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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CAPSTONE
REFLECTION ON THE UGA MPA PROGRAM

ALEXANDER HINTON
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PART I

PROFESSIONAL GOALS AND PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES

Throughout my education with the UGA MPA program, I have developed both short- and long-term career goals. In the short-term (the next five to ten years) my primary goal is to work in local and state governments in order to use and hone my skills in both policy analysis and broader public management strategies. In the long-term, my plans are less structured: I hope to work as a higher-level government official or in intergovernmental organizations, specifically in policy development and implementation. Whereas before my entrance into the MPA program, these goals would have taken much longer to be feasible, I feel confident in my ability to pursue these goals, as well as any new ones that may emerge as I grow older.

The MPA program has prepared me for life in public service. My coursework has demonstrated to me both what I am inherently good at and passionate about while at the same time showing me the skills I need to better develop to be as effective an administrator as possible. The MPA career services made me aware of multiple internship opportunities and enabled me to work as an Urban Leaders Fellow in the summer of 2019. This work, in conjunction with the classes I took that summer, helped me develop and uncover the skills and passions which inform my career goals. Aside from networking opportunities and coursework, the MPA program also has caring professors who both prepare students for success and educate them effectively.

These experiences have helped me to develop my values. As it pertains to public service, the most important values I have are the following: integrity, discipline, collaboration, communication, and excellence in work. Our program emphasizes all of those values, and I feel strongly about adhering to them throughout my career.

PART II

INTERNSHIP REFLECTION

I have a unique experience as it relates to my internship requirement. Since July 2018, I have worked as a staff member for the UGA Wesley Foundation (Wesley), a 501c3 non-profit. Additionally, I served as an Urban Leaders Fellow through the Urban Leaders Fellowship (ULF) in Atlanta during the summer of 2019. Initially I sought to use my work through ULF to count towards my internship requirement; however, due to travel constraints, I was unable to reach the minimum work hours. Thus, my internship requirement was fulfilled through my work at the Wesley Foundation, specifically through my work with the Crosstrainers Mentorship Program. In both of these vastly different experiences, I found ways to both utilize course-relevant information and develop the MPA core competencies.

Public service is the entire purpose of ULF; and while Wesley is a religious-affiliated non-profit, a large portion of our work revolves around serving the long-term residents of Athens-Clarke County. Specifically, with ULF I worked on behalf of Atlanta residents in developing a Promise Program proposal in order to provide free and reduced tuition at Atlanta Technical College. At Wesley, I worked with a team that partnered with the food distribution organization iServe in their monthly event "Feeding Athens." I also worked with departments focused on providing mentorship opportunities for at-risk children through Crosstrainers and facilitating partnerships with The Light and The Sparrow's Nest which work to meet the needs of underserved communities in Athens. Working with both Wesley and ULF has developed my understanding of the public service mentality because of the service-based partnerships in which I have participated.

Both of these positions have also given me the opportunity to develop my communication and teamwork skills, especially with those of diverse backgrounds. My team at ULF was especially diverse, and it brought a multitude of perspectives and backgrounds together to pursue the betterment of Atlanta. As we developed our Promise Program plan, we met with a variety of people that increased my awareness of Atlanta's racial, cultural, and political diversity. While Athens is more homogenous, my work with Wesley has exposed me to a wide variety of communication structures which has provided an opportunity to develop my communication skills into an effective tool.

My work in both organizations has grown my problem-solving capabilities to a large extent. Before my work at Wesley I was indecisive and insecure in my proposed solutions and eventual decisions, whereas after two years of development I have come to be confident in both formulating and executing solutions to a variety of problems—especially as it relates to human resource management. As my primary roles are mentorship and volunteer management at Wesley, any point in my day-to-day schedule can exemplify my mastery of this subject. At ULF, my problem-solving skills were developed in a different way: my professional growth came more in the way of policy analysis, development, and implementation. In developing a proposal for a Promise Program, it was instrumental to look at all sides of an issue, take relevant lessons from other implementations of similar programs, and apply the same principles to a program in Atlanta.

While both organizations have helped me concurrently in multiple competencies, there are two competencies where I advanced my skills isolated from each other. For example, Wesley has been instrumental for the development of my understanding of leadership and

management. Wesley operates our organization as a way to launch current students to serve their communities more effectively post-graduation, and staff plays an instrumental role in making that possible. The Urban Leaders Fellowship developed my understanding of the public policy process to a large extent. In developing our proposal for a Promise Program, we came to understand dynamics in the Atlanta City Council, the public perception of such programs, and any statewide barriers which could prevent the implementation of the program. While each city is unique, working at ULF on behalf of Atlanta has taught me a great deal concerning the urban policy process, which is instrumental to succeeding as I continue with my public service career.

