

Safeguarding the Public Trust: Can Administrative Ethics Be Taught?

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ABSTRACT

The changing nature of the public sector brings new challenges to governance and ethical decision making. A main objective of the Master's of Public Administration (MPA) program is to bring current the pedagogy of ethics, in order to reflect the evolving nature of the sector. This article reports on one such effort that was employed in an introductory MPA course, using the approach outlined by Walton, Stearns, and Crespy in 1997. It also provides details on the students' evaluations of the coursework related to the ethics module. The ethics assignment given to students was designed to illustrate the complexity of moral reasoning that is required to maintain adherence to ethical principles, when processes lead to conflicts between deeply held value systems. Students are provided with an updated administrative framework that builds upon our Constitutional values, and emphasizes the implications of decision making for a population that is broader and more diverse than those in the past.

INTRODUCTION

Trust in government — or the lack thereof — has become a subject of considerable academic concern (Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997; Catlaw, 2007). As America has grown larger and more complicated, and as governments at all levels have assumed additional responsibilities, the need for public administrators to function as ethical and trustworthy managers of our public regulatory agencies also has grown. Whatever their political ideologies, most Americans want government to discharge its duties competently and in a manner consistent with our Constitutional values. Furthermore, even the most ardent contemporary advocate of limited government is likely to concede the utility and propriety of

Food & Drug Administration (FDA) regulations on food quality, for example, in an era when few of us grow our own vegetables or slaughter our own animals. Americans today must rely on government agencies to ensure that our water is drinkable, our aircraft flyable, our roads passable, and much more.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of being able to trust our government agencies to discharge these and other, similar, functions in a competent and ethical manner. When America goes through a time where government seems inept or corrupt, as we periodically do, that confidence is shaken, and our skepticism and distrust affect more than just the political system. This is because trust in our governing institutions inevitably sets the tone for our confidence in all institutions. When we perceive that our government is not trustworthy, that perception infects the entire society (Menzel, 1997, 2006; Bowman, 1990).

It is easy to assert that schools of public administration should teach aspiring public servants to be ethical and should encourage the integration of ethics into the curriculum, and into all aspects of program operation (NASPAA, 2009).¹ Operationalizing that instruction, however, has proven to be more complicated. A recent article in the *Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAAE)* outlined a praxis-based, ethical decision-making process that conceptualizes the public administrator as an agent who is prone to opportunism (Shareef, 2009). From this perspective, ethics is the counter-force to administrative efficiency, and a key reason for having ethical standards is to prevent moral hazard. Administrative moral hazards arise when managers take inefficient actions, often because their individual interests do not align with the public interest — a form of costless, unethical behavior for the administrator that has a significant cost to taxpayers (Milgrom & Roberts, 1992). In short, according to this analysis, the ethical goal of administrators is to prevent inefficiencies. Shareef incorporates the Rawlsian (1971) notion of basic rights and a social contract between citizen and government. The idea that public servants are obligated to provide and defend “core public values” also has been developed in recent literature (Bozeman, 2002).

These scholars all provide useful approaches to the subject matter of ethics, but collectively they underscore a basic challenge to public administration. That is, for the past 30 or more years, the discipline has struggled not only with the question of how to teach ethics, but also with the more basic, threshold question: What *are* public administration ethics? There is reasonably broad agreement about what administrative ethics are *not*. They are not vague, “feel-good” exhortations about an undefined public interest, and they are not simply the general ethical principles that typically guide personal, moral choices (Goss, 1996). Just as the legal and medical professions have codes of ethics tailored to their professions, public administrators have adopted ethical principles for public stewardship.

We believe the approach to ethics outlined in this article adds to the literature by focusing on new challenges that are related to the evolving nature of governance. A main premise is that the American Society for Public

Administration (ASPA) Code of Ethics implicitly commits public administrators to adjust their frameworks for decision making in a way that reflects the changing nature of the public, and — by extension — the public interest. Indeed, this Code requires public administrators “to exercise discretionary authority to promote the public interest” (ASPA Code of Ethics, 2009, Section I, p.1), and further recognizes that the Code of Ethics is “a living document” (Section IV, p.7).

