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What Individual and Organizational Competencies Facilitate Effective Collaboration? Findings from a Collaborative Governance Simulation

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to elicit insights on the individual and organizational competencies associated with effective collaboration. Specifically, the authors gathered grounded insights on collaborative competencies from undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory public affairs course at a research-intensive, Midwestern university—following student participation in an interactive and replicable simulation designed according to Ansell and Gash's (2008) "collaborative governance" framework. Results indicate that respondents associated being open-minded, strategic, respectful, an effective communicator, and patient with individual competencies; whereas compromise, teamwork, and trustworthiness were identified as organizational characteristics. Findings also highlight the educational value of simulations and related experiential- and active-learning techniques in elevating the knowledge, skills, abilities, and confidence of students in relation to practices integral to public service delivery, such as collaboration.

Keywords: Collaboration, Public Management, Simulations

INTRODUCTION

Multi-organizational collaboration has received tremendous theoretical, empirical, and practitioner-oriented attention in public affairs scholarship (Agranoff, 2006; Agranoff & McGuire, 1998; Entwistle & Martin, 2005; Getha-Taylor, 2008; Kettl, 2006; McGuire, 2006; O'Leary & Vij, 2012; Thomson & Perry, 2006; Thomson, Perry, and Miller, 2009). This is largely attributable to the complex problems governments are charged with addressing in policy areas of public importance, including healthcare, education, sustainability, criminal justice, and poverty. While federal, state, and local organizations are committed to effectively delivering on policy mandates, the public sector cannot implement policy goals independently. As a result,

governments increasingly collaborate with agencies across sectors and policy disciplines to address issues of public importance (Frederickson, 1999; Kettl, 2006). In fact, Agranoff and McGuire (2001, 297) identify collaboration as a "core public activity" for any organization, regardless of sector, because it promotes a shared obligation to create public value among collaboration participants. In spite of this shared commitment, collaboration is a complex exercise, partly because organizations bring to collaborative exchanges distinct values, preferences, structures, personnel, and even self-interested motives (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Given the complexities associated with the practice of collaboration for individuals and organizations and its implications for the achievement of public outcomes, this study aims to answer the following question: *What are the individual and organizational competencies associated with effective collaboration?*

Employing grounded theory methodology, the present study seeks to identify the individual- and organizational-level characteristics associated with effective collaboration *as construed by students* who participated in an interactive, replicable collaborative governance simulation executed in an undergraduate-level public affairs course. The interactive simulation from which grounded insights emerged centered on participants/teams collectively filling out an NCAA-style tournament bracket comprised of public administration concepts (in lieu of college basketball teams). To design a simulation that would foster successful collaboration, we employed Ansell and Gash's (2008) "collaborative governance" framework. In their conceptual framework, Ansell and Gash identify essential structures of multi-organizational collaboration that enhance, albeit not guarantee, likelihood of effective engagement amongst participants. Working within these structures, the simulation provided participants with an educational opportunity to self-identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to effective collaboration.

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In particular, participants discovered that even when operating within an ideal or satisfactory collaborative structure, certain competencies generated by the participants themselves are fundamental to collective group success.

While grounded theory has been utilized to better understand the attributes that foster effective collaboration (Getha-Taylor, 2008; O'Leary, Choi, and Gerard, 2012), this method has been underutilized in generating insights from students who experienced the realities of collaboration in an academic environment. Additionally, although grounded theory is utilized to generate original insights, we are equally interested in the extent to which this study's findings align with existing knowledge in this area. This alignment would demonstrate the educational utility of the present study's simulation by enabling student participants, current and future public servants, to unpack the characteristics empirically associated with effective collaboration.

The motivation for this study centers on the importance of demonstrating the value of simulations and related active-learning techniques in providing students with first-hand exposure to the practices integral to public service delivery, such as collaboration. The importance of active learning techniques has been an area of great attention for the *Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAE)* (e.g., Ku, MacDonald, Andersen, Andersen, and Deegan 2016; Kelley and Johnson, 2016)*, given the importance of public affairs instruction in providing students with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and confidence to play meaningful roles in public service delivery. Nevertheless, *JPAE* readers would benefit from additional scholarship on the role of simulations in elevating student awareness on what Getha-Taylor (2008) identifies as "collaborative competencies".

The remainder of this study: reviews existing literature on collaboration and active learning, outlines the parameters and design of the executed simulation from which students

identified collaborative competencies, describes the data and methodology, and provides findings. We conclude by presenting the study's limitations and implications for educating public affairs students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Collaboration?

Collaboration is described as "the process of facilitating and operating in multiorganizational arrangements to remedy problems that cannot be solved—or solved easily—by single organizations" (McGuire, 2006, p.33). The practice of collaboration is based on the necessity for the collective capabilities of governments and organizations across sectors to innovatively and effectively address public problems in areas such as healthcare, education, sustainability, criminal justice, and poverty (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001; Goldsmith and Kettl, 2009). O'Leary and colleagues (2012) similarly contend that modern-day public problems "are larger than one organization, requiring new approaches to addressing public issues…In order to address these problems effectively, a 'full-court press' is needed within and across boundaries" (p.70). Therefore, collaboration may involve interorganizational, intergovernmental, or intersectoral partnerships (Kettl, 2006) and range in structure from informal to formal, temporary to permanent, and informational to action-oriented (O'Leary and Bingham, 2006). While collaboration is most frequently associated with government and government organizations' efforts to address public problems, organizations that initiate collaboration may be any entity, government or private, impacted by public problems (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006).

O'Leary, Choi, and Gerard (2012) provide a framework on the "skill set of a successful collaborator", which identifies individual and organizational competencies which promote successful collaboration. Interestingly, the role of the individual in enhancing the effectiveness

of collaborative efforts has, until recently, been largely overlooked in the public management

literature (O'Leary and Vij, 2012), with primary focus instead on the organizational-level

structures and institutions (Huxham, 1993). However, recent research has dedicated more

extensive attention to individual competencies that promote meaningful collaboration, while still

attributing value to organizational factors (Getha-Taylor, 2008; Emerson and Smutco, 2011;

O'Leary and Vij 2012; Williams, 2002). Individual-level traits are comprised of attributes

associated with personal knowledge, behaviors, and skills that uniquely promote effective

collaboration; while organizational-level characteristics center on skills integral to group-level

and task-oriented processes (O'Leary et al., 2012). According to O'Leary and colleagues,

> The most frequently mentioned *personal characteristics* across numerous studies
> were (in order): open minded, patient, change oriented, flexible, unselfish,
> persistent, diplomatic, honest, trustworthy, respectful, empathetic, goal oriented,
> decisive, friendly, and sense of humor. The most frequently mentioned
> *interpersonal skills* were good communication, listening, and the ability to work
> with people. Tied with this were *group process skills*, mentioned third in
> importance as part of the skill set for the successful collaborator. These included
> facilitation; interest-based negotiation; collaborative problem solving; skill in
> understanding group dynamics, culture, and personalities; compromise; conflict
> resolution; and mediation. The common thread here is the emphasis on people and
> people skills.

