

Navigating the Multiple Roles of the MPA Director: Perspectives and Lessons

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how the changing landscape of higher education affects the roles that a director of a Master of Public Administration (MPA) program plays in leading and managing academic programs. I offer a new perspective on the dominant business model of higher education and its impacts on the multiple roles of the MPA director. I argue that institutions of higher education must adopt a new model that responds to changing societal landscape and needs. As institutions seek to adapt to these changes, the MPA director is asked to play a variety of roles vis-à-vis many stakeholders. I present a typology of these roles: (1) the manager, (2) the advocate, (3) the liaison, and (4) the entrepreneur. I review characteristics of these roles and provide illustrative examples by drawing on the experiential education model pioneered at Northeastern University.

KEYWORDS

Administration, leadership, management, higher education, public affairs

In recent years, many transitions have dramatically affected the state of higher education, notably those shaped by increasing economic uncertainties and the advancement of numerous technologies (Ginsberg, 2011). This is evident in the copious news headlines about higher education that remind us about the impacts of globalization, demographic change, waning political support, and financial challenges (O'Neil, 2014). In the spring 2013 issue of the *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, Schultz (2013) argues that "the dominant business model for American higher education has collapsed" (p. ii). Graduate programs in public affairs are particularly affected, given their unique mission to serve the public.

Institutions of higher education have in fact evolved from a traditional model to a business

model. The traditional model is based on the demand for strong public support of colleges and universities and the supply of many students seeking an education. In contrast, the business model seeks to compete for scarce resources by developing new markets for higher education. Thus, academic leaders are confronted with the imperative to adapt their leadership strategies and management skills to align with these new realities. Given their mandate to serve the public affairs community and maintain professional accreditation, directors of public affairs programs take on numerous roles in the areas of management, advocacy, and entrepreneurship to fulfill their program's mission.

This article presents a new perspective on the dominant business model of higher education

and its impacts on the multiple roles of a director of a Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. I first review the literature on the evolution of higher education and then analyze a case study of the MPA program at Northeastern University. I then present a typology of the multiple roles of the MPA program director and conclude by reflecting on possible lessons to be learned.

THE EVOLUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

There is a large body of literature on the evolution of higher education in the United States (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990). The mission of the university evolved from a religious purpose to an intellectual pursuit for the advancement of knowledge and economic development through research, teaching, and public service (Loss, 2012). After World War II, the nation witnessed the rise of the modern university. Millions of returning veterans used the GI Bill to advance their education, and governments invested dramatically in higher education (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). This transformation was also defined by universities' outreach to external stakeholders through the dissemination of research (Kerr, 2001). This led to the growth of a multifaceted system of some 2,000 institutions of higher education, such as the public land-grant university and the private university, among other types of institutions.

This evolution resulted from a complex interaction of many factors, including but not limited to globalization, new demographic patterns, political and economic changes, and neoliberalism (Rich, 2013; Schultz, 2013). Globalization has affected people, places, and institutions in the United States (Stiglitz, 2003). The process of globalization can be broadly defined as the sociospatial, economic, and political processes that concentrate socioeconomic activities of humans and firms in an agglomerative pattern (Sassen, 2011). Without a doubt, globalization has touched institutions of higher education in distinct ways. From study-abroad programs and the internationalization of student bodies to the knowledge economy and new learning technologies, the footprint of globalization is evident across the nation's campuses (Rubaii,

2016). Although globalization brings many new opportunities to universities, many observers caution that global competition and disinvestment in U.S. institutions of higher education present new threats. Friedman (2005) draws attention to the "quiet crisis" of American society and more specifically, higher education, arguing that there is an erosion of the organizations that promote and sustain the nation's scientific thinking.

Models of Higher Education

The globalization of society and the economy in the United States shaped the growth of institutions of higher education. Two models, the traditional model and the business model, reflect the evolution of the approaches to leading and managing these institutions. From approximately the 1940s to the 1980s, the traditional model of higher education enjoyed broad political support and healthy public investments to grow facilities, faculties, and student bodies. The decline of public support, the lack of financial resources, and the competition for students are some factors that led to the rise of an alternative model of higher education (Newfield, 2008). In contrast to the traditional model, the business model evolved in the 1990s and persists today. It promotes corporate, entrepreneurial behavior among institutions of higher education to seek revenue sources other than public support in the face of competition for scarce resources.