The public administrator also must consider implications for a population that is broader and more diverse than those in the past. For example, today’s “governance” features new entities and new relationships that may be subject to new conflicts of interest — ones that previously had not existed (e.g., Kennedy & Malatesta, 2010). As a result, students should be familiar with the ASPA Code, but the utility of ethics codes can only be realized after students learn how to recognize circumstances (old and new) that pose ethical dilemmas, and acquire a broader understanding of the approaches to ethical decision making. One way for students to grasp and prepare for the evolving challenges is to discuss events, preferably local ones, that pose ethical dilemmas. It also is important for students to develop a “system” for considering ethical dilemmas. Thus, the ethics assignment that is discussed in this article requires students to reflect on the broader implications that are inherent to any decision brought on by the changing nature of governance.

In the next section, we discuss the broader topic of administrative ethics. In the remainder of this article, we report on our efforts to teach administrative ethics, which build on the approach outlined by Walton, Stearns, and Crespy in 1997, and then we provide details on students’ evaluations of the coursework, as related to the ethics module.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE ETHICS

In an important 1988 article in *Public Administration Review*, April Hejka-Ekins summarized what she referred to as the history of “vacillation” in the field. According to Hejka-Ekins, the political/administrative framework — one that administrators were viewed within during much of pre-World War II American history — was based upon a conception of administrators as being little more than functionaries who carried out the policies assigned to them by political actors. Public administration was thus deemed to be a purely ministerial and “value neutral” field. The importance of ethics for public managers became clearer once this particular paradigm weakened, and the profession recognized the importance of assuring the ethical exercise of bureaucratic discretion (Hejka-Ekins, 1988). As the article notes, however, even after recognizing the importance of ethical public management, there remained a considerable distance between a stated commitment to ethics instruction, and actual educational practices. The cadre of approaches in the *Handbook of Administrative Ethics* (Cooper, 2004) and other, more recent, writings are testament to the

continued lack of a unified approach (Maesschalck, 2004; West & Berman, 2004).

Hejka-Ekins raised a number of questions that would characterize much of the subsequent literature on the subject: What goals are appropriate for ethics instruction? What standards are appropriate for ethics instruction? How can those of us who teach administrative ethics help our students cultivate sound moral judgments?

Several scholars have argued that professional ethics should be viewed through a normative lens (Bayles, 1989), rather than through the bureaucratic-democratic framework that has characterized much of the literature. Terry Cooper summarized five normative theories advanced by the literature:

1. Regime values, which are most closely associated with John Rohr (1976, 1989);
2. Social equity, which draws primarily from John Rawls' (1971) immensely influential *Theory of Justice*;
3. Virtue, which is connected to character development;²
4. Citizenship theory, which is closely allied to regime values; and
5. Public interest, with its absolutely enormous literature selection that includes Frederickson (1990), and Goodsell (1990), and that has been criticized as being so broad it lacks concrete application (Cooper, 2004).

In 1984, ASPA adopted a Code of Ethics that drew from all of these normative perspectives. Divided into sections, the Code reflects Constitutional values of

- A. Equal protection (opposing discrimination, promoting fairness and equality);
- B. Due process (mentioned in several sections);
- C. Free speech (protection of dissent, obligations of transparency); and
- D. Emphasizing governmental accountability and the rule of law.

The current ASPA Code of Ethics also commits members to:

- E. Serve the public interest;
- F. Respect the Constitution and laws;
- G. Demonstrate personal integrity;
- H. Promote ethical organizations; and
- I. Strive for professional excellence.

THE WALTON, STERNS, CRESPIY FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING ETHICS

The W-S-C framework for teaching ethics takes as a starting point the

results from a 1986 survey of 64 ethics instructors from NASPAA-accredited schools. These public administration educators explicitly defined the three most important goals of ethics education as the following:

1. Developing an awareness of ethical issues and problems in the field;
2. Building analytical skills that can address those problems when they arise; and
3. Cultivating an attitude of moral obligation and personal responsibility as part of public service (Walton, Sterns & Crespy, 1997, p.471, referencing Hejka-Ekins, 1988, p.887).

