

## Research Article

# Exploring Experiential Learning (EL) in Masters of Public Administration Programs

Kimberley Garth-James\*

Department of Public Administration, Notre Dame de Namur University, California, USA

\***Corresponding author:** Kimberley Garth-James, Department of Public Administration, Notre Dame de Namur University, California, USA. Tel: +19168442331; +16505083469; Email: kgarthjames@ndnu.edu

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### Abstract

This project involves exploring the use of experiential learning in Masters of Public Administration (MPA) Programs. This research draws upon mostly primary sources including catalogue, institution policies, and a collection of comments from graduates. The literature review of research focus is problems, issues and prospects of using experiential learning approaches such as portfolios and internships to support MPA student learning outcomes. This focus supports the view of teaching theory and practical experience in the MPA curriculum which is most influential on post-graduate career accomplishments in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### Introduction

Academic professionals and community stakeholders concerned with opportunities for social justice and employment opportunities for graduates of MPA programs, think that what students are learning in the classroom is linked to practice. What do we expect from the graduate programs in public policy and administration? Certainly, we want students to think statistically, using evidence as the basis of their practical management and administration of public policy programs. Conversations in and out of the classroom regarding work (volunteer, experiential learning) in the community hark back to the “Early Voices” (see Classics of Public Administration) in public administration that regarded our field as one of theory and teaching public service, or practice. The term “Experiential Learning (EL)” refers to an established method of learning through practical experience [1]. The concept of students learning theory and getting experience is, from an epistemological view point, a learning process described in a book by David Kolb in *Experiential Learning* (1984). Essentially, the Kolb Model is an elaborate learning process of four (4) stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. The experiential process is cyclical, thereby allowing learning to happen in the four stages [2]. Drawing from the basic ideas of Kolb and the stages of learning, we examine the developments of theory and research that can enhance the use of EL in Master of Public Administration (MPA) program curricula to meet administration expectations for student learning and public service in the community.

The issue of ways to use, or even enhance, experiential

learning in post-secondary institutions is linked to student learning styles and providing a learning environment in the college/university space. For example, one author wrote that EL is restricted to certain disciplines such as healthcare (nursing), engineering and, at the community college level, vocational education (apprenticeships) [3]. In the literature, the topic of first time adult learners in the community colleges was about improvements to curricula and emphasis on establishing a “Legitimate Space” for EL and relational learning [4,5]. The concept of relational learning is reflective of adult learning goals, which is to use information and build adult learners’ skills through professorial lectures, career guidance and practical learning-i.e. application of theory to practice. The public administration discipline’s emphasis is on the ideas, theory, and applying theory in the real-world through paid work and volunteerism [6,7]. The Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), which provides the MPA (and Master of Public Policy, MPP) program accreditation establishes the standards that contribute to a better learning environment for exchange of academic ideas and the field of practice. The goal is to ensure that study and work experience area integrated into the educational philosophy and curricula of the MPA program for practitioners at universities with the NASPAA accreditation. Public administration is a field of study and practice (occupation, career). But, is there broad support for providing relational, or for that matter, experiential learning that requires a specific pedagogical approach? The question is addressed in this research study; but not meant as a treatise to support or oppose MPA programs and curricula that lack EL. Rather, the author’s aim is to share knowledge from the literature and examine one hundred

MPA programs across the country that seek to address the matter of EL to meet the needs of students, academic professionals and align to the institutional mission. This contribution presents an argument that relevant experience is a priori in the modern MPA curricula based on concrete ideas and deductions from literature review; and, observations (narratives) of student benefits from EL. It is important to note that traditional students (less than age 24 years old) and non-traditional adult learners (ages 25 years and up) usually do not have practical public service experience and are enrolling in MPA programs, therefore experience in public administration (nonprofits, governments, joint partnerships between public and private organizations) is necessary. One reason, with emphasis in the literature, is that practitioners (public servants) and institutional leaders connected to the community identify the valuable role and responsibility of faculty pertains to relational and experiential instruction—approaches useful to facilitate student engagement, by having them recognize the applicability and relevance of subjects, issues and analyses to their practice. Examples from the literature that associate faculty lectures and EL learning include case and scenario learning, and the action-inquiry method used in management and leadership courses; and, of course, the master's project approach (Capstone) which is a channel for practical application of theory to solve real-world problems. Formative responsibilities are centered on course evaluations and the role of the department chair (or director) is to help with the personal and professional development of the faculty member to cope with rigorous case-study teaching methods; or, to find some way to combine theory and practice. Interestingly, research associates the formative and normative tasks with student learning success. As such, this study tried to address whether (or not) there is a role for the academic leadership (program chairs/directors, college deans) to create an EL learning environment, and implications for the faculty members' formative and normative tasks. The assumption guiding this research is that department leadership is necessary for the effective implementation of experiential learning in MPA programs regardless of NASPAA accreditation status.