Table 1 summarizes these two models' characteristics. In the traditional model, fiscal affairs are centralized at the university level and depend on strong political support, whereas the business model promotes fiscal autonomy at the college or unit level. The traditional model assumes regular enrollment growth, while the business model must attract and retain enrollments in a competitive market. Finally, the traditional model provides an accessible education, whereas the business model seeks to create new markets for nontraditional educational opportunities. The decline of the traditional model and the subsequent rise of the commercialization of higher education is well documented (Bok, 2003).

TABLE 1.
Characteristics of the Models of Higher Education

	Traditional model	Business model
Key years	1940s–1980s	1990s–2010s
Key premise	Broad political support for healthy public investments in research, faculty, and facilities	Corporate, entrepreneurial strategies to seek other revenue sources for varied activities
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal centralization • Enrollment expansion • Accessible education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal autonomy • Enrollment imperatives • Develop new markets

Still other observers of the evolution of higher education have called attention to the rise of the entrepreneurial university, often viewed as a response to globalization. The entrepreneurial university seeks to be a self-reliant organization that engages in innovation through economic development activities. This occurs in several ways: the university may pursue urban revitalization and real-estate investment (Rodin, 2007); the university may partner with science and technology corporations to produce intellectual property (Thorp & Goldstein, 2010); or the university may become a business incubator to create jobs (Feldman, 1994). Clark (2001) offers a positive assessment of these activities, observing that this creates “new forms of knowledge, new types of students, new labor force connections, new problem-solving skills for government and the economy” (p. 23). However, Slaughter and Rhoades (2000) critique this transformation, asserting that “academic capitalism ... reduces the calculus of the public interest” (p. 79). Whatever the case, it is no surprise that at the beginning of the 21st century, former president of Cornell University, Frank Rhodes (2011), observed that the “knowledge business” of universities has witnessed the restructuring of an industry.

Collectively, the transformation of institutions of higher education has placed distinct pressures on MPA programs and, more generally, on

academic units of public affairs. Berry’s (2010) presidential address to the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) effectively underscores the impacts on the field, declaring that “a transition from the traditional model to the business model will require public affairs programs to be more entrepreneurial” (p. 4). Historically, conversations in public affairs have focused on the utility, worth, and value of the MPA degree (Grote & Holzer, 1975; Lewis 1987). However, more recently attention has focused on the pressures to maintain and grow enrollments in the wake of the Great Recession and even to save MPA degree programs (Kerrigan, 2011; Teicher, 2010). It is time to reconsider other models of higher education.

THE CASE OF THE MPA PROGRAM AT NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Based on five years of experience (2011–2016) as director of a medium-to-large MPA program at a private research university, I offer a new perspective on the dominant business model of higher education by illustrating the experiential education model pioneered at Northeastern University and the impact on its MPA program. Drawing on Barth’s (2002) method of reflection on building an MPA program, I reflect on these experiences and draw lessons about academic leadership for MPA directors. In this section, I employ the method of thick description to consider three contexts (institutional, program,

and administrative) that shape the leadership and management environments of MPA program directors (Geertz, 1973).

The Institutional Context

Few other institutions in the nation have witnessed as dramatic a transformation as Northeastern University. Founded in 1898 as the Evening Institute for Younger Men at the Huntington Avenue Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Boston, the institution was incorporated in 1916 as Northeastern College and later, in 1922, as Northeastern University (Churchill, 1927). During the 20th century, Northeastern's academic portfolio and enrollments grew dramatically. By the 1980s, enrollments peaked at 60,000 before the institution implemented a strategy to decrease the size of the student body and improve the quality of the academic experience. Today, the institution is a global, experiential, research university built on a tradition of engagement with the world. This model creates a distinctive approach to education and research (Itin, 1999). Experiential learning integrates the classroom and the real world (Kraft & Kielsmeier, 1995). Students engage with the world through cooperative educational experiences known as "co-ops." Students leave the university to participate in an intensive 6-month period of full-time work with a private, public, or nonprofit organization in their area of interest. Students repeat the co-op experience on several occasions over the course of their academic career. The integration of learning experiences allows students to affect the world around them (Kolb, 1984; Shor, 1992).

