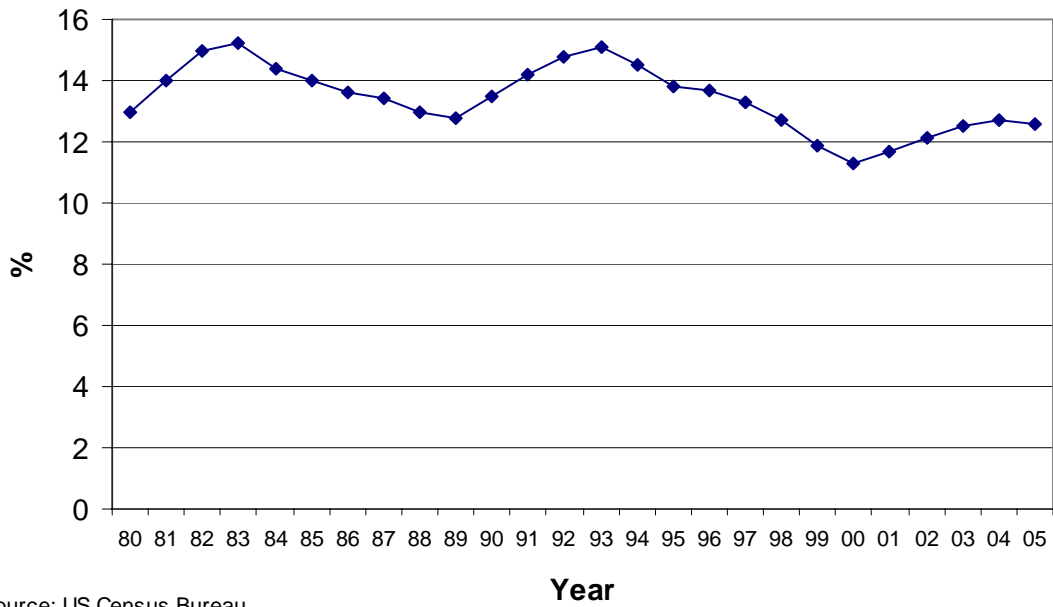
Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 8 - The Top 10% Income Share, 1980-2004



