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DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND ADMINISTRATION: ISSUES FOR THE 1990S

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a 1990 survey of 60 NASPAA doctoral programs in public affairs and administration. It presents descriptive data about a variety of facets of public affairs and administration doctoral programs: program and institutional structure, size, student diversity, number of degrees granted, and faculty hires. Respondents identified five broad areas as sources for special concern for the design and operation of
doctrinal programs: (1) problems that stem from limited resource availability; (2) issues related to the quality of the educational program; (3) questions dealing with the definition of the scope of offerings and requirements; (4) considerations for the needs of part-time students; and (5) issues of minority recruitment and retention. The paper concludes with a discussion of issues that the survey findings pose for doctoral education in public affairs and administration.

INTRODUCTION

A perennial question for the public affairs and administration community concerns the nature, quality, and direction of doctoral education. During the past decade, numerous articles and papers have addressed various aspects of doctoral education in public affairs and administration. The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) published a policy on doctoral education as early as 1975, revised it in 1983 and 1987, and established a Doctoral Programs Committee in 1989.

The swirl of debate in recent years surrounding the quality and direction of doctoral programs in public affairs and administration suggests that it may be useful to take stock of doctoral education as we enter a new decade. This paper reviews issues facing doctoral education in public affairs and administration for the 1990s. It reports a 1990 survey of 55 NASPAA doctoral programs in public affairs and administration.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

NASPAA's concern with doctoral programs began in the late 1970s within the Comprehensive Schools Section. The Section considered the doctorate at meetings in San Antonio in 1980 and Indianapolis and Lexington in 1981. As an outgrowth of these discussions, Guthrie Birkhead and Dick Netzer prepared "The Doctorate in Public Affairs and Administration," which described the status of the doctorate in public affairs and administration circa 1981.

Birkhead and Netzer summarized opinion at the time: "It is fair to say that most members have concerns about the present condition of PAA [public affairs and administration] doctoral education...." Perhaps the chief issue Birkhead and Netzer identified from the 1981 survey was the status of the DPA. NASPAA's 1975 guidelines had indicated that the DPA was intended for enhancement of the managerial skills of practitioners, but Birkhead and Netzer contended that by 1981 most institutions engaged in doctoral education had come to believe that the doctorate should center on research. They, together with the members of the Comprehensive Schools Section, firmly expressed a preference for the centrality of research rather than practice as the core of the doctoral degree, regardless of whether it was called a PhD or DPA.

Birkhead and Netzer also raised some practical concerns. These concerns included the validity of part-time study, the relationship between faculty size and number of students, the relationship between doctoral and masters programs, and the perceived worth of the degree outside of public affairs and administration programs.

Shortly after Birkhead and Netzer's 1981 survey of doctoral programs, the issue of the quality of doctoral research and education became closely intertwined with a more general debate on the quality of research in public administration. The debate was set off by McCurdy and Cleary's criticism of the low quality of doctoral dissertations and Garson and Overman's finding regarding the low sophistication of sponsored public management research. Subsequently, White and Stallings indicated that
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questions are presented and analyzed in subsequent sections of this paper.

Institutional Structure and Control

Throughout the 1980s, the structure and control of doctoral programs within university structures was a major issue. In 1987 the NASPAA doctoral policy stated that "a strong institutional research program creates an opportunity for excellent doctoral training...", but warned that "... when a strong institutional thrust toward research is missing, launching a doctoral program will not by itself create it."\(^{(11)}\) The NASPAA policy also recognized that the institutional administration of the doctoral program is a major determinant of a school's ability to affect the quality of instructional content, admissions criteria, financial support, dissertation processes, and faculty recruitment.

Of the 55 NASPAA programs offering a doctoral degree and responding to the survey, 35 were freestanding and 20 offered the doctoral degree in cooperation with other schools or departments. Table 1 shows that organizational control was heavily skewed toward separate schools or colleges, as represented by members of NASPAA's Comprehensive Schools Section. Autonomous, largely self-contained programs are clearly the norm, but types of cooperative arrangements also appear to be very common.

