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The evolution of organizational forms for public service education

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates transformations in public service education over the past 50 years, specifically: How have organizational forms evolved, and what lessons can we draw from that evolution? The organizational form construct originates in population ecology theory. We draw from a variety of evidentiary sources in answering the research questions, specifically extant literature, quantitative analysis of longitudinal data about organizational forms, and interviews with public service education opinion leaders. Among the findings are that formal structures, program activities and delivery, and the norms that underpin public service education have changed significantly over time. Organization environments influence organizational forms in public service education. Stand-alone university units, typically colleges and schools, offering a comprehensive portfolio of teaching, research, and service are increasing and have become a preferred form for public service education. Educational leaders in US universities should note emerging organizational forms as they seek to adapt to changing environments.

The Progressive Era lasted less than 3 decades – roughly from Theodore Roosevelt's presidency in 1901 to the advent of the Great Depression in 1929. The era was a time of both business expansion and industrial and social reforms. Progressives sought to make America a better and safer place to work and live, to regulate big business, to clean up corrupt governments, and to conserve the environment and natural resources. A feature was professionalization of activities such as law, medicine, and accounting. The movement gave rise to many polity or civic service professions, among them city managers and social workers (Stever, 1987), in response to the public work created by progressive reforms.

Not surprisingly, the changes sparked by progressive reforms led to the founding of the first higher education program for nurturing the new polity professions. The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs opened at Syracuse University on October 3, 1924. The School of Citizenship and Public Administration at the University of Southern California became the second public service education program in the US, opening in 1929.

Although university-based public service education[1] in the US is approaching its centennial, little formal effort has been made to study its evolution and the associated processes and social forces. Our inattention to the evolution of public service education is surprising given its current scale. For example, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and

Administration (NASPAA), a membership organization for such schools, represented 317 members globally in 2020–21; 204 programs at 187 of those member schools have been accredited by NASPAA's affiliated organization, the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA).

COPRA is one of at least three agencies worldwide that accredit public service education programs. The European Association for Public Administration Accreditation, which was formed in partnership between the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee), conducts quality assurance for programs in Europe. The International Commission on the Accreditation of Public Administration and Training Programs (ICAPA) identifies standards for public administration education and training programs worldwide. NASPAA members deliver the full range of public service education, but COPRA accredits master's programs only. The other two organizations accredit master's, PhD, undergraduate, and training programs.

The takeaway after reviewing the state of public service education is that it has grown significantly in the past century and is now institutionalized in higher education, not only in the US but across the globe (Anheier, 2019).[2] This article focuses on an important questions arising from the growth and institutionalization of public service education since its inception: How have organizational forms for public service education evolved, and what lessons can we draw from how they have changed?

For practical reasons, the universe we encompass in this article is smaller than the one implied above. We marshal evidence from the last 50 years rather than the 100 years for which we can trace developments in public service education. Because national context is an important variable, the evidence we scrutinize focuses on US public service education, which began earlier, grew more quickly, and was institutionalized sooner than in other parts of the world. We believe that these temporal and geographic constraints do not diminish the value of our findings for other parts of the world, however, and that the inferences we draw can appropriately be generalized because of the theoretical foundations and rigor of our analysis.

This article is intended to inform directors, deans, university administrators, and other interested stakeholders about how public service education has evolved since its origins in the Progressive Era. Our primary research questions: How have organizational forms for public service education evolved in the last 5 decades? What theories inform us about the evolution of public service education, especially since the 1970s, when it became an identifiable organizational field in US higher education? What do patterns of change in organizational forms for public service education tell us about its future?

We present our evidence in four steps, beginning with a review of the literature – most of it descriptive – on the evolution of public service education. We next review the primary theories that inform our understanding of the evolution and institutionalization of organizational forms. The theory has been applied to and confirmed for a variety of organizational settings and populations, which makes us confident it is worth applying to public service education in institutions of higher learning. The third step is presentation of our research methodology, including the strategy, data, variables, and quantitative and qualitative methods used for the analysis. We then report the results of the research. The article concludes with discussion of the results and their practical implications.

Review of literature about evolution of public service education in the US

Although the primary goal of this article is to analyze longitudinal data about the evolution of organizational forms for public service education, we begin by looking at the literature on that education. We start with a simple query: How is the evolution of public service education depicted? The brief summary of this literature reviews early conceptions and growth of public service education, periodic waves of change, discrete changes in its environment, and debates about undergraduate public service education.

Early conceptions of public service education

Though the beginnings of public service education in the US are well documented, university-based programs received relatively little attention in the 3 decades after the first were established in the 1920s, at Syracuse University and the University of Southern California.[3] The silence is not entirely surprising in light of the Great Depression and World War II that came soon after the founding of the first schools.[4]

Despite what may be perceived as a pause in the growth of public service education in the 1930s and 1940s,[5] several commentators shed light on shifting contexts that had far-reaching, long-term consequences. One development (Plant, 2015) is that threads of Progressive reforms were woven together in those decades. Plant recounts that William Mosher, founding dean at Maxwell, played a key role in driving the idea that such a melding "would require the cooperation of universities, research bureaus, active citizens, and professional administrators" (p. 14).

Another development was a shift away from the foundations for public service education and research in the first third of the 20th century. Municipal research bureaus, led by the New York bureau, founded in 1907 by Frederick Cleveland and William Allen, were the original settings for developing a body of knowledge and theory for the field and for training people and applying that knowledge (McDonald, 2010). The bureaus and the government institutes that gradually augmented them at many universities represented the first organizational field for public service education. In 1936, John Gaus (1936) describes affairs at the beginning of the New Deal:

> Throughout the country the professional organizations of public servants ... are similarly working in close association with university departments of political science and with governmental research organizations in the effort to improve the quality of administration and to introduce the note of research, inquiry, and self-examination into the day-to-day life of the public servant (pp. 41–42).

As Ascher (1946) reveals in his tribute to Mosher after his death in 1945, change was afoot. Mosher, the first nondirector to chair the Governmental Research Association (GRA) executive committee, in 1939–40, sensed an incompatibility among the research bureaus and the needs of university faculty and diverse professional administrators at all levels of government:

> Indeed, the founder-members [of the GRA] had over a decade viewed with some doubts the infiltration into GRA of university professors and public administrators. These sought in its annual meetings a forum for the discussion of issues of public policy and the place of

administration in a changing society, rather than the problem of operating a citizen-supported local bureau. As a result, neither group got adequate satisfaction out of the association. (p. 104)

Mosher was instrumental in founding the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and served as its first president, bringing to the scene a professional association to integrate disparate strains of Progressive reforms (Mosher, 1938).

Although relatively few other schools were initiated immediately after founding of the first public service education schools, a coherent foundation was laid for the intellectual development of the field in this period. Creating the Master of Public Administration (MPA), establishing ASPA and the American Political Science Association (APSA) as association homes for professionals and scholars, and redefining the organizational field from governmental research associations to university-based programs were key components of the foundation.

Evolution as periodic waves of change

The roots of public service education described above have been incorporated into scholarship as specific waves of change as public service education evolved (Stokes, 1996). Many discussions of the waves of change treat them as epochs to explain longer-term temporal developments. For example, Anheier (2019) identifies three waves in the evolution of public policy schools to project a likely fourth wave. He labels the four waves the Wilson/Truman school (public administration and management focus), McNamara/Rand school (public choice and political economy focus),[6] Advanced Political Study school (political philosophy focus), and New Laswell school (future public policy). Anheier credits changing environments as a force behind a fourth wave. \"The environment for public policy schools changed by slow erosion rather than abruptly. Indeed, the seeds for coming changes were put in place at a time when public policy schools blossomed" (p. 79). His analysis is largely anecdotal, however, and lacks systematic evidence of the attributes of schools or the organizational population.

Another sweeping observation about the evolution of public service education is Ellwood's (2008) retrospective on his involvement with public policy programs after their establishment in the 1970s. Ellwood compares the forms of public service programs in 1981 and 2006. His 1981 inventory is based on a NASPAA database. From that data, Ellwood identifies five types and their frequencies[7]:

(1) separate schools or programs of public administration – 91;
(2) public administration programs located in political science departments – 72;
(3) public policy programs – 9;
(4) comprehensive schools of public administration offering degrees at two or more levels – 5; and
(5) generic management programs located in business schools – 3.

Ellwood's 2006 data is drawn from a survey conducted for a conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) convened for the 20th anniversary of the first conference of APPAM's Committee of Institutional Representatives

and public policy faculty. The 1981 and 2006 samples are based on very different popula-tions. Ellwood describes three categories comprising the 42 master's programs at the 2006 APPAM conference:

(1) new policy programs and comprehensive public administration programs – 16;
(2) original public policy programs – 6;
(3) other programs – 20.

