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DOCTORAL PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:  
SOME BASIC DATA AND A FEW COMMENTS

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Also, the views do not necessarily represent those of the General Accounting Office.

Graduate schools in Public Administration awarded about 400 degrees in 1964<sup>1</sup>; fifteen years later they awarded over 6,700<sup>2</sup>. In 1972, the American Society for Public Administration claimed a membership of 14,000; six years later they enrolled 20,500<sup>3</sup>. In 1970, 101 institutions of higher education joined the nascent National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration; ten years later, 216 participated in its programs. Other figures could easily be cited, but the point is obvious: during the past decade, Public Administration as a profession passed through a kind of adolescence, a period of substantial growth providing an opportunity for increased influence in the management of public policy. The theme of this conference — "developing the professionals: developing the profession" — is timely, if for no other reason than the need to address the implications of this growth.

But if the quantitative growth of the field is apparent, a determination of our intellectual maturation is far more problematic. Despite persistent debates about whether Public Administration is a profession, a discipline, or both, and disputes over the contributions of Policy Analysis, the "New Public Administration", and policy implementation, we are nowhere near resolving our intellectual heritage and future direction. And, in terms of defining what education in Public Administration is and should be, we have been either extremely unsuccessful or extremely lethargic. An exception is the "Mellon Project", an ambitious attempt under the auspices of NASPAA to construct a morphology of the field by gathering data on educational programs.

Particularly absent, even in the Mellon Project, is a comprehensive examination of the role of doctoral programs. The omission is understandable. Master's programs comprise the core of the graduate programs, and for a variety of reasons — the teaching needs of a program, the demand of

the market, etc. — Public Administration education develops around the needs of Master's students. It is easy to decry, as Political Scientists frequently do, the intellectual vacuousness of Public Administration or its lack of "a useful normative apparatus and (the) ability to make persuasive prediction".<sup>4</sup> But the fact remains that most recipients of advanced degrees are interested in "doing", and in response to this kind of demand, our academic development and our curricula formation have fallen victim to quick expansion. This growth, however, is precisely the reason why scholarly concerns should now receive greater attention. Prior to the 1970's, Public Administration academic disputes were quite simply "academic"; when only 400 graduate degrees are conferred, the need to define the field seems less significant. I contend, however, that the urgency is now far greater, and that doctoral programs must be the primary long-term mechanism for advancing research and developing the field — that's why the lack of attention devoted to them is so disturbing and long past due.

My modest goals in this paper, despite my lofty preliminary comments, are to present some basic data from a few different sources, draw some inferences, and explain further the importance of investigating this topic. The lack of information on the most basic questions — number of degrees, placement, number of programs — hampers any analysis, and the few discussions of doctoral programs usually infer trends based on limited personal observations. It may not yet be possible to reach firm conclusions, but our guessing should at least be informed.

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Since 1973, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) has published a biennial directory of their member

institutions. The directory provides a variety of information, including the number of degrees awarded. Collecting these figures is a less than precise task — it relies on sometimes inaccurate self-reporting, to mention one caveat — but it is the only longitudinal survey which reflects the broad composition of the field, including not only Public Administration programs, but also political science and "generic administration" programs which grant P.A. degrees and presumably conduct relevant research. This inclusiveness is also one of the survey's drawbacks: it becomes difficult to consistently define what is relevant over the course of several years. Nevertheless, the figures provide evidence of the change, or lack of it, in doctoral programs.

TABLE I  
Degrees Granted by NASPAA Institutions, 1973-1979

	1973	1975	1977	1979
Programs Responding to Questionnaire	101	138	176	202
Master's Degrees	2867	4586	6449	7252
Ph.D.	150	120	167	187

Source: NASPAA Directories: 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978

The figures plainly indicate almost imperceptible growth in doctoral degrees, which starkly contrasts with the steady growth on the Master's level. In fact, considering the number of programs responding — twice as many in 1979 as in 1973 — the data suggest a decline: the average number of doctoral degrees per program in 1973 was 1.5 while in 1979 it was .9.<sup>5</sup>

Such gross figures conceal even further evidence of a lack of vitality: if only the programs responding to all four biennial surveys are taken into account, the number of doctoral degrees changed from 141 to 110 ; most of the

increase, in fact, can be attributed to one new program, NOVA University, which granted 107 degrees between 1976 and 1979.

The NASPAA survey squares with other evidence presented by the National Center for Education Statistics. Table 2 contains the number of Public Administration bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degrees for each of the last eight academic years. The data purportedly include virtually all the universities in the United States, and are derived from a survey which requires universities to specify the number of degrees they award in each discipline. Thus, the NCES figures utilize, ironically, a narrower definition of "public administration" since, for instance, a political science undergraduate major, despite a "concentration" in Public Administration, would be included in political science, not Public Administration; a similar situation presumably exists on the doctoral level. The NASPAA figures are not so unambiguous. Still, NASPAA and NCES support each other in their indication of enormous growth on the bachelor's and Master's levels contrasting with a lackluster performance on the doctoral level.