## Problem

The biggest problem facing academic leadership at most colleges and universities nationwide that operate the Master in Public Administration (MPA) program is student enrollments. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveals that of the nearly 800,000 graduate degrees conferred in 2014-2015, about half were in business and education; and, 6% in public administration. Nevertheless, public administration is still one of the five strong graduate degree fields. Another problem, and one that is the focus of this research study, is limited exposure to experiential learning in the MPA program curriculum. As public servants retire from federal, state and local civil service, there will be additional career opportunities for graduates with the MPA degree and honed skill sets to effectively manage public behaviors and problems. Colleges and universities are experiencing an increase in non-traditional first-time adult learners in community colleges that want practical experience [4]. Additionally, s traditional students in MPA programs that reach the final course, capstone (or seminar),

that confront workplace change, and challenges for which they are unprepared, also seek practical lessons. Today, the typical MPA student learner is different - older part-timers returning to work, commuters experiencing job retraining, or even first-timers, first-generation, and virtual students. This is a sharp change from long ago when colleges and universities primarily had less concern for the latter in life students—i.e. adult learners requiring career guidance and professorial lectures with application of theory to practice methods. Raising tuition, dramatic increases in teaching loads for full-time tenured faculty as well as a reduction in classes available to students have met with opposition from students, family and faculty. The focus on hiring adjunct faculty (or non-tenured part-time teachers) seems reasonable [8]; but addresses one aspect of the problem regarding employment competitiveness of MPA graduates. Administration leaders (provosts, deans, chairs, directors) believe that addressing the educational debt problem (e.g. excessive student loan debt), partly, is through course design, or re-design with focus on marketable job skills training to improve job readiness and competitiveness upon graduation from the MPA degree program. Instruction and curriculum that could make graduates competitive in the workplace, whether it be case-study method or career guidance, will require some form of experiential learning. The NASPAA Data Center (2014-2016) reports of MPA graduate employment surveys results for six (6) months after graduation, indicate that the majority are working in the nonprofit sector (23%), state and local government (15%), and national public service (11%). Narratives indicate that securing jobs requires some experience; and, problems linked to graduate enrollment status (students without industry experience) is a significant issue [5,6]. The issue is effective implementation of EL in the MPA program, preferably prior to or in the Capstone course, which is a primary goal of modern post-secondary institutions interested in approaches to effectively enhance student skills and insights necessary to becoming successful.

## Research Questions

Four research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What precisely is Experiential Learning (EL), and its approaches in the capstone course?
2. How is EL integrated into the Master of Public Administration curriculum (capstone course)?
3. What is the level of support (or opposition) in relation to creating EL learning environments in the post-secondary institution? Is there stakeholder (faculty, community) support?
4. What are the specific policies (MPA program admission requirements, other) for experiential learning? If none, should some programs have EL requirements?

## Definition

One interest is discovering the way institutional leaders perceive experiential learning. What is meant by the term Experiential Learning (EL)? The Oxford Dictionary defines the term experiential (an adjective) as a form of learning and