By the beginning of the 21st century, Northeastern enrolled approximately 25,000 students in its undergraduate and graduate programs that lead to degrees through the doctorate in nine colleges and schools, as well as select advanced degrees at graduate campuses in other regions. In 2016, Northeastern was categorized as a doctoral university with the highest research activity (also known as Research-1, or R1) by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Northeastern was ranked 39th in the 2017 edition of *U.S. News & World Report* in its annual ranking of national universities—in 2007,

its ranking was 98 (Northeastern University, 2016b). Indeed, the Northeastern story attracted national headlines and followed a parallel discussion about the future of higher education (Carey, 2015; Fischer, 2011; Lewin, 2011).

The Program Context

The MPA program at Northeastern University was founded in 1969 as a graduate program of the Department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences (formerly the College of Liberal Arts). The original mission of the MPA program was to assist those who aspire to government employment (pre-service) in obtaining public management jobs, and to help those who have jobs (in-service) advance to their utmost skill and preference levels. Over the years, the program focused on preparing students with a professional education for the public sector in a constantly changing environment. The program successfully capitalized on the need in the workforce to produce qualified and highly skilled public sector employees, with a focus on state and local government. Thus, two faculty members with expertise in the public administration field were initially hired to support the program. During the 1960s, 10 additional faculty were hired in the department. By 2007, on the department's 50th anniversary, the faculty had grown to 22 full-time members, many of whom supported the MPA program in various capacities. Ultimately, four decades of growth produced more than 1,000 MPA graduates—the public managers and policy analysts of state and local government in the Boston metropolitan area.

Following a national trend, numerous institutions of higher education sought to develop more effective budgeting systems to sustain their core missions of research, teaching, and service in an increasingly uncertain and complex landscape of higher education (Duderstadt, 2000). Like many of its peers, Northeastern also pursued this strategy. In 2008, the university initiated a reorganization of the College of Arts and Sciences and launched a hybrid "responsibility center management" budget model. The college was divided into three smaller, thematic units: the College of Science; the

College of Arts, Media, and Design; and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. Each new college was designated a responsibility center in the university's new budget model. The Department of Political Science and the nascent School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs were administratively relocated to the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. National searches were launched to hire deans for the newly created colleges.

The 2009–2010 academic year was a critical turning point for the MPA program. In this year, the program was part of the last cohort of NASPAA member schools to be evaluated and reaccredited under the pre-2009 standards. A variety of factors led the program to consider an administrative reorganization to position itself for future compliance with the new accreditation standards. First, the newly adopted mission- and outcomes-based NASPAA accreditation standards necessitated that the MPA program reevaluate its organizational structure, administrative capacity, and operating procedures (NASPAA, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, 2014).

Second, in 2009, the MPA program launched an online component. Many graduate programs in public affairs created online courses and degree programs during the 2000s, but they faced several obstacles in providing effective, efficient, and responsive educational experiences as accredited programs (Ginn & Hammond, 2012).

Third, the growth of enrollments, especially during the Great Recession, created new demands on the faculty and staff of MPA programs to provide quality experiences. Between 2009 and 2012, Northeastern's MPA program tripled the size of its student body, which peaked at 130 students. Similarly, the university's new budget model created fiscal incentives to grow enrollment, but it also created budgetary pressures to maintain them (Teicher, 2010).

Fourth, a national trend showed a decline of MPA programs supported by traditional political science departments (NASPAA, 1995). Baldwin (1988) found that schools of public

affairs consistently outperformed political science departments in their ability to fulfill program mission and achieve the program goals.

Finally, broad aspirations to grow the reputation and quality of Northeastern motivated the MPA program to focus on providing a distinctive and high-impact educational experience. In the wake of these new administrative changes, it became clear that the complexity of administering the MPA program could not be sustained solely by the Department of Political Science.

As a result of these organizational dynamics shaping the environment of Northeastern's MPA program, a complete program reorganization took place over the course of three academic years. Table 2 summarizes the reorganization of the MPA program. During the 2010–2011 academic year, the faculty reevaluated the program's mission and reviewed the administrative structures of peer institutions with similar MPA programs. In the following academic year, program faculty engaged the community of stakeholders to consider reorganization options. The program director and faculty facilitated open forums, small group interviews, and informal conversations with university administrators, current students, alumni, internship partner organizations, and employers. The results of these engagements informed the MPA program that its stakeholders wanted it to grow and further develop while maintaining NASPAA accreditation.

