**Talking Points**

**A Big IDEA**

**September 17, 2019**

**Title Slide**

Interviews do not always provide a good opportunity to lay out a vision for what one might attempt to accomplish in a role like an MPA director.

Being on the job market for MPA director positions though puts you in a position where you reflect on what it is that you actually want to **do** in that job.

Want to try to give you a sense then of my own thinking: what makes me excited about being here with you.

Don’t take this talk as a fixed roadmap, but rather as a starting point. These are a few thoughts that occur to me in reflecting on my own experience in teaching in an MPA program. They represent what I think makes for a successful MPA program and how we might sustain and enhance the impact we have on the students and communities we serve.

I use the term “community-engaged” here with intentionality. Not all MPA programs are community-engaged, or at least do not make it central to their mission in the same way an institution like Evergreen does.

Lots of great models are out there for MPA programs at flagship institutions that excel in producing scholarly research and generating a new generation of faculty.

But MPA programs can also be, and often are, vital assets to the communities they serve. They don’t just produce generalizable knowledge, but application to the particular problems of the state and city in which they are located.

And relative to other academic programs, they are externally facing: an instrument through which a college or university provides benefits to the community that is hosting it.

**Vision**

Three characteristics of a successful community-engaged MPA program:

1) Prepares skilled professionals to address social problems and lead a diverse citizenry

--- Educating professionals/practitioners: practice and problem-focused, technical skill sets and methods matter

--- In a metropolitan region with significant social and economic inequalities, MPA programs are in an excellent position to educate leaders who have the tools for analyzing and addressing these inequalities

--- Key considerations are not just curriculum but student body: representation and diversity. Who we admit and who we help succeed in our program shapes the pool of professional public administrators for the region

2) Engages challenges in the community with technical outreach and applied research

--- Supports the program’s instruction mission:

---- pro bono work through service learning.

--- Gains currency with potential employers to enhance recruitment and placement

--- In an excellent position to produce applied research and technical help that address regional issues and needs of public agencies and nonprofit organizations

--- Particularly, MPA programs are in an excellent position to provide the research needed to describe and analyze significant inequalities and injustice, propose solutions, and act as a neutral actor in bringing stakeholders together and supporting efforts with high-quality research.

3) Supports a collaborative and adaptive culture for faculty, staff and students

--- Achieving the first two objectives means that PA faculty typically work collaboratively in teaching, applied research and public service.

--- Also requires continuous improvement, adapting the program to meet needs of the public/nonprofit sector.

Collaborative culture:

--- Faculty are “unsiloed”, collaborate in developing curriculum that integrates program goals across the curriculum (e.g. ethical concerns, quantitative and qualitative methods, social justice considerations, inclusion, serving diverse mass public)

--- Implies a diverse faculty

--- Inclusive culture

--- Transparent and collaborative decision-making process

--- Shared responsibility for executing applied research and responding to public requests

Adaptive culture:

--- Continuous improvement in meeting program educational and research goals.

--- Collecting relevant data to support improvement (assessment)

--- Adhering to best practices in program administration (e.g. NASPAA)

**A Big IDEA**

We are in an ideal position to that will not only serve students well, but the community at large by contributing to problem-solving on social inequality [AND THAT CAN ADD TO STANDING, GENERATE RESEARCH REVENUE]

--- Enthusiastic faculty and student support

--- Support from administration

--- Relationships and track record with community…using our position in the state capital and relationships with tribal governments effectively

--- Important applied research and outreach niches that an MPA program can fill (e.g. administrative data, field research)

Path forward: A Big IDEA [EVERY VISION NEEDS AN ACRONYM ☺]

Aiming to create a program that is:

1) Integrated (as opposed to academically-siloed) curriculum:

--- Connected to other units of the college, interdisciplinary orientation

--- Connected to the region

2) Diverse (and inclusive): it matters who the students are not just for the learning experience, but for the region

3) Engaged: in supporting the community and region in high quality applied research, technical services or non-credit training

4) Assessed: Communities are constantly changing, and that means a community-engaged program also needs to adapt to change.