observation. In the early nineteenth century, this term was associated with learning and employment. There is wide use of the term experiential, or even experiential theory or experiential learning in public administration magazines, news articles, blogs, conferences, legislative sessions and reports, and academic curriculum. Examples include Cunningham's [9] research published in the Journal of Public Administration and Education (1997) citing Hopkins' (1994) concerns of "Disequilibrium" for learners without some experiential training in their graduate degree program. Further, Ohare's (1991)[10]urging that one necessary task of the professor is to help students learn the challenges of working in the public-sector workplace. Additionally, the concept of experiential learning is sometimes linked to John Dewey's theory regarding instruction in lessons that engage students in reflective thinking and action, the basis of problem-solving skills used in the workplace [11]. Kolb's Four Stages of learning framework has illuminated the important aspects of instruction within theoretical approach to adult education and emphasis on learning that is relevant and requires elaboration on the application of ideas in the lesson materials to solving real-world problems. Malcom Knowles in, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*, perspectives on adult learning and instruction has helped to advance the assumptions underlying the andragogy of learning; not least is defining the adult learner as one that needs to direct their own learning as well as transforming book knowledge into action. Becoming familiar with the nuances of the real-world public environment is, of course, essential in these times of great technology, globalization and robust executive governance.

The concept of EL is described in various journal articles, publications, and media reports related to MPA instruction, and curriculum in higher educational institutions include descriptions that characterized EL as:

1. Experiential learning approaches relevant to non-traditional adult learners that are working professionals (e.g. returning to school for retraining, commuters seeking education for promotional purposes)
2. Experiential learning approaches for traditional students without work experience (or limited) in the field of public administration, that seek practical knowledge about work conditions, norms, roles and responsibilities of public servants).
3. Experiential learning is driven by text, demonstration, and practice learning, and relies on the classroom environment to support student's learning style.

## Literature Review

The millennial students studying for a graduate degree in public administration tend to have little or no experiential knowledge of the field and its issues to address them through effective and efficient management. In this sense, my research findings agree with Cunningham, Hopkins and Ohare's observations that an end-product of instruction and curriculum will help students gain some practical experience. For example, at Jane DoE University,MPA

students' perceptions of a life-changing course (captured in course evaluations) was fulfilling the internship/externship requirement of the Capstone (or final course in program). Professors teaching in the graduate programs, namely NASPAA accredited public administration, across the US have carefully considered the role of internships/externships that correspond to student learning outcomes. Jane DoE University's MPA students find that some professional experience in the program can help to overcome challenges of finding and securing employment in the public industry. Teaching public administration requires an understanding of the field. Public administration has been a sub-field of political science and administrative science. Shafritz and Hyde (2017) [7]wrote the *Classics of Public Administration*, a useful resource to MPA students taking introductory courses in the discipline. Students are primarily engaged in learning modules that emphasize the nature of governments (laws, regulations, judicial decisions); and, administration of government programs. The field of public administration is characterized as being multidisciplinary - a combination of policy proposals that surface in sub-fields of administration which include human resource management, organizational theory, community-based research and statistical theory, budgeting and finance, ethics and public policy. The criticism of administrative science is strongly influenced by ideas of maximizing profits and efficiency which, sometimes, has unintended and awful consequences for the most vulnerable groups in society. The translation of politics into reality through administrative processes, is an expectation that has been met with criticism. Habermas' concerns about unequal distribution of wealth in the US and government interventions that are less attentive to political enfranchisement, exemplifies the conflicts in administration [12]. The students that observe injustices in their community, and in the classroom study poorly constructed legislative and administrative solutions must reconcile incompatible imperatives. MPA instruction and curriculum that use an experiential learning approach -i.e. students can study through cases, scenario and practical application-can produce alternative policies. The incompatible ways in which institutional leaders will pursue the normative goals to educate graduates in MPA, usually is a problem-i.e. public administrators and policy makers seek practical application of problem solutions that are assumed learned in the graduate program. One example is noted in Chappell's (2007)[12]work and reflective of critical theories urging attention to multicultural issues, problems and prospects in the public policy and public administration graduate program. Public servants can make improvements so that policy programs reflect the broad support of multicultural communities, the poor and most vulnerable in society [12]. Students must learn to think statistically-collect data and evidence to improve public administration practice. Instruction and curriculum development that include EL can address some concerns expressed in the critical public administration materials related to multicultural communities.