At the conclusion of this process, a plan was adopted to reorganize the MPA program into Northeastern's School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs. The school's mission complemented the MPA program's mission, and the school had the capacity to serve professional graduate students and the public affairs community. Over the course of the next three academic years, the administration of the program shifted incrementally to the new unit. First, in 2013, a new Faculty Nucleus was constituted, consisting of faculty teaching and serving the program from a variety of academic units. Then, in 2014, the position of MPA program director was created, appointed by the dean of the College of Social

TABLE 2.
Timeline of the Reorganization of the MPA Program at Northeastern University

Academic year	Actions
2009–2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPA program is reaccredited in the Department of Political Science • New NASPAA standards launched
2010–2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPA program’s mission reevaluated • Administrative structures of peer institutions reviewed
2011–2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement with MPA program’s stakeholders
2012–2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPA director position created • Faculty Nucleus constituted
2013–2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bylaws and policy documents created • Administrative team formed
2014–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum and budget transferred • Joint faculty workloads established
2015–2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-study year for NASPAA reaccreditation

Sciences and Humanities upon recommendation of the Faculty Nucleus. Next, the MPA program adopted new bylaws and established itself as a self-governing body to be supported by the various units from which the Faculty Nucleus was composed. An administrative team, consisting of the program director and professional staff members, also formed to provide student services and to support program operations. Last, in 2015, the curriculum and budget were transferred from the Department of Political Science to the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs. Joint faculty workloads for members of the Faculty Nucleus were established in consultation with other unit heads in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. By 2016, the beginning of the MPA program’s next self-study year for NASPAA reaccreditation, the reorganization was completed.

The Administrative Context

Northeastern’s MPA program used the university’s academic planning process to grow and further develop. In 2015, Northeastern launched a university-wide academic planning process to create a new strategic and long-range plan for the institution (see Table 3). In its academic plan, the university identified three key institutional strategies: (1) build diverse, inclusive

networks of endless possibilities; (2) learn any time, from anywhere, with anyone; and (3) accelerate discovery exponentially through the power of networks (Northeastern University, 2016a). The MPA program sought to align its activities strategically with other organizational units in the university in order to establish the distinctive nature of the program. The university’s academic plan, *Northeastern 2025* (Northeastern University, 2016a), provided that opportunity.

The first institutional strategy identified the building of diverse, inclusive networks to create experiential opportunities for students. In response, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities developed a learning model of “experiential liberal arts” as the conceptual grounding of its mission. Northeastern president Joseph Aoun (2015a) called attention to this model by launching a national conversation on the experiential liberal arts, asserting that they “combine the rigor of traditional academics with active participation in workplaces, laboratories or volunteer opportunities—especially ones in a global context. These real-life elements would heighten students’ motivation, promote practice and self-reflection, promote contextual understanding, and encourage self-direction.”

In this model, students engage in a rigorous study of politics, society, culture, and ethics; apply and transform liberal arts knowledge and capacities across and beyond the university; study issues of diversity and inclusion in theory and practice; and develop awareness about the impact of their activities on the city of Boston through meaningful community engagement. Thus, all units and programs in the college, including the MPA program, would adopt the experiential liberal arts model.

The MPA program's educational mission and public service values meshed well with this new model, and the program aligned its activities in two ways. First, it created graduate certificates in targeted areas of strength, including data analytics; nonprofit sector, philanthropy, and social change; public policy analysis; urban informatics; and urban studies. The program gave MPA students the opportunity to craft their elective coursework in these areas. Second, the program redeveloped its capstone

course to engage the public affairs community and incorporate experiential elements in substantive ways. Following similar models at other institutions, the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs adopted a unit-wide, client-based capstone course (Allard & Straussman, 2003; Mayhew, Swartz, & Taylor, 2014; Schachter & Schwartz, 2009). Designed as the culminating educational component of the school's professional graduate degrees, the course requires students to integrate the skills, tools, and knowledge they acquired during their training to complete a real-world project for an individual client or organization. Drawing on a network of alumni and partners based in Boston and throughout the world, students work in interdisciplinary teams over the course of one semester to conduct research and analysis and develop a set of recommendations for the client. These strategies aligned the MPA program's educational activities with the institution's model for experiential liberal arts education.