Central to this is assessment: need to be able to measure what impact we have, on our students and community.

And need to use what we learn to inform how we change how we teach and work with program stakeholders (close the assessment loop).

**Integrated curriculum**

--- An important way to assure that students leave the program knowing how to analyze public problems and develop solutions is through experience

--- Deepens learning by integrating experience (professional, community, personal) with course content

--- Addressing social inequality and urban issues in the classroom thus is integrated throughout the curriculum

--- And in addition can develop specializations/certificate programs that allow an even deeper focus (as well as credentialing)

Two key dimensions to achieving this:

--- Community integration: Incorporating local case studies, service opportunities and resources throughout the curriculum.

Case studies: Native cases library

Service learning: capstone; Amy’s program evaluation course, Cali’s integration of local and state issues into core

Adjunct faculty

Tacoma/Pierce County open further possibilities

--- Interdisciplinary collaboration: seeking opportunities for students to experience different ways of knowing and learning.

--- Native Pathways: Not learning about Native methods and experiences, but employing Native ways of learning about and interpreting the social world.

--- MES: opportunities to develop students at the intersection of public administration and environmental science, e.g. urban sustainability

**Diversity and Inclusive Culture: Student recruitment**

Two main sorts of considerations when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

First is student recruitment

General goals:

--- Sustain a viable number of students in the program

--- Attract academically qualified student pool

--- Develop student body that is diverse and representative of the region

1. Accessibility and flexibility

--- In general, professional masters programs are looking for ways to enhance flexibility, i.e. the range of options have in terms of scheduling for completing their degrees.

--- Especially matters for economically vulnerable students: more likely to need to schedule around jobs, families, emergencies.

Considerations:

--- Weekend and evening scheduling options

--- Clear part-time pathway to completing degree

--- Hybrid or online options

--- Child care options

1. Affordability and risk-reduction

--- Another trend among professional masters programs is stackability of credentials: options for earning credentials along the path towards completing a masters program

--- Again, especially likely to matter to economically vulnerable students: most at risk for not completing a degree, in the worst position to meet tuition and fees, and most burdened by student loans.

Considerations:

--- Early entry/4+1 options

--- Graduate certificate programs

--- CPM program credit

--- Developing graduate assistantships

1. Marketing

--- Campus visits (targeting NWIC, historically-Hispanic serving institutions (Heritage University, Big Bend Community College, Wenatchee Valley College, Yakima Valley Community College)

--- Recruitment options through CPM program

--- Visibility and recruitment at regional public administration functions (NFBPA, professional organizations in city management, municipal and county leagues)

--- Reactivation of alumni network

--- Graduate school fair participation

--- Program visit day

--- Outreach to state legislative interns and aides

--- High school recruitment if early-entry program is viable

--- Undergraduate public administration courses

1. “Soft” recruiting:

--- Encourage faculty participation in supervising undergraduate student research projects

**Diversity: Student support**

Goals:

--- Program that supports the success of all students in the program

--- Responsiveness to NASPAA standards and competencies pertaining to program diversity, i.e.

Standard 3.2 Faculty Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment and retention of faculty members;

Standard 4.4 Student Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, admissions practices, and student support services; and

Standard 5.1 Universal Required Competencies: To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

Three sorts of considerations:

1. Professional socialization

--- Serve a large proportion of students who are first-generation college, who are at a disadvantage in preparing for classes and cultivating professional relationships

Considerations:

--- Orientation: doing well here. Thoughtful consideration on how students can succeed in the program, what our expectations of them are, what they can expect of us, and how to relate with their peers

--- “Context” course: provides an opportunity to even the playing field: how to succeed in graduate school coursework

--- Developing opportunities to network (e.g. with alumni): need to come back to the alumni event that was planned last year. Considerations on how to use “return to Evergreen” to our full advantage.

1. Cohort Identity-building

Support networks are crucial to graduate school success, and again are likeliest to matter most for the most vulnerable students.

