Article

Searching for social equity among public administration mission statements

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Abstract
The main research question considered in this article is the relative prominence of social equity among public administration curricula via an examination of program mission. It has long been asserted that social equity is a key component of public administration education so much so that the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) made social equity a fourth pillar of public administration. The article points to a serious dilemma faced within the discipline, namely the unequal geographic distribution of social equity mission statements at the program level, while at the same time promoting it as essential to the discipline nationally. Based on an analysis of 184 public administration programs, this article advocates for a continued commitment and dedicated resources to promote social equity across smaller Masters of Public Administration programs.

Keywords
Accreditation, mission statements, learning outcomes, social justice, social equity, public administration

Introduction

The history of public administration in the USA can be traced to the late 19th century. The modern notions of Public Administration education are a bit more recent and find their origins in the mid- to late- 20th century. Education in the discipline of Public Administration is not merely the transmission of knowledge and skills but also a means to promote public service values. These values are characterized by a constant pursuit of the public interest, ensuring accountability and transparency, behaving professionally,

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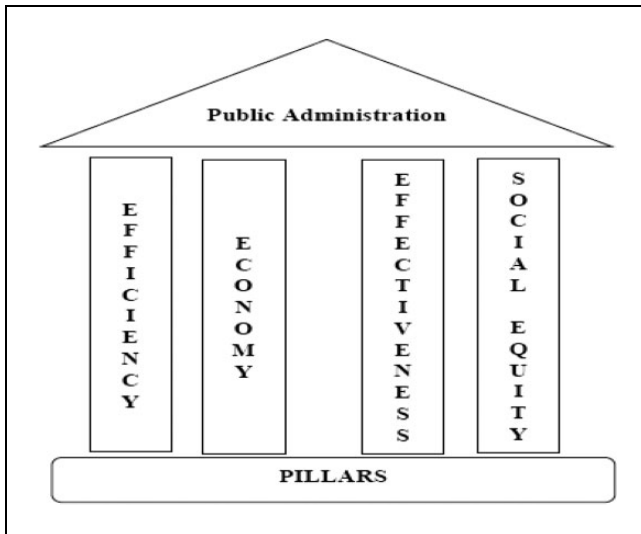
Figure 1. Pillars of public administration.

objectively with competence and efficiency, acting ethically, and demonstrating respect and equity (NASPAA, 2009/2014). These are the core values for programs accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) and are reflected in NASPAA accreditation standards.

The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) goes even further asserting that ultimately the discipline and the curriculum is based around four key pillars of efficiency, economy, effectiveness, and social equity (Figure 1). The challenges that Masters of Public Administration degree programs across the USA face are the incorporation of these confidences effectively into the curriculum. This is particularly important when one considers the changing face of the USA since the 1960s. Due to the diversification of the population, over this period, there is an increasing and growing need for the administration of agency to be done in a just and fair way. The overall goal of this study is to determine whether Masters of Public Administration (MPA) programs accredited by NASPAA incorporate socially just components within their curriculum based on an analysis of program mission statements of 184 NASPAA accredited MPA programs.

Literature review

The National Academy of Public Administration Panel on Social Equity defines social equity as "the fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract, and the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy, and the commitment to promote fairness, justice and equity in the formation of public policy." The underpinnings of social equity can be

traced to the classic works of Woodrow Wilson who indicated that it is the role of public administrators to implement the law with enlightenment and equity (Johnson and Svara, 2011). This is an important point, in that, with even a cursory examination of the Constitution, the founding documents, and the implementation of public policy in the USA for most of its history, the institutions, processes, and conventions were not developed or designed for marginalized populations. The construct of social equity has a wide-ranging application in the field of public administration relegated not merely to issues related to race and inclusion but also to other areas such as housing income inequality, issues related to poverty, and other areas of public policy. However, as applied in the USA, social equity too often deals with issues of race. Perhaps this is due to the maltreatment of minorities and other marginalized populations in that country, particularly as it relates to these policies. A key feature of American policymaking, for a preponderance of its history, has been the active promotion of policies that negatively impacted communities of color (Rothstein, 2017; Schreckhise, 2018). The public service professions have seldom examined these contradictions of representative democracy in the USA, which have been characterized as having implicit supports for racialized systems of governance which have shaped the contemporary social and cultural order (Stafford, 1999).