Additional characteristics of individuals who engage in successful multi-organizational

collaborative efforts include being self-reflective (Emerson and Smutco, 2011); not expecting a

return on investment (Getha-Taylor, 2008); tolerant, approachable, reliable, and sensitive

(Williams, 2002).

Vangen and Huxham (2012) note that important questions remain in this line of research.

Of particular note, research on public affairs education should seek to prescribe how instructors

can train current and future public service professionals to develop and continuously enhance

collaborative competencies (Bryer, 2011; Morse and Stephens, 2012; O'Leary, Bingham, and

Choi, 2010), particularly given that such competencies may decay or diminish over time (Getha-Taylor, Silvia, Fowles, Merritt, 2015).

The Role of Simulations in Providing Experiential and Active Learning

Undergraduate public affairs programs are purposed with promoting education on and application of complex public administration practices, such as collaboration. Given the complexity of public administration practice across a range of professions, traditional pedagogical techniques such as lectures, classroom discussions, multiple choice examinations, and essays may not maximize students' knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to succeed in public service (Silvia, 2012; Leonard and Leonard, 1995). As a consequence, instructors increasingly implement innovative teaching and active learning techniques in public affairs courses, which elevate student learning, promote information comprehension and retention, and foster critical thinking to address real (or realistic) problems (Raines, 2003; Silvia, 2012). Meyer and Jones (1993) comment that "active learning provides opportunities for students to *talk and listen, read, write,* and *reflect* as they approach course content through problem solving exercises, informal small groups, simulations, case studies, role playing, and other activities—all of which require students to *apply* what they are learning" (xi).

Simulations, specifically, refer to "concentrated learning experiences specifically designed to represent important real life activities by providing the learners with the essence or essential elements of the real situation without the hazards, costs, or time constraints" (Queen, 1984, p.144) and call for students to "apply the course content to a new, relatively realistic context in order to weigh policy alternatives, draw upon the various course components in order to formulate an argument and make judgements regarding the best alternatives" (Silvia 2012, 401). Simulations may range in length from a few minutes to extending over multiple class

sessions (Davis, 2009), and vary in format from role-playing to computerized games (Moore, 2009; Silvia, 2012).

Comparatively speaking, courses in the discipline of public affairs utilize experiential- and active-learning methods less frequently than other academic fields, namely the hard sciences (Silvia, 2012). This is concerning given that students who enroll in public affairs courses often express interest in professions which design, deliver, manage, and/or evaluate public policy. Therefore, maximizing students' knowledge, skills, and abilities through experiential- and active-learning techniques is also normative because public affairs programs emphasize *responsible* citizenship (Silvia, 2012) and *informed* leadership (Figueroa, 2014). Despite the benefits of active learning, Silvia (2012), citing a series of studies on experiential learning, notes that implementing these techniques in the classroom: often requires an extensive level of preparation to produce meaningful activities (Crawford & Machemer, 2008; Faria and Wellington, 2004; Killian and Brandon, 2009); reduces time for other learning activities (Faria & Wellington, 2004); and often do not work in practice as originally intended (Powner & Allendoerfer, 2008). With these pros and cons of experiential and active learning in mind, this article takes a similar position as Silvia (2012): "instead of flocking blindly toward an approach that is an unproven panacea, professors need to apply the research skills that we hone in our individual disciplines to our teaching to see if what many think works really does work" (2012, 399).

SIMULATION PARTICIPANTS AND DESIGN

The purpose of the in-class collaborative governance simulation executed for the current study is to provide participants with an educational opportunity to self-identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to effective collaboration. 30 undergraduate students participated in

the simulation, all of whom were enrolled in an introductory public affairs course at a Midwestern, research-intensive university during the 2015-2016 school year. The course educated primarily traditional students, but also non-traditional students, on public affairs through critical and analytical inquiry into policymaking, implementation, and management at all levels of government. Topics covered in this course section prior to the collaborative governance simulation included: public policy and administration, government reinvention, intergovernmental relations, social equity, diversity, ethics, accountability, public management, organization theory and behavior, and public leadership.

Undergraduate students were appropriate participants for this study because instruction regarding theory and practice in introductory public affairs courses at the undergraduate level requires better integration (Massie, 1995). Undergraduates are often presented with one of these ingredients—theory but not practice (Massie, 1995). Activities such as simulations "are especially appropriate in introductory classes, where students often lack experience in the discipline, i.e. the practice, to which to apply the theory. Without such experience, students tend to learn theory in the abstract" (Massie 1995, 103). Given the limited practical exposure among many undergraduates, Milam (2003) similarly suggests that undergraduates may uniquely benefit from simulations because these exercises create "an active environment for students to explore their own interests in public administration" and may "enhance…[their] participation in the field of public administration". Lastly, undergraduates were appropriate participants because we aimed to obtain the insights of individuals who had relatively limited experiences in professional careers. This would better enable us to evaluate the individual and organizational competencies that engender effective collaboration *based on participants' experiences in the simulation* as

opposed to that which emerged from professional encounters. Descriptive statistics for

simulation participants are included in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

To design a simulation that would foster effective collaboration, we employed elements

of Ansell and Gash's (2008) "collaborative governance" framework. In their conceptual

framework, Ansell and Gash identify essential structures and institutions of multi-organizational

collaboration that enhance, albeit not guarantee, likelihood of productive engagement amongst

participants. Specifically, Ansell and Gash identified conditions that must be present before the

process of collaboration begins and conditions that govern the rules of engagement once the

collaborative process has commenced. Together, these features include: (1) starting conditions,

(2) facilitative leadership, (3) institutional design, and (4) collaborative processes. For the

purposes of clarity, we describe features of the present simulation in the following sequence:

institutional design, starting conditions, facilitative leadership, and collaborative processes.

Institutional Design

Ansell and Gash (2008) define institutional design as "the basic protocols and ground rules for

collaboration, which are critical for the procedural legitimacy of the collaborative process" (555).

The present simulation included institutional design elements regarding clear ground rules,

participatory inclusiveness, forum exclusiveness, and process transparency.

