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Part I: Professional Goals & Public Service

Professional Goals Statement

I have lived my entire life in Athens, Georgia. It is where I was born, raised, and educated. It is where I got married and started my professional career. Now, as I prepare to move on, I can definitively say that Athens shaped me in nearly every way. All my experiences and opportunities—the things that define my life—tie back to Athens. That is how I have come to believe in the power of place.

Places have a profound effect on us. They make us who we are. They change us. And we do the same to places, for better or worse. As I approached the end of my studies at the University of Georgia, my professional goals statement began to take shape around that concept: I want to build stronger communities so that those around me and those who come after me love where they live. I love where I live. And I owe it to generations of public administrators who have contributed to my hometown. My hope is to have a similar impact on the places I will call home in the years to come.

Within my goals statement is a primary objective of community development and placemaking. That includes improving quality of life, cost of living, availability of affordable housing, and community identity. There is also a secondary objective of sustainability. I want the communities that I work for to operate in a way that manages resources, especially finances and the environment, responsibly so that the generations to come can also live well. That requires thoughtful planning and management.

Impact of the MPA Program

Over three years ago, I wrote in my statement of purpose for my application to the MPA program at UGA that this degree was the “necessary prerequisite” for the career of purpose I desired. Today, that remains true. Without this program, I would not be prepared to begin my career in public service.

Throughout the MPA program, I have gained new skills and knowledge that directly enhance my ability to contribute to public administration in my areas of interest. Many of the solutions to the problems we face lie at the intersection of local government and nonprofits. So, in addition to the core courses of this program, I completed four local government administration electives and two nonprofit-specific electives. The coursework directly bolstered my capacity to work in these public and nonprofit spaces.

During the program, I have applied concepts and theories in practical ways through projects and memos. I developed technical skills in financial management, data applications, and geographic information systems that will be valuable in my future career and help me stand out as a job candidate. And I have been taught leadership styles and personnel management strategies that will guide me in future positions.

There is no doubt that this program heightened my professional potential, refined my career purpose, and prepared me to achieve that purpose through my professional work.

Public Service Values

During my first semester, I took Public Administration & Democracy, which required students to develop a personal statement on professionalism and accountability. In that statement, I wrote about the public service values I aspire to most in my career: equity, public engagement,

sustainability, and representative bureaucracy. Today, I continue to hold those as my most important public values.

The emergence of new public administration introduced a more prevalent focus on enhancing social equity through public administration (Frederickson 1971). I wrote about poverty alleviation and enhancing generational wealth in my MPA statement of purpose, I've studied affordable housing policies, and I remain committed to improving social equity among citizens. But I also learned about equity theory as it relates to employee management and work motivation through core MPA classes like Public Management and Public Personnel Administration. As a future manager, I need to remain mindful of how equity relates to how I treat my employees—not just how it relates to the public.

I will be intentional and strategic in engaging the public in the policy process. I loved the way Athens-Clarke County involved individuals in the Envision Athens planning process because it placed the emphasis on public input. It is crucial to draw your citizens into participation and disseminate information to the public regularly. And as it relates to public budgeting, an interest of mine, I agree that public engagement is best aligned with the values of democracy (Willoughby 1918). At the end of the day, public administrators should not operate in a professional vacuum, relying only on their own education and judgment. We should partner with our constituencies so that we truly embody democracy.

Sustainability is a key component of my professional goals statement. The work we do today is important, but it should not just benefit today's population. Our work should be done so that generations to come can enjoy its fruit. This does not only relate to responsible fiscal policy or efficiency in government. It also applies to land-use planning, energy conservation,

environmental stewardship, and climate change. I want those who come after me to be able to love their community as well, not feel like they need to atone for our generation's failures.

I will be a champion of representative bureaucracy, the idea that our governments should reflect the people they serve. People like me have been overrepresented in government for the entirety of our nation's history. As a manager, I will need to take proactive measures to increase the diversity of candidate pools and be mindful of the demographic composition of my communities. Ultimately, the public will have more trust and confidence in their government when they see themselves in their government.

Part II: Career Reflection

During my first year in the program, I worked as an administrative specialist in the dean's office at the UGA College of Pharmacy. I was not always enthusiastic about my career around the time I entered the program. I struggled to understand how my role related to my ultimate career goals. I valued my job mostly because it allowed me to participate in the Tuition Assistance Program while I pursued my degree. But as I began my coursework, I immediately was able to tie material from class to my work. My favorite moments at work were the ones in which I could make that connection, reminding myself that I was already working in a public service job.