In the field of public administration, the discussion of social equity began with the Minnowbrook conference in 1968 (Gooden and Portillo, 2011). During the conference, a group of like-minded young public administration practitioners and researchers were looking at the discipline of public administration and envisioning the future of the discipline. Social equity became relevant due to the societal changes amid the Civil Rights movement in the USA and how, historically, American politics had created a playing field that socially, politically, and economically advantages the privileged (Frederickson, 2005).

In 2005, the National Academy of Public Administration adopted social equity as a fourth pillar of the discipline, along with efficiency, effectiveness, and economy. From both a theoretical and a practitioner perspective the emergence of social equity scholarship has been useful in understanding issues related to justice in public administration (Frederickson, 2005). It embodies the premise that everyone should have the same prospects for success and protection from adversity in life (Johnson and Svara, 2011). In the public administration realm, it also includes activities to enhance political power and the economic wellbeing of minorities (Frederickson, 2015). These all stem from the belief that marginalized groups have unique life experiences to contribute to society (Gooden and Portillo, 2011). Central to the lens of social equity is the concept of justice; and, any analysis of justice in US policy making should include John Rawls and his writings on justice. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) details how a polity should be organized from the original position which is distinguished from the perspective of not knowing one's position in society (veil of ignorance). In essence, a society should be evaluated by how it treats those that are most at risk and at the margins. Social equity is inextricably linked to the writings of John Rawls. He developed the principle of justice as fairness whereby each person would have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for all. When applied to agency, the application

of this principle obligates public administration to address issues of fairness, justice, and equity. These are the principles around which social equity is based.

As Susan Gooden (2010) argues, social equity really is firmly entrenched in public administration and policy, but is caught in a rather unproductive cycle characterized by indecision and delay as it relates to the application and implementation of social equity within the discipline. Relative to internal stakeholders, public sector managers historically lack a clear understanding and appreciation of diversity within an organization's culture; consequently, the introduction of social equity components across the discipline would be of great benefit. In terms of external stakeholders, social equity is a commitment to reduce disparity and advocate equality for populations that have been subject to treatment that is inferior, prejudicial or hostile (Johnson and Svara, 2011). In essence, social equity is a commitment to reduce disparity and advocate equality for populations that have been subject to treatment that is inferior, prejudicial or hostile (Johnson and Svara, 2011).

NASPAA, a global community of over 300 schools of public policy, public affairs, and public administration focused on improving the quality of programs and the overall field, recognized this need through the incorporation of social equity within its assessment criteria: "To ensure excellence in education and training for public service and to promote the ideal of public service" (NASPAA, 2009/2014). The following standards in particular demonstrate this:

- Standard 1.1: The program will have a statement of mission that guides performance expectations and their evaluation, including its purpose and public service values.
- Standard 3.2: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment and retention of faculty members.
- Standard 4.4: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, admissions practices, and student support services. (NASPAA, 2009/2014)

Mission statements and curricula

For MPA programs, a way to transmit and disseminate Core Concepts is through the curriculum. What informs the construction of program curricula is the overarching mission of the program. The specific linkages between mission statements and curriculum content, in general, have been largely unexplored, particularly when examining MPA programs. This is an area that needs further development in the literature. For MPA programs that seek to incorporate diversity-related content, scholars have articulated a linkage between the program mission and curriculum content as part of a broader model (Lopez-Littleton and Blessett, 2015). Mission statements can serve as a catalyst to transmit core ideals to students' curriculum and engagement (Davis et al., 2007). The linkage between the transmission of conceptual information from organizational mission to outputs is far more common. One distinctive way to determine program outputs is to look to the program's mission. There is a substantial body of

work that supports this assertion (Bart et al., 2001; Bartkus and Glassman, 2008; Desmidt and Decramer, 2011; Macedo et al., 2016; Morley et al., 2015; Pandey et al., 2017; Weiss and Piderit, 1999). Several scholars have examined mission statements and determined that they can affect performance outcomes whether that be in the private sector (Bart et al., 2001; Bartkus and Glassman, 2008; Desmidt and Decramer, 2011) or in the public sphere (Macedo et al., 2016; Morley et al., 2015; Pandey et al., 2017; Weiss and Piderit, 1999). Interestingly, organizations that include content related to social equity and diversity in their mission statements tend to associate these constructs with actions and behaviors regarding those issues within the organization (Bartkus and Glassman, 2008; Davis et al., 2007).

