

The Capacity and Constraints of Small MPA Programs: A Survey of Program Directors

William Hatcher

Augusta University

Wesley L. Meares

Augusta University

Victoria Gordon

Western Kentucky University

ABSTRACT

Small Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs are commonly defined as having enrollments below 100 students. Given their size, these programs face unique administrative challenges, such as heavy faculty teaching loads, resource constraints, and marketing beyond their region. However, the graduates of small programs serve many of the nation's communities by building the capacity of local public administration. To explore the capacity and constraints facing small MPA programs, we administered a survey to the directors of these programs. We find that many small programs have faculty with manageable teaching loads and adequate funds for travel. However, small programs still face challenges. Directors of small MPA programs receive little formal training, work under recruitment pressures, and have difficulties maintaining active advisory boards. Directors also report needing more administrative support and budget autonomy to do their jobs effectively and maintain accreditation with the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration.

KEYWORDS

Small MPA programs, MPA program directors, public administration employees

A significant percentage of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) have enrollments below 100 students. In 2014, there were 118 small MPA programs, and of these 85 (72%) were accredited by NASPAA. For that year, small MPA programs comprised 44% of NASPAA member MPA programs. These small

programs play an important role in public affairs by contributing to governance and life in many communities. The graduates of such programs serve many rural and medium-sized communities and nonprofits in the United States. Small programs offer several advantages: the ability to provide individualized attention to students; small classes where instructors can employ interactive teaching methods; mean-

ingful service-learning projects for pre-service students; and the ability to educate large numbers of in-service students already working in the field, which also enriches the learning experience of pre-service students (Hatcher, 2015).

Still, directors of small programs face special challenges. First, small programs are often in universities and colleges that require faculty to teach many courses. Heavy teaching loads make it difficult for faculty to balance instruction with research and service roles, and this is especially problematic if the service responsibilities include serving as MPA program director. Second, given how budgeting decisions in higher education are often driven by the number of students enrolled in a program, small MPA programs may struggle to obtain needed resources. Lastly, small programs have difficulty marketing themselves because their reputation does not extend beyond their region.

In recent decades, MPA programs of all sizes have faced existential challenges. Even large programs struggle to compete within public university systems that focus increasingly on the bottom line. According to an article in *Governing* on the future of the MPA (Kerrigan, 2011), programs are fighting to survive by detaching from their home colleges and forming new schools, as with public affairs at the University of Arizona. Other programs are seeing constraints as a prompt to make a case for their value, as with the Evans School at the University of Washington. However, some programs are being shut down, even large, historic ones like the undergraduate and graduate degrees in public administration at the University of Maine. These examples illustrate what Rich (2013) describes as the difficulties public affairs programs face in making their case when higher education is dominated by return on investment and cost centers. To survive, public affairs programs need to fund-raise, find externally sponsored grants and assistantships, increase graduate-level tuition, consolidate programs, and develop new undergraduate offerings (Rich, 2013). If large MPA programs are facing these constraints, one can imagine that the need to

justify costs is even more salient for small MPA programs. But little is known about the challenges facing small programs.

Only two published studies (Cleary, 1990; McGinnis, 1993) have focused on small MPA programs and the directors of these programs. Given the importance of small programs and their increasing numbers within NASPAA, this dearth of research prompted us to survey directors of NASPAA member programs that have 100 or fewer students. We developed our survey questions using McGinnis's (1993) survey as a starting point. We intend for our research to gather and analyze data on the modern challenges and constraints facing small MPA programs and their directors. More important, these results can be disseminated to ensure that small programs continue to build and strengthen their governing capacity and to give program directors a forum for voicing their needs and concerns about program capacities, challenges, and constraints.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In public administration, we often ask our students to think about why something is considered a "public" problem. We challenge students to understand who and what matters in any issue that we try to analyze. Following this logic, we determined that the administration of small MPA programs does warrant a place in the discussion of public administration education. We want to understand the issues, challenges, and constraints that the directors of small MPA programs face in fulfilling day-to-day administrative tasks and in balancing the competing roles of teacher and researcher. By understanding the viewpoints of directors, we gain insights into the challenges and capacities of small MPA programs. Though we do not attempt to fully answer these questions, we begin here so as to place our study in the context of what has come before and where we hope to go.

Previous research, as shown in Table 1, has focused on ranking programs through looking at program reputation, faculty research productivity, student job placement and advancement, success in securing presidential management

fellows, and program quality. Uveges (1987) looked at program prestige and was very supportive of NASPAA accreditation standards for public administration programs; however, he was never able to secure that designation for his program during his tenure due to lack of resources and small faculty size. The lack of resources ensured that the program struggled to satisfy accreditation standards. Baldwin (1988) studied MPA program directors' perceptions of the effectiveness of their programs and the effect on accreditation status of organizational structures, such as being an autonomous or stand-alone program, a program located within or attached to another department such as political science, or a program located within another school such as business. Jennings (1989) focused on outcome assessment criteria and found that small programs are at a disadvantage compared to larger programs due to resource constraints. He suggested focusing on outputs rather than inputs. For example, MPA program quality should be judged based on the knowledge, values, and skills of graduates as well as their success in securing employment upon graduation.

