

The APSA Public Administration Section's Electronic Newsletter Volume 2, Issue 2, Fall 2003

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Greetings fellow public
administration scholars!

In this issue:

Welcome back to the PA Section Electronic Newsletter, your vehicle for basic information about section activities and events that are of broad interest to our community of political scientists who study bureaucracy, administration, and management. Each newsletter also contains a topical editorial and a number of links to important information sources. The Electronic Newsletter is edited by [Patrick Wolf](#) of Georgetown University, with important technical assistance provided by [Mel Dubnick](#) of Rutgers University-Newark.

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EDITORIAL

"Citizens, Public Administration and the Search for Theoretical Foundations"

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(Excerpt from the 17th [Annual John Gaus Lecture](#), American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, 29 August 2003. A more extensive version will appear in *PS: Political Science & Politics*, January 2004. Excerpt printed with permission.)

Many students of public administration have claimed, as rationale for the field, that the Prince, the President, the Legislator or the Ruling Class needs help. In contrast, John Gaus argued that it is the citizens who need help. From the latter perspective, the questions become, under what conditions is it likely that administration will provide help in democratic settings where legitimate government depends on popular consent? To help citizens effectively, does it make any difference how public administration, and in particular the relations between administrators and citizens are organized?

Gaus places public administration in a larger political setting, as a core institution of democratic government. A theory of administration also has to be a theory of politics. The support of public opinion is essential. The purposes and methods of administration should be derived from citizens and the whole body of citizens should have ultimate control. Good government depends upon the quality of organization, and a theory of administrative organization should specify what the proper role of citizens should be, and how relations between citizens and administration can best be organized.

Gaus argues that the task of the academic discipline is to identify, describe and analyze important developments that public administration faces and constantly redefine the field in the light of new experiences. Understanding the conditions under which administration adapts, or fails to adapt, to changing circumstances and shifting public opinion, requires first hand observation of government in action. Important developments can best be observed at sites and in eras where established institutions are disintegrating. Scholars are advised to observe the search for new institutions to replace decaying or overthrown ones, and the development of workable explanations of citizens' relation to institutions. The discipline should avoid "arrogant generalization" and aspire "to put together a tentative, working hypothesis of government to set alongside the older ones".

How many, and which, administrative phenomena can be understood on the basis of a priori assumptions about a single, universal set of behavioral logics, organizational arrangements and dynamics of change, is an empirical question. If, however, no single set of assumptions is found to be more fruitful than all the others under all conditions and if different assumptions are not seen as necessarily mutually exclusive, then theoretically inclined public administration scholars may join foundational debates in other social sciences. They may resolve public administration into a limited number of basic behavioral logics, structures and processes. Then they can examine their variations, shifting significance, scope conditions, prerequisites and interplay, and they can explore ideas that can reconcile and synthesize different sets of assumptions. The agenda is tall, yet a modest step is to consider three subjects of theory development.

SUBJECTS OF THEORY DEVELOPMENT. First, public administration theory may benefit from taking into account the observation of a great diversity in human motivation and modes of action. Actors are driven by habit, emotion, coercion, interpretation of internalized rules and principles, as well as calculated expected utility and incentive structures. Human character is variable and changeable, not universal and constant.

For example, New Public Management assumes self-interested, utility maximizing actors. "Old Public Administration" assumes administrators socialized into an ethos of rule following and public service. Actors are, however, constituted both by their interests, by which they evaluate expected consequences, and by the rules embedded in their identities and institutions. They try to calculate consequences and follow rules, and the relationship between the two is often subtle. Therefore, rather than assuming a single dominant behavioral logic, we may explore behavioral logics as complementary. We may inquire where and how different logics of actions and a sense of administrative identity and role is developed, lost and redefined. We may also seek a better understanding of the interrelationship between strategic and rule-driven action and the conditions under which one logic comes to dominate another.

Secondly, public administration theory may also benefit from taking into account the observed diversity of organized settings and types of collectivities and social relationships within which administrators operate, and their different types of impact. Hierarchies, markets and networks are commonplace in modern democracies and institutions have a role in coercion, in managing exchange, in redistribution, in building an administrative culture, and in developing constitutive structures for the sustenance of civic virtue and democratic politics. Institutions provide opportunity and incentive structures regulating behavior and impacting transaction costs. They also constitute and transform actors by shaping their identities and mentalities through deliberation and socialization, and forms of government have historically been assessed according to their ability to foster the virtue and intelligence of the community.