In my role at the College of Pharmacy, I supported three main areas: conference planning, program assessment, and procurement. I also provided high-level administrative support to the associate dean and maintained several UGA websites. During my first semester, the emphasis on efficiency as a public service value in Public Administration & Democracy stood out and motivated me to find more efficient ways to work. Through that process, I

developed a standard set of operating procedures for college staff to use when administering course evaluations for academic programs.

I also became more interested in the financial side of public administration while taking Public Financial Administration and Public Financial Management during my first year. I immediately was able to apply concepts like the break-even analysis to my role managing the budget for a pharmaceutical conference. I also better understood how transparency and integrity factored into the compliance process I was responsible for as a holder of a departmental purchasing card.

In January 2020, I transitioned into a new role with UGA's Development & Alumni Relations division. In that position, I managed communications and marketing projects for five internal clients: Parent Giving, Black Alumni, the Career Center, the Alumni Association, and the UGA Foundation. I also wrote content for a variety of division- and university-wide initiatives. It was the perfect opportunity to use my writing skills and build valuable experience in project management. A few years before, Blaine Williams—the city manager for Athens-Clarke County—told me to focus on gaining project management experience if I wanted to be a city manager one day. So, that's what I did.

During the spring semester of 2020, I took a Local Government Management elective that featured a panel of local government practitioners each week. Prior to that course, I knew I enjoyed branding. Previously, I led the rebranding efforts for a conference at the College of Pharmacy. One week in the course, we discussed community branding and economic development. Ever since then, I have been specifically interested in community branding and placemaking. This is an interest I was able to develop more working for UGA. In my communications job at UGA, I utilized several different guides that used the overall UGA brand

to create a specific style for individual units or programs. When we covered this topic in a later nonprofit marketing course, I learned so much and became more convinced I wanted to work on those sorts of community branding projects in the future.

My role with Development & Alumni Relations helped me learn skills in public sector communications, something that will no doubt be useful in future government roles. I was responsible for producing content geared towards a variety of diverse audiences, from philanthropic parents to Black alumni and university trustees. Especially during the turbulent and sensitive year of 2020, I spent significant time getting to know my audiences more so that I could effectively communicate with them. This is a principle that I learned more about in 2021 through my Strategic Marketing for Public and Nonprofit Organizations elective with Dr. Rebecca Nesbit. That course was the most valuable course I took in the program in terms of immediate application of material to my work. Given that I worked in public sector marketing, every bit of course material was helpful in boosting my knowledge of the field, especially given I did not study marketing as an undergraduate student. Dr. Nesbit taught us the importance of understanding your audience before beginning a project. She also talked about starting with the “why” behind a project. Both concepts helped me to pause and step back at the beginning of each new project I worked on. Instead of jumping right into the busyness of my workload, I became more reflective and ensured I was clear on the primary purpose of a marketing tactic and about how the audience may affect messaging. Dr. Nesbit also taught us about value propositions, which really helped move me toward a more complete understanding of the marketing work I was already doing at UGA.

So many of the concepts from that class, from stewardship and engagement to volunteer management, applied directly to my work for UGA. I was able to incorporate public service

values into my work as well. For example, I helped raise money for the Black Alumni Scholarship Fund—an initiative that highlighted equity and diversity in higher education. I also worked on the President’s Annual Report to high-level donors and government officials, a project that represented the values of stewardship and transparency. In my work on the Bulldog 100 and 40 Under 40 programs, I advocated for strategies to increase the diversity of applicant pools. This included changing language for Bulldog 100 to be more inclusive of nonprofit organizations—many of which did not realize they were eligible to apply.

Since 2020, I have also worked as a seasonal, part-time elections clerk for the Athens-Clarke County Board of Elections. I worked the 2020 presidential election, January 2021 runoff, and the November 2021 E-SPLOST election. That experience has been incredibly valuable, because I have been able to see concepts like street-level bureaucracy in action (Lipsky 1980). Never had I been in a position for a local government in which I was directly delivering services as the face of the government. At a time during which there was much skepticism around elections, I relished the opportunity to provide professional and efficient services to citizens while promoting clarity and integrity in the work.

More recently, I came to understand neutral competency in more personal terms (Kaufman 1969). The new election law in Georgia meant there were new changes to the process when I showed up to work the most recent election. I disagreed with many of the changes, including a new rule that rejects all provisional ballots cast before 5 p.m. by voters who are at the wrong precinct. But my job was not to create policy. It was to implement it. I am sure that will not be the first time I will experience that tension, so it was a good experience in which my MPA training helped clarify my role.

