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Prioritizing social equity in MPA curricula: A cross-program analysis and a case study

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ABSTRACT

Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Policy programs are training grounds for current and future public service leaders. However, many programs may underemphasize the importance of social equity, a pillar of public administration. Without this training, administrators may be poorly placed to understand the causes of inequities and to develop solutions. This article examines these issues in several ways. First, it argues for greater coverage of social equity in graduate programs. Second, it reviews the literature on calls for how to improve teaching social equity. Third, it presents a content analysis detailing the extent to which social equity is integrated into core courses currently offered across 120 MPA programs in the United States. Finally, a case study discusses the authors' development and teaching of a stand-alone special topics social equity course in a large Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration-accredited program.

KEYWORDS

Graduate curricula; social equity; teaching

Social equity is a pillar of public administration alongside efficiency, effectiveness, and economy. It spans several enduring questions, such as what the constitutional underpinnings of equality are, how definitions of “we” change, how much inequity exists, why inequity persists, and how accountability for social equity is achieved (Gooden, 2015b). Across these questions, several patterns emerge. For one, the underrepresented in society—especially along dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and class—tend to experience the costs, not the benefits, of public policies (Gooden, 2015a). For another, public policy makers and public administrators are culpable in perpetuating inequities in the formulation and implementation of public policy (Alkadry & Blessett, 2010).

Professional organizations such as the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) have recognized this culpability and have made promoting social equity an important part of their code of ethics. For instance, NAPA's (2017) definition of social equity emphasizes the importance of active promotion of fairness:

The fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services

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and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy.

Further, ASPA's code of ethics makes social equity a central component. The fourth part of this code reads: "Treat all persons with fairness, justice, and equality and respect individual differences, rights, and freedoms. Promote affirmative action and other initiatives to reduce unfairness, injustice, and inequality in society" (Svara, 2014, p. 565).

Despite the importance of social equity, it remains both understudied and often under-incorporated into Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) curricula (Gooden, 2015a; Norman-Major, 2011). This is a problematic space for one of the field's most important concepts to occupy. If inequities are to be addressed, graduate programs must educate students (who are today's and tomorrow's administrators) both in the role played by public agencies in creating inequities and in how to address those issues (Svara & Brunet, 2005; Wooldridge & Gooden, 2009). Without this training, administrators may be underprepared in several ways, especially understanding their ethical duties, addressing tensions between social equity and other criteria, and exploring why public services can treat one group in ways that promote excellent service yet create inequities for other groups (Gooden & Myers, 2004b; Johnson III, 2011a).

This article explores these issues in several ways. First, it examines the need for greater coverage in social equity in public affairs graduate curricula. Second, the results of a content analysis are presented detailing the extent to which social equity is integrated into core courses currently offered across 120 MPA programs in the United States. Third, a case study discusses the authors' development and teaching of a stand-alone special topics social equity course in a large public administration program accredited through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). The article ends with a discussion and reflection about the role graduate programs must play in promoting greater awareness of social equity.

Acknowledging student and societal needs

Public affairs programs were borne out of need for well-trained public servants who could effectively serve and solve complex problems. This becomes apparent by taking a brief look at calls for the development of public administration curricula over time. Since Wilson's (1887) argument for an autonomous field of study, administration scholars have continuously urged academic institutions to respond to the nation's needs at critical points on the American timeline. Many have emphasized promoting efficiency and effectiveness. Reflecting on World War I, Beard (1916) argued for recruiting and training civil servants to become technical experts, aiming to enhance *efficient* administration. The Roosevelt

Administration supported more formal training to prepare more *effective* federal employees to fulfill the mission of programs that emerged from the New Deal and to fill positions of dire necessity in World War II. And around the mid-20th century, pivotal events like the Civil Rights movement and Johnson's vision of the Great Society began to trigger the integration of social equity in MPA programs.

Today, actions and intentions of the Trump Administration are presenting a similarly momentous state of urgency as those that beckoned such calls in the past. These events deserve special attention by MPA programs. Recent scholarship has acknowledged that the most vulnerable communities are anticipated to suffer the most in the Trump Era, proposing partnerships between public administrators and communities at risk to ensure socially just outcomes (Pynes & Rissler, 2017). Gooden and Rissler (2017) recently noted that local government practitioners are preparing to act as first responders to soothe the pain of the Administration's proposed budget cuts. In order to prepare MPA graduates to take on these roles with the necessary skillsets, MPA programs must also *respond*.

