

Project and Report Narrative

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Narrative

Purpose

Motives to enter public service can be categorized as rational, norm-based, or affective (Perry & Wise, 1990). Norm-based reasons for entering public service include the desire to serve the public interest, which is also cited as the most frequent reason to enter public sector employment. Furthermore, a person's desire to serve the public stems from an individual's personal values to contribute altruism to society (Perry & Wise, 1990). My motivation to pursue higher education directly after attaining an undergraduate degree was to further my abilities and refine my skill-sets in seeking employment opportunities in the public sector. My education will allow me the chance to give back to the country that has extended numerous opportunities for my parents to escape oppression and create a better life for themselves. In addition, a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) is typically accepted as a generalist degree that is intended to prepare students for various roles at each level of government.

During this pursuit, I have read theories about government, interacted with public sector professionals, examined public service values, and witnessed the pitfalls and successes of the foundation and structure of American government. Throughout each professional experience and academic assignment, there is an underlying current that reminds me that the American government continues to prevail despite political disarray, inefficiencies in bureaucracy, and scrutiny under the public eye. In this narrative, I will demonstrate how my professional and academic experiences have prepared me for a career in public service especially with the knowledge I have gained throughout graduate school.

Furthermore, I will discuss and elaborate on fifteen deliverables that I have produced throughout my time at the Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP) and explain how

the deliverables have met the six performance objectives set forth by the policy guide. The deliverables are organized based on the MPA curriculum of public management, public policy, and public service and include an extracurricular section. The six performance objectives include:

A. Performance Objective: Communicate effectively through organized, concise, and grammatically correct writing.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Provide evidence of clear, concise, and professional writing skills.
2. Demonstrate ability to use written language and graphical displays to convey complex ideas.

B. Performance Objective: Communicate effectively through a structured, appropriate, and well-timed presentation.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Present research or analysis to a general audience clearly and concisely.
2. Actively engage in a serious, sustained, and productive exchange of views about a topic.

C. Performance Objective: Use qualitative and quantitative research methods appropriate to the nature of the task.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Demonstrate the ability to reason clearly and logically.
2. Clearly link a decision to accumulated evidence and knowledge.
3. Formulate a research question and use an appropriate research method to investigate it.

D. Performance Objective: Apply theory to practice in a range of settings.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Demonstrate the application of theory to practice in context.
2. Describe connections between course concepts and individual professional experiences.
3. Provide progress reports describing internship experience (if applicable).

E. Performance Objective: Understanding the nature and functions of management and leadership in policy formulation, development, and implementation.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Exhibit leadership. Contribute to meeting team objectives.
2. Present recommendations that are realistic, achievable, and can be evaluated.
3. Demonstrate a sensitive awareness of professional norms.

F. Performance Objective: Recognize, analyze, and understand the normative dimensions of management and policy issues.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Articulate a personal commitment to ethical public service.
2. Demonstrate understanding of some key issues and major challenges regarding issues of cultural and normative diversity.

Deliverables

Public Management

The deliverable for PAPA 5316: System Skills for Managers is a report that analyzed a nonprofit organization through the lens of the systems resource approach and to determine if the organization was effective based on the concepts, research, and theories from class. My group and I evaluated Community Housing Partners (CHP) in Christiansburg, Virginia. CHP was evaluated for effectiveness and effectualness by their stances in decision-making. According to Miles and Snow, the four types of strategic stances include prospectors, defenders, reactors, and analyzers. Government is often described as a reactor because the typical impetus to assert a policy change is when a disaster has struck. However, non-profits are usually systemically different and driven by fewer public values than governments. Thus, they are able to be prospectors like CHP. Prospectors are willing to take risks, make rapid organizational responses to impending circumstances, actively search for new market opportunities, regularly experiment with potential responses to emerging environmental trends, and are innovative leaders in the field (Andrews, Boyne, & Walker, 2006).

Learning about the four types of strategic stances has had a profound impact on how I view organizations. I have worked at a small broadband consultancy that serves only public clients where the leadership is able to take more risks due to fewer bureaucratic limitations. The consultancy has experienced increased revenue and organizational growth due to risk taking. In the future, I hope to carry a mindset that is open to change and calculated risks within my

organization, because I know that a prospector mentality is exposed to more opportunities for growth and progress.

For this assignment, qualitative individual interviews of key decision makers at CHP were conducted to determine if CHP was a prospector and the type of decision-making that lead them to success. The final deliverable presented qualitative research analysis through in-person interviews and exhibited evidence of clear, concise, and professional writing skills. In addition, this assignment applied decision-making theories to practice within a specific context. The final component of the assignment included a presentation of the research and findings. I had the opportunity to contribute to team objectives by delegating tasks, revising documents, and compiling all of the data into one report. Thus, the deliverable for PAPA 5315: System Skills for Managers fulfilled performance objectives: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, C3, D1, E1 and E2.

In PAPA 6314: Public Budgeting Processes and Their Policy Implications, my group and I conducted a trends analysis on the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and presented the findings to the class. The assignment entailed reviewing the FDA's budget history and reporting any unexpected findings. Our analysis included data gathering, extrapolation, and summarization to produce condensed line and bar graphs. The report demonstrated evidence of clear, concise, and professional writing skills and included graphical displays of complex data from the FDA budget. Our group engaged in a serious, sustained, and productive dialogue with our peers and professor during the Q&A portion of the presentation. The data for the assignment was derived from the FDA budget schedules where information was extracted and logically conveyed in our report. Thus, the deliverable for PAPA 6314: Public Budgeting Processes and Their Policy Implications fulfilled performance objectives: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, and C3.

Like many Federal agencies, the FDA has experienced budget cuts from Congress in recent years. In order to offset the budget cuts, our group discovered that the FDA implemented user fees on pharmaceutical firms to drive a revenue stream. Pharmaceutical firms are required to have their drugs reviewed by the FDA before distribution, and pharmaceuticals can pay an increased fee to expedite the drug reviews.

I have discovered through this assignment that organizations can resolve problems creatively and through alternative measures without reliance on one source of resources (funding). As a graduate assistant to the Office of Budget and Financial Planning at Virginia Tech, I have seen a similar situation occur. Historically, the General Fund from the General Assembly distributes a large portion of the operating budget for Virginia Tech. However, the amount distributed from the General Fund has steadily decreased and Virginia Tech has had to implement alternative strategies to supplement operating funding. In recent years, specific departments at Virginia Tech have implemented program fees to generate additional revenue to make up for the lack of funding from the State and to limit the amount of increase in tuition fees. Furthermore, these two examples have demonstrated that organizations are not always restricted to one set of rules or norms, and that creative problem solving can provide more than one option to organizations.

The deliverables for PAPA 6324: Public Personnel Processes and Their Policy Implications were essay answers on medical monopolies and efficiency. The assignment entailed reviewing a case, defining institutional efficiency outcomes and identifying the free rider, third-party payer, and the mandated default option. The essay answers were communicated effectively to the reader through clear, concise, and professional writing. In addition, the essay answers

applied theories of free riders, third-party payers, and mandated default options to a current event. Thus, this assignment met performance objectives A1, A2, and D1.

America is benevolent in that the government is available to step in and provide assistance to those in need when necessary. For instance, the Department of Health and Human Services offers a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for individuals and families who are struggling to afford food. However, the Department of Health and Human Services lack the resources to thoroughly screen each individual and family to ensure that there is a definite need for assistance. Thus, there are some individuals and families who take advantage of the program and are “free riders” in the system when they do not necessarily need the assistance. PAPA 6324: Public Personnel Processes and their Policy Implications has confirmed that many government programs are created with good intentions, but controlling the issue of free-riders is challenging when financial resources are unavailable. Thus, public values like prudent use of resources is sometimes compromised in order to achieve a different public value like helping low-income individuals and families afford an adequate diet to achieve greater social equity.

The final course requirement for public management is PAPA 5315: Behavioral Skills for Managers. The deliverable for this course is a critical review essay on emotional skills and emotional intelligence. The essay reflects on theories of emotional intelligence, applies the concepts from the literature to the profession, and offers insights about the key issues. The essay provides evidence of clear and concise writing within three pages. Additionally, the essay discusses the key issues and challenges of normative diversity as it relates to emotional skills and intelligence. This essay fulfills performance objectives A1, A2, D1, D2, and F3.

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to understand one's own and others' feelings in order to apply this information to guide one's thinking and action (Vigoda-Gadot & Meisler, 2010). Refining the skill of emotional intelligence entails the aptitude to reason about emotions, and to use feelings, emotions, and emotional knowledge to enrich the thought process of sensitive situations that involve people with diverse emotional capacities. In the past couple of months, I have interviewed with several organizations for my job search. Based on the type of interview questions I have been asked, I have concluded that organizations are no longer seeking just technical individuals, but also prospective employees who are able to work well with others and understand diverse personalities. One of the key points of this assignment is that organizations are more successful when managers and employees possess emotional intelligence, but building emotional skills can be a challenge when personalities and work place norms vary so widely.

Public Policy

As part of the MPA curriculum, I have completed three deliverables to fulfill the public policy requirements. In PAPA 6214: Public Policy Processes and Analytical Approaches, my group and I conducted a comprehensive literature review on various public policy theories as it relates to environmental policy. My role involved researching the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework. The analysis of the IAD framework included a description of the IAD framework, definitions of the key elements of the framework, and recommendations to improve the current framework. Subsequently, our group presented our findings of the various public policy frameworks to our class and professor. The deliverable in PAPA 6214 met the requirements for performance objectives A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, and C3.

The IAD framework acts as a theoretical, conceptual map to guide researchers in understanding the policy processes by delineating the systematic approaches for analyzing institutions that influence actions and outcomes with collective action arrangements. As a prospective practitioner, I can use the IAD framework when examining interorganizational networks. More specifically, the IAD framework highlights the importance of recognizing rules in an organization and between organizations. Organizations need to be wary about the impact of rules, rule making, and rule changing – all of which may lead or misguide the goal of a policy. The ability to lead transformative policy processes either at the administrative level or in public policy stems from a strong understanding of the existing framework and the components of the framework, which is exactly what the IAD framework signifies.

In PAPA 6514: Public Administration and Policy Inquiry, I began a short literature review and case analysis of the health benefits of broadband in rural health. I used some of the material from this course to fulfill my capstone project for the Masters in Urban and Regional Planning degree. The capstone major paper that I spent nearly a year researching and compiling includes an abstract, problem statement, literature review, analysis of the benefits of broadband, case studies, analysis of the current state of broadband in rural areas, arguments to extend broadband to rural areas, and challenges to obtain access to broadband in rural communities. The paper contains research, figures, tables, case studies, and literature review to support my claim that access to broadband in rural areas can improve overall health to constituents in those areas. After review, feedback, and six iterations of my paper, I was approved to defend my 58-page paper for a 45-minute defense presentation. The deliverable for PAPA 6514: Public Administration and Policy

Inquiry and my MURP capstone fulfill performance objectives A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, and C3.

From this intensive experience, I have learned that an initial deliverable submitted in the workplace is never the final iteration. My committee included two of my professors, as well as my boss, and they were not at all hesitant to mark my paper with red ink marks. However, I think this is a great process to help improve performance when bosses or managers take the time to review and offer feedback before a final draft is submitted. In addition, this collaboration leads to better ideas and/or faster problem solving, and your boss or manager is included in the process.

Since I am a dual degree student, UAP 5224: Quantitative Techniques fulfilled and replaced the course requirements for PAPA 6224: Design, Implementation, and Evaluation of Policy and Programs. The deliverable for UAP 5224: Quantitative Techniques is a report that assesses the Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Radford Metropolitan Statistical Area. The data used to support the findings of the report originated from the U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey. The report assessed and analyzed housing, demographics, and economic and employment conditions within the Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Radford metropolitan statistical area. This report fulfilled performance objectives: A1, A2, C1, and C2. My experience in writing this report has thoroughly prepared me for my current role as a GIS Technician and Project Management Analyst where I often write needs assessments and feasibility reports for our clients. The familiarity of data analysis and extrapolation in Microsoft Excel helped demonstrate that I was competent to research, write, and compile reports.

Public Service

In PAPA 6414: Normative Foundations of Public Administration and Policy, students were asked to select and review a code of ethics, determine the strengths and weaknesses of the code, and critique the code. For this deliverable, I wrote a four-page paper about the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). The purpose of the assignment was to explain the relevance of the AICP code of ethics for students pursuing the planning profession. In addition, this assignment also helped me recognize some of the key issues and major challenges in the planning profession. Thus, this assignment fulfilled performance objectives A1, A2, F1, and F2.

The existence of the AICP code of ethics is critical to planners, so that they are not easily influenced by developers to fulfill private interests as opposed to public interest. The AICP code of ethics provides standards, enumerates values, and defines the planning profession. One aspect of the code formation that I particularly liked was the fact that the code undergoes review every couple of years to reexamine if it reflects the needs of the practice. In addition, every planner is required to answer questions on ethical competency in the AICP professional certification. Whether I am a practitioner in planning or public administration, I think it is vital to have a code of ethics so that managers and employees have guidelines, goals, and procedures to adhere by in the case of an ethical dilemma.

The second course to fulfill the public service course requirement is PAPA 5014: Concepts of Public Administration. My deliverable for this class was a paper on the administrative state of the Affordable Care Act website. The paper required research to determine the key issues with the rollout of the site, analysis of the stakeholders involved in the site, identification of public administration issues, an analysis of theories linked to the problem, and recommendations to improve the issue. This paper was also the winner of

the 2014 Larkin Dudley MPA Student Paper Award. As one of the three winning papers, I was asked to present the paper at High Table. This assignment fulfilled performance objectives A1, A2, B1, B2, D1, and D2.

Out of all of my papers written at CPAP, this paper linked the most theoretical concepts of public administration to a practical case. This paper highlighted the issues the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, President Obama, Congress, contractors, and the general public encountered with tight deadlines, lack of testing, incomplete and changing guidelines, and an unanticipated large number of users applying on the launch date. Some of the underlying administrative issues stemmed from tensions between democracy and administration, power and administration, and competing public values. The rollout of the Affordable Care Act site had numerous initial mistakes, but it is certainly a case that I have learned from and I am sure the Department of Health and Human Services is acknowledging. This case also demonstrates the need to have a team or individual that bridges the technical as well as the policy components of a problem.

Extracurricular

I am the Education and Outreach Chair for Public Administrators of Virginia Tech (PAVT). I am responsible for organizing events to help students with professional development and to increase interactions with professionals in the field. In the fall of 2013, I organized a CPAP Career Day where I recruited an analyst from Homeland Security, a director of a non-profit, a director of a department at Virginia Tech, and the former chief of staff of two governors in Virginia to serve as panelists for a discussion with students. The panelists discussed their background, career trajectory, tips for interviewing, advice for networking, and what they wish they had known when they first launched their career.

Afterwards, I asked Virginia Tech Career Services to hold a seminar on resume building and networking. In the spring of 2014, I organized a CPAP Mock Interview Day where Human Resources professionals from Virginia Tech conducted mock behavioral interviews on students. Each student had the opportunity to interview with three different interviewers for thirty minutes. At the end of the interviews, a moderator conducted a follow-up discussion about the students' strengths and weaknesses. Preparation for these two events required marketing, planning, logistical organization, delegation of tasks, and outreach to professionals. As part of my role as the Education and Outreach Chair for PAVT, I have met performance objectives E1, E4 and F1.

Professional Development

After nearly nine required public policy and management courses, four courses for a GIS certificate, one internship, a full-time assistantship, a part-time position at a broadband consulting firm, and a part-time job at a local gym, I believe that I am much more prepared to begin my full-time position on July 9th than I was when I first graduated from undergrad. For every position that I take on from here on out, I am cognizant of the organizational structure, strategic decision-making, leadership, organizational culture, budget models, public administration tensions, conflicting public values, and other factors from my graduate experiences that impact the success or failure of an organization. I have a better understanding of how public organizations function and I am armed with strategies to overcome bureaucratic red tape and political turmoil. From my assessment, I have refined my skills in technical writing and data analysis especially with the use of Microsoft Excel. I am certain that both skills will be utilized in every role that I take on. However, I do believe that I have room for improvement in presentation skills as well as management of

individuals with diverse personalities as I progress in my career. My experiences at CPAP are a stepping-stone to a life long journey to continue a career that will serve the public.

References

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