Part III: Program Competency Reflection

Competency 1: To Lead and Manage in Public Governance

I would argue this is the most critical of the five MPA core competencies, because to effectively lead and manage in the public sector requires the other four. It is the competency that brought me to the MPA program because I knew it would prepare me for leadership in public service. During my first semester, Public Administration & Democracy helped me understand the unique public sector environment. I learned how transparency and ethics change the legal context for public organizations. I also studied wicked problems and how they are not challenges that can be solved by one government alone, but require partnerships across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

In Public Personnel Administration with Dr. Sun Young Kim in the fall of 2020, I studied theories of employee motivation, several performance evaluation methods, approaches to diversity and representative bureaucracy, and issues related to compensation and pay scales. Given the unique environment of the public sector, it is important for managers to understand these issues and how they can differ from the private sector. This is an area that I have continued to explore with Dr. Hal Rainey this semester in Public Management. I am learning about management topics that can be applied across sectors, like Theories X and Y, but also am discussing case studies on a weekly basis to apply class concepts specifically to public sector examples.

However, I chose an assignment from a different course to represent this competency in my portfolio. During my first semester, I took Public Financial Administration with Dr. Tima Moldogaziev. The final project was a group assignment which required developing a 5-year

Capital Improvement Plan for a city government. This project was the first major project of the program that developed my ability to “understand the importance and dynamics of working in groups or teams to make collaborative decisions, incorporate diverse viewpoints, and create a cohesive and professional product” (Department of Public Administration & Policy 2021). Together, our team discussed competing capital priorities, developed an evaluation process to measure need, agreed upon priorities, and identified funding mechanisms to accomplish our goals. This was not an easy or simple project, but I am proud of how we worked together to produce a professional product that reflects the challenges of public sector management.

Competency 2: To Participate in the Public Policy Process

It is important to remember that public administrators do not solely implement the policies adopted by legislatures or councils. Public administrators can participate in the public policy process, lending expertise and analysis so the policies enacted by elected officials are in their best form. That may be most true in the area of fiscal administration, where many elected officials may not have the time or expertise to get into the weeds of public finances.

In Public Financial Administration, I learned the basics of fiscal administration and how to conduct analyses like cost-benefit analysis, budget analysis, forecasting, capital budgeting, and property tax analysis. Even if I do not work for a budget office, I will end up relying on this foundational knowledge in a future manager or director role. Once I climb high enough, I am guaranteed to have a budget as some part of your responsibilities. This class equipped me to participate in the public policy process without a fear of budget analysis and fiscal policy. I continued developing my ability to formulate, implement, and evaluate policy the following semester in Public Financial Management with Dr. Alex Combs. I learned about government

accounting principles, funding mechanisms, and conducted research to evaluate the effectiveness of federal funds on affordable housing in Georgia counties.

Currently, I am learning how to use additional tools for policy evaluation in Economic Foundations of Policy Analysis with Dr. Emily Lawler. I now have basic tools to approach policies from the perspective of an economist, applying theories and concepts from class directly to policies that interest me. I have also learned the economic rationale behind existing policies like Certificate of Need and antitrust laws.

Competency 2 emphasizes the ability to persuasively communicate information through concise written documents. For that reason, I selected an assignment from Local Government Management with Ted Baggett to reflect this competency in my portfolio. While taking this elective course, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. I chose to incorporate that current event into a memo assignment. Recognizing that sales tax revenues would plummet for many local governments at that time, I wanted to understand how that would affect Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) projects. Using the skills gained from my coursework, I forecasted sales tax revenue shortfalls for Athens-Clarke County and how they would affect several SPLOST programs. Then, I provided recommendations to the Mayor & Commission. The assignment allowed me to understand how these taxation programs worked and apply my financial analysis skills to concisely persuade elected officials to adopt recommended solutions.

Competency 3: To Analyze, Synthesize, Think Critically, Solve Problems and Make Decisions

Many of the courses I mentioned above also influenced my growth in this third competency, especially Public Financial Administration and Economic Foundations of Policy Analysis. Those two courses required me to understand complex issues, interpret difficult

situations, and synthesize the problems and solutions in a simple, concise manner. So, it makes sense that that ability is reflected in my first two portfolio items. However, there are other classes that developed my competency in this area. One of my favorite courses I took during the MPA program was Research Methods in Public Administration with Dr. Bradley Wright. That course fundamentally changed my understanding of research and data. It taught me to be a healthy skeptic, leaning on my knowledge and training so that I do not fall victim to misleading information or flawed rationales in a professional setting. I have the expertise to understand where research and data interpretation can go wrong and will be able to apply that directly in my career.

I am currently taking Data Applications in Public Administration, another course that is sharpening my ability to analyze and think critically about complex issues. Dr. Combs has shared his expertise in data applications software so that I feel ready to utilize that software in a professional role. I feel confident in my basic abilities to analyze an issue using data analysis in R Studio and then synthesize the problem for others to aid in the decision-making process. That is an incredible new technical skill I did not anticipate gaining in this program and I will be a better employee because of it.