## Why experiential learning in MPA?

An article by Whitley (1989)[13]reveals a strong relationship between experiential knowledge gained in the academic program



of public administration/affairs and on-the-job performance at work in a public organization. From an experiential learning perspective, one recognizes that the classroom is an appropriate place for interactive learning in which professor and students learn by sharing knowledge and professional experiences. In the last decade, more publications, NASPPA reports and articles in the *Public Administration Times*, focus on professorial lectures about workplace problems and solutions, and coursework has been emphasizing emotion and cognition in lessons. Public administration resources, such as the *American Society for Public Administration academy journal*, *Public Administration Review* (PAR), as well as the ASPA conference workshops, include theory-to-practice studies, and methods that are commonly relied upon by professors to ensure integration theory and practice goals in the course lessons. Experiential learning in public administration is a necessary way to discover problems and policy solutions that exist in the community. Sanford (1966)[14] wrote about ways to validate self and place in the larger society by progressing through a series of exercises in the classroom that results in knowledge and skills relevant to making effective decisions in one's personal and professional (work) life. Promoting human development by teaching students to act -this is basic to changing personality, and developing oneself in the community [14]. Learning the norms of society and finding satisfaction in public service work-i.e. to change lives, is part of the exploring work done in the classroom. By sharing professorial knowledge of practical problems and solutions to improve management in the classroom (lectures, exercise), then students are less isolated from the real-world workplace problems. In the class room, students have a chance to work on interpersonal and management readiness skills. They learn about the unstable and defective public-sector environment that is a concern of policy makers, public servants and most Americans. Experiential learning provides an opportunity to address some of the perceptions that students have about what is wrong and ways to make public systems operate effectively (attain goals) and cost-efficiently. Instruction and curriculum should help students learn ways to have "Unintended consequences" and avoid adversely affecting student performance.

In the literature, identifying the experiential models was significant. The characterization of the EL approaches are:

- **Professional Projects:** Thinking about ways to best equip graduate student learners with skills to manage public policy projects and workplace behaviors is an opportunity in teaching that can be enjoyable. Professional projects include working in the community in a public organization (agency, nonprofits) to solve a problem; presentations (panel, instructor only) and peer review assessment tools can be useful to evaluate the appropriateness of the project and quality of service rendered by the student. Pool-Funai (2015) wrote that a well-orchestrated public administration program requires the conductor and musicians (or MPA students) to do their part (para #2). Professorial lessons with professional projects are commonly found in the requirements of the Capstone or Seminar course.
- **Internships (or externships):** These programs are used to

bridge the gap between classroom learning and basic practices in administrative occupations. Students are exposed to work environment characteristics, learn to use soft skills (interpersonal gifts) and hard skills (research, problem solving) to contribute. The MPA curriculum requirements vary by institution; certainly, simply writing up the master's thesis is not an internship.

- **Professional Portfolios:** The professional portfolios require students to collect documents (letters from organizations, other) and analytical work of problems confronting public organizations and make presentations using power points, and/or collection of work over the semester. This form of EL is occurring in few MPA courses in either the final course or as a separate work requirement. and work in the community. The portfolio is meant to develop competencies that are required in public service professionals.

The requirements for the capstone course with the abovementioned EL learning approaches depends on the program and institutional requirements. For instance, some MPA programs such as those at the University of Oregon, University of Missouri, and University of Southern California, have stipulations regarding practical learning or a field requirement. The professional portfolio as an assessment for competency-based EL has been discussed by focus group participants and community stakeholders [6]; revising the MPA curriculum is underway at large public universities such as California State University, Long Beach and Tennessee State University. The portfolio requirements and guidelines require "Systematic Organization" of evidence from the research and application to real-world problems; formative performance evaluations of student work are by the instructor and exam at the end of the semester [15]. The professional portfolio helps with writing, research, critical thinking and presentation skills; and, assignments are in the research courses, capstone or separate course toward the end of the MPA degree program. The way administrators and faculty define EL was necessary to understanding the intentions of programmatic design and policies. Clearly, the NASPAA MPA instruction and curriculum design are to meet accreditation standards that pertain to implementing models reflective of theory-to-practice (Naspaa.Org, 2017)[6].