TABLE 3.
Alignment of Institutional Strategies

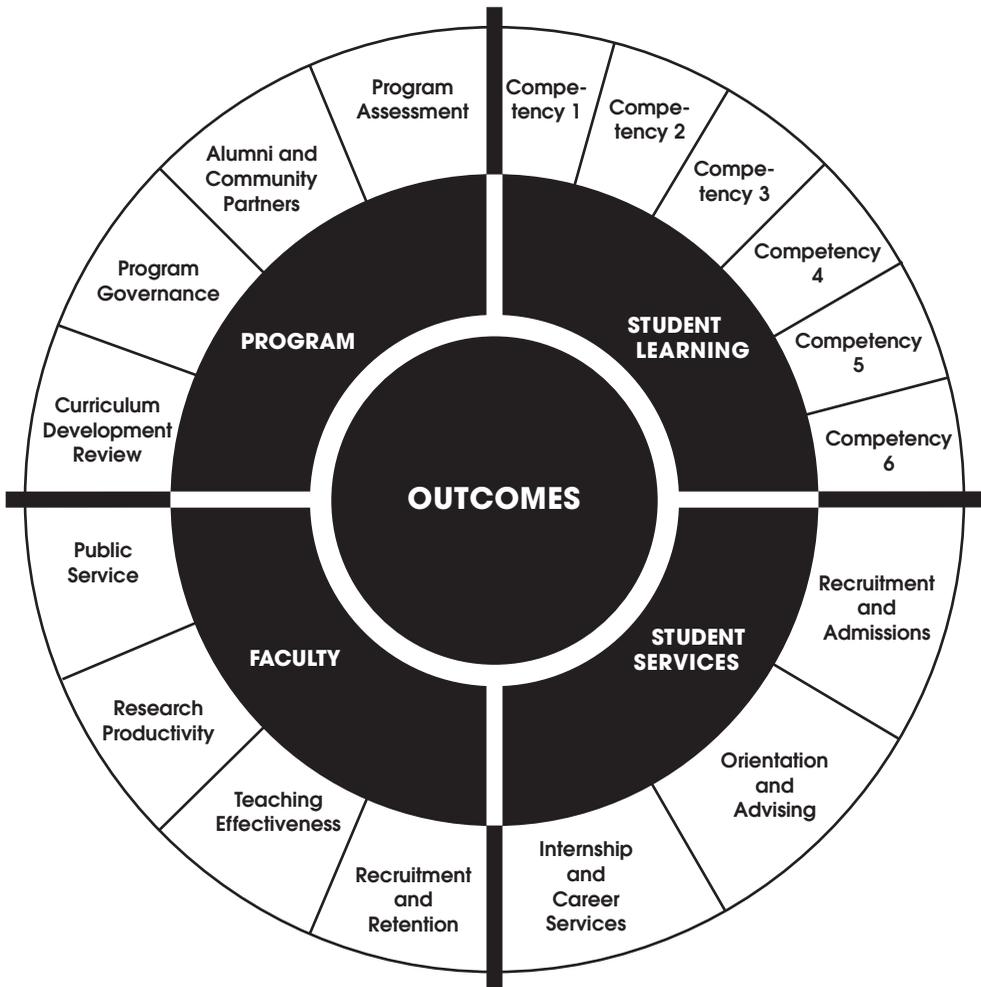
Organizational level		
Institutional strategy	College or school strategy	Program strategy
Build diverse, inclusive networks of endless possibilities	Provide an experiential liberal arts education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align graduate certificates to targeted areas • Engage key stakeholders • Implement experiential capstone course
Learn any time, from anywhere, with anyone	Promote professional, graduate-level education through the Professional Advancement Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a degree program campus, online, and hybrid modalities • Enroll additional students • Institutionalize assessment activities
Accelerate discovery exponentially through the power of networks	<p>Develop foci in three areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience and sustainability • Big data, network science, and digital humanities • Governance, globalization, and civic sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strengths in targeted areas • Create high-impact experiential opportunities

The second institutional strategy put forth a learning model in which students engage with the university in multiple ways. In response, the university launched its Professional Advancement Network, a portfolio of professional programs offered across multiple learning channels. These academic programs are composed of on-ground, online, and hybrid modalities in a network of campuses in Boston, Seattle, and Charlotte. The College of Social Sciences and Humanities identified the MPA program as one to join this network. Through its participation in the institution's Professional Advancement

Network, the MPA program received new financial resources to redevelop its entire curriculum as online courses to be offered across the network. Additional resources for advertising, marketing, and student recruitment were also provided.