To illustrate this competency in my portfolio, I chose my final project for Introduction to Geographic Information Systems, an elective course I took during the summer of 2020. The project required using ArcGIS software to analyze and interpret data related to a problem. I studied fresh food accessibility in Athens-Clarke County, created maps, and presented policy recommendations based on my findings. The portfolio item includes my full final paper and presentation slides.

Competency 4: To Articulate and Apply a Public Service Perspective

While all MPA students will likely agree that public service motivation is what drives them, the meaning of the “public service perspective” can vary from student to student. Throughout the history of American public administration, this perspective has changed. Early on, the dominant perspective was that the government should value efficiency above all else. In *Public Administration & Democracy* and *Public Management*, I learned how scientific management perspectives gave way to new public administration, how approaches to budgeting have evolved over the last century, and how public service values can often conflict with one another.

Public managers will differ in how they weigh certain public service values and in their preferred approaches to budgeting or organizational structure. This program gave me a foundation to understand different perspectives, while providing the space for me to determine my own views. Because of this, I feel confident that I can go into a workplace and apply my knowledge while also valuing the opinions of my coworkers. As mentioned earlier, I reflected on public service motivation and values in *Public Administration & Democracy* to produce a written statement of professionalism and accountability. *Public Personnel Administration* expanded on this competency further by diving into management styles, organizational structure, and merit systems as they relate specifically to public administration. In *Public Management*, I am continuing to learn how managers approach these areas differently.

For this competency, I chose two portfolio items. The first is a case memo from *Public Administration & Democracy*. In that memo, I evaluated a delicate situation that involved several partner organizations and provided next steps to address the problem. The reason I chose this assignment is because it incorporated concepts from academic literature and directly applied

them to the case to support my arguments. For example, many of the agencies in this case have their own narrow mission. But I argue that the agencies need to broaden their view of success by reminding them that the public will be better served by a “networked government” that collaborates to solve the problem (Benington & Moore 2011). I also stand by the elected officials in this case, even though they serve as an obstacle to progress, because they have an obligation to be responsive to the public who just elected them. The second assignment is a public manager biography I wrote for the same course. I interviewed Jim Dove, who at the time was the director of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission. I included this assignment because it reflects on Mr. Dove’s specific views on public service perspective and how he applied them to his own career. In the paper, I also tie in literature from class and discuss my own public service perspective.

Competency 5: Communicating with a Diverse Workforce and Citizenry

Throughout the MPA program, there was a consistent emphasis on the role diversity plays in public sector management in the twenty-first century. In *Public Administration & Democracy*, we learned about representative bureaucracy, a value I discussed earlier. The management implications of workforce and citizenry diversity was discussed in several courses, including *Public Personnel Administration*. In that course, we discussed different approaches to recruiting diverse candidates, learned how perception of equity influences an employee’s motivation, and explored how selection methods can be biased against minority candidates. I am thankful my MPA program included such in-depth attention to the issue of diversity, which is rightfully a prominent issue in public administration today.

During the Maymester of 2020, George Floyd was killed. At the time, I was in a Local Government Practicum elective with Dr. Zeemering. Our class was engaged with Athens-Clarke County on a project related to cultural arts in the community. Floyd's death and the ensuing movement for racial justice gave our class an opportunity to reflect further on equity and diversity as it related to our project, and we made an intentional effort to pay close attention to that issue in our project. As I mentioned earlier, my marketing course with Dr. Nesbit played a significant role in furthering this competency as well. During the final group project, a comprehensive marketing plan for a theater in North Carolina, my group made a significant effort to engage the Black community and diversify the play selection through our marketing strategies.

For this competency, I want to again highlight the public manager biography about Jim Dove. In that paper, I reflect on some specific examples in Mr. Dove's career in which his success depended on his ability to effectively communicate with a variety of stakeholders. As a regional organization leader, Mr. Dove partnered with governments across the area that varied in their political persuasions. Not only did he need to respect the points of views of other leaders, but he had to promote that same respect among governmental leaders to achieve a common objective. Mr. Dove also discusses challenges related to managing more than one generation in the workforce and predicts future equity issues in Georgia for public managers to consider.

My final portfolio item, a final exam paper from Public Personnel Administration, also illustrates my development of this competency. In my response to the first question, I discuss how cross-cultural intelligence is a key component of modern strategic human resource management (Pynes 2013). I also advocate for an active strategy of promoting diversity in the workforce. In the other two questions, I touch on other key public personnel management skills

in this competency, including how I would structure an interview process to minimize bias against minorities and a discussion of functional turnover management strategies.

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