
Public Administration Education in America: A Case Study of Quality, Strength, and Challenges

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Abstract

Highly effective public administration is an important element of a robust and healthy nation. This requires competent and well-trained public administrators and effective educational programs must be present in order to properly train and educate them. It is a daunting task as the breadth and scope of the public sector work is extensive and it requires intricate balancing between theory and practice. This research explores factors that contribute to effective public administration education through a case study of highly recognized Master of Public Administration and Public Policy programs in the U. S. from Cornell, Syracuse, SUNY-Albany, Harvard, Rutgers, Princeton, Columbia, New York University, CUNY-John Jay, University of Maryland, Georgetown, American, and George Mason University. Sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, a team of researchers visited these programs to conduct interviews with the faculty members and administrators involved in developing and running the programs – deans, associate deans, program directors and faculty members. This article reports findings from the interviews, exploring their views on what constitutes effective and successful public administration education, what they see as their comparative strengths and factors that contributed to such strengths. Key challenges facing these programs and American public administration education in general are discussed as well as some of the new and innovative initiatives and practices to advance their program quality and impact are also explored.

[Key Words]

MPA, MPP Education quality and challenge

I. Introduction

Highly effective public administration is an important element of a robust and healthy nation. This requires competent and well-trained public administrators and effective educational programs must be present

1) Acknowledgement

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in order to properly train and educate them. As an effort to improve its workforce in the field of public policy, public administration, law and auditing, Japan initiated its professional public policy programs in 2003. Prior to this, there existed 'traditional' and academic public administration graduate programs to foster academics and researchers since the establishment of its university system and, in the 1980's, 'professionally-oriented' graduate programs (mostly called "policy studies") to educate public officials, non-profit staffs and researchers through academic rather than professional training. In a country whose public sector has been dominated by generalists trained in law, especially the graduates from University of Tokyo ("Todai") and Kyoto University ("Kyodai") (Kim, 1992), the establishment of 'professional' public policy programs (mostly called "public policy and management" degrees) in 2003 was a meaningful initiative and a break from the past aimed at producing practical and management-oriented public administrators.

However, since its foundation, the newly established professional public policy and management programs came to face a number of challenges. First, there was the question of identity as the curriculum of the professional graduate program closely resembles the traditional academic graduate programs and there was significant overlap in the missions of pre-existing professional and academic graduate programs - that is, to produce and educate public officials and non-profit organization staffs. Such similarity between the two programs caused some confusion among the potential applicants who wanted to study public administration and join the public or nonprofit sector.

Second the professional graduate programs did not offer any explicit advantage over other disciplines and programs that trained and supplied public officials in the job market. In Japan, students who want to become public officials must pass a civil service entrance examination and graduates from the professional graduate programs do not receive any advantages - such as an exemption from the exam - as they must take the exam and therefore compete with students from other disciplines. In addition, Japan puts heavy emphasis on a legal formulas and legal interpretation approach to public administration, reflecting the German influence on the prewar Japanese public administration (Kim, 1992) and this is reflected in the general civil service entrance exam which primarily tests students' knowledge in law and economics. Therefore the graduates of the professional MPA/MPP programs do not receive any advantage compared to the graduates of law and economics who continues to dominate Japanese public sector. These problems pose challenges to the identity as well as the future of the newly established professional MPA/MPP graduate programs and its aim of producing practice-oriented public administrators trained in public management.

At this juncture, this article seeks to understand how some of the reputable public administration programs in the US approach public administration education. American MPA/MPP programs and their practical as well as theoretical approach to public administration and its holistic approach to public administration incorporating various aspects of management, public administration and policy analysis (Geva-May & Maslove, 2007) is something that the new Japanese MPA/MPP programs seek to accomplish. More importantly, there is an interesting similarity in the conditions faced by these programs in both countries as American programs also face the question of identity as a discipline (Mandell, 2009) and graduates of these programs do not receive any practical advantage over students from other disciplines when competing for public sector employment. Although there is no general civil service entrance exam in America (perhaps, with an exception of the Foreign Service exam), graduates of MPA/MPP programs do not receive any explicit

advantage over students of law, economics, and political science who continue to dominate American public sector.

In such context, we wanted to examine how American MPA/MPP program continue to not only survive but also flourish as highly recognized public administration and policy education in the world. This paper reports findings from in-depth interviews with thirteen reputable public administration programs located in the northeast region of America where we asked how they define effective and successful public administration education, identify factors that they consider vital in creating such effective program and discuss key challenges confronting their programs and public administration education in general. In addition, we examined the strategies and initiatives these programs are engaged in, as a way to distinguish them from others in the field and develop a *niche*.

II. American Public Administration Education - A Background

Historically, American public administration, in its foundation, aimed to maximize administrative efficiency and output of government under the principle of "scientific management" and apolitical administration advocated by scholars such as Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol. Later this approach came under criticism from various disciplines as public administration is perceived to be suffused with questions of value, politics, and cultures (Dahl, 1947; Herring, 1936; Waldo, 1984). Although this realization has deepened the understanding of the perimeters and the nature of public administration, it has caused the fall of what was thought of as a general theory of public administration and an identity coined in the field as *the orthodoxy*. The field has then embraced multiple disciplines such as political science, economics, and sociology and began its *diversification*.

With the increasing diversification and blurring of its identity, public administration scholars in America have been involved in thoughtful conversation over the distinctive role of public administration education and defining what are high quality public administration degree programs and factors that constitute such program. What is interesting to observe, in this discussion, is that the debate over the validity and utility of the scientific management in public administration is still continuing. Efficient management continues to be an important aspect of public administration today as these managerial concerns such as "producing deliverables on time and under budget" receive predominant attention from the public administration community over "the core value of governing, such as representativeness, responsiveness, and responsibility" (Henry, Goodsell, Lynn Jr., Stivers, & Wamsley, 2009). This is also reflected in the positivist approach to policy analysis leaving the field unable to grasp the complexities of the political environment and leave out anything that is not *hard science* such as - values, ethics, and democracy (Bowman, 1998).