### **What Policies Support EL in MPA Capstone Courses?**

The professional portfolio projects and internships are designed to prepare students for public service occupations (careers) and rely on professorial lessons with emphasis on theory-to-practice. The instruction role requires the input of academic leaders (e.g. deans, department chairs, program directors) that push the requirements to support MPA program goals and meet the needs of students. The research findings regarding writing formal administration policies and requirements to support EL in the MPA capstone courses indicates affirmative as some 90% in the sample for this study are using a form of practical learning. NASPAA accreditation for the MPA instruction and curriculum is globally recognized as the standard for public administration and public policy programs. Colleges and universities that hold the NASPAA accreditation for their MPA degree programs have written requirements to complete professional projects,

or internships with the students enrolled in the typical capstone (or seminar), or research methods courses (3 credits); few have requirements and guidelines for an internship course (1-3 credits). For example, MPA degree requirements in detail are in the course catalogue and require 39 credits (rather than the typical 36 credits), which includes taking a for-credit internship and completing 400 hours at post-secondary institutions such as Evans School of MPA, University of Wisconsin, California State University of the East Bay, SPA-American University, Price-USC (internships are in conjunction with capstone course), University of Colorado Denver, and Eastern Michigan University MPA (requires two internships in undergraduate and graduate program). The for-profit online universities do not have the internship requirement and tend to not have the NASPAA accreditation without the regional accreditation. What are colleges and universities generally requiring for admission to their graduate level MPA program? The MPA programs in our sample required the following: Application, 2-5 Letters of Recommendation, GRE Scores (Can substitute with LSAT or GMAT scores; or no test scores at all), Undergraduate Transcripts, Essays (including interests, career goals, etc.), History of work within the area of public administration (This is not a general requirement; and some schools' admissions accept enrollees and then require internship hours). Finally, Students' Alumni Survey data is useful to adjusting MPA Programs to meet industry expectations and student demand.

Our research discovered the following:

- Program requirements are available to students in either admissions or MPA program guidelines and course catalogue.
- MPA Capstone (or Seminar) is a requirement by most of the colleges/universities; especially those with the NASPAA accreditation.
- Research Project requirements are written in the course catalogue; although, requirements vary by university (can be used to judge writing competency). Interestingly, the online MPA Programs tended to require a project rather than the traditional thesis.
- All degree programs have either the requirement for students to complete a Capstone course or an Internship (or both) depending on their past work experience within the area of Public Administration. Colleges and universities that do not require past professional (work) experience for admission to the MPA program, however, will address the EL deficiency either in the Capstone and/or Internship course.
- The NASPAA and ASPA conferences, workshops and trainings continue to be source to learn best practice information to establish a program (curriculum ideas, professor academic requirements for graduate-level teaching) and improve the MPA Program to meet quality standards and expectations.

Discussions about the faculty role in relation to student outcomes was referred to as normative goal and indeed the modifications to instruction and curriculum have the input of

faculty. For instance, using counternarratives to engage students to develop critical skills and share perspectives requires curricula to explore contemporary public administration processes that contribute to disparate treatment and injustice (Blessett, Gaynor, Witt, & Alkadry, 2016)[16]. The critical perspectives in public administration curricula is linked to EL to aid in creating a well-rounded workforce with theory and real-world practice. Implementing the EL requires collaboration of academic leaders at the department level and approval of other committees (faculty senate, or top-level leaders in the office of the president). Authors often discussed implementation and links to student and faculty satisfaction with MPA instruction and curricula (which is beyond the scope of this paper). In the literature review regarding the implementation of the experiential learning approaches in the capstone course, certainly the on-campus student learning (instruction and curriculum) environment was an issue; specifically, that there is need of more work experience and opportunities to reflect on classroom lesson topics on fairness, equity, social justice of marginalized groups and the effective role of the public administrator.

## Results

The literature review was rich in text regarding words and phrases about the Experiential Learning (EL) approaches. It was significant to capture some basic ideas that correlated EL to practical learning, relational learning and internship opportunities. The text-based information was used to construct frequency tables about EL in the MPA program courses in post-secondary institutions. The analyses indicated that most words and phrases about EL were also about relational learning and practice (practical) learning, which we may refer to as internships (or externships). The analyses indicated in the following Figure 1.

