AI in Public Affairs Education—Bolstering the Bridge to the 21st Century: Call for Proposals

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Technologist Andrew Ng calls artificial intelligence (AI) "the new electricity," highlighting its transformative potential (Lynch, 2017). AI is rapidly transforming society in sectors like healthcare, supply-chain management, public services, and education (Chen et al., 2020, 2021; Dash et al., 2019; Mirbabaie et al., 2021). The U.S. National Artificial Intelligence Act of 2020 defines AI as a "machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions or decisions influencing real or virtual environments."

AI adoption is rapid: 65% of respondents in a 2024 survey reported their organizations regularly use AI, nearly double the percentage ten months ago (Singla et al., 2024). Growing AI utilization also applies in public administration: over half of federal, state, and local government employees report using AI tools at work daily or several times a week (Ernst & Young, 2024). In public affairs, AI has the potential to strengthen and expand the "bridge" connecting the public sector to citizens by improving the efficiency, accuracy, and effectiveness of public service delivery. However, AI poses challenges, including ethical concerns, equity considerations, and uncertainty over AI governance (Alhosani & Alhashmi, 2024).

Public affairs education must evolve to equip future professionals with knowledge and skills needed to navigate AI-driven environments (Marotta & van de Laar, 2024). Educators increasingly integrate AI into curricula, particularly in areas such as decision-making and human resource management (Allgood & Musgrave, 2024; Li et al., 2024). However, the field lacks guidelines for incorporating AI into curricula to ensure that future public administrators have the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to AI's opportunities and challenges.

Possible scenarios for AI suggest different implications for public administration education. One optimistic scenario predicts AI's wide adoption in public service, leading to efficiency gains in administrative tasks and processes like permitting (Horvath et al., 2023). In this scenario, public affairs educators should emphasize literacy in and creative applications of technology. A more concerning scenario anticipates mass unemployment due to AI (Virgilio et al., 2024), suggesting leadership and policy development as foci of public affairs education.

Beyond content, AI is already influencing teaching pedagogy and learning, creating new opportunities for classroom innovation (Diaz & Nussbaum, 2024). Additionally, the application of AI extends to educational administration, where AI may influence fundraising, accreditation processes, and community partnership development. However, AI integration into public affairs education remains challenging due to limited literature on best practices and uncertainty surrounding AI's future development and societal impacts. This evolving landscape underscores the critical need for proactive exploration and adaptation within public affairs education.

Call for Papers

This call seeks submissions that address two streams of AI use –1.) The incorporation of AI in public affairs education and administration, 2.) The emerging nature and implementation of AI in the public and nonprofit sector: 3) the role of AI in shaping pedagogy, including its impact on instructional methods and curriculum design. This call is also interested in the larger question of how public affairs education can best equip practitioners for the realities of AI implementation beyond academic programs in considering emerging best practices[SR1] and policies. In assessing the role of this rapidly evolving technology, this call seeks objective interpretation that considers both the opportunities and challenges of AI in public affairs, including but not limited to ethical considerations and issues of equity and inclusiveness.

The list of questions below is not exhaustive but rather indicative of the types of research streams this special issue will engage in.

> 1.) How is AI affecting the human interactions that are at the heart of public affairs work?
> 2.) How and under what conditions can AI tools be used to complement traditional teaching practices?
> 3.) How can AI policy in syllabus language foster innovation and critical thinking?
> 4.) What are the potential effects of AI on equity and inclusion in PA education?
> 5.) What implications does AI have for the role of PA educational institutions and programs in society, in governance, in the development of public service professionals
> 6.) How does AI affect expectations regarding the desired level of technological proficiency among PA faculty, staff, and students.

We aim to include 6-9 research articles, editorials, and pedagogical practice articles, including a geographic and demographic spread of authors and issues addressed. To submit a proposal for this edited collection, please email a 500-word abstract outlining the manuscript's contents, including its methodology, application of theory, and fit within this special issue, alongside a 50-word author biographical statement, to the editors. All submissions must be received by April 25 , 2025.

All submissions selected by the editors will be invited to submit a full article through the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* submission system, which will then be subject to the journal's usual double-blind peer review procedures. However, an invitation to submit a full article does not guarantee publication, and all decisions are ultimately those of the journal editors. All invited submissions will be able to take place at a roundtable at the annual NASPAA conference. Proposal submissions are to be sent to jbstovall@clintonschool.uasys.edu.
If you have any questions about potential submissions before proposal submission, please contact the special issue editors, Victoria M. DeFrancesco Soto, Ph.D. dean.soto@clintonschool.uasys.edu, Robert C. Richards, Ph.D. rcrichards@clintonschool.uasys.edu, or Sunny Nillasithanukroh, Ph.D., snillasithanukroh@clintonschool.uasys.edu.

Projected Timeline:

Date	Detail
April 25, 2025	Deadline for proposals including a 500-word abstract (*abstract only).*
June/July 2025	Feedback from editors - invitation to authors with successful abstracts to submit a full paper.
October 2025	NASPAA Roundtable Discussion
December 2025	Full paper submitted via JPAE submission system and sent out for review.
2026	Revisions and publication

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