While the value of efficiency continues to run in the vein of public administration education, like the public administration field itself, there is a parallel emphasis on something other than maximization of efficiency and output - that is, public values and ethics. Here efficiency is perceived as means to an end rather than an end itself. That is, efficiency is an answer to the question of 'how' while public value will guide the question of 'what' public administration should do and how it should make decisions. Here, the goal of public administration is in the preservation of public values and public interest and hence public values should be incorporated in the analysis and management of organization (Bowman, 1998; Mandell, 2009). Public administration education in this context does not solely focus on practical managerial skills and knowledge, but also broader awareness of

constitutionalism, politics, democratic theory (Henry et al., 2009) and more importantly ethics (Hejka-Ekins, 1998).

The debate is reflected in the discussion on the proper curriculum of public administration program where you can focus either on providing students with useful and practical skills or providing a more holistic education that encompasses concepts such as public service, ethics, leadership (Williams, 2002), constitutionalism, politics and democratic theory (Henry et al., 2009). Rather than choosing one side or the other, public administration education in America mixes both aspects in their curriculum as there is a considerable consistency in the core courses such as public administration, research methods, public finance, policy analysis, and political institutions and processes as Cleary (1990) found in his research in 1990. These core courses tend to remain markedly similar over time as Holzer and Lin (2007) found in their 2007 research where they found the core courses such as public administration, administrative and organizational theory, public finance, budgeting, research design and methods, HR management, public policy analysis and management. While core courses remain consistent in most of public administration programs (Cleary, 1990), there is no clear consensus on elective courses as the areas of specialty in public administration are extensive.

Consequently there is significant variation in the opinion of scholars as to what skills and knowledge students should obtain as outcomes of the education they receive in American public administration education. Some emphasize the practicality and usefulness of practical and marketable analytical skills (Crewson & Fisher, 1997), and “craft skills” such as ethics, law, leadership, communication skills, budgeting, nonprofit management, organizational theory, HR management, and statistics that expose students to “the art of doing policy analysis and implementing the outcomes” (Jensen, 2008) and the importance of interpersonal, interagency and intra-agency levels (Holzer & Lin, 2007). Others look at personal, intellectual and moral development and transformation as a factor of successful public administrator (King, Britton, & Missik, 1996) and ethical skills or training which preserve the integrity of the public sector (Hejka-Ekins, 1998), reduces corruption in the public sector (Jurkiewicz & Nichols, 2002) and protects long-term public interest (Bowman, 1998).

Like in Japan, public administration education in America faces many challenges as it struggles to establish its core identity and skills. With a broad scope of the field and generalist approach to public administration with varying fields of electives and specialization, many public administration programs see the problem of poor job fit and little help with the first job for pre-service students (Yeager, Hildreth, Miller, & Rabin, 2007). The field faces increased complexity of the policy and organizational environment (Smith, 2008) and the need to teach relevant courses in such environment, especially emerging subjects like information technology (Holzer & Lin, 2007), communication, international affairs (Ellwood, 2008) and non-profit management (Cleary, 1990). While the need for teaching ethics has been discussed relatively well in the literature, this has been found wanting in many programs (Hejka-Ekins, 1998). In addition, lack of diversity and cultural competency (Ellwood, 2008; White, 2004) has been identified as a continuing challenge in the field.

These are ongoing discussions that will continue to influence the vector of public administration education in America. While the challenges facing American public administration education are abundant, it continues to flourish as respected and effective public administration education in the world. This paper seeks to understand how reputable public administration and policy programs in America are currently addressing these questions of identity, quality and challenges and what steps they are taking in order to advance and distinguish their programs from their peers.

III. Methodology

A team of researchers from Iwate Prefectural University, Tohoku University, and University of Massachusetts Boston visited thirteen MPA/MPP programs located in the northeastern region of the States between February 13th and 20th in 2009 and conducted interviews with people who are deeply involved in running these programs such as deans, associate deans, graduate program directors, and faculty members. The thirteen universities visited during this trip include Cornell, Syracuse, SUNY-Albany, Harvard, Rutgers-Newark, Princeton, Columbia, New York University (NYU), CUNY-John Jay (John Jay), University of Maryland (Maryland), Georgetown, George Mason (George Mason)², and American University (AU). We interviewed 11 deans/associate deans, five program directors, and four faculty members. We held one meeting at each location where an interview was conducted with one or more members of the program. The interviews lasted anywhere between 40 minutes to 1 hour and 51 minutes with a majority of the interviews lasting between an hour and an hour and a half. Interviews were conducted with one member of the program or with a several members together. See appendix 1 for more details about the visited programs.

We focused our interview effort in the northeastern region of the country where we found a high concentration of reputable programs. This allowed us to visit several MPA/MPP programs in a limited time. However, therefore, our sample is not entirely representative of American MPA/MPP programs. They were selected based primarily on their standings at *U. S. News and World Report* which, while its reliability is debated (Teasley, 1995), is generally regarded as a measure of program reputation. Meetings were arranged prior to our arrival through email communication. During the interviews, the following questions were explored:

1. How will you define a successful and effective MPA/MPP Program?
2. What are the key factors that make your program successful and effective?
3. What are the challenges facing American MPA/MPP Programs?
4. What are some of the new and innovative initiatives or strategies to advance and distinguish your program from others?

First, in order to understand what they perceived to be an ideal public administration and policy education, we asked what they thought was a successful MPA/MPP program. Such ideal is likely to influence the way each program is designed and run, and ultimately influence the educational quality and outcome. In addition, this would help us identify key elements that should be incorporated in an effective MPA/MPP program. Second after asking about what a successful MPA/MPP program should be, we wanted to capture which factors in their programs contributed to achieving such an ideal. So we asked them to identify various factors that they perceive have contributed to the successes of their programs. Third, we asked what they saw as challenges and barriers. We framed our question broadly so that they can discuss what they saw as challenges in their programs as well as the MPA/MPP programs in general in America. Lastly, we asked about any new innovative initiatives and projects some of these programs were engaged in, in order to assess where they find new potentials and niches in the MPA/MPP domain.

2) The authors visited School of Public Policy at George Mason but weren't able to visit the Department of Public and International Affairs.

IV. Findings

1. What is a Successful MPA/MPP Program?

There was significant consistency across different schools in defining what they considered to be a successful and effective public affairs program. A number of factors emerged as important conditions of an effective program, which include: 1) maintaining a proper balance between theory and practice; 2) providing students with practical skills in the public sector; and 3) teaching proper public sector ethics and values.