These early studies, while important, did not address the role of the program director. Cleary's study published in 1990 got a little closer. In 1989, Cleary surveyed all principal representatives of NASPAA-affiliated programs. He described programs based on name of degree, program setting and organization, credit hour requirements, and internship requirements; he focused primarily on core curriculum requirements. One notable finding was that a significant number of small programs were not accredited. Cleary found that small programs, defined as enrolling 100 students or fewer, were less likely to be accredited than larger programs.

It was not until McGinnis's (1993) study that the needs of small programs were addressed through survey research and the status of small programs was assessed. McGinnis focused on nine areas of concern: the public service role of MPA programs, MPA student population, the definition of a small program, NASPAA faculty standards, program autonomy, faculty research, the importance of NASPAA standards, measur-

ing program outcomes, and small programs and NASPAA governance (p. 21). McGinnis surveyed 84 directors of small programs and found the following:

- Larger programs had more of a national reputation (p. 30) than smaller ones and defined their size based on number of MPA degrees awarded and extensive reliance on an active alumni (p. 23), although small MPA programs often had solid reputations that extended regionally. Further, small program definitions were self-selected based on number of full-time faculty, number of graduate students, level of program resources, and breadth of curriculum (p. 22).
- Small MPA programs had more in-service students than pre-service students, and the interaction between in-service and pre-service students during class discussions added value and meaning for the pre-service students in understanding public service in practice (p. 21).
- For the most part, institutions provided small programs with the research support needed to achieve and maintain NASPAA accreditation (p. 26).
- The six criteria identified by program directors as important and that should be considered by NASPAA in accreditation of small programs were autonomy, faculty size, sufficiency of program resources, program outcomes, research capacity, and enrollment levels (p. 28).
- The two program outcomes identified by program directors as most important were quality of education and the success of placement of graduates into public service positions (p.28).

Despite the passage of 25 years and a wealth of data collected about small MPA programs, the role of the MPA director has not yet been thoroughly studied. Through our survey research, we attempt to fill this void in the literature and to more fully describe and understand the current status of small MPA programs, including their capacity and constraints.

TABLE 1.
Survey of the Literature on Directing an MPA Program

Source	Focus
Morgan, Meier, Kearney, Hays, & Birch, 1981	Program reputation and research productivity in an effort to rank 10 best programs; autonomy of program vis-à-vis other departments, schools, etc.
Morgan & Meier, 1982	Program reputation and research productivity
Adams, 1983	Program reputation
Ferris & Stallings, 1988	Program reputation and program quality
Uveges, 1987	Impact of NASPAA standards on graduate education, program resources, and program viability
Baldwin, 1988	Program effectiveness, institutional arrangement, and accreditation status
Jennings, 1989	Assessment criteria, accountability, and program quality on graduate education
Cleary, 1990	MPA program curriculum
McGinnis, 1993	Demographic descriptions and needs of small MPA programs

Note. Adapted primarily from McGinnis, 1993

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, STUDY SUBJECTS, AND SURVEY LIMITATIONS

Our study’s main research question is, what is the status of small MPA programs? Uncovering the answer would help us better understand the capacity and constraints of small MPA programs. Furthermore, we use our survey results to describe the status of small MPA programs by asking program directors what their tasks are, what resources they have, and what resources are lacking.

We extended and developed survey questions from McGinnis’s (1993) survey. We sent our survey via e-mail on August 3, 2016, to programs identified on NASPAA’s small program mailing list. We sent a reminder survey on August 27, 2016. We netted a total of 74 surveys as of October 4, 2016, a response rate of 43.7%. Most of the questions were answered by 40 to 50 respondents.

We acknowledge the following survey limitations: Those who are part of a professional organization such as NASPAA may have a particular

interest in and assign significant importance to the subject of the survey. We do not know how those who did not respond might have answered the questions. The length of the survey may have proved daunting to some and affected the response rate. We offered no incentives for completing the survey. Finally, while the survey instrument promised confidentiality, fear of being identified may have negatively affected the survey response rate.

SELECTED DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

At most universities in the United States, faculty have responsibilities in three areas: teaching, research, and service. There can be variation in the amount of time and effort that goes into each of these areas of responsibility. For example, first-year, tenure-track faculty might be protected from extensive service responsibilities as they prepare to teach new courses and develop their research agendas. Once faculty are established in those areas, service duties are generally added to their mix of responsibilities.

