

**STATEWIDE MEETING FOR MASTERS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMS:  
TEACHING RESEARCH FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

**PROJECT REPORT**

June, 2001

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### **PART I: THE PROJECT PROPOSAL**

The project proposed to undertake three activities: 1) hold a statewide meeting of public affairs, public policy, and public administration programs in the CSU; 2) form working groups to continue activities begun at the meeting; and 3) make plans for continuing the dialogue.

The focus of these activities was to be on the public sector research and evaluation that has been undertaken by these programs, and how that research has been integrated into teaching and learning for students in the CSU. A primary reason for the statewide meeting was not only to share the secrets of success of individual programs, but to plan for collaboration among CSUs to leverage strengths and meet anticipated demands in these areas in the future.

The original proposal for this also speculated on possible expected outcomes, both short-term and long-term, concerning collaboration among programs in the CSU in terms of research, contract, and scholarly activities; identification and dissemination of best practices; adaptation and incorporation of best practices into the curriculum; teaching and learning outcomes for thousands of students in public administration programs in CSU; and long-term impacts on public administration in California.

This report describes how we carried out the project, who was involved, how much was spent, what was accomplished, what happens next, what turned out differently than we expected, and what lessons we learned. We would also like to express our thanks to ITL for the funding we received, without which the level of success we attained would not have been possible.

### **Part II: THE STATEWIDE MEETING**

#### **A. PLANNING THE MEETING**

The first objective was to hold a statewide meeting on the experiences of the different CSU public sector research units which have successfully produced research and evaluation useful to the public sector, as well as those CSU public policy and

administration departments which have successfully integrated those projects into teaching and learning.

We understood from some of the senior faculty that statewide meetings had once been held, but at some time in the past (perhaps 25 years ago) before some of the current programs even existed. Thus there was little precedent for how such a meeting should be constructed and held. We identified 16 CSU campuses with MPA Programs, and we set our goal at including approximately 3 faculty from each campus. Given the short time frame in which we could operate, we were pleased to have at least one faculty member in attendance from each of the CSU campuses with an MPA Program. Several campuses sent two- or three-person teams, and two campuses sent four persons, for a total attendance of 42 faculty. Details on meeting planning are attached.

## B. HOLDING THE MEETING

The meeting was held April 26-27, 2001. All sessions were audio-taped (expenses were included in the original budget request). The tapes are in the process of being transcribed. A summary of each session will be sent to all participants, as well to any interested parties unable to attend. The following is a brief summary of the major session topics. Meeting expenses are described at the end of this report.

1. Research and Funding. The main focus of the meeting was to dialogue on current public sector research and evaluation projects in the CSU, on conditions that facilitate success, and on opportunities for future collaboration among campuses. One of the highlights of the meeting was the first panel, a presentation by seven research units within the CSU which are engaged in research and evaluation in the public sector. Participants included:

Bureau of Government Research and Service, Long Beach  
Public Research Institute, San Francisco  
Sacramento

We discovered that there has not been good communication among research units, most of which were unaware of the existence of the others on the panel. Nor, for a variety of reasons, is there always good communication between each research unit and the public policy and administration faculty on the same campus.

Another of our original objectives was to hold a dialogue with some other types of participants, including major governmental and non-governmental sponsors of, as well as consumers of, public sector research. Although we did invite such participants, and all expressed great interest in the meeting, given the short time frame, most were not able to attend. Many did send materials or referred us to a web site where we could download current funding information. We believe that, given more advance notice, we can be successful at attracting such participants to a follow-up meeting next year.

We had also initially planned to invite participants from independent and private sector research and evaluation units, as well as from similar units at non-CSU campuses. However, after careful deliberation, we decided to limit invited participants to the CSU only. We did not include others because we got the sense in planning the meeting that it was important to first build community among our CSU campuses, and then reach out to other allied entities. As it turned out, our intuition was correct.

Evaluation of the research session was extremely positive. All the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that this session was worthwhile. A typical written comment was, "This session alone was worth the trip!" Most also agreed that the session provided new ideas and/or information; and that the handouts were useful. Three-quarters agreed or strongly agreed that the session would help to improve the MPA Program on their home campus.

Evaluations of the session on funding a little were less positive. This session was organized as more of a roundtable discussion, but participants were disappointed that more funding agency representatives were not able to attend. Still, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that the session was worthwhile; it provided new ideas and/or information; and that the handouts were useful. Just over half agreed that it would help to improve their MPA Program. Written comments indicated participants desired to attend a future session on the same topic, with more funders present.