(1) Maintaining a proper balance between theory and practice

First, one theme that kept appearing during the interviews was the importance of striking a “healthy balance” between theory and practice in the curriculum. As an interdisciplinary field, theory has practical implications and practice provides opportunities for research and theory construction. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the program in the long run if it is nested in both worlds. This theme emerged frequently during the interview:

“The key to success is a real commitment to blending, very carefully blending theory and practice in the curriculum, in individual courses and core courses. In each course there is a blend of theory. Students need to be challenged to think more broadly but also practical skills, techniques, hands on experience. Get students out of the classroom and go do things. That’s very important in a successful curriculum.” (NYU)

“Theory and practice. I think there is a very strong belief here of the notion that we must draw a linkage between the two [theory and practice] when we do theory we have to show how it leads to practice or its implications in practice and through projects and other things. So it’s theory in action, theory in practice. And we have people who are in service - mid level managers in bureaucracy - they have a lot of practice but not necessarily the theory to guide them.” (AU)

Most programs were mindful of the fact that the majority of their students would be working in the “real world” after graduation, and they’ve put in conscious efforts to keep their curriculum relevant by teaching practical skills in their courses and emphasizing the practical implications of various theories they learn. Keeping a right balance requires a conscious effort, as without such efforts, it is easy for a program to swing too far to one direction - either becoming too academic and theoretical with little practical implications or too practical with little theoretical foundation. This continuous balancing effort was viewed not as a problem to be solved, but rather a tension to be maintained.

“I think it is a healthy tension. It is not a bad tension . . . if this tension is ever to go away, that will be a sign of danger. That is if the school became too academic, purely academic in research oriented. Or, purely professionally oriented and lost its sort of academic standing and roots. For us it is a sign of health rather than a debilitating illness or disease. It’s not a problem to be solved, it is a healthy tension to be managed and protected.” (Harvard)

“One of the key features of success is a simultaneous commitment to theory and practice. We don’t see this as an either/or. It’s both and most schools are stronger at theory or stronger at practice. They make a conscious decision. We are conscious across the curriculum and in individual courses. . . You can’t balance both perfectly but you can emphasize both. And when one side is tipping too much toward theory or tipping too much towards practice we bring it back.” (NYU)

(2) Practical skills and knowledge for students

While keeping a balance between both theory and practice is considered to be an important aspect of a successful MPA/MPP program, many programs emphasized the importance of providing students with practical skills that can be applied in the real work environment. These skills are considered to be essential in performing public sector works and provide the future public administrators with a “toolbox” to work within diverse fields of public administration.

“Our philosophy is that rather than focusing most of the efforts on particular subjects is to give students a broad toolbox of skills that we hope will be useful to whatever position or job they are occupying.” (Maryland)

Among the toolbox of skills, three areas of skills were commonly identified as particularly important by several programs - analytical, managerial and political skills.

“There are three broad categories of knowledge and skills that students need: one is answering analytic questions related to organizational purpose and value; second is answering managerial questions to get work effectively; third is answering political questions like “how does one secure the authority, permission, support, track the sufficient support, to get the resources and to secure sufficient support for the espoused purpose of the organization... Because those are quite fundamental for being an effective organization. So if we are able to instill that in people, I think that makes for a successful program.” (Harvard)

First, statistics, economics and policy analysis are regarded as useful analytical skills applicable in the public sector work environment. Many programs provided essential level of economics and statistics courses to train their students to be effective “consumers” of quantitative analysis they encounter at work.

“What we promised is not a producer usually of statistical study we want them to be intelligent consumers of the study. We want them look at the study and be able to see if it makes sense to follow the rules of good statistical study and how to interpret that sort of thing. We won’t give them enough courses to make them statisticians out there.” (Maryland)

“Our goals in these two economic courses are for our students to be economically literate. We’re not trying to teach them to be economists - we want them to be literate, to be able to use economic concepts, to be able to ask the questions. And then we also require that our students develop some other quantitative skills, specifically statistical analysis. . . Again to be able to read the work of those who do the quantitative research and you have to be able to ask the right questions.” (George Mason)

Secondly, several programs emphasized the importance of teaching managerial skills as these skills are essential in leading an organization to work together effectively for a common goal and mission.

“How does one sincerely take groups of people and get them to work effectively - traditional administration. How do you think of various systems, both administrative systems, personnel, financial systems, technology and performance systems . . . How do you think in terms of connecting people up in ways that will efficiently and effectively do whatever is the value proposition?” (Harvard)

As the areas of public management are extensive, schools that issued MPA degrees provided a diverse set of managerial courses such as public management, performance management, HR management, public health management, financial management, IT Management, Nonprofit Management, collaborative public management and conflict management. Similarly, public policy programs (MPP) focused on a wide range of policy fields such as environmental, health, security, energy, social policy, international development, law, economic and urban policies.

Political skill was also identified to be another important aspect of public affairs education. “Political skills” included understanding the political aspects of public administration as political forces are keenly intertwined in the administrative process such as securing resources, authority and necessary political support for various government programs and organizations.

“Political administrative process - so that you understand the relationship between politics and administration. It’s not a dichotomy or separate. They really are together. That they are interlocking.” (Rutgers-Newark)

“True across all sectors, how does one secure the authority, permission, support, track the sufficient support, to get the resources and to secure sufficient support for the espoused purpose of the organization… one has to ensure to build support behind the sort of legitimate uses of resources on behalf of the public good. So one needs to think in terms of skills persuasion, and negotiation.” (Harvard)

These three skills - analytical, managerial and political skills - are “the three pillars” of public affairs education as one school administrator noted and these must be included in the curriculum to provide broad perspectives and skills in the art of public administration.

Lastly, in addition to the three essential skills of public administration, several program administrators mentioned that they found teaching proper writing and communication skills to their students to be increasingly important. Especially they emphasized the usefulness of summarizing and communicating information in a succinct manner.

“But we also want them to have specific skills and the skills that we emphasize are writing skills and being able to be articulate, writing very concisely because that’s what policy makers read, short pieces.”
(George Mason)

“Being able to write is very critical, writing in a very professional manner, short descriptive statements, short analytical memos, working in small group settings collaboratively to produce a product, oral communication, and presenting your ideas clearly is a skill to be developed. It’s very important for these qualities to be embedded in the curriculum.” (SUNY-Albany)

While all three kinds of knowledge are deemed important, Harvard mentioned an interesting finding from a large alumni wide survey that it conducted where its graduates thought the program did best in teaching economics and statistics. However, they found that managerial and political management skills and strategic communications such as writing a concise memo to be most helpful in their career, reflecting the applied nature of the field and the significance of more managerial and practical skills in the work place.