Many students entering the classroom today are calling for greater attention to social equity topics. At both the University of Colorado–Denver (UCD) and the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh (UWO), *students* have organized to address the lack of coverage. At UCD, a graduate student led efforts with the authors and the MPA Director to catalogue various case studies related to diversity and inclusion, pinpointing core courses in which each would be relevant for the learning objectives. After bias incidents at UWO, the Black Student Union and Organization of Latinos responded by organizing an event called *Unpacking Racism at UW Oshkosh*. Students provided explicit advice for faculty to address injustices, from integrating topics of equity and inclusion into the classroom to hiring more faculty and staff of color on campus.

These examples also point to several consequences to maintaining a status quo curriculum. First, the number of women and minority students in MPA programs is worthy of note. As of AY 2013–2014, 57% of MPA students were women, 31% were persons of diversity, and 10% were international students (NASPAA Data Center, 2015). As noted by the President of the Black Student Union at UWO, many highperforming students of color leave the university due to acts of bias, discrimination, harassment, and assault committed against them. Such ramifications leave both emotional and financial scars on programs struggling to recruit and retain students. Equally important, MPA graduates need experience and training in the management of a racially and culturally diverse workplace to be competitive on the job market. Willis (2017) recently noted that many graduate students today struggle in interviews when asked “the diversity question,” an increasingly common emphasis of employers to hire candidates that have a solid understanding and can demonstrate commitment toward equitable approaches with both internal and external audiences.

Faculty and instructional staff can gain from listening to student voices and acknowledging the challenges graduates face beyond the doors of the MPA program, both personally and professionally. Injustices are plaguing the day-to-day lives of the people working within public organizations, in addition to those relying on their services. Fifty-eight percent of Americans believe racism is a “big problem in our society,” which has increased by 22% since President Barack Obama was inaugurated in January of 2009 (Neal, 2017). The number of hate crimes reported in large American metropolitan areas was roughly 20% higher in 2017 (Levin & Grisham, 2017).

College and university campuses are by no means immune. Hate crime reports have also spiked on college campuses after the 2016 election (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). White nationalists triggered a violent outburst at the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville over the summer. Reports have sparked back up again across the United States as students returned in the fall semester (Bauer-Wolf, 2017).

The traditional learning objectives are important. Developing foundational understandings of public administration and policy theories, analytical skills, and competencies in efficient and effective management are no less valuable today than they were when first introduced into the curriculum. However, social equity is still the “unfinished business” of the discipline (Rutledge, 2002), and the ability to systematically assess and advance fairness is becoming ever more vital.

Improving graduate curricula: Calls and suggestions

Student stories echo—with increasing emphasis—the same calls that scholars have been making for more than one decade. It is often found that many graduate public affairs programs de-emphasize or under-cover social equity. Efficiency, effectiveness, and economy are woven throughout courses, yet equity is treated as a stand-alone or unintegrated subject (Norman-Major, 2011). Few textbooks define it, and many do not discuss the history of inequities. When equity is discussed, it is often restricted to topics like human resource management (Svara & Brunet, 2004). While some have questioned the value of employing social equity in MPA courses as an umbrella for topics of constitutional rights, representative bureaucracy, and equal protection (Rosenbloom, 2005), there is growing acknowledgment in the academy that social equity must take a more prominent place in MPA and MPP education (Norman-Major, 2011).

The literature discusses several suggestions for how to better incorporate social equity. At times, the suggestions pertain to using specific classroom tools, such as employing case studies to explore the importance of leadership (Beckett, 1997) or showing popular TV shows to explore cultural competency (Gaynor, 2014). At other times, specific topics are suggested, such as teaching about the Civil Rights movement and the role of churches in providing

governance for those excluded from government (Ward, 2004) or understanding the issues faced by transgender persons when accessing public services (Johnson III, 2011b).

Other suggestions pertain to how to integrate social equity into specific classes or topics. For instance, Gooden and Wooldridge (2007) argued that human resource management courses are ideal venues to discuss social equity. These courses focus on professional training in “black box” of agency practice, especially practices related to the traditional functions of management, like POSDCORB. Social equity could be incorporated into topics such as job analysis, recruitment, and selection (Gooden & Wooldridge, 2007). Further, courses examining tax policies are also ideal venues to discuss equity. Students would learn not only about the “demand-side” of social equity (i.e., delivery of services) but also supply-side (i.e., what is available for programs). These topics would encourage exploring the effects on social equity of tax policy, alternative tax structures, and economics in general (Gianakis & Snow, 2008).