Qualitative responses indicated a small number of programs were concerned about "developing new relations with other programs throughout the university." Few concerns were expressed about the relationship with the Graduate School, with only one school reporting that "we are extremely worried about governance of the program...."
TABLE 1

Institutional Location of NASPAA PhD Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Location</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center/Institute</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Political Science</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Public Administration/Urban Affairs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/College</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Admissions

The two aspects of admissions investigated in the survey were the trends of PhD and DPA admissions and full-time and part-time admissions during the past five years. Table 2 presents aggregate data on admissions to the 55 doctoral programs. Total PhD and DPA admissions grew annually during the five years. Overall, 2,305 persons were admitted to the 55 doctoral programs from 1985 through 1989. The largest growth in admissions occurred in 1986, followed by 1989, the most recent year for which data were available.

The traditional expectation of the doctoral student is 2 to 5 years of full-time residence and study. Many programs reinforce this expectation with a residency requirement. This expectation has been modified in many doctoral programs of public affairs and administration, for reasons related to demographic patterns and the attributes of the field. Table 2 indicates that PhD programs admitted almost twice as many full-time students as part-time students while DPA program part-time admissions were more than twice the number of full-time.

Several schools report the need either for "targeting recruitment to maintain a more appropriate balance between part-time and full-time students" or looking for ways to increase "funding and recruitment of full-time students." As reported later in this paper, however, there is a more widespread and general concern for recruiting high quality students.

Diversity

Another aspect of admissions is the need for attracting qualified women and minorities to pursue doctoral education in public affairs. Our attempt to collect and aggregate data regarding characteristics of doctoral students admitted over the five years was only partly successful. Some schools did not report the
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increases in the number of women admitted. African-Americans and Hispanics are substantially under-represented.

Data for several representative schools that reported complete information is detailed in Table 5. The schools are categorized according to geographic region (for example, northeast, southeast), public or private, main or branch campus, and urban or non-urban environment. Most of these schools are comprehensive schools of public affairs and administration. Minorities are under-represented in this sample just as they are in the larger population, with only one of the six representative schools reporting more than 10 percent black or Hispanic enrollments. Many schools reported that recruitment of minority students was an issue. One school simply observed that there were "no minority candidates for admission."

Degrees Granted

The issue of granting the DPA or PhD degree was hotly debated in the early 1980s. Plant and Stillman(12) examined the issue, concluding that public reaction against government professionalism in the late 1970s and 1980s and a new research emphasis seriously challenged the assumptions upon which the DPA degree was designed. The NASPAA Policy on Doctoral Education states: "The use of the PhD or DPA degree is heavily influenced by historical accidents at particular institutions...."(13)

Table 6 reports data on doctoral degrees granted in public affairs and administration. In the five year period from 1985-89, a total of 764 degrees were awarded by the 55 doctoral programs surveyed.

Table 6 shows that while the number of DPA degrees remained steady over the five years, the number of PhD degrees that were awarded increased dramatically in 1987. Prior to 1987, PhD degrees granted were decreasing. Evidence of probable

---

**TABLE 3**

Admissions by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**TABLE 4**

Admissions by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

information, others had incomplete information, and some have programs so small that percentages would be misleading. In addition, the data did not distinguish between international and American students.

Because of variability in responses, the data on ethnicity and gender in Tables 3 and 4 were drawn only from programs whose information appeared complete and accurate. Men appear to outnumber women by about 2 to 1 in most schools. However, much of the growth in admissions appears to be related to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5 (Continued)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### DOCTORAL EDUCATION

#### Table 5

| School 5 | SW, Public | Female | 22 | 48.9 | Black | 5 | 11.1 |
| School 5 | Main Campus | Male | 23 | 51.1 | Hispanic | 0 | 0 |
| School 5 | Urban | Total | 45 | 100. | Asian | 5 | 11.1 |
| School 5 | | White | 35 | 77.8 | Other | 0 | 0 |
| School 5 | | Total | 45 | 100. | |

| School 6 | W, Private | Female | 50 | 31.0 | Black | 2 | 1.2 |
| School 6 | Main Campus | Male | 111 | 69.0 | Hispanic | 8 | 5.0 |
| School 6 | Urban | Total | 159 | 100. | Asian | 75 | 47.2 |
| School 6 | | White | 68 | 42.8 | Other | 6 | 3.8 |
| School 6 | | Total | 159 | 100. | |

#### Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctoral Degrees Granted by Type of Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
continuation of growth for the doctoral degree is that several new doctoral programs have been initiated within the last several years. In addition, 10 schools reported in the survey that they were considering doctoral degrees in public affairs and administration.