--- Learning community model represents one tool

--- But need to consider others as well, e.g. peer mentoring, student organization

1. Inclusive culture

--- Promote good faculty and student communication

Public administration student organization can play a role

--- Developing opportunities for students to socialize and network with program stakeholders and alumni

--- Incorporating diversity and inclusive climate as part of program assessment process:

--- Student application pool analysis

--- Student climate survey

Managing diversity is also a skill sets students need to master. Critically important that the program role model how this is done.

--- Curriculum mapping that identifies points at which best practices in inclusion and diversity are included in the core curriculum.

--- Integrating diverse perspectives in course content: reading selection, guest speakers, and course content that requires students to actively consider pluralism as part of analysis and decision-making.

--- Integrating pluralism into course development: encouraging elective courses that directly address pluralism and multicultural issues as major themes

--- Service learning: capstone experience and service learning components in other parts of the curriculum that require students to practice skills in inclusion and diversity.

--- Assessment of universal competency 5.1 as part of program assessment plan (e.g. evaluation of project report and student peer evaluations)

**Engaged: Applied Research and Technical Support**

Goals:

--- Support *pro bono* applied research/technical outreach needs in the community

--- Enhance placement of MPA students

--- Facilitate synergy between scholarly research and applied research

--- Support graduate student engagement in applied research

--- Develop external sources of funding, particularly contract research and/or noncredit training (e.g. program evaluation, collaborative governance, group facilitation training, nonprofit executive director training)

Strategy for addressing social inequalities: pro bono work in:

--- Providing data and research: typically beyond the budget and staff capabilities of small nonprofits/neighborhood organizations/etc.

--- Could include need assessment, program evaluation, problem analysis to support grantwriting and advocacy

--- Catalyzing collaboration: bringing stakeholders together

**Engaged: Training and Organizational Support**

Organizational support: strategic planning, group facilitation services

Incubating new organizations consistent with MPA program mission, e.g. NFBPA, regional planning organization, etc.

Noncredit training:

--- Can include one-day workshops intended to build skills (e.g. nonprofit executive director skills, board skills, nonprofit bookkeeping and taxes)

--- Could also be more extended (certified tribal administrator training or neighborhood leadership training)

**Assessed**

--- Reinforces goal of adaptive culture: provides a mechanism for obtaining data on program outcomes; hearing from stakeholders/employers about their needs from the program; adjusting accordingly; documenting outcomes.

--- Reinforces goal of a collaborative program culture: process of developing and improving curriculum requires that faculty closely collaborate and work as a team. Objective is to meet program learning goals, and so recognizing how these are integrated across courses is vital. Planning and assessment both are central collaborative activities for faculty and usually a shared responsibility [not simply a check box]

Considerations:

1. Stakeholder engagement

--- Faculty, staff and students are crucial

--- But in a community-engaged program, we also need to incorporate community stakeholders:

Employers

Clients

Mass public

--- Summer Institute provides one avenue

--- May need to extend beyond this

Outreach on tribal governance specifically

And outreach on Tacoma specifically

--- Engagement at state and local professional events in PA

1. Learning outcomes

--- Multiple types of assessment:

Learning outcomes (capstone and other artifacts)

Diversity (student, faculty, staff)

Placement

Need a comprehensive assessment plan and to implement it

Other considerations:

Attendance at NASPAA

Participation in COPRA site visit teams

Closing the loop: incorporating the results of assessment back into our strategic planning and implementation to inform:

Changes in course content

Curriculum

Scheduling

**The MPA Director**

--- Handles administrative duties obviously

--- But has important functions in building the MPA faculty and staff into a team

Responsible for communicating information to MPA faculty and staff

Facilitating the sharing of ideas and ongoing events across the unit (e.g. faculty and staff research, student issues, etc.)

Initiating strategic planning and collaborative problem-solving: group deliberation (everyone is involved)

Taking the lead in developing program mission, identity-building and “branding”

Lead role in relationship-building in the community:

--- Person who sells the program, its students, and its services

--- Makes sure local officials and leaders know about us and what we can do

Takes accountability for program outcomes: responsible for assessing outcomes, maintaining program quality and assuring quality of applied research and technical outreach (as needed).