In terms of clear grounded rules, students who participated in the simulation were

randomly divided into six teams (using an online learning management system) and subsequently

instructed to sit with their teams in designated locations throughout the classroom. Two teams

were comprised of four individuals, two teams consisted of five individuals, and two teams were

made up of six individuals. Variation in team size simulated that collaborative governance may

involve organizations and stakeholder entities with asymmetrical sizes and capacities, simulating that absolute power balance is not realistic. While Ansell and Gash (2008), referring to participatory inclusiveness, note that broad participation in collaborative governance must be "actively *sought*" (italics in original), participants for the current simulation were members of an introductory course and were not recruited.

Once teams were assembled, they were provided with two copies of an incomplete bracket comprised of public administration concepts. The two copies of the incomplete "concept bracket", depicted in Figure 1, were identical within and across teams.

[Figure 1 about here]

Upon receiving incomplete concept bracket handouts, teams were educated on how to appropriately complete a bracket according to the purposes of the simulation. Specifically, teams were asked to independently select one public administration concept for each "match-up" based on answering the question: "which concept, in practice, is more essential to effective public administration?" For example, in the Sweet 16, teams were presented with a series of match-ups, including one between "regime values" and "political responsiveness". To determine which concept would advance to the Elite 8, teams engaged in intra-group discussions to determine whether regime values or political responsiveness was more fundamental to effective public administration. Teams were instructed to complete this selection process by engaging in intra-group debate/discussion and reaching a consensus in a selection for each match-up in every round (in the following order: Sweet 16, Elite 8, Final Four, and Championship) within 10 minutes and ultimately identify a "champion". In addition to completing selections, all teams were required to justify—based on intra-group discussions—*why* they considered one concept to be more integral to effective public administration over another, given that there were no *a priori*

correct selections. Upon completing selections, each team kept one copy of the handout and submitted the second to the facilitator leading the simulation.

After completing this preliminary stage, the facilitators referred to an at-large concept bracket displayed on the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. The concept bracket displayed on the whiteboard was identical to handouts containing the incomplete concept bracket teams received at the start of the simulation. With the concept bracket on the whiteboard being incomplete, the facilitator informed participants that the objective of the simulation was to *collaboratively* complete selections for a single at-large bracket in 40 minutes that would represent the collective views of all six teams. In doing so, the secondary objective for each team was to aim for the completed at-large bracket to approximate (as closely as possible) the bracket their team completed in terms of common selections. To complete the at-large bracket, each team received one vote to select which concepts would advance to the succeeding round. [i] Voting for each match-up round by round would occur until at least five of six teams agreed on a particular concept. If at least five teams were not in agreement on a selection for any given match-up, teams were allowed to change or maintain support for that selection during a revote, which occurred after further team deliberations and cross-team debate on the concept more essential to the practice of public administration. Once concepts were selected to advance to the subsequent round and written on the whiteboard by the facilitator, selections could not be revised. In addition, selections for every match-up in a given round were required before advancing to the subsequent round. [ii]

Teams received points when a concept selection identified in their individual brackets advanced in the at-large bracket. Selecting a common concept to advance to the Elite 8, Final Four, Championship, and identifying a champion was worth 10, 20, 40, and 80 points,

respectively. To simulate the trade-offs collaborative partners often experience when simultaneously pursuing both individual and collective goals, members of the first and second place teams receiving the most points would be rewarded an additional 15 and 10 points, respectively, to their individual point totals (i.e., grades) in the course (out of 1,000 possible points). The third through sixth place teams would not receive extra credit. However, the at-large bracket had to be completed through the identification of a champion *within 40 minutes*, otherwise no team would qualify for extra credit.[iii] With the potential for students to receive extra credit, the forum achieved exclusiveness, as this was the only venue and opportunity to realize the collective goal at stake.

The facilitator offered bonus points to simulate the high stakes environment associated with real-life collaboration and that collaborative governance often centers on a collective, agreed-upon objective which motivates participating actors. Further simulating collaborative governance conditions, bonus points also motivated teams to advocate for their views while simultaneously seeking to identify common ground with other teams. A 5/6 voting majority was integral to simulating the difficulties associated with organizing actors to agree upon strategies for achieving a collective purpose. Based on the facilitator's estimation, requiring a 5/6 majority created a learning environment that would bring to light individual and organizational collaborative competencies, which may have been circumvented had the simulation required four or fewer teams to select a common public administration concept. At the same time, by not requiring a 6/6 voting consensus, conditions simulated the reality that while collaborative governance is "consensus oriented," consensus is not always achieved (Ansell and Gash 2008, 557)—in fact, consensus can produce decision stalemate (Coglianese and Allen 2003).

Any participant was permitted to speak during team and at-large deliberations. Participants were required to seek permission from the facilitator if wanting to address the entire class. The facilitator suspended dialogue prior to (re)voting.

After providing these instructions, but prior to beginning simulation activity, the facilitator answered all participant questions regarding basic protocols. This was purposed for further promoting ground rule clarity and process transparency.

Starting Conditions

Ansell and Gash (2008) contend that "conditions present at the outset of collaboration can either facilitate or discourage cooperation among stakeholders" (550). Below, we highlight the following as it relates to the present simulation: power-resource-knowledge imbalances, incentives to participate through interdependence among stakeholders, and prehistory of cooperation.

To facilitate a realistic form of equal empowerment, all teams were provided with 10 minutes to complete their individual brackets. Each team received one vote when selecting a public administration concept to advance in any given round, regardless of the number of individuals assigned to a team. Finally, all participants had the opportunity to gain exposure to public administration concepts identified in the bracket. Specifically, each public administration concept included in the bracket was previously covered at length in the course. The pedagogical approach to course instruction emphasized theory and practice, and included interactive lectures, small and large group discussions, classroom exercises, case study analyses, written exams, and a take home assignment which promoted conceptual development of a course topic. The primary textbooks, supplemented with additional academic readings and newspaper articles, were

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Introducing Public Administration (Shafritz, Russell, and Borick, 2013) and *Serving the Public Interest: Profiles of Successful and Innovative Public Servants* (Riccucci, 2012).

With a minimum of five teams required to select a common concept for each match-up from the Sweet 16 through the identification of a champion, teams could not achieve individual or collective goals unilaterally. With these conditions, even "highly antagonistic stakeholders who are highly dependent on each other may move toward a successful collaborative process (Ansell and Gash, 2008, 553).

Participants did not previously participate in a simulation of this nature in the course. However, the courses interactive nature, particularly small group discussion during the traditional class format, empowered participants to form a professional rapport and trust with student colleagues prior to the simulation. This better enabled participants to identify the perspectives, views, and inclinations to collaborate of participants on other teams with whom they may have previously worked. As Ansell and Gash (2008) note, "a history of successful past cooperation can create social capital and high levels of trust that produce a virtuous cycle of collaboration" (553).

