

Collaborations and Partnerships Across Sectors: Preparing the Next Generation for Governance

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ABSTRACT

This article examines inter-sectoral collaborations as reported in the literature and the suggested characteristics and competencies of collaboration participants. The ultimate goal is to suggest some strategies for preparing the next generation of students. The article's focus is on inter- and multisectoral collaborations and partnerships that involve not only government and nonprofit service agencies, but might also include business, university, civic groups and faith-based organizations. Following a literature review, the article identifies appropriate skills, competencies, and tools that Master of Public Affairs and Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) students should begin practicing to be effective in collaborations that involve organizations and stakeholders from different sectors and types. The final section of the article offers several specific recommendations for more effective approaches to applying these general suggestions, recommendations drawn from *Journal of Public Affairs Education* articles, interviews, focus groups, and the author's experience teaching in an MPA program.

KEYWORDS

inter-sectoral collaborations, nonprofit-government relations, MPA curriculum

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The literature on public-private contracting, partnerships, and collaboration has grown dramatically in the last three decades, as scholars seek to understand these increasingly common tools for public governance. Since the beginning of the 21st century, public-private arrangements of many kinds have flourished in countries around the world, often as a means for governments to cope with resource scarcity by engaging private organizations (Bovaird, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Mitchell, 2014). Additionally, certain "wicked" problems, such as homelessness, hunger, and unemployment, are not only complex and difficult to solve (Keast, Mandell, Brown, & Woolcock, 2004), they also necessarily involve a variety of

collaborative approaches, organizations, and jurisdictions to address them in what Linden (2002, 2010) calls a "networked world." Public policy tools have become more sophisticated (Salamon, 2002), and as a result, more complicated and confusing to even those who pass the laws and design the "new governance" systems (Kettl, 2002). Public administrators must now recognize that governance and management are likely to involve nonhierarchical structures and relationships with private sector actors, who cannot be simply understood or managed by employing hierarchical command and control methods or straightforward principal-agent relationships. Organizational silos, boundaries, and hierarchies are becoming

more and more obsolete in the face of rapidly changing environments in an increasingly global society. As Henry (2002) rightly points out, “governance characterizes the current political and economic environment of public administration; inter-sectoral administration is a method of public policy implementation and government service delivery that is unusually compatible with that environment” (p. 377).

Despite these new interorganizational structures, relationships, and purposes, public administration research analyzing the many variations in this inter-sectoral world is only beginning to develop some coherency (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2011; Herranz, 2010; O’Leary & Vij, 2012; Thomson & Perry, 2006). The development of many careful and rich case studies in the literature points out some common patterns, behaviors, and techniques that may lead to more general theories and practices (Alexander & Nank, 2009; Arbuckle & DeHoog, 2004; Bradshaw, 2000; Imperial, 2005; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002). Yet many times the focus in the public administration literature remains primarily on government action and leadership without analyzing the key roles of private organizations.

This article begins with an examination of inter-sectoral collaborations and their partners as reported in the literature and then discusses the suggested characteristics and competencies of inter-sectoral collaboration participants in this body of research. The ultimate goal of the final section is to suggest some strategies for preparing the next generation of students for the collaborations of the 21st century. Four assumptions underlie my approach to this topic and article. First, collaboration between and among organizations is a current fact of professional life for many public service leaders and managers (Horne & Paris, 2010), whether through grants, contracts, interjurisdictional agreements, or more fluid collaborations and partnerships. Second, today many professionals often move from jobs in one sector and type of organization to another over the life of their careers, typically due to their subject matter expertise. Those who understand other sectors

and are skilled at collaboration, boundary spanning, and networking are likely to be more successful than others in making these transitions. Third, as Smith (2008) and Salamon (2005) note, MPA and MPP programs and curricula should prepare students for understanding the sometimes messy, confusing, and fluid environments that they will find themselves in, particularly where traditional sector boundaries are blurring or irrelevant. Fourth, MPA programs and faculty can expose and equip students with many of the requisite skills to be effective practitioners in various organizations and collaborations (Benavides, 2013). It is important to become more familiar with the collaboration research and the many variations of collaborative structures and processes, as well as consider both new and traditional approaches to prepare students for new organizational realities.

THE SECTORS INVOLVED IN COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The focus of this article is on inter- and multi-sectoral collaborations and partnerships that involve not only government and nonprofit service agencies, but might also include businesses, universities, civic groups, and faith-based organizations. These can involve a wide variety of organizational types, from small to large, from community-based to state level to international. The structures themselves might also be characterized as a fluid network, informal arrangements, or a multisided public-private partnership, or what Cigler (1999) terms the “partnership continuum.” In my view, inter- and multisectoral collaborations can be understood as special types of collaborations—and more difficult ones, due to multiple stakeholders, competing interests, different time horizons, and conflicting organizational values and cultures (Hardy & Phillips, 1998). The usual three-sector (public, nonprofit, for-profit) approach may also be inadequate for more nuanced comparisons among and within these sectors (Schlesinger, 1998).