One aspect of service for public administration faculty is to serve as MPA director. Accordingly, the administrative work is often treated as service. The tasks of an MPA director have to be balanced with the demands of teaching and research. This leads to the assumption that the person appointed to the position of MPA director has teaching experience and an established research agenda and publication record in his or her field of expertise. Ideally, the MPA director is tenured and holds the rank of associate or full professor. This is not meant to imply that the teaching and research roles and areas of responsibility disappear or are somehow less important than the role of MPA director. However, some concession or consideration must be made about the workload associated with the tasks related to the position of director.

First, we wanted to answer the question, who are the directors of small MPA programs? An examination of survey respondents shows little diversity: 88% of those who answered the question ($n = 42$) self-identified as white, and 67% were male compared to 37% female. As expected, 88% of those who answered the question about their position ($n = 41$) were tenured faculty; and 95% held either the rank of associate (58%) or full professor (37%). Only three directors reported their rank as assistant professor. Interestingly, 76% reported working as a practitioner before becoming an academic, and several respondents reported holding high-level governmental jobs for a significant number of years before becoming an academic. The finding that many respondents are “pracademics” (academics with practitioner experience) is encouraging and enhances the connection between theory and practice in the field (Battaglio & Scicchitano, 2013).

Second, we wanted to confirm that the MPA programs surveyed were small. Respondents reported that in fall 2015, their programs admitted an average of 22 students, with 20 being the number most prevalent in the data set. These programs reported an average student body size of 55.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

What Do Directors of Small MPA Programs Do?

The day-to-day tasks of an MPA director vary in part based on the level of administrative support provided to the small MPA program. Other resource constraints also factor into a director’s tasks. Table 2 presents the responses to “Select all the tasks that are part of your job as director.” This list is not exhaustive nor does it show the amount of time or frequency of each task; rather, it shows the variety of tasks undertaken by the MPA director.

According to respondents, they have most autonomy in their jobs in the area of curriculum changes (92% reported having autonomy over this issue), and they have the least control over issues concerning the budget and tenure and promotion. The lack of control over tenure and promotion is understandable for two reasons: promotion and tenure decisions are normally not made at the program level, and some of our respondents are not tenured and hold the rank of assistant professors. When we asked directors what they viewed as their most important tasks, they ranked recruitment, student advising, and curriculum as the most important parts of their jobs. Respondents saw career service and alumni relations as their least important tasks.

TABLE 2.
Tasks Undertaken by Directors of Small MPA Programs

Task	Percentage of directors reporting
Managing the program’s budget	52%
Supervising administrative staff	58%
Recruitment	90%
Curriculum changes	96%
Career services	65%
Student advisement	96%
Alumni relations	92%

Note. $N = 52$

The directors reported that their home institutions viewed enrollment levels as the most important outcome of their MPA programs, while the directors themselves saw program resources as the most important.

What Resources Are Important to Directors of Small MPA Programs and to Their Satisfaction?

For the individual faculty member appointed to the position of MPA director, we must recognize that just like any employee in any other organization, job satisfaction may be influenced by or associated with several factors (Ellickson & Logsdon, 2001). An individual's job satisfaction may be a function of the multiple roles that person fulfills—teacher, researcher, and MPA director as the primary service role. Because these three roles are distinct, we have a unique opportunity to explore how resources available to or perceived as important to the MPA director in serving within that role may be associated with varying levels of job satisfaction. And the job satisfaction of the directors of small programs affects how they approach their work, which in turn affects the overall capacity of their programs. If directors are not satisfied with their jobs, this is an important constraint facing their programs and limits program capacity.

A sense of autonomy and the ability to work independently often contribute to job satisfaction. The ability to work independently as a teacher or researcher is not questioned; indeed, independence in these roles is normal in an academic setting. We expected to see the same with the role of MPA program director, because of the need to balance the demands of competing roles. Of the survey respondents, nearly 90% felt they had control over their work. Pay and benefits also contributed to job satisfaction. Close to 60% of respondents reported that they somewhat agree or strongly agree that they are fairly paid for their work, and 69% indicated having the needed travel support. Of the survey respondents, 74% reported that they are given an additional stipend or other monetary consideration for serving as MPA director.

A reasonable workload also contributes to job satisfaction. Only 37% reported that their faculty have a 2/2 teaching load, while 38% reported a 3/3 teaching load, and 9% reported a 4/4 teaching load. Approximately 13% reported other types of teaching loads, such as 2/1 or 3/2 loads. These institutional teaching loads may be an indicator or a proxy of whether the MPA director has colleagues who are in a position to assist with the service tasks that must be conducted to support the director and/or the program. Of the survey respondents, 95% reported a teaching load reassignment as a consideration for serving as MPA director.