“We do large surveys years after the fact. A couple of years ago we did a not quite an alumni wide survey, but almost alumni universe wide, got 4000 responses from 8000 we sent out and ask simple questions like that. Two that stood out for me . . . What has been the most useful to you in your own career? It might not surprise you . . . What’s been the most useful to people have been more political and managerial, political management, some of the management courses, even strategic communications. . . that people feel like they learned how to write succinct memo and things like that.” (Harvard)

(3) Teaching public service values and ethics

Lastly, some programs emphasized the importance of teaching the spirit of public sector values, ethics and motivation as a critical factor of successful public administration and policy education since it not only is about learning practical skills of management and administrative theories, but also about learning what are public sector values and ethics as they are closely intertwined in various issues of public and social problems. University of Maryland explained that questions of value, equity and fairness such as “do you think about what is in the public interest?”, “Do you think about how policies might affect different groups of different sections of the population differently?”, and “how do you determine if something is fair?” encounter public administrators frequently and students must receive proper training in ethics and public sector values in order to make proper decisions. In fact, before anyone begins to think about ways to maximize efficiency in using the resources in the public sector using the analytical, managerial and political skills, public administrators must decide “where” the resources are going to be committed that would advance public values. In other words, if the analytical and

managerial skills address the question of “how” (to run the government), ethics and public sector values help address the question of “what” (to do with the government).

“The program objective is to foster leaders who contribute to public goods with public spirit… We also try to give breadth and vision of making a better world through leadership. There is also respective contribution to the spirit of public good.” (Cornell)

This reflects the characteristics of the public sector where the primary goal of public sector is not merely the achievement of maximum efficiency, but rather the achievement of public good. Columbia elaborated on these characteristics of the students in its public policy program where the students have strong public service motivation of “making the world a better place.”

“Students are interested in very practical skills. They are very similar to business students in terms of the skills they want. But almost uniformly across the student body is that they want to apply these skills to work in the public service… Whether they want to work in the business world, nonprofit world or public sector, it sounds idealistic, but they want to make the world a better place… They actually want to make a difference. They come looking for really practical skills that they can make them successful in making the world a better place.” (Columbia)

While teaching ethics was identified as one of three critical conditions of a successful MPA and MPP program, many programs also identified this as one of the challenges facing American public affairs education as there weren't enough curricula on ethics in general.

2. Critical Factors of Success

“What are the key strategies and factors that make your program successful?”

“What are your comparative advantages and strengths?”

After the initial discussion on the definition of a successful and effective MPA/MPP program, we asked subsequent questions to identify key factors and advantages that help these programs realize the successful programs they aspire to be. A wide range of factors were identified and discussed, however, of these, the quality of the curriculum and faculty, job placement strategies, location advantage, and collaboration with other universities emerged as particularly important factors.

(1) *The quality of the curriculum and the faculty*

Most programs mentioned the quality and relevancy of their curriculum as the single most important factor of a high quality program. First, many programs emphasized the importance of keeping strong core required courses with emphasis on analytical skills (such as statistics and research methods) and theory-leaning courses such as economics, political science, organization theory and policy analysis as they provide students with essential skills necessary in public affairs.

"It's very important to have an essential required core courses well thought out and really established. The core courses include statistics, quantitative methods, microeconomics, something that describes the political contexts of administration like politics of the policy process and then public management where you get to focus on organization theory and behavior and its applications to organizations. These courses are the typical core of public policy and administration programs that provide the essence for the students." (SUNY-Albany)

"Economics and statistics are being standardized across the schools so we can say that all graduates have parallel levels of economics and statistical analysis. We've taken more practical management courses that were isolated in certain parts of our program. We've taken those practical management skills also move across the entire curriculum of the school, so that constant reality of rigorous analytical skills and practical management skills will now be a standard part." (Columbia)

Along with strong core courses, many programs emphasized the importance of good elective courses – courses that cover specific areas of public administration and policy. While core courses tend to be similar across different programs, elective courses leave a lot of room for diverse specializations and concentrations. As the spectrum of what government does is broad, choosing the subjects of elective courses has direct impact on the relevancy of the curriculum and they define who you are as a public administration and policy program.

"The other thing I think you need to have is kind of an identity. We've struggled with that. Public policy is everything. Just name something. Pens. There's an agency that worries about this. It's Consumer Product Safety Commission. Phones. We have the Federal Communications Commission. Anything you can think of is public policy. Whereas if you're running a law school, well not everything has to do with law. Or if you're running a medical school. But if you're running a public policy school, you immediately face this identity issue... What do you want to associate your brand name with? That's very difficult in public policy because there are so many things you can focus on" (Georgetown)

"Couple of specializations is who we are. Who we are. When we talk about emergency management, criminal justice policy and administration, we are here... what the students are requesting. I mean management operation is why many people come here to get an MPA. This is what the MPA program is." (CUNY-John Jay)

Some programs stressed the importance of the faculty on curriculum (Hur & Hackbart, 2009) to ensure the diversity as well as the quality of the electives and the need of strategic thinking at the dean's level to have a coherent direction in the curriculum.

"You need a diverse faculty. And by that I especially mean diversity of discipline and background. Both Maxwell and Wagner... had very broadly trained diverse faculty. We had J. D. s and M. D. s and Anthropologists and even Mathematicians and people trained in policy. It is very valuable for students."

(NYU)

“Someone, typically the research dean or the associate dean in charge of academics, has to think about the curriculum as a whole. Somebody at the school has to have a picture of the whole curriculum in their head. It is very important because students come in, the world changes. It is important to have a 30,000-foot view of the whole curriculum, how the pieces fit together, what new electives we should be offering . . . we actually do large focus groups . . . asking students what electives are missing. What courses are more useful.” (NYU)

In fact, “specializations” and subsequent identity of a school is derived from a number of strong faculty members who develop their areas of specialties into core competencies of the school.

“I would say that first of all any program is going to develop distinctive competencies that is usually based on two or three faculty members and they develop some competencies and strength and then students tend to gravitate toward that. For us, Rockefeller College, the same thing. Two to three faculty members specializing in IT policy. We also draw on resources from beyond my college. We have something called, the Center for Technology and Government and it does a lot of contract research – state government and also for internationally. And so they do some teaching for us and PhD students come and because of that, we get the benefit. You can develop specialization beyond your faculty if you have people who are cooperative.” (SUNY-Albany)

While some programs emphasize the importance of established core as well as elective courses as part of their curriculum, some programs allowed flexibility and “customizability” in their curriculum.