Ellwood observes that public administration programs in political science departments, representing the second-largest number of programs in 1981, is absent from the 2006 APPAM sample. He writes: "They are still there but are not in the data collected for this conference. Although these programs were small . . ., they did – and still do – train many public administrators" (p. 176).

The disappearance of generic schools

Because the 1981 and 2006 samples are drawn from vastly different populations, it is impossible to produce valid inferences about the evolution of public service education from the data. Ellwood offers at least one generalization that merits consideration, though: "Generic management programs have largely disappeared" (p. 176). The key idea of generic schools is that administration is an activity common to all sectors and therefore needs little differentiation across business, public, or education institutional environments. Most gen-eric schools were designated schools of administration, management, or administrative science to contrast them with those whose names contained "business" or "public."

Although Ellwood's inference is based on limited and to some extent faulty evidence,[8] his conclusion garners support elsewhere in the literature. Kraemer and Perry (1980) concen-trated exclusively on the population of generic schools and the challenges associated with public administration education in this organizational form. Their analysis affirms Ellwood's (2008) subsequent speculation about one of the difficulties of public service education in generic schools, which is the gap in starting salaries offered in the government and business sectors (Kraemer & Perry, 1980, p. 96).

Many of the schools identified in Kraemer and Perry's analysis have changed organiza-tional forms. The School of Public Administration in the College of Business and Public Administration at the University of Arizona, which became the School of Government and Public Policy after the dean of the College of Business sought to dissolve the MPA program (Kerrigan, 2011; Rich, 2013), is one example. As further support for Ellwood's (2008) inference that generic programs had largely vanished by 2006, independent sources (Bowman & Thompson, 2013; Frederickson & Smith, 2003) arrived at similar conclusions.

The effects of discrete changes in the environment for public service education

The periodic waves of change examined in the sources discussed above represent one stream of research about the evolving environment for public service education. Another stream of commentary about public service education involves discrete environmental changes that potentially influence organizational forms. This literature is more recent. Among the issues it takes up are the internationalization and globalization of public service

education (Berry, 2011; Knott, 2013; Rubaii, 2012), public accountability (Berry, 2011), and fiscal pressures (Berry, 2011; Rich, 2013; Teicher, 2010). The following discussion reflects that fiscal pressures and their implications have garnered the lion's share of attention.

Fiscal pressures

Analysts identify several fiscal pressures on universities and their public service education programs. One is declining levels of financial support, particularly from state governments. Declining state support indicates broader transformations, however. Daniel Rich (2013), dean of the School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware from 1990 to 2001 and university provost from 2001 to 2009, characterizes the transformation:

> The key driver of the global transformation in higher education is a long-term shift in the underlying political economy that shapes costs, revenues, markets, and priorities. The emerging environment of higher education is more turbulent, more competitive, and more threatening than was the case only a few decades ago. (p. 264)

A second theme is how fiscal pressures are changing the ways that universities and their units manage internal affairs. One manifestation is models for funding higher education programs. In her NASPAA presidential address, Frances Berry (2011) drew attention to a report (Teicher, 2010) that the association commissioned on the heels of the 2008 recession. Berry observed that two distinct models of funding – traditional and business – had come to govern fiscal decisions:

> The traditional model, representing how most of our schools receive their funds, is one in which the budgets of departments are determined primarily by historical precedent and have little direct linkage with enrollments. ... The second type of model is the "business model," which has emerged in the last 10 years. In it, department budgets are based on numbers of students served or course credit hours, making enrollment critical to a program's financial stability. (p. 4)

Berry (2011) ties the business model to roughly the year 2000, but it originated in private universities and then diffused to public universities by the late 1980s (Whalen, 1991). Daniel Rich (2013) refers to the shift in funding models as the rise of the entrepreneurial university. Rich viewed the alteration as threatening public service education as it had been known before the new millennium. He writes:

> For most public affairs programs, the rise of the entrepreneurial university represents a challenge that will be difficult to meet. Most public affairs programs are simply not designed to be successful under the entrepreneurial university's calculus of value, and the opportunities for redesign are much more limited than the rhetoric of innovation and entrepreneurship would suggest. (p. 269)

A third area concerning fiscal pressures is how universities and their units are addressing shifts in public funding for public service education. How have organizational forms – the formal organizational structures, patterns of activity within organizations, and the normative order – been perceived to change as a result of fiscal pressures? Although no one has marshaled evidence to answer this question systematically, knowledgeable observers have offered assessments.[9]

Rich (2013) argues that a shifting normative order in higher education is the basis for long-term transformation. The transformation is not at the unit level but reflects instead changing values within higher education, which could have profound implications for public service education. Rich writes:

> In essence, public affairs programs and the public service values they embody are themselves no longer valued as they were for the last half century. Moreover, these programs and values are not regarded as important to the emerging vision of the public role of 21st-century universities. (p. 264)

In addition to a changing normative order, Berry (2011), and Rich (2013) and others point to changes in formal organizational structures and patterns of activity within academic units. For instance, Rich argues that, when confronted with the new fiscal environment, comprehensive schools[10] – those offering "diverse programs of instruction, research, and service" (p. 269) – may be positioned for innovation and growth. Rich envisions opportunities for some but says they may come at the cost of other programs. He observes, "The expansion of these comprehensive schools as profit centers, with increased enrollments (on-site, at satellite campuses, or online) is likely to come, at least in part, at the expense of the much larger number of small state and regional programs" (p. 269).

Termination is one prospect that confronts public service programs in the face of fiscal pressures. Rich (2013) frames the choices:

> Fighting to save graduate public affairs programs as stand-alone entities is likely to become increasingly difficult given the inability of many programs to generate positive net revenues or to make a sustainable claim on university subvention [i.e., subsidies] as a separate entity. In fact, the separate identity of programs may make them a more vulnerable target of downsizing budget decisions than would be the case if they were part of a broader program mix representing a stronger institutional alliance. (p. 273)

Although we have noted Ellwood's observation that generic schools have disappeared, some of their constituent programs have emerged in new forms. Rich characterizes as a "success story" the University of Arizona's School of Government and Public Policy, created by an alliance between the political science department and the MPA program after the unit that housed the program was terminated.

Terminating or consolidating programs are ways to respond to fiscal pressures, particularly for graduate-only programs, but undergraduate offerings are another option. Rich (2013) notes:

> Short of consolidation, some graduate public affairs programs may develop undergraduate programs that add tuition-generating enrollments and also provide the opportunity to recruit students for graduate programs. Beyond this, undergraduate programs strengthen citizenship education, combat the negative vision of government and public administration, and more visibly affirm the importance of public service values within the university community. (p. 274)

Berry (2011) arrives at a similar conclusion that undergraduate education will become more compelling: "Under the business model, nearly every public affairs program will have pressures to develop undergraduate programs. Our member schools are taking a variety of approaches regarding what they offer undergraduates, such as degrees in public policy, public administration, public service, and urban affairs" (p. 4).

Berry and Rich's observations are an opportunity to review another focus in the literature: undergraduate public service education.

Debates about undergraduate public service education

Although undergraduate education was integral to the identity of citizenship education at both Syracuse and USC in the 1920s, William Mosher's primary ambition was to institutionalize the MPA degree (Ascher, 1946; Plant, 2015). He succeeded, and the MPA gradually became a fixture in virtually all public service education programs.

What, then, has become of undergraduate programs in public service education? Eleanor Laudicina (2011), chair of the NASPAA Undergraduate Section from 1979 to 1981, recounts the evolution of the their status. NASPAA approved guidelines for undergraduate education in 1976, just 2 years after curricular standards for master's degree programs were adopted. Master's programs tripled between 1970 and 1978 (Laudicina, 2011). The rapid growth of MPA programs in the 1970s, coming on the heels of governments expansion in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the almost simultaneous formalization of self-study and peer review for graduate programs in the 1970s, brought obvious consequences for undergraduate education. Laudicina (2011) describes these consequences:

> To reassure those who feared that the standards and peer review process would stifle innovation and creativity, the "Broadmoor Pledge" assured that diverse approaches to meeting the educational needs of public service would be welcome. Acceptance of diversity, however, had its limits, as proponents of undergraduate education soon discovered. The effort to "protect the brand" (i.e., the integrity and credibility of the MPA degree) may have been successful, but the end result was to marginalize programmatic or curricular forms not related to master's-level education or not consistent with the standards for master's degree programs. The underlying though never expressly articulated sentiment was that alternative approaches to public service education were by definition second rate and a potential threat to the legitimacy of the MPA degree. (p. 319)

The consensus on professionalization of master's programs was lacking on undergraduate goals. How undergraduate public service education has fared in the period since the 1970s is therefore not solely the result of being crowded out by graduate programs. One source of contention is whether undergraduate public service education is professional or assumes a liberal arts identity. This distinction has been a source of lively debate for decades. Reporting on multiyear deliberations among NASPAA's Committee on Undergraduate Education, David Sweet (1998) writes that undergraduate programs should be multidisciplinary, drawing from behavioral and administrative sciences and liberal arts disciplines. The panel's final resolution is for professional programs, according to Sweet: "The Committee recommended that the programs focus on process, substance, and the skills needed to understand and implement public policy" (p. 209).