Other survey questions asked about NASPAA and accreditation, which respondents viewed favorably: 57% strongly agreed that NASPAA was beneficial and an additional 21% somewhat agreed. Of the small programs surveyed, 24% reported not being accredited by NASPAA. However, 90% of respondents indicated that their institutions support the research needed for NASPAA accreditation; but only one MPA director received reassignment of research load as a consideration for taking on the role of MPA director. MPA directors indicated that they receive varied levels of support from other faculty in the NASPAA accreditation or reaccreditation process, along with assistance in recruitment, intern supervision, and student assessments activities such as the grading and evaluation of comprehensive exams, portfolios, or theses. Willingness to continue in the role of MPA director may be related to how the director perceives such support or lack thereof.

What Resources Are Lacking?

Adequate training and resources to accomplish a job also contribute to job satisfaction. Responses to the question of whether the MPA director received training from the former director upon starting the position revealed that only 25% did, while 75% did not. Of those who answered the open-ended question to describe the training received, two described the training as "informal," four described it as "mentoring or shadowing," and four described it as "discussions." Respondents referenced NASPAA conference training for small program directors. Concerning training provided

to MPA directors, the appendix presents responses as written by survey respondents in the categories of informal, mentoring or shadowing, or discussions; some responses could fall into multiple categories.

Most respondents (69%) reported having a 9- or 10-month appointment; however, all directors reported that they worked year-round (12 months) in performing their MPA director duties. This may be a significant constraint on the reasonableness of their workload and their satisfaction as directors. All directors surveyed work throughout the entire year but only officially serve in a 9- or 10-month appointment. In their comments, many directors said they received a stipend, but not all received this extra pay for the summer months.

Other resources that might be lacking are an adequate number of faculty to meet NASPAA accreditation standards. Of the respondents, 44% reported having difficulties in recruiting faculty. Further, 60% reported not having administrative support dedicated to the MPA program. These factors, coupled with the MPA director's working year-round and an inadequate number of faculty to share in program governance responsibilities, could indicate lack of support from the upper administration for the MPA program and the director. Certainly, these factors indicate resource constraints experienced by MPA programs.

We asked several open-ended questions of MPA directors to understand the importance of resources. Responses to the question "What resources do you wish you had?" generally fell into three categories: more money, more faculty, and more administrative support. The appendix lists all responses; some responses could apply to more than one category.

Lastly, in terms of adequacy of resources, only 18% of respondents reported having a very active MPA program advisory board. In the open-ended responses, those who reported having active advisory boards indicated a variety of ways in which the board contributed to governance of the program. The appendix presents these responses. It is apparent that advisory

boards are being used in helpful ways that other MPA programs might duplicate and find useful.

What Is the Most Frustrating Part of the Job of MPA Director?

To further understand the role of MPA director, we asked this open-ended question: "What is the most frustrating part of your job?" We also asked that respondents provide an example. Responses were similar to those presented in the prior tables, and many respondents referred to resource constraints: lack of budgetary support, lack of faculty support, and lack of administrative support. It is also notable that some directors indicated that they felt a great sense of responsibility for the success of the program but acknowledged that they did not have the authority in many instances to accomplish necessary tasks. The appendix presents these responses and the examples provided.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SMALL PROGRAMS

Directing a small MPA program is a challenging administrative job fraught with difficulties. None of the difficulties described by survey respondents are insurmountable, but no MPA director should view these difficulties in isolation. As a discipline and profession, public administration needs to do a better job of encouraging the sharing of best practices via NASPAA, the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), or other professional organizations. We need to encourage more research into the role of MPA director so that we might come to a greater understanding of how to better govern the MPA programs we serve.

From our survey, we found that most MPA directors are tenured, and a plurality are associate professors. The directors as a group are not that diverse in terms of gender or ethnicity. Our field needs to focus on encouraging a more diverse range of faculty members to become MPA directors and examine why this lack of diversity among directors exists. Program directors are mostly engaged day-to-day in curriculum changes, student advising, and recruitment. It is not surprising that recruitment is a major pressure on directors of small MPA programs, but respondents reported that they

lacked resources to support recruitment. It is also worrisome that many home institutions did not value program outcomes—such as quality of education provided or how prepared students were to be gainfully employed upon graduation—as much as they valued recruitment and enrollment numbers.

When it comes to their work, we learned that directors reported having control of how they undertook their jobs and having manageable teaching loads. In fact, a majority of respondents said that their nucleus MPA faculty had reasonable teaching loads (2/2 or 3/3). Only a few reported that their faculty were teaching a heavy load of classes (4/4 or higher). When faculty teaching loads are reasonable, faculty are in a better position to offer assistance with service activities to the MPA program in the form of supervising internships or serving on assessment committees or grading comprehensive examinations. We were surprised to find that many respondents reported having adequate financial support for travel, which indirectly shows that there is support for research efforts.