While there are many extant organizational typologies, separating the public sector agencies into additional, finer distinctions—for

example, between the military, university, and other public agencies—allows for an improved understanding of differences. Additionally, within the broad category of nonprofit organizations, faith-based agencies, foundations, community-based organizations, and voluntary membership organizations (such as civic clubs), are distinctively different organizations with various patterns of behavior, funding streams, and incentive structures that may often be important to analyze in complex collaborations. (Of course, even these broad categories do not begin to convey the variations within each type.)

In addition to nonprofit and government collaborations, it is important to examine the various types of interactions with business organizations, which have often been neglected in research on public and nonprofit organizations. They also constitute a wide range of types, from consulting agencies, small businesses, professional practices, and traditional larger, multifaceted corporations. As noted in the social entrepreneurship literature (e.g., Dees & Anderson, 2003), growing numbers of established and new enterprises have incorporated a social mission into their goals. However, businesses may have some difficulty in participating successfully in multisector collaborations, due to quite different time horizons, skills, cultures, and values (Najam, 1996; Rubin & Stankiewicz, 2001; Waddell, 2000). Increasingly, in the nonprofit literature (Salamon, 2005; Suarez & Hwang, 2013) and in the business management field (Austin, 2000; Dees & Anderson, 2003; Sawaga & Segal, 2000; Waddell, 2000), greater attention is being paid to venture philanthropy, earned income strategies, corporate sponsorships, social sector alliances, expansive marketing campaigns, and competition with for-profit agencies for government grants and contracts. According to a recent study of San Francisco Bay Area nonprofits, almost one third collaborate with businesses (Suarez & Hwang, 2013, pp. 590–591). While some of these collaborations may be one-time philanthropic relationships, clearly the business sector serves an expanding role in revenue diversification and support for nonprofit organizations.

Today, governance is understood as involving multiple actors and complex structures. Yet many organizations are evolving from their previous strategies, forms, and practices into what Dees and Anderson (2003) call “sector-bending”: “a wide variety of approaches, activities, and relationships that are blurring the distinctions between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, either because they are behaving more similarly, operating in the same realms, or both” (p. 16). They call attention to new organizational forms, such as hybrid organizations, nonprofit subsidiaries, or for-profit foundations. This also indicates that some of the common generalizations about organizational performance in the three sectors may no longer be as accurate in describing or predicting behavior, as found by Schlesinger (1998) and Witesman and Fernandez (2013). In preparing students for governance, MPA faculty and programs must be aware of promoting too easily the traditional stereotypes about nonprofits being strong in mission clarity, program development and service delivery, but weak in finances and evaluation; or about government agencies excelling in management and accountability, but weak in creativity and strategic thinking; or about businesses having skills in finance, performance measurement, and strategy, but less ability in program development and service delivery. Nonetheless, Najam (1996, p. 213) makes some useful comparisons among the sectors and describes their key features—differing values, incentives, and cultures—that may prove to be barriers in forming a collaboration.

In this article, following a brief review of the collaboration literature, I seek to identify appropriate skills, competencies, and tools that MPA and MPP students should develop to be effective in these multiple-partner collaborations. What is clear from this review is that relatively little attention has been paid to personal characteristics of collaboration participants and the preparation of newcomers to public service (two exceptions are Horne & Paris, 2010 and Koliba, 2012). Given the changing public service landscape, MPA faculty and programs must be more explicit on how

organizations and personnel can adapt to the new realities of inter-sectoral governance with skills of boundary spanning, bridging sector differences, and building collaborations among public, nonprofit, and even business sectors. I echo the goal of Lester Salamon (2005) in his 2004 keynote address to the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) conference attendees, which is

to devise a form of training that focuses on preparing people not for a particular type of organization—be it government, business, or nonprofit—nor with a particular technique, such as the technique of policy analysis, but for a particular type of career. The career I have in mind is that of what I call the professional citizen. The career of a professional citizen is broader than that of a public servant as traditionally conceived. It embraces all those positions that are centrally involved in addressing public problems. This includes positions in government, but also positions in nonprofit organizations, foundations, and even corporate community affairs programs. It even embraces voluntary citizen action. (p. 11)

DEFINING THE TERMS, PROCESS, AND PARTICIPANTS IN COLLABORATION

Scholars from a variety of perspectives and research sources (e.g., Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Cigler, 1999; Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001; Milward & Provan, 2003) have helped to describe the structural, leadership, and management components of effective collaborations, networks, and partnerships, though only a few (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013; Coston, 1998; Gazley & Brudney, 2007; Shaw, 2003; Suarez & Hwang, 2013; Witesman & Fernandez, 2013) provide much detail or analysis of the roles of the nonprofit or business sector. The consensus among researchers is that collaborations, whether interorganizational, intergovernmental, or inter-sectoral, are not only difficult to create and manage, they are also difficult to define and analyze with common frameworks

(O’Leary & Vij, 2012; Thomson & Perry, 2006), though the work of several (Bryson et al., 2006; Emerson et al., 2011; Herranz, 2010) are recent attempts to do so.

Similarly, public-private partnerships can be complex, as well as difficult to understand from a common set of variables. They connote a more formal set of agreements between two or three partners (usually one public agency and at least one for-profit organization), often with financial terms, for a more specific project or activity (Finney & Grossman, 1999). Collaborations are usually understood as having multiple participants who take on a more complex set of plans, services, or policy initiatives. Nonetheless, the terms themselves are sometimes used interchangeably in the academic and professional literature, and thus cause considerable confusion, as O’Leary and Vij (2012) point out. In this article, I use Bardach’s (1999) definition of collaboration, “any joint activity by two or more agencies working together that is intended to increase public value by their working together rather than separately” (p. 8).

According to Finney and Grossman (1999), “the basic components of an inter-sector partnership seem to come down to three factors: voluntary willingness to collaborate; a truly public purpose; and the ability of the partners to accomplish something collectively that they could not do as well, or perhaps even at all, separately” (p. 341). Several scholars (e.g., Mulroy, 2003; Thomson & Perry, 2006) have identified the conflicts, complexity, and adaptation that are likely to be found in longer-term, public-private projects, as participants learn and then adjust to multiple external and internal stresses.

As we might imagine, not all partnerships are successful, and many fail (e.g., Rubin & Stankiewicz, 2001; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002). Thomson and Perry (2006) suggest that collaborations are “inherently fragile.” Recognizing that conflict is likely to occur in these arrangements (Boris & Steuerle, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2002), many scholars and nonprofit organizations have developed practical advice

about how to manage partnerships and collaborations, both in the nonprofit and public sectors, with appropriate attention to the potential pitfalls and challenges associated with them (Austin, 2000; Bardach, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 1999; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Linden, 2002, 2010; Miltenberger, 2013). While these efforts are probably helpful to practitioners, the complex relationships that evolve in the context of inter-sectoral collaborations are only beginning to be understood by scholars and in turn, applied to teaching about them.

THREE KEY FACTORS IN MULTISECTOR COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

The growing attention to the concept of governance via multiple organizations in carrying out public policies and programs recognizes the importance of what Bardach (1999) calls “managerial craftsmanship” and leadership to structure effective capacity of these ventures. A range of these management challenges go beyond hierarchical planning and intra-organizational coordination. According to Agranoff and McGuire (2003):

Collaborative management is a concept that describes the process of facilitating and operating in multiorganizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved, or solved easily, by single organizations. Collaboration is a purposive relationship designed to solve a problem by creating or discovering a solution within a given set of constraints (e.g., knowledge, time, money, competition, and conventional wisdom). (p. 4)

Some scholars (Agranoff, 2005, Agranoff & McGuire, 2003, Finney & Grossman, 1999) suggest that collaborations are a strategic choice designed by government agencies to implement policy solutions to difficult and complex problems that they cannot manage, often due to resource constraints. However, the notion that they direct or even “manage” these relationships suggests a role that may not always be observed in reality. The process and solutions via relevant nongovernmental actors are often less a strategic choice and more a process of

learning and “muddling through,” to use Lindblom’s (2004) term (see also Arbuckle & DeHoog, 2004; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Hardy & Phillips, 1998). As Bryson and colleagues (2006) conclude from their literature review, “the normal expectation ought to be that success will be very difficult to achieve in cross-sector collaborations” (p. 52).

Given the difficulty of organizing and managing these inter-sectoral collaborations which are frequently necessary to address complex and wicked problems, the following questions need to be asked: What knowledge, skills, and competencies seem to be most useful in successful collaborations? How can MPA faculty and programs prepare the next generation to be competent in this rapidly changing, complex world?

Various approaches can be taken to understand and then communicate the key features of collaboration structures and participant skills. Thomson and Perry (2006) define several dimensions of collaboration processes: governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms. Some (Agranoff, 2006; McGuire, 2006; Thomson & Perry, 2006) suggest that collaborative skills include good management skills already taught in MPA programs and practiced by effective public executives, including the following:

- excellent communication skills (oral, written, listening, technology);
- strong organizational and management skills;
- knowledge of other organizations and the community;
- strategic analysis, planning, and follow-through;
- integrity, reliability, and ethical behavior; and
- broad public service values, not competitive attitudes or single-sector focus.

Nonetheless, my argument is that additional competencies need to be addressed and integrated into MPA curricula intentionally to

prepare students for understanding and managing more complex governance structures and relationships. McGuire (2006) and Thomson and Perry (2006) point to the necessity of several unique competencies, attitudes, and skills in evidence in successful collaborations that go beyond what is traditionally taught in public administration programs. McGuire (2006, p. 37) outlines four unique skills particularly critical in early stages: activation (identifying and including key players and resources), framing (obtaining agreement on leadership and management roles), mobilizing (gaining commitments and building support among key stakeholders), and synthesizing contributions and participants' resources. Another important contribution to this discussion is the research and findings of Horne and Paris (2010), in which they interviewed public and nonprofit managers experienced in social services collaborations. Their subjects also conclude that management in inter-sectoral networks and collaborations requires different skills from those applicable to traditional hierarchies. No longer can the government agents consider themselves as the "experts" who drive and organize collaborations with an emphasis on top-down decision making and control.

Three elements drawn from the extensive collaboration literature are the focus of this article for the purpose of teaching the next generation: (a) *understanding various organizational structures and values* (those of partners as well as the design of partnerships, networks, and collaborations), (b) *creating effective interpersonal relationships* (via social capital, trust, social networking), and (c) *developing appropriate leadership qualities and skills* (e.g., communication, conflict resolution, flexibility).

Organizational Structures and Values

Collaboration partners require some knowledge of the structures, values, and processes of partner agencies—whether government, nonprofit, business, consulting, or, as in many local human services, also faith-based and civic organizations. Since they bring different backgrounds, experience, and behavior patterns to collaborations, participants need to adjust

their assumptions and expectations that may otherwise get in the way of progress. Government partners may be more accustomed to hierarchical structures with formal procedures and specialized staff roles that emphasize accountability. They may have less knowledge or experience with nonprofit and business organizations' decision-making processes, resources, and behaviors. For their part, nonprofit participants, especially those from community-based and faith-based agencies, will often be less familiar with complex organizations and their procedures. Thus, unrealistic time frames, conflicting expectations, and unfamiliar communication systems can create confusion and conflict among partners who interact in these new relationships. Social services managers interviewed by Horne and Paris (2010) recommend that participants must be familiar both with partners' formal structures and processes and with those partners' particular strengths to play their parts in collaborations.

A particular challenge of early stages of collaborations and partnerships with diverse partners is designing appropriate systems and structures that reduce communication barriers, conflicts, and competition, while promoting accountability, trust, and coordination of efforts. Often these will begin as fairly flexible, informal, nonhierarchical organizational relationships that may evolve into more formal designs for implementation and accountability (Coston, 1998; Gazley, 2008; Mandell, 1999). As the work plans and tasks become clearer, and as participants learn more about each others' capacity, the forms will evolve into a design more tailored for their collaboration's purpose, partners, and processes.

Understanding other organizations' interests, cultures, and values are suggested by Thomson and Perry (2006) as competencies that may be necessary for collaborations but may be underemphasized in MPA/MPP programs. Certainly government and business participants must be clear on the critical role that nonprofits' mission focus, ethics, and culture may play in collaborations (O'Neil, 2006). Just as importantly, those working in nonprofit and for-profit org-

anizations must be familiar with the political environment, public service values, cultures of other organizations, and various legal and structural forms of partnerships and collaborations. Partnering with for-profit businesses and venture capitalists requires an understanding of business forms, practices, and mental models that emphasize competition over collaboration, which often can conflict with the motives and values of those in public service agencies (Najim, 1996, Waddell, 2000). While it may be simplistic to say that businesses emphasize profits, government agencies focus on accountability, and nonprofits pursue their missions, enough differences in values, cultures, and time horizons exist among these types to constitute an important factor to consider in developing inter-sectoral collaborations.

Interpersonal Relationships

Several studies on interorganizational collaborations offer research findings on the requisite and specific skills and personal traits of participants, though not necessarily for inter-sectoral collaborations. For example, O'Leary, Choi, and Gerard (2012) found in their survey of senior federal managers that they emphasized the personal qualities and interpersonal skills most necessary for effective collaborations, as well as "group process skills, strategic leadership skills, and substantive/technical expertise" (p. 70). Shaw's (2003) interviews on nonprofit and public agency collaborations found two themes in successful collaborations that highlighted participants' skills and backgrounds—first, the idea of likability that fosters relationships and second, understanding the organizational culture of the partners. The concept of "trust" or "trustworthiness" figures prominently in this and several other studies (Austin, 2000; Lambright, Mischen, & Laramée, 2010; Lee et al., 2012; Snavely & Tracy, 2002; Williams, 2002). Left unclear in these accounts, however, is exactly *how* to learn and demonstrate trustworthiness with other partners. The evidence from Lambright and colleagues (2010) indicates that trust in networks is more likely when participants come from roughly equivalent organizational contexts, have frequent interactions, and have had previous

successful cooperative relationships. Obviously, these conditions are sometimes absent in inter-sectoral collaborations during the early stages. The explicit application of social capital and social networking may be useful here, as partners get acquainted with each other and each others' networks. Additional research (Miltnerberger, 2013) suggests that partners should regularly demonstrate reciprocity, express mutual commitment, and communicate a strong sense of joint ownership of successful outcomes to build and maintain trust.

Leadership Qualities and Skills

The critical role of key leaders or "champions" in forming and maintaining effective collaborations figures prominently in case studies and other research (e.g., Cigler, 1999; Linden, 2010; Miltnerberger, 2013). Their competencies certainly include those mentioned above, such as personal qualities and trustworthiness, yet other skills seem to be more critical for leaders who promote the collaborations and/or maintain them. Leaders must be fully dedicated to the success of the collaboration and passionate about its purposes (Linden, 2010), even though they may have to navigate conflicting demands and loyalties—to their home organization and to the collaboration. Some of their attributes mirror what is widely accepted as "emotional intelligence," which Goleman (1998) states includes self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills. Flexibility, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities are mentioned by Thomson and Perry (2006), based on their study of AmeriCorps and other collaborations. Williams (2002) found in his observations and interviews that key boundary spanners had personal qualities that include not only an open and inviting personality and awareness of organizational culture, but also communication skills (including listening), conflict resolution skills, ability to influence and negotiate, social networking skills, "being creative, innovative and entrepreneurial" (p. 119), and the ability to manage multiple roles and accountabilities. Koliba (2012) argues that leaders must also have critical skills in developing and managing networks strategically with sys-

tems thinking, oversight, resource provision, and facilitation skills. All in all, it is safe to assume that the collaborative leader's work will demand more knowledge, skills, and abilities than appeared in POSDCORB (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting) and the public administration textbooks of the 20th century.

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TEACHING COLLABORATION KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO THE NEXT GENERATION

How and why should faculty expose MPA students to new forms of governance, as well as teach and then assess interpersonal and leadership skills among students? While the new NASPAA standards do not explicitly recognize the complexity and importance of partnerships and collaborations, the competency "to lead and manage in public governance" (Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, 2009) implies that MPA programs should focus on developing students' knowledge, skills, and competencies to prepare them for a variety of organizational contexts and challenges, not just the traditional hierarchical forms of government agencies. Koliba (2012) notes: "The intentional use of the term *public governance* reflects the shift away from viewing public administration as the management of unitary governments and toward the recognition that modern administration takes places within and across polycentric governance networks" (p. 89). Just the same, all of the five competencies could be said to support and develop the abilities of graduates who work in these more complex systems: (a) to lead and manage in public governance; (b) to participate in and contribute to the policy process; (c) to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions; (d) to articulate and apply a public service perspective; and (e) to communicate and interact *effectively* with a diverse and changing workforce and *public* [emphasis added].

Some (e.g., Smith, 2008) have argued cogently that programs should include knowledge of all sectors and organization types in the core curricula to prepare students for the 21st century complexity. In reviewing course titles and

descriptions of NASPAA-accredited programs in two years (2007, 2010), Koliba (2012) reports on the growth of nonprofit courses and concentrations. But he expresses the concern of Salamon (2005) who sees the growth of separate training of nonprofit managers as a potential problem because issues that require concerted public and nonprofit collaboration might not get effectively addressed from these silos.

In creating separate programs, certificates, or degrees in nonprofit management are programs adding to the boundaries instead of overcoming them? Two forces encourage programs to overcome the barriers that separate students into nonprofit and government camps, as well as encourage them to integrate their learning. First, over the years, MPA alumni may well move between sectors, whether due to choice or to unexpected opportunities. Knowing more about various organizational contexts and management concerns would equip graduates to be more strategic and successful as they seek new positions. Second, most MPA students will inevitably be part of intra- or interorganizational networks, partnerships, and collaborations as they pursue their careers. They should be prepared with knowledge about these structures to ensure that they will be effective in the process and outcomes of these efforts.

The question arises then, how can faculty integrate the content and research about networks, partnerships, and collaborations with the practical skills required by partners in these inter-sectoral collaborations? Should new courses be created, or should some content and skills be folded into existing core courses? What kinds of assignments and special programming can promote the development of skills for networks, collaboration, and inter-sectoral relationships?

While all MPA programs likely have elements of these skills and values imbedded in their curricula, faculty should feel some responsibility for articulating their importance in being successful managers and leaders. And programs should be quite intentional in emphasizing the importance of these skills, not only in hierarchical settings, but also in inter-sectoral and

interorganizational relationships. Public service programs and faculty bear the responsibility of adapting and modifying course readings and assignments to reflect the new literature on governance and collaborations. Separate courses in collaboration, network management, or conflict resolution and negotiation certainly recognize the changing public service landscape, add value to any curriculum, and may be viable elective options in some programs (Smith, 2008). Additionally, carefully selected cases, discussion guides and journal articles (Horne & Paris, 2010) can provide some coverage in core courses to emphasize comparisons between sectors and subsectors, and to focus more explicitly on the role and structure of networks, collaboration, and partnerships in both public policy formulation and implementation (Garris, Madden, & Rodgers, 2008). Topics on organizational culture, behavior, politics, and leadership in different organizational contexts should be central concerns in graduate programs that go well beyond the technical skills typically supplied in MPA/MPP education. Through a variety of tools, in case studies, interviews, class discussions, readings, or videos, faculty can offer students insights into how to examine and compare interorganizational structures, processes, and behavior. Given the fact that adding new topics to existing classes or creating new courses is often difficult due to constrained resources and existing program requirements, the following section will suggest ways that faculty in MPA and MPP programs can teach these skills and knowledge.

Alternative Approaches to Teaching and Learning

In the following section, I offer some additional alternatives to these more traditional suggestions. These alternative suggestions flesh out methods to integrate the three essential collaboration ingredients introduced above—understanding organizational structures and values, creating interpersonal relationships, and developing leadership qualities and skills. They are based on four sources of information: (a) research and perspectives from previous *Journal of Public Affairs Education* contributors (Benavides, 2013; Cross & Grant, 2006;

Hartley, 2009; Kapucu, 2012; Smith, 2008; Wheeland & Palus, 2010); (b) my experience acquired in working in several community collaborations as well as teaching in and directing a small MPA program at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) that draws both in-service and pre-service students for public and nonprofit careers; (c) interviews with three groups of UNCG MPA alumni (police officers, nonprofit executives, and local government managers); and (d) the suggestions of a group of 2013 Southeastern Conference on Public Administration (SECoPA) conference panelists and audience participants convened to discuss partnerships and collaborations.

My personal experience in inter-sectoral collaborations has included projects in community development (see Arbuckle & DeHoog, 2004), refugee resettlement, and housing. The alumni interviews and the SECoPA discussion were fairly informal; the purpose was to draw out the reflections and suggestions of MPA alumni (19 total) and public administration faculty (approximately 25) who were interested in improving the understanding and teaching of collaboration. The interviews with alumni were part of a larger research effort and included participants who had been involved in several partnerships and collaborations.

Program Intentions. First, MPA programs can be intentional and systematic in their efforts to promote collaborative learning and skills. Recruiting and admitting students from diverse backgrounds can provide the ingredients for appreciating differences, practicing interpersonal skills, and sharing varied work experiences in different types of organizations. As many programs have found, and as the alumni interviewees noted, integrating pre-service and in-service students, as well as nonprofit and government employees, enriches the learning experience for all.

The alumni I interviewed strongly supported this approach to acquaint students with people and programs they may otherwise have no connection to, along the lines suggested by Koliba (2012) and Salamon (2005). Promoting

a student cohort with a mix of career interests, diverse backgrounds, and work experiences enriches programs and promotes peer learning. For example, the police officers specifically asserted that being in classes with students in the nonprofit sector prepared them to understand the “big picture of public service” and the broader community resources available to assist them in their work. Nonprofit managers saw the value of students gaining broader public service perspectives about government agencies with which they partner and will receive funding. They also mentioned the personal and professional benefits of gaining a network of future contacts that help them build social capital and collaborations.

Program Expectations. Second, spelling out program expectations and values can also set the stage to promote collaborative and interpersonal skills among students. MPA graduates reported in their interviews that program themes of collaboration and community, as well as other values introduced first in applicant interviews and then in the program orientation, led to positive peer relationships and networks that continued beyond the classroom. The explicit statement of program values communicates to students what is expected in and out of the classroom as well as lays the groundwork for public service careers where building collaborations and community are increasingly necessary.

Classroom Themes and Approaches. Third, in teaching courses in public administration, local government management, and organizational behavior, I intentionally return to these themes and develop various classroom approaches to promote collaboration, teamwork, and leadership skills among students. These include additional subject matter coverage, team assignments, cases, and classroom practice in interpersonal and leadership skills. Of particular benefit is when students are able to identify proficiency in others, learn from their examples, gain feedback from peers on their efforts, and then reflect on how to improve their own skills, whether in a required reflective paper or in a journal (Cross & Grant, 2006; Herzog, 2004). In structuring these exercises, I often design

small groups—dyads or triads with a mix of experienced and inexperienced students who can practice skills, observe, and offer advice and encouragement to their peers. Providing specific expectations and then feedback in conflict resolution and communication skills are particularly essential in my experience.

Internships. Fourth, well-structured internships for pre-service students and career changers provide valuable work experience, exposure to an organization’s culture, and improved communication skills (Benavides, 2013; Cross & Grant, 2006; Garris et al., 2008; Horne & Paris, 2010). To achieve these benefits, internship coordinators should give clear directions to supervisors that they are expected to expose interns to the broader context of the agency’s work, to invite interns to interorganizational meetings, and to provide time for questions, feedback, and career guidance. Benavides (2013) offers a useful summary and framework to show the linkages between the internship and the external host organizations, the university, and students. In my experience, internship coordinators and faculty should intentionally encourage students to develop an understanding and analysis of what these experiences mean, and what skills they have gained in their work. These may include structuring reflective assignments and exercises (Cross & Grant, 2006; Herzog, 2004), requiring, wherever possible, in-depth site visits with the student and supervisor, and allowing students to share and compare their internship experiences (with each other and with prospective interns). These activities give them opportunities to analyze both their own behavior and that of the organization as well as focus on certain elements of interorganizational or inter-sectoral collaboration. To promote quality supervision, faculty coordinators must determine how much oversight is required, how the site supervisors view their role, and to what extent they encourage interns to see the big picture of the organization’s work and their interorganizational relationships.

While recognizing the need for and value of quality internships, MPA alumni who were interviewed suggested that they would like to

hire and supervise more paid interns, but they were often limited by their resources of time, money, bureaucratic barriers, and lack of support from their own leadership. To allow students who cannot locate or accommodate a traditional internship due to work, financial or family obligations, some alternatives to full-time paid internships can be designed to encourage learning about other organizational contexts. These suggestions include job shadowing, workplace informational interviews, research projects, online “virtual” work, and flexible part-time internships. While not ideal, these options can be structured to include feedback and reflection exercises to capture meaningful learning about organizations and professional skills.

Team Research Projects. Fifth, requiring team research projects for a real client in particular (Hartley, 2009) may help to build flexibility, adaptability, and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to understand other people and organizations, which are necessary to be effective in interpersonal and collaborative relationships. This suggestion builds on what Kapucu (2012) stresses—that our classrooms should model “communities of practice.” By this, he means that well-designed classroom discussions and group assignments should not only build peer relationships and balance theory and practice but also improve an understanding of real world issues by involving students with community practitioners. These can be part of requirements for a capstone course, a class team project, or an internship’s research project. In UNCG’s MPA program, at least one core course and one required concentration course involve a team research project for an area organization.

These projects can be met by resistance from some students, due to the required time commitments and conflicts with their full-time jobs, though most alumni (especially pre-service students) reported these experiences as particularly eye-opening and rewarding. Additional challenges regularly appear with the client agency in obtaining information, gaining cooperation from staff members, communicating with different personalities and agencies, and

completing projects on time. Instructors also face the issue of recruiting appropriate projects and liaisons and then dealing with unequal student contributions, unclear expectations from liaisons, and their own level of involvement in the project.

Alumni suggested that organizing and supervising meaningful student team projects at their agencies take considerable staff resources, which are sometimes in short supply, such that the project results can be disappointing. Yet everyone agreed that students can learn some important leadership and interpersonal skills from frustrating team experiences—such as the need for patience, persistence, and flexibility in the midst of conflict. With some guidance, but not micromanagement from faculty, students can figure out how to complete the project despite various complications. Students’ level of confidence and coordination skills will greatly improve as a result. Nonetheless, it is important for faculty members to monitor their progress and keep the client’s expectations and goals at the forefront of students’ work, while giving students some latitude to develop their research and recommendations.

Observations, Interviews, and Case Examples.

Sixth, in addition to or in the absence of a project for a client, students can learn about collaborations through observations of meetings of interorganizational projects, interviews of collaboration partners, and rich case examples in their communities (Horne & Paris, 2010). SECoPA participants strongly supported using detailed case studies of collaborations and partnerships, with some recognition that failures often provide greater learning than focusing only on the successes.

Inviting collaboration participants as panelists to share their experiences (good and bad) in classes can allow students to appreciate the challenges and methods of organizing and sustaining collaborations. If possible, speakers from business, nonprofit, and public organizations could provide insights about their different perspectives and their learning from them. Since some guests may not be prepared to

provide a complete lecture or analysis of a partnership or collaboration, another suggestion was to invite guests, adjuncts, or faculty members to bring in a “problem of the day” scenario to a class to promote problem-solving skills and real-world action plans for collaborations. The SECoPA faculty suggested assigning students to identify specific roles, communication patterns, conflicts, and leadership behaviors. As an instructor, I have found that students often retain and reflect on these examples as well as my own candid cautionary tales about failed collaborations.

Short Courses Taught by Practitioners. Seventh, offering short courses or workshops (e.g., for one credit rather than three credits) taught by practitioners on specific subjects like network management, contracts, conflict resolution, negotiation, group facilitation, or strategic planning may provide another approach to introducing collaborative skills. Such options not only acquaint students with specific topics they may need for current or future work, but also can draw on the experience and interests of adjunct faculty. Some MPA programs, such as Villanova University’s (Wheeland & Palus, 2010), offer short courses or workshops regularly taught by area local government professionals who can also build bridges to internships and research partnerships. Nonprofit executives whom I interviewed in particular suggested short courses that would provide students with more exposure to “business” topics, such as social enterprises, business plans, and investment strategies. The value, as they saw it, would be to develop an understanding and language that would benefit not only their partnerships with businesses but also improve their communications with board members.

The MPA program at UNCG for many years has offered a wide variety of one-credit courses (now almost 20) taught by practitioners that both adjuncts and students benefit from and gain useful connections through. Though hiring adjuncts or creating new short courses at some universities can become a bureaucratic burden, UNCG’s process for including these courses in the curriculum and integrating practitioners

into the teaching schedule has been relatively easy. Alumni mentioned examples of how they used their practical assignments at work, how they contacted these instructors later for advice, and how they gained specific feedback that assisted them in their career development.

Some of the one-credit course topics have long been in place for students with a public administration or nonprofit career in mind (e.g., grant writing, strategic planning, oral communication skills); others have been developed and taught specifically for the growing nonprofit curriculum (e.g., social entrepreneurship, volunteer management), both on campus and online. The topics are scheduled flexibly, partly based on student demand, adjunct availability, and current employer needs. Some adjuncts are hired with successful experiences in inter-sectoral collaboration, partnerships, and networks that our faculty members do not have. Ensuring the competence and preparation of the adjuncts to teach their subjects is critical, but it is also necessary to communicate regularly with them to convey the program’s values, the students’ backgrounds, and the organizational contexts graduates will likely enter. In UNCG’s MPA program, the annual meeting with adjuncts involves not only obtaining their input about students and courses, but also sharing the program’s concerns, alumni feedback, and curricular changes.

Student Reflection. Eighth, another option to consider is to ask students to reflect on their learning process and outcomes during their education to prepare them for interviews, career opportunities, and future collaborative work. UNCG’s MPA program requires a summary of learning reflection paper as a final written requirement, followed up by an oral discussion with faculty members. The current noncredit assignment involves students analyzing and reflecting on their development in mastering the five NASPAA competency areas, with a rotating emphasis on two of them. While not explicitly designed to focus on collaborations, students’ improvements in self-awareness, interpersonal skills, leadership abilities, and even emotional intelligence often come through

clearly in these papers. This analysis is not only worthwhile for students, but it also provides the faculty with insights about what students gain from certain course themes and assignments. Over the years, the value of internships, assignments that apply theory to practice, and team projects for community clients have been frequently emphasized by students.

Most of the research and suggestions cited thus far focuses on improving MPA core and elective curricula, classroom teaching, and experiential learning to prepare students for their future collaborations. A final suggestion mentioned by alumni, nonprofit executives, and SECoPA participants was to encourage students to consider "cross-pollinating" by taking elective courses in Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Health programs to gain a better understanding of the interests, motives, language, and innovations in business management. A nonprofit manager suggested developing interdisciplinary team projects for community agencies with these programs as another method of learning from each other to benefit both sets of students.

This approach involves breaking down barriers between business education and public service education, a challenging task indeed. While some courses and topics offer readily transferable professional skills in management, communication, and leadership, the larger benefit for preparing students for inter-sectoral collaborations is in learning the structures and values of for-profit organizations. Those who have never worked in a business are often struck by the dramatically different conversations and attitudes by these faculty and students. An additional benefit that some have realized was that their educational experience solidified their career choice and commitment to public service.

CONCLUSION

This article seeks to familiarize faculty with the expanding and diverse literature on collaborations, with the goal of preparing to address several key topics in teaching about collaborations. Key topics include the organizational structures and values of collaboration partners,

the interpersonal and leadership qualities that are critical to organizing and implementing these arrangements, and specific suggestions on how to prepare the next generation in our programs to be competent in this rapidly changing public governance system.

Programs that seek to prepare MPA/MPP students for the complex 21st-century structures and practices should consider a variety of different approaches, depending on their missions, student mix, and geographic locations. It is likely that opportunities for observation, instruction, experience, and reflection related to collaborations and partnerships are close at hand for most programs, no matter where they are located. Both program administrators and faculty bear the responsibility and challenge of integrating collaboration materials, knowledge, and skills into their curricula to prepare students for a more complex, even messy, public service environment.

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