Some authors have focused on ways to more broadly integrate social equity across the curriculum. These goals are influenced by NASPAA’s adoption of its standards regarding diversity, which include creating a diverse and inclusive climate for both students and faculty. After this standard was adopted, programs tend to emphasize issues of race, ethnicity, and gender more, and they increasingly attempt to integrate diversity into courses instead of offering stand-alone courses (Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2008).

Several specific suggestions for how to integrate social equity across a curriculum have been proffered. First, Gooden and Myers (2004a) proposed five ways graduate programs could better prepare students to appreciate and address equity: (1) classes should detail historical patterns in inequities; (2) instructors should encourage (and require) students to examine social equity issues beyond simply one policy area. More generally, MPA and MPP students specifically need to be trained in social equity analysis, or “examining ways to distribute a limited amount of goods or services” (p. 172); (3) students need to understand the communities they serve, so they should acquire knowledge about those communities and interact with them; (4) more faculty should themselves be prepared to engage in social equity analysis; and (5) programs should actively recruit more minority students to foster greater diversity (Gooden & Myers, 2004a).

Second, Norman-Major (2011) provided several ways in which social equity could be incorporated throughout curricula. Assignments might promote understanding the four pillars as well as prompt students to define ethical service, explore how organizational values affect equity, discuss how affirmative action is achieved, dissect administrators’ legal responsibilities, and more (pp. 245–247).

Third, Wyatt-Nichol, Brown, and Haynes (2011), noting the rise in income inequality and the effects this has on both segregation and public service delivery, argued that these topics need to be better understood by MPA and

MPP students. The authors provide suggestions for how these topics can be incorporated into typical courses (pp. 201–203). For instance, an *Introduction to Public Administration Course* could examine outcome disparities along socioeconomic statuses. A budgeting course might examine access and distributional equity in terms of who benefits from tax policies at multiple levels of government. A public policy course could examine procedural fairness in terms of relationships between socioeconomic status and levels of participation in the policy process.

Fourth, some have discussed ways in which curricula should promote greater multicultural awareness. One author found in a survey of 20 top public affairs schools' course content that issues related to social equity (e.g., sexual orientation, gender, race, and ethnicity) are often variably addressed or under-addressed (White, 2004). Given changing demographics in the United States, those involved in service delivery need to be better prepared and trained in diversity, especially given the historical trends that public organizations do not often acknowledge different groups' needs and do not tailor delivery to those needs (Rice, 2004).

Better coverage of cultural competency, especially when matched with classroom strategies designed to promote discussion, is often cited as a way to promote multicultural awareness (Saldivar, 2015). White (2004) found that less than half of top ranked MPA programs cover diversity and cultural competency. Further, when these topics are covered, race, ethnicity, and gender feature most prominently with little attention devoted to sexual orientation, age, religion, and disability. Carriazales (2010) recommended four dimensions in which cultural competency could be integrated into a course: (1) *knowledge-based components*, consisting of definitions and terms, understanding demographics and disparities, and policy and legal dimensions; (2) *attitude-based*, including self-reflection and how biases are evident in both societies and organizations; (3) *skills-based*, or how to engage in communication, program development and assessment, and use of technology affect cultural competency; and (4) *community-based*, or participating in the community (e.g., an internship) and studying how publics and nonprofits are involved in formulating and shaping public sector practice (p. 598).

Similarly, Lopez-Littleton and Blessett (2015) noted that NASPAA standards have no specific objectives for faculty and staff to be trained in cultural competency; there are no requirements for courses and co-curricular components related to cultural competency; and there are no requirements regarding identifying student perceptions of diversity issues. They propose the diversity and inclusiveness framework, which guides programs to (1) train faculty and staff to handle discussions, create assignments, and build classrooms with cultural competency as a central component; (2) integrate knowledge, skills, and abilities so that students can work with diverse groups; and (3) provide ways to evaluate how effective teaching cultural competency is (pp. 564–565).

