Editorial Perspectives

The Values of Public Administration

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Is public administration neutral and, if not, what are the values that define its practice? Advocating for a normative theory and practice of public administration has long been a major theme of many articles in this and other journals, yet such a call runs contrary to much of the field's received wisdom and the idea of an "objective" science of public administration and policy. How, if at all, is it possible to reconcile the two viewpoints?

Consider, first, that the tradition of public administration and policy dates back to the 19th century. Students of public administration and policy are familiar with the concepts of neutral competence and the politics/administration dichotomy that emerged at the end of that century (Schultz, 2004). This dichotomy called for removing politics from the administration of government, leaving politics to the realm of elected officials who make policy. This movement arose in reaction to the spoils system that had developed under U.S. president Andrew Jackson and the corrupt and often politicized administrations of other presidents. In the United States, civil service reform legislated by the Pendleton Act of 1883 became one mechanism to address these problems.

However, reformers' goals were broader, seeking to reconcile the operation of the federal bureaucracy with the mandates of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights (Schultz & Maranto, 1998). Reformers asked how a politically neutral merit system and a tenured civil service could operate within a political system that respected representative democracy and accountability for public office holders through competitive elections. One solution was to try to distinguish politics from administration and to advocate for the goal of neutral competence.

The experiences of foreign regimes offered late 19th- and early 20th-century Americans a model for civil service reform and how to purge politics from the administration of government. Woodrow Wilson (1885/1968a), writing in his "Notes on Administration," contended that "the task of developing a science of administration for America should be approached with a larger observance of the utilities than is to be found in the German or French treatment of the subject" (p. 49). In this essay, Wilson stated for the first time that "administration should be subservient to the politics," a distinction that he would make more forcefully in his now famous essay "The Study of Administration" (Wilson, 1887/1968b, p. 359). Administrative questions, for Wilson, were distinct from political questions because while political questions are policy questions, public administration is simply the "detailed and systematic execution of public law" (p. 372). Borrowing from German writers, Wilson argued that administration is the detailed execution of general government policies and "lies outside the proper sphere of politics" (p. 372). Policies should be set by elected leaders and their appointees. Administration is the province of politically neutral, permanent officials selected for their expertise.

While Wilson's writings had little influence until decades after his death, Frank J. Goodnow's *Politics and Administration* was perhaps the most influential book upon early 20th-century administrative thinking (Goodnow, 1900/1967). It sought to clarify the various functions of the state, which Goodnow described as politics and administration. He defined politics as the "expressions of the state will" and administration as the "execution of these policies" (p. 18). While these are distinct functions, there is a need for harmony between the expression and execution of the law, because a popular government must be able to control the execution of the law if its will is to be expressed. Yet, while politics should control administration, there is a limit to how much politics should penetrate into administration lest the latter become inefficient.

For Wilson and Goodnow, a politically neutral bureaucracy was essential to respecting the values of a democracy. Thus it is the task of elected leaders, not unelected bureaucrats, to make normative policy decisions. If voters are to be able to control their leaders, they must be able to hold them accountable via elections. The theory, then, is that voters through elections select representatives who then make policy choices that are neutrally implemented by administrators. This is the process—or at least the theory—of how popular will is translated into law and policy.

Except in reality, this is not how it is done. Countless studies point to how elected leaders delegate policy functions to the bureaucracy. The field of administrative law is all about this process, and empirical political science, public administration, and policy studies also point out how the bureaucracy makes normative policy choices. And of course, increasingly, these descriptive studies themselves have turned normative. Beginning in 1968 with the Minnowbrook Conference under Dwight Waldo, there were calls for public administrators to reject the traditional formalism of public administration. This movement advocated for public administrators to become more concerned with social issues such as equity. Public administrators were thus to become advocates or guardians for democracy and democratic values.

Today that normative mandate manifests itself as calls for social equity and cultural competence. More specifically, during my editorship of *JPAE* I have seen in this journal and others repeated arguments for both of these concerns to become central components of what we teach. While it is not my intention to quarrel with these values, it is important to understand the tension that such advocacy poses. Yes, good public administration and policy should consider these issues, but is it the purview of unelected bureaucrats to make these choices? Conversely, should public administrators simply serve neutrally and ignore threats to important democratic or other values? When President Donald Trump fired acting U.S. attorney general Sally Yates because she refused to defend his travel ban, believing it unconstitutional, was that a legitimate role for her or did she act beyond her scope of authority? There are powerful arguments on both sides of this issue.

