14. Challenges and Trends in Public Administration
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Recognize and defend the unique contribution of public administration
The foundation for a new strategic plan should be a clear view of what public administration has and can continue to contribute to governance in the United States. Our simplistic stereotypes of the earlier stages in the development of public administration and our rejection of the historical roots of the field reinforce the attacks that come from critics. If we present the origins of the field as grounded in strict separation of politics and administration and characterize early public administrators as value-free technocrats who simply carry out the instructions of elected officials, we provide erroneous evidence to critics who ask why public administrators have gotten involved in policy and why “bureaucrats” have so much power. It is not surprising that they would eagerly seek to return P.A. to a narrow role. Often the counter-argument is presented—as part of the standard story of how P.A. developed—that the field began in dichotomy but has evolved into a broader role, but we have trouble legitimizing this approach as a “new” stance.

Public administration in the U.S.\(^1\) began in a complementary relationship with elected officials. For the elements of politics and professional administration to come together to form a whole, they had to be differentiated and P.A. had to be somewhat insulated from partisan interference and micro-management by elected officials, but from the beginning the interaction between public administrators and elected officials and the direct relationship between administrators and the public has been recognized by contemporaneous scholars and practitioners. Public administration veered toward strict separation during the orthodoxy of the twenties and thirties, but political-administrative relationships have always been characterized by complementarity. The specific terms of the relationship have evolved over time and there are new challenges in defining the relationship today that are addressed below. Still, public administrators have always

- helped to shape policy that serves the public,
- implemented policy and delivered services with a commitment to effectiveness and fairness, accountability to political oversight and responsiveness to the public,
- managed resources with a commitment to efficiency and economy, and
- acted with independence guided by a commitment to the public interest.

A strategic plan should seek to ensure that P.A. can continue to make all these contributions in the future. In so doing, we are building on the heritage of the field, not trying to defend a recent expanded role.

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\(^1\) Mel Dubnick in his background paper is correct that Americans have been parochial in our thinking about P.A. It is important to recognize, however, that the origins of public administration in the U.S. are different from the development of state administration in Europe, as Richard Stillman has argued in his work. Creating a professionally-competent public service in a highly politicized setting has been a different task than introducing democratic ideals to well-established bureaucracies in centralized states.
**Expand the commitment to equity**

Building on long-standing concerns, an area that deserves increased emphasis is the commitment to promoting equity. We ignore our heritage if we argue that “equity” is a post-sixties discovery in P.A. Part of establishing a modern, professional, democratic public administration in the U.S. and other countries was promoting standards of fairness and due process and reducing favoritism and arbitrary treatment of citizens. “Equality” has been an ideal in the U.S. from its beginnings, although we have a long history of systemic and specific shortcomings in achieving it. ² What is relatively recent is the realization that there are basic inequalities in society that will never be corrected by simply treating everyone equally and that existing government programs can perpetuate inequality. We began in the “new public administration” to consider the position of the field regarding redistribution of resources to reduce inequalities.

As George Frederickson has argued in a recent *PA TIMES*, there is a widespread perception of unfairness in society and the feeling that government contributes to it. A panel of the National Academy of Public Administration is working to develop standards and measures of equity that can be used to better monitor the performance of government agencies and to guide efforts to elevate the attention to equity. A commitment to equity should be an overriding concern in the work administrators do in policy formulation, implementation, and management because equity issues arise in all these areas.³ The NAPA panel hopes to develop an assessment of the state of equity in major policy areas in the U.S. Individual agencies can use the same standards to conduct an equity inventory of their programs, procedures, and performance. The objective is to identify shortcomings and undertake corrective change regarding the following:

A. Procedural fairness. Examination of problems or issues in procedural rights (due process), treatment in procedural sense (equal protection), and application of eligibility criteria for existing policies and programs. The review should include management practices involving areas such as hiring, promotion, and award of contracts.

B. Access—Distributional equity. Review of current policies, services, and practices to determine the level of access to services/benefits and analysis of reasons for unequal access.

² Furthermore, there is tension between the ideals of equality and freedom. We have probably done more to advance the latter than the former in the U.S., and used the protection of freedom and individual initiative as a reason for not seeking to greater equality.

³ It is not the expectation that public administrators within an agency will become policy campaigners offering gratuitous advice to elected officials about new programs that they favor to make society more equitable. What these administrators should do is analyze unmet needs and identify ways to improve existing policies and programs to advance equity. The public administration “community” may raise issues about new approaches to policy that address pervasive problems, e.g., universal access to health care or eliminating differentials in criminal penalties that have clear racial impact.
A visible commitment by public administrators and public agencies to equity and a willingness to engage in discourse with citizens about how to increase equity is the right thing to do and reflects the professional value commitment of the field to democratic-constitutional government (to use Rosenbloom’s phrase). Furthermore, it addresses an important cause of public distrust of government. Consistent with the recognition of the positive heritage of P.A., we must avoid presenting ourselves as enlightened and earlier generations as benighted in handling equity issues.

**Respond proactively to the “new governance”**

This is a big area but a few comments can be made. We should recognize that the environment in which public administration operates is changing and respond positively to these changes. In a world of new governance described so well by Don Kettl, public agencies work along with nonprofits in addressing public problems and increasingly nonprofit and private business are used as the agent for delivering public services. Less and less is “governance” determined exclusively within the governmental process, within one level of government, or at the local level within a single government. The contribution of P.A. is not necessarily diminished by these chances since public administrators can play an initiating and integrative role in mixed-participant and cross-jurisdictional networks. On the hand, public agencies are increasingly sharing tasks with other organizations or monitoring the work of contractors rather than delivering services directly. Public administrators do not have a monopoly of expertise or information as interest and advocacy groups become more active, and no corner on public serving values as nonprofits promote their own views of how to serve the public.