Based on their own experiences in teaching, W-S-C emphasized three additional learning outcomes:

1. “Developing an understanding of the diverse perspectives of moral philosophers (Hejka-Ekins’s ‘awareness of ethical issues’);”
2. “Understanding how to frame the ethical dilemma in a model that allows discussion from diverse perspectives (Hejka-Ekins’s ‘build analytical skills in decision making’);” and
3. “Developing skills necessary for playing out the conflicts that arise, so that students can measure the extent to which they have fulfilled the manifold and conflicting moral obligations they have identified” (Walton, Sterns & Crespy, 1997, p. 471).

In the paragraphs that follow, we report on an effort to bring the pedagogy of ethics current with the changing nature of public administration and management. Our approach integrates the W-S-C framework, while adhering to Rohr’s regime values, which — as we will explain — are consistent with the ASPA Code (2009). Moreover, we also recognize that ethics should not be treated as a one-time-only course. Ethics should be integrated into the curriculum and all aspects of program operation (ASPA Code of Conduct, 2009). Accordingly, we explain how ethics training also is covered in a separate, but required, MPA core course at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, titled “Law and Public Policy.” We explain how it is addressed with preliminary readings in “Governing and Leading in a Global Society,” another core MPA course, and, finally, how it is supplemented with a practical exercise as a component of “Governing and Leading in a Global Society.”

PRELIMINARIES

Ethics involves cultivation of an attitude of moral obligation and personal responsibility, as part of public service (W-S-C # 3). Following the U.S. Constitution is a normative value and moral obligation that we all should agree upon. Indeed,

the current ASPA Code (2009) holds its members to a "...healthy respect for the Constitution and law." This also is consistent with John Rohr's regime values. The regime framework that John Rohr refers to is covered as part of the MPA core curriculum. All students in our MPA programs are required to take a class in "Law and Public Policy." The class explores public administration and policy in the context of the U.S. Constitution, government institutions, laws, and regulations. It emphasizes that the legitimacy of public service rests on the Constitutional principles of equality, fairness, representativeness, responsiveness, and due process.

Together, #1 and #5 of the W-S-C framework focus on an appreciation for ethical issues, within the context of a changing professional environment that includes new and sometimes daunting challenges. Specifically, today's public administration instructors must introduce students to the ethics of a profession that is just beginning to grasp the complexities of administration in an ever-more diverse polity, where the increasing population *pluribus* challenges the ability to forge American *unum*. We must add to our subject-matter the ethical issues that arise in the context of emerging globalization. Even more challenging is that we must teach an ethic of public life at a time when the very definition of "public life" is undergoing radical redefinition, because the lines separating public from private and nonprofit have become increasingly blurred by outsourcing, privatization, public-private partnerships, and a variety of other mechanisms that have collectively given us the term "governance" in place of the former, more recognizable, "government."

We address #1 and #5 of the W-S-C framework in "Governing and Leading in a Global Society." In the first five weeks of the course, students are introduced to the differences between managing in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors; the changing governance landscape; and the challenges of privatization and outsourcing. In the first five weeks of the semester, students read a series of academic articles on leadership, governance, and globalization, as well as selected chapters from *Leadership: Succeeding in the Private, Public and Nonprofit Sectors*, an edited volume by Sims & Quatro (2005); and Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000).

ETHICS COMPONENT OF COURSE

The second five weeks of "Governing and Leading in a Global Society" includes a set of lectures on general ethics — definitions, concepts, and references to key writings on the subject. Students are shown how to recognize an ethical dilemma (W-S-C # 5), and introduced to the differences between ends approaches (Utilitarian), means approaches (Deontological), and pragmatic approaches (compromises and political realities) (W-S-C #4).³ Importantly, class work also involves the presentation of short cases that address ethical dilemmas (W-S-C #6). Three objectives in the class discussion are to

1. Give students practice in identifying relevant facts of the case and in setting aside the facts unnecessary to the analysis;

2. Get students to think systematically before making a decision, for example, by asking themselves several questions pertinent to any decision (Whom will this decision affect? What are the wider implications? What happens if I do nothing?); and
3. Bring out the limitations of each ethical approach. For example, Utilitarianism requires us to judge acts in light of their consequences, yet we do not always know what consequences will ensue. Likewise, Deontology assumes that we have a clear sense of our duties of obligation, yet most agree that there often is a gray area.