Facilitative Leadership

Facilitative leadership is considered "a critical ingredient in bringing parties to the table and for steering them through the rough patches of the collaborative process" (Ansell and Gash 2008, 554). In the current simulation, the reliable, honest, and unbiased broker for the simulation was a single facilitator, the course instructor. In line with prescriptions offered by Vangen and Huxham (2003), the facilitative leader embraced, empowered, and engaged participants to a degree essential to elicit mobilization, thereby enhancing likelihood of collaboration success. Specifically, throughout the simulation, the facilitator clarified and safeguarded rules and

procedures, encouraged professionalism, and frequently reinforced collective objectives by promoting broad and active participation among individuals and teams (see Lasker and Weiss 2001). For example, during one instance when negative emotions reached a particularly high level, the facilitator respectfully intervened to remind the opposing parties of the collective mission at stake and expectations regarding collegiality.

Collaborative Processes

Collaborative processes enhance the likelihood of successful collaboration and are defined by face-to-face dialogue, trust building, stakeholder commitment to the process, shared understanding, and the achievement of intermediate outcomes (Ansell and Gash 2008).

The present simulation was conducted using face-to-face dialogue in a classroom, which promoted direct communication, thus minimizing barriers to dialogue that prevent mutual gain (Bentrup, 2001). Second, trust among stakeholders was present, due in large part to prehistory of classroom interactions not being antagonistic. Third, commitment to the process was demonstrated "through an up-front willingness to abide by the results of the deliberation, even if they should go in the direction that a stakeholder does not fully support" (Ansell and Gash, 2008, 559). During the present simulation, for example, teams continued to actively engage in dialogue and vote for public administration concepts (albeit at times reluctantly), even when they sensed that the outcome of the simulation would not be in their favor. Furthermore, commitment was demonstrated by stakeholder "ownership of the process", evidenced by the participants not excessively relying on the facilitator to advance the collective to the latter rounds of the bracket. Fourth, there was "shared understanding" of the collective's mission: to complete the at-large bracket within 40 minutes. In addition, there was shared understanding of the barriers to achieving this collective mission, most notably failure to muster agreement on public

administration concept selections. "Buy-in" was present due to the prospect of receiving extra credit points. Fifth, intermediate outcomes were present. For example, each instance when five or more teams selected a mutual concept to advance to the subsequent round in the at-large bracket, participants experienced the collective's collaborative potential. Indeed, such "small wins" facilitated trust building and renewed commitment (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Vangen and Huxham, 2003).

SIMULATION RESULTS

The objective of this study is to explore the individual and organizational competences students associated with effective collaboration following their participation in a collaborative governance simulation. Below, we discuss the outcome of the simulation participants experienced prior to completing the post-simulation survey.

Teams collectively completed the at-large bracket in 39 minutes and 41 seconds and in step with the specified parameters informed by Ansell and Gash's collaborative governance framework. Figure 2 illustrates the completed at-large bracket, which demonstrates that students identified features of the policymaking cycle as most integral to effective public administration. Teams 2 and 4 claimed first and second place, respectively. Figures 3 reveals that team bracket selections were distinct from one another, confirming the reality that collaborating organizations often maintain distinct views, priorities, and goals. Interestingly, the completed at-large bracket only moderately aligned with team brackets (and maintained only 10 of 15 common selections with the winning team). Since each team's original bracket was unique, all teams had to "trade" concepts (at varying levels and differing points in time) for the collective group to arrive at a 5/6 majority. In other words, each team conceded some of the concepts they initially selected as an individual group to advance the collective goals of the entire group. Thus, the winning and

runner-up teams succeeded in obtaining extra credit because their brackets aligned *most closely*—not identically—with the at-large bracket. This demonstrated that outcomes resulting from collaboration may not always strongly align with the preferences of any stakeholder. However, compared to other teams, the first and second place teams were most successful in advancing their Elite 8 selections in the at-large bracket, thus enhancing likelihood of success in subsequent rounds.

Although the collaboration simulation was completed in under 40 minutes, the experience was not always "smooth sailing" for participants, and was at times filled with frustration and hostility. At the beginning of the exercise, the opportunity to learn the views of and collaborate with other teams and the possibility to receive extra credit appeared to motivate participants. However, individual interests and the countdown clock appeared to be the primary motivator for participants as time approached expiration. In particular, during the final 10 minutes of the exercise, students appeared less collaborative and more authoritative, less collegial and more argumentative, less methodical and more rushed during decision making. For example, one particular team engaged cooperatively in the collaboration simulation until this team perceived that it was unlikely to receive extra credit. Frustrated with this possible outcome, the team in question aimed to filibuster the simulation by stalling during the voting process, sometimes taking 15-20 seconds to cast their votes. This required the facilitator to incessantly remind this particular team that they were required to vote, to which one member of this team spitefully responded, "We don't have a chance to win, so we want to 'bust' [i.e., ruin] this bracket". On another occasion, in place of arguing, frustrated participants across multiple teams would not leave their designated areas when it was time to collaboratively engage with members of other teams, instead opting to sit in their chairs (often with arms crossed) and refusing to speak with

other participants. Recognizing that extra credit would not be awarded to any team if the entire

bracket was not completed within 40 minutes, even teams perceiving that they were well

positioned to receive extra credit became hostile towards stakeholders who appeared less

committed to completing the bracket. Moreover, as the exercise proceeded, debate centered less

on the merits of why a given public administration concept was more integral to effective public

administration and more on intergroup politics and frustrations associated with vote trading. For

example, there was preliminary vote trading behind the scenes—yet when casting votes, teams

did not always vote according to their commitments made to other teams. On other occasions,

miscommunication prevented teams from voting in accordance with the other teams'

expectations.

Based on the combination of individual and team experiences from the simulation,

students were better positioned to provide views on competences associated with effective

collaboration. The specific methods employed to collect and analyze perspectives on

collaborative competencies are discussed in the following section.

[Figure 2 about here]

[Figure 3 about here]

POST-SIMULATION DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study explored the primary individual and organizational competencies associated

with effective collaboration, as identified by students who participated in a simulation conducted

in an introductory public affairs course. Below, we describe the present study's data collection

and analysis procedures.

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Data was collected from 30 simulation participant responses to an open-ended questionnaire immediately following the execution of the simulation. According to Jain and Getis (2003), "the period of time between treatment and measurement can be a threat to internal validity" (161). Administering a post-test immediately following an experiment can minimize these unwarranted effects (Jain and Getis 2003, 161).

