

The Changing Climate for Public Affairs Education
NASPAA Presidential Address
Delivered on October 1, 2010
By Frances S. Berry

It is a pleasure and an honor to serve as your NASPAA president for the upcoming year. I look forward to working with all of you to make NASPAA valuable for our programs, our faculty and our students. My first official duty is to recognize and thank Jeff Rafel for his excellent and proactive leadership this past year. Jeff did yeoman's work chairing the MPA standards revision process two years ago, and was rewarded for his fine leadership by being asked to take the helm of NASPAA to oversee the extremely important process of implementing the new standards. He has done this well. Thanks are also due to Marv Mandell as he completes his term as Past President, and to Michelle Piskulich, who served this past year as Chair of COPRA, the accrediting body of NASPAA. Michelle has agreed to stay on for a second year as we continue making the transition to the new standards, and I thank her for her willingness to do so.

In the year ahead, NASPAA celebrates its fortieth year as an organization. NASPAA grew out of the Council on Graduate Education for Public Administration, a section of ASPA formed in 1959. In 1970, NASPAA was established, with the first standards for the MPA developed in 1974. Voluntary peer review started in 1977, and formal adoption of the accreditation process began in 1983. NASPAA has been well supported by the public affairs and administration community throughout its life. The association has grown from 205 members in 1979 to 275 today. Among our members, 169 schools now have at least one accredited master's program from NASPAA or are in the accreditation process currently. In a variety of ways, NASPAA is a strong and effective organization.

A brief review of past NASPAA presidential speeches suggests that many talks have begun with the message that currently we face real challenges, and certainly that is the case today. Our world, our country, and our member schools are all being asked to do more with less. We must reassess what is important that we do, and what is important in how we do it. We must continue to be inclusive and maintain high standards; and help both our member schools, and the broader community of public administration in which we live and work. I understand that in the Chinese language, the written character for "crisis" or "challenge" is the same as that for "opportunity," so that we can think of crisis and opportunity as two sides of one face. Today, I would like to highlight six opportunities and challenges that we face as program directors and faculty in public affairs, administration and policy education, or for short, "public affairs education."

Our first challenge and opportunity is to continue to develop and promote high quality public affairs education. This is NASPAA's core mission and purpose, and it is a goal that all of us as program directors and faculty have strong commitments to realize. NASPAA's new master's of public administration (MPA) and master's of public policy (MPP) accreditation standards are being rolled out this year for programs conducting their self-study for accreditation renewal or new accreditation. These new standards are the third generation of MPP and MPA degree accreditation standards. The first

generation standards in the 1970s were oriented towards inputs, uniformity and requirements. The second generation standards in the 1990s began a move towards mission-based accreditation, and kept curriculum requirements in key areas but encouraged our schools to link their purpose, their curriculum and their outputs. The new third generation standards emphasize mission-based, outcomes-oriented assessment with a focus on public values and student learning objectives and outcomes, while encouraging our programs to become more transparent and accountable to a wider audience of citizens and students. Our new standards allow our schools to keep common core elements of high quality public service education while tailoring their programs to their community and targeted students. In a world of specialized niches, NASPAA's standards are trying to keep the best of the common elements and quality for which our MPA and MPP brands are known, while also recognizing flexibility for our schools' curriculums. Again, public service values such as social equity, public service leadership, legal governance, transparency, and accountability are key and stable elements of our curriculums and new standards.

Under this bedrock goal of promoting high quality public affairs education, we face our second challenge and opportunity. Our commitment to inclusiveness and social equity, within our programs and within government employment, must not diminish, and indeed should be redoubled. We know that education and the networks students build in their public affairs programs can open doors of opportunity that last a lifetime. At Wednesday's Executive Council meeting, we discussed a new NASPAA initiative put forward by Dr. Susan Gooden and the Diversity Committee to provide extra mentoring and collegial assistance to minority-serving institutions offering public affairs education. Some of these institutions have been among the hardest hit of our programs, and we want to help keep their capacity and programs strong.

In Dan Mazmanian's 2005 presidential address (p. 4), he states, "in the upcoming year, NASPAA will amplify our role within the international community of public management and public affairs education programs ." He was right, of course, and in fact, I would argue that we can make that same statement today. This I view as our third challenge and opportunity. I realize that not all of NASPAA's programs have an international focus in their curriculum or their student bodies. Yet I believe all our schools share an interest in helping students understand how globalization is developing and its impacts on all levels of government. We all also share a common interest in helping countries around the globe develop and maintain high quality public administration training and advanced degree programs so that the world's governments are well run and live by public service values.

Let me just mention a few important highlights of the past few years on the international front. In the fall of 2008 we changed NASPAA's bylaws to allow international members into full membership. NASPAA now has member schools in Korea, Brazil, Italy and Kazakhstan. Under President Kathy Newcomer's leadership, in 2008, NASPAA organized an international conference on quality standards in public affairs education in Dubai that was well attended by representatives from several dozen countries. NASPAA's international Committee, under the able leadership of Ellen Schall and

Kathleen Beatty and others, has provided networking and dialogue on these issues for many years. Finally, this year's conference has an international track of panels to discuss global perspectives and program accreditation in PA curriculum.