Others who have looked at undergraduate public service education express quite different perspectives. Ventriss (1998) contends that professional undergraduate education is neither needed nor desirable for public administration or public policy. His concern is that professional undergraduate education will just reinforce students' technical orientation. "As convincing as some of the arguments may seem concerning the importance of exposing undergraduates to managerial and policy skills – even with the customary lip-service given to the intrinsic value of liberal arts – such an educational view will only serve to obfuscate the hidden (and myopic) technocratic proclivity in such

a pedagogical approach" (p. 228). Ventriss is not opposed to undergraduate public service education but to forms that tilt toward professional training. He is also explicit about forms he considers acceptable:

> I think education in public affairs at the undergraduate level should focus exclusively on broad macrosocietal issues—namely, issues dealing with what the substantive role of the citizenry might be in a democratic polity at a time when most policy issues are becoming inherently more complex and technical, or the issues concerning the nature of the public interest in an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society; or even an exploration of the different notions of social justice and their meanings (and political implications) in contemporary society. (p. 228)

The debate in Sweet (1998) and Ventriss (1998) is present across the higher education landscape. Sweet asserts that 160-plus universities offered undergraduate programs in public administration and public affairs in 1998. Ventriss does not report the frequency of public service–oriented liberal arts degrees, but in 2013, Carrizales and Bennett reported 15 undergraduate programs related to public service, policy, and management. Programs at four universities – Florida State, Providence College, Rutgers University–Newark, and University of Massachusetts Boston – offered degrees or concentrations designated as public service. Programs at 11 others were categorized as prioritizing management or policy over service.

To summarize, the literature on the evolution of public service education in the US reflects that its initial development was focused primarily on legitimizing the MPA (see especially Henry, 2015; Plant, 2015). As later debates about undergraduate public service education illuminate, the attention to the MPA – including its self-study, peer review, and accreditation – deflected attention from undergraduate education and shaped normative debate about it. A different fiscal climate and higher education norms also were influential in shaping the organizational field for public service education. The environmental shifts created threats to the dominant, graduate-only focus of public service education and brought renewed attention to undergraduate programs.

What influence do environmental factors have on organizational patterns of change and legitimacy in public service education? We next discuss theories informing our understanding of the evolution of organizational forms for public service education.

Theoretical models for understanding changes in public service education

We use several theoretical models to guide our analysis of the evolution of organizational forms for public service education. The theory central to our analysis is population ecology theory (Hannan & Freeman, 1977), which applies the biological model of evolution to organizational populations. Also reviewed is density dependence theory, a by-product of population ecology theory that focuses on subpopulations of similar organization forms. The discussion concludes by considering structural inertia, which may insulate organizations from environmental shocks.

Organizational ecology

Population ecology theory, originating from the Darwinian model of evolution, provides a structure for better understanding types of organizations and their suitability for survival within a variety of environments and over time. Hannan and Freeman (1977) argue that

until the 1970s, organizations were viewed through an adaptive lens, wherein pressures from the external environment induced change. They offer a radically different model of organizational change, contending that environments "select" organizational forms, mimicking how natural environments shape species (Singh & Lumsden, 1990). They apply this model by exploring the environmental processes leading to survival and examining the origin and transformation of organizational forms as responses to environmental demands.

They conceptualize three broad dimensions that distinguish organizational forms. First, the formal structure of an organization is inferred by examining tables of organization and formal rules of operation and procedures. Second, patterns of activity (what gets done by whom) distinguish the boundaries of organizational forms (Hannan & Freeman, 1986). Finally, the normative order, established by members and influential external actors, defines ways of organizing that become legitimate in the eyes of stakeholders, creating professional standards, values, and goals that are shared across organizations of the same form (p. 935). Survival rates for organizational forms can be evaluated by assessing the level of structural inertia and attitudes toward change, isomorphism (organizations becoming increasingly similar), and environmental complexity in the population.

Population density

Evaluating variation in organizations within a population over time can help researchers identify the antecedents of birth, death, and change across organizational forms. Density dependence theory contends that within an environment, legitimacy is enhanced when a form has large numbers of similar forms (Hannan & Freeman, 1988). The births and transformations of organizations within a population lead to a rise in density of this form through isomorphic evolution, characterized by convergence toward common forms or characteristics (Bogaert et al., 2016; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The increasing acceptance of common organizational form reduces the demand for continued justification to stakeholders, reducing the costs for existing and entering organizations of this form (Stinchcombe, 1965). As a result, ties within the environment strengthen, leading to increasingly more robust organizational forms with lower rates of failure (Stinchcombe, 1965).

Organizations adopt a set of features common to other firms within a population due to shared environmental conditions, industry or professional expectations, and pressure from powerful stakeholders (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Using the theory and density analyses employed in this area of literature, we observe trends in organizational forms for public service education programs and examine how changes in the last 50 years signal the emergence of an organizational form that is well suited to this environment.

Change and inertia

Literature on structural inertia describes the challenges and consequences associated with change, the potential benefit of protecting organizational forms from external pressures, and the consequences of inappropriate or ill-timed adaptive change (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Once founded, organizations often develop structural inertia that can serve to protect and insulate them from environmental shocks. Péli et al. (2000) argue that environments

change more rapidly than organizations and that inertia can be associated with positive selection, wherein dominant organizational forms are more likely to survive when insulated from external pressures or environmental changes. However, changes in stakeholder pressures and features of the environment can lead to negative outcomes for unfit organizational forms unable or unwilling to adapt.

Changing demands and external pressures can signal developing normative expectations for organizations, which may lead to heightened impetus for change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Public service educational units face numerous sources of pressure from a variety of stakeholders, with variation across environment (e.g., sectoral or regional differences). Public service education programs founded in the first 8 decades of the 20th century represent a varied set of organizational forms that faced processes of competition and selection. Organizations within this population optimized structural form, behavioral patterns, and other features over time, creating dominant features within the organizational environment.

Quantitative longitudinal analysis

We employ a longitudinal descriptive analysis of changes in organizational forms (see online Supplement: Appendices for operational definitions) to examine the density of unit types and evaluate the nature of changes to formal structure from 1985–2016 using NASPAA rosters of accredited programs.[11] While NASPAA-accredited programs make up an influential subset of public service education, we recognize that some programs do not seek or maintain accreditation. We later discuss descriptive statistics using a broader sample of programs (using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)) and the NASPAA membership roster) to address the limitations of this sample. The advantage of looking at longitudinal information drawn from NASPAA-accredited programs is that this data set provides changes in public service education over a longer period than others. Examining the programs with the most complete data (those reporting for at least 21 years, starting no later than 1995), we follow 85 US universities to highlight signals of changes in the normative and formal structures of public service education.

Using our guiding theoretical dimensions (formal structure, patterns of activity, and normative order), we examine trends in organizational form in the following ways. First, we use formal structure, defined in this article as a higher education unit within which public service education is housed, to capture, in part, the level of focus and discretion afforded to entities granting public service degrees. We assume that such an entity will have a higher level of autonomy or decision-making capacity when housed in a school or department of public service rather than an adjacent field (e.g., business or political science). We track substantive field changes and reflect on trends by formal structure (i.e., which programs are likely to experience such changes).

We weigh changes in patterns of activity, including trends in degree types offered – particularly the expansion of undergraduate education over the last several decades – using a broader set of programs from NCES's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). These data let us compare trends by institutional characteristics, including sector and degree type.

Next, we discuss potential insulation from trends by examining whether schools of public service exhibit inertia or resistance to change in the form of substantive field transition (e.g., a public affairs school becoming a business school). Finally, we look at features of the predominant normative environment by reviewing prevailing values and goals emphasized in program mission statements.

Program densities, 1985–2016

Schools of public service constitute the largest growth category of formal structure from 1985 to 2016 across US universities. The programs in our sample are housed in 12 private and 73 public institutions in 37 states (see, Figure 1 for breakdown of programs by formal structure).While departments of political science represented the dominant unit for public service education delivery in the earliest years we observe, stand-alone schools of public service saw a higher rate of growth over the last several decades, trending above departments of political science in the early 2000's, signaling a growing movement in which departments, sometimes with multiple primary department stakeholders (e.g., political science and public administration), become stand-alone schools of public service.[12] Similarly, schools of public policy grew substantially in the early 2000's, rivaling combined public service departments and schools.

