

**NASPAA PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**  
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I would like to begin by thanking Cornelius Kerwin for his strong leadership of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration during this past year. I also would like to say I am honored to assume this organization's presidency and that, I assure you, there is no American University conspiracy at work here.

Our association has a long history of excellence in accreditation and innovation in the field of public affairs and administration, and I am proud to have the opportunity to be a part of such excellence. I think we all have learned a lot here in the past few days, and I think we all have been given useful information and ideas to take back to our respective institutions. I would particularly like to mention James Carroll's, Mark Abramson's, and Patrick Hennigan's enlightening panel on private sector employment for NASPAA graduates. I would also like to acknowledge Nadia Rubaii-Barrett's panel on examining student diversity, Margaret Gordon's panel on examining how we teach diversity, and Paul Light's panel on the profile of the public service profession. These panels truly embodied this year's theme of building bridges and forging new partnerships for public service.

All across the nation and around the world, businesses and governments are taking the time in the face of the coming millennium to evaluate their missions and rededicate themselves to this new era of global interconnectedness, lightning-fast communication, and a future of seemingly infinite possibility.

And in academe—especially in academe—we have the responsibility of being in the forefront of this movement to reevaluate and be introspective. We are the ones who will prepare the next generation of public servants. We have to know and understand the practical challenges our students will face. We ourselves have to know what we do well and know what we don't do so well so that we can send our students out into a highly competitive, high-tech-driven world with the proper tools to succeed.

As educators, as public servants, it is imperative that we take this time and reevaluate, reflect upon, and redefine what it is we do and how we fit into the world around us.

First, we must look at reevaluation—reevaluation of our relationships with practitioners and agencies. We must ask ourselves how open our doors are to practitioners who wish to impart to us and to our students their daily travails as they cope with tight budgets, difficult and sometimes partisan politics, computer crashes, and the like. As academics, are we taking the opportunities to go out and learn firsthand what practitioners face in this new age? As institutions, are we

working in our communities and with local and state practitioners to maximize communication and the benefits of having these valuable resources in our own back yards?

Second, we must reflect upon the good things we've done and are doing to give our students the best possible chance to succeed. We've sent many MPAs (Masters of Public Administration) out into the world, and with confidence I can say we've graduated many highly competent, well-trained, dedicated public servants. For that we should be proud.

Our institutions should also be commended for recognizing the challenges of the times and acting accordingly to bring their programs in line with the vast and rapid changes taking place all around us.

And finally, we have to continue in our efforts to explore and understand what public service is, and even more importantly, what it is becoming. We have already done a good job of recognizing and reacting to the expansion of public service to include practitioners in nonprofit entities and certain aspects of the private sector. Now, we must inspect the long-range ramifications for the enterprise. We must look at how we are changing to meet the needs of a changing world and changing definitions of public servant and public service.

I have always believed in the relevance and importance of what we do, both as practitioners and as educators. Some may say that in this age of contracting out, downsizing, reengineering, and budget constriction, the heyday of a strong corps of public servants has passed. I say that is wrong. I say the world's problems—be they disease, providing proper health care for children, or protecting the environment—can be and are being tackled in the public-service realm. A strong corps of public servants is the vanguard—the first line of defense against chaos—the oil that keeps society's wheels turning and often turning smoothly.

Now our profession and our association are not without their problems. We are in a period where we must reconcile the valid academic goals of ethics and theoretical inquiry with the practical concerns our graduates face when they hit the workforce—which is getting the job done and providing the public with quality service under daily deadlines and various other constraints.

How do we accomplish these many tasks, which at times seem to work at cross-purposes? Enter the "pracademics."

Practitioners offer a wealth of information and experience that is invaluable to our students. They also offer a wealth of information for us. What we've heard from practitioners is that they are seeking graduates who can hit the ground running and are up to speed in the latest technologies and methods of the field.

But it is not just up to academics to simply invite practitioners into the learning process. We, as teachers, must go out there and see how real-world public-service problems are solved—so that when a student approaches one of us with something she saw happen at the agency where she's interning we can explain to her with authority what she saw and thereby increase the interface between academe and practice and build credibility in the student's eyes as well as better prepare her for the real world.

We also cannot overlook bringing in more practitioners as instructors. As you probably already know, I am a “pracademic.” Many of you out there are also. If you are, then you know how much government experience helps in a classroom setting. Lessons are backed up with real-world examples, and the student benefits by hearing what we hope is sage advice from someone who has been there, done that.

I recently came to American University and found it to be a shining example of the blend of practical skills and academic inquiry. There, the faculty is a strong mix of practitioners, academics, and both—and I say that the academic quality can only be enhanced under such conditions. Moreover, the power of the educational prescription when consumed is greatly enhanced.

Much has already been done to cast the net wider and attract more successful practitioners into meaningful exchanges with institutions of higher education. And we have done well so far in bringing in the practitioner’s point of view.