When organized settings are seen as interdependent, supplementary and competing, understanding is not likely to be furthered by a single set of assumptions. The success of one institution depends on the organization and functioning of a larger configuration of institutions, differently organized. Furthermore, identification can be a powerful motivator, yet identities can seldom be decreed from above. A challenge is to understand variations in the capacity and legitimacy to develop democratic officials and citizens with a sense of community, civility and common good through differently organized administrative processes.

Thirdly, public administration theory may provide a better understanding of continuity and change if, rather than assuming structural choice, it is observed that administrative life continuously achieves and loses structure through a variety of processes that may interact in complicated ways. Administrative change is a study in path dependencies as well as path departures. Authority is achieved, maintained and lost. The basic units are constituted and reconstituted, and so are their relationships in terms of integration and disintegration, formalization and de-formalization, centralization and decentralization, politicization and de-politicization, bureaucratization and de-bureaucratization, professionalization and de-professionalization.

Change may be driven by functional-instrumental concerns, by a commitment to principles and by shifting cycles of attention and cycles of trust in institutions and agents. Yet, attempts to reform public administration implies intervention in large-scale, complex configurations of institutions with pre-existing identities, structures, internal dynamics and resources and it can not always be assumed that leaders simply choose structures. Change processes include deliberate design and reform, but also rule-following, learning, diffusion, imitation and competitive selection. Therefore, a key question is: What is the role of human intention, reflection and choice in the development of institutions of good government? Under what conditions, and through what mechanisms, can actors rise above, and get beyond, existing institutional structures? Exploring the latitude of purposeful reform, institutional abilities to adapt spontaneously to environmental changes and environmental effectiveness in eliminating sub-optimal institutions requires attention to several dynamics of change, not a commitment to a single dynamic or mechanism.

HELPING THROUGH COOPERATION. John Gaus was right. Citizens need help. Direct participation by the people in administrative processes contributes to government for the people but only under some conditions. Citizens depend on the democratic quality of the institutions and actors that affect their life chances. They need institutions and agents that act reliably and with competence and integrity on the basis of agreed-upon, publicly known and fairly stable principles and rules,

standards and objectives.

Gaus was also right arguing that any modern theory of public administration has to be a theory of politics and, as he implied, any modern theory of politics has also to be a theory of administration. In democracies, the distinction between administration and politics is as basic to legitimating administration as the two are difficult to separate in practice. A challenge for the discipline is to specify the conditions under which various institutions, processes and agents provide help to citizens.

Doing so, students of public administration have to recognize that what citizens want from government, what they are willing to contribute in terms of time and resources, their beliefs about "good administration" and their trust in institutions and agents, are formed partly endogenously in administrative processes. In order to effectively help citizens in such a complex world public administration may have to cooperate more than before beyond specific national settings and across schools of thought.

APSA 2003 RECAP

Public administration scholars were a force to be reckoned with at the 99th Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia, PA. Here are the highlights:

- **Under the deft leadership of Program Chair Norma Riccucci, the PA Section fielded 12 paper panels and a total of 17 sections.**
- **Treasurer Ed Kellough delivered his annual update on the PA Section's favorable financial status. The Section added almost \$1,700 in new income last year to reach a balance of over \$6,900 -- despite e-newsletter expenses of, well, \$0.00.**
- **Section Chair Charles Wise described how a number of scholars lost their membership in the PA Section because they assumed that APSA would automatically re-enroll them each year. After Charlie contacted them about the fact that Section Members must actively check the box themselves each year, many of them quickly renewed their membership.**
- **Mel Dubnick, the section webmaster, announced that we have received over 2000 hits on our PA Section web-site, with many of them from international sources.**
- **The assemblage elected the following Section Officials by thunderous acclamation:**
 - **Lloyd Nigro, Georgia State University, Chair**
 - **Norma Riccucci, Rutgers University-Newark, Chair-Elect**
 - **Katherine Newcomer, George Washington University, Program Chair**
 - **Trevor Brown, Ohio State University, Council Member**
 - **Patricia Florestano, University of Baltimore, Council Member**
 - **H. Brint Milward, University of Arizona, Council Member**