Of the programs reporting during our full set of years (1985–2016), we note several patterns for those undergoing a field change, as measured by program name changes. Nearly 47% of programs undergoing field changes added a public service field (e.g., public administration or public policy) to their name or replaced a separate field (e.g., political
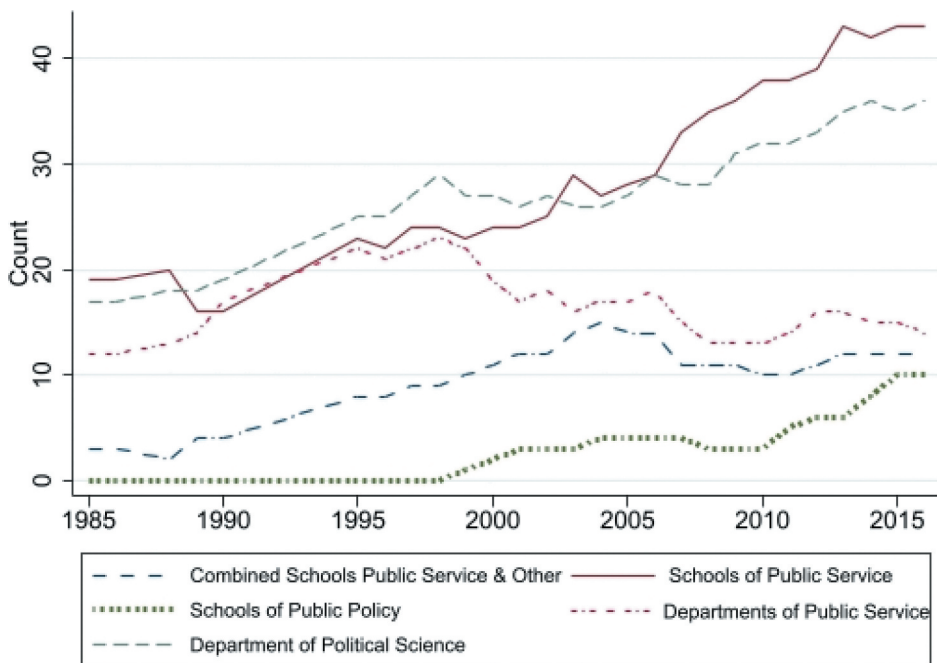

Figure 1. Density of programs by formal structure and year.

Table 1. Number of accredited programs by formal structure and year.

	School of Public Service	Department or Program of Public Service	Department of Political Science
1985	11	33	12
1988	12	41	12
1990	13	48	13
1998	16	55	15
2000	16	54	16
2003	19	52	15
2005	18	53	15
2008	20	50	16
2010	21	48	17
2013	22	46	18
2016	22	45	18

Data derived from NASPAA Accreditation Rosters from 1985–2016.
The programs in our sample are housed in 12 private and 73 public institutions in 37 states.

science) with public service, while only 24% switched formal structure from a public service field to another field. Nineteen percent added a donor name to their program, and 11% either condensed the list of subfields presented in the name (e.g., from school of public policy and health administration to school of public policy) or added a field not directly related to public service (e.g., business administration).

Using information from NASPAA membership rosters to include programs that were not NASPAA accredited (N = 103), we find similar trends in program ownership from 1994, 2006, and 2021. Of the 16 member programs with name changes from 1994 to 2006 that indicated a substantive shift in formal structure, eight became stand-alone schools of public service. The period 2006–21 saw another 13% rise in programs' becoming stand-alone schools of public service. The formal structures constituting the greatest declines were departments, centers, or institutes of public service and departments of political science (see, Table 1 below for descriptive data). These results are consistent with the findings from the set of NASPAA-accredited programs.

Analysis of patterns of activity and growth in public service education

To move beyond the institutions in the NASPAA universe, we use a broader data set from IPEDS, including all universities (n = 203) with at least one degree conferred in the public service area using the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes for public administration and public policy.

We calculate the growth in number of degrees conferred by type from 1988 to 2019. Breaking down the growth in public service degrees conferred, we see an overall pattern of growth over the last several decades for doctoral, master's, and baccalaureate degrees awarded. While the scale is different for each category, we observe strong upward trends in public service degrees awarded across each category (see, Figures 2 and 3 below). The evidence reflects relative expansion of undergraduate public service education; universities have significantly expanded baccalaureate public service degree options in recent years. Growth in doctoral public service degrees indicates both an expansion of the field and a growth in public service research.
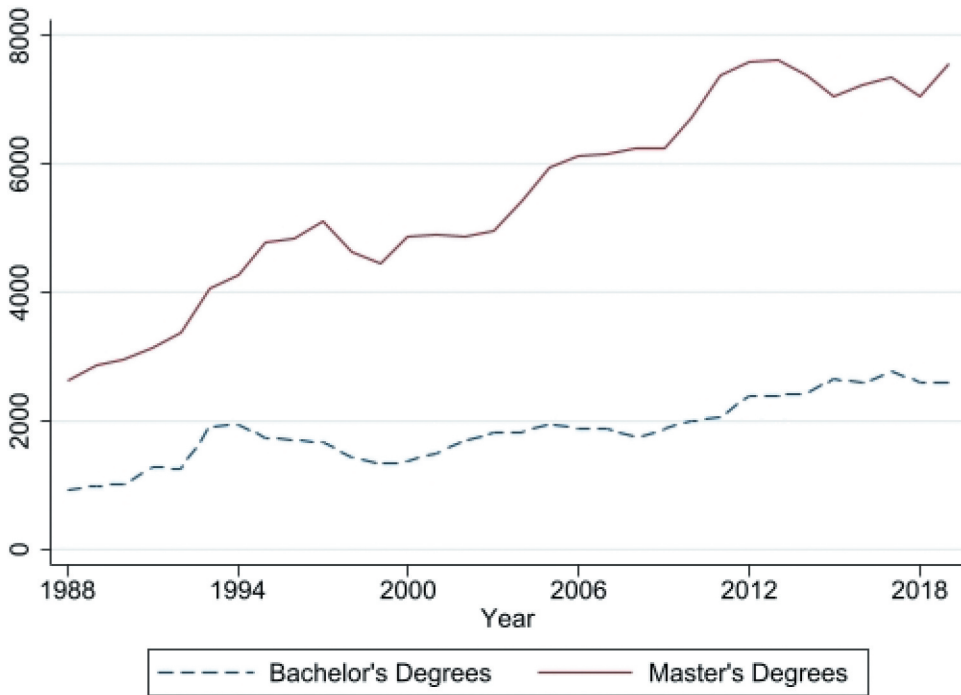
Figure 2. Bachelor's and master's degrees awarded in public administration by year.
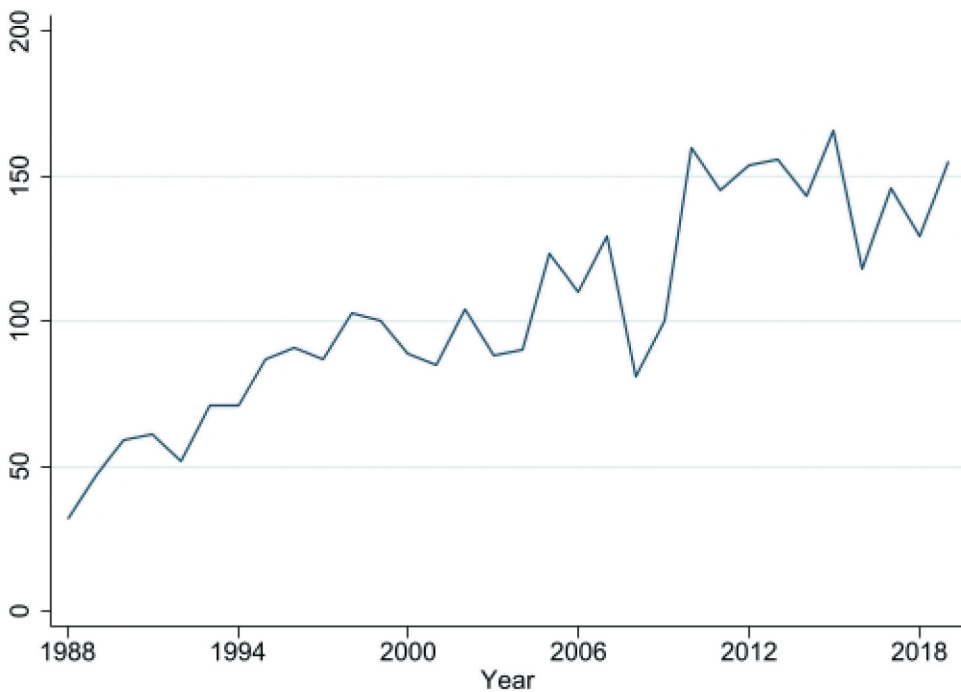

Figure 3. Doctoral degrees awarded in public administration by year. Data derived from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Includes set of institutions by Carnegie designation from 1992–2020. Note that Figure 3 is depicted on a smaller scale than Figure 2.