The Academic Market

Although data are available about predicted shortages in many academic markets in the 1990s, the market situation in public affairs and administration is not clear. The survey found that the 55 doctoral degree-granting NASPAA schools hired 204 faculty over the past five years, less than 1 per school per year. The pattern of hires falls in three major areas, in order of demand: (1) public administration, management and organization theory; (2) economics and public finance; and (3) public policy and law (see Table 7).

The 204 faculty hired compared with 764 degrees granted, and 2,305 admitted over the same five year period. While there are problems that must be kept in mind when comparing these numbers, especially the time lags between admissions, graduations, and hires, several inferences are plausible. The number of admissions greatly exceeds the number of graduates, suggesting that many graduates may go either to other academic programs, non-doctoral degree granting programs, foreign institutions, or to non-academic positions.

Several programs expressed concern over hiring qualified faculty, especially minorities. One program was concerned about "maintaining the huge resource (faculty and financial) commitment required by the doctoral program--balancing it against other programs." Another program raised a cautionary note concerning graduates and hiring: "The only concern is in the placement of new PhDs in public policy, as there is not the depth of a market for these students as found for new economists, political scientists, etc. Consequently, we expect to keep our PhD program small."

Respondents perceived that the demand was increasing for highly qualified degree holders while the supply was declining. One school remarked: "Interest in PhD study by highly qualified students is not close to the level of market demand for PhD graduates." Another claimed: "We could probably place twice as many PhDs as we are producing in the PP/PA field." Clearly, there is a need for a systematic study of academic supply and demand in the field of public affairs and administration. In the meantime, there is a perceived shortage of qualified doctorates in public affairs and administration, at least among the degree-granting schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Number of Hires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics/Public Finance</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Affairs/Comparative Administration</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration/Management/Organization Theory</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy and Law</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCERNS IDENTIFIED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Although the 55 respondents identified a broad range of issues that were of particular concern to their individual institutions, five broad issue areas emerged from the responses that suggest a set of shared problems within the field. The clusters of issues are: (1) problems that stem from limited resource availability; (2) issues related to the quality of the educational program; (3) questions that deal with the definition of the scope of offerings and requirements; (4) considerations for the needs of part-time students; and (5) issues of minority recruitment. While we have presented these issue areas as separate clusters, many of them are interrelated and produce very entrenched problems.

Questions of Resources

Given the financial pinch in most academic institutions today, it is hardly surprising that the respondents expressed concern about the impact of limited resources on their doctoral programs. The limitations affected faculty, students, and basic facilities within the programs.

Concerns about faculty resources involved limited ability to hire new faculty and the impact of too few faculty members on teaching loads, particularly on dissertation supervision. Respondents lamented that "budgetary constraints prevent us from hiring additional faculty to meet the demand of a growing program" and faculty were "stretched too thin."

Probably the most prominent resource issue involved student financial aid, which is critical for attracting high quality students and facilitating their prompt completion of the doctorate. Student resource concerns involved the availability of financial support for doctoral candidates as well as funds for hiring teaching and research assistants. Some respondents indicated that shortages of funds for student assistance created instability in the criteria for receiving aid. For example, one respondent noted: "Due to funding shortfalls, eligibility criteria for in-state and out-of-state tuition waivers were continually changing." Another respondent observed that limited funds "has led to shifting money from existing students to incoming students."

The fiscal issues also involved problems with the graduate school for support for the number of PhD students that were desired as well as university support for international students. Several programs commented on the difficulty of obtaining funding for students at the dissertation stage.

Some of the resource concerns raised by respondents extended beyond considerations of the doctoral program to broader issues of institutional support. For example, one respondent indicated that limited resources impacted the ability to maintain an up-to-date library for both faculty and student use. Another suggested a more basic issue of survival--that it was difficult to maintain the huge financial resource commitment required by the doctoral program in face of demands of other programs within the department.