Content analysis of social equity in PA curricula

Given arguments by both students and scholars to more robustly incorporate social equity into MPA programs, the following section aims to understand the extent to which these topics presently exist in the curricula. This investigation was inspired by Hatch's (in press) content analysis that examined the extent to which diversity of thought is present in the current MPA curricula. She found that less than 20% of required readings in the top MPA programs are written by women. Moreover, only 5% of courses cover the topic of gender diversity. Hatch (in press) therefore argues that the content and concepts discussed in the classrooms do not align—and thus, do not represent—the actual body of knowledge that is available and characterizes the field. The same could be said social equity literature.

Therefore, the following section details a content analysis of department websites, which was conducted to systematically determine how many MPA programs explicitly include social equity in their core courses. We propose that use of the term “equity” signals a balanced commitment to detailing all pillars. This is especially important to account for in core courses which all students are required to take, regardless of their pursuit of more specific emphases, such as healthcare administration, nonprofit management, or emergency management, to name a few.

The content analysis was performed in alignment with the *manifest* approach, which entails quantifying words to explore the extent to which they are utilized in specified text (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). In this analysis, a search was conducted for one key root word: equity. A list of 213 MPA programs in the United States was compiled using the NASPAA Data Center. Once the list was compiled, a random sample of 120 programs was generated. The sampling frame was drawn to uphold a 90% confidence interval with a 5% margin of error.

Once the correct program websites were determined, the core course descriptions were identified on each website. The content analysis was performed by searching the course descriptions. If the term “equity” was included in any of the core descriptions, it was documented on a tracking list in Microsoft Excel. The authors acknowledge that an emphasis on equity-related topics may be further evident through the review of syllabi. However, this initial step in examining MPA program course descriptions is reflective of a more formal, enduring commitment that recognizes the importance of explicitly integrating the pillar writ large.

Table A1 provides the overall results. As illustrated, 12 out of 120 (10%) programs emphasize equity in their core courses. More than five times that amount, or 88 out of 120 (74%), do not require students to take courses that emphasize the topic of social equity. Notably, 19 out of 120 (16%) programs did not have adequate course descriptions available to determine if their core curriculum reflected such topics.

Based on [Table A1](#), if 1 out of 10 MPA programs require students to complete courses that touch on social equity, that suggests that most graduates may finish their degree having never once discussed one of the four *pillars*—and relatedly, core values (Molina & McKeown, 2012) – of public administration. They likely miss the opportunity to gain one of the most critical competencies of their future careers. And this suggests nearly 90% of MPA graduates may be underprepared for the complex challenges that await them in the public and nonprofit sectors.

[Table A2](#) groups the core courses into seven general course areas including: introduction to public administration, ethics, human resource management, information management, public economics and finance, public policy, and race and social equity. The university and course title are also provided to illustrate which content analysis findings make up the totals (see [Appendix A](#) for full course descriptions). Moreover, the following discussion notes the variety of ways that equity is taught in different course areas across the curriculum and the extent to which they are included based on the 120 programs analyzed.

First, equity was most commonly included in *public economics and finance* course descriptions. Six out of 120 programs (5.0%) mention social equity did so in this area. The descriptions often noted that the concept of equity would be explored in contrast with efficiency. The concept may be defined in different terms in such courses, which emphasize expenditure policy, tax revenue, and the budgetary process. Social equity is seldom operationalized as economic equity. However, the reference to equity in these courses may align with Gianakis & Snow's (2008) call for the curriculum to consider fairness in distribution of public services delivered in conjunction with an analysis of how they are funded as well.

Human resource management courses were the second most common in this content analysis. Three out of the 120 programs (2.5%) included equity in their core courses in this area. More specifically, two out of the three course descriptions noted that the topic of “pay equity” would be covered. This finding aligns with Svava and Brunet's (2004) assertion that equity is often considered in human resource management courses. Furthermore, it also suggests that such courses offer opportunities when discussing public service recruitment and retention topics, as Gooden and Wooldridge (2007) argued.

Two out of the 120 programs (1.7%) had *ethics* core courses that emphasized social equity. Both approached the topic through the lens of value dilemmas. These types of courses are also ideal for exploring the tensions inherent in bureaucratic organizations that are tasked with producing democratic outcomes.

The remaining four areas had just one program that mentioned equity, including the *information management*, *public policy*, and *introduction to public administration* core. The Evergreen State College MPA is not designed with core courses like most traditional programs. Rather, it is structured into a cohort model with intensive, week-long sessions that focus on specific

topics, which included *race and social equity*. Thus, this suggests that less than 1% of MPA programs are introducing graduate students to social equity in these types of courses overall.