What immediately comes to mind is Pi Alpha Alpha’s electronic journal, which allows practitioners to become part of the academic process. Pi Alpha Alpha is celebrating its 25th anniversary, and by honoring practitioners who add value to education it provides a good starting point for the meaningful exchanges I have talked about.

Another program that, by its nature, draws institutions closer to practitioners and communities is the Small Communities Outreach Project for environmental issues, or SCOPE. Under this pilot program, The University of Kentucky, Clark Atlanta University, and the College of Charleston worked with small communities to minimize the adverse effects of federal environmental regulations on communities while maintaining the regulations’ intended environmental and health benefits. What SCOPE has done so far in the policy realm has been impressive. But what I think may be an overlooked benefit was the increase in exchange and communication between the schools and governmental entities.

So what else can we do to bring practitioners closer to our institutions? My dream is to, indeed, cast the net wider and have practitioners play an even greater role in our organization, NASPAA. My dream is to have practitioners participate more in our conferences and, by the year 2003, maybe even make up 25 percent of our conference attendees as participants. It is with this close-quarters interaction—when our shoulders rub together in committees and at other functions and when we talk about the real-world problems with those who are charged with solving them—that we can begin to truly make the connections that bring us closer together under the united goal of producing a new generation of outstanding public servants.

But what else can be done? What more can individual institutions do to increase their relationships with practitioners? These are questions that I will leave you to consider and develop responses that are individually tailored to your particular situation.

At NASPAA, we can help, but it certainly can’t be a top-down effort. It has to be the individual institutions that take the lead in coming up with new and innovative ways to engage more practitioners. And I say this understanding the vagaries of the appointments and tenure processes.

Across the nation, many schools are already doing this and doing this with what I would term exciting results. Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Columbia University, and the Maxwell School at Syracuse are just a few of the schools and programs across the country that make engaging practitioners an important part of their educational paradigm.

At the national level, NASPAA is looking into expanding the SCOPE pilot program to include more schools. We are toying with similar pilot programs in other policy areas. We can help in the search for grant money to help fund these efforts. And, finally, we can revisit the Faculty Fellows Program, where academics get a chance to work inside agencies and get the hands-on experience that has proved time and again to be invaluable to students and to professors as well.

As I alluded to earlier, public service and public administration are organic, ever-changing enterprises. And with these changes to the field—and to society at large—we must learn to continue with our readjustments of and to what our understanding of public service is as well as what it may ought to be.

Public service is no longer just simply public-sector employees performing traditional public-sector roles. I think that, as an organization, NASPAA has been very responsive thus far in recognizing the struggle to understand the changing nature of public-service careers—reaching out to embrace what have been viewed as private-sector and nonprofit workers into our more inclusive definition of what a public servant is.

Back in 1988, Paul Volcker talked of “an erosion of student interest in public life.” And for years we've been talking about the “quiet crisis” of bright young minds being pulled away by the attraction of taking better-paying jobs in the private sector. Does this change mark a simple trend whereby we hope things will change back and the public sector will once again be able to draw those who are unquestionably the best and brightest? Or has the world shifted beneath our feet? Has the state of the field moved to a place to which we haven't yet caught up?

Another commonly held belief has been that students were cynical about public service and that they received few positive reinforcing messages about opportunities and rewards offered by public-service careers. The National Commission on the Public Service recently concluded that, according to the commission's sample of honor-society students, the public service is not perceived as a place where talented people can get ahead. Another recent survey, this one by Do Something Incorporated, found that 55 percent of students do not think that the government is a good place for someone like them to work.

What does this tell us about students and the state of public service and its future?

Well, for one thing, we've found that this reticence to work for the government does not translate into ambivalence toward public service broadly defined. In fact, studies show that young people are actively seeking ways to connect to the people and public issues around them. A 1997 poll shows that young Americans have an inclination toward public service, but that this idea of service translates into helping individuals and not necessarily achieving broad social change, especially where government would be the instrument of that change. And a 1996 Youth Voices

Poll conducted by Lake Research found that youth are committed to their communities with an emphasis on volunteerism.

So, I ask again, what does this all tell us? Or, at least, what does it suggest?

I think it tells us that the world has, indeed, shifted beneath our feet and that the old picture of what a public servant was must be scrapped completely and replaced, not with a picture, but maybe with a collage—not by one image alone, but several.

As I said earlier, I think we have done a good job of responding to the changing nature of our field and the changing definition of what it is we do. But more must be done to bring ourselves in line with what is going on beyond our ivy-covered walls.

I don't need to tell you that, right now, nonprofit programs are hot. Or that the money is in consulting. Our students already seem to know these things.

And when we talk of how problems are solved, it's not just the public sector that's calling the shots. Take any problem and you'll find multiple actors working to solve the problem or represent interests that might not otherwise have a voice in how it would be solved. From toxic spills, which involve the EPA, nonprofit environmental advocacy groups, and contracted disposal companies, to a heavy snowstorm in Smalltown, U.S.A., where nonprofit homeless shelters scour the streets looking to bring the unfortunate in from the cold, city workers shovel the streets clear, and the firm that was contracted to pick up trash makes its rounds despite the bad weather, public servants today come in many guises.