The Quality of the Doctoral Program

Throughout the 1980s, questions related to the quality of doctoral education were the subject of debate within the public administration field. The respondents to the survey suggest that we have entered the 1990s with little resolved in this area, but that we may be asking the right questions.

The respondents expressed concern about quality issues in many areas; dissertation production and supervision were perhaps the most frequently mentioned issues. Many programs appear to believe that neither faculty nor students have developed high
quality expectations for dissertation research. In some cases, respondents questioned the historical discretion of the individual faculty member to supervise dissertation work; others were uneasy about the norms that guided faculty members as they developed mentoring relationships with their doctoral students.

Quality issues were also raised in conjunction with student admissions. One of these involved admissions criteria. Some programs did not appear to be comfortable with the criteria—some of which are imposed by the campus graduate school—that were used to scrutinize applicants. Several programs were particularly concerned about the lack of high quality applicants; another commented on the difficulty of ensuring that capable students were admitted. One respondent summarized the difficulty of the admission task: "How to ensure capable students are admitted, provide opportunity, but prevent the admission of persons who will drag down the quality of the program."

Respondents observed that variability of skill levels among students produced difficulties. They were particularly concerned about satisfying the research tool needs for a highly diverse group of students—some of whom needed econometrics, others content analysis, others mathematical programming, factor analysis, or system dynamics.

Some of the quality concerns raised by respondents arose from structural factors that may have been peculiar to their programs. For example, one respondent noted that quality control was extremely difficult because the program was relatively decentralized. Decentralization made it difficult to assure high standards and consistency throughout the program. Another program that had reported similar problems indicated that it was attempting to develop standards for constructing a dissertation committee and providing guidance for instructors teaching in the doctoral program as a means for reducing problems associated with decentralization.

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Defining the Scope of the Program

Many doctoral programs were grappling with the difficulties of defining the public administration field as they create or modify degree requirements and assessed their ability to provide a variety of course offerings. While this problem appears to be both ubiquitous and universal, it also may be an inevitable but important quest within the public administration field.

Respondents reported concern about the dimensions of core curricula requirements, particularly methodology requirements and examination modes that appeared to be both fair and valid. Issues related to a balance between requirements and flexibility or specialization were also noted.

Many respondents commented on the difficulty of developing a core curriculum that fit the competencies of the faculty as well as the various definitions of the public administration field. This involved a balance between practical vs. theoretical courses and a decision about uniformity of requirements. One program noted that it was attempting to develop a program structure flexible enough to meet requirements of four diverse specializations while maintaining uniformly rigorous standards. Another program was struggling with the definition of the doctoral program as a post-masters professional degree or a research degree and, as such, the extent to which there should be a common core of advanced research methods courses and seminars beyond the masters core. Several respondents reported struggling with the definition of quality for a DPA program as contrasted with a PhD.

Several programs commented on the process of developing interdisciplinary relationships with other departments. As one put it, to offer an effective ind depth experience, it was necessary to utilize courses and faculty from other departments. If courses from other departments were utilized, special problems were
experienced. Yet because of the small size of many programs, it was difficult to offer a range of doctoral level seminars. As one respondent observed: "When entering PhD classes are too small, it is difficult to justify the cost of staffing a sufficient variety of advanced PhD courses and seminars."

Part-time Students

As Table 2 indicates, enrollments of part-time students have almost doubled during the last five years. The respondents raised a number of problems that revolved around the special needs of this type of student. There appears to be a concern about the completion rate for dissertations for part-time students who find it difficult to balance their other demands with the dissertation writing process. Respondents also focused on availability of financial aid to part-time students (since many sources, by definition, exclude these students); admission policies and requirements; residency requirements; time limitations for coursework; and access to libraries and time for library research.

One respondent noted that its doctoral program was the first part-time program within the university; thus it faced special problems within the institution. Another was particularly concerned about targeting recruitment to maintain a balance between full-time and part-time students. One noted that because many of its students were part-time, the faculty spent considerable effort expediting their completion of the program. That faculty also was concerned about finding sufficient funding to make it possible for more of the students to enroll full-time.

