

Viewpoint

From Domestic Public Service to Global Agendas: Employing Comparative Public Administration Courses to Bridging between Life, Lessons, and Learning

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Abstract: The world needs public service leaders who understand public administration from an international perspective. Ensuring an effective public service workforce requires responsiveness to citizens and other stakeholders. Developing competencies to productively engage in culturally responsible ways with a global society is critical to the effectiveness of public administration. Teachers, scholars, and researchers all have a vital role in developing these competencies. Comparative public administration courses that connect with prior learning should be essential components of US-based MPA programs offered by colleges and universities if their graduates are expected to become globally competent public service professionals. This paper demonstrates how small US-based MPA programs can offer a CPA course that builds on other course work to provide a

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robust response to the need to develop a cadre of public service professionals who competently interact with a diverse, global world. Three key takeaways are provided.

MPA Programs Need Comparative Courses

The world needs public service leaders who understand public administration from an international perspective. A changed and integrated global world presents US-based Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs with challenges that are increasingly cross-national (Ashworth et al 2013; Hou et al 2011; Manoharan 2017). However, research over the last 20 years has found that few MPA programs offer a course in comparative public administration (CPA). The accreditation agency for MPA programs, NASPAA, called for graduates to possess skills and abilities in order to interact with diverse populations, but few MPA programs offer a comparative course to advance this charge. An examination of 2006 data found that 35% of NASPAA-accredited MPA programs offered a course in CPA (Holzer and Lin, 2007), and 2015 data that included Master of Public Affairs programs showed a negligible increase to 38% (Manoharan, 2017). Both NASPAA's call and the basic demographic shifts requiring culturally competent public service professionals underscore the important role of CPA courses.

This paper argues that increasing the number of US-based MPA programs that offer a course dedicated to global preparedness will require the involvement of small MPA programs. These programs generally include those with fewer than 100 enrolled students and as few as five nucleus full-time faculty (not including adjuncts).

This paper demonstrates how small US-based MPA programs can offer a CPA course that builds on other course work to provide a robust response to the need to develop a cadre

of public service professionals who competently interact with a diverse, global world. It does so by describing a basic, graduate-level course in CPA that is grounded in the NASPAA standards of universal competency, and one that is linked to other basic courses. The paper contains basic information for those programs that currently do not offer a single course that helps students develop global competencies or for those programs seeking to refresh their approach to this subject. The course described herein aims to increase students' appreciation of global perspectives by employing a comparative approach that examines participative governance and public service provision.

The paper first describes how a US-based MPA program links the learning aims of the basic curriculum with a course in CPA. The general parameters of the CPA course are established. Second, the paper discusses the pedagogical theories that inform the approach to teaching and how they link with key learning activities. Third, the paper explains the comparative approach used in the course and how students are assessed.

MPA Programs: Linking Domestic and Global Administration

In most US-based MPA programs, an effective comparative course provides students with the foundations of the discipline and employs a scaffold approach. An MPA degree is supposed to provide students who desire to work in public service with general professional preparation that can be employed in a variety of settings. Most MPA programs are highly general by design. This is especially true for the approximately 70% of NASPAA-accredited programs with fewer than 100 enrolled students. A review of NASPAA-accredited programs shows that general/public management combined with nonprofit management account for 50% of all programs

(Hatcher et al., 2017). These types of programs can easily employ a comparative course similar to the one described here.

Background on the Course

The course summarized here was part of a small US-based MPA program that was first offered in spring 2017. The MPA program offers courses in general management with a specialization in nonprofit organizations and leadership. For anecdotal instructional material and peripheral components of broader learning outcomes, the program has a domestic United States focus. The CPA course links the foundations of general public administration from an international perspective while underscoring the relevance of comparative perspectives by drawing on current relevant issues. The syllabus informs students that during the semester they will examine several administrative challenges, including human resource development; diversity, inclusion, and representative bureaucracy; budgetary decision-making; government reorganization; and public sector reform.

The course material is designed to raise as many questions as it answers. To facilitate this "intellectual disorder" the course is conducted in a workshop fashion with a mixture of lectures, group work, and in-class discussion. The syllabus implicitly notifies students that space will exist for innovation and hypothesizing. The course is administered with a formal structure, but it also intentionally employs a semi-structured learning experience. In short, the instructor presents course material via traditional teaching and lectures during the first part of each meeting, and discussion and group work focusing on assigned readings takes place in the second half of class.