TABLE II  
Public Administration Degrees Conferred, by Level of Degree  
1971-1979

	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctoral
1971-72	355	1909	69
1972-73	606	2500	67
1973-74	1024	3296	76
1974-75	1471	4173	84
1975-76	2025	5249	98
1976-77	2317	6467	122
1977-78	2047	6921	153
1978-79	2140	6636	138

Source: National Center for Education Statistics,  
Washington, DC

In Table 3, I have constructed ratios comparing the levels. Although doctoral degree production recently stabilized relative to other degrees, the overall trend is dismal.

TABLE III  
Ratio of Public Administration Doctoral Degrees  
to Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, 1971-79

	Doctoral: Bachelor's	Doctoral: Master's
1971-72	19.5:100	3.6:100
1972-73	11.0:100	2.7:100
1973-74	7.5:100	2.3:100
1974-75	5.7:100	2.0:100
1975-76	4.8:100	1.9:100
1976-77	5.3:100	1.9:100
1977-78	7.5:100	2.2:100
1978-79	6.4:100	2.1:100

Source: Based on data from the National Center for  
Education Statistics, Washington, DC

To reiterate one caveat, the gross figures conceal some important considerations. For example, to return to the 1979 NASPAA figures, of the 202 programs responding, only 51 (or about one-fourth) offered the doctoral degree — and, perhaps more revealing, only 37 of these programs actually enrolled students. As on the Master's level, only even more so, there is wide disparity in the character of the programs. The University of Southern California reports 228 students enrolled in their doctoral program, while a smaller political science department might produce only one or two students a year who can be considered Public Administration Ph.D.'s.

In order to understand these more qualitative dimensions, the "Comprehensive Schools Section" of NASPAA conducted a survey of its members. The questions were, for the most part, open-ended with the intent of gaining a sense of the character (rather than the precise measurement) of doctoral programs, the returns are preliminary, and the results are reported here under the rules of confidentiality. Sixteen diverse schools responded by mid-March, 1981. One school reported granting 82 Public Administration doctoral degrees (9 were D.P.A.'s) since 1975, while two did not grant any. Tables 4 and 5 portray the character of the sample in terms of the kinds of degrees conferred for each of the five years and the subject of the dissertations approved.

TABLE IV  
Degrees Awarded 1975-1980

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	Total
Ph.D.	28	37	40	38	41	25	209
DPA	6	9	4	15	12	12	59
DA	1	1	-	-	-	1	3
Total	35	47	44	53	53	39	271

Source: Survey of members of the Comprehensive Schools Section of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration

TABLE V  
Dissertations Approved 1975-1980, by TOPIC and Degree

	Ph.D.	DPA	DA	Total
Intellectual Heritage	10	1	1	12
Bureaucratic Politics	21	1	1	23
Budgeting/Finance	12	5	-	17
Personnel	34	14	1	49
Policy Analysis/Evaluation	38	15	-	53
Organization Theory	38	13	-	51
International/Comparative	42	2	-	16
Total	209	59	3	271

The sample seems to conform with trends found in previous data, but there is no assurance, especially given the significant range in program size, that it is a representative sample. Because of this limitation, I am attempting only to describe the kinds of dissertations produced by the programs in this sample in the hopes that the results may at least engender some hypotheses for further research.

Tables 5 and 6 show the number of dissertations for each of the several sub-fields of Public Administration. Predictably, organization theory is popular, as is Policy Analysis. International or comparative studies also offers no surprises, probably because the category includes several dissertations which appeared to be considerations of another country's public sector problems; hence, most international students, whose main concerns were the applications of management



techniques — whether they be organization theory, personnel management, or budgeting — to another setting, fell into this category. Less predictable is the low figure for budgeting and finance, especially in light of its apparent popularity in the literature and the profession. The low standing of "bureaucratic politics", which includes many political science topics, results probably from the small size of programs based in political science departments. Perhaps not surprising, but still disappointing, is the lack of concern for the intellectual heritage of the field. To be sure, such topics are not easily translated into dissertation topics nor are they marketable to programs teaching "techniques"; these philosophical topics may nevertheless provide the foundations for future research, as Waldo's Administrative State demonstrated. (Granted, how many Waldo's can a field ever hope of having?)

TABLE VI  
Dissertations 1975-1980 by Topic

	1975	1975	1977	1978	1979	1980	Total
Policy Analysis/ Evaluation	5	8	8	8	14	10	53
Organization Theory	5	12	6	11	9	8	51
International/ Comparative	6	4	12	15	9	4	50
Personnel	6	11	5	7	10	10	49
Bureaucratic Politics	6	4	3	4	3	3	23
Budget/Finance	2	2	3	4	4	2	17
Intellectual Heritage	4	2	2	2	1	1	12
Other	1	4	5	2	3	1	16
Total	35	47	44	53	53	39	271

Source: Survey of Members of the Comprehensive Schools  
Section of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and  
Administration (NASPAA). Dissertations were classified into subject area  
by the author on the basis of title.

