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Public service values in NASPAA programs: Identification, integration, and activation

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ABSTRACT

NASPAA expects accredited public affairs programs to stress public service values in their educational program. This article examines the values that are included the mission statements of 125 public affairs programs. There is wide dispersion in the number and content of the values identified in these mission statements. Content analysis of the five universal competencies was conducted to determine the match between the values in the mission statement and the description of competencies. The results indicate a common need for better integration of key values and the content of the curriculum. Finally, an approach to strengthen the activation of values by relating them to ethical standards in the Code of Ethics of the American Society for Public Administration or another comprehensive code is demonstrated. Despite clear connections between the values in NASPAA competencies and the principles and standards in the American Society for Public Administration Code, few programs incorporate codes in their curriculum.

KEYWORDS

Code of ethics; NASPAA guidelines; public service values; universal competencies

One of the central themes in NASPAA's standards for programs in public affairs is the incorporation of public service values. The presence of these values is a distinctive feature of programs in public affairs, administration, and policy. When new accreditation standards were adopted in 2009, they were based on the requirement that their graduates "achieve measurable objectives with respect to learning, scholarship and service" (Raffel, Maser, & McFarland, 2007). Including service reflected the shared view in NASPAA that "public administration and public policy programs, whatever the differences among them, share a distinctive mission: promoting values in community governance such as accountability, responsibility, justice, transparency, and improving welfare." The articulation of values reflected the conviction that "public service be a distinctive component in each program's mission." In 2008, NASPAA President Mandell (2008, 266–67) stated,

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an important characteristic of our programs, regardless of their specific labels, is that we and our graduates bring—or at least aspire to bring—an appreciation of public values to bear upon the analysis and management of organizations, programs, and policies. Further, this characteristic is common to all of our members, and distinguishes us from other professions.

In the new accreditation standards, NASPAA indicated that it was “standing up for public service” (Raffel et al., 2007). This is a marked change from the 2001 standards that only mentioned values once along with the only reference to ethics: “the common curriculum components shall enhance the student’s values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively” (NASPAA, 2001, p. 8). Whereas the previous version had included the competency to “act ethically as a Public Manager,” the 2001 version omitted this as a separate competency.

Despite the agreement about the importance of values, there were several questions that were not resolved. First, what values should be stressed? Second, to what extent is the inclusion of public service values in a program mission statement intended to distinguish it from programs in other fields, on the one hand, or to differentiate that program from public affairs programs at other universities, on the other? Turner (2015) offers this explanation that advances both perspectives:

Recognizing the diversity of public service orientations, NASPAA compels schools to define their own relative to program mission and curriculum. Regardless of how particular schools express their public service orientation, public affairs and administration education programs need to provide students with an adequate framework within which they can situate their personal public service orientation and weigh the consequences of their actions in different contexts.

Third, how are the values to be incorporated in the definition and development of competencies and in public affairs practice? The “appreciation of public values” does not necessarily translate into the application of values and ethical behavior.

The purpose of this article is to examine how public service values have been incorporated into the mission and curriculum of NASPAA programs since the adoption of the new standards. First, using self-study reports from 125 programs, it will examine the values that are identified in the mission statement. Second, it will attempt to assess the extent to which mission statement values are incorporated in the description of the student competencies that the program develops and if other values are included as well. Both measures can indicate gaps in the integration of values into the competencies. Third, the paper examines the linkage between values, competencies, and the promotion of ethical action. It considers whether ethical standards in codes of ethics can clarify the connection between values and behavior.

The nature of public service values and issues in their use

Values are widely recognized as a foundation and framework that influence individual and organizational behavior (Kernaghan, 1994, p. 616). Values are internal responsibilities that shape behavior in contrast to reliance on structures or rules (Kernaghan, 1994, p. 618). Still, values are not necessarily linked to specific behaviors or standards (Rokeach 1973).

Values are numerous and differ in their orientation, and the same value may be interpreted in different ways. Kernaghan (2003) categorizes 32 public service values into four categories: ethical, democratic, professional, and people values. Nabatchi (2011) divides 20 values into political, legal, organizational, and market frameworks. She identifies a separate group of “itinerant” public values that have “conditional meanings and interpretations” depending on the frame within which they are viewed. These are some of the most important values in public affairs: accountability, citizenship, legitimacy, and the public interest (Nabatchi, 2011, p. 24). Box (2015) identifies five values that he considers to be central to public affairs and links 31 additional values with these five. His central values are neutrality, efficiency, accountability, public interest, and public service.

Potential public service values are not always compatible and the interpretation of the impact of values varies. Box sees the potential for tension between the first three and the last two of the values he identifies. Similarly, Nabatchi notes that there is a traditional distinction and potential conflict between a democratic orientation reflected in the political and legal values, on the one hand, and a bureaucratic orientation expressed in the organizational and market frameworks. Turner (2015) distinguishes between public values and public service values. She links public service values to the Denhardt’s “new public service” orientation (2000). Adding to the complexity of classification, similar values may be interpreted differently. For example, Nabatchi considers “cost-savings” and “cost-efficiency” to be “market” values related to a negative attitude toward government. In contrast, van der Wal and Huberts (2008) view this mix of values as reflecting some commitments that are unique to public service organizations and others that are common to all organizations, but they do not view these common values as conflicting with the public values.