In review, some MPA programs integrate social equity into their core curriculums across a variety of courses. However, the key finding of our content analysis shows how infrequently equity is actually taught, with just 10% of programs mentioning it at all. MPA core curricula do not adequately represent the pillar of social equity, even though the field has increasingly committed itself to advancing fairness and justice as evidenced by growing scholarship and ASPA's code of ethics. In contrast, the lack of attention to social equity in the classroom aligns with Hatch's (in press) findings in regards to women's scholarship as well.

Perhaps one of the reasons social inequity persists in a practical sense relates to the lack of training public servants receive in up to 90% of MPA programs. Because core courses often neglect social equity topics, there is certainly a need to better incorporate them into the curricula. This can be done in two ways. The first likely includes professional development and intentional curriculum revisions for the core curriculum. The other option involves taking a more punctuated step by developing a social equity course. The following section outlines how to move the needle on designing such an offering.

Case study

The authors used the curricular suggestions detailed in the literature review as well as the initial results of the content analysis to develop and teach a social equity course. We had several goals: (1) apply suggestions for how to teach social equity, especially those detailed in *JPAE*; (2) expose students to multiple, intersecting social equity issues; (3) demonstrate the culpability of the public sector in creating inequities; and (4) discuss actionable strategies to promote equity.

The course was offered in commuter-based NASPAA-accredited school of public affairs in a large research institution. The school offers undergraduate and graduate programs, with public administration and criminal justice in the same department. The institution has recently expanded programs to promote greater awareness of diversity, inclusion, and social equity. [Table A3](#) summarizes the essence of the course.

Background

The authors, who at the time were PhD candidates in the final months of their degrees, approached a senior faculty member as well as the MPA program director about starting a social equity course. There was widespread interest in and support for offering the course, but several obstacles were evident. First, timing was an issue. Course schedules had been set almost a year in advance, so the class could

only be offered in the “Winterim” semester, or the first two weeks of January. Winterim classes typically meet for 4.5 hours a day for 2 weeks. Second, the level of student interest in taking a social equity course was unknown. The authors used individual students’ comments as well as class surveys to showcase how numerous students wanted to know more about social equity. Third, special topics courses tend to be costly because reaching minimum capacity is often difficult. This was especially problematic given when the class could be offered. Despite these issues, the MPA program director agreed to offer the course.

Topics and textbooks

Given the breadth of social equity topics, the authors debated what should be covered, and choosing textbooks was particularly important. It was decided that students should receive a broad overview of the history of social equity and that the final assignment would allow them to specialize in a particular issue. In order to give this broad overview, two textbooks were employed: Gooden’s (2014) *Race and Social Equity: A Nervous Area of Government* and Johnson and Svara’s (2011a) edited book *Justice for All: Promoting Social Equity in Public Administration*. Journal articles and government reports were assigned as needed. The course material was purposefully selected and included a diverse range of scholarly voices, taking Hatch’s (in press) findings into account. Women and people of color authored the majority of the required readings.

Course content

Course content was divided in half. The first was titled “Social Equity Theory.” This portion covered historical trends and public sector culpability in fostering inequity. Inequities faced by several groups were examined regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic class, and intersectionalities. Each day in the first week had a “Theme,” such as “Social Equity in Law Enforcement,” to correspond to how chapters from both textbooks matched. The second was titled “Social Equity in Practice.” This portion consisted of studying applied ways to measure social equity and strategies to improve it. For instance, students learned about performance measurement and tools used to conduct a social equity impact analysis.

Given that the program offered both criminal justice and public administration in one school, the authors approached program chairs to have the course cross-listed. After ensuring that enough content from both degrees would be present, the cross-listing was approved. However, given the timing, only nine students took the course: one MCJ major and nine MPA majors. The class was roughly evenly divided between native English speakers and English Language Learners (ELLs).

Assignments

There were several course assignments. First, reading reflections were required. The instructors used an online instructional system to pose questions to students. Responses were required to be posted before class. For instance, questions included those like, “What are the major ways in which public administrators contributed to urban inequality” and “In your assessment, what is required to improve social equity in law enforcement?”