The questionnaire sought to acquire insights from students on the competencies related to effective collaboration. The questionnaire was comprised of the following questions:

1. Please reflect on your experiences, feelings, and knowledge gained from the simulation. Discuss what you would have done differently to facilitate effective collaboration?
2. Based on your experiences from the simulation, what does effective collaboration entail?
3. Provide three words that described your feelings and emotions during the collaboration simulation. To what extent were these feelings and emotions productive or counterproductive? Explain.
4. Is collaboration a complex and difficult process? Explain why or why not.
5. Provide any additional observations or comments regarding the simulation and your experiences participating in this exercise.

Grounded theory methodology guided data analysis. Agranoff (2007) contends that grounded theory enables scholars to probe public administration processes, practices, and phenomena at a real-world level. To conduct analysis, a team of two researchers engaged in a process of open coding recommend by Strauss (1987) to identify and categorize patterns emerging from the data. Specifically, each researcher participated in an iterative process of close reading of the data, open coding, and constant comparisons of codes within and across respondent cases (Romzek et al., 2012). Subsequently, researchers individually aggregated codes based on thematic relationships and according to *individual* and *organizational* competencies related to effective collaboration. After executing this procedure independently, the researchers compared coding patterns and emerging themes to achieve inter-coder reliability,

while also engaging in in-depth discussions to resolve inconsistences in coding (Romzek et al., 2012). This process yielded agreement on the primary individual and organizational characteristics associated with effective collaboration.

FINDINGS

Findings offer insights on the individual and organizational competencies associated with effective collaboration as perceived by participants in an interactive classroom simulation. We discuss these competencies below.

Individual-level Attributes

Open-mindedness

Maintaining an open mind to ideas and courses of action was an individual competency respondents associated with effective collaboration. Open-mindedness, according to respondents, was not a condition that occurred merely during the early stages of collaboration, but a condition that persisted throughout *all* stages of the collaborative process. What is more, open-mindedness was not viewed in passive terms, rather open mindedness was associated with the *active* pursuit of alternatives that may be distinct from personal preferences, but that benefitted the collective. A respondent commented that being open-minded is not easily learned or easily achieved, but rather, "entails self-discipline in making sure you listen to every opinion, be open-minded to every opinion, and to not get too worked up if things don't go in your favor". Another respondent noted the value of projecting behaviors that reflected mere attempts to be open minded: "You could tell that some [individuals] weren't practicing open-mindedness which [members of] our team tried to do. [This] came to our advantage and the [class's] advantage too". Lastly, open-mindedness did not refer to belief systems alone, but also an openness to whom one would forge partnerships with to achieve collective objectives.

Strategic

Respondents identified being strategic as a personal characteristic integral to meaningful collaboration. Being strategic was comprised of attributes associated with being logical, disciplined, visionary, goal-oriented, and having foresight to capitalize on (rare) opportunities to achieve collective interests. At the most basic level, being strategic entailed *constructively* seeking one's team's primary objectives amid evolving short-term preferences. At a more advanced level, being strategic entailed maintaining a clear sense of the collective's end goal, while simultaneously accounting for (and proactively preempting the negative effects resulting from) the transaction costs associated with achieving a joint objective. As one student commented, "to convince someone of something, I had to know what they wanted as well as what direction they were going".

Respectful

Being respectful was associated with effective collaboration according to simulation participants. Subthemes of being respectful included being diplomatic, personable, empathetic, and actively listening to the viewpoints of others. One student, reflecting on the diversity of perspectives present during the simulation, remarked, "We have to respect one another and the different opinions when collaborating with people who have opposing viewpoints". The most frequently expressed subtheme was actively listening to the differing viewpoints of others, while acting upon the belief that all individuals and teams "deserved" to have a voice in the collaboration process. More specifically, active listening entailed seeking to learn and potentially accept the opinions of others, in contrast to actively listening merely to confirm the degree to which the perspectives of others aligned with one's pre-existing views. As one respondent put it, "To be effective, people needed to be more willing to listen. When listening, they needed to [identify

the needs of] others instead of having an 'all for my group' mentality". Another respondent similarly noted, "To convince someone of something, I had to [respect] what they wanted as well as what direction they were going. If I could empathize with their plans, then we could create a mutually beneficial strategy."

Effective Communicator

Clear and efficient communication fostered effective collaboration, particularly given the time constraints of the simulation. Effective communication, according to participants, entailed effective argumentative ability, persuasive ability, and positivity. Communication was even integral to enhancing morale during the simulation. One student remarked, "Collaboration entails a lot of communication by all parties. Also, communication is key as to not hurting feelings or relationships". Additionally, effective communication entailed demonstrating informed understanding of the concepts during dialogue.

Patience

Exercising patience promoted effective collaboration. Patience was underscored when participants maintained commitment to the collaborative process even when the direction of the simulation appeared at odds with team goals, albeit in greater alignment with collective goals. Along these lines, one student remarked that patience entailed a persistent *yet non-detrimental* desire to succeed. This characteristic captured not only patience when seeking to collaborate with other teams, but also patience when working with members of one's own team, given that individuals who share a common goal often maintained varying perspectives on the means to realizing those goals. Patience with oneself when seeking to make sense of the often complex perspectives of collaborators and the core issues and tradeoffs at stake was also essential during the simulation.

Organizational-Level Attributes

Compromise

Compromise was the most frequently identified organizational characteristic associated with effective collaboration. For teams, compromise entailed deal-making, concession, and actively identifying areas of shared "common ground". As one respondent put it, "Effective collaboration shows that you should not only keep your interests in mind, but others' interests in mind as well. Teams must be willing to follow through their agreements and sometimes bend to others. Basically you have to give a little to achieve overall goals". Likewise, another respondent noted, "effective collaboration entails compromise. [My team] needed to recognize the end goal and weigh what could be given up along the way". Referring to deal-making and concession, specifically, one student remarked, "You can't get every single issue/vote to go in your favor. Sometimes you must make small sacrifices for the greater good. Sticking to your guns is important, but if there is extra room to wiggle in order to help an important issue that still aligns with the bigger picture, then that's necessary to do". Another respondent reflected on the essential qualities of compromising because it fostered small wins essential to the achievement of long-term objectives. Compromising, this respondent noted, "is sometimes difficult, but a good compromise will be better for the long run. My team was willing to vote for a [public administration concept] to help another team win. That was a great compromise". Compromising for its own sake, however, was deemed ineffective. Therefore, when compromising, teams and the collective benefited from thoroughly considering the possible transactions costs, tradeoffs, and long-term implications related to this organizational competency.