From our survey, we identified a number of constraints facing MPA directors and their programs. Perhaps most concerning, we found that many directors received little to no training before assuming their administrative roles. Training of new MPA directors is lacking, and there is no suitable reason that an MPA director who steps down should not spend some time training his or her replacement. Such training should be more formalized, moving beyond informal discussions, mentoring, or shadowing. Perhaps there needs to be a transition or overlap period of one semester where both outgoing and incoming directors share in the role of director; or perhaps the outgoing director could continue to have a teaching reassignment for one semester to ease the transition and be available to train the incoming director.

Eight of the MPA directors who responded to our survey reported that their small program is not accredited by NASPAA. Across universities, resources are scarce and there is great competition for them. But universities need to

provide support and necessary resources for their accredited programs, including dedicated administrative support for MPA programs. This is a resource sorely missing from small MPA programs. Meeting the standards for reaccreditation takes a tremendous amount of work and must be a joint effort of all faculty in the program. Strengthening the contribution of each faculty member and sharing in the governance process would make it easier for MPA directors to avoid burnout and would decrease turnover in the position. Additionally, we found that advisory boards of MPA programs are underutilized. These boards help connect MPA programs, students, and alumni to the practice of public affairs and to the communities in which they serve. The lack of involvement from advisory boards is significant for the field of public administration.

Based on our research, we suggest the following important takeaways for public affairs education, especially for small programs. First, we need to encourage the training of MPA directors. Most directors only receive informal training before and after assuming their leadership roles. While NASPAA-provided training is helpful, travel to the NASPAA annual conference is a hefty cost for small programs to incur. However, asking NASPAA for help or to recommend someone to speak to at another institution is an acceptable way to find assistance.

Second, we need to help directors with recruitment and marketing. We need to help them communicate the importance of program outcomes to both internal and external constituencies. The top pressure on directors from their home institutions is recruitment. Again, NASPAA can assist with this pressure by offering more help in the area of marketing programs. Beyond recruitment and enrollment, graduation rates and placement of graduates in public sector positions are outcomes important to the success of MPA programs that must be acknowledged by home institutions. NASPAA can also help small programs learn how to highlight those successes to their constituencies and how to further use that data in recruitment and marketing efforts.

Third, on the surface, directors reported having needed resources, but their open-ended comments revealed major resource constraints. In particular, deficiencies revolved around the inability of programs to control their operating budgets, the inability to have enough faculty to share in the workload, and the lack of administrative support dedicated to the MPA program. If they need help, MPA directors must learn to advocate for it, whether with the upper administration in terms of funding an administrative aide or additional graduate student or by asking a colleague to share in the workload.

Lastly, utilization of advisory boards needs to be strengthened, and our director-respondents have solid ideas for leveraging boards to achieve important outcomes for their programs and students. Advisory board members can assist with program reviews and course assessments; serve as guest speakers and adjuncts; serve as mentors; and develop internship placements for students and job placements for graduates. It is likely that most programs have alumni who are just waiting to be asked to serve on an advisory board and could lighten the load of the MPA director, while at the same time bringing a fresh perspective to governance of the program.

CONCLUSION

This study advances our understanding of the role of the MPA director in the administration of small MPA programs in the United States. Academic programs in public affairs are operating in constrained environments (Kerrigan, 2011; Rich, 2013). Even large public affairs schools and programs face budgetary constraints that hinder their work of educating public servants and improving the governing capability of our communities. Small MPA programs face an even more tightly constrained situation than larger programs.

Our survey findings confirm that small MPA programs are operating in constrained environments. Respondents reported not receiving administrative support and support from the upper administration to accomplish programmatic goals. At the same time, small MPA programs do seem to have needed resources in some areas. For instance, it appears that faculty

of small MPA programs tend to have control over their work, manageable teaching loads, and necessary travel resources.

When asked to indicate the number of years the individual intends to serve as MPA director, the 54 respondents' average answer was three years. Resource constraints may play an important role in these directors' intentions. Frequent turnover may indeed exacerbate administrative challenges and resource constraints faced by small MPA programs.

Public administration as a discipline needs to focus on addressing the constraints facing small MPA programs (Hatcher, 2015). According to our findings, small MPA programs comprise a large percentage of NASPAA member programs. We know that the faculty of these programs serve many of the nation's communities, especially nonmetropolitan areas. Still, only a handful of studies have examined the particular challenges facing small programs. Our work contributes to the literature by building on these studies and providing a clearer understanding of small MPA programs as they currently operate.