Thanks to Charlie Wise for his exemplary chairmanship of the PA Section over the past year. He will be rewarded/punished with an additional year of service on the Council. Also thanks for the service of outgoing Council Members Guy Adams, Marissa Martino Golden, Ann Chih Lin, and Nichole de Montricher.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Awards:

- The 2003 Kaufman Award was bestowed upon Evelyn Z. Brodtkin, Carolyn Fuqua, and Katarina Thoren for their outstanding paper, "Contracting Welfare Reform: Uncertainties of Capacity-Building Within Disjointed Federalism," delivered at the 2002 APSA Annual Meetings in Boston. Congratulations to Evelyn, Carolyn, and Katarina!
- The [American Review of Public Administration](#) 2003 Best Article Award was given to Gregory Saxton, Chris Haney, and Steven Erie for their article, "Fiscal Constraints and the Loss of Home-Rule." Kudos to Gregory, Chris, and Steven! (PA scholars who aspire to win awards next year are advised to work in teams of three, as that seems to help.)

Call for Papers/Meetings:

- The call for papers for the 2004 American Political Science Association Annual Meetings has been issued. The deadline for proposals is November 14, 2003. This is the big one: number 100. For information on how to join the festivities in Chicago, September 2-5, 2004, surf to <http://www.apsanet.org/mtgs/>.
- Speaking of Chicago, the Midwest Political Science Association has shocked everyone by announcing that their 2004 Annual Meeting will be in, of all places, Chicago! The event takes place April 15-18 at the Palmer House Hilton. The deadline for paper proposals is October 10, 2003, so don't dither. Information is available at <http://www.indiana.edu/~mpsa/>.
- The Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management is meeting November 6-8 to celebrate its 25th anniversary. The event will take place in Washington, DC. For details, visit <http://www.appam.org>.

The PA Section has established a Mentoring Committee to develop a section-sponsored program for assisting public administration doctoral students and junior faculty. For more information, please contact Ken Meier at kmeier@polisci.tamu.edu. The members of the Mentoring Committee are:

- Ken Meier, Texas A & M University, Chair
- Richard Feiock, Florida State University
- Eric Gonzalez Juenke, Texas A & M University
- Greg Lewis, Georgia State University
- Katherine Naff, San Francisco State University
- Larry Terry, University of Texas - Dallas

The Public Management Research Association (PMRA) recently held officer elections. Emerging from the political rough-and-tumble are the following victors:

- Ken Meier, Texas A & M University, President (through 2005)
- Larry O'Toole, University of Georgia, Vice-President (becomes President in 2005)
- George Frederickson, University of Kansas, Treasurer (through 2005)
- Eugene Bardach, University of California - Berkeley, Council Member
- Patricia Ingraham, Syracuse University, Council Member
- Ann Chih Lin, University of Michigan, Council Member
- Norma Riccucci, Rutgers University-Newark, Council Member

Thanks to H. Brint Milward for his extraordinary service as founding President of the PMRA. As a reward, the Association presented him with a paperweight and a 2004 Visiting Professorship in Hong Kong (or maybe he got that on his own).

Actually, Brint and B. Guy Peters were invited by the [University of Hong Kong's Department of Politics and Public Administration](#) to conduct month-long seminars in the department's public affairs workshop course. Brint's will be on NGOs and non-departmental public bodies.

Other folks posted overseas are:

- H. George Frederickson (University of Kansas), who will serve as the John G. Winant Visiting Professor of American Government for the 2003-2004 academic year in the [Department of Politics and International Relations at Oxford University](#). He has also been appointed a Visiting Fellow at [Oxford's Balliol College](#).
- Melvin J. Dubnick (Rutgers University-Newark), who is a Senior Fellow and Visiting Professor at the [Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research](#) of The Queen's University of Belfast, Northern Ireland. Mel's position this academic year is funded through a Fulbright award and will be extended through 2004-2005 under a Queen's University International Research Fellowship.

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If you have any questions, or in the highly unlikely event that you wish to unsubscribe, contact Mel Dubnick at dubnickmj@yahoo.com