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Teaching Public Administration Conference Update

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Teaching Public Administration Conference Update

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This *JPAE* mini-symposium on teaching public administration is the outgrowth of papers presented at the June 2013 Teaching Public Administration Conference (TPAC) in San Francisco. The conference was sponsored jointly by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Section on Public Administration Education (SPAEE) and the University of San Francisco. Following the conference, a call for conference papers was placed for submission and publication in *JPAE*. Two articles from TPAC 2013 form the basis for this mini-symposium on teaching public administration. Both articles describe two excellent case studies on how student learning is measured in MPA curricula.

In his article, “Motivating MPA Students to Independently Develop Linkages Among Multiple Courses,” Robert Peters designed an experiment to address and manage the limitations of the traditional “course-based silo approach.” Peters argues that the silo approach and its emphasis on specializations, perspectives, and terminology creates artificial boundaries. He believes that these boundaries limit critical thinking and creative skills. He argues that the development of such skills requires students to make strong connections between courses. Peters created and executed an in-class course experiment that would motivate and shift students into identifying concepts of prior coursework. His goal was to

measure and test students’ ability to develop a deeper understanding of MPA course material and facilitate the achievement of public administration competencies. His study yielded disparate results on course concept integration (concept maps, essays, and final exams). His data (and related theory), however, supported the proposition that his approach empowers students, promotes a deeper understanding of material, facilitates competencies, and enhances best practices in public administration. Peters also found that the specificity of grading criteria influenced but was not a primary motivator in having students make connections.

In their symposium article, “Capstone Assessment of NASPAA Competencies,” David Powell, Michelle Saint-Germain, and Linda-Marie Sundstrom describe the approach used by California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) to measure NASPAA competencies. NASPAA expects affiliated MPA programs to use direct measures of student learning on “competencies.” This article describes the use of a capstone course to measure student learning on NASPAA’s third universal competency: “To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions.” The students whose learning was assessed were in the university’s PPA-696 Research Methods course. The PPA-696 case analysis is one step in the systematic assessment process used in the MPA Program at CSU, Long Beach.

The faculty compared the scores students earned on the case study to the students' grades for PPA-696. Students received a numerical score (0–100) on their submitted case study. For the 28 students in the study, the average score assigned was 89.6 with a low of 78 and a high of 100. The case analysis concludes that although most students performed well, several areas of learning deficiencies were identified. Powell and colleagues report that CSULB faculty will use this data to remedy deficiencies when planning and delivering future sections of PPA-696.

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITORS

Philip M. Dodd-Nufrio is an associate professor of Public Administration in the School of Public Affairs and Administration, Metropolitan College of New York. He was co-conference chair for the 2013 Teaching Public Administration Conference held in San Francisco. He holds a Master of Public Administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship, Syracuse University, and a PhD in Public Administration from Rutgers University.

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