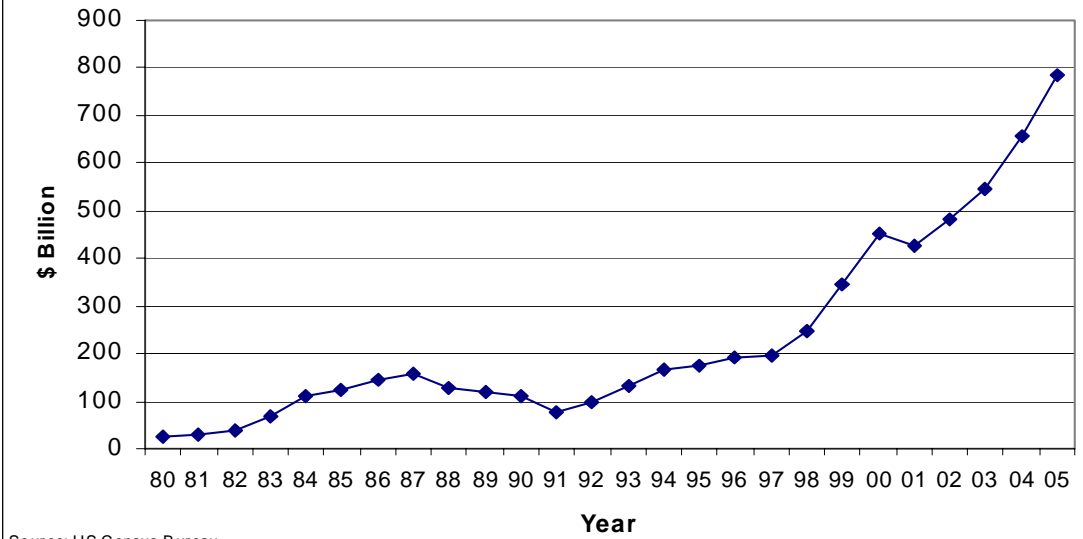
Source: Piketty and Saez

Figure 9 - Percent Living in Poverty in US, 1980-2005



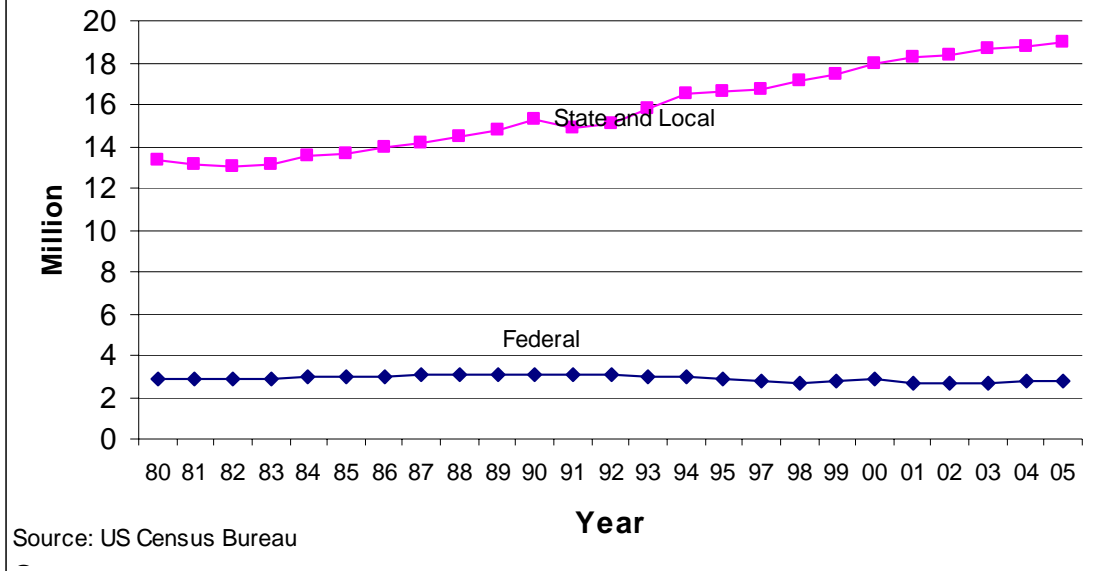
Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 10 - US Trade Deficit, 1980-2005