Do the kinds of dissertations conform to the kinds of courses now being taught in the Master's programs? In other words, how good is the match between the kinds of courses being demanded on the Master's level and the skills of the new faculty? To make some preliminary judgments, I tried to compare the data on dissertation topics with the number and kinds of courses now being offered. Table 7 lists the frequency of certain course offerings.

TABLE VII

Percent of Master's Programs and the Number of Courses Offered, by Topic.

	Number of Courses				Total
	0	1 or 2	3,4, or 5	6 or more	
Budgeting/Finance	1.7	46.1	36.1	16.1	100
Policy Analysis	2.8	37.8	41.1	18.3	100
Personnel	7.2	42.8	32.8	17.2	100
Organization / Behavior	2.8	30.6	42.8	23.9	100
Intellectual* Heritage					
Bureaucratic* Politics					

(Number of programs in sample: 202)

Source: NASPAA Survey for 1977-78 academic year.

\*Data not available for these topics

The dissertation data and the data on courses are extremely different in nature, so any inferences I draw are suggestive and perhaps better stated in the form of questions. Does the popularity of dissertations (and therefore the specialties of graduates) in policy analysis, personnel and organization theory affect the trends in course offerings? If so, what about the difference between the large number of offerings in budgeting and finance and the low

number of dissertations? While the connection between dissertation and future research is tenuous and Public Administration scholars change research interests perhaps more than those in other disciplines, the disparity still provokes concern; for if our doctoral education differs from our Master's curricula, we then need to ask not only whether we are producing enough Ph.D.'s, but also whether the kinds being produced are appropriate.

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The proportional growth in Master's and Bachelor's degrees far exceeds that on the doctoral level. The implications are obvious. First, the intellectual content of Public Administration, if that is defined at least in part by the curricula offered to Master's students, will be heavily influenced by those trained in fields other than public management or public affairs. The lack of attention devoted to doctoral programs portends a future of continued intellectual "second-class citizenship", a situation where faculty members in Public Administration programs are socialized into other disciplines and come to Public Administration for reasons not always based on scholarly interests.

Second, further attention needs to be given to the "research culture" of Public Administration, specifically, the contribution of doctoral programs. The Council of Graduate Schools articulates the nature and purpose of the Ph.D. degree.

The doctoral program is designed to prepare a student for a lifetime of intellectual inquiry that manifests itself in creative scholarship and research. The program emphasizes freedom of inquiry and expression and development of the student's capacity to make significant contributions to knowledge. An essential element is the development of the ability to understand and evaluate critically the literature of the field and to apply appropriate principles and procedures to the recognition, evaluation, interpretation, and understanding of issues and problems as the frontiers of knowledge. All of this is most effectively accomplished in close association with those experience in research and teaching. A central purpose of doctoral programs is the extension of knowledge...<sup>6</sup>

Public Administration has often been referred to as a problem-oriented field of inquiry, which seeks to investigate social problems and contribute to their resolution. If that is correct, the responsibility demands increased attention, for such investigation requires an eclectic approach drawing from research traditions in other social science disciplines. Regardless of how well interdisciplinary efforts work in devising Master's programs — that is, regardless of the success of combining political scientists, economists, and organizational theorists for teaching purposes — the research traditions of Public Administration will continue to be derivations of methods and perspectives from allied disciplines, unless future scholars support and define their own field — unless, that is, they are trained to recognize the distinct concerns of Public Administration.

None of my comments and none of these data should be used by themselves as support for creating or expanding doctoral programs. In fact, a blind market response, while perhaps rewarding in the short-term, can only be crippling in the long-term. Increased, assembly-line production of doctoral degrees without a rigorous appreciation for advancing scholarship will forever condemn us to intellectual inferiority. A research tradition and distinct intellectual character can only be created gradually with new approaches subjected to persistent critique. Although there may be other settings for accomplishing this, quality doctoral programs must be the most appropriate. Admittedly, the foundation of the field must always be the Master's student, the practitioner. But practitioners are not technicians; their activities have an intellectual content. Moreover, the role of the researcher is to define issues, clarify problems, and assure that the information used for decision-making is comprehensive, valid, and relevant. If our intent is to develop the profession and the professional, our long-term commitment should be to develop doctoral programs.

## NOTES

1

John C. Honey, "A Report: Higher Education for Public Service", Public Administration Review, 27, 4 (November, 1967), p. 301.

2

1978 Directory, National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, Washington, DC

3

American Society for Public Administration, Washington, DC

4

Richard Nelson, "Intellectualizing About the Moon-Ghetto Metaphor: A Study of the Current Malaise of Rational Analysis of Social Problem", Policy Sciences, 5 (1974), p. 396.

5

John Ellwood from Princeton University supplied some of the data for this section — data he obtained while working on the Mellon Project. His comments were helpful and greatly appreciated, but the interpretation is my own and is not necessarily shared by him.

6

The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, "The Doctor of Philosophy Degree: A Policy Statement", Washington, DC, October, 1977, pp. 1-2.