Inter-organizational Teamwork

23

Teamwork was integral to effective collaboration. In the current study, teamwork is distinct from compromise in that the former entailed leveraging *pre-existing* group cohesiveness as opposed to navigating through discord or areas of disagreement. One student identified teamwork as fundamental to long-term fortitude and morale across teams. On a related note, another respondent emphasized that while there were occasions when conscious teamwork across units was not necessary due to pre-existing alignment on preferences, it was essential to intentionally invest in teamwork to build capital for possible future conditions defined by discord. Furthermore, teamwork *within* teams fostered teamwork across units. As one respondent put it, "Group cohesiveness in the individual group helped the cohesive nature of the larger group".

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness between and among teams fostered effective collaboration. According to one student, "effective collaboration requires trust most of all. It [was] difficult for groups to change their votes to agree with another [team] if there is no trust between the two groups". Likewise, another student reflected, "The biggest thing is trust…This exercise of collaboration made [trust] seemingly difficult at first because of the mistrust and the backbiting. Some groups would say one thing, but when it came down to a vote they would change their minds if they already had got what they wanted. This created some hostility towards the end of the bracket". Simply put, inability to trust was a barrier to small wins and often dismantled professionalism and collegiality constructed through prior teamwork and compromise.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to elicit student viewpoints on the competencies associated with effective collaboration, subsequent to student participation in an interactive simulation designed

according to Ansell and Gash's collaborative governance framework. Students associated being open-minded, strategic, respectful, an effective communicator, and patient with individual competencies; whereas compromise, teamwork, and trustworthiness were identified as organizational attributes. Much research identifies and demonstrates the importance of collaborative competencies at the individual and organizational levels (Getha-Taylor, 2008; O'Leary et al., 2012; Williams, 2002), while another well-developed body of public affairs literature demonstrates the educational value of interactive classroom activities such as simulations (Raines 2003; Silvia, 2012; Leonard and Leonard, 1995; Meyer and Jones, 1993). To date, few academic studies have integrated these distinct lines of research in the context of public affairs education—particularly at the undergraduate level, where students often lack practical experience in public administration (Massie 2013). The contribution of the present study lies at the nexus of these distinct bodies of literature, where an interactive classroom activity is executed to expose public affairs students to individual and organizational competencies essential to successful collaboration.

Three core limitations, for which we subsequently offer recommendations, merit discussion. First, findings on collaborative competencies identified by participants in the simulation can only be tentative. Insights provided by this study are not facts, but the embodiment of simulation participants' interpretations—from a single run of the simulation— that cannot be construed as objective data (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 23). Future research similar to the present study would benefit from conducting multiple iterations of a simulation, and analyzing (and comparing) the perspectives on collaborative competencies from participants across different runs of the simulation. Second, this simulation was conducted during a single class session, resulting in difficulty simulating the more extensive duration of

most meaningful and complex collaborative efforts in public affairs. Baranowski (2006) notes that simulations "can be particularly problematic in introductory level classes, as the breadth of coverage is generally far greater than in upper-level classes" (34). Referencing Kathlene and Choate (1999), Baranowski further notes that, "for a simulation to reach its full potential, the class should be composed of a large number of motivated students possessing solid writing, research, and analytical skills and with a background in [the disciplinary major] or a related field. These conditions often cannot be met, particularly in introductory classes with a large number of first year, [non-major] students with little or no prior knowledge of [the field]." (34). Therefore, instructors may benefit from conducting collaborative governance-related simulations spanning multiple class sessions in upper-division undergraduate courses or at the masters level. Third, while the simulation elicited participant-identified emotions which are not uncommon to real-world collaboration experiences in public affairs (e.g., frustration, excitement, anxiety, worry, thrill, competitiveness, hopeful, defeated, betrayed, victorious, motivated, focused, engaged, and intense) (see Dickinson & Sullivan, 2014), the current study's simulation was not centered on addressing a substantive policy issue. Nevertheless, its content and design promoted the "essential elements" of intended student learning objectives (Queen 1984)—identifying collaborative competences— and was arguably most appropriate for our participants, many of whom had limited prior exposure to the practice of collaboration. While the simulation achieved the goal of exposing public affairs undergraduate students to real-life collaboration experiences, this activity serves as a *precursor* to more complex case studies, exercises, and assignments centered on the process of collaboration. Furthermore, while this study enabled students to *identify* individual and organizational competencies associated with effective collaboration, this exercise alone is not necessarily sufficient for the actual *development* of collaborative

competencies. Therefore, after students participate in simulations which enable participants to

identify collaborative competencies like in the present study, we recommend instructors utilize

the myriad of simulations and case studies that develop skills pertaining to collaborative public

management, including those offered by the Program for the Advancement of Research on

Conflict and Collaboration (E-PARCC) at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

Recognizing the importance of the development of collaborative competencies, E-PARCC's

website states, "Collaboration is not simply a body of substantive knowledge; it is also a set of

skills. We believe that one of the best ways to prepare students to operate in networks,

understand how to incorporate public concerns into policy development, and manage complex

public and non-profit organizations, is through the use of case studies, simulations, and

negotiation exercises".

Public affairs instructors replicating this simulation will benefit from taking various

implementation recommendations into account. First, students must be well educated on the

concepts included in the bracket. The role of the facilitator is to empower the participants to

complete the simulation within the specified parameters; he/she does not substantively facilitate

student dialogue regarding which concept is more essential to effective public administration.

Second, ideally the simulation should be comprised of a minimum of five teams and maximum

of seven teams, with between three to six student participants on each team. This equates to

optimal class sizes of between 15 to 42 students being suitable for this activity. Based on the

facilitator's experiences in conducting the simulation in previous courses, too few of student

participants (i.e., <15) and teams (i.e., <5) do not create an appropriately complex collaborative

environment—rather, participants too easily find common ground and may be unsuccessful in

deciphering competencies essential to effective collaboration. On the other hand, too many

student participants (i.e., 42<) and teams (i.e., 7<) lends itself to an environment where "small wins" are difficult to attain, leading to a possible decline in student motivation in completing the simulation. Third, in addition to the specified formal tasks, the facilitator (or non-participating observers) should document the actions, dialogue, and decisions of participants, teams, and the at-large group. Facilitator observations and subsequent recommendations for students regarding the practice of collaboration will supplement the practical takeaways identified by the participants themselves. Finally, we recommend (time permitting) that the facilitator distribute both a pre-test immediately preceding the execution of the simulation and a posttest immediately afterward. Due to time constraints, we were only able to distribute a posttest and, as a consequence, were unable to determine the extent to which students identified collaborative competencies based on participation in the simulation or prior professional experiences. Along these lines, we agree with Baranowski (2006), who notes that "an important question that has not been addressed herein is the longer term effects of simulations. A design in which a second posttest is conducted weeks or perhaps even months after the simulation would provide a better understanding of the effects of simulations on long-term retention of key concepts" (42).

