

Policy Brief

Global Comparative Public Administration and the Practice of Cultural Competence

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Abstract: Recent decades have witnessed an increasing focus on global issues that often require a multiregional approach to developing and implementing solutions. Such challenges need both support from local stakeholders and cooperation from global players to ensure that policies formulated to work across various regions remain consistent and avoid conflicting solutions. In short, public administrators and policymakers can no longer focus solely on local issues. They must develop a global understanding of public problems and develop holistic sustainable solutions. The training and education of such public sector employees with global and comparative perspectives is becoming more essential. Academic programs need to integrate such perspectives in their core curriculum. There are also several international organizations, such as the United Nations, World Bank, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), that focus on global issues and assist many nations in developing responses. The increasing role and influence of such organizations creates the need for a new generation of global public

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administrators who can function with an international and comparative perspective.

This commentary reemphasizes the arguments made by Manoharan et al. (2018) in their article titled “Global Comparative Public Administration - Are MPA Programs Responding to the Call” published in *Teaching Public Administration*. Academic programs need to internationalize their curricula and train the next generation of public administrators and policy analysts. The study focused on member institutions of the Network of Schools of Public Policy Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) and discussed how programs approached comparative education through courses, concentrations, and other methods of learning. This paper further reflects upon their findings in the context of diversity and equity and highlights the area of Cultural Competence as one aspect that can be further included in comparative governance. As issues of diversity and equity continue to be critical areas of discussion for public administration and policy within the United States, in this paper, we explore how comparative administration can view such educational areas globally.

Manoharan et al, (2018) point out, “the lack of focus on equity is striking, since most developing nations are now designing inclusive policies for promoting gender equity, health equity, and social justice.” (p13). Specifically, discussions on cultural competence lend themselves to studies in comparative public administration. Cultural competence underscores the diversity of communities throughout the world and how governments can best serve their culturally diverse residents. The study and practice of cultural competence does not focus on any one culture or group but rather recognizes that cities and municipalities throughout the world are home to a diverse

group of citizens, which continually grow in diversity.

Focus on Comparative Public Administration

With the growing connections and collaborations between regions through market globalization, there is an increasing interest in public administrative systems, rules, laws, and governance. The expertise resulting from a foundation of knowledge that includes an understanding of global public administration can help overcome disciplinary boundaries and provide insights into solving some of the most complex cross-border problems. In certain respects, renewed interest in this subject can be attributed to the influence of new public management (NPM), along with the introduction of the concepts of 'international development management' or 'development management' as opposed to 'development administration' (Guljarani and Kim, 2012).

Global and comparative public administration has long been a tradition in the discipline. After a brief decline, it is now gradually gaining focus and attention from researchers. Many scholars have studied global experiences to gain a better understanding of their public administration systems (Heady, 2006, Tummala, 1998, Ventriss, 1991). Some of the early comparative initiatives were criticized for ignoring local context in their advocacy for administrative capacity building (Jreisat, 2005). Scholars now tend to pursue an ecosystem approach in understanding and reforming a region's administrative system. Riggs (1964) recommended a culture-centered framework that considered the influence of political, economic, social, and symbolic institutions, in shaping a public administrative system. Jreisat (2011) further emphasized that comparative public administration can provide a crucial platform in today's global and

information-based societies. With increasing contact between people and governments from different regions of the world, there is also a growing interest in the comparative study of public administration and administration law, and this is arising out of social necessities rather than idle curiosity (Cendrowicz, 2018). The role of the state is also being questioned with increasing globalization, and the resulting rise of non-governmental organizations, businesses and public-private entities (Moloney and Stone, 2019). The future of public administration will be global and comparative, and development administration will be a fundamental component in "New World Order" as all nations are at various stages of development (Farazmand, 2019).

Teaching Comparative Public Administration

Many academics have emphasized the need for a global and comparative perspective in the curriculum of academic programs in public affairs, public administration, public policy and related fields. "Globalization impacts education from a multidisciplinary perspective and the field of public administration is in a unique position to shape this commingling of different perspectives to form a shared common framework. Such an education would allow students of public administrators and public policy to form a global perspective and enable them to develop sustainable solutions to national and local issues" (Manoharan et al, 2018, 2). MPA and MPP programs emphasize inculcating leadership and management skills and we need leaders and public administrators with cross-national analytical skills.

Heady (2001) even recommended the "mainstreaming" of comparative administration in universities' curricula that can enable learning from other's experiences

and further encourage the adoption of smart strategies on targeted environments (Bardach, 2000). When adapting an idea to another region, public administrators should take into account the cultural differences between the different regions (Rutgers, 2004). Thus, the global and comparative perspective only enhances public administration (Hou et al. 2011) and can be extended to several topics in the discipline.

The study by Manoharan et al (2018) focused on global/comparative course offerings in the 296 NASPAA member schools in 2015 (25 located outside US). The study found that 92 of 271 (34%) NASPAA member schools offered at least one course on “global / comparative” public administration. This percentage was higher among the 175 accredited programs, of which 79 (45%) had such a course. Less than half of these programs listed the CPA course as a core requirement: 37 (41%) member schools and 28 (35%) accredited programs. These numbers are also abysmally low when compared to all the programs included in the study. As the authors pointed out, more than two-third of the graduates of the examined programs do not have any academic exposure to comparative public administration.