“If you ask me what makes a successful program, it is that it gives them a lot of flexibility. Basically they (students) come in, they define a field that determines 8 of those 16 courses. Then they can move around. We have some certificates, in health and health policy and science and technology and environmental policy. We have five different certificates. So they can choose those courses. But relative to our peer institutions, some of them have much more rigid requirements. If you’re coming to study X you have to do A B C D through the next two years and you don’t have much freedom of movement. And here I think we have much more flexibility and students tend to like that.” (Princeton)

“One of the factors of success in our program is the fact that we have these different tracks that appeal to students because they have a choice about which direction they will go in.” (CUNY-John Jay)

(2) *Job placement*

If a public administration and policy program can be viewed as a system of input-process-output where students are the “inputs” who are subsequently “processed” and exit as “products” of the system, the quality of faculty and curriculum, as just elaborated above, can be thought as an important factor relating to the process

aspect of the educational system as students learn through the curriculum and interactions with the faculty teaching and research. Many program administrators pressed the importance of job placement strategies as they help strategically launch their students in the job market, improving the output aspect of their program process.

Programs varied in the extent to which they approached to improve student career development and job placement. There were programs that were not actively involved in career development at all as their students mostly came with full-time employment while other programs were actively involved when their students were mostly full-time students with relatively fewer years of work experience. These strategies and activities include running various job-related workshops, requiring internships and consulting projects as part of degree requirement, keeping active relationship with alumni network, keeping dedicated career development staffs, maintaining a large job database, and hosting employer information sessions.

First, many programs provided various assistance in preparing students for the job market such as hosting workshops for interview skills, resume and cover letter writing, negotiating salary, and even dinner etiquette.

“We do a lot of those kind of professional development workshops whether it is interviewing skills whether it is something seemingly trivial as an etiquette dinner we do those kind of things… We help them to write resumes, we help them to write cover letters. We teach them about these things. And we help them learn to interview for job interviews.” (George Mason)

Also, many programs incorporated skills and experiences that employers find valuable as part of their curriculum in order to increase the chances of the employment for their graduates.

“Employers want to know about the skills and knowledge the applicant has acquired rather than the courses he has taken. It is important to think of the products that the students obtain in their coursework that can be used when they are actually on the job market, so the consulting projects connect theory and practice to tangible products of the student … Essentially we are looking at how the products of some of these courses can feed into job placement.” (SUNY-Albany)

In addition, alumni network was identified as a critical source of information and career opportunities by several programs as a source of jobs and a point of consultation for new courses and curriculum.

“We have a very loyal group of more than 3,000 alumni across the world. And they help our students to find jobs. They want to hire our students.” (Princeton)

“There are different kinds of networks, the MPA alumni help us find and place new students, and it also provides information about possible new courses or substantive material to be added to our curriculum.” (Syracuse)

In order to encourage students to work or get internship while enrolled in the program, some programs structured their program such that it would allow the most flexibility in balancing their work and school.

“Two-thirds of my students work all day and come to school at night. One of the benefits or one of the features of the Wagner school is there is a very aggressive effort to encourage students to either work or get internships. So we structure our curriculum specifically so every single core course have at least one and often half the classes meet in the evening. Make it flexible open so they can do internships or work during the day and come to school in the evening. It enables the possibility to work so they don't have to wait till they graduate to find a job.” (NYU)

Lastly, another important aspect of job placement was creating and managing relationships with potential and past employers as they improve the chances of finding employment for the students.

“We are constantly trying to find ways to make more connections with potential employers, market segments, sectors, ways to represent what it is (our) students bring. And to encourage people who have jobs and interests to think about coming here.” (Harvard)

(3) Location

Many programs identified their geographical location to be of significant advantage point and condition of successful program. Especially this was mentioned by the programs located in or near the major metropolitan areas such as New York City, Washington DC, or in the capital region such as Albany, NY. Being near a large metropolitan area or capital provides access to “pracademics,” jobs and internship opportunities as well as relevant government agencies that may form some kind of collaborative relationship with the school. Also, being near the major metropolitan areas helps with admission as students are attracted to them.

“There is no question that the location in New York makes it much easier to get high profile speakers to come to the school, it makes it much easier for us to get very high profile part-time faculty to teach in the classroom. It means it is easier for us to recruit students. It is very easy to persuade students to come to New York City to a graduate school. The fact that New York is such a global city makes it easier for us to recruit students from 155 different countries come to study.” (Columbia)

“We have a strong faculty. A lot of credits for a strong faculty go to that location advantage. People want to be in Washington or near Washington they want to remain engaged with the public policy process... We got a lot of top students for the same reason they're coming here to be in Washington area that includes both Americans and students from overseas being in the Washington area is very attractive to them.” (Maryland)

3. Emerging Challenges

We interviewed each school to ask what they perceived to be the key challenges and issues facing public

administration and policy programs in the US. A number of challenges were identified:

- 1) Lack of a brand name for MPA/MPP programs and degrees
- 2) Curriculum not adequate for the rapidly changing world
- 3) Competition from other disciplines, especially MBA, law and economics
- 4) Not fully developed market for MPA/MPP graduates
- 5) No immediate career advantage from obtaining an MPA degree
- 6) Negative image about the public sector from bureaucracy bashing and reviving interests in government.

(1) Lack of Recognition

Many schools have expressed concerns over the lack of recognition or brand name for masters of public administration and policy programs. First, there is no universally agreed-upon, uniform degree title for the master-level public administration programs as there exist variations such as MPA, MPP, MAPA (Master of Art in Public Administration), and MSPA (Master of Science in Public Affairs), to name a few. Even some of more frequently used titles such as MPA and MPP are not widely recognized by the general public and this lack of recognition makes it difficult to attract students as they are more familiar with political science or business management.

“I think one of our biggest problems that undergraduates simply do not know that MPA exists as a carrier path. So they think about business, law, medicine, maybe nursing. But they don’t attempt to think about MPA.” (Rutgers-Newark)

In addition, behind this issue of lack of brand name is an issue of lack of established identity of public administration and policy as an academic discipline. Government addresses a wide spectrum of issues with sometimes ambiguous goals. This poses challenges in teaching public administration and policy as it encompasses a vast variety of issues and problems.

(2) Curriculum not adequate for the changing world

A number of schools expressed concerns over the inadequacy of the curriculum in preparing students for the rapidly changing world. In particular, topics such as globalization, science and technology, ethics, diversity, non-profit and private sectors were identified as subjects that need to be properly reflected in the curriculum as they increasingly influence various aspects of public administration and policy. Columbia University explains the need for public administration students to possess at least some superficial level of understanding in these emerging issues:

“That (the emerging challenge) is dealing with science and increasing importance of science in public policy making. Whether it is climate science for climate change and environment, or biological and health science in terms of governments making policy about health, for about reproductive health and

all the debates in the United States, about vitro fertilization, these are all public policy questions, and a lot of people involved in those questions, nuclear non-proliferation, a lot of people involved don't have the science knowledge that we need. Not the deep and profound science knowledge but even somewhat superficial science knowledge to lay in on some of the questions. We are asking ourselves that our colleagues are asking that, I hear a lot of public policy schools just now starting to ask those questions." (Columbia)

This is also acknowledged by SUNY-Albany and American University. Both schools emphasize the importance of understanding the forces of globalization as well as the powerful influence of the private sector on government (SUNY-Albany).

"MPA/MPP curricula have not adjusted to the changing world. Globalization is not embedded into program. How the impact of globalization affects the curriculum. Powerful influence of the private sector." (SUNY-Albany)

"One thing we haven't mentioned, and I think that has kind of crept into the curriculum is the whole issue of globalization. Because increasingly faculty who never went outside of the country is now doing work in other countries." (AU)

CUNY-John Jay identified ethics and diversity as another area that are becoming increasingly important in public administration education and it is a challenging task to properly educate students on these topics.

"One of the other challenges is to make students think about these larger ethical issues and issues of diversity . . . I think that are related to but different from globalization. How do you teach or train students to function within very diverse world?" (CUNY-John Jay)

SUNY-Albany recognized non-profit organization to be an important topic as the sector has grown significantly in size and it has become an important player in the job market for public administration students. In addition, there has been increasing demand for addressing international and homeland security issues in curricula since 9/11.

"NGO and NPO students are increasing because of the growth of NPOs themselves. The organizations lack somehow in the basic abilities, fundraising, budgeting, evaluation and they are looking for people with those kinds of skills, so there has been an increase in this field. . . the PA program has seen a big growth since 9/11 for obvious reasons, Homeland and International Security is definitely becoming more and more popular." (SUNY-Albany)

(3) *Competition from MBA, Law and Economics*

Competition from other disciplines such as MBA, law, and economics was identified as another major

challenge. While it is true that there is a trend of the graduates of public administration and policy finding employment in the private sector (Chetkovich, 2003), many programs felt that other disciplines began to expand their student base and encroach upon the field of public administration. NYU explains:

“What we think of as our territory, public service, public management, public policy is being encroached upon by other professional areas. Law Schools and Business Schools in particular are moving aggressively into this space and trying to peel off the students interested in public service. . . The space we think of ours of the public sector is being aggressively carved. That is a major challenge schools like ours face. . .” (NYU)

This sentiment was shared by University of Maryland and Rutgers-Newark who felt this encroachment particularly strong from the business administration who tries to cover the gray areas of public administration such as not-for-profit.

“Especially business will be the biggest challenge...business school is looking to public sector jobs as well as the non-profit sectors as a major emphasis and of course we believe that our curriculum and skills that we give students are, maybe, more appropriate than a traditional MBA curriculum for students who want to go to work in government or in non-profits.” (Maryland)

“I think business administration is a challenge to the field. I think they’re increasingly trying to shape something related to the public sector, particularly to not-for-profit. Many business programs are establish for not-for-profit.” (Rutgers-Newark)

(4) Student statistical ability – student dislike of statistics

Another challenge mentioned by several programs was a lack of student ability and interest in statistics (Hy, Waugh, & Nelson, 1987). In general, it was a perception that students are fearful of statistics and this was a factor in discouraging some students from applying for masters of public administration and policy programs. In addition, students did not understand the relevance of statistics in the field and they had to educate public administration students of the importance of statistics.

“Many students who go into the public policy programs think that they are going into the program to debate politics. They are frequently surprised either during the admissions process or sometime even after they are admitted to the program that they will actually have to do math. Getting to the people much earlier in the process while they are still in college that public policy is about politics and numbers. It’s about data and political process. You have to understand both worlds to work well. I think it’s a big challenge . . . so we put quite a bit of effort into educating our prospective students much earlier, because you can’t teach people math that quickly. It takes time to teach math. So we really highlight in our recruiting materials about quantitative part of our curriculum.” (Columbia)

(5) *No immediate career advantage from the degree*

Somewhat related to the relatively small scale of public administration programs compared to MBA and JD, and lack of recognition as a well-known brand, another important challenge was that obtaining an MPA degree did not translate into any immediate career benefits to students. That is, for instance, while JD degree is a requirement for admission to a bar exam - a step for a lawyer to practice law - MPAs or MPPs do not provide such explicit advantage to students.

“In the U.S. the Government doesn’t require a degree in Public Administration to work in the Government, that would be nice. They take people in from all different disciplines, we have programs that teach you these very applied concepts of the material but it doesn’t guarantee you the job because you’re competing against lawyers and management business school and people from private practice. Anybody can apply to work for the Government.” (Syracuse)

“I guess for public sector’s perception that special public policy and public administration degree is not an advantage…The (public sector) job is typically open to somebody in economics or political science or public policy. That’s a real problem that the credential does not automatically give you advantage for the job. It helps but you are in a broader pool and the pool has become broader over the last thirty years.” (Rutgers-Newark)

(6) *Negative image about the public sector from bureaucracy bashing and reviving interests in government.*

Many schools identified bureaucracy bashing and lack of interest in government and public sector as another important challenge. The negative image portrayed about the public sector has made it difficult to stimulate interest in working in the sector and attract a talented pool of potential public servants into the program (Conant, 1989).

“When students are in your classroom and they see all this bad things going on in public service, and they get demoralized… Bureaucracy bashing. And this is their challenge: to be good public servants and to rise above this.” (CUNY-John Jay)

Consequently, the lack of interest and motivation to work in the public sector has led to the shrinking of the pool of talented and thoughtful, potential public servants. In addition to the negative image attributed to the public sector, powerful private sector and its attraction and hiring power in the job market was identified as a factor that further drains potential public sector employees.

“The supply for talented, thoughtful, skilled, potential public servants is shrinking. There are fewer Americans going to college and the attractiveness of other fields, of business in particular, of the private sector, is very powerful. We have an anti-government climate in our country…One big problem is the pipeline. How do we find people who are interested in public service and get them to our schools in the first place?” (NYU)

4. Innovative initiatives and strategies

Lastly, we asked about any new and innovative initiatives that some of these programs may be undertaking in order to promote and expand their niche in the market. Some common as well as novel efforts have been identified. These efforts include:

- 1) Partnership with schools abroad
- 2) Online teaching
- 3) Undergraduate public service programs
- 4) Building an identity and reputation in specific areas of public administration and policy
- 5) Certificate courses
- 6) Adding new courses

(1) Partnership with schools abroad

Many schools said that they were actively involved in developing partnerships with schools abroad. These partnerships came from public administration programs from a range of countries. Among them, countries in Asia, such as South Korea, Singapore, and China were most frequently mentioned and the nature of the partnerships ranged from holding conferences and seminars together, formal exchanges of students/faculties, establishing branch offices, and offering courses and dual degrees jointly.

For instance, at the time of our interview, Columbia University had partnerships with numerous schools such as London School of Economics in London, with Beijing University in Beijing, University of Tokyo in Japan and National University of Singapore - the Lee Kuan Yew School. NYU was also aggressively developing partnerships with schools abroad opening branch campuses worldwide - Florence, Paris, Ghana, Shanghai, Tel Aviv, Abu Dhabi, and Rio de Janeiro. The University of Maryland was engaged in a series of conferences in Singapore and planned another one in Korea with the KDI (the Korea Development Institute) while seeking a joint degree opportunity with universities in Asia. Georgetown had a joint degree with the International University of Geneva in Switzerland, exchange program with the Indian Institute of Management in India and several other programs with Hertie School in Germany and Oxford University in England. SUNY-Albany has a dual program with the KDI in South Korea, and an arrangement with Bocconi University in Italy. Rutgers had various types of engagement with China, Korea, European countries as well as India.

(2) Online teaching

We probed about online course (online degree or teaching) to see how they recognize the potentials of the Internet in their programs. While many programs recognized the potential of online teaching in attracting a large pool of new students and generating revenue, they mostly approached it with caution. In fact, the proliferation of various online degrees has been considered to be a challenge, rather than an opportunity, as it tends to "dilute" the value of MPA/MPP degrees and create competition with traditional programs.

(3) Undergraduate public service program

Two schools (NYU and Rutgers) we interviewed have made some efforts to open undergraduate public administration and policy programs. Tapping into the undergraduate student body is financially advantageous

as it attract a lot of students and this also helps “transitioning” them into MPA programs.

“One thing we have done that has been very innovative and helpful to us is to open an undergraduate program. We have 25 or 30 courses, 500 to 600 undergrads.” (NYU)

Rutgers also saw this as an opportunity to introduce MPA to undergraduate students to facilitate them to continue into the program by providing a five-year program between the undergraduate and the MPA.

(4) Building an identity and reputation in specific areas of public administration and policy

Some schools were engaged in developing an identity or reputation in specific subject areas of public administration and policy. CUNY-John Jay has Inspector General Program that specializes in training students to work “over” government, not “in” the government. The program has four Inspector General Specializations - 1) investigation and operational inspection where students are taught to investigate; 2) program assessment and regulation where students are doing regulatory assessment; 3) financial and fiscal oversight; and 4) internal inspection and oversight (of international agreement, trade, environmental issues). This distinguishes its program from other more general public administration programs and the school is active in promoting its Inspector General program. Rutgers University was also actively involved in building an identity and expertise in performance measurement, e-governance, and transparency.

(5) Certificate courses

Some schools offered certificate courses. Certificates were offered as part of MPA degrees or they were offered independently as a stand-alone degree. This helps students to add courses outside typical MPA and MPP curriculum and earn an extra “title” in addition to their MPA/MPP degree. A stand-alone certificate degree help to tap into mid-career professionals who would prefer specialized and short certificate degrees rather than a whole years-long MPA degrees, requiring much greater commitment. NYU has what is called 2 plus 2 program students are given an option of earning a certificate.

“We also do something called 2 plus 2 here. So say, you are a student in law school, you can take two extra courses at the law school and two additional courses at Wagner and get a certificate. It is a way of getting students to get an interdisciplinary flavor. It is good for the students because it is an extra advantage to put on their CVs. And we can name the 2 plus 2 anything we want, ‘law and public policy’ ‘business and management.’” (NYU)

In addition, NYU had a certificate program for mid-career professionals who instead of a whole MPA can come and take four core courses in several different areas for the certificate. Rutgers was engaged in opening a new niche program for school principals.

“We have a program that certifies public school principals so they take our MPA. It’s a special MPA that has courses in education where we take our courses and we adopt that to education and the New

Jersey law they can be certified to become principals and that's an internship. I think that opens up a whole area ... So there is no reason to be in one side. I think we can move over to the education side as well." (Rutgers-Newark)

(6) *New Courses*

In order to keep up with the changing world, which some schools have identified as emerging challenges, many schools were engaged in offering new courses or concentrations that address the emerging and novel public administration and policy topics. Some of the new topics mentioned during our interviews included transnational crime and corruption, security policy, terrorism, globalization, international comparative public administration, and international NGO.

V. Discussions

This article helped to provide a snapshot of how some of reputable public administration and policy programs perceive what constitutes a successful and effective public administration and policy programs and identified critical factors that contribute to their quality and effectiveness. In addition, we discussed various challenges facing public administration and policy education in America and heard about new initiatives and projects aimed at promoting and expanding their program venues.

There was a relatively well-established consensus on defining what a successful and effective MPA/MPP program was and key factors that contribute to the quality of these programs. First, putting together key elements discussed during the interviews, it would be reasonable to define a successful public administration and policy program to be 'a program that provides a curriculum well-balanced between theory and practice, with strong established core courses especially in research methodology, statistics, economics, political science and organization theory and addresses the relevant subject areas (traditional and emerging) of public administration with high-quality and diverse faculty.' In addition, consistent with the discussions in the literature, there was a relatively well-established consensus on the ultimate objective of the public administration and policy program as producing public administrators who are well trained in knowledge and skills of running an efficient and effective government (management) and ensuring that the government promotes public values (public values and ethic).

Among others, two factors were identified as key elements that contribute to the quality of a public administration and policy program. One is the quality of the faculty that contributes to the quality of the curriculum and the second, in a much more practical level, is the effectiveness of various career services and job placement strategies for students. The quality of faculty was identified as one of the most important factors of a successful program. This is no surprise as the quality of faculty would determine the quality of the curriculum, teaching, and research that make up a bulk of what is an academic program, reminding us of the importance of investing in the quality of faculty in hiring and support as it would ultimately determine the quality as well as the identity of the program. Secondly, if the quality of faculty influences the quality of the program, the effectiveness of the career services and job placement strategies improve the quality of student *outputs*. That is, if a public administration education can be viewed as a system of input, process and output where students can be regarded as input, and if the quality of faculty influences the process aspect of the system, career services

influenced the output aspect of the system by providing links to good employment opportunities in the public sector.

This paper also had an opportunity to hear about the emerging challenges facing American public administration education. As discussed in the paper, numerous challenges had been identified. Looking at the list of challenges reveal that these challenges are reflective of the problems facing American public administration as a discipline. The nature of public sector work, which addresses a wide spectrum of public problems, issues, and goals, make it difficult to come to a consensus in a "universal curriculum" (except for the core curricula such as statistics and research method) and form a common identity. Variations in the naming of various master's level public administration programs reflect such challenges and in the absence of a well-established identity, and we observed significant encroachment from other disciplines such as business administration, law, and economics which seek to expand their student base into that of public administration.

Furthermore, the relatively small size under which public administration programs operate posed another challenge of lack of recognition or brand name compared to other more recognized programs such as MBA and JD. This coupled with lack of immediate advantages given to public administration degree holders, lack of fully developed job market and shrinking supply of talented potential public servants stemming from negative image portrayed about government and the powerful influence of the private sector in the job market posed significant challenges to public administration education in America.

Although American public administration education faces difficult challenges ahead, they were also actively involved in various innovative initiatives and activities to expand their programs and find new niches. A particularly common activity practiced by many schools was increasing partnerships with universities abroad with varying degree of commitment and types of partnership. These partnerships provide opportunities in collaborative research and teaching as well as potential conduits of new students and public officials. Some schools were beginning to tap into the potential of undergraduate students as potential student base and many schools were exploring the option of new courses, joint degrees and certificate courses in order to address increasingly diverse students and their needs.

VI. Conclusion

Educating highly capable and well-prepared public administrators is a critical factor of sustaining an effective public sector. Effective educational programs must be present in order to properly train and educate the current, as well as future public administrators. The establishment of professional MPA/MPP programs in 2003 is a meaningful initiative in this regard and perhaps a spark of change in Japanese public service dominated by generalists mainly trained in law and economics. The challenges facing the newly established Japanese MPA/MPP program, therefore, are the first hurdles that must be addressed as it seeks to secure its place in Japan and define its identity, mission and contribution in Japanese public sector education.

Our visit to the leading public administration programs in the US had been most valuable. We find that while the programs in the US face similar challenges of identity and competition from other disciplines as in Japan, these programs have vigorously upheld the value of holistic approach to public administration education, incorporating theoretical as well as practical education encompassing various aspects of public administration and policy, making it a unique and important identity and contribution over other competing disciplines.

American MPA/MPP education provided not only relevant theoretical lenses and practical skills in several key areas of public administration and policy, but also instilled a sense of public service values, ethics and public service ideal for the students to pursue. In addition, it continuously invests in the quality of the faculty, curriculum and job placement strategies for its students to stay competitive in the field. American MPA/MPP programs show a hope and a model for Japanese public administration education to follow and perhaps this is the beginning of practically-minded and management-oriented public administration education in Japan that we hope will further improve the quality of the public service in Japan.

Appendix

Appendix 1- [Information on Schools Visited]

University	Location (City, State)	School	Degrees Offered	NASPAA Accreditation Status (As of 9/1/2011)	US World Report Ranking (As of 2008)
Cornell University	Ithaca, New York	Cornell Institute for Public Affairs (CIPA)	Master of Public Administration Accelerated MPA	N	36
Syracuse University	Syracuse, New York	Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs	Master of Public Administration MA-International Relations Master of Public Health Ph.D. in Public Administration Executive -MPA Executive-MIR Joint and concurrent degree programs	Yes	1
University at Albany, SUNY	Albany, New York	Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy University at Albany	Master of Public Administration Ph.D. in Public Administration Combined and dual degree programs	Yes	14
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Newark	Newark, NJ	School of Public affairs and Administration (SPAA)	Master of Public Administration Ph.D. in Public Administration Executive -MPA Joint degree programs	Yes	32
Princeton University	Princeton, NJ	Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs	Master's in Public Affairs Master's in Public Policy Ph.D. in Public Affairs Joint degree programs	N	4
Columbia University	New York, NY	School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)	Master of Public Administration Master of International Affairs Executive MPA Ph.D. in Sustainable Development Dual degree programs	N	14
New York University	New York, NY	Robert F. Wagner Graduate school of Public Service	Master of Public Administration Master of Urban Planning Executive MPA Ph.D. in Public Administration Dual degree programs	Yes	10
CUNY, John Jay College	New York, NY	John Jay College of Criminal Justice	Master of Public Administration Master of Arts in Criminal Justice Master of Science in Digital Forensics and Cyber Security Master of Arts in Forensic Mental Health Counseling Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology MA-JD in Forensic Psychology and Law Forensic Science Master of Arts in International Crime and Justice Master of Science in Protection Management Ph.D. in Criminal Justice Ph.D. in Psychology MA/BA programs	Yes	51
University of Maryland, College Park	College Park, Maryland	School of Public Policy	Master of Public Policy Master of Public Management Executive MPM Master of Engineering Public Policy Ph.D. in Policy Studies Dual degree programs	Yes	25
Georgetown University	Washington, DC	Georgetown Public Policy Institute (GPPI)	Master of Public Policy Master of Policy Management Master of International Development Policy Executive Master in Policy Management Joint degree programs	N	14

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