I have spoken extensively on the ways my internships have educated my understanding of the MPA core competencies. While I have gained a great deal of understanding related to public administration through these internships, MPA coursework has proved crucial to my success in these positions. I could use a multitude of classes to show the truth of my statement, but two courses stand out in their usefulness.

Grant Proposal Writing has been instrumental to my success at the UGA Wesley Foundation. Crosstrainers is a separate entity from the Wesley Foundation and functions exclusively from grants. It is vital for effective grant proposal writing procedures to be in place to secure these grants, and the curriculum for *Grant Proposal Writing* has been crucial in working with fellow staff members to secure those grants.

US Policy Process has been beneficial both in working with the Urban Leaders Fellowship, and in considering Wesley's internal policies. In my work with ULF, specifically, it was enlightening to work as a policy entrepreneur and work with Atlanta officials to take steps toward implementation. Although the policy streams were not properly aligned in order for the

program my team developed to proceed further than proposal, understanding the US policy process, especially as it relates to urban policy development, was instrumental in the development of the policy to be relevant when the policy streams are better aligned.

PART III

PROGRAM COMPETENCY REFLECTION

Competency I – To Lead and Manage in Public Governance

The MPA program has given me a breadth of knowledge related to leading and managing in the public sector, while also extending my capabilities in realizing this goal professionally. The entire program is centered on preparing both current and future public administrators to succeed in their careers. Accordingly, it is evident in each class, conversation, and class assignment that all our work prepares us effectively for public governance: each one stresses to students the importance of leading and managing, even if the topic of the course is not specifically “Leadership and Management in the Public Sector.”

For instance, each class had an aspect related to effective leadership and management, and what it looked like to excel in specific areas—from policy analysis to fiscal management. However, some course focused on leadership and management more specially—course such as *Personnel Management*, *Public Management*, and *Public Administration and Democracy*. As a result, I gained more insight to effective leadership and management in those courses than I did in others. For example, in *Public Administration and Democracy*, I learned the historical context of modern bureaucracy and the lessons that can be taken from the United States’ perspective on government work. For instance, I learned Woodrow Wilson’s perspective on bureaucracy before his presidency, and how that informs current beliefs on administration: these ideas, like merit-based promotions, professionalization, and distinction of bureaucratic systems from political systems, are integral to a modern understanding of administration (Wilson 1887). The Principal-Agent issue was introduced in *Public Administration and Democracy*, which furthered my understanding of the intricacies related to effective management and leadership, especially

in a democratic government. Other ideas were also introduced, like Arstein's Ladder of Participation (Arnstein 1969), affective motives, and civic consultation.

In *Policy Implementation*, these concepts were expanded upon. The importance of clear communication and the integration of bottom-up and top-down governance was stressed, in addition to its political and managerial implications. There were multiple class discussions on the merits and disadvantages related to various implementation frameworks and their management at various levels of government. In addition, *Policy Implementation* gave multiple opportunities to work in groups to develop an appreciation for collaboration and the ability to work on a team to produce a professional product.

The writing sample I selected to demonstrate my mastery of *Competency I* is my final exam submission for *Policy Implementation*. The paper addresses key issues related to policy implementation, especially those related to communication, principal-agent issues, and the definition of success in leadership. It demonstrates mastery of the competency for two reasons: first, the paper is addressed to the governor and its premise is to be distributed as a white paper for the State of Georgia. In other words, the premise for the writeup is to explain to state leaders how to lead and manage well as it relates to policy implementation. Second, it provides specific strategies on how to do that. In order for effective management to happen, it is necessary for one to have an ability to comprehend, summarize, and communicate the importance of effective leadership, while also providing practical strategies in order to do so. This writing sample accomplishes this goal.

Competency II – Understanding the Public Policy Process

My focus in the program was public policy; as such, understanding the public policy process was a central point to my experience in the MPA program. In most of the classes I took, the policy process was, at minimum, mentioned, though other classes gave it more emphasis than others. Considering the specialty of UGA's MPA is management and leadership, it is unsurprising my focus was mentioned less in non-policy classes. Regardless, as a public policy focus in the MPA program, I have gained a wealth of knowledge and skills related to the policy process.