Course Teaching Methods and Assignments

The teaching methods employ both cognitive and constructivist techniques and practices to accomplish the learning aim. The cognitive aspect focuses on how knowledge is acquired (e.g., decision making, critical thinking, processes), whereas constructivism emphasizes learning by interpreting experiences—the type of learning usually associated with the practice of public administration (Duffy and Bednar, 1991; Kirshner 2008; Paavola and Hakkarainen, 2005; Packer and Goicoechea, 2000). Cognitive techniques are employed to standardize and simplify information through theory. Constructivism occurs by immersing students in international issues to provide an apprenticeship-type experience. The challenge is to provide a sufficient amount of data (i.e., real-world experience) with sufficient sophistication for substantive constructivist learning to occur.

Cognitive learning is influenced by providing explanations, demonstrations, and illustrations. This occurs as part of the first assignment in which students build on their prior learning by producing a low-risk summary of Wilson's Study of Administration (1887). Students prepare a 500-word summary that serves as a scaffolding device when they are asked to address questions such as to explain the "science of administration" in terms of Wilson's arguments in terms of its language, principal ideas and historical groundings, and to describe ancient administration in Europe. Students must be able to explain how Wilson describes the bulk of mankind in the United States, how he uses this to argue for comparative analysis, and to justify why he believed that comparative studies were needed in order to rid ourselves of misconceptions about people and processes.

If a student's submission does not adequately summarize the material, feedback is provided

to guide an additional examination of the reading, and the assignment can be resubmitted. This scaffolding technique of revise and resubmit is a vital, low-risk assignment that serves cognitivists aims of students making proper mental linkages.

In another class session, students must read about a variety of contemporary issues that have global implications. These readings underscore the value of comparative analysis. For example, students examine populism to understand its global aspects. They are given a brief article by a public administration specialist⁹ and a slightly longer magazine article¹⁰ about the backlash of populism. Students were required to: 1) describe the component parts of the types of globalization described in the article by John Short and to provide examples of specific phenomena or studies that report the same; 2) explain how populism argues for and against the use of comparative analysis; and 3) describe two ways in which globalization is viewed as driving populism in the world.

The discussion of the two articles wraps in Wilson's discussion of the difficulty of changing the opinions of people and what Wilson says is necessary to know the public mind of a country. Students must use the Gros and Short readings to detail and illustrate what Wilson describes as misconceptions about the work of providing public service (i.e., administration) in democratic and non-democratic countries.

The in-class discussions aim to connect Wilson's treatise on public administration with the students' consideration of populism, globalization, and views of the usefulness of

⁹ Daniel Gros, who has experience with the Center European Policy Studies, International Monetary Fund, and European Commission.

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comparative approaches to analysis. The lectures, readings, and in-class discussions illustrate how scaffolding is employed to bridge learning from the known to the less familiar (e.g., challenging the brain to make multiple connections with the same material). This initial low-risk work is followed with progressively more challenging assignments, including those that assess learning outcomes. Early in the semester students are asked to select the readings they want to examine (Table 1) and present in class that draw upon works such as those by Heady (2001), Riggs, and others (Otenyo and Lind 2006).

Four readings are mandatory, and students must also select another topic. Topics are assigned based on a first-come, first-served basis (i.e., the first person to select a topic gets the first choice). Students are required to make five 15 to 20-minute in-class presentations in accordance with the central theme of the semester (i.e., Structure and Process of Public Administration: Historical Antecedents) and to develop one policy memorandum. The student presentations collectively represent 50 percent of the course grade. Each presentation must include a written summary (300–500 words) of the readings. Students must create 10 to 15 slides in Microsoft PowerPoint to accompany each presentation. Some of the five presentations are to include a relevant contemporary phenomenon. Other presentations may combine a summary of the reading with a progress report on the policy memorandum assignment.

The policy memorandum represents the other 50% of the course grade. It requires that students imagine they are a promising public administration professional working for an organization they select (the organization must be real, the scenario/problem may not necessarily be real). The organization may be a non-US actor or those selected in the comparative analysis to provide empirical

evidence may be a non-US actor. The freedom provided to students late in the semester aims to build on constructivist's desires as students emerge from being embedded in designated international issues and contexts to identify those of most interest to them. Students are directed to assess a functional or geographic area that resulted in their identifying the focus of their memorandum. Then they select from one of the following issues as a focus of their memorandum: 1) human resource development; 2) affirmative action and representative bureaucracy; 3) budgetary decision-making; 4) government reorganization; or 5) public sector reform.