The collaborative governance simulation required participants to revisit, in a non-traditional classroom format, the practical importance of concepts such as representative bureaucracy, organizational ethics, and leadership—all of which empower individuals and organizations to make meaningful contributions to the public good. Instructors replicating this simulation may substitute concepts incorporated in our bracket with concepts covered in their courses. This will enable their students to rediscover fundamental course concepts in a setting that requires collaboration and thoughtful debate regarding which concept, in practice, is more integral to effective public administration.

What Individual and Organizational Competencies Facilitate Effective Collaboration? Findings from a Collaborative Governance Simulation

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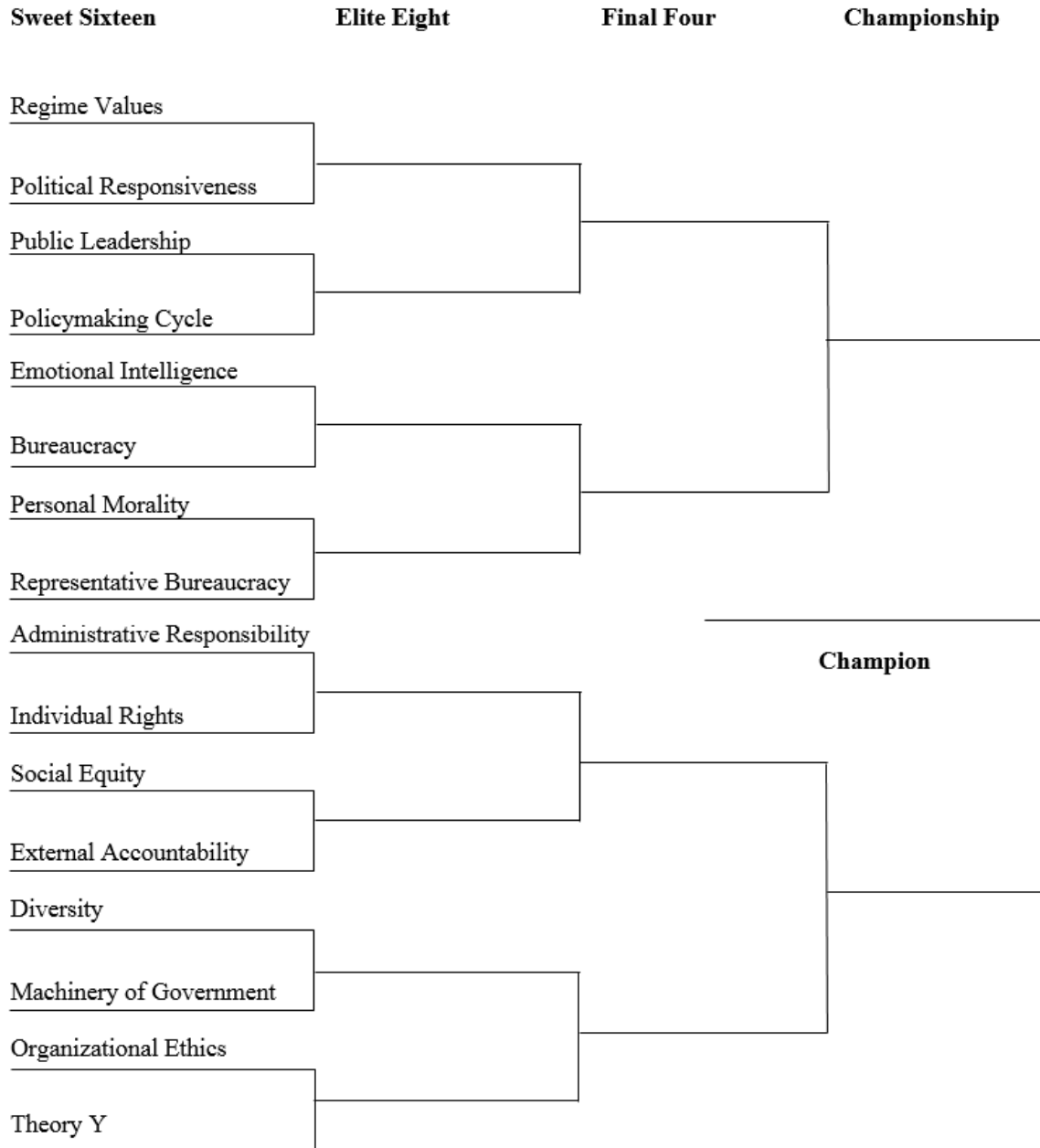
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Characteristics	Percentage(N)
Gender	
Male	60.0 (18)
Female	40.0 (12)
Academic Classification	
Senior	10.0 (3)
Junior	33.3 (10)
Sophomore	33.3 (10)
Freshman	20.0 (6)
Advanced High School Enrollee	3.3 (1)
Academic Major	
Public Affairs	60.0 (18)
Non-Public Affairs	40.0 (12)
Years of full-time professional employment experience	
0	23.3 (7)
1-5	40.0 (12)
6-10	23.3 (7)
11-15	10.0 (3)
15<	3.3 (1)

What Individual and Organizational Competencies Facilitate Effective Collaboration? Findings from a Collaborative Governance Simulation