The importance of the public service values is related to the discretion exercised by public professionals. In particular, value orientations partially inform and influence the discretion exercised in the development and implementation of public policy and in the delivery of services (Kernaghan, 1994, p. 615; Turner, 2015, p. 42). As the result of the particular values held by an administrator, the perception and definition of problems, the formulation of policies, and the treatment of citizens can vary. Viewed differently, however, the discretion that administrators may exercise indicates the need to uphold

ethical standards, not simply act in a way chosen by the individual based on a value that they deem relevant to the situation.

The emphasis on public service values in public affair programs is noteworthy, but it is also important to consider what values are emphasized, what they mean, how they relate to each other, and how they are applied and converted into ethical action.

Public services values in NASPAA standards

NASPAA has incorporated the commitment to “stand up for public service” in its accreditation standards. All programs are expected to promote public service values with latitude provided concerning which values are emphasized. The NASPAA accreditation standards indicate that programs will emphasize a set of public service values that distinguish a degree in public affairs from degrees in other professional fields as well as values related to its mission:

NASPAA expects an creditable program to define the boundaries of the public service values it emphasizes, be they procedural or substantive, as the basis for distinguishing itself from other professional degree programs. (NASPAA, 2017, 4)

In the Preconditions for Accreditation Review number two, certain universal public service standards are listed that presumably are expected to be found in all programs.

The mission, governance, and curriculum of eligible programs shall demonstrably emphasize public service values. Public service values are important and enduring beliefs, ideals and principles shared by members of a community about what is good and desirable and what is not. They include pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust; and demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants. (NASPAA, 2017, 4)

In addition, in the instructions for Standard 1.1, there is reference to “NASPAA’s commitment to public service values, for example civic virtue, participatory processes and social equity” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 39).

The universal competencies in the NASPAA standards are divided into five domains. Domain 4 focuses on public values. Students should be able “to articulate and apply a public service perspective” and “incorporate public values into decisions.” A key issue is how to best promote this competency and how to apply it to the competencies in the other four NASPAA domains that also contain implied values and ethical standards. It is also important to consider whether this competency stands alone, or is applicable to the decisions made in all the other competencies as well.

In Standard 1.1 regarding Mission, programs are also asked to identify values that are unique to their program. The mission statement should indicate the program's "purpose and public service values, given the program's particular emphasis on public affairs, administration, and policy." NASPAA self-study reports call for programs to identify the public service values reflected in the program's mission (1.1.3), to link the program performance goals to the mission's purpose and public service values (1.3.1), to identify the required and mission-oriented competencies developed, and to list the required courses that are relevant to the competencies.

In addition, Standard 5.1 specifies the universal required competencies that provide the basis for a program's curriculum. In the self-study reports, the program describes the required competencies it has adopted related to its mission and public service values in five domains:

- To lead and manage in public governance
- To participate in and contribute to the public policy process
- To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions
- To articulate and apply a public service perspective
- To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Examining values in self-study reports

A review has been completed of the self-study reports of 125 programs that examines the responses to Standard 1.1.3. It asks programs to "describe the public service values that are reflected in your Program's mission." All responses provided in the reports were examined separately by the two authors and grouped into categories with similar content. The categories were generated from the language used in the reports rather than using a preset list. Usually more than one term is used to label a category reflecting the original language in the self-study report. There is great variation in the values included in mission statements and in the way that values are expressed. The list would have been much longer if the exact wording from the report had been used and each variation had been treated as a separate category. For example, it seems appropriate to put "integrity" and "character" into the same category and to combine "respect" and "sensitivity." In some cases, the specific values combined into a single category are more divergent. For example, all of the following terms seem related to valuing the role of providing advice and counsel to elected officials: addressing problems, formulating solutions, making decisions, initiatory leadership, leadership through change, and social change. After the first stage of the content

analysis, over 60 categories were identified. Categories with entries from 5 or fewer programs were combined with other categories with adjusted labels to create 38 consolidated categories.

The list and distribution of these values is presented in Table 1. Two characteristics stand out from this list of public service values. First, the number of categories identified by 5% or more of the NASPAA programs is very large. Categories could have been consolidated even more, but these more general groupings would be farther removed from the original language

Table 1. Consolidated public service value categories identified in 125 NASPAA self-study reports.

<i>Value</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1. Ethical awareness/standards/norms	83	66
2. Accountability	66	53
3. Equity/reduce disparities/social justice	66	53
4. Transparency/democratic process/openness/communication	62	50
5. Diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural competence	56	45
6. Objectivity/critical thinking/analysis/evidence-based decision making/unbiased	50	40
7. Efficiency	50	40
8. Democratic governance/rep democracy	44	35
9. Serve the public/community [service to public good]	42	34
10. Effectiveness/efficacy	40	32
11. Competence	38	30
12. Fairness/impartiality/due process	38	30
13. Respect/sensitivity	33	26
14. Involve/engage public/citizen self-governance/participatory practices	32	26
15. Public interest/common good	32	26
16. Integrity/character	27	22
17. Citizenship/civic responsibility [civic virtue]	24	19
18. Leadership	24	19
19. Advise/address problems/formulate/make decisions/initiatory leadership/leadership through change/social change	24	19
20. Collaboration [external]/working collectively	23	18
21. Excellence/growth/lifelong learning	22	18
22. Law, respect for/rule of	21	17
23. Professionalism	21	17
24. Responsiveness/responsible leadership	17	14
25. Community/strengthen community/stewards of place	16	13
26. Decision making based on all perspectives	16	13
27. Dignity and worth of all persons/human rights, respect for	16	13
28. Innovation/commitment to solve problems/continuous improvement	15	12
29. Public trust	12	10
30. Responsibility/trustworthiness	12	10
31. Stewardship encompassing efficiency and effectiveness	12	10
32. Beneficence/caring/compassion/benevolence	11	9
33. Justice	10	8
34. Sustainability	10	8
35. Equality	8	6
36. Organizational change/performance excellence/quality	8	6
37. Constitution	7	6
38. Honesty	6	5

Values explicitly identified in NASPAA standards as examples of public service values in the Preconditions for Accreditation Review and Standard 1.1 are in bold type.

used in the self-study reports. Second, there is extensive dispersion in the categories with no value chosen by more than two-thirds of the programs, and only four identified by half or more of the programs—ethical awareness, equity, accountability, and transparency.

The values identified most often are ones that are mentioned by the NASPAA standards as examples of public service values. Eleven of the 12 of the values mentioned by NASPAA are in the top 17 of the values identified.

There are numerous examples of what would seem to be central public service values that are typically omitted from the program mission statements. “Serve the public” and “public interest” are identified by just over one third and one quarter of the programs, respectively. If one were shown the following values, there would probably be the expectation that they are commonly included in the list of values related to the mission of a public affairs program:

- Beneficence/caring/compassion/benevolence
- Justice
- Sustainability
- Equality
- Organizational change/performance excellence/quality
- Constitution

In actuality, each was identified in less than 10% of the self-study reports.

In view of the important values that are rarely identified by public affairs programs as linked to their mission, it is important to ask what the significance is when a value is *not* identified by a program. Presumably it does not mean that all the values that are not listed are excluded from the curriculum. The omissions may suggest, however, that the mission statement and the values related to it are not always closely aligned to the public service values that are conveyed to students.

Another indication of the wide dispersion in the values chosen is to compare the frequency of values identified by NASPAA programs with the values identified by Kernaghan (2003), Nabatchi (2011), and Box (2015). Out of a total of 38 values listed by these three scholars, 12 were identified by all three. As indicated in Table 2, only one of these—accountability—was identified by a majority of the NASPAA programs as a value related to their mission. Four were identified by less than 20% of the programs, and three others did not make the cut and were eliminated as separate categories. The low level of correspondence may suggest that NASPAA programs are not always selecting the most important values in the field when they write their mission statements.

There is also substantial variation in the number of values that were linked to the mission statement. Among the 125 programs,

Table 2. “Consensus” values included in mission statements.

Consensus choices by value researchers	Percent of programs including the value in their mission statement
Accountability	53
Benevolence/compassion/caring/empathy	9
Dignity/humanity/humaneness/individual substantive rights	13
Efficiency/cost-efficiency/savings	40
Fairness/due process/impartiality/merit/formalization/decency/probity/honesty	30
Innovativeness/creativity	12
Lawfulness/legality/rule of law	17
Neutrality	[3] ^a
Public interest/people	26
Tolerance/flexibility	[2] ^a
Serviceability/service/costumer service	34
Representativeness	[4] ^a

^aActual number. These values were combined with other broader categories.

- 24% identified 2–5 values
- 50% identified 6–10 values
- 17% identified 11–15 values
- 9% identified 16–22 values

The wide range might suggest different approaches to the specification of values in the mission statement. Programs that identify a small number of values might concentrate on certain key core values. An assessment of the 30 programs with 2–5 values, however, indicates even more dispersion in the values chosen than among programs overall. Only one value—ethical awareness—was included by a majority of these programs (57%). No other single value was chosen by even a quarter of these programs. Thirty-one different values were listed by only 1–7 of these 30 programs. Covering such a small number of specific values does not seem to be compatible with NASPAA’s emphasis on the importance of public service values.

Public service values and description of competencies

To assess the correspondence between the values contained in the mission statement and the values incorporated in the description of competencies, two additional forms of content analysis were conducted on the description of the universal competencies in response to Standard 5.1 regarding the five required universal competencies. The first examined whether the values identified in the mission statement were mentioned in the description of the competencies, that is, were all values clearly articulated in the description of competencies? The second type of analysis identified values implied in the description of competencies that were not included in the mission statement. Presumably, these are values