Second, class discussions formed the majority of class time. Students were assigned as discussion leaders. They led the class through a discussion of the material and were required to have a specific exercise to demonstrate the material for the week in action. Given that half of the students were ELLs, the instructors encouraged cross-country comparisons of social equity issues, such as similarities and differences in gender equity across national boundaries. Further, three guest speakers were invited, including the campus’s Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion, a police sergeant involved in community policing, and a transportation outreach specialist.

Third, the final assignment consisted of students extendedly examining a specific social equity issue of their choice and the role the public sector played in the issue. Topics were varied, such as inequities in private prisons, homeless “camping bans,” and gender inequities in South Korea. Students were required to situate their topics in a constitutional-legal environment to understand what governments are legally obligated to do and which rights are implicated. Next was a literature review to survey and summarize what is known about the topic in public administration and criminal justice and to contextualize the program in the broader public landscape. Next, they conducted a social equity impact analysis using templates Gooden (2014) presented, such as one from Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative (pp. 154–155) or one presented by Johnson and Svava (2011b) that asks a broader series of questions related to assessing a program based upon procedural fairness, access, quality, and outcomes (p. 152). A final section discussed and summarized the findings, including giving suggestions for the future.

Fourth, on the final day, students formally presented the results of their papers to the class. Students were required to have a PowerPoint, speak for at least 15 minutes, and answer several questions about their projects.

Evaluations

Results from student evaluations were largely positive. All reported that other classes often did not discuss equity but that the present class transformed their understanding of social equity. Students indicated they were more aware of public sector culpability in creating and maintaining inequities, and they felt

more confident in using tools to track and improve equity. All reported wanting the class to receive a regular course number, and one suggested a “social justice” track in the MPA program. Some criticisms were noted. One centered on making sure the two weeks more fully “meshed” with one another. The concern was that both topics—theory and practice—were so broad that they could almost be separate classes. Another related comment concerned the division of topics. Most of the class liked the even division between theory and practice, but one person reported wanting more theory, and another wanted more practice.

The school has expressed satisfaction with the results and wants to offer the course again. Several approaches have been discussed. One consists of more regularly offering the course as a special topics course, albeit offered during the fall or spring semesters and promoting the class more. Another consists of giving the course a permanent course number. Yet another suggestion is to promote greater interest by offering the course online. The greatest interest, however, is in encouraging faculty to incorporate social equity throughout the curriculum, especially in core courses.

Discussion

Social equity is an increasingly important concept in public affairs. This importance should be reflected in MPA and MPP curricula. Administrators and policymakers have ethical and constitutional duties to promote social equity (Svara, 2014), and they have pragmatic responsibilities regarding equity as they are increasingly called upon to determine how policies and actions differentially affect underprivileged groups (Gooden, 2014). Graduate programs need to provide adequate training grounds for students to appreciate these issues and acquire the skills necessary to address and resolve inequities.

This need for training is evident in how social equity, representativeness, diversity and inclusion, cultural competency, and the classical tasks of public administration (e.g., planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting) intersect. For instance, without knowledge of social equity, an administrator may take little initiative to hire a diverse workforce or promote inclusive work environments. An administrator may do little to promote cultural competency, thus hindering responsiveness to diverse communities and possibly creating a hostile work environment. Further, an administrator may insufficiently appreciate the ethical imperative to be aware of and address intersecting inequities of gender and gender identity, race, and sexual orientation. A lack of awareness can perpetuate inequities.

However, teaching social equity is complicated. For one, it consists of numerous literatures that may or may not overlap. For instance, literature on race and ethnicity is often distinct from literature on gender. For another, the extent to which one program opts to teach equity can be quite distinct from

another program. A student in one program may learn about equity in personnel administration whereas a student in another program learns about it in terms of policy analysis. One program may discuss equity largely in terms of race and another largely in terms of gender. These are good starts, but two concerning possibilities become evident: (1) social equity may not be integrated *across* subjects and (2) students may only be exposed to particular types of social equity issues without appreciating other equity issues. Without a discipline-level discussion of what equity means and greater incorporation of equity across the discipline, students may remain underexposed to a pillar of the field and the constellation of concepts surrounding it.

Relatedly, the authors' experiences reported herein suggest that social equity classes are difficult yet rewarding to offer. Institutional support is essential. However, even with support, offering special topics courses entails a risk, and it is often difficult to get students to sign up for such courses. Even if students are interested in the course, they may not be able to take it due to the need to prioritize other, more regularly offered courses. As course evaluations and post-semester follow-ups suggest, those who take a social equity class may be those already interested in and committed to equity.