Figure 1

Incomplete Concept Bracket

Sweet Sixteen	Elite Eight	Final Four	Championship

Regime Values

Political Responsiveness

Public Leadership

Policymaking Cycle

Emotional Intelligence

Bureaucracy

Personal Morality

Representative Bureaucracy

Administrative Responsibility

Individual Rights

Social Equity

External Accountability

Diversity

Machinery of Government

Organizational Ethics

Theory Y

Champion

What Individual and Organizational Competencies Facilitate Effective Collaboration? Findings from a Collaborative Governance Simulation
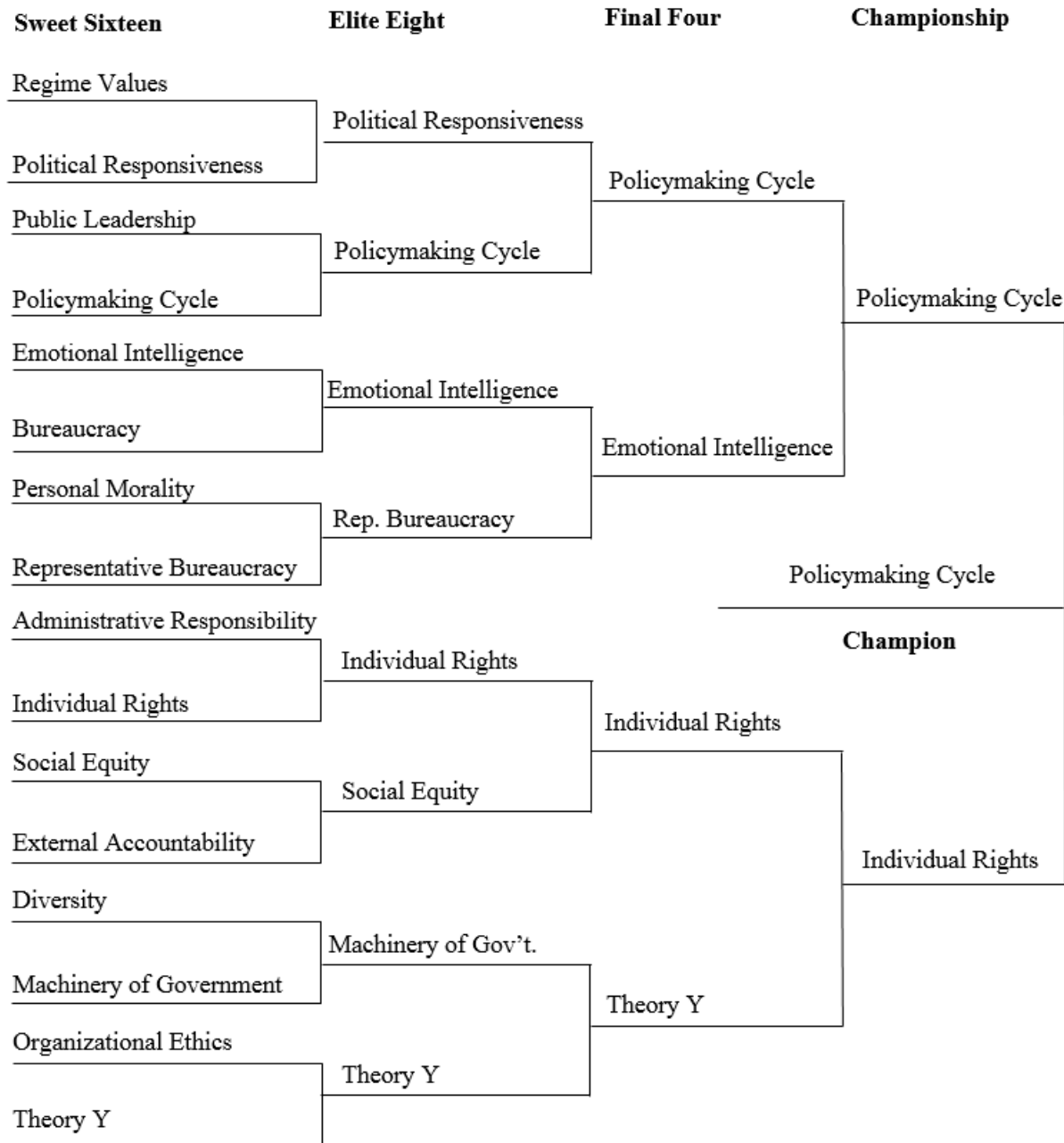
Figure 2

Completed At-Large Selections

Sweet Sixteen	Elite Eight	Final Four	Championship
Regime Values			
	Political Responsiveness		
Political Responsiveness		Policymaking Cycle	
Public Leadership			
	Policymaking Cycle		Policymaking Cycle
Policymaking Cycle			
Emotional Intelligence			
	Emotional Intelligence		
Bureaucracy		Emotional Intelligence	
Personal Morality			
	Rep. Bureaucracy		
Representative Bureaucracy			Policymaking Cycle
Administrative Responsibility			**Champion**
	Individual Rights		
Individual Rights		Individual Rights	
Social Equity			
	Social Equity		
External Accountability			Individual Rights
Diversity			
	Machinery of Gov't.		
Machinery of Government		Theory Y	
Organizational Ethics			
	Theory Y		
Theory Y			

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Figure 3

Individual Team Selections

Team 1 Selections

Elite 8
- Regime Values
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Emotional Intelligence ✓
- Representative Bureaucracy
- Administrative Responsibility ✓
- External Accountability
- Diversity
- Organizational Ethics

Final Four
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Representative Bureaucracy
- Administrative Responsibility
- Diversity

Championship
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Administrative Responsibility

Champion
- Policymaking Cycle ✓

Team 4 Selections

Elite 8
- Political Responsiveness ✓
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Bureaucracy
- Representative Bureaucracy ✓
- Individual Rights ✓
- External Accountability
- Machinery of Government
- Theory Y ✓

Final Four
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Representative Bureaucracy
- Individual Rights ✓
- Theory Y ✓

Championship
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Individual Rights ✓

Champion
- Individual Rights

Team 2 Selections

Elite 8
- Political Responsiveness ✓
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Emotional Intelligence ✓
- Personal Morality
- Individual Rights ✓
- Social Equity ✓
- Machinery of Government ✓
- Organizational Ethics

Final Four
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Emotional Intelligence ✓
- Social Equity
- Machinery of Government

Championship
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Individual Rights ✓

Champion
- Policymaking Cycle ✓

Team 5 Selections

Elite 8
- Regime Values
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Bureaucracy
- Personal Morality
- Individual Rights ✓
- Social Equity ✓
- Machinery of Government ✓
- Theory Y ✓

Final Four
- Regime Values
- Personal Morality
- Social Equity
- Theory Y ✓

Championship
- Personal Morality
- Theory Y

Champion
- Theory Y

Team 3 Selections

Elite 8
- Political Responsiveness ✓
- Public Leadership
- Bureaucracy
- Personal Morality
- Individual Rights ✓
- Social Equity ✓
- Machinery of Government ✓
- Theory Y ✓

Final Four
- Political Responsiveness
- Personal Morality
- Individual Rights ✓
- Theory Y ✓

Championship
- Political Responsiveness
- Individual Rights ✓

Champion
- Theory Y

Team 6 Selections

Elite 8
- Regime Values
- Policymaking Cycle ✓
- Emotional Intelligence ✓
- Representative Bureaucracy ✓
- Administrative Responsibility
- External Accountability
- Diversity
- Organizational Ethics

Final Four
- Regime Values
- Emotional Intelligence ✓
- External Accountability
- Organizational Ethics

Championship
- Regime Values
- Organizational Ethics

Champion
- Regime Values

✓ = Concept advanced in the at-large bracket

BIOGRAPHIES

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[i] Each team was provided with one placard labeled with their team number. To vote, one member (who was selected by their teammates) would raise their team's placard and displayed it until votes were tabulated by the facilitator.

[ii] Although the order in which selections were made for match-ups in the same round was inconsequential.

[iii] Time extensions were not permitted once the countdown clock started at the beginning of at-large deliberations. The facilitator would provide time updates as requested.