Analysis of structural inertia

As we noted when discussing research on population ecology theory, resistance to change and inertia may insulate positively selected organizations from the potential harms of change. While endogeneity problems prevent us from making causal claims regarding the likelihood of a program type (i.e., school versus department) experiencing a substantive field change, we employ a robustness check on the density analysis using logistic regression to test the relationship between program type (i.e., school versus department or program) and whether a program will experience a substantive field change. We match NASPAA program-level data to IPEDS institution-level data, including percentage of revenue from state appropriation to control for potential financial factors that may influence formal program structures. We find that status as a school of public service is statistically significant (meeting the threshold of p < .05) and negatively associated with field change by a factor of nearly 2.9. In contrast, programs or departments of public service or departments of political science are positively (although not statistically significant) associated with substantive field changes, accounting for level of government funding and year (see, Table 2). To interpret these results, we calculate the marginal effect and find that the probability that a program will experience a substantive field change decreases by nearly 52 percentage points when the program is an early (pre-2005) stand-alone school of public service. This result is statistically significant. These results indicate support for our hypothesis that stand-alone schools of public service may be insulated from many of the external pressures and are therefore less likely to experience substantive changes to formal structure.

Analysis of changes in normative order

The dimension of normative order provides important context to our analysis of the prevailing organizational form. Using two periods (2011–2012 and 2018–2020) to evaluate mission statements from NASPAA member programs over time, we identify prevailing norms dominating our sample of public service education programs (see, Table 3 below). Of the reported program missions from 2011–2012, over 62% (39) mention "public service" or explicitly refer to the goal of facilitating the development of "public service values among

Table 2. Likelihood of substantive field change by program status.

Variables	Substantive Field Change
Standalone School of Public Service	−2.881***
	(0.907)
Program or Dept. of Public Service	0.241
	(0.270)
Political Science Dept.	0.142
	(0.470)
State Appropriations as % of Revenue	0.0111
	(0.0241)
Year	0.00103
	(0.0153)
Constant	−3.443
	(30.54)
Observations	1,760

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p < .01, ** p < .05, * p < .1

Table 3. Mission Statement Trends (Count) by Year.

	Public Service/Values	Democracy	Civic Engagement/ Citizenship	Diversity/Equity/ Inclusion
2011–2012 (N = 58)	39	9	5	4
2018–2020 (N = 62)	42	6	13	18

Data derived from NASPAA Annual Data Report, using the broader set of members (not just accredited programs).

students." More than 15% (9) refer to "democracy" or "democratic," while nearly 9% (5) refer to "civic engagement" or "citizenship." Finally, nearly 7% of programs (4) note "diversity," "inclusivity," or "equity." While there is some convergence across programs in 2011–2012, greater cohesion is observed in the mission statements from 2018–2020. More mission statements explicitly refer to citizenship or civic engagement (from 9% to 21%) and the number of mission statements referring to diversity, equity, or inclusion increased from 7% to 29%.

Summary of quantitative longitudinal analysis

Formal structure has changed for many units since the late 1970s. The shifts in formal structure suggest growing legitimacy for stand-alone schools as an organizational form for public service education in US universities. Analysis of mission statements from a large sample of public service education programs reflects normative change for the population of public service education units in the US, which is consistent with recent commentaries about normative change (Hamidullah, 2022; McDonald & Hatcher, 2020; Svara & Baizhanov, 2019). The latest wave in the evolution of public service education may represent a rising normative emphasis on teaching public service values, including civic engagement and citizenship.

Quantitative results in the context of in-depth interviews

The quantitative analyses provided in the preceding section reveal trends in public service education over the last 50 years. How is the evolution of that education perceived by those who have been closely engaged in this organizational field during all or part of the period? We interviewed 10 opinion leaders, most of them current or former deans or directors, for their perspective on the evolution of public service education in the US. The protocol for these interviews appears in appendix 2 of the supplement. We were especially interested in their perspectives on changes associated with the formal definition of organizational form, specifically what they perceived as changes in formal structures of organizations, patterns of activity, and normative order (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). The discussion highlights themes from the interviews around four generalizations. Interview excerpts have been edited for length and clarity.

Formal structures have changed significantly in the past 50 years

The quantitative longitudinal analysis shows that formal structures changed significantly since the early 1970s. This finding is reinforced by views expressed in our interviews. Many of our interviewees commented on a dramatic shift they perceived, ". . . emergence of stand-alone schools of public policy, public affairs . . . ." They also conveyed where major shifts in

formal structure have occurred, and their descriptions are consistent with the picture from our quantitative analysis. Stand-alone schools are becoming more common. Political science–based programs have decreased significantly. One interviewee summarized the main contours of the changes:

> Whereas some of the leading schools in NASPAA decades ago were already stand-alone schools, the news item of the last 20 years has been the exit of a lot of MPA programs from political science departments. They've exited in a variety of ways—some into departments still within a college of arts and sciences or whatever; some into stand-alone institutes and things short of schools. Some have evolved into schools.

Those whose careers spanned the period since the 1980s recalled beginning when the dominant formal structure for public service education was an MPA housed within a political science department. Our group agreed on what is becoming the dominant formal structure – an independent college or school. In addition, some interviewees referred to more nuanced developments behind the growth in the number of independent colleges or schools. One development is philanthropy, specifically major gifts. An interviewee remarked, "I am very pleased that some of these schools have been getting major gifts, like the one at Georgetown. There's some kind of broader societal recognition that these are significant schools."

The latter comment is intriguing because it implies one reason behind our interviewees' perceptions about increases in stand-alone schools – that is, named schools imply both broader societal recognition and significance for public service education. As a way to make interviewees' rationale transparent, we sought to identify named schools engaged in public service education. Table 4 lists named schools in the field and the year they acquired that identification.

Table 4. Named academic units in the public service education organizational field by year they acquired their name.

School Name	Year
Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University	1924
Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania	1937
Henry W. Bloch School of Management, University of Missouri–Kansas City	1953
The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University	1959
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York	1964
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University	1966
McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific	1966
Pardee Rand Graduate School	1970
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin	1970
Atkinson Graduate School of Management, Willamette University	1974
Milano School of Policy, Management, and Environment, The New School	1975
D. Inez Andreas School of Business, Barry University	1976
Peabody College of Education and Human Development, Vanderbilt University	1979
Robertson School of Government, Regent University	1983
Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago	1988
Marriot School of Business, Brigham Young University	1988
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University	1989
Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University	1989
Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, Georgia Institute of Technology	1990
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters (School of Public Administration), Florida Atlantic University	1991
Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University	1991
Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University	1992
Reubin O'D. Askew School of Public Administration, Florida State University	1994

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued).

School Name	Year
Martin School of Public Policy and Administration, University of Kentucky	1994
Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University	1994
Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley	1997
The Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University	1997
Henry C. Lee School of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, University of New Haven	1998
Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	1999
Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin–Madison	1999
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University	1999
Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs, Wichita State University	1999
H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship, Nova Southeastern University	2000
Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy, University of Albany	2000
Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University	2000
Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Government, University of Washington	2000
Mark O. Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University	2001
Lorry I. Lokey School of Business and Public Policy, Mills College	2001
Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs, University of Missouri–Columbia	2001
Barbara Jordan–Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs, Texas Southern University	2002
McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston	2003
Clinton School of Public Service, University of Arkansas	2004
John Glenn College of Public Affairs, Ohio State University	2006
Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, George Washington University	2007
Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service, Ohio University	2007
Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia	2007
Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs, Florida International University	2008
H. John Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy, Carnegie Mellon University	2008
John P. Burke School of Public Service and Education, Post University	2011
Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota	2011
Meyer and Renee Luskin School of Public Affairs, University of California, Los Angeles	2011
Sol Price School of Public Policy, University of Southern California	2011
Katherine Reese Pamplin College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Augusta University	2012
Gerald G. Fox Master of Public Administration, University of North Carolina at Charlotte	2012
McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University	2013
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University	2013
Jack H. Brown College of Business and Public Administration, California State University. San Bernardino	2016
Hobby School of Public Affairs, University of Houston	2016
Austin W. Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College, City University of New York	2016
Joseph R. Biden Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration, University of Delaware	2018
Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University	2019
Max S. Baucus Institute, Department of Public Administration and Policy, University of Montana	2019
Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy, Cornell University	2021

The schools listed are neither direct nor definitive evidence of philanthropy or societal recognition for public service education, but the table is prima facie evidence of the interviewees' perception of the growing significance of these schools.[13] A school may be named for a variety of reasons, including philanthropy (e.g., Sol Price School of Public Policy, Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs) and ties to notable political leaders (e.g., Joseph R. Biden Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration, Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs). The 63 entities in Table 4 represent a substantial and growing portion of the organizations engaged in public service education in the US. The increase is important in itself, because naming a school reflects a commitment from university trustees and boards that encumbers the institution to support the program in the future. A commitment is connected with obligations associated with endowments that sometimes come with naming, but naming for a prominent person has a particular significance. Given the ups and downs of many public service education programs, naming is

one way to support long-term stability. In exchange, many named schools are expected to expand their scope in ways that increase enrollments and revenues for the university. It is conceivable that acquiring named status is now part of the formal organizational structure, one of the three dimensions of organizational form (Hannan & Freeman, 1977), which was rare in the 20th century, especially at midcentury. There was only one named school in the 1920s and only a handful before 1960. The process of naming schools increased modestly in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s but accelerated significantly in the following decades. Fourteen named schools appeared in the 1990s, 16 in the 2000s, and 14 in the 2010s.