Minority Recruitment

Despite some efforts within the field (such as NASPAA's Minority Fellowship Program), doctoral programs in public administration have not been successful in recruiting and retaining minority students. This pattern is also paralleled by similar problems in minority faculty recruitment and retention. Respondents signalled their difficulties in this area; some expressed a lack of knowledge about how to proceed in developing targeted recruitment efforts. The survey suggested that many programs were not familiar with successful models of minority recruitment; as a result the respondents expressed frustration about this issue.

One program noted that budget constraints prevented it from hiring added faculty to provide gender and racial diversity. According to one respondent, interest in doctoral study by highly qualified students was not even close to the level of market demands for graduates, particularly minorities. As a result, "until this situation changes, affirmative action programs for faculty hiring cannot be expected to succeed for the total group of competing schools."

ISSUES FOR DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

This study indicates that there are some shared values and approaches within public affairs and administration doctoral programs. At the same time, it is obvious that programs are confronting a number of difficult problems as they constantly examine their work. Some of the problems are program specific and require attention within the specific constraints and possibilities of each university setting. Others, however, would profit from a broader discussion within the public administration community, for example, within NASPAA, ASPA and other public administration venues.

We highlight six areas for continuing discussion. We raise the issues as questions that may or may not be resolved in a collective or field setting. However, we believe that discussion would be useful to all.
1. **Hiring patterns.** Survey data suggest that public affairs and administration programs may not be hiring many graduates from the field. What does this pattern tell us? Is it positive or negative? Do we need to think about some sort of balance between specialized fields and a more generic public administration focus?

2. **The numbers questions.** For some, the increase in the number of PhD students and the quality questions raised by respondents suggest that we may be producing (or at least admitting) too many students. Is it true? Can we deal with increased quality at the current enrollment rate? What about the faculty needs within the next decade as 1960s hires move into retirement? Are we anticipating these needs?

3. **The quality debate.** In many ways, the debate on quality of research has been a surrogate for the inevitable methodological battles that surround a field such as public administration. Is it productive to continue this debate as it has been waged? What can NASPAA do in this area?

4. **Scope of offerings.** The NASPAA Doctoral Committee plans to do an analysis of the requirements within the doctoral programs that responded to the survey. Will such an analysis be useful to individual programs? Can we learn from one another, not in a standards-setting sense, but by collegial sharing?

5. **Part-time students.** The findings indicate that part-time students are increasingly seeking the PhD degree and that DPA enrollments have increased over the past five years. However, if there is a cutback in the numbers of students, would it disproportionately affect the part-time students? As a field that requires a level of interaction with the world of practice, what are the implications of such a pattern? What are our expectations about second career patterns of part-time students, particularly as the demographic patterns emerge during the next decade?

6. **Minority recruitment.** It is obvious that the field is not doing enough in this area. Is there a need for a strong technical assistance role from a group such as NASPAA? How could it be organized? Are there additional resources that could be directed toward these efforts (such as the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Sloan Program)?

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the NASPAA Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 27, 1990. The authors would like to thank Jeremy Plant for his helpful comments on an earlier draft.

**REFERENCES**


3. Ibid.

4. McCurdy and Cleary, "Why Can't We Resolve the Research Issue in Public Administration?" op. cit.


APPENDIX A:
List of Schools Responding to the Survey

American University
Arizona State University
Carnegie Mellon University
Cleveland State University
Florida Atlantic University
Florida State University
Florida International University
George Mason University
George Washington University
Golden Gate University
Harvard University
Indiana University
Kent State University
New York University
Ohio State University
The Pennsylvania State University - Harrisburg
Portland State University
Princeton University
Saint Louis University
THE PUBLIC BOARD AS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
(AND CITIZENS AS ADMINISTRATIVE PARTICIPANTS)

John A. Nicolay
Department of Political Science
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859

ABSTRACT

Service on public boards is described in a normative model of public administration. Further, public boards, such as the historic architectural review boards discussed here, provide unique opportunities for students of government and public administration. The public board serves an important balance within the local government. Public boards provide expertise not easily purchased by government; public boards provide an important interface for citizens to their elected government and their career public administration; and public boards provide an important opportunity for citizens to involve themselves with their government. This citizen as administrative participant is not typically schooled in government or in public administration, but an opportunity exists for aggressive public administration programs.