

Teaching Diversity And Cultural Competency In Public Administration Programs: What Are We Doing?"

*Ethel Williams, Ph.D.
School of Public Administration
University of Nebraska at Omaha*

Background

- *The question of how diversity issues should be addressed is not a new one to public administration and public policy programs.*
- *Ongoing discussions at NASPAA and COPRA highlight the need for NASPAA accredited programs to take a serious look at the issue.*
- *The text of the new proposed standard, "Diversity Across the Curriculum" reads:*
 - *"Program activities must prepare students to work in and contribute to diverse workplaces and communities. Consequently, courses, curriculum materials, and other program activities should expose students to differences relating to social identity categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, and disability."*

Background

- *J-PAE devoted the entire Winter 2007 edition to addressing the question of diversity in public administration education.*
- *This presentation stems from an article entitled, *Teaching Diversity in Public Administration: A Missing Component?* which was published in that edition.*
- *The published study observed whether a sampling of NASPAA accredited programs had courses aimed at fostering an understanding of diversity.*

Study Rationale

- Since its inception, the discipline of public administration has been troubled by its mission to educate both the practitioner and the academician (Golembiewski, 1977, Denhardt, 2001).
- Issues such as ethical behavior, social equity, and the impact of diversity on public institutions and policies are matters that conjoin public administration scholarship and practice.
- These issues are not standard in the curriculum of public administration education.

Study Rationale

- Both ethics and social equity have received intermittent attention in the professional journals and in the curriculum offerings of schools associated with NASPAA (Bowman, 1990, Lee and Paddock, 1992, Gooden and Myers, 2004).
- This study explores the question of whether diversity has received similar interest in public administration education.
- By observing the curriculum at fifty NASPAA accredited schools, this study concludes that teaching diversity in the public administration/public affairs curriculum is not overlooked.

Study Rationale

- The educational advantages of diversity in the curriculum have been examined by several studies (Hurtado, 2005, Maruyama and Moreno, 2000, Niemann and Maruyama, 2005).
- Diversity education was found to foster:
 - self-reflection,
 - greater personal development,
 - greater intellectual and social self-confidence,
 - greater critical thinking and problem solving skills,
 - greater acceptance and openness to racial and cultural change (Astin, 1993, Chang, Denson, Saenz and Misa, 2006, Niemann and Maruyama, 2005).

Study Rationale

- Other studies have shown that diversity education creates greater social concern and humanitarian values thereby fostering greater community service participation (Chang and Astin, 1997).
- Additionally, greater civic engagement, which leads to greater participation in community affairs, creates an atmosphere that serves in the development of a democratic state (Niemann and Maruyama, 2005). The development of a democratic state is one of the goals important to the field of public administration (McSwite, 2005).

Study Design and Methodology

- This study aims to determine the extent to which emphasis is placed on diversity in public administration/public affairs curriculum at NASPAA member schools.
- It looks at course titles and catalog descriptions to observe the coverage of race, nationality, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and class.

Study Design and Methodology

- The unit of analysis is fifty public administration/public policy programs - 37.31 percent of NASPAA accredited programs listed on the website.
- The data were generated from a systematic random sample of the accredited programs listed on the NASPAA website.
- The characteristics of the programs' host schools varied. Some were private, but overwhelmingly they were public institutions. The schools were geographically dispersed including 31 states and the District of Columbia.

Study Design and Methodology

- Data were collected using the following descriptions.
 - **race, ethnicity** – courses covering any of the populations identified in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act as protected classes
 - **religion** – courses focused on religious theory, practices, and influence public administration/public policy.
 - **nationality**- courses exploring issues associated administering public programs to non-native American populations in the United States
 - **gender**- courses focused on women and public administration either in the workforce as administrators, decision makers or courses addressing gender disparities.

Study Design and Methodology

- Data were collected using the following descriptions..
 - **sexual orientation** – courses addressing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues.
 - **disability** - covers extensively the responsibility of administrators in dealing with issues of the disabled or differently abled including but not limited to Americans with Disabilities Act, administering agencies serving disabled, mentally challenged.
 - **class** – provides an understanding of the role of public administrators in issues of poverty or socioeconomic disparities.

Study Design and Methodology

- Data were collected using the following descriptions..
 - **age** – courses exploring the unique issues associated with managing an aging workforce, issues associated with the administration of the Age Discrimination Act, and other similar factors.
 - **multiple or general coverage** – courses providing a general exposure to all aspects of diversity. Courses placed in this category may also combine the study of one or more elements of diversity such as age and gender or race and socioeconomic disparities.

Study Limitations

- Observing catalog descriptions rather than syllabi. These are broader and often do not show specific teaching modules.
- The generalizability of the study may be limited based on the small sample of only 50 units
- Because there is no standard definition for diversity, or many of its key elements, the descriptors used in the word search may have excluded courses.
- This study does not consider diversity courses that students are permitted to take that may be offered in other programs or departments unless they are included among the list of public administration courses in the catalog.

Findings

- **General findings**
 - 28 programs (56%) had at least one diversity course and 20% (10 programs) had more than one course.
 - The largest number of courses were those providing a general overview or covering multiple aspects of diversity.
 - 17 programs (34%) had courses which covered more than one element of diversity. Of those seventeen, three programs had more than one course.
 - When diversity is disambiguated into its various elements two of the descriptors, religion and sexual orientation, had no independent courses in the programs sampled. These topics were covered, however, in the general or multiple coverage courses.

Findings

■ Gender issues

- Seven schools (14%) had at least one course covering gender issues.
- Two of those seven had two courses devoted to the topic.
- This category was that it appeared in all of the courses covering multiple issues

Findings

■ Race and Ethnicity

- Four schools had courses covering one or more aspects of this element
- One school had more than one course

■ Class and Age

- Three schools had courses covering topics emphasizing socioeconomic disparities and age issues.

Findings

■ Nationality and disability

- Only one school had a course with this descriptor
- A large number of schools had courses in comparative administration that addressed, or sometimes focused on, specific nationalities.
- None of the schools addressed the element within the context of diversity as defined for this study.

Conclusion

- Teaching diversity in the public administration/public affairs curriculum is not a missing component.
- Over one-half of the programs in the sample deemed it necessary to include diversity in their curriculum.
- Given the conceptual framework, this indicates that a majority of public administration programs recognize the importance of this topic in preparing students.
- Of particular importance is the inclusion of gender and gender issues in the curriculum.