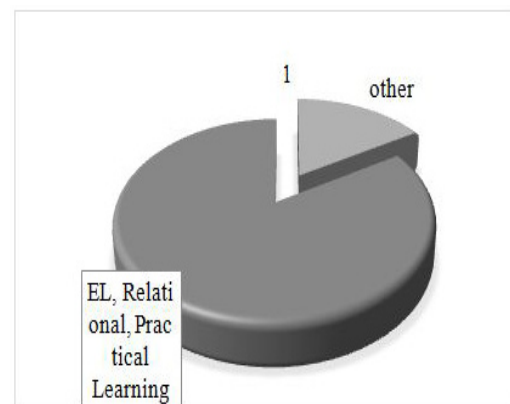


Figure 1: EL Types.

The terms EL and MPA programs using the find and search returned more than 27,000 materials such as higher education program websites, books, scholarly journal articles, and some job sites. The findings revealed that the experiential learning is of interests to graduate programs in public administration. The research questions regarding integrating the EL into the MPA program and

level of support are partly answered in the literature and find and search. For example, EL is linked to program MPA program-i.e. particular courses (Capstone/Seminar, Internship), to evaluations of effectiveness (narrative evaluations), and flexibility. Universities such as Evergreen State College, Martin School of Public Policy and Administration (University of Kentucky), Northeastern University (Master of Nonprofit Management degree), Cambridge University's MPA Program, and some 65 schools in our sample have some form of EL or internship learning opportunities. The for-profit online institutions such as DeVry, Walden, Columbia Southern University, and National University tend not to have practical experience requirements; although, the capstone (seminar) course is a part of the curriculum.

The answer to the question of the existence of certain types of EL approaches that are most popular in the MPA programs is shown below in Figure 2. The Professional Project is mostly a requirement of the MPA curriculum; and, sometimes it is in the Capstone (or Seminar) course. In fact, of the 75 MPA curricula examined, 90%, namely the NASPAA accredited ones, did require project-based work. The Professional Portfolio may be required, few programs in our sample (less than 10%) had the requirement.

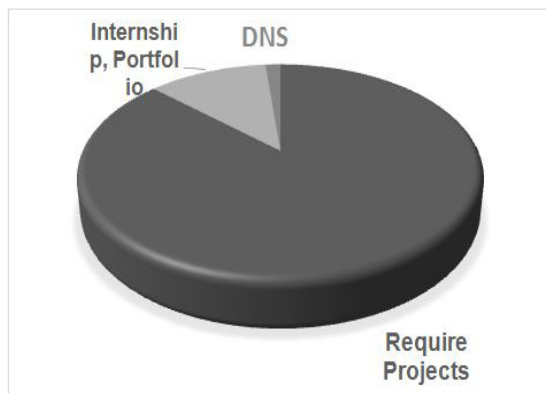


Figure 2: MPA EL Professional Projects and Portfolio Required.

The requirement for the internship (working in a public organization), is a necessary policy element and of the MPA program to get the degree. Interestingly, the for-profit universities such as Columbia Southern University, and DeVry, as examples, do not have policies for internship requirements to graduate with the degree. However, completion of a master's written project/thesis was required by much of the 73 institutions in the sample; others had internship and even portfolios. The capstone courses that require a professional portfolio and project work in community organizations (or government agencies) include universities such as the University of Nevada Las Vegas, (UNLV), University of Colorado, and University of Kentucky. The purpose is to demonstrate application of theory to practice to address a real-world public problem.

The breakdown of requirements for project (research), or internship or mix, is in Figure 3. The capstone courses with internship requirements vary (see illustration), however, most MPA Programs such as those at the University of Oregon, University of Missouri, and USC (with stipulations), do have a practice-learning (field) requirement.

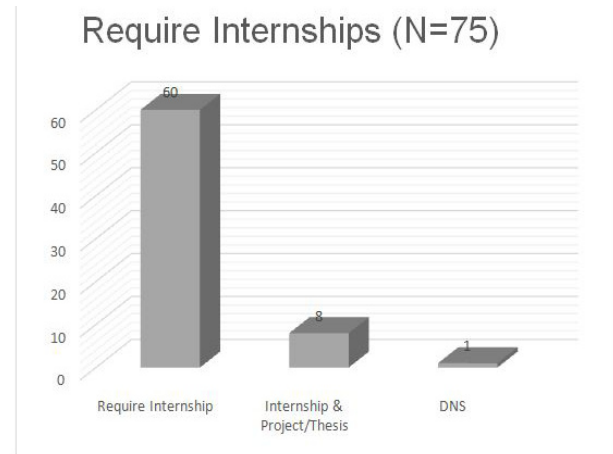


Figure 3: Require Internships.