The focus of most of these courses was on governance and policy. Additional areas of concentration were ethics, leadership, disaster relief, development, human rights, non-profit organizations, gender, energy, and conflict mediation. The following table shows the results of a content analysis of topics in the syllabi and course descriptions

In terms of regional focus, there was a wide interest in studying China’s administrative system, along with Brazil, Ghana, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland, and the

United Kingdom. Broadening the discipline is also important. Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) noted that comparative public administration studies were traditionally centered on European, Asian, and North American countries, but have recently begun incorporating countries from Africa and South America.

Diversity and Cultural Competence

With an increasing globalization and international collaboration, public administrators must have sufficient understanding of the inner workings of public administrative systems around the world. Graduate programs are the primary entry point for public administrators and policymakers to formally study the discipline. It is important that they incorporate courses with international and comparative perspectives. The 2018 article by Manoharan et al examines this trend among MPA/MPP programs in the United States based on a review of their curriculum and finds that programs were not adequately responding to the call for global and comparative public administration. They lacked the necessary elements to form a comprehensive understanding of governance systems that have arisen in response to global integration and interdependencies. The courses also lacked a focus sufficiently broad enough to include a representative sample of the world’s many regions.

Overall, Manoharan et al (2018) found that about 45% of US accredited programs offered a course in CPA. This is a positive outcome because it was an increase from previous studies. Exposure to global administrative practices provides students with better perspectives for understanding their strengths and weaknesses in terms of efficient and equitable service delivery as well as some familiarity with global and local business

practices. But the data also indicated that many of the courses were skewed toward certain regions of the world and lacked a broader focus in terms of the regions covered. Only a few member schools and accredited programs required these courses as part of their curricula (16% of accredited programs and 13.7% of member schools). Manoharan et al (2018) also found 25 schools that offered a degree or concentration in CPA.

Although a wide range of administrative functions were covered in these courses, there was little focus on topics related to equity and diversity that are integral to many segments of societies across the world. As Manoharan et al, (2018) point out, “the lack of focus on equity is striking, since most developing nations are now designing inclusive policies for promoting gender equity, health equity, and social justice.” (p13). Such a focus would enable students to gain a better understanding of policy initiatives in other nations.

Cultural competence in comparative public administration education underscores the diversity of communities throughout the world and how governments can best serve their culturally diverse residents. The study and practice of cultural competence does not focus on any one culture or group but rather recognizes that cities and municipalities throughout the world are home to a diverse group of citizens.

Cultural competence within the context of public administration is a growing area of research and practice (Bailey 2005, Carrizales 2010, Rice 2008 and Norman-Major & Gooden 2012). Cultural competence is a practice that government organizations and programs can take to be a more effective means of delivering their services by considering the customs, languages, and

cultural practices of diverse populations. Cultural Competence can be viewed through a framework of accountability that underscores four systems—Bureaucratic, Legal, Professional, Political; stated another way, these are four opportunities for government agencies to improve their overall effectiveness (Carrizales, 2019). The accountability framework allows for a critical look at where government entities can make necessary shifts toward cultural competency.

Cultural Competence Accountability

(Carrizales, 2019)

Bureaucratic	The first system of cultural competency accountability, Bureaucratic, is grounded in operating procedures with rules and regulations that can foster cultural competency practices.
Legal	The second accountability system, Legal, is underscored by the laws and mandates from varying sources of authority.
Professional	The third approach in cultural competence accountability is Professional, which underscores the cultural competency standards by which academic and professional institutions can help advance.
Political	The fourth and final accountability system, Political, emphasizes the role of the public - calling upon democratic practices and community partnership.

Conclusion

The addition of global comparative cultural competence into the public administration curriculum is not as simple as adding a required course to an existing program. These content areas should build off research, discussions, and practices. Some possible takeaways are noted below that can help further the curriculum integration of diversity and cultural competence into global comparative public administration.

Public administration associations, such as American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), NASPAA, and AAPAM, can collaborate with similar professional associations across the world and hold joint conferences or workshops to promote awareness of global and comparative topics of study. Academic programs can collaborate with international universities in developing exchange programs for students and faculty. Such partnerships can also facilitate internships for students in other global locations or with international organizations such as the United Nations. Programs can also incorporate a study abroad component for specific courses.

Lastly, as we witnessed during this pandemic, many programs are teaching online. New possibilities for teaching across boundaries are opening up topics of global diversity and equity. Faculty can invite guest speakers and other faculty from other nations to discuss issues surrounding their public administration systems.

The study found many program directors were proactive in using distance-learning platforms for their courses. With these advances in digital learning technologies, they can experiment with more hybrid learning options

and incorporate both synchronous and asynchronous modes. Some of the challenge in providing such courses may be the lack of qualified faculty. The solution seems to be offering collaborative courses taught by faculty from many locations. This would require a certain level of flexibility in the program curriculum and a willingness on the part of the program and faculty.

Topics on social equity and diversity are not limited to any one country or region. Although different historical contexts may provide for varying developments in policy and practices - the knowledge, skills, and values that can be learned through best practices and comparative approaches as well as the willingness to collaborate across borders is essential for the next generation of public administrators and policy makers.

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Appendix

Table 1:

