Local Government Practicum: Graduate Education, Public Service, and Statewide Partnerships

Tyler P. Reinagel
Department of Public Administration and Policy
University of Georgia
tpreinag@uga.edu

Grace E. Bagwell
Department of Public Administration and Policy
University of Georgia
gbagwell@uga.edu

Prepared for the National Outreach and Scholarship Conference
Tuesday, October 2, 2012
University of Alabama; Tuscaloosa, AL
- Masters of Public Administration
- Largely a practitioner degree
- Preparation for students wishing to enter federal government, state government, local government, and non-profit agencies for management rather than politics
- Pulls students from a variety of undergraduate fields, including
  - History
  - English
  - Political Science
  - American Studies
- In the academic structure, the PA faculty and MPA program take on one of two forms:
  - Housed within the Political Science department
  - Independent department of strictly PA faculty

What is the MPA?
Two year program as full time student

Coursework
- MPA Socialization (Orientation) – 2 Hours
- Public Administration and Democracy
- Public Personnel Administration
- Public Financial Administration
- Economic Foundations of Policy Analysis
- Organizational Theory
- Research Methods in Public Administration
- Data Applications in Public Administration
- Elective Courses/Specialization (6 Courses)

Internship
- 300 Hours
- Professional Experience Paper

Comprehensive Exam
- Health Policy and Administration
- Higher Education Administration
- Local Government Administration
- Nonprofit Administration
- Public Budgeting and Finance Administration
- Public Management/Organization Theory
- Public Personnel Administration
- Public Policy
- Generalist

MPA Specializations
@ UGA –

18 Semester Hours/6 Courses
An increasing number of UGA MPA students are entering as full-time, pre-service students with a small or non-existent portfolio of work and experience.

Geared toward second-year students with significant coursework-based training.
- Allows students to apply coursework to “real world” scenarios.

Client-consultant relationship *rather than* employer-employee relationship that stems from a traditional internship.
- Project-based

Tangible results and portfolio building.
- Reports, Plans, Documents, and Presentations.

Characterizing the Practicum
Players in the Practicum

- **UGA Department of Public Administration and Policy**
  - Offers the course on a regular basis
  - Acknowledges the value of the course in multiple specializations
  - Devotes faculty and facility resources to the course

- **Georgia Municipal Association**
  - Recruiting city participation
  - Uses *existing* relationships with member cities to facilitate a *new* relationship with MPA students
  - Matching students with experts and GMA officials based on assessed needs and interests

- **Georgia Cities**
  - Identify projects for student participation
  - Provide communication, resources, and professional relationships for students to apply coursework in a client-consultant role rather than an employer-employee role

- **MPA Students**
  - Apply classroom material to active project/policy development, implementation, and analysis
  - Hone skills in effective communication and public speaking
- Has been offered 7 times since inception
- To date, clients include 36 cities, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and one non-profit agency
- Students have completed 51 projects

- Cities are generally council-manager form of government, rather than mayor-council or commission
  - This ensures a full-time, experienced point of contact for the student

**Client Cities**

- Client cities include:
  - Roswell, GA
  - Douglas, GA
  - Decatur, GA
  - St. Marys, GA
  - Sky Valley, GA
  - Atlanta, GA
  - Tybee Island, GA
  - Valdosta, GA
To protect the interests of the student, client city, Georgia Municipal Association, and co-instructors, an MOU was developed such that all parties understood expectations from the outset.

For students:
- Regular communication
- Identify scope of project
- Clarify expected deliverables within 1 month

For client cities:
- Connect students with appropriate staff
- Provide clear, written direction
- Attend presentation in Atlanta at conclusion of semester

For GMA:
- Provide feedback throughout semester
- Connect students with field experts through GMA relationships
- Arrange final presentations in Atlanta

For Instructors:
- Remain in contact with instructors throughout semester
- Connect students with appropriate resources within and beyond the university setting
Benchmark 1
- 1 page summary of the project/challenge facing the client city
- Week 4

Benchmark 2
- Executed Memorandum of Understanding
- Week 4

Benchmark 3
- Presentation of Research Design to Co-Instructors and Classmates
- Week 6

Benchmark 4
- Mid-Semester Presentation of Project Status to Co-Instructors and Classmates
- Week 9

Benchmark 5
- Rehearsal of Final Presentation to Co-Instructors and Classmates for feedback
- Week 13

Benchmark 6
- Final presentation to GMA Officials, City Officials, Co-Instructors, and Classmates at GMA Offices in Atlanta, GA
- Week 15

Practicum Benchmarks
(Based on 15 Week Semester)
Examples of Previous Practicum Projects

- Personnel Assessment – Millennials in the Workplace
- Municipal Composting Business Plan
- Assessment of Development Codes and Standards
- Urban Garden Business Model
- Consolidation of Policy and Fire Services
- Downtown Marketing Plan
- City/County Consolidation Plan
- Corridor Redevelopment Plans
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Implications of courthouse relocation
7-8 Students
- This ensures that there are plenty of viewpoints and ideas to be shared as students work through their respective projects, but not so many that it becomes overwhelming.
- Based on the number and variety of projects, this also ensures that students will be assigned a project/city that is of interest to them and their career objectives.

Non-weekly meetings
- UGA’s MPA program is generally composed of once-per-week class meetings of 3 hours. This regularity is not necessary, as students commit significant time to independent research, field visits to their assigned client cities, and research/presentation preparation. Meeting days are fluid and designed to meet the needs of students.

Conference room setting
- The course is not lecture style, and should be treated as conversation, discussion, constructive criticism, and a time to “get creative” with new and innovative ideas.
Travel

- License to Drive
  - Can students be assigned projects with the same city and carpool?
- Access to Transportation
  - Are there University vehicles available?
  - Can students rent vehicles with reimbursement?
- Reimbursement for Travel
  - Can the city (particularly those far away) make accommodations for student travel?

Representation by Cities

- City officials must be present in Atlanta (GMA Offices) at the conclusion of each semester for results presentations by the students
- This can involve 300+ miles of travel and potential overnight stays
- Cities were frequently not showing up, prompting a clause requiring attendance in the MOU in recent semesters

Enrollment

- The course had been offered every fall and spring semester for three years
- Enrollment was inconsistent and availability of projects from cities slowly dwindled
- The course is now offered during the fall semester only and geared toward second-year students
Continuous 100% success is difficult to achieve

- Of the 51 projects completed in the seven offerings of the Practicum at UGA, one was not completed to the standards expected by the client city, GMA, or the co-instructors
- Study on feasibility and a cost/benefit analysis of municipal annexation

Relationship with the client city

- The city invests time, energy, and resources into the project
- Meetings with city leadership, department heads, employees
- Potential financial investment in reimbursements for travel

The partnerships are vital

- Because of the joint effort between the five actors, the co-instructors of the course were able to work together and deliver a quality document to the city that successfully met their expectations and needs
- Maintains a healthy relationship between the city, GMA, and entities within UGA

When the Practicum fails
- 165 MPA programs accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) in 41 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico
  - Accreditation is not a prerequisite
  - There is often a disparity between number of MPA programs in a state and accredited MPA programs in a state

- There are 19 accredited online MPA programs, but online coursework does not lend itself toward a practicum-type model of “on the ground” application of skills

- State Municipal Organizations
  - 49 States

- State County Organizations
  - 38 States

- BPA Degrees
  - Public Administration programs are largely limited to graduate-level – there is not a general flow, such as BBA to MBA, BA to MA, BS to MS, etc.
  - Undergraduate students may not be as well equipped to work directly with cities
Consider the MPA curriculum
- Does a practicum fit into the curriculum?
- Are there specializations that would benefit from the model?

Contact your state’s association or league of cities/counties
- Are any of our alumni staff members of these organizations?

Identify partners within the university setting
- Are we a land-grant school with public service units?

What is the municipal setting of our state?
- What are the distinctions between cities, towns, villages, townships, and other incorporated areas?
- Do forms of government lend themselves to a healthy, constructive environment for students?
- Home Rule or Dillon’s Rule?

Embrace the reality of your state
- Nevada’s only accredited program is at UNLV – nearly 8 hours from Reno and Carson City

Characterize the students
- Are these pre-service or mid-service students?
- Is the program full-time or part-time?

How do we start?

Recall the players:
Academic Department
Municipal League/Association
Individual Cities
Students
Public Administration/Policy programs lend themselves toward the model because of their education and training for public and non-profit services and existing/established actors.

Other academic programs can utilize the model or adapt it to their own needs:
- City, Urban, Community, Regional Planning
- Civil Engineering
- Business
- Environmental Design/Landscape Architecture
- Historic Preservation
- Social Work
- Agricultural Economics
- Others
Tyler P. Reinagel
Department of Public Administration and Policy
University of Georgia
tpreinag@uga.edu

Grace E. Bagwell
Department of Public Administration and Policy
University of Georgia
gbagwell@uga.edu

Questions,
Discussion,
and Feedback