Curricula, in essence, translates the goals, values, and ideals of a program into the output relative to the matriculating students and the populations that they serve in the public and nonprofit arena. The caveat is that when left to their own devices, programs will, in general, reproduce the status quo which in turn serves to reinforce existing social and cultural hierarchies already established (Rychen and Salganik, 2001). Mission statements can communicate values in ways that engage and encourage (Weiss and Piderit, 1999). This is why it is paramount that concepts related to social equity be included in the organizational mission and across program curriculum. Otherwise, the same existing social and cultural structures will continue to be representative across MPA programs curriculum, and therefrom the matriculating students in the public and nonprofit organizations. A need for public administration to incorporate social equity into its curriculum in a meaningful way has been identified (Rice, 2004).

Mission statements demonstrate organizational vision in terms of who the organization wants to serve and what direction the organization wants to take (David, 1989). A key benefit in support of examining program mission statements is the role that mission statements have in facilitating strategy formulation and providing a framework for decision-making relative to curriculum design in support of the organizational mission (Macedo et al., 2016; Pearce and Robinson, 1991). Mission statements provide a sense of purpose and direction to an organization (Gray and Smelzer, 1985; Pearce and David, 1987) and contributes to a prioritization of goals by serving to focus resources (Bart, 1998; Bart and Baetz, 1998).

This research aims to fill a gap in the public administration literature pertaining to social equity and the extent to which MPA programs consider issues of race and inequality in their mission statements.

Curriculum adoption

The adoption of curriculum innovations is a complex process. It is particularly challenging to promote change within organizational systems when decision-makers do not perceive changes as necessary (Garland et al., 2010). Additionally, other barriers to adoption are often complicated by organizational factors related to hierarchy, culture, and values (Aarons et al., 2011). Adoptable innovations clear in purpose, which are simple to use, are unambiguously more advantageous than the prior practice, and are observable, and transferrable (Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Oldenburg and Glanz, 2008;

Rogers, 2003; Simpson, 2002). Innovations that are more complex lead to greater levels of uncertainty within a decision-maker. Thus, greater levels of complexity negatively impact adoption decisions in organizations (Thong, 1999). Compatibility is a key barrier to adoption of organizational changes across a system and connotes how consistent an innovation is with the values, experiences, and needs of the potential adopters (Rogers, 1983). In this study, internal and external determinants relative to the curriculum adoption of social equity across MPA programs will be examined. Ideally, key indicators may emerge which may impact the decision-making process of whether to implement a social equity curriculum.

Methods

The overall goal of this study is to determine whether MPA programs accredited by NASPAA have a social equity component. This research aims to fill a gap in the public administration literature pertaining to social equity and the extent to which MPA programs consider issues of diversity and inequality in their mission statements. The data from the present study was obtained using data obtained from the US Census Bureau, NASPAA, and the HAAS Institute at the University of California Berkeley.

According to the NASPAA 2017–2018 roster of accredited programs, data for the current study was obtained via a review of program mission statements of 197 NASPAA member MPA programs. Of these programs, 184 or 93% are the subject of this study. Only programs within the USA were included in this study.[1] Data collected from the 2016–2017 Accreditation Data Report included number of students enrolled in the program, the percentage of minority program enrollment, number of students enrolled in the program, and the number of full-time faculty.

The Inclusiveness Index score developed by the Haas Institute is designed to measure marginality without regard to wealth or economic conditions. For this study, the inclusiveness Index state scaled score, from the 2018 Inclusiveness Index Report, was used to obtain a general state-level equity measure. The range for the scaled Inclusiveness Index score has a maximum value of 100 and a minimum value of 0. The Inclusiveness Index is a state-level metric that focuses on the degree of inclusion of a given state by examining public policies, laws, and outcomes. Higher inclusiveness scores indicate an environment that fosters a lower degree of group-based marginality.

General demographic data was obtained by state and region from the United States Census American Community Survey, 2017 and the Kaiser Family Foundation Population Distribution by Race and Ethnicity, 2017.

Findings

This section provides an overview of key features of the data collected. Table 1 details the search terms used and the total number counts for each term. Social equity as a pillar of public administration should be found among MPA program mission statements. Out of 184 programs, not a single school employed the term 'social equity.' However, concepts associated with social equity were evident. Seventy-one programs used the term 'Diverse' in their mission statements, while the term 'Equity' was found 20 times.