In this article we have identified what tasks small MPA program directors perform and both the capacity and constraints of their programs. We plan to further analyze our survey data to help explain how directors of small MPA programs view their contributions to public service. Through responses to our survey's open-ended questions, we will try to understand what motivates directors to serve as MPA director, what directors view as the rewards of serving in the role, and what factors make serving as director frustrating and might result in turnover. We also hope to further explore what contributes to or diminishes the overall job satisfaction of these administrators who do such important work for MPA programs. Knowing more about directors' job satisfaction will help us develop prescriptions for improving public administration education and practice. As practitioners in this discipline and profession, we all need to work diligently to ensure that small MPA programs receive the necessary resources to accomplish their goals and continue to contribute to the field of public service.

While our findings contribute to the discussion of small MPA programs' importance, more research is needed. We invite interested researchers to study MPA directors and small MPA programs. We are hopeful that further research will help small MPA programs continue to build and strengthen their governing capacity and will help program directors voice their needs and concerns about program capacities, challenges, and constraints. As a result, we may come to a greater understanding of how to better govern the MPA programs we serve and how to assist those serving in the important role of MPA director.

REFERENCES

- Adams, W. O. (1983). Reputation, size, and student success in public administration/affairs programs. *Public Administration Review*, 43(5), 443–446.
- Baldwin, J. N. (1988). Comparison of perceived effectiveness of MPA programs administered under different institutional arrangements. *Public Administration Review*, 48(5), 876–884.
- Battaglio, R. P., Jr., & Scicchitano, M. J. (2013). Building bridges? An assessment of academic and practitioner perceptions with observations for the public administration classroom. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 14(4), 749–772.
- Cleary, R. (1990). What do public administration masters programs look like? Do they do what is needed? *Public Administration Review*, 50(6), 663–673.
- Ellickson, M., & Logsdon, K. (2001). Determinants of job satisfaction of municipal government employees. *State and Local Government Review*, 33(3), 173–184.
- Ferris, J. M., & Stallings, R. A. (1988). Sources of reputation among public administration and public affairs programs. *American Review of Public Administration*, 18(3), 309–325.
- Hatcher, W. (2015, October 13). Learning more about small MPA programs. *PA Times Online*. Retrieved from <http://patimes.org/learning-small-MPA-programs>.
- Jennings, E. T. (1989). Accountability, program quality, outcome assessment and graduate education for public affairs and administration. *Public Administration Review*, 49(5), 438–446.
- Kerrigan, H. (2011, August). Fighting to save the MPA. *Governing*. Retrieved from <http://www.governing.com/fighting-save-MPA.html>.
- McGinnis, H. K. (1993). The status of small MPA programs: A commitment to quality, diversity, and uniqueness. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 16(1), 15–33.
- Morgan, D., & Meier K. (1982). Reputation and productivity of public administration/affairs programs: Additional data. *Public Administration Review*, 42(2), 171–173.
- Morgan, D., Meier, K., Kearney, R., Hays, S. W., & Birch, H. B. (1981). Reputation and productivity among U.S. public administration and public affairs programs. *Public Administration Review*, 41(6), 666–673.
- Rich, D. (2013). Public affairs programs and the changing political economy of higher education. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 19(2), 263–283.
- Uveges, J. A. (1987). Identifying the impacts of NASPAA's MPA standards and peer review process on education for the public service: 1975–1985. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 9(2), 193–227.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

William Hatcher is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Augusta University in Augusta, Georgia. He directs the university's Master of Public Administration program. His research focus includes public finance, community development, and public health.

Wesley L. Meares is an assistant professor of political science and public administration at Augusta University. His research interests include housing, economic development, sustainability, urban politics and policy, and the role of nonprofits in neighborhood revitalization.

Victoria Gordon is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Her research focus includes municipal finance and human resources management.

APPENDIX

Open-Ended Survey Responses

TRAINING PROVIDED TO MPA DIRECTORS

Informal

- Informal training from previous director and NASPAA conference.
- Informal transition meetings the semester before I started. On-demand advising as needed during first year.

Mentoring or Shadowing

- More shadowing than training.
- Had been interim director during a sabbatical; shadowed; went to NASPAA orientation.
- It was informal training, probably considered shadowing or mentoring. Prior to becoming MPA director, I helped the previous director with accreditation reports, attended graduate program director meetings when he or she couldn't, etc.
- Shadowing, mentorship.

Discussions

- Ability to ask questions about situations that have and might arise.
- I inherited a program that was designed and run based on the old NASPAA standards. The former director helped me understand the program and our institution. He had not initiated anything necessary for the program to meet the new standards; so I had a lot to learn and create on my own.
- Answered questions when I asked.
- One-on-one conversations.