A variety of classes throughout my time in the MPA have developed this knowledge and skill—specifically, my coursework in *Urban Policy*, *US Policy Process*, *Program Evaluation*, *Policy Implementation*, and *Policy Analysis*. In these classes, we covered the processes and methods by which policy is developed, implemented, and assessed. In *Policy Process* and *Fundamentals of Policy Analysis*, we covered the multiple streams framework which stipulates the conditions by which different policies can be developed and implemented (Kingdon 2003). In *Policy Process*, we placed special emphasis on policy entrepreneurs, as well as methods by which to influence the streams to coincide for policy implementation. In *Fundamentals of Policy Analysis* and *Policy Analysis I*, there was a greater focus on economic analysis of policies through methods like cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, and the other microeconomic impacts resulting from policy implementation. In *Urban Policy*, we analyzed specific cases of the economic impacts and policymaker justifications for certain policies. In *Policy Implementation*, the course placed emphasis on the necessity for effective communication of goals in the policy implementation process, as well as the necessity for integration of top-down and bottom-up implementation for truly effective policies. Resulting from each of these classes, my

understanding of the policy process expanded—and at the end of the MPA program, I can confidently assert my mastery of *Core Competency II*.

The writing sample I chose to demonstrate my mastery of the competency is my cumulative report for the class *Fundamentals of Policy Analysis*. The memorandum was a semester-long project, wherein students applied their knowledge of policy analysis to an issue affecting a portion of the United States. My project focused on the inability to discharge student loan debt through bankruptcy and conducted an in-depth analysis of the history of the policy, economic impact, and alternative policies which could be implemented. The majority of my analysis dealt with the ethical implications and analysis rather than dealing with hard numbers, as this sample is prior to my coursework in Policy Analysis I. However, this memorandum still demonstrates my mastery of the competency: in this sample, I show my understanding of the policy process through my understanding of the history of the policy, as well as through the alternatives I propose. I additionally demonstrate my ability to interpret policy and its nationwide ramifications, while employing my ability to persuasively communicate information—especially in terms of the needs for a new policy. I use statistics and other quantitative and qualitative data to show this need and explain how it would impact the portion of the US which has unbearable student loan debt. My mastery related to understanding the public policy process is substantial, and this sample demonstrates that mastery.

Competency III – Analyzing/Synthesizing Information to Solve Problems and Make Decisions

My studies through the UGA MPA program have, to a great extent, developed my ability to analyze and synthesize information for problem solving and decision-making. The MPA program stresses the necessity of looking at issues from multiple sides, using these viewpoints to inform a response, and utilizing available data while in the decision-making process so that a holistic approach to a problem is adopted.

This skill is emphasized in most classes—usually through memorandum and other policy papers focused on an organizational response to a problem. In most classes, skills related to analyzing and utilizing data are taught, though there is not a “one size fits all” approach. For instance, the analysis skills taught in *Policy Analysis I* were different from the skills taught in *Research Methods*; though both are valid, they are also vastly different approaches to the analysis and synthesis of information. In my MPA experience, the classes that focused most on data analysis and synthesis were *Data Applications*, *Research Methods*, and *Program Evaluation*. The former two focused on statistical analysis and research design isolated from each other, while *Program Evaluation* focused on the intersection of statistical analysis resulting from the research conducted—in other words, it was a true application of the information taught in *Data Apps* and *Research Methods*. These classes taught the communication of this information through assignments such as presentations and memorandum.

The writing sample I selected to demonstrate my mastery of *Competency III* is the cumulative memo for my internship with the Urban Leaders Fellowship. The policy paper synthesizes information related to community college Promise Programs that exist through the

United States; it analyzes the successes and failures of these programs from both a microeconomic and statistical sense; it then applies this analysis to the development of a unique program for the City of Atlanta. Though it is lengthy, it utilizes its length purposefully and concisely explains the details of the program analyses for important stakeholders—in this case, the Atlanta City Council. What is especially relevant is that this work was a group effort. In any professional environment, there are a number of projects accomplished alone; however, there are as many completed on a team. This sample both demonstrates my own ability to analyze and synthesize information, but also demonstrates my ability to work on a team to do so—which is vital to effective analysis, synthesis, and application of information for problem-solving and decision-making.