All facets of organizational forms for public service education have changed

Formal structures for public service education have changed, but what academic units do, who delivers programs, and the norms that underpin public service education have also changed. Perhaps even more surprising than the shift in formal structures for public service education during the 50-year span we investigated are changes in the other two dimensions of organizational form. These other two dimensions, the patterns of activity within the organization and normative order, have evolved in ways that may not be readily apparent to many stakeholders across the organizational field.

Among the more prominent changes in the last two dimensions is the composition of people who instruct students in public service education. Practitioners who stepped into traditional academic roles were once referred to as pracademics (Posner, 2009). These appointments have become varied and nuanced. Their nature differs, but interviewees commented on trends related to adjuncts, teaching faculty, clinical faculty, and professors of practice, among others.

> At the master's level we are using professors of practice, and they can get tenure. I am very happy with the professors of practice we have in our school and in other departments. They really pull their weight. You need people who are devoted to teaching. These individuals have research expectations, but the balance is shifted. For them, teaching is primary.

> Part of this [trend] depends on location. All the programs in Washington, DC, have dozens of adjunct professors who are experts in their own fields, and we in the state capital likewise use people who are the leading-edge experts to teach those classes. But the bigger change perhaps will be if faculty continue to be tenured. We've seen in the last 5 or 10 years large growth in teaching faculty who basically don't have research obligations but are teaching 4/4 or 5/5. That is happening in our field but definitely within universities overall.

> When I was in the political science department, almost the entire program was delivered by tenure-track faculty. That is simply no longer the case. A large number of contract or nontenure-track faculty are very much involved in delivering public service education; adjuncts are hugely involved. They all have full-time jobs elsewhere and want to teach a course to give back. Some adjuncts are amazing, prominent people.

> The bigger changes have been the move toward more adjuncts. An adjunct here is not what it is at many other universities; it's not quite tenure track but is closer to it. We have three groups: lecturers, who are more like adjuncts in any other university; adjuncts; and faculty members. Adjuncts are really professors of practice. So we've really increased the number of adjuncts and lecturers. That's to the good, because we've needed to have people come in and do more practical kinds of things.

> Over time, we probably added more professors of practice, people who come from professional life and share based on their career. We have always had them, but my guess is that we have more now.

The interviews confirm that who delivers programs is now more balanced between traditional university faculty and professionals with public service experience than in the 1970s and 1980s.[12] This evolution is consistent with preferences expressed by master's graduates in government service, as reported in *Preparing Tomorrow's Public Service: What the Next Generation Needs* (The Volcker Alliance, 2018):

> Universities can also play a more effective role in providing learning from the field, according to study respondents. While three-quarters of rising government leaders with a master's degree (from any discipline) consider their degree education to be valuable preparation for their government work, many wish that elements of field-derived learning had been stronger in their program. (p. 21)

Given the shift from political science departments to stand-alone schools, faculties' disciplinary composition is an unsurprising change. As an interviewee observed, "If we take the long view, who delivers public service education has certainly migrated from political science programs." Another shared an observation about integration despite increases in disciplinary variety:

> We have standards for public affairs scholars, regardless of your disciplinary training. There are some journals we want folks to be highlighting, some work that we want people to be undertaking, regardless of their background. That shows a maturation of the field. As a direct result, the school is coming into its own and being divorced from some traditional disciplinary backgrounds.

Overall, interviewees expressed appreciation for disciplinary variety and the stimulus it brought to their intellectual development and capacity to interact with diverse faculty with common interests.

To summarize, the shifts in patterns of activity and normative order are important changes in the nature of professional education for public service. What gets done and by whom has shifted radically since the 1970s, a period during which public service education in US universities has grown significantly. Some of the changes are driven by a redefinition of what government does and how it pursues public ends – increasingly with and through nonprofit and private partners, a point we treat further in the next section. A key implication of this shift is that the missions of public service education have expanded, often encompassing nonprofit, health care, and social programs that reach beyond traditional boundaries of government. A less transparent shift is who delivers public service education, which now includes a stronger professional contingent that includes traditional adjunct faculty, augmented by clinical faculty and professors of practice.

Environments are influential

Environments have significant consequences for both organizational forms and organizational fields. Interviewees identified many environmental influences, but they returned repeatedly to several themes: changing nature of public service, accreditation, fiscal pressure and technology.

Changing nature of public service

We should probably not have been surprised, but were struck by the consensus response to our question, "During your career, what is the single most important factor that explains changes in public service education?" Although our interviewees cited several things, one stood out – the changing nature of public service. Many of the interviewees' comments about changing public service also called attention to drivers of dimensions of organizational form, including what gets done, by whom, and the associated normative order.

> We did change our curriculum because we were largely reacting to the dynamics in society—with performance management and contracting and all these processes that had been around but were now being solidified into state and local laws.

> From my standpoint, the tremendous changes in the public sector explain the change in the structure and institutions in the delivery of public service programs.

> The growth of the nonprofit sector, the growth of public sector consulting, the growth of contracting, a lot of our students end up in the contract sector. The labor market has changed dramatically over the last 40 years.

> One of the big shifts was the number of students interested in the nonprofit area, driven by a number of things, not only the negative feelings about government from Ronald Reagan on. The percentage of students interested in going into nonprofits or already in nonprofits in the public service area has expanded tremendously, and programs have to react to that.

> In the US, it has to do with the growth in the delivery of public services and work on public service outside government. If you look at the almost antigovernment culture in the US and the outsourcing of practically everything that government does, that is hugely influential.

Accreditation

The process for accrediting the MPA by COPRA began in 1986. It has received a mixed reception. The NASPAA website indicates that "208 programs at 190 schools (60% of member institutions)" are accredited. This includes a small number of accredited degrees at institutions outside the US. But 40% of NASPAA member institutions have no accredited degrees. As one of our interviewees recounted, "Again and again the faculty has voted not to do the accreditation process," and then described an alternative approach:

> You learn from your competitors, when several internal study committees take a look at what your competitors are doing—just to take a pulse. We're pretty happy with our programming, the kind of classes that we are offering. This [alternative approach] is a driving factor in terms of making sure that the kind of skills that we're offering our students are up to par with others.

Despite mixed acceptance of accreditation, many interviewees viewed the process as influential beyond the degree programs for which it is designed. In response to a follow-up question about a respondent's comment about accreditation ("Would it be fair to say that the accreditation process is one external influence that goes beyond the MPA to influence other components of these programs?"), an interviewee quickly replied, "Absolutely, without blinking an eye." That person commented later, "The accreditation process shapes what we look like way more than they intended and way more than we intended."

What are some of the reasons our interviewees give for the accreditation process's influence? One respondent said, "The standards reflect the struggle to define ourselves and create norms that are both thresholds for practice and aspirational, trying to help direct the field forward."

Respondents reminded us that accreditation is a moving target because standards must be revisited every 9 years (see, Jennings, 2019 for more on how the NASPAA Standards have influenced the field). The NASPAA standards are now in their fourth generation, the first characterized by an interviewee as "essentially checklists and bean counting." The second generation was mission-based accreditation, "recognizing it's OK if 1,000 flowers bloom so you could essentially be credible if you had a mission and you could show that you were supporting it with your program." The relative openness of mission-based accreditation eventually raised a fundamental "question about what it means to be an MPA?" The permissive era of mission-based accreditation gave way to standards associated with universal competencies, reflecting a turn toward student-learning outcomes. The universal competencies "represent a consensus in the field of what people who graduate should know and do."

The influence of peer conversations like those surrounding student-learning outcomes for master's programs has transcended graduate professional education. An interviewee commented, "One has to argue that the standards and the conferences – not just NASPAA but all of them – have made a big difference. I would say it's the fusion and people talking to each other."