Draft portions of the memorandum are submitted in three separate, sequential submissions. Feedback is provided to guide preparation of the final version. The final memorandum must be 800 to 1,000 words, not including sources/references. The assignment requires students to make a compelling case for the importance of the problem or issue they selected, provide background, propose a solution, provide evidence or examples of the solution having worked before, and discuss limitations of the recommendation.

Student Assessment & Comparative Approach

Each of the five in-class presentations and the policy memorandum are used to assess course-learning outcomes. The work of aligning course-learning outcomes to specific instruments of assessment is foundational to course organization. So too are the materials and learning practice activities employed to achieve learning outcomes. Methods of assessment include:

1. Explain and report key features of government service and contentious administrative policy issues.

This is assessed by the class presentation assignment. Constructivist learning is demonstrated by students' being emerged in contentious administrative policy issues performing the work of constructing an understanding to explain and report key features of government service (Duffy & Bednar, 1991).

2. Identify and distinguish among key concepts in a comparative analysis of issues affecting governance and administration within non-U.S. sovereign states.

This is assessed by class presentation assignment. It demonstrates cognitive learning through students employing knowledge of criteria, principles, and discriminations to establish frames for ascertaining similarities and differences of relevant data (Tennyson, 1990).

3. Examine and argue in favor or against diverse forms of public administrative organizations and institutions.

This is assessed by both the class presentation assignment and the policy memo. Constructivist learning is demonstrated by students determining, presenting, and defending a position. Students work to make sense and create meaning in a manner that relates to the real world seen through their eyes, their own interpretation, informed by employing knowledge produced by comparative analysis.

4. Develop, write, and make oral presentations to demonstrate one's learning of the structure, flow, and organization of material.

This is assessed by both the class presentation assignment, which includes an oral and visual (e.g., PowerPoint) component, and the policy memo. Cognitive learning is observed in how students make connections with material they encounter in the course. The outcomes involve students working to structure, organize, and order information to optimally use approaches such as outlining, comparing, and summarizing.

The course operates from the premise that all analysis is comparative at its core. From there, students are encouraged to view comparative analysis as being within spaces and structures and between spaces and structures. CPA is taught as being within units of governments and between units of governments, including countries. Similarly, the course is taught as being between structures, such as departmentalization and public sector employment. In-class discussions (ungraded) focus on practical real-world policy issues, such as the extent of public employment (comparing public administration in low-income and high-income countries) and priorities between specialization and representation. This occurs by establishing a foundation for the theories and underpinnings of bureaucracy, including characteristics, orientations, and dimensions. The focus on practical real-world issues is observed by examining the firing of Acting Attorney General Sally Yates in January 2017. This included a comparison of the expediency principle and how it is understood in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The aim of the course is to connect theory and practice by using the lessons students learn in other parts of the general US-based MPA curriculum primarily by examining contemporary issues between different countries. Regulation as a public service is examined with respect to global trade by

comparing France and the United States. Standards of living are reviewed by comparing those in France and the United States with a focus on France's effort to achieve that found in the United States.

Conclusion

Ensuring an effective public service workforce requires responsiveness to citizens and other stakeholders. Developing competencies to productively engage in culturally responsible ways with a global society is critical to the effectiveness of public administration. Teachers, scholars, and researchers all have a vital role in developing these competencies. CPA courses that connect with prior learning should be essential components of US-based MPA programs offered by colleges and universities if their graduates are expected to become globally competent public service professionals.

In short, this paper offers three key take-away thoughts:

1. Students with scant global knowledge in an US-based MPA program can benefit from a rigorous comparative course that employs scaffolding with a view toward building on the learning outcomes of a general management program's core curriculum.
2. Practitioners and policymakers understand the importance of CPA courses in preparing public service professionals who graduate from small US-based MPA programs.
3. US-based MPA programs are encouraged to move beyond diffusing global, inclusive learning outcomes throughout the curriculum to offering a robust graduate CPA course with specific learning outcomes.

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Appendix

Table 1:

Required Reading	Selected Reading
The Field of Comparative Administration Through the Years	Tradition and Modernity (Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change)
A Focus for Comparison-Bureaucracy	The Prismatic Model
Administration in Less Developed Countries	The State of the State: Institutional Transformation, Capacity and Political Change in South Africa
Managing Institutions through Planning and Decentralization	Historical Antecedents of National Administrative Systems
	Administration in More Developed Nations
	Western Conceptualization of Administrative Development
	Administration in More Developed Nations
	Managing Institutions through Planning and Decentralization
	Analyzing Institutional Change and Administrative Transformation
	Administering to the Poor
	Bureaucratic-Prominent Political Regimes
	Party-Prominent Political Regimes