We are living in an age of multiple actors and competing interests. We are living in an age of tighter budgets and government contracts. Yes, the public servants of today are no longer the blue-suited, mostly male, and mostly white bureaucrats of the past. They're now the data specialists, computer technicians, hired consultants, nonprofit activists and, yes, the blue-suited bureaucrats who come in different colors and sexes, speak several languages, and spring from many different cultures.

Let the voices of the past continue to talk of the "quiet crisis." I see the future of public service as strong and healthy. I see public service as a big umbrella under which many interests and professions can, with some effort, comfortably stand. The studies show students care and want to tackle society's problems, but that they are less interested today in many of the opportunities found in the traditional public sector. However, we can and are working on even better ways to attract the best and brightest to the public sector. I, frankly, would have been worried if the studies showed that students didn't care and were not concerned about creating a better society. Then there would have been a real crisis, and it wouldn't have been quiet, either.

I think NASPAA schools have done well coping with this fundamental change in what public service is and who public servants are. But, of course, more can and must be done.

The age of multiple actors has also brought about an age of increased and higher job mobility. With blurred lines of who provides what service come blurred career paths where professionals begin in an agency and move to the consulting realm and then move back to the agency world

and maybe later start their own businesses. What's lost in all these transactions is the concept and importance of mentoring and the need for continuing education.

In the past, professionals stayed in agencies their entire careers and were mentored—prepared for higher responsibility up the line—by their superiors. Now, it's the individual who is in charge of his or her career path. The mentors of the past no longer exist because often they, too, have left, seeking greener pastures.

So, what's a mid-career professional to do?

That's where NASPAA comes in. If the individual now has to take responsibility for his or her own career advancement, NASPAA should be there, preparing not only the young public servants but also the mid-career professionals who've come back looking for support, refreshers, respite, and renewal as well as brand new beginnings.

Our institutions can and should promote the concept of lifelong learning in an era of increased job mobility. The schools can provide continuity in training when the agencies can't. To be successful, we're finding our graduates and mid-career professionals need new competencies—information technology, performance-related budgeting, and human resources policies that reflect changing career paths—just to keep their heads above water.

Our students are becoming more flexible and the world they work in is becoming more flexible as well as more complex. Thus, we must become more flexible and sophisticated too. The solutions to all of the problems we face as an organization and as individual schools, departments, and programs can be found in the open lines of communication we build and maintain among ourselves and among other actors in the public-service realm.

We've recognized many of the problems that occur in an organization when it bends to meet the fast pace of the times. We're reminded that the times march relentlessly on and constantly change, and, sometimes, associations such as NASPAA may move creakily toward maintaining their relevance and currency. But at least we move. When organizations cease to move and change with the times they are subject to being buried by history.

It speaks very well of this association and its member institutions that we seem to be on top of the lightning-fast changes that are happening in the realm of public affairs—a field we are charged to continue discovering, learning, and teaching.

I'm reminded of COPRA's Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Non-profit Organizations, Management and Leadership. This comprehensive document prepared by NASPAA and the Non-profit Academic Centers Council is a strong outline of how a nonprofit management program should be set up. But more than just a document that rides the crest of current topics in our field, it shows how coordination and communication between NASPAA and other organizations can produce a tool that will essentially benefit students across the nation. It is through communication among national organizations, between schools and government at all levels, between the schools and NASPAA, and among academics and practitioners from multiple sectors that we can fully gain an understanding of our changing field and can therefore

stay on top of and respond effectively to such changes. In academia, especially in a field such as ours, currency is the lifeblood of what we do.

And by recognizing the changes going on beyond our gates, we can provide our students with the best chances to succeed in whatever arena they wish to work. And when we send them on their way, degrees in hand, we can be reasonably confident that we have injected strong, competent leadership into our society.

In conclusion, let me say that NASPAA is strong and current. Our accreditation processes are at the state of the field and the students we send out into the world are sent out with high-quality, meaningful, and useful degrees.

Of course I believe that more can be done to give our students an even better education. We should work even harder to create more exposure to practitioners on a daily basis. We should strive for more interplay between the world of the practice and the academy. And we must work to promote a broader recognition that public service as a career is more diverse today and offers more opportunities in a much wider arena than ever before.

As the millennium approaches, and as some individuals and organizations scramble to rededicate themselves, let us also take this time to reevaluate, reflect upon, and redefine who and what we are and what we wish to become.

I feel we are closer today and getting even closer to the ideal of melding serious academic inquiry and the importance of the daily travails and problem-solving acumen needed by and from the front-line practitioner. And I will dedicate my presidential year to a continual pursuit of this most important goal.

Thanks again for the great honor you have shown me by electing me your president. Best wishes to you all and may we all have another very good year and continue to help in the pursuit of an even brighter future for our nation.