One can ask, then, what are the distinguishing features of public administration and what does it bring to the new governance? First, professional administrators and their agencies bring a distinctive orientation to the process. They help to shape and articulate goals for a jurisdiction or policy/service area and develop ways of determining whether the goals are being met. It is natural for public administrators to be concerned with an overarching vision for the activities in which they are engaged as opposed to the separate and partial visions that other participants in governance may have. Second, administrators promote coherence, coordination, and continuity. These qualities are hard to maintain with many participants and fluid arrangements. Third, public administrators infuse the process with public service values and integrity. As noted above, this is not to say that other participants are not committed and ethical. Public administrators should, however, have commitments to serve that are --

- Broader--balancing specific with broad purposes and short-term with long-term interests
• Deeper--grounded in the law and regulation, in the accumulated knowledge and experience of the "agency," and in the enduring purposes that it promotes

• Higher--guided by ethical commitments that are based on virtue, principle, and regime values.

Furthermore, public administrators are committed to the democratic process and seek to insure that decision making in new governance processes is open and inclusive. They also seek to insure that the process of implementation and management of programs includes appropriate provisions for accountability. Public administrators know a lot about accountability and their values support it. Accountability will be a major concern when there are many actors and no one is clearly in charge.

As professionals, public administrators have special competence in addition to their special orientation and values. Fundamentally, they understand the process of governance, although this understanding must be continuously updated as the process is being transformed. They are expert at managing organizations, agreements with other organizations, and alliances of organizations. They are effective at interacting with the full range of participants in governance and at communicating through a full array of media. They have strategic planning and systematic decision making capabilities. They can lead even those who are not subordinates or followers. They have methods for measuring performance and evaluating results. They can design and guide new governance arrangements.

In short, public administrators have appropriate orientation, values, skills, and experience for new governance. MPA programs and ASPA activities need to work on developing them further.

**Strategic manpower development issues in public sector**

It would appear that we are seeing the start of a growing number of retirements from government service. The need to educate and develop public administrators is surely going to increase. MPA programs must be ready to meet this challenge, and ASPA needs to contribute to expanded professional development.

It may be useful to consider a campaign to recruit a “new generation of public servants.” It seems likely that political leaders across the ideological spectrum would support this campaign. The call to service is not to have a secure position or to be a compliant technocrat—stereotypes about the nature of public service in the past. The new generation of public servants is made up of committed professionals who bring distinctive competence and values to serve the public, the community, and elected leaders in government. The new generation of public servants does not work in closed bureaucracies but rather works in flexible organizations. It is important that this campaign not be another case of dumping on the past in order to cope with the present. How do we know that this new generation can have the qualities and make the contributions that are expected and required? They build on the “older” generations and the traditions of service and excellence they established. A new generation will stand on
the shoulders of dedicated public servants while at the same time facing new challenges. Although this would not be the lead message in the campaign, it should not be lost.

**Issues in research and doctoral programs**

One can make two observations about the academic field of public administration at the doctoral level that I think are related. First, in the academic multi-discipline of public administration, the development of empirically-based research has been slow in coming. Much of the general public administration literature promotes normative positions with little research foundation. Although there is broad consensus on the norms being advanced within the public administration community, the limited empirical research weakens the credibility of these norms among people outside the P.A. circle where many believe that a commitment to public service is a mask of respectability worn by self-serving (or uncaring, lethargic, wasteful, power-hungry, etc.) bureaucrats. I am not advocating that quantitative research drive out our attention to values; indeed, part of the research effort should focus on the value preferences of public administrators, how they are fostered, and what impact they have. The credibility and impact of our research depends on incorporating more social science research methodology along with other methodological approaches. ASPA should look for additional ways to promote high quality research in its journals, publications, and meetings (e.g., building on the successful Van Riper Symposium in 2002.)

Second, there is an important manpower development issue in academia. As Mark Holzer commented at the last NASPAA meeting, “we are not replacing ourselves.” The number of new doctoral degrees awarded to persons interested in faculty positions that combine teaching and research may not be sufficient to provide high quality candidates for the new and replacement faculty positions that are being filled. P.A. faculty members, like practicing public administrators, are going to start retiring in growing numbers in a few years. We need to attract more doctoral students.

The connection between the two observations is that we need to recruit more students who are interested in entering research-based doctoral programs directly or soon after completing undergraduate degrees. Many of our doctoral programs are built on an MPA-base. This is appropriate because teaching and research on public administration can be enhanced by having a grounding in professional education and practice. This approach, however, presumes that students are first attracted to professional service and then shift their orientation to an academic career. Students primarily interested in an academic career may not even consider P.A. despite the fact that opportunities for faculty positions are very attractive. The professional orientation also has an impact on interest in research. The first task of doctoral programs is to reorient many students from asking “what can I learn to perform better on the job” to asking “what do we know and how can we expand what we know?” The former attitude is appropriate for the MPA degree but may limit at least initially the interest in new research, or, to use a hackneyed phrase, pushing back the boundaries of knowledge.

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4 In my doctoral foundations of p.a. class, I have students search for empirical research studies that deal with the big issues we are studying. They typically have a difficult search and come back with very few examples.
Doctoral programs can give more emphasis to research and be adjusted to accommodate students without the MPA. Along with these changes, I suggest that we consider a second campaign to recruit “New Governance Scholars.” These are students who will enter doctoral programs in public administration and public policy to gain understanding of how societies govern themselves and to generate new knowledge about the formation and implementation of policy, political-administrative relations, implementation, the relationship between citizens and government, the management of public resources, the performance of public-private networks. Hopefully, this approach will attract more students who would normally go into mainline social science disciplines—Political Science, Economics, Psychology—into public administration.