With these additional institutional resources, the program was able to invest in developing its operations. It placed a special focus on building systems and capacities to institutionalize the assessment of outcomes for all programmatic activities. Figure 1 displays the domains and

FIGURE 1.
Domains and Outcomes of the MPA Program



outcomes established by the MPA program. The program's activities are divided into four domains: program, faculty, student learning, and student services. In each domain, activities are assessed that lead to program outcomes. This administrative approach facilitated assessment of the program's activities across all modalities and networks at the institution.

The third institutional strategy focused on creating new networks for the discovery of knowledge. The university's strategy supported interdisciplinary collaborations that promote sustainable human communities. In response, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities developed research and scholarly foci in three areas of strategic strength: resilience and sustainability; big data, network science, and digital humanities; and governance, globalization, and civic sustainability. The MPA program, in partnership with the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs, aligned its activities with the strengths of experiential education and with areas of resilience and sustainability of the city and public policy. The program, in collaboration with the school and college, developed public platforms to take ownership of policy issues and build the public affairs community, using a variety of flagship programs, centers, and labs aligned to the program's strengths. These initiatives include the following:

- The Myra Kraft Open Classroom Series is a semester-long seminar series for students and the general public to explore public problems and solutions around critical issues that face Boston, the state, the nation, and the world. This weekly seminar series attracts hundreds of people from the public as well as students, faculty, staff, and members of the public affairs community. It is taught by faculty of the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs.
- The Conflict, Civility, Respect, Peace: Northeastern Reflects Series focuses on creating public dialogue around civic sustainability. The series encourages the practice of civility in engaging with diverse

opinions and in acknowledging wrongs of the past, broadening personal networks, finding common ground in social action, and making the world a better place.

- The Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, the Resilient Cities Lab, and the Social Impact Lab serve as the school's hubs for research activities and public engagement.

The MPA program aligned its programmatic activities to the school's and college's experiential opportunities by (1) having members of the Faculty Nucleus lead and manage these efforts; (2) integrating these activities into the MPA curriculum; and (3) engaging the public affairs community to create new experiences for students. Such alignment allowed the MPA program to fulfill its mission while also supporting the university's strategic plan.

LESSONS FOR THE MPA DIRECTOR

The case of strategic planning and reorganization of Northeastern's MPA program offers several lessons for MPA directors. Leaders of public administration programs are often engaged in a variety of distinct leadership roles. What are the roles of the MPA director in an increasingly complex institutional landscape? The MPA director position is a classic example of a middle manager. Academic middle managers, like department chairs and program directors, face numerous challenges. Charged with leading and managing academic programs, the middle manager has little institutional support and training to be effective (Floyd, 2016). In most cases, the MPA director is neither a unit head or dean but is given substantial administrative responsibilities. Caught in between the unit and college level in the organizational structure, the middle manager reports to many stakeholders (Buller, 2012; Ginsberg, 2011). Directors of MPA programs have even further challenges to confront, including maintaining NASPAA accreditation, ensuring autonomous governance and decision making, and engaging the public affairs community. An understanding of how to navigate these administrative roles is essential to an MPA director's success.

The following case is emblematic of the leadership and management environment that confronts directors of graduate programs in public affairs. Although the case draws on the experience of a private research university, the external forces shaping higher education and public affairs affect all programs, albeit in different ways. In addition, directors of NASPAA-accredited programs face similar leadership and management obligations to maintain standards for the program, the faculty, the student experience, and the public affairs community. Thus, we can draw lessons from the experience at Northeastern University to inform our broader understanding about the challenges and opportunities for directors of these programs. Based on these experiences, I identify four key roles of the MPA director: (1) the manager; (2) the advocate; (3) the liaison; and (4) the entrepreneur. Table 4 displays a typology of these roles and describes the responsibilities and key activities associated with each role. I review each of these roles in turn.

The MPA Director as Manager

The primary role of the MPA director is to serve as a manager of the program. The MPA director administers all operations that are central to the program. The director is responsible for developing, monitoring, and executing the

budget and financial resources of the program. As a manager, the director oversees human resources, including hiring, monitoring, and evaluation of faculty and staff. The director also oversees the curriculum and ensures the quality of students’ experience through rigorous assessment of the program’s domains and outcomes. As a manager-academic, the MPA director is equipped with theoretical and applied training in the management of organizations, thus the manager role is learned with practice and interaction with colleagues. Academic units can empower the manager-academic by promoting opportunities for self-critical reflection and peer evaluation (Johnson, 2002).