Finally, there is a discussion of how moral reasoning is complicated by globalization and increased cultural and religious diversity, as well as by sectoral blurring (W-S-C # 1 and #5). For example, as part of a class discussion, students are asked to consider how individuals from different religious backgrounds (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) might view issues of sexual discrimination, whistle-blowing, and stealing. The point is not to opine about the values of these faiths, but to make students aware that perspectives and levels of sensitivity on these issues can vary. With respect to sectoral blurring, we read and discuss a local ordinance that prohibits panhandling. The ordinance is considered, along with a mission statement of a local nonprofit organization that provides food and funds for homeless people. Students are asked to consider how they *might* handle these conflicting objectives (as opposed to how they *would* handle them). Situations where the objectives of nonprofit groups are inconsistent with local ordinances appear more often, as nonprofits proliferate in our communities. A key objective at the end of the class section is to develop in students an appreciation for the evolving complexity of public sector decision making.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Following the introduction of these key concepts, students are given a two-part assignment: Part One requires that the student find and present an ethical dilemma in case format (W-S-C # 1, # 2 and #6). The case must be an actual ethical dilemma that recently has occurred, or is presently occurring, within a state or local government, or in a nonprofit. This approach has the added benefit of keeping students in touch with local events (W-S-C #1). The narrative should (a) be limited to one page, (b) include only the relevant facts, and (c) pose a dilemma at the end. The grading rubric for the narrative is presented in Table 1.

Part Two required students to relate the facts of the case to ethical theory (W-S-C #4). Students choose from a wide variety of ethical challenges, including workplace discrimination, the controversial conscience exemptions that allow pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions based on moral or religious grounds, privatization, truthfulness in grant-writing, and same-sex marriage (W-S-C #5). The prescribed format of the student essays said they were to identify (a) the

relevant facts of the case, (b) the applicable laws or regulations, (c) the ethical issues involved, (d) the primary stakeholders, and (e) the available alternatives.

They then had to identify the most relevant perspective — Utilitarian, Deontological and/or Pragmatic — and the advantages and disadvantages of each. At first this approach seemed awkward, but there was a logic to having students pose questions. Specifically, they learned to think of issues more objectively, rather than from their own perspectives. Next, they were to consider whether and how culture and religion had played a role in creating and resolving the dilemmas. Finally, they identified the practical constraints involved, and to what extent the changing nature of governance might affect the situation (W-S-C #1). Students were required to avoid giving their opinions or any indicators of right and wrong (W-S-C #5). The full set of questions that students were required to answer appears in Table 2 and the related grading rubric appears in Table 3.

Table 1.
Grading Rubric for Ethical Dilemma Narrative

	Narrative is reasonably titled and subtopic identified, if applicable
	All facts necessary to narrative are included
	Facts/Background are limited to what is necessary to the storyline
	Alternative courses of action/moral dilemma posed at end of narrative
	Main actors are identified, but limited to those in storyline
	Narrative flows logically, positions do not seem disconnected
	Narrative conforms to one-page limit
	Writing is concise and to the point
	Source is identified
	Writing is without grammatical errors
	Total Points for Part 1

Table 2.
Student Handout

Questions for Part 2 of Ethics Assignment. Answers should be based on the moral dilemma you posed in your narrative (Part 1).
What are the relevant facts of the case?
What laws are relevant?
What are the ethical issues?
Who are the primary stakeholders?
What are the possible alternatives?
What are the relevant questions from a utilitarian (teleological) perspective?
What are the relevant questions from a deontological (Kantian) perspective?
What are the relevant questions from a prudent pragmatism perspective?
What role do culture and religion have in this dilemma?
How does globalization affect your approach to this decision? (There are several approaches to this answer but I am looking for you to draw on readings and lectures).
What do the three major religions [as defined in class] have to say about this issue?
What are some practical constraints?
What effect does the changing nature of governance have on the issue at hand?