2. Teaching Research, Statistics, Policy Analysis. Session participants turned out to have widely different views of the appropriate type and level of quantitative methods to be taught to Master's level students in Public Administration and Public Policy. Some argued for statistics and quantitative methods close to what students use on the job - relatively simple statistics and spreadsheets. Others argued for a more research oriented and traditional statistics approach using statistical packages. There seemed to be agreement that MPA graduates should know how to use a spreadsheet, but beyond that fact, agreement broke down.

Many participants faced the somewhat jarring experience of having their colleagues from other campuses take totally different approaches to teaching this subject. Some argued for traditional forms of "education," and not "training." Others felt that preparing students to use methods they will not use once leaving the MPA program was not worthwhile, including statistics. There was considerable discussion of the general phenomenon of math phobia or non-numeracy that seems to afflict the average Master's level student in public administration.

There was also discussion of burnout among faculty teaching quantitative methods. The demands of dealing with students whose antipathy to what is being taught is obvious from day one enacts a toll among some faculty. Even nationally, few faculty teach a required quantitative methods course during their entire careers, a phenomenon that imposes stress and demands on all but the largest programs.

Eight campuses and 11 participants were at this session. There is room for a continuation of this discussion, although a consensus viewpoint does not seem likely in the short run. However, one of the possible products of this session is a symposium in a public administration, teaching-oriented journal on different approaches to non-numeracy among MPA students.

This session received very high ratings from participants for the excellent presentations and for the high degree of interaction between the presenters and the audience. All the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the session was worthwhile; that the handouts were useful; and that it provided them with new ideas and/or information.

3. Comparing Pre-Requisites and Curricula. The session on pre-requisites centered on what we might expect students to know when they come to MPA programs. Since their undergraduate backgrounds are so diverse, the level of expectations is fairly low. In the technology area, most students know how to use e-mail, but there are still some who do not. Many do not write well. Most--but again, not all--know spreadsheet basics. Most students can word process and use the world wide web. Knowledge of the basics of American government, however, is frequently inadequate.

Some possibilities discussed for remedying this situation include: summer workshops with modules covering different topics; assessing students when they enter the program and assigning certain courses to be taken initially; having all students take prerequisite courses unless they have had the specific course already. Many campuses agreed that the overemphasis on full-time equivalent students (FTES) for funding in CSU, with no differentiation in funding for graduate programs, affected their ability to have as many prerequisite courses as they might otherwise feel are warranted.

The discussion also included things that affect only a few campuses and the conduct of their programs. One campus has a program where all the courses are taught as overloads by the faculty. Others have extremely high housing costs, affecting the ability of students to go to school full-time while living in the area.

The session on pre-requisites was structured as a round-table discussion of how different MPA programs handle potentially under-prepared students. From 70% to 90% of participants agreed that the session was worthwhile; that it provided new ideas and/or information; and that it would help to improve the MPA program on their home campus. Written comments described the session as stimulating, helpful, and a good airing of the problem. Another participant wrote that their campus will definitely consider offering foundational workshops for MPA students.

The session on comparing curricula was originally prompted by programs now operating on the quarter system which may have to convert to the semester system, but it covered a great deal more. One of the most interesting findings was that while all the CSU MPA programs use the same NASPAA guidelines to structure their curricula, there are wide differences in MPA program curricula across the CSU.

Another finding was that some campuses apply the system-wide seven year rule for completing any masters' degree more strictly than others. At least one campus enforces a five year rule. Others indicated that the seven year rule was routinely waived on their campuses, whereas some said it was rarely waived. There seems little system-wide consistency in this area.

This session received high ratings from participants. Almost all the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the session was worthwhile; the handouts were useful; and the presenters did a good job. Eighty percent or more felt it provided them with new ideas and/or information, and that it would help to improve the MPA program on their home campus. Furthermore, this session generated the most suggestions for workshops at future meetings, on topics including admission criteria, distance learning, required versus elective courses, comprehensive exams, and comparative public administration.

4. Culminating Experiences. This session presented the options used by the different MPA programs as culminating experiences for graduating students. These range from capstone seminars, to thesis or projects, comprehensive examinations, and portfolios. Participants discussed the context for their approach, pluses and minuses of different approaches, and the directions they are moving toward for the future. A summary of all culminating experience requirements for MPAs in the CSU is attached.

This session was very highly rated by participants; one written comment called it the "best session at the conference." Participants overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed that it was worthwhile; provided them with new ideas and/or information; the presenters did a good job; the handouts were useful; and it would help to improve the MPA program on their home campus.

5. Accreditation and NASPAA 2002. These sessions were rated as extremely important by the participants. As stated in the original proposal, all the CSU programs in public administration are institutional members of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), and 13 have been accredited by its Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA). Thus, MPA Programs in the CSU have many issues in common, but they are also a strong group within NASPAA (see attached data) as well as nationally for the education of public sector managers and policy analysts.

The statewide meeting was also very helpful for planning the October 2002 national meeting of NASPAA, which is being co-hosted by seven Southern California CSU MPA Programs (Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Northridge, Pomona, and San Diego). The national meeting is attended by about 400 deans, directors, and administrators annually. At this point, the CSUs involved need to begin to make preliminary arrangements for the NASPAA conference, and to brainstorm about how to use this opportunity to best present the CSU and its MPA Programs to NASPAA and visitors from outside California.

The conference has been booked at the Biltmore in downtown Los Angeles. Each of the seven MPA programs in the CSU has pledged to raise between \$1,000 and \$2,000 to host a reception for the conference. Possible sites include the renovated downtown Library. We also need to decide on an invited keynote speaker, preferably someone with a high profile in the public sector.

It was also noted that the Political Science Department at CSU Long Beach is hosting the March 2002 meeting of the Western Political Science Association, attended by about 1,000 political scientists annually.

6. Final Session: Ideas and Projects for the Future. This session provided participants with an opportunity to express concerns, to share insights, and to start work on the next two phases of the project: setting up working groups and planning to continue the dialogue. It also allowed for us to conduct an evaluation of the meeting.

### C. EVALUATING THE MEETING

An overall evaluation was administered to all participants at the statewide meeting, and there was very good response. The evaluation covered planning, the event, and suggestions for follow-up.

Regarding planning, over 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they received sufficient advance notice about the meeting. Nearly all communications were conducted by e-mail, without which it would have been nearly impossible to plan and hold the meeting in the short time frame from January to April. Almost 75% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had adequate opportunity to contribute to planning the statewide meeting. Most of the rest were neutral, although one or two strongly disagreed. A longer time frame for planning may remedy this situation.

About the same proportions of participants responded to the question, "my interests were taken into account in planning the statewide meeting." Although most participants seemed satisfied, there were one or two proposals for session topics that could not be accommodated in the limited meeting time available. A slightly longer meeting might allow for more interests to be addressed. Other topics suggested included comparative public administration; faculty recruitment; faculty development; trends in public administration; and issues for programs within a larger department.

Most participants were highly enthusiastic about the meeting itself. Over 80% of participants felt the meeting was just about right in length, with about 5% saying it was too long and 15% saying it was too short. Even though it was a relatively small gathering, most participants liked the idea of concurrent sessions. Over 90% found the scheduling of sessions to be adequate to cover the topic. Over 85% were enthusiastic about the hotel and the catering, with complimentary written comments about the rooms, food, and service. The performance of the co-coordinators was also highly rated. Written comments called it "best P.A. gathering I've ever attended," "the most

useful/worthwhile professional meeting I've attended this academic year," and "the most useful--and pleasant--meeting/conference I've attended, period!" Finally, 95% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the meeting would help to improve the MPA Program on their home campus.

### **PART III: FORMING WORKING GROUPS**

The major objective for the period immediately following the statewide meeting was to form Working Groups which will continue to pursue the important topics decided upon at the meeting. Participants generated ideas for four major Working Groups, under the umbrella title the California Collaborative. The topics identified by the working groups are collaboration; teaching and learning; marketing; and NASPAA.

#### **A. WORKING GROUP ON COLLABORATION**

This working group will explore how to develop stronger ties among MPA programs within the CSU. The California Collaborative supports the idea of regular meetings of MPA Programs, similar to those of other discipline-based councils. Collaboration will also benefit the MPA Programs in the CSU by group representation to NASPAA, and other relevant bodies. This working group will collaborate on the production of a directory of MPA Programs and Research Institutes. This group will also explore how to make it easier for matriculated students to take courses in MPA programs at other campuses for credit.

The working group on collaboration will also help to identify strategies for developing collaborative responses by MPA Programs in the CSU to public sector needs for research and evaluation. Taken together, we have impressive strengths to present in collaborative proposals to funding agencies. It will also make plans for continuing the dialogue among CSU public administration programs, through identifying support for future meetings and other support for the California Collaborative. This working group will also brainstorm on other ways we can continue the dialogue, for example, by piggy-backing on other professional and scholarly meetings, by participating in peer review site visits of other CSU programs, and by seeking funding for future state-wide and/or regional meetings.

#### **B. WORKING GROUP ON BEST PRACTICES**

This working group is interested in improving communication and collaboration between research units and MPA faculty, both within and across campuses. The group will collect documentation on all public sector oriented research institutes in the CSU, and work on identifying the characteristics of successful research and evaluation units. Another interest is to show how MPA faculty in the CSU can collaborate with these units for research, contracts, and scholarship. The group will develop a list of all these units in the CSU, their areas of expertise, and their recent accomplishments, for possible public dissemination. It will also identify similar research institutes in California outside the CSU for possible collaboration.

Similarly, this working group wants to find ways to better integrate the research and evaluation products of these CSU units into the teaching and learning activities of MPA faculty. It will look for innovative teaching and learning models for courses on research in MPA programs, and recommend ways for supporting, developing, identifying, and disseminating best practices. Another aim is to identify materials to make it easier to integrate research into the classroom. Finally, it will explore ways to integrate the experiences of students with the generation of research and evaluation in the public sector.

#### C. WORKING GROUP ON MARKETING

The working group on marketing will focus on developing strategies to make the MPA degree more visible and better known to the public in general (as well known as the MBA). It will also make the MPA Programs in the CSU more visible in particular. This will include collaborating on publishing a directory of the research activities of MPA faculty and research units in the CSU; a directory of MPA Program resources on the various campuses that will be useful to those seeking public sector research and evaluation projects; and a guide to the diversity of the different MPA Programs in the CSU.

It will also seek liaisons with other groups in California which could benefit from increased marketing of the MPA degree, such as the Municipal Management Association of Southern California, the Government Financial Officers Association, and the metropolitan Los Angeles branch of the American Society for Public Administration, and seek for national sources of funding for marketing the MPA degree.

#### D. WORKING GROUP ON NASPAA

The working group on NASPAA will advocate for support from NASPAA for MPA Programs in the CSU, as well as increased representation for California programs within NASPAA. This group will work on ideas that the MPA programs in the CSU as a group could take to NASPAA.

#### E. EVALUATION

A promising start has already been made. First, all participants at the statewide meeting agreed that forming working groups was a good idea. Already, several of the meeting participants, working together, have already developed preliminary plans for the working groups. The co-coordinators will follow up with the working groups at six and twelve months after the initial statewide meeting.

### **PART IV: CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE**

The evaluation of the statewide meeting revealed that all participants were unanimously in favor of attending another such meeting, Some people suggested that

the meeting should be held in one year, others in two years. Others suggested regional meetings in Northern, Southern, and Central Valley locations. No matter where the location, however, the one written comment summed it all up by saying that another statewide meeting was “a must!”

We believe this statewide meeting of MPA Programs in the CSU has helped us to start on the path toward meeting our long term goals of increased collaboration among campuses, especially in the areas of research and teaching. Achieving these goals will have impacts on thousands of students in public administration programs in CSU, and, in the long-terms, on the practice of public policy and administration in California. As indicated in the original proposal, the campuses of the CSU have the sole responsibility within the state’s system of higher education of preparing public administrators for California’s future. With over 1,300 students graduating with MPA degrees from a CSU campus in 1999-2000, the CSU can have a vast impact on public sector performance in California.

The co-coordinators will continue the evaluation of the project in the future and will develop ways to assess the progress that has been made toward reaching the projected project goals and outcomes. To continue the activities of the working groups, to hold another statewide meeting, and to continue the long-term evaluation of this project, however, will require some additional funding, from ITL and/or other sources.

## **PART V: LESSONS LEARNED**

Faculty in MPA programs in the CSU who attended the statewide meeting were universally impressed with their colleagues across the system. While some of us have been gathering informally for several years at other national and regional professional meetings, it was typically only a couple of people over a hurried lunch. These occasional encounters did not afford us the time to get together for frank exchanges of views and productive work. This meeting, stretched over two days, greatly facilitated communication and interaction among the programs in mutually beneficial ways. We believe that this first statewide meeting began the foundation for a strong, productive, and lasting collaboration among MPA programs in the CSU.

One thing that may have helped us to reach a high level of cooperation and trust in a relatively short time period is our mutual participation in NASPAA, the national accrediting body for MPA programs. Another is that we do not believe that we compete for students, since our programs vary widely and draw students from different populations. Still, we believe we have begun to develop a model for disciplinary collaboration across campuses in the CSU that could be used by other fields as well.

Another thing we learned is that it was really great working together as co-coordinators. It would have been nearly impossible for one person to do all the work required to set up the meeting and make it happen in the short time frame. We have summarized how we did it in the attached handout. Also, it would not have been possible without the modern advantage of e-mail. Fortunately, all of our colleagues are

adept at communicating via e-mail, dealing with attachments, and providing quick responses. We also saved money at the meeting because of the high level of technological expertise among our colleagues, by bringing our own computers, projectors, and overhead projectors, as well as extension cords, power strips, and projection screens.

While the meeting featured research as a centerpiece, we found that there were many other issues that were equally important to the participants. We endeavored to allow time for participants to address as many of these additional concerns as possible at the meeting, but some must wait for another meeting to be addressed. It will never be possible to make everyone 100% happy at one meeting. So planners have to do the best they can by making everyone welcome and acknowledging that everyone's issues are important.

Finally, we may have been overly optimistic in our initial proposal. Looking back on our goals and expected outcomes, we see that we set out an ambitious agenda for ourselves that will take several years to fully realize. Yet, if we had not tried for the ideal, we would not have reached the very high level we did. It is important to reiterate, however, that to continue the activities of the working groups, to hold another statewide meeting, and to continue the long-term evaluation of this project, however, we will need some additional funding. The best case scenario would be to fund this--or similar--projects over a three-year cycle, so that the gains made in the first round do not evaporate during this crucial period of foundation building.

#### Expenditures

Course release for one co-coordinator  
Meeting expenses for 42 participants  
Audio taping the meeting  
Travel expenses for 42 participants  
Stipends for 4 working group chairs  
Materials and supplied for meeting

Total

MPA

## STATEWIDE MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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HOW WE DID OUR STATE-WIDE DISCIPLINARY MEETING, OR  
"Michelle and Ted's Most Excellent Adventure at LAX"  
by  
Ted Anagnoson and Michelle Saint-Germain, Meeting Co-Coordinators

We received notification of the awarding of the grant from ITL in December. In order to sent up a state-wide meeting of MPA Program faculty in the CSU during Spring, we needed to act rather quickly. Here is a summary of the steps we took (warning: don't try this alone):

1. (December) We contacted all chairs, heads, or directors of the 16 Masters in Public Administration Programs in the CSU by e-mail to inform them of the ITL grant. We set up a group e-mail list, and added names as more people responded. We negotiated with the Chancellor's Office over who would handle the budget.
2. (January) We asked the chairs for input about the best dates and place for state-wide meeting. After receiving input, we called local hotels to get a tour, availability, and prices. We set the meeting for April 26-27 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at LAX. There is free shuttle service to and from the airport, so those flying in do not have to rent cars or take taxis. The hotel provided excellent service throughout the meeting.
3. (February) We invited all faculty to identify the topics to be addressed at the meeting. A list of topics was drawn up and sent back out to faculty, inviting them to identify which sessions they wished to either convene, present, or participate in, and prepared a program and schedule for the meeting.
4. (February) We distributed invitations to the meeting by e-mail to chairs, asking them to pass these on to their faculty, but not all did so promptly, so we e-mailed all individual faculty as well. Up to three faculty were invited to participate from each campus with expenses covered by the grant; however, other faculty who paid their own way could also attend. We also identified research units associated with public policy and administration at the various CSU campuses, and we invited their directors to attend.
5. (March) We coordinated the meeting schedule with the hotel, from a noontime welcoming lunch on Thursday until a closing session ending at noon on Friday. We divided the time into lunch, three program sessions, a no-host reception, and dinner on Thursday; and breakfast and two program sessions on Friday. We had about 40 attending, so we offered two concurrent panels in each program session time slot. Each session lasted about 90 minutes, with a 15 minute break in between sessions. We had a coffee break on Thursday afternoon and again on Friday at mid-morning. We booked about 20 double hotel rooms.
6. (April) We finalized all the arrangements with the hotel, audio visual and technical equipment, transportation, driving directions, etc., and communicated these to participants.
7. (April) We continually sent e-mails to all participants to make sure that their needs were being met, e.g. ordering vegetarian meals, ensuring rooms with disabled access, asking for early check-in or late check-out, etc., and communicated these to the hotel.
8. (April) We prepared folders of materials for participants, hand outs, signs, badges, and travel reimbursement forms, etc.; we also brought our own presentation equipment.