Table 2 provides an overview of Public Administration Master's programs in the USA which have a social equity component presented by region for the 184 NASPAA

Table 1. Program mission statements social equity component Counts.[3]

Key Words	Number
Diverse	71
Diversity	24
Social Justice	6
Equity	20
Inclusion	3
Minorities	2
Minority	0
Social equity	0

Table 2. Public administration Master's programs with social equity present by region.

Region	Number	Percentage
Midwest	20	21.5
Northeast	19	20.4
South	33	35.5
West	21	22.6
Total	93	100.0

Source: NASPAA.

accredited programs. Of those, only 93 have a social equity component within their mission statement. This constitutes 50.5% of programs across the country. When broken down by Region, the largest percentage of Master's programs containing a social equity component reside in the South with 35.5%. The fewest reside in the Northeast at 20.4%.

As Table 2 indicates, the highest concentration of programs that have social equity in their organizational mission are concentrated in the South. The Southern region in the USA also has a high minority population. Historically, this region has a history of racial discrimination, segregation, and unequal treatment of minorities that is well documented. This would seem to indicate that the high concentration of social equity programs in this region is a response to this history.

Table 3 details the percent of minority population by region. The South has a large concentration of minorities with 41.8% while the Midwest has the smallest population of minorities at 23.4%.

Table 4 details the average inclusiveness score ranking by region. Regions that promote policies for education, health, welfare, and criminal justice that tend to benefit marginalized populations have higher inclusiveness scores. States that comprise the West have the highest Inclusiveness score at 37.3 while the Southern States have a scaled score of 21.1, the lowest score relative to the other regions of the country.

Table 5 details key features of MPA programs that have a social equity component within their mission statement. Table 5 illustrates a number of interesting characteristics

Table 3. Percent minority population by region.

Region	Percent Minority Population
Midwest	23.4
Northeast	33.4
South	41.8
West	48.8

Source: US Census, American Community Survey.

Table 4. Average inclusiveness by region.

Region	Inclusiveness
Midwest	32.7
Northeast	26.6
South	21.1
West	37.3

Source: HAAS Institute.

Table 5. MPA programs with social equity – key components.

	Program Size	# Core Faculty	Average School Rank	Percentage Program Minority Population	Average Inclusiveness
Mean	125.00	11.61	6.63	40.35	28.51
Median	102.50	8.00	7.00	36.50	29.76
Standard Deviation	105.69	10.24	1.49	23.69	13.69

among MPA Programs with a social equity component. The first is the overall size of the program. Here we find that programs of this type have a median size of 102.50. The average school rank, based on the Carnegie Classification ranking that distinguishes among schools with larger populations and resources is 7.00. This is equivalent to Research 2 (R2) institution that is characterized by a high degree of research activity. The median inclusiveness average for the states where these schools reside is 29.76. Also of note is an average minority student population of just over 40%.

Table 6 details selected characteristics found among MPA programs that do not have a social equity component within their mission statement. These programs have an average minority student population of approximately 30% with median enrollments of a 70.50.

One of the possible reasons that social equity has not expanded across the discipline of public administration entirely is that the degree of marginalization is low in certain

Table 6. MPA programs without social equity – key components.

	Program Size	# Core Faculty	Average School Rank	Percentage Program Minority Population	Average Inclusiveness
Mean	115.68	12.76	6.57	31.63	27.45
Median	70.50	7.00	7.00	30.00	28.91
Standard Deviation	141.47	14.15	1.38	19.011	13.14

areas of the country and may be impeding adoption. In these regions the relative ambiguity of incorporating social equity among program missions may not be perceived as advantageous or necessary (Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Oldenburg and Glanz, 2008; Rogers, 2003; Simpson, 2002). When change is not perceived as necessary, innovation does not occur (Garland et al., 2010). The Midwest serves as an illustration of this point. The Midwest has the second lowest level of social equity implementation among MPA programs (Table 2) and it also has the lowest level of minority population (Table 3). Coupled with the high inclusiveness ranking of any region (Table 4), I posit that as a region, racialized marginalization and attitudes associated with racial animus are at distinctly lower levels. This is supported in the literature that correlates the size of minority population with community attitudes related to social equity (O'Connell, 2018; Taylor, 1998).[2]