Table 3.
Decision-Making Substance (Part 2 of Ethics Assignment)

	Considers the range of positive and negative consequences
	Acknowledges that consequences extend to a range of persons/groups
	Acknowledges that consequences can be short term/long term
	Acknowledges advantages/disadvantages of consequentiality approach
	Points for overall knowledge of utilitarian approach
	Acknowledges actions can measure up to numerous principles (equity, respect, etc.)
	Acknowledges advantages/disadvantages of action-based approach
	Demonstrates understanding of practical obstacles to decision
	Acknowledges decision is improved by considering range of facts and experiences
	Acknowledges that circumstances may change nature of decision
	Relevant facts are identified
	Ethical questions/issues are identified
	Alternative courses of action are identified
	Acknowledges codes (professional and organization-based) implicated in decision
	Acknowledges laws (international, national, state, and local) implicated in decision
	Demonstrates an understanding of how globalization affects nature of decision
	Demonstrates an understanding of how governance affects nature of decision
	Demonstrates an understanding of how culture might affect the nature of decision
	Demonstrates an understanding of how religion might affect the nature of decision
	Conforms to 3-page limit
	Includes APA-style bibliography
	Total Points for Part 2 of Ethics Assignment

THE EVALUATION

Following the first class to incorporate this approach and assignment, a colleague evaluated the experience, in order to determine whether it met its objectives. As noted previously, the three overarching goals of ethics education have been identified by PA scholars as the following: (1) developing an awareness of ethical issues and problems in the field; (2) building analytical skills to address those problems when they arise; and (3) cultivating an attitude of moral obligation and personal responsibility as part of public service. Accordingly, the evaluation instrument was developed to test the degree to which these goals were satisfied.

Students in the class were asked to complete a questionnaire. The survey instrument began with a grid, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Survey Questionnaire: Principled Decision-Making Assignment

How much did the principled decision-making assignment that you just completed emphasize the following mental activities?

		Very Much	Quite a Bit	Some	Very Little
a.	Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form.				
b.	Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in-depth, and considering its components.				
c.	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships.				
d.	Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions.				
e.	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.				

Completion of this grid was intended to identify the students' own perspectives on the mental activities involved in the assignment, including the roles of memorization, analysis, synthesis, judgment, and application.

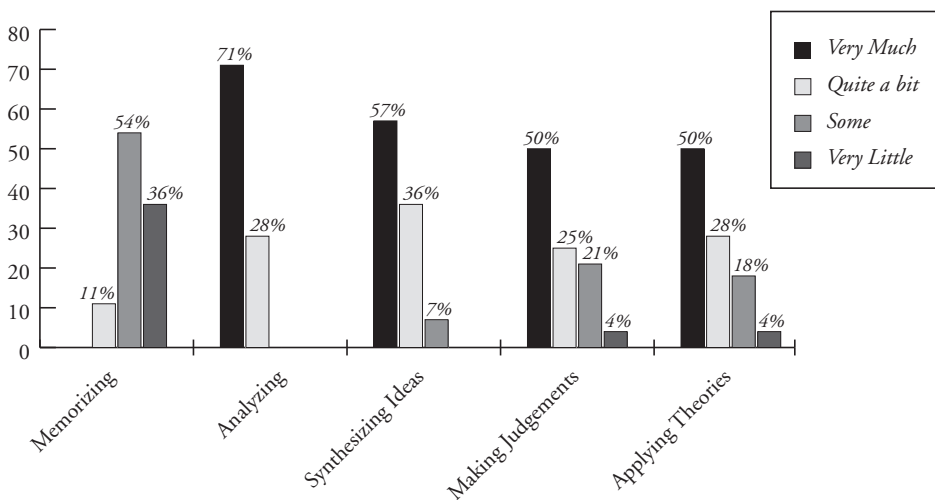
The Likert-type response categories were: "very much," "quite a bit," "some," or "very little." Some of the results were particularly encouraging:

- 100 percent of the students reported that the exercise involved "quite a bit" or "very much" analyzing of the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in-depth and considering its components;
- 93 percent of the students reported that the exercise involved "quite a bit" or "very much" synthesizing and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships; and
- 78 percent of the students reported that the exercise involved "quite a bit" or "very much" applying of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations.