RESOURCES MPA DIRECTORS WISH THEY HAD

More Money and Faculty

- More endowments and more support from the university. When I came after the program had been around 40 years, there was zero in MPA endowments and gifts and no scholarships. Now we have some resources from fund-raising, but if they had done this 40 years ago, we would be in great shape now.

- A sense of what a budget really is for the program and control over it. A full-time recruiter.
- Bigger budget. More university support for advertisement and recruitment.
- More travel and budget autonomy.
- More money, more and better staff.
- More money for graduate assistants.
- Small operating fund, say \$1,000 per year.
- Additional funding and a bit more freedom to raise funds and keep the funds we raise. There's a lot of revenue sharing that goes on, but not as much sharing of the work it takes to raise that revenue. Additional faculty; we had a retirement a few years ago and the line is still vacant. It really stretches us, especially in a year like this one when we've got two of five faculty taking sabbaticals. More competent administrative support staff.
- A much larger budget for advertising and recruitment, at least one more faculty member, a separate organizational identity (department), co-located offices.
- A larger faculty would help us focus our energy into fewer subfields, which would be helpful for trying to have some kind of research agenda.
- More money for travel and faculty and student development; more recruitment support; more faculty.
- More faculty or a 3/3 teaching load cap.
- More faculty, a separate budget, better technology for distance learning (we have to rely on a central university location that does not meet our needs).
- More faculty to spread out related functions, like setting up club advising and outreach. Our outreach and marketing services are too decentralized, which requires more time for coordination than should be necessary. Still, we are making significant progress.
- More faculty lines.
- More faculty and travel money.
- More faculty.
- More faculty! We struggle to count the minimum of five on a regular basis.

Administrative Support

- More funding for recruitment and career placement administrative positions.
- A program manager that could work on recruitment and manage assessment and NASPAA requirements.

Administrative Support (continued)

- More help with student recruitment.
- An enrollment growth specialist and a marketing specialist.
- Administrative support. A million or so in an endowment to support more student scholarships and fund a public speaker series.
- An associate director and administrative support for assessment.
- Every program needs some sort of dedicated professional support. No MPA director should have to become an expert in marketing, learn how to develop Facebook/Google ads, develop websites, etc. It is also impractical to think that I can maintain an updated alumni list as people get married, change names, relocate and change jobs, and have their university e-mail dumped into spam folders.
- A full-time administrative assistant and a small budget to support student programs, bringing in speakers, and supporting travel to another conference. Most small programs severely lack resources. Note: The rankings asked earlier in this survey were affected by the fact that my program does not have a budget; therefore this is not one of my main duties.
- Dedicated recruiter, more marketing money.
- A program manager to maintain records and figures, especially for annual reports and the self-study report for accreditation.
- Reliable administrative support.
- More administrative support.
- Feedback on communication, placement, quality of graduates, fund-raising, sounding board for curriculum changes and other proposals.
- Recruitment and curriculum guidance, mentoring to current students.
- They make course suggestions based on what is needed in the field. Provide accountability with regards to budgets, hiring, and assessment results.
- Helps us with strategic planning.
- We have started and restarted the committee three times in the last 6 years. Curriculum review has been an important component. We have also sought advice on how to create internship and placement opportunities.
- Currently, it is more of a stakeholder group and we are considering restructuring. It reviews curriculum and placements. Members have served as city manager in residence and have attended program events. Most have been guest speakers and some have been practitioner adjuncts. One has been a link to local ASPA chapter; others have referred students or hired students.
- Networking, alumni relations, recruitment, and advisory.
- We are revising our committee to provide more curriculum development input and less student recruiting.
- They fight for us with the dean and the administration.
- Provides direction on marketing, fund-raising, curriculum needs, etc.
- Reviews mission, helps with fund-raising, helps with internship and job placement.
- They provide good feedback on the field in practice, including feedback on how new employees (ours and others) are doing in the field; help us crafting mission; help us/advise on starting new programs.
- We meet annually to review curricular changes, discuss internships, provide feedback and insight on the direction of the field and skills required of graduates.
- They are not a governing body, but an advisory body. Most recently, they helped with a branding initiative, participated in aspects of our NASPAA reaccreditation, and provided input on curriculum revisions.
- Outreach and recruitment and curriculum development.

Other

- More time.
- A course release for someone else to do student advising and monitoring of scheduling and progress in curriculum. Would give me more time to focus on bigger-picture issues.

ADVISORY BOARD CONTRIBUTIONS TO MPA PROGRAMS

- They can provide useful input when contemplating a curriculum or other program change.
- Assists in internships and curriculum.
- Reviews changes to the program. Plans for the future.
- They review current curriculum and program requirements and offer suggestions for revisions.