Another possible explanation for the variance of implementation of social equity mission statements by region could be tied to the relative influence of minority population size. The Southern region of the country is a good illustration of this point. The South has the lowest inclusiveness score of any region (21.1) and has the highest minority population at 41.8%. This relationship may be why the South has the largest number of social equity program mission statements at 35.5%. This ties in with issues related to DOI compatibility. DOI compatibility refers to the degree to which an innovation consistently fits with existing organizational processes, values, past experiences, and needs. Greater levels of compatibility increase the expected net benefits of an innovation and require fewer efforts to integrate the innovation within the curriculum. The more compatible the innovation, the greater the likelihood of adoption (Scott et al., 2008). Because of the cultural and historical issues surrounding inclusion in the South and the efforts to correct that history, significant effort among Southern MPA programs have been utilized to ensure that social equity is incorporated into their program missions.

Conclusions and future research

When comparing the programs that have a social equity component within their mission statement with those that do not have a social equity component, a number of interesting points emerge. First, when looking at the size of the programs with a social equity component, those programs are typically larger with an approximate mean of 125 students versus an approximate mean of 115 students for programs without a social equity

component. The median comparisons are even more illuminating with a median score of 102.5 for programs with a social equity component and a median score of 70.50 for those without a social equity component. These findings indicate that the implementation of social equity initiatives by MPA programs requires a commitment of significant financial resources. Those financial resources are typically found among larger programs. Rogers identified a commitment of significant financial resources as a key factor in organizational implementation (Rogers, 1983).

Another characteristic references the inclusiveness scaled score for the state in which the programs are located. For programs that have a social equity component, the inclusiveness scaled scores are higher than the programs that do not have a social equity component by a full point. This suggests that MPA programs present in regions with lower levels of marginality tend to incorporate social equity elements within their mission statements.

A third characteristic is perhaps the most informative. The size of a program's minority student population seems to be determinative. Programs that have a social equity component have minority student populations slightly over 40% while programs that do not have a social equity component have minority student populations slightly over 30%. This demonstrates a positive relationship between the size of the minority student population and the likelihood of having a social equity component within a program mission statement. These findings produce two distinct possibilities. As the size of the minority student population increases, the likelihood of having a social equity component within the program mission increases. This is consistent with Hero and Tolbert (1996) predictions that diversity is likely to be positively related to educational equity. The inverse could also be true, in that programs with social equity components attract minority students. This is consistent with other research that has demonstrated that programmatic efforts to increase diversity resulted in increased admission of minority students (Loftin et al., 2012).

The portrait that emerges from this study is that a large program with a substantial minority population with significant financial resources located in a region of the country with high levels of inclusivity will typically have a social equity component in their organizational mission.

The main research question considered in the article is the prominence of social equity among public administration program mission statements. Although it has long been asserted that social equity is a key component of public administration education, so much so that the National Association for Public Administration made social equity a fourth pillar of public administration, it has failed to become a critical component of public administration curriculum across the country. Based on an analysis of 184 MPA curricula around the USA, this paper advocates for a renewed initiative that leads to the incorporation of social equity across public administration programs. This work builds on the research of Svara and Brunet (2004) that examined the social equity from a curricula perspective. Their findings suggested that more work needs to be done to incorporate social equity into public administration programs. In considering the field of public administration and the accreditation standards that guide Master's programs across the country, the results of this study indicate that there is a serious commitment to

include social equity across accredited MPA program mission statements. The linkages between program mission and curriculum are complex; however, at their core the inclusion of social equity within program mission statements may allow students to be exposed to specific concepts in the curriculum that will help them work in a just and fair way as public servants in an increasingly diverse society.

There are a number of limitations related to the present study. This study did not examine the relationship between program mission and curricula inclusion of social equity components. Future research in this arena should be expanded to examine the specific linkages between program mission and program curriculum among MPA programs. Another area that needs exploration is the inclusion of social equity among mission statements over time. Future research should examine the promulgation of social equity components across accredited MPA programs in a time-series. Additionally, an exploration of social equity within the broader context of social inequality, beyond racialized policy-making, should be examined. This may have the effect of furthering the cause of social equity within the discipline and ensuring that students entering the public sector will be cognizant of the impacts of policy implementation on society. While much work still needs to be done, the NAASPA guidance embodied in the core competencies has served as a beacon for programs to incorporate social equity into their missions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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Notes

1. Territories or districts were also excluded.
2. Social equity tends to be viewed as a tool to counter the negative aspects of racial decision-making.
3. Several program mission statements contained multiple social equity-related components.

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