Lower percentage scores were reported on the two mental activities of memorization and judgment making. Given the emphasis placed on higher-level skills and objectivity, we did not interpret this as negative.

A summary of responses related to the mental activities involved in the assignment are collated in a bar chart, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Mental Activities Related to Assignment According to 28 Students: Bar Chart of Students' Responses



The grid was followed by twelve questions that further tested the students' judgment about the extent to which desired learning outcomes were achieved: Did they truly learn the basic concepts being presented? Did students learn to apply those concepts to "facts on the ground"? Did they increase their awareness of how others approached these issues and tasks, and did they learn how to evaluate those approaches? Did they feel confident that they could apply the principles involved to new situations? For each statement, the student was asked whether he or she "strongly agreed," "agreed," felt "neutral," "disagreed," or "strongly disagreed." The learning outcome questions are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

Student Questionnaire: Judgments on Achieving Desired Learning Outcomes

Please comment on the extent to which you believe that you mastered each of the following learning outcomes for this assignment. Circle the answer that most closely represents your beliefs.

1. I can identify a set of circumstances that present leadership and ethical challenges for deciding contemporary public policy issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I can distill the ethical dilemma(s) presented by a contemporary public policy issue in a clear, concise, and neutral written narrative, according to the guidelines presented in this assignment.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I can apply the teleological (utilitarian), deontological (Kantian), and prudent pragmatism approaches, as described in the classical and traditional literature, to decision making for contemporary public policy issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I can identify and acknowledge a range of short-term and long-term, positive and negative consequences of a teleological decision-making framework to a range of persons or groups affected by a contemporary public policy issue.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Table 5.

Continued

5. I can identify and acknowledge the principles (justice, equity, fairness, respect, dignity, etc.) embodied in the deontological approach to decision making for contemporary public policy issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I can identify and acknowledge the practical obstacles to decision making that are embodied in the prudent pragmatism approach to decision making for contemporary public policy issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I can identify and acknowledge how the quality of decision can benefit by considering a range of facts and experiences embodied in the prudent pragmatism approach, and that circumstances may change the nature of decision.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I can recognize and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the teleological, deontological, and prudent pragmatism approaches to decision making for a contemporary public policy issue.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I can identify professional and organization-based ethical codes and laws (international, national, state, and local) that are relevant to decision making and apply these appropriately and in an unbiased way to contemporary public policy issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I can identify and consider the roles of globalization, governance, culture, and religion in decision making for contemporary public policy issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. I can recognize my personal biases relative to globalization, governance, culture, religion, etc. and set these aside when analyzing and making a decision relative to contemporary public policy issue.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Table 5.
Continued

12. This assignment has caused me to re-consider my approach to decision making, and my future decisions will incorporate the principles of neutral analysis and analysis from different decision making frameworks.					
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
13. This assignment contributed to my ability to think critically and analytically.					
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	

It is clear from the self-reporting that a majority of the 28 students surveyed believed they gained an appreciation of ethical analysis. A few summations highlight the overall effectiveness of the assignment:

- 92 percent of the students reported that, after the assignment, they could identify a set of circumstances that present leadership and ethical challenges for deciding contemporary public policy issues;
- 97 percent of the students reported that, after the assignment, they could distill the ethical dilemma(s) presented by a contemporary public policy issue in a clear, concise, and neutral written narrative, according to the guidelines presented in this assignment;
- 100 percent of the students reported that, when analyzing a decision, they could identify and consider implications for governance and its related institutions, such as transparency and accountability; and
- 96 percent of the students reported that they could recognize their own personal biases relative to globalization, governance, culture, religion, etc., and could set these aside when analyzing and making a decision relative to contemporary public policy issues.

Self-reported outcomes are empirically suspect, and this sort of evaluation exercise suffers from the same drawbacks that characterize student evaluations of teachers' performance. Notwithstanding, we believe the evaluation exercise is useful in two very important ways. First, it requires an instructor to clearly identify the desired learning outcomes. Too often, those of us who teach these courses disproportionately focus our preparation on the subject matter we intend to convey, and neglect to think strategically about the conclusions we want

students to reach and the skills we want to impart. The creation of an evaluation instrument forces us to prepare for the classroom by considering what outcomes we are aiming for, and by identifying what information and skills we want the students to acquire during the semester.

