

# Why Public Administration is Needed now More Than Ever

Advancing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in  
Public Administration

# Agenda

- Why are we having this discussion?
- What does this mean for research?
- How does all this relate to public administration teaching and learning?
- Barriers to research
- Views of the future

# Why are We Having This Discussion?

- Changes in past 10 years
  - Great recession/austerity measures
  - Lack of trust in media
  - Rise of alternative truths
  - Decline of citizen trust
  - Ethical issues in politics
  - Attacks on democratic ideals
- “Brexit and Donald Trump are only the most recent manifestations of democratic distemperment. Both represent a turning away from toleration, openness, and respect for rights (Diamond & Schultz, 2018)

# Why are We Having This Discussion?

- Continued attack on media, on truth, partisan divide overshadowed economic gains
- “Fake news” and “alternative truths” part of vocabulary
- In the US, political interference in agencies dealing with science
  - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Anecdotal evidence:

“Federal scientists have already blown the whistle on the Trump administration for prohibiting them from doing further research in their areas of expertise...for prohibiting them from speaking to the press, and for discouraging the use of terms such as “climate change” and “evidence-based” in some agency documents” (UCS, 2018)

# Why are We Having This Discussion?

- Public service not viewed favorably
- US: decline in those wanting to serve
- Partnership for Public Service:
  - Millennials account for only 7% of all federal government employees, lowest in almost a decade
  - Baby boomers retiring, millennials represent 75% of workforce
  - Limited pool of candidates to fill vacant positions

# Public Servants

- Recent headlines:
  - “The Trump Effect: America’s Civil Servants are Shunned, Ashamed, and Can’t Get a Date”
  - “Wanted: Public Servants”
- Issues with the forced departure of qualified civil servants who are perceived as not supporting the White House agenda, career uncertainty in federal agencies

# Public Servants

“There’s no question that it not only demeans the value of public service, but undermines the trust the public has in public institutions...Those are all bad for democracy”

(Mulligan, 2018)

Add to that the president’s campaign to “drain the swamp” & civil servants can feel stuck in a difficult situation

# UK & Brexit

- Difficulty for civil servants having to determine how to implement Brexit next year
- “Brexit will be a major test of the Civil Service’s ability to adapt and change” – Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary & Head of the Civil Service
- Prompted hiring specialists in policy analysis & trade, promoting the need to work collaboratively across government

# UK & Brexit

- Institute for Government:

- Civil service numbers in England have increased about 3% since announcement of Brexit, most in policy
  - Focus is on formulating policies, not implementation

- However, there is criticism

- Former Bank of England governor Mervyn King complained last week:

Civil servants have been partly to blame for “the incompetent handling of Brexit.”

# UK & Brexit

- Last month, Prospect trade union surveyed 1,073 civil service members
  - Less than 5% approved of the government's approach to Brexit
  - 14% lower than last year's approval rate of 19%

# State/Local/County/District Issues

- Financial pressures
- Great recession & austerity measures severely affected local government revenues, where most activities of government are performed
- Reduced funding from national governments causes localities & states to increase revenue, reduce spending, or rely on reserves to balance budget

# State/Local/County/District Issues

- US administration's 2018 budget had proposed changes to the intergovernmental system by eliminating funds for
  - the Community Development Block Grant (\$3B),
  - the Social Service Block Grant (\$1.4B); and,
  - many more programs directed at local governments (Brookings, 2018)

“Those proposals and actions point to a new era likely to be characterized by antagonism, greater fiscal obligations for state and local governments (as likely under infrastructure reform), increased regulatory interference in some arenas (particularly on immigration policy), and heightened uncertainty” (Brookings).

# Why are We Having This Discussion?

- These changes have an impact of public servants at all levels of government
- Have to understand and apply the rule of law, withstand political interference in policy implementation, uphold public values, including the norms of transparency, rationality, and ethical standards  
(Moynihan, 2017)

# What Does This Mean for Research?

- What does this mean for us, for public administration research, and the teaching of public administration?
- Joyce Liddle, Honorary Chair of the UK Joint University Council (JUC), provided a reflection on the historic context of public administration in the UK and how the council has responded to these changes in terms of research and teaching.

# What Does This Mean for Research?

- During Prime Minister Thatcher's tenure:
  - Increase in the importance of business schools
  - Resulted in a changes in politics departments, where most PA programs reside
  - Resulted in fewer PA courses, PA faculty relocating in business schools, and a decrease in the number of PA faculty overall.
  - In trying to compete for research dollars, PA lost out to business departments
  - With loss of revenue from central government, localities shifted their educational funding to business courses, which they believed to be a better fit for public administrators

- Not all doom & gloom
- “Public administration research, teaching, and scholarship are as necessary, if not more so, in 2018, and that issues such as accountability, legality, integrity and responsiveness, and the overall ethical guidelines are vital for both public and private educational curricula ” (Liddle, 2017).

# What Does This Mean for Research?

- Don Moynihan presented his thoughts on what effect Trump administration will have on PA research after last election
- PA researchers will need to document the expected erosion of public values and educating PA students on how they are integral to a functioning democracy

# What Does This Mean for Research?

- Leadership and motivation:
  - Transformational leadership fits in a public setting
  - Leaders put aside their self-interest and work for the public good
  - Will be sorely tested

# What Does This Mean for Research?

- White House has shown a propensity to appoint individuals who disagree with the mission of an organization
- Examples:
  - Ryan Zinke, opponent of federal land protection appointed as head of Dept. of Interior
  - Scott Pruitt, climate change denier, ran the EPA

# What Does This Mean for Research

- Betsy DeVos, proponent of private education, heads Dept. of Education
  - She has not attended, worked in, or sent her children to public schools
  - Actively spent her own money promoting a private alternative
- How can these leaders motivate a civil service who believes government can be good stewards of federal land, improve the environment, and provide educational opportunities for all children?

# What Does This Mean for Research

- Executive branch has not concretely presented a governmental reform agenda
- Actions taken in the past 18 months outline changes to the federal workforce:
  - Hiring and pay freezes,
  - Efforts to fire executives, such as with the Veterans Administration

# What Does This Mean for Research

- Public sector unions have been a major force in maintaining public sector pay and hiring
- May of this year, president issued an Executive Order to curb federal staff protections and union powers

- In UK, during the 2010-15 UK Coalition government, Minister for the Cabinet Office Francis Maude pushed departments to cut back on ‘facility time’ by 2015
- Moynihan predicted “[f]rom a practical perspective, it would weaken a system of governing that has worked quite well for the U.S. given the political antagonism it faces. We may witness a vast experiment about whether a highly politicized state that rapidly loses institutional capacity can still function” (2017).

# How does all this relate to public administration teaching and learning?

- Changing landscape influences what we research & how we teach
- Moynihan suggested several areas that **will** require more research in an effort to prepare future public administration graduates

# How does all this relate to public administration teaching and learning?

- Debate last year on the future of research and teaching public administration in the UK
- Ian Elliott offered his university as an example where research is still alive and well and research concerning big data, citizen integration, and other pressing concerns is continuing (Liddle, 2017)

# Scholarship in PA

- Three areas:
  - Pedagogical;
  - Academic administration in PA programs; and,
  - Accrediting
- All intertwined

# Scholarship in PA

- Pedagogical research represents **what** we teach and **how** we teach it
- Given the expected changes in government, both in the US and UK, what we teach will be critical to ensuring MPA graduates are prepared to enter public service.

# Scholarship in PA

- Changes in technology in the past decade have increased the need to understand how we teach and how students interact with their learning environment
  - Both in class and online

# Scholarship in PA

- For-profit institutions used online instruction that reflected more of a correspondence course format
  - Public universities now offer entire degree programs online
- Archives of Teaching Public Administration Conference research and presentations
  - Online teaching has been one of the primary categories of interest

# Online Teaching

- Can't just take an in class lecture and post it online and expect to get the same results as in class
- Need to:
  - understand how a learning management system works,
  - importance of instructional design in creating a quality experience for the student,
  - how to manage and engage students, and
  - ways to go beyond the lecture using other forms of media

# Online Teaching

- Online students use mobile apps to participate in class
- Blackboard and Canvas (LMS) created mobile apps for phones and tablets
  - Instructors and students can work just about anywhere with an internet connection
- Resulted in a push, at least in our university, for phased content that students can access
- Translates to smaller bytes of information that are easily accessed

# In Class Teaching

- How we teach in class has also gone through changes
- We are (or should be) moving from traditional lecture towards an interactive approach
  - Increases critical thinking and problem-solving skills
  - Research indicates that students do better with this type of instructional focus
- Flipped classrooms (flipped learning):
  - Requires students to complete required readings prior to class, and then work in class to apply relevant theories in a student-led situation
- Need for additional research in both in class and online

# Administration of PA Programs

- Research focused on how to manage the program
- How to deal with university administration
- How to effectively manage your student population

# Accrediting Issues

- Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, or NASPAA - accrediting body for public administration
- Research issues include:
  - How to navigate through the accrediting or reaccreditation process,
  - Effect of accreditation on national standings,
  - Determining whether the competencies advocated by NASPAA reflect what future public servants need to succeed

# Barriers to Research

- Successful in conducting pedagogical research in PA
  - Evidence: teaching journals and conferences
  - Some barriers
- Lack of acceptance of this type of research
  - Not as valued as research that supports the field, and in turn, tenure & promotion opportunities
- While published in a peer-reviewed journal, does not compare favorably with other types of research

# Barriers to Research

- Push for more empirical evidence in pedagogical research
- Using current classes as case studies is a convenient way to demonstrate a new approach to teaching a particular course, or the effects of using a case study, or portfolio; or highlighting issues in teaching online
- Information is useful to those who teach PA
  - However, employing a quantitative or qualitative or mixed-methods approach lends more credence to the findings and can result in publishable work

# Barriers to Research

- More opportunities for publication of non-pedagogical research in PA nationally and internationally
- Field for pedagogical research specifically in the area of PA is somewhat limited
- Elsevier's SCOPUS rankings of the top 50 PA journals worldwide
  - Not one is dedicated to PA educational research

# Barriers to Research

- Venues for discussing teaching-related research is more readily available
- Annual conferences of the Public Administration Council in the UK, Teaching Public Administration Conference in the US, and the European Group for Public Administration conference all good opportunities

# Views of the Future

- Where do we go from here?
- Encouraged by the rise of international collaboration, in both conferences where we can bring together scholars from other countries, and journals, where we can gain insight on issues that reach across boundaries

# Views of the Future

- This year: UK journal Teaching Public Administration and the US Journal of Public Administration Education published joint symposium on “Democracy and the Teaching of Public Administration”
- Highlights the importance of the teaching and learning of democratic values and ideas

# Views of the Future

- Recommend you read the editorial in full
- Diamond & Schultz capture the essence of what they describe as the attack on democracy. Their view of the future:
- “We think that an active community of teachers/scholars/researchers working in our universities and colleges and engaging too in the processes of critical reflection on practice as well as anticipating developments or responding to new ways of thinking provides one site of resistance to the crisis in democracy”.

# Views of the Future

- Venue that provided opportunity for collaboration was the TPA Conference in Columbus, Ohio in 2015
- First for both journals, and it should not be the last
- Important that we continue to provide opportunities for discussion and collaboration of both academics and practitioners
- To advance the dialogue on the practice and teaching of public administration

# Final Charge

- To continue the scholarship of teaching and learning,
- To collaborate with international partners, and
- To practice the ideals that are espoused by public administrators