## Discussion and Recommendations

Common courses are introduction to public administration, public policy, administrative law and the Capstone (or Seminar). Capstone courses are designed to showcase the knowledge that students learned throughout their program and they must demonstrate mastery of skills in writing, technology, research, presentation and managing a community problem. The seventy-five schools in the sample, did have student requirements to complete 33-48 semester credit hours of coursework based upon the MPA program that they were enrolled (internship requirements may increase the credits from 36 to 39). Core courses (e.g. capstone, research methods, public policy) can have lessons on critical perspectives that show students ways to examine multicultural and social justice issues. Additionally, the courses that teach students to use evidence to support problem solving, or to think statistically, will help graduates transition into the role of practitioner (public servants (administrators, managers)) that are confident to manage programs in a fair manner; and, perhaps, facilitate equality on-the-job. Public service is about limiting injustices for historically marginalized persons in society. Stakeholder demands, NASPAA requirements and standards, and scholarly materials regarding experiential learning in the MPA program in the capstone course (or not), will continue to influence improvements. Students will need to gain the knowledge and skills to perform the job functions as a public servant such as writing memos, policy analysis, using technology in communication, conducting research and making presentations as well as supervision and management. Internships are required for students with no prior history of employment



within the area of Public Administration, e.g. American University requires Leadership Course training and project in lieu of internship, and Baruch, Binghamton State and Boise State universities require a minimum of 3-credit hours of internships, or field work in a public organization. Rutgers University has a separate course and Directed Study requirement to accomplish Experiential Learning (EL) through the internship.

Recommendations are based on the research, which indicates that quality MPA Capstone courses must:

Have a component of Experiential Learning (EL) that is demonstration or practice learning in the capstone course.

The practice learning lessons should focus on professional projects and internships (or externships in the field). In the classroom, professorial lectures should include real-world scenarios and application public administration theory to engage students to become problem solvers in the public workplace.

Internships are necessary for students that study for the MPA degree to acquaint them to the norms, challenges and prospects of working in the public sector. Presently, colleges/universities are experiencing more and more non-traditional students without professional experience enrolling in the MPA Programs. As such, non-EL students are less effective with in-class assignments, role play and team exercises that require integration of theory and practical application. Conversations with some of the new NDNU-MPA students reveals a strong desire for internships in our field.

NDNU-MPA BUS 4891 (Public Policy & Capstone) course needs modification to meet reflect the modern-day trends to incorporate EL; namely, expand public service internships with academic credit as Directed Study, or specified hours in the Capstone course. Therefore, the public policy lessons must be removed and implemented in a course title Public Policy, which exists in 99% of the MPA Programs surveyed.

NDNU-MPA Program should consider applying for NASPAA membership as a 14% growth in job opportunities through 2020 (DOL) may increase enrollments; the program must show quality with programmatic accreditation.

## Conclusion

In this study, the research does indicate the use, perhaps even growing use, of experiential learning in the MPA degree programs. Mostly EL curriculum and instruction are designed to help entry-and mid-level practitioners with promotional goals and career aspirations. The prominent academic vision of the public administration degree is to prepare graduates to join a cadre of professional public servants through theory and practice learning in an academic setting. The experiential learning approaches are accessible in most capstone courses, and sometimes the internship course is created to accomplish programmatic goals and correlate to the NASPAA accreditation standards and institutional mission.

New research in the literature review and analyses of the sample of MPA programs in this study indicates that EL is for students that are focused on a career of that blends theory and practice. Addressing the departmental reluctance to EL, and the extent to which increasing MPA degree credit requirements has an adverse effect on student enrollments is beyond the scope of this essay; however, the author has noted them. The field of public administration has the primary goal of providing practical application to hone public administrator (servants, managers) skills. The EL approaches are worthwhile to help students gain practical experience, namely for the learners without field professional experience. Practice learning using professional projects, portfolios and internships is necessary to modern capstone lessons in the MPA degree programs.

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