A special topics social equity class can be useful for students, but questions remain regarding sustainability and interest. Two additional options present themselves. First, a social equity class could be made a required course. Such a class, much like in the case study above, would present students with background on social equity problems and offer specific tools to aid in social equity analysis. A problem with this approach is that relegating social equity to one course might discourage discussions about inequities *vis-à-vis* topics covered in other courses. Second, social equity could be covered throughout courses, especially those in the core. As other authors have suggested, there are numerous ways in which this could be accomplished, such as raising equity questions regarding constitutional underpinnings, budgeting, HR, and more (see Norman-Major, 2011; Wyatt-Nichol et al., 2011). Instructors would need to make sure that social equity is not relegated to a "special week" but, rather, spread throughout topics, especially beyond personnel management.

Finally, this article emphasized external social equity concerns. But this is arguably also a critical time to examine how academics can respond to student needs given the challenges cast on, not only citizens, but the administrative state itself. Internal equity is just as important. Greater emphasis must also be placed on workplace protections, emotional labor, hiring/firing, LGBT protections, and so forth.

If social equity is to be taken more seriously in public affairs, both in the academy and in the public sector, it must be taught. Graduate programs need the institutional will and commitment to make social equity a greater teaching priority lest the next generation of public administrators be underprepared to acknowledge, understand, and remedy inequities.

Notes on contributors

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Appendix A: University, course title, and description with keyword “equity”

1. California State University, East Bay

Ethics and Administrative Responsibility: Ethical dimensions of the public service; value dilemmas, administrative ethics and accountability, responsibility in making public choices, whistle-blowing, the public interest; equality and equity in democracy.

2. DePaul University

Government Financial Administration: The basic principles, logic, and processes of public budgeting are explored to understand the allocation of scarce resources. The concepts of efficiency and equity in taxation are applied to identify the advantages and disadvantages of specific taxes such as income, sales, and property. Specific skill sets include present value techniques, interpreting the basic financial reports generated by governments, and evaluating financial performance of a government based upon its financial reports.

3. George Mason University

Ethics and Public Administration: Topics of ethical dimensions including constitutionalism, democratic values and traditions, standards of conduct and ethics, and conflicting values of public officials and social equity of public programs.

4. North Carolina State University

Public Policy Analysis: Methods and techniques of analyzing, developing, and evaluating public policies and programs. Emphasis given to benefit–cost and cost-effectiveness analysis and concepts of economic efficiency, equity, and distribution. Methods include problem solving, decision making, and case studies. Examples used in human resource, environmental, and regulatory policy.

5. Presidio Graduate School

Human Resources & Management Ethics: This course focuses on staff management in public and nonprofit organizations. It explores ethics and decision making in human resources development, law, hiring process, allocation, and training and considers the relationships, contracts, and structures that support human resources planning, management, and action. Students will learn theoretical concepts in the ethics of decision making and apply those concepts to practice in public administration. The course focuses on concepts such as public service, sustainability, equity, bias, legality, liability, ethics, professionalism, labor relations, disclosure, legislation, and staff management in public administration.

Information Management, Technology, and Policy: This course provides an overview of tools, techniques, and best practices for effective information management, technology, and policy (IMTP) in the public and nonprofit sector. Topics covered include organizational mission, ethics, and information; technology’s impact on human resources; Business Process Analysis; technology planning, investment, and financing; information security and accessibility; data governance; business intelligence; shifts in technology infrastructure, operations, and applications; Government 2.0+; Geographic Information Systems and spatial analysis; IT project management; change control and Change Management; technology sprawl; Open Government; emerging laws, policies, and best practices in IMTP. In addition, this course explores ethical issues related to information access, transparency, privacy, and equity. Students are required to learn and directly apply IMTP tools to create improved systems sustainability within real-world agencies.

Public Sector Finance: This course prepares students to apply models from microeconomics, finance, and budgeting to public policy and public administration challenges, and explores the strengths and weaknesses of these models in real-world scenarios. Theoretical approaches to efficiency and equity are used as foundations for examining the roles of public, private, and nonprofit organizations within the overall market for goods and services.

6. The Evergreen State College

Race and Equity: No course description is available as this program is designed as an intensive cohort model; however, the topic of Race and Equity is covered in Week 9 of the first semester for all students.