I write about this tension between neutral and normative public policy and administration because it remains an important issue that is often ignored. As educators, we need to be cognizant of what role values play in our pedagogy and how what we advocate in our work addresses the complex issues and line drawing that follow advocacy for different teaching and research imperatives. The articles in this issue of *JPAE* explore these issues and offer a variety of answers.

Thomas P. Dunn and Manfred F. Meine lead off this issue examining a recurrent topic and concern of public affairs education today: online learning and programs. In "MPA Programs and Internet Education: Validation of Quality and Acceptance Despite Challenges Surrounding Online Delivery," the authors look to the U.S. military's significant role in the initial growth of online programs, and they also investigate recent enrollment declines. They examine the connections between the two and discuss the future of online learning as it potentially faces a new crossroads.

Personality assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are staple tests in many human resources departments. Yet, as Christopher A. Cooper, Whittney Campbell-Bridges, and David M. McCord contend in "Personality and the Teaching of Public Administration: A Case for the Big Five," such tests or, more specifically, discussions of personality types, seem absent from public affairs programs. Their article offers suggestions for how examination of personality types can be useful as a frame for many issues in public administration, even if Myers-Briggs is not in their opinion the best measure of personality.

Business administration programs have long employed case studies as pedagogical tools, but their use in public affairs has lagged, especially when it comes to teaching public administration in non-U.S. contexts. In "Providing Context and Inspiring Hope: Using the Case Method to Teach Public Policy in Developing Countries," Robert Mudida and Nadia Rubaii explore the use of case studies in Kenya, arguing that contextual use of cases is critical to understanding the unique issues present in many developing countries.

One of the contemporary trends in education is reaching out to, or facilitating, life-long learners. Educators often think of themselves as educating current students, but what about those who are already in their careers? In "Expanding the Classroom: Local Government Practitioners' Use of Academic Resources," Willow S. Jacobson and Kristina T. Lambright undertake a survey of practitioners to determine if and how they use academic resources as part of their work. This article offers some surprising ideas and data regarding new ways that academics and schools might engage practitioners.

Social entrepreneurship and social enterprise curricula are increasingly large components of many public affairs programs. But who is teaching about these subjects and how?

Roseanne Marie Mirabella and Angela M. Eikenberry begin to answer these questions in "The Missing 'Social' in Social Enterprise Education in the United States." They examine course offerings in public affairs programs and seek to determine how they address issues such as social capital and community building.

One challenge in teaching public affairs is how to deliver content in programs that are more applied as opposed to traditional liberal arts, especially at the undergraduate level. It is often difficult to reach students and make some concepts relevant to them. In "The Relevance of Regulation: Teaching Public Affairs Students in Applied Fields," Marco Castillo addresses this conundrum, using student career interests as a hook to bridge the gap.

This issue of the journal also inaugurates the new *JPAE* Tools section, including the first of what will be useful case studies for teaching and classroom use. This issue features "Assignments for Studying Frontline Bureaucracy," by N. Alexander Aguado, which describes coursework that teaches about what street-level bureaucrats do, helping students to examine and possibly consider public affairs career options.

Finally, this issue concludes with Muhittin Acar's review of *Surveillance, Transparency, and Democracy: Public Administration in the Information Age*, by Akhlaque Haque. This excellent book, writes Acar, points to the challenges that technology poses to both public administrators and democratic governance. This book is a suitable companion to many classes that explore contemporary issues in public administration as well as other classes that critically examine the impact of new information technologies upon public affairs.

This issue of *JPAE* delivers a kaleidoscope of perspectives regarding the concerns of public administration, policy, and affairs. The articles all address implicit or explicit values and normative concerns that educators, students, and practitioners confront. I hope you enjoy what you read and feel that you, too, want to contribute to the dialogue by submitting an article, book review, or case study. Please contact me at dschultz@hamline.edu if you have questions, comments, or suggestions. Thank you.

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