- Curriculum content, search committees, internship supervision, student networking, guest speaking, training, fund-raising, class projects.
- We have two, a student advisory board and an alumni advisory board. Members of both may attend faculty meetings. All are involved in providing advice on proposed changes in curriculum, recruitment, and program evaluation and student outcomes. All participate in search and screen activities for recruiting new faculty.
- Twice-a-year retreats discussing curriculum changes, marketing and recruitment, pedagogy.
- We meet with the advisory board twice a year. They provide report assessment, strategic goals, curriculum changes, etc. They also provide suggestions for the program.
- Assists in alumni recruitment and involvement. Assists in major curriculum development or change. Assists in fundraising and event planning. Will assist in assessing comprehensive exams in the future.
- Encouraged to help with final assessment of student final project.
- Portfolio evaluation; recruitment.
- Reviews and comments on curriculum issues. Identifies new opportunities for student community engagement. Reviews and approves program mission.

MOST FRUSTRATING PARTS OF THE MPA DIRECTOR JOB

- Having responsibility but no authority. If the program fails, I am held responsible, but I don't control resources, do evaluations, etc. I don't really direct anything.
- It is ceaseless.
- Too many things going on at once.
- When we meet with the dean and have to explain why enrollments did not meet her expectations even though we have no resources for recruitment.
- Dealing with administration. The university wants the program to be accredited but provides no resources to make that happen.
- Dealing with university administrators who couldn't give a crap about program quality and just want enrollments so they can re-program those new resources to some pet project that will get them a new line in the résumé and something to highlight in their cover letter, so they can get their next job at another university before the chaos and carnage they created are discovered.
- Upper administration.
- University politics.
- University politics, constantly fighting for limited university resources, working with administrators who don't have the same values, cultivating donors, maintaining communication with alumni.
- Working with administrators to provide adequate resources.
- Too much focus from the university on the revenue side of the program. For example, a request to change the teacher/facilitator model to soften the pressure on instructors has been met with great resistance even though the current design is putting a lot of stress on faculty who did not expect the rapid growth.
- Dealing with administrators who couldn't care less about any public service role for the university.
- Dealing with bureaucracy, university, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and NASPAA.
- Dealing with the bureaucracy. We're based at a physical campus but "remote" from the main campus, where we rent space from a commercial property management firm. It can be difficult to get basic support down here, whether IT, janitorial services, or something else. Also, helping students navigate what seems to be unnecessary red tape in terms of filing forms, whether withdrawal paperwork or any other kind of "petition" the bureaucracy demands. We are overly reliant on paper, among other things.
- The lack of administrative support.
- NASPAA has not always been helpful, as there is often a top-down, NASPAA/COPRA (Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation) knows best attitude and little appreciation of the issue of sustainability in terms of NASPAA/COPRA demands on my time.
- Administrative tasks and data gathering that appease others but do little to support what is needed at the ground level to properly innovate, support faculty, and achieve student and research success.
- NASPAA reporting requirements.
- Fights over limited resources.

MOST FRUSTRATING PARTS OF THE MPA DIRECTOR JOB (continued)

- Competing for resources with another grad program in the department. For example, I secured resources for a student recruiting course release from our grad school and had another public administration faculty member willing to do the day-to-day recruitment activities. The course release was diverted to support our other grad program, which has very weak enrollment.
- Recruiting without any control over how it is done.
- Lack of resources. No money for marketing, travel, space, etc. It is improving now, but it has been difficult.
- The School of Public Affairs is short two to three faculty lines based on our enrollment stats and graduation outcomes. We could do more if we had more core faculty to teach courses in public management and policy and in criminal justice.
- Budget cuts and micromanaging.
- Lack of budget authority.
- Lack of faculty.
- Faculty narrow view.
- Distrustful faculty.
- Dealing with difficult faculty members who fight you over everything. Having to fight for resources in a college with 13 departments/programs where you are the second smallest program.
- Recognizing and acknowledging diverse faculty perspectives and finding common ground to move projects/decisions forward.
- Dealing with political science colleagues.
- Annual scheduling of graduate courses with faculty.
- Assessment. We have a strong culture of assessment, but few people who are willing to keep up on it.
- Large portion of time spent on assessment for accreditation at various levels—NASPAA, state council on higher education, regional association of colleges, etc.
- Right now, we are behind on enrollment outreach and there are more areas to be updated than originally anticipated.
- There are a few of us really dedicated to going the extra mile to make this program awesome for our students. There are a few others who could not care less about these extras and who rarely even attend events, let alone help. There are a few others who will show up and think it's great, but do little else. We'd be blowing the doors off of this thing if we could get rid of the few slackers and replace them with the very dedicated.
- I was an untenured assistant during most of my time as MPA director, and I was still doing service work and prepping courses. My research agenda suffered terribly, and I remain a bit angry about that loss, but I am proud of the work I accomplished. It need not have been so difficult if the full professors had helped. Such is life in the academy, I suppose.