The MPA Director as Advocate

The role of an advocate is to represent the interests of the program and its stakeholders. The community of stakeholders is broad, including administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, employers, and the public. In balancing these multiple interests, the MPA director’s primary role is to advocate for the interests of the program’s mission, vision, values, and goals. In the context of NASPAA-accredited programs, the MPA director must regularly make decisions that are grounded in the mission of the program. Similarly, the director advocates for the values of the program in its research, teaching,

TABLE 4.
Description of the Roles, Responsibilities, and Key Activities of the MPA Director

Role	Responsibilities	Key activities
Manager	Administers the operations central to the program	Manage the budget and human resources, assessment, curriculum, and the student experience
Advocate	Represents the interests of the program and its stakeholders	Promote the interests to the program’s mission, vision, values, and goals
Liaison	Facilitates relationships with organizations and people that promote the program’s mission	Engage stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff, and students as well as the public affairs community
Entrepreneur	Provides strategic leadership	Create new opportunities for growth and development of the program

and services activities. While the program's values are context-specific, an appreciation for public service values of the public interest, equity, accountability, ethical practice, and democracy are paramount for the public affairs community (Molina & McKeown, 2012).

The MPA Director as Liaison

The role of the liaison is to facilitate relationships with organizations and people that promote the program's mission. The MPA director engages stakeholders and balances their interests with the interests of the program. In the context of NASPAA-accredited programs, the director serves in a liaison role as the principal representative to NASPAA and ensures that information is shared with stakeholders. The director also creates formal and informal networks to develop an organizational climate that is essential to the well-being of the program. Ultimately, the director is a champion for the successes of the program's stakeholders (Gmelch, 2004).

The MPA Director as Entrepreneur

The role of the entrepreneur is to provide strategic leadership for the program. The MPA director participates in an ongoing process to create new opportunities for the growth and development of the program. The director identifies opportunities, articulates short- and long-term goals, crafts a plan for implementation, and executes the plan. Creative thinking, collaboration, coordination, and delegation are skills essential for the success of the academic entrepreneur (Chu, 2012).

The experience of strategically planning and reorganizing the MPA program at Northeastern University underscores the multidimensional nature of these various roles for leaders of public administration programs. We can draw several lessons for MPA directors. Strategic alignment of the program's mission to the institution is essential. Creating institutional parity with the university, college, and unit levels facilitated the success of the reorganization of the MPA program. The decision to focus the program's strengths and align them to the institution's strengths helped to clarify the program's distinctiveness in a competitive land-

scape for graduate education in public affairs. Furthermore, directors can utilize the NASPAA accreditation process as an imperative for programmatic improvement. Articulation of the value of NASPAA accreditation to university administrators is essential for securing resources to institutionalize assessment, engage stakeholders, and maintain a commitment to the public affairs community.

In summary, MPA directors should be prepared, flexible, and ready to adapt to new realities in an increasingly global landscape in higher education that demands demonstrated results and impacts. Change is constant, and successful academic leadership will depend on the ability to manage uncertainties. The multiple roles of managing, advocating, liaising, and entrepreneurial leadership are essential for MPA directors.

CONCLUSION

Institutions of higher education in the United States are rapidly changing. The globalization of colleges and universities, the introduction of advanced learning technologies, and uncertainties about funding and enrollments are influencing how academic leaders and policy makers respond to these changes. The dichotomy between the traditional and business models of higher education limits the discussion of how to confront the challenges that these changes present to our institutions. The experiential learning model provides academic leaders with a novel approach to create opportunities to learn by doing. MPA programs and their leaders are well positioned to take advantage of these changes because their educational approach is grounded in experiential learning and real-world problem solving. Based on a case study of Northeastern University's MPA program, this article demonstrates the importance of the multiple roles of the MPA director in aligning the program with the institution's strategies and goals. As a manager, advocate, liaison, and entrepreneur, the MPA director plays an essential role in the implementation of these plans. In an age of rapid change, leaders of public affairs programs will need to adapt their programs to respond to institutional and societal changes.

NOTE

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