NASPAA's work with international organizations has a lengthy history. We have worked with emerging organizations around the world, and hosted faculty representatives from many countries at NASPAA's annual conferences. In Latin America, INPAE—the Inter-American Network of Public Administration Education—was created in 2003 and supported by NASPAA. Although INPAE does not accredit programs, it promotes professional learning about quality public affairs education. NASPAA is considering collaborative arrangements for accrediting public administration programs with international associations, such as the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA), the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA), and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPACEE). We welcome their leaders, who are participating in our conference.

Our fourth challenge and opportunity is the changing landscape in which our programs and universities operate. We exist in a hyper-competitive environment with more programs online, more types of degrees available, and more niche marketing across the nonprofit, private and public sectors. The economy in most American states is still weak, and some state budgets have been hit very hard by the recession. I could give an entire speech on this topic alone, but let me focus on just one issue: university models of funding and enrollment. Over the summer, NASPAA prepared a study entitled “The Effects of the Recession and State Deficits on Graduate Public Administration and Affairs Programs”; this report gives a substantive and sometimes sobering view of universities across the fifty states.

I will not take the time to discuss all sections of the report. But one point that caught my attention is that our public affairs programs now exist in universities with two distinct models of funding. The traditional model—representing how a majority of our schools receive their funds—is one in which the budgets of departments are determined primarily by historical precedent and have little direct linkage with enrollments. Moreover, departments have few ways of augmenting their budgets by offering services to nontraditional clients. The second type of model is the “business model” – which has emerged in the last ten years. In it, department budgets are based on numbers of students served or course credit hours, making enrollment critical to a program's financial stability. The business model is spreading as university presidents try to encourage programs to increase their enrollments by allowing them to share in the financial rewards when they are successful. Under the business model, public affairs programs are given higher levels of fiscal autonomy to collect tuition or fees for online or off-site programs, or for professional-level programs, including programs that host international students. But since the MPA is a professional degree program, our student numbers are relatively small compared to most other departments, which also both undergraduate and graduate programs. Under the business model, nearly every public affairs program will have pressures to develop undergraduate programs. Our member schools are taking a variety

of approaches to what they offer undergraduates, including degrees in public policy, public administration, public service and urban affairs.

Clearly, a transition from the traditional model to the business model will require public affairs programs to be more entrepreneurial in developing markets and attracting students. The transition is likely to impose some tough choices on us about what curriculum we offer, how we deliver our classes to students, and how we maintain high quality in a rapidly changing environment. We will be asked to provide student outcome data and other measures of accountability to our universities and other stakeholders. Certainly our partnerships with local practitioners and communities will help us find the right balance. But all this change will require leadership, collaboration with faculty and stakeholders, and thoughtful decision making.

All of this suggests a fifth challenge and opportunity: that our programs—perhaps more than ever—have to demonstrate our purpose for existing; and our relevance to students, our universities, and our broader communities. We have to be highly accountable to a broader group of stakeholders than perhaps we have been in the past. We have a strong case to make, of course, but we are being asked to make that case more explicitly than we have in many years.

NASPAA has been helping us make this case through its branding of the MPP and MPA degrees for students and potential employers. Marketing our programs on and off campus is more important than ever. We are also helping programs by organizing—through the NASPAA Data Center—program data that can show stakeholders and potential students what our programs are doing. This project began nearly a decade ago, and it is bearing fruit under the leadership of National Council member Marilou Goodyear, and her dedicated data policy committee members. Accountability and data-driven decision-making are core elements of how our universities are being asked to function, and we want our programs to be leaders in this effort.

A sixth challenge and opportunity is keeping strong ties with practitioners and communities. It is a hallmark of public affairs education that we use conceptual and methodological skills to address applied issues that our society—and government in particular—faces. As part of our duty to work with practitioners and communities of practice, we are concerned with helping replenish the tidal wave of retirements in government service, and simultaneously insuring that our students have access to employment opportunities at all levels of government. NASPAA's Human Capital Campaign, ably led by Jack Knott, has been about educating the federal government on how to recruit college graduates; and how to revamp both law and procedures to make recruitment, retention and promotion as fair and transparent as possible. Connecting our students to government and nonprofit jobs, through many avenues, is an important function of each of our programs.

As I conclude my talk, I want to note that I am grateful for NASPAA. It serves many purposes, but one that is important and not often mentioned is that NASPAA serves as a forum for us to listen, exchange stories, and learn from our peers. I am hopeful that each

of us—along with the colleagues in our programs—will continue to be optimistic and improve in what we do and what we offer our students and our communities. I am confident that NASPAA will continue to serve us as a network in which we can grow and learn, and be of tremendous value to our students and our programs.

References

Mazmanian, Daniel. 2005. “NASPAA in the 21st Century”. Taken from the website of the National Association of Schools of Public Administration and Affairs, Washington, DC. On September 22, 2010.

http://www.naspaa.org/about_naspaa/about/presidential_address/Dan_Mazmanian.pdf

Teicher, Paul. 2010 “The Effects of the Recession and State Deficits on Higher Education and NASPAA Member Programs.” NASPAA Research Paper. National Association of Schools of Public Administration and Affairs, Washington, DC.