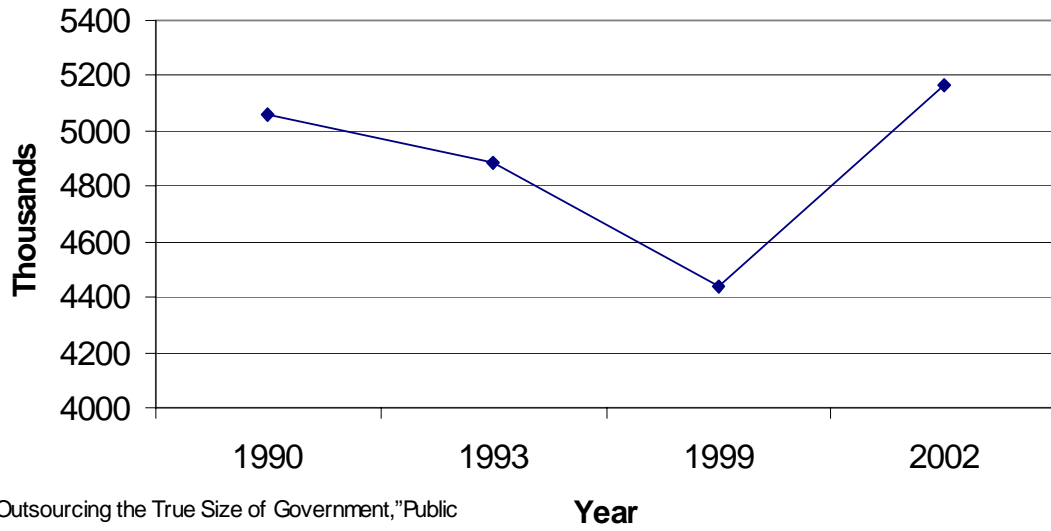
Source: US Census Bureau

**Figure 11 - Federal and State and Local Employees,
1980-2005**



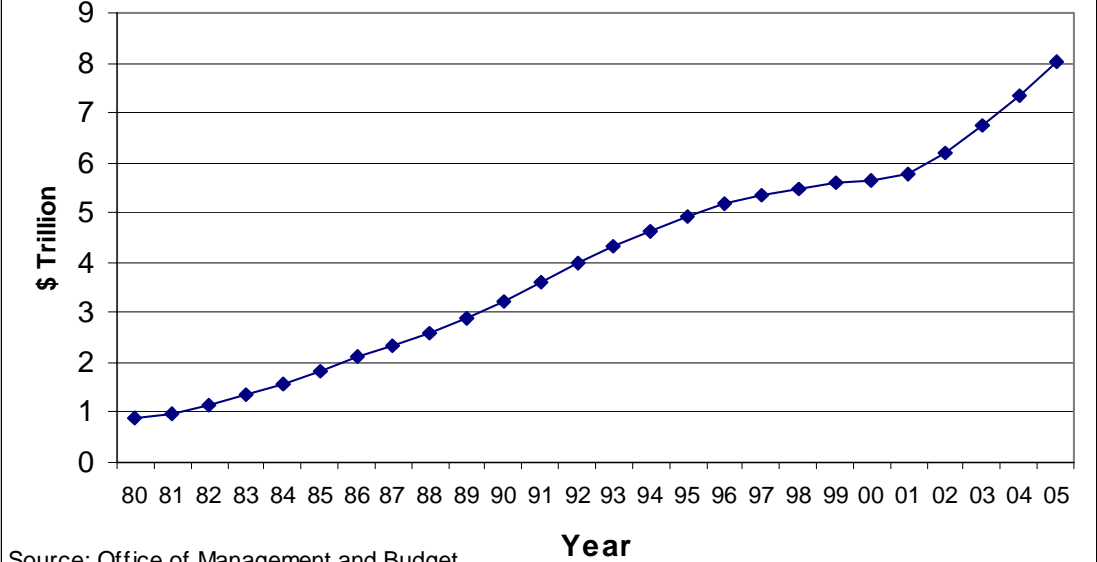
Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 12 - Federal Contractor Jobs, 1990-2002



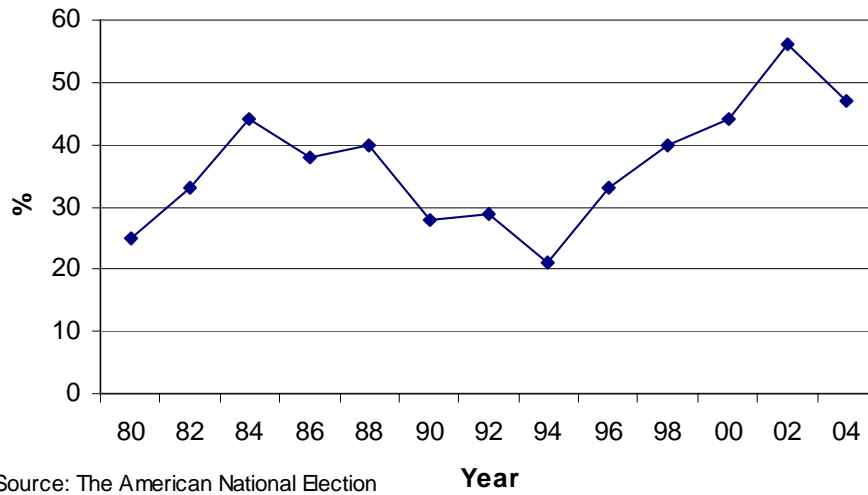
"Outsourcing the True Size of Government," Public Contract Law Journal, Winter 2004.

Figure 13 - Federal Debt, 1980-2005



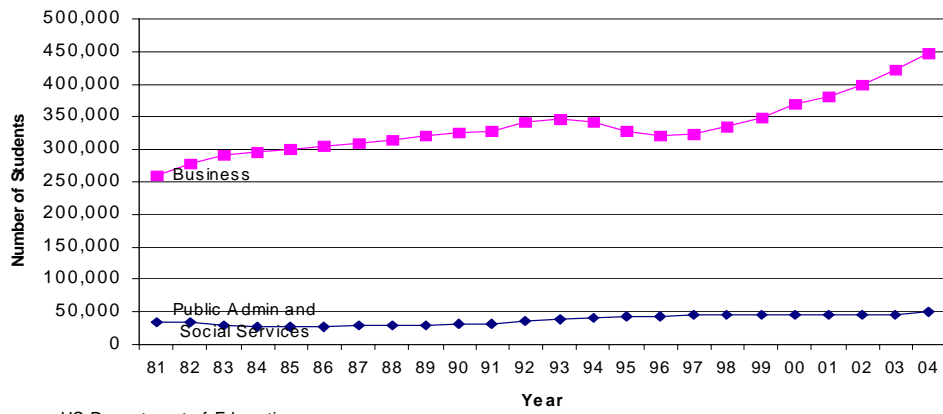
Source: Office of Management and Budget

Figure 14 - Trust in Government, 1980-2004



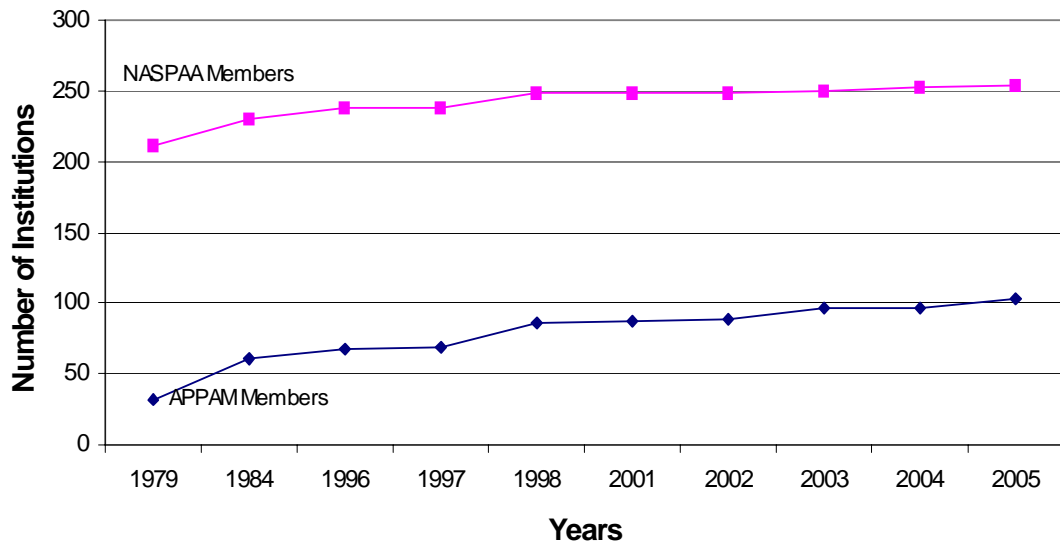
Source: The American National Election Studies

Figure 15 - Public Administration/Social Service and Business Degrees, 1981-2004



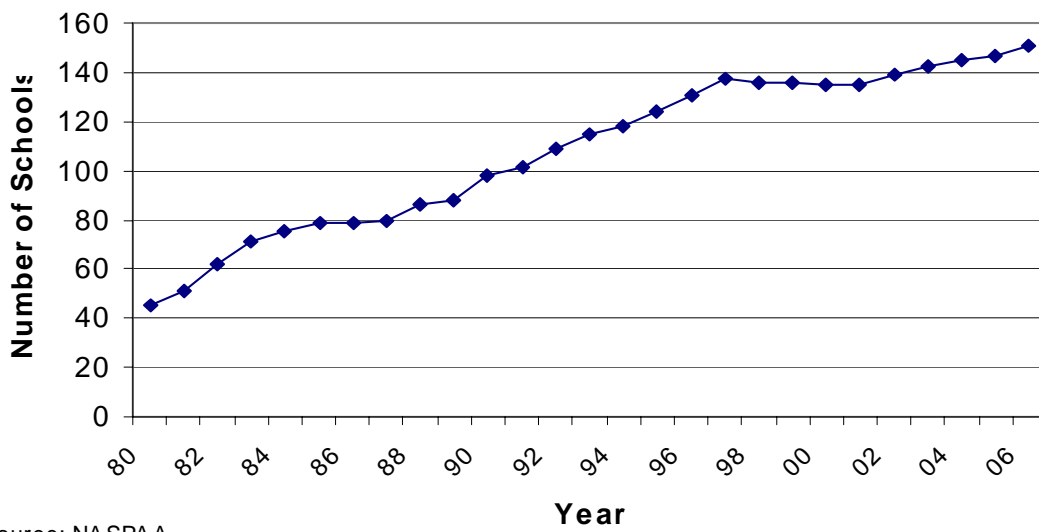
Source: US Department of Education

Figure 16 - NASPAA and APPAM Members, 1980-2006



Source: NASPAA and APPAM

Figure 17 - Number of Schools with NASPAA Accredited Degree Programs, 1980-2006



Source: NASPAA