Fiscal pressure

Our literature review uncovered concerns about fiscal viability, particularly stand-alone master's programs, which resurfaced in our interviews. The most prominent consequence of fiscal pressure is the changing status of undergraduate programs in the organization field for public service education. One interviewee summarized the change simply: "The undergraduate degree is far more prevalent now than it was when I started. It was totally an afterthought." Interviewees commented on ties between fiscal pressures and increased attention to undergraduate programs:

> For public universities, funding is always attached to enrollment because you have an enrollment-based funding. It's a lot easier to get some extra money or an extra line if you can show that you're teaching more people.

> A change is offering of undergraduate programs that goes back not to any change in the field, per se, but goes back to the financial models that universities are now using, putting a much greater emphasis on revenue-producing activities, especially undergraduate enrollment tuition, federal research contracts and grants, and deemphasizing graduate programs.

Another of our interviewees called attention to an environmental reason for growth of undergraduate programs – parental preferences and influence:

> There has been a lot of growth in the undergraduate sector in the most recent years. Some of that has to do with revenue. Some of it has to do with the rise of practical focus of parents that they don't want their kids majoring in liberal arts as much anymore.

One interviewee reported growth in undergraduate programs despite the absence of financial incentives within the interviewee's university:

> We've had an undergraduate minor for a long, long time. It really got expanded in the last 10, 20 years, and it's an enormous program, about 600–800 students enrolled. It is a minor. We have not had the resources or the ability to go to a major. If we went to a major, not a single nickel more would come to us, given the way things work.

Greater attention to undergraduate enrollment, when driven by financial incentives, has led to other forms of growth:

> The university has incentivized us to be interdisciplinary, to enroll students in a wide variety of types of classes. We're encouraged to be entrepreneurial, to develop niches and new classes. Legislative appropriations for special public service programs has occurred. That has also pushed us to be bigger and more visible and more engaged. If you look at PA departments 30 years ago and now, I bet that 85–90 percent have more faculty and bigger enrollments, and offer a lot more majors or degrees.

Technology

A common reply to our question about the single most important factor in changes in public service education was technology – specifically, online education. Some interviewees referred to "technology opportunity," because online programs reach more people now. Others pointed to a need to respond to market competition created by online enterprises such as the University of Phoenix. Still others referred to an interaction between technology and fiscal pressure, for instance, "offering online degrees with incentives in most places to keep more of the revenue than normal." The cumulative effect of these dynamics is that technology is influential in shaping the evolution of public service education (McDonald, 2021, pp. 3–5).

Comprehensive stand-alone units emerge as the preferred organizational form for public service education

University units offering a comprehensive portfolio of teaching, research, and service are increasing because they are better suited for survival within their environments. Our interviewees concurred that a stand-alone college or school is becoming the dominant formal structure, which is what our longitudinal analysis of NCES and NASPAA data suggests. But identifying a normative model best suited for facilitating the growth of effective public service education is more difficult to assess. Most interviewees contended that a stand-alone college or school offering a comprehensive array of programs, including graduate and undergraduate degrees, was well suited to facilitate the growth and effectiveness of public service education. One interviewee suggested that integral features of public service education had served to transform the institution:

> We played a pivotal role not just in public affairs education but in the university itself. Our two big mantras are knowledge in the service of society and interdisciplinarity—that we should do applied work and should work across disciplines. This was not a popular thing at the time. The biggest thing that's changed for us is that the university has changed around us.

Another way of posing the question is to ask which organizational forms prominent in 2021 are most likely to be sustained and make a mark, both within their home universities and in the organizational field for public service education. The data show that stand-alone colleges or schools offering graduate and undergraduate degrees are

a growing share of that organizational field. More importantly, the number of schools offering graduate degrees only or programs situated in departments housed within colleges or schools is declining. Regarding a normative model, one of our interviewees made this observation:

> I've always viewed the ideal arrangement as a separate, freestanding school where you are big enough to have sway in the university—so you've got an undergraduate and a master's program, PhD programs—plus you've got a robust research program.

In an article responding to two other assessments of public service education (Anheier, 2019; Piereson & Riley, 2013), Knott (2019), then dean of the Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California and currently dean of the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University, articulated why he views freestanding schools and colleges offering a wide range of graduate and undergraduate programs as normative models for the future of public service education.

> While all of these types of public policy schools and programs, whether big or small, are enormously valuable for providing education and research, I believe that the most promising future for schools of public policy lies in the further development of comprehensive schools in the US and elsewhere. These schools begin to achieve the scale that is necessary to meet the huge need for producing graduates to fill the many roles in government. They support problem-focused research that creates synergies across interdisciplinary fields. They also conduct research and provide education across the sectors, graduating students who go on to careers in government, nonprofits, and the private sector and who understand the convergence of the sectors. These schools integrate policy processes and implementation with the skills in policy analysis and evaluation that are critical to effective governance. And, they are increasingly providing education across the lifespan, from undergraduate programs to master's and Ph.D. programs, to executive education programs for more experienced practitioners.

Among the most interesting observations during the interviews were those concerning the nature of public service education holistically. Two perspectives stood out: branding and public values.

> Once upon a time, the MPA was more the brand that we were selling. We now have probably 50 different degree names under our umbrella. A lot of the stand-alone schools have begun to brand the school and the university as much as they market the degree. So part of what's getting done in public service education now is not just the awarding of the degrees but the branding of the graduate that they went to such and such a school.

Coupled with branding, which involves values identified with public service education both generally and at specific institutions, is the issue of the values identified with public service education. Our interviewees perceived the distinctive values associated with public service education as an important identity and a competitive advantage.

> We tried to build into the program that ethics and public integrity are a very important norm. Second is public service itself. We felt that's what differentiated us from the business school. You're going to do good to serve the public, and that is the norm we emphasized. Third I will call equity and social justice. If you're going into public service, this needs to be front and center in the way we're thinking about what we're doing in terms of affirming people of different backgrounds, different characteristics, supporting people and communities of color, especially urban communities. The fourth norm is like in the medical school—do no harm. Two other

things. Data-driven decision-making is very important. We're not ideologues. Everybody has values, everybody cares about everybody else's preferences. But we're going to do analysis, and that's fundamental to how we go about public service. Then finally is excellence. Whatever we do we want to do with high quality, with excellence. Those are some of the norms and values. We articulated that to our students, we had that as part of our ethos.

It is the public service values that matter, that's what differentiates us from MBAs or other management degrees. We had lots of conversations about how we articulate that. How do we say that public service values the common good?

Discussion

We began this article seeking answers to a broad question about public service education: How have organizational forms for public service education evolved, and what lessons can we draw from how they have changed? We used diverse evidence to answer the question, informed by theory about organizational forms and their evolution. As a result of this examination, we conclude that organizational environments have had profound influences on organizational forms and the organizational field for public service education. We documented significant changes in all three dimensions of organizational form as defined by Hannan and Freeman (1977). Formal organizational structures, patterns of activity within organizations, and ways of organizing defined as right and proper (the normative order) have all changed in significant ways. If environmental selection is at work, as the theory predicts, then stand-alone university units that offer comprehensive portfolios of teaching, research, and service also identify an emerging preferred organizational form for public service education in US universities. The inferences from our analyses have important lessons for educational leaders in those universities.

The results of our quantitative analysis and interviews revealed some unanticipated changes in organizational forms that merit elaboration. One of these involves patterns of activity within organizations that deliver public service education – what actually gets done and by whom. Given our familiarity with the evolution of the organizational population since the 1970s, we expected changes in formal structures (e.g., shifts from political science departments to schools) and especially the disciplinary composition of faculty from dominance of political scientists to interdisciplinary faculties.[13] The biggest surprise, however, is the mix of tenure- and nontenure-track faculty who deliver public service education. Public service education has experienced an infusion of appointments – adjuncts, lecturers, clinical professors, and professors of practice – that reflect growing attention to professional practice. This and other changes speak to significant transformations in professional education for public service.

In his study of the professions of law, engineering, clergy, nursing, and medicine, Sullivan (2004) recounts the history of these professions in the US. Sullivan writes, "In broad terms, this [modernization] meant a movement away from apprenticeship (with its intimate pedagogy of modeling and coaching) toward reliance upon the methods of academic instruction (with its emphasis upon classroom teaching and learning carried out far from the sites of professional practice)" (p. 195). Sullivan goes on to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the university model: "The university setting, and even more

the prevalence of the academic model of thought and teaching, facilitates training analytic habits of mind. It does far less, however, to further students' progress in developing practical skills and capacity for professional judgment" (p. 195).

The collective changes on all three organizational form dimensions signal that public service education has evolved significantly toward integrating "the parts and several aims that modern professional education confronts" (p. 196), including theory and practice, the complex relationship between values and behavior, and the difficulties of discerning ethical choices and behavior involving the public good.