Second, the feedback gained from student responses permits us to “test” their (admittedly subjective) perceptions about those outcomes against our intended results. In cases like this one — where the student responses appeared to reinforce the value of the assignment in terms of producing the desired outcomes — the instrument can assist in fine-tuning subsequent curricular choices, classroom discussions, and assignments. It allows the instructor to see areas of relative strength and weakness, and to respond appropriately.

In this case, students’ responses suggested that additional time should be spent reviewing specific ethics codes, and on learning the tenets of deontology. Specifically,

- 7 percent of students did not believe they could identify professional and organization-based ethical codes and laws (international, national, state, and local) that are relevant to decision making, and apply these appropriately and in an unbiased way to contemporary public policy issues; and
- 7 percent of students reported that they could not identify and acknowledge the principles (justice, equity, fairness, respect, dignity, etc.) embodied in the deontological approach to decision making for contemporary public policy issues.

CONCLUSION

While the field still lacks a consensus on the appropriate approach to teaching ethics, two things are certain: First, the changing nature of the public sector has brought new challenges to governance and ethical decision making. While ethical training was difficult to operationalize in the past, it seems even more challenging now. We have reported here on an approach to bring current the pedagogy of ethics, in order to reflect the evolving nature of the sector. It builds on the Walton, Stearns, & Crespy (1997) framework, acknowledges and adheres to our Constitutional foundations, and is consistent with both the current ASPA Code of Ethics and the NASPAA Code of Conduct.

Furthermore, regardless of our diverse perspectives, there is one normative basis we all must agree on: We are obliged to teach with a “healthy respect for the Constitution and law” (ASPA, 2009). The success of that task ultimately must rest upon the level of civic competence that students bring to the ethics classroom. This is because administrative ethics ultimately rest upon Constitutional competence (Rosenbloom, 1992). As John Rohr has persuasively argued, ethics must be understood within a regime framework (1989). This

is because ethical administrative behavior is largely defined by one's fidelity to the values of the governing philosophy. In the United States, that governing philosophy is expressed in our constituent documents: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Unfortunately, there is substantial reason to be discouraged about the level of civic competence that students bring into our classrooms.

A report issued by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in November, 2008, once again confirmed the deficits in civic literacy that had been highlighted in previous years. In "Our Fading Heritage: Americans Fail a Basic Test on Their History and Institutions," the Institute issued a truly sobering "report card" that detailed the alarming level of public ignorance about our most basic legal structures. This ignorance spanned a wide swath of demographics. Poor scores plagued graduates of poor and/or mediocre institutions, as well as graduates of so-called "prestige" colleges. (Harvard graduates had the nation's highest average score of 69.56% — a collective D-plus).

Addressing this extremely troubling deficit of civic literacy is well beyond the scope of this article, but we would be remiss if we did not identify this challenge to our ability to teach administrative ethics. Until this nation's high schools and colleges get serious about transmitting American Constitutional history and norms, any effort to teach administrative ethics will necessarily begin with the remedial task of introducing — or perhaps reintroducing — our students to the ethical, philosophical, and Constitutional premises of American government.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ The current Code of Good Practice for NASPAA-accredited schools is available on the NASPAA Web site, <http://www.naspaa.org/codeofgoodpractice/index.asp>
- ² Virtue/character is understood as “the predisposition to behave consistently with one’s espoused values and principles” (Cooper, 2004, p. 398). It also is understood that character is developed, built over time, and cultivated (Cooper & Wright, 1992).
- ³ The five-week period did not allow sufficient time to introduce more than a few of the approaches to ethics reasoning. However, the approaches chosen are widely covered in ethics textbooks. Boss (2003) is a good starting point for a more comprehensive list of approaches. As another option, instructors can refer to recent textbooks on public administration ethics, including Geuras and Garofalo (2005), and Menzel (2006).

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