7. The University of Georgia

Public Personnel Administration: Procedures and problems of governmental personnel administration. Included in the topics are classification, performance appraisal, hiring practices, affirmative action, and pay equity. Studies of governmental agencies are employed to give the students first-hand knowledge of governmental personnel administration.

(Continued)

(Continued).

8. The University of Illinois at Chicago

Economics for Management and Policy: Basic economic tools and methods relevant to public admin and current policy: opportunity cost, supply and demand, rational choice, production costs, competition vs. monopoly, and economic efficiency versus *equity*, market failure, and public goods.

9. The University of Pennsylvania

Public Economics: This course provides students with the knowledge required to understand government operations in relation to the market economy. In theory of supply and demand, students explore the pricing mechanism, price elasticity, and the effects of price controls on markets. Efficiency is examined in connection with competition and again in connection with *equity*, and market failure is considered as a reason for government intervention. Cost–benefit analysis is examined in the context of selecting among public investment alternatives. The course also assists students in addressing issues connected with local public goods and economic development.

10. University of Alaska Southeast

Economics and Public Policy: Examines economics both as a determinant of public policy and as a tool of public administration. Topics include how markets allocate resources, the role of government in a market economy, market failures and responses, problems of efficiency vs. *equity*, and application of microeconomic tools to analysis of Alaska and national policy issues.

Human Resource Administration: Survey of human resource management issues in the public sector, including recruitment, selection, classification, compensation, training and development, discipline and dispute resolution, collective bargaining, performance evaluation, and risk management. Addresses law and practice of current issues such as affirmative action, discrimination, sexual harassment, disabilities, family medical leave, and pay *equity*.

11. University of North Texas

Revenue Policy and Administration: Examination of the economic, political, and administrative issues that governments encounter when making revenue decisions, including how to achieve *equity*, economic efficiency, and administrative feasibility. Topics include the three principal revenue sources of government—income, sales, and property taxes—plus such nontax sources as user charges, grants-in-aid, and lotteries.

12. West Chester University

Foundations of Public Service: Introduces students to the practice and discipline of public administration and the values of public service. Special emphasis is placed on the concepts of pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically to uphold the public trust; and demonstrating respect, *equity*, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants. Students are also introduced to the ethics of public administration and nonprofit organizations.

Appendix B: Tables

Table A1. Percentage of MPA programs that mention social equity in core courses.

| | % of programs ($n = 120$) | | | Total |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Yes | No | Not available | |
| Social equity in core course description(s) | 12 (10%) | 89 (74%) | 19 (16%) | 120 (100%) |

Table A2. Core course area with “equity” in description: Total courses.

| Core course area | Total |
|--|-------|
| <i>Introduction to Public Administration</i> | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Chester University: Foundations of Public Service | |
| <i>Ethics</i> | 2 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> California State University, East Bay: Ethics and Administrative Responsibility George Mason University: Ethics and Public Administration | |
| <i>Human Resource Management</i> | 3 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presidio Graduate School: Human Resources & Management Ethics The University of Georgia: Public Personnel Administration University of Alaska Southeast: Human Resource Administration | |
| <i>Information Management</i> | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presidio Graduate School: Information Management, Technology, and Policy | |
| <i>Public Economics and Finance</i> | 6 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DePaul University: Government Financial Administration Presidio Graduate School: Public Sector Finance The University of Illinois at Chicago: Economics for Management and Policy The University of Pennsylvania: Public Economics University of Alaska Southeast: Economics and Public Policy University of North Texas: Revenue Policy and Administration | |
| <i>Public Policy</i> | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Carolina State University: Public Policy Analysis | |
| <i>Race and Social Equity</i> | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Evergreen State College: Race and Equity (Cohort Model) | |

Table A3. Summary of course.

| Dimension | The course |
|-------------|--|
| Textbooks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Johnson and Svara: <i>Justice for all: Promoting social equity in public administration</i>. New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe. Gooden: <i>Race and social equity: A nervous area of government</i>. New York: Taylor & Francis. |
| Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Social Equity Theory</i>: The roots of equities in race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic class, and intersectionalities. <i>Social Equity in practice</i>: Social equity performance measurement, measures of inequities (e.g., GINI coefficients) . |
| Assignments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading reflections Course discussions with leaders Social equity impact analysis Final presentation |