Another unexpected finding of our analysis is the role of undergraduate programs in public service education. As recently as 2011, Donovan (2011) described NASPAA's orientation toward undergraduate education as wavering "between indifference and downright hostility" (p. 311). Although change has been underway for several decades, growth in undergraduate programs has accelerated because of factors identified in our literature review and interviews – declining financial support in public universities, changing internal models to incentivize entrepreneurship, and parental expectations for more practical majors than traditional liberal arts. Light and Ding's (2021) report, based on the top 77 schools, supports a finding that undergraduate programs are diffusing. They report that 63% of the top 25 schools offer undergraduate degrees and that 70% of public schools offer them, versus 50% of private schools.

The growth in undergraduate public service education is a result of a complex set of causal factors about which we did not gather systematic evidence, but our analyses offer some likely insights. One of the factors is financial pressure, identified first in our literature review and later in interviews with key informants. The needs of programs, particularly those in public universities, to generate revenues to offset declining public support and augment resources from graduate programs is likely affecting growth in undergraduate education.

Another factor is the proliferation of options for undergraduate public service education. As our literature review revealed, conversations in the late 20th century focused on two options: a bachelor's level professional program mirroring graduate programs, or no undergraduate program. As undergraduate programs have diffused (Carrizales & Bennett, 2013), options for undergraduate education have grown to include certificates, concentrations, minors, majors, and civic engagement programs. The growth in options has led more public service education units to choose explicitly to expand undergraduate public service education.

A third consideration is that attributes of public service education we heard about often in our interviews – including interdisciplinarity, curricula that emphasize public problems as well as solutions, and opportunities for students to engage with communities – are increasingly valued for undergraduates. The Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, for instance, offered graduate-only public service programs for many years but initiated an undergraduate minor in 2019. Yackee (2021), LaFollette's director, describes the aftermath of this initiative and developments at other Big Ten campuses:

> We launched our first undergraduate program in public policy in 2019, enrolling 50 students. Enrollment tripled in 2020, and this year, demand is even higher. Big Ten Conference peers like the universities of Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio State are also seeing soaring

undergraduate interest in public policy. Indiana University's public policy major is now one of its largest. The University of Maryland had to expand its original plans for a new campus facility to accommodate the increasing number of students signing up for public policy programs and classes.

As many of our interviewees observed, the attributes of public service education appeal to today's undergraduates, who are trying to navigate both personal and parental expectations for their futures and their beliefs about obligations to the larger society.

Although the attributes of public service education we referred to are increasingly valued for undergraduates, their value likely flows from developments in American society writ large. Among those developments are declines in citizen engagement and civic competence as the "greatest generation" passes from the scene, turmoil within American democracy, and US universities reducing attention to public purposes and disinvestments in public higher education (Bok, 2002, 2006; Crow & Dabars, 2015; Daniels, 2021; Jennings et al., 2021). These societal influences reinforce the case for the importance of environment as an influence on public service education.

The quantitative and qualitative research and analysis reported here provides a useful picture of the evolution of organizational forms for public service education. It also raises new questions that deserve further scrutiny. Although schools and colleges have become the normative standard for organizational forms, our data identify subpopulations of organizational forms that persist within the population. Master's degree–only programs are an organizational form that persists in the face of environmental selection favoring stand-alone, comprehensive schools or colleges. Such programs are more common in small liberal arts colleges and universities (e.g., California Baptist University, Jacksonville University) and historically black colleges and universities (e.g., Clark Atlanta University, Murray State), but are also common in the California State University system (e.g., East Bay, Fresno, Pomona, Stanislaus). The persistence of this organizational form is facilitated in part by online technology, which makes graduate degrees accessible to larger numbers of students. What accounts for the persistence of these subpopulations of organizational forms is an important question for future research. A related question is whether small programs can adapt to changing organizational forms, perhaps by coordinating with networks of other small programs, to provide a larger range of programs to compete with the growing subpopulation of stand-alone, comprehensive schools.

Conclusion

This article has drawn upon extant literature, quantitative longitudinal analysis, and opinion-leader interviews to answer key questions about transformations in public service education over the past 50 years, specifically: How have organizational forms evolved, and what lessons can we draw from that evolution? We drew four generalizations from the analysis of the evidence. First, formal structures have changed significantly in the last 50 years. Second, change has occurred not only in formal structures, but in all facets of organizational forms for public service education. Third, organizational environments have significant consequences for organizational form and the organizational field for public service education. Finally, comprehensive stand-alone colleges and schools have become the preferred organizational form for public service education in US universities because these forms are better suited for survival within their environments.

This article places in relief the evolution of public service education in the US since the Progressive Era. The organizational field for public service education is far different from that in the early 1970s, as momentum for public service education accelerated in the aftermath of the Great Society. Academic entities primarily housed in a single discipline, political science, became more multidisciplinary and ultimately interdisciplinary. Today, the most common and prominent manifestations of public service education units in US universities are schools and colleges offering diverse undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs with portfolios of civic engagement, executive education, and applied research.

Many of these evolving public service education units are already major influences on university campuses, while many others are poised to become significant contributors. Although public service education organizations in the US are remarkably diverse, the core attributes they share give us reason for optimism about their future. Emergent features of organizational forms for public service education are attractive components of universities seeking to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The population of public service education organizations in the US are therefore well positioned as levers for change to fulfill their missions, thereby strengthening public service.

Notes

1. Terms used to describe public service education are quite varied. For instance, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) uses "public policy," "public affairs," and "public administration" in its name. Raffel (2010; 2019, pp. 98–99), chair of the 2009 NASPAA standards revision process and subsequently president of NASPAA, describes the difficulty of getting agreement on an umbrella designation for the field. Rather than using any of the three common designations, which are not exhaustive, we usually use "public service education" to refer to the whole range of education programs that prepare people for public service. Public service education is not just related to government service but to the entire public sector. It also embraces education for the nonprofit sector and public-private partnerships.
2. Although public service education has grown since the 1920s, it is a relatively small share of US higher education. For example, law schools admit a total of about 110,000 students per year and graduate about 35,000. Business schools attract about 300,000 students annually, and public service education between 20,000 and 30,000.
3. As evidence of slow growth, Grode and Holzer (1975) note that the number of MPA programs increased from 2 in 1931 to 13 in 1952.
4. For intellectual histories of the field, see, Kettl (1993) and Farrell et al. (2021).
5. A noteworthy addition to the organizational population for public service education was the founding of the Littauer Graduate School of Public Administration at Harvard in 1936. Littauer became the Harvard Kennedy School in 1966.
6. This second wave coincides with the entry of the Ford Foundation, which initiated start-up grants for US universities to establish programs designed to address problems of urban America. The University of Delaware's Biden School, for example, grew out of a program funded by the foundation in 1961. Another Ford Foundation initiative was support for eight universities (Berkeley, Carnegie Mellon, Duke, Harvard, Michigan, University of Texas at Austin, Stanford, and RAND Graduate School) to create public policy schools in the mid-1960s. See, Rich and Warren (1980), Stokes (1996), and Ellwood (2008) for more about involvement of the Ford Foundation.
7. Ellwood (2008) acknowledged three additional categories of graduate public service education programs. They include (1) programs part of a field of public endeavor such as public health or planning, (2) schools of public affairs, and (3) continuing education programs. Ellwood excluded programs in (1) and (3) and merged the public affairs schools into the public policy category.

8. Ellwood refers to public service programs in generic schools as being located in business schools, but most of them were in schools of administration or management (e.g., graduate schools of administration at the University of California, Davis, Irvine, and Riverside, Willamette University Atkinson Graduate School of Management, Yale University School of Management) rather than business schools.

9. Some mergers and related strategies have been documented that begin to answer how organizational forms have changed in response to fiscal pressures. Denhardt et al. (1997), for instance, discuss how the University of Delaware managed its funding of graduate students.

10. Although the designation "comprehensive school" has been used by NASPAA for many years, we discovered it had no formal or consistent definition among NASPAA members. We therefore avoided using it as a label for formal structures (see online Supplement: Appendices).

11. Program units are categorized by the inclusion of phrases in unit names. Program names with multiple combined fields including public service (i.e., "school of political science and public administration") are sorted as public service programs. The category for "Other" includes units such as "College of Arts and Sciences," or "School of Professional Studies." Table 1 includes the breakdown for the three most prominent formal structures.

12. Denhardt et al. (1977) describe an early systematic effort to join theory and practice, which they call the Delaware model. It is based on their experiences beginning in the 1960s in the University of Delaware's College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, now the Joseph R. Biden School of Public Policy and Administration.

13. Evidence of the current disciplinary composition of faculty in public service education appears in Light and Ding (2021, pp. 31–32). The sample for their report used the top 77 public affairs schools ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* in 2019. The average percentage across all types of schools is about 20%.

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