IV – The Public Service Perspective

The slogan of the UGA MPA program is “Commit to Public Service,” and the program revolves around preparing students—from recent undergraduates to seasoned professionals—to have a correct mentality as it comes to public service. Through the entrance socialization, the opportunities to serve the community, and the encouragement from professors and peers alike to participate in civic engagement and community service, the program has a whole develops a sense of what it means to be a public servant and how one can actively serve their communities, even if they are not in a position of authority.

The classes of the MPA program additionally serve to develop a public service perspective. Each of the core classes give a focus to the ethics of leadership, public service in a democracy (specifically regarding the history of American bureaucracy), and how to treat both

citizens and peers respectfully in public administration. Aside from the seven core classes, I have seen a great focus on the public service perspective in classes like *Grant Proposal Writing*, *Urban Policy*, *Policy Implementation*, and *Policy Analysis I*. In these classes, I learned strategies on public engagement, correct perspectives on public decisions, and, perhaps most importantly, the ethical implications regarding certain decisions by policy implementers. These classes additionally emphasized the complexity of issues and environments where public administrators operate—for instance, in *Urban Policy*, we discussed the complex funding process involved with building a sidewalk in a city; likewise, in *Policy Implementation*, we discussed the issues arising from vague communication, as well as the problems that become evident when there is no civic engagement from policymakers and implementers.

The writing sample I chose to demonstrate my mastery of *Competency IV* is my midterm exam submission for *Public Administration and Democracy*. Though it is from the first Public Administration class I took, the concepts I learned and applied in *Public Administration and Democracy* are perhaps the most relevant in regard to articulating a public service perspective. The writing sample takes into consideration the history of American public administration and applies concepts to an especially relevant issue in US policy. It additionally seeks to apply ethical considerations regarding political discourse and the implications of inaction by administrators to the problem of gun violence—an issue incredibly unique to public administrators in the United States. Most pointedly, however, the sample addresses the complex nature of the issue, especially the administrative complexity that public servants must consider as they devise solutions to this ongoing issue. For these reasons, in conjunction with

the understanding that these same concepts and perspectives were built upon through every subsequent class, the sample demonstrates my mastery of *Competency IV*.

V – Communicating with a Diverse Workforce and Citizenry

The MPA is structured in such a way that communicating with a diverse workforce and citizenry is inherent to almost every event, opportunity, and class. The program stresses teamwork in a multitude of ways, which gives rise to a greater understanding of multi-leveled communication. The program also gives a focus to presentations in classes, so that the skills related to dissemination of information become a well-honed skill. In addition to this, there are a variety of opportunities for a diverse population to both gather and share their perspectives through service opportunities, networking events, and in-class debates.

In my classwork, almost every class has provided an outlet to develop *Competency V*. In *Public Personnel Management*, for instance, we worked on hypothetical situations in human resource management, from hiring from a diverse pool of applicants to the communication of employee discharge, that require communicating with a diverse workforce. In *Public Administration and Democracy*, we discussed the complexity of this same sort of communication as it relates to administration in a democracy—with both employees and citizens. These same communicative concepts were reflected in other classes, from *Urban Policy* to *Program Evaluation* to *Grant Proposal Writing*, and so on. While there was a large focus based on conceptual considerations, I also had opportunities to present information in front of classes, furthering my ability to communicate with people from a variety of backgrounds.

I chose a combination of work samples to demonstrate my mastery of *Competency V*. Like with *Competency III*, I am using the cumulative memo for my work with the Urban Leaders Fellowship. Unlike *Competency III*, however, I am also including the final PowerPoint presentation of that information. The combination of the memo and presentation demonstrates my mastery of the competency in a number of ways, most prominent being the fact the work was done on a team. Working on a team gives rise to an understanding of much of the competency: in working with a team, I was given a direct opportunity to recognize and respect different points of view and integrate these into the final memo and presentation; I was also able to demonstrate my ability to work productively on a team, displaying professionalism and effective communication skills. As a team, we were able to recognize the strengths of each peer and use these to create a more holistic final product. These samples also demonstrate my ability to communicate information to a diverse community: at the end of the internship, my team presented our findings and recommendations at Atlanta City Hall to an audience including community stakeholders, as well as city council members. Finally, the samples demonstrate my ability to develop policies that enhance equitability and representation within a diverse jurisdiction. In all, the samples provided give a holistic view of my professional development as it comes to communication, in addition to looking towards how I will employ effective and inclusive communication throughout my career.

References

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