

Public Administration Research: Relevancy to Teaching and Learning

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Agenda

- Why is this important?
- What does this mean for research?
- How does all this relate to public administration teaching and learning?
- Barriers to research
- Good news!

Why is This Important?

- Changes in past 10 years
 - Great recession
 - 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 is This Important?

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

Why is This Important?

- Public service not viewed favorably
- US: decline in those wanting to serve
- Partnership for Public Service (2017):
 - 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

State & Local Issues

- Financial pressures
- Great recession 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 Issues

- US administration's 2018 budget had proposed changes to the intergovernmental system by eliminating funds for:
 - Community Development Block Grants (\$3B),
 - Social Service Block Grants (\$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, 2018).

Why is This Important?

- These changes have an impact on 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?

- 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

- 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

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
 - Document erosion of public values
 - Leadership that works in this political/bureaucratic environment
 - Effect of “fake news” on public perceptions of bureaucratic functions and results

How Does This Relate?

- Changing landscape influences what we research & how we teach
- Given the expected changes in government, what we teach will be critical to ensuring MPA graduates are prepared to enter public service.
 - How we teach it is still a primary expectation of teaching and learning scholarship

Barriers to Teaching & Learning Research

- We're somewhat successful in conducting pedagogical research in PA
 - Evidence: teaching journals and conferences
- However, there are 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

Good News!

- Venues for discussing teaching-related research are more readily available
- Annual conferences of the Teaching Public Administration Conference in the US, Public Administration Council (PAC) in the UK, and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) in Europe all good opportunities

Good News!

- Panels and presentations at ASPA 2019 can provide needed research that can (and hopefully will) inform what we teach
- MPAC and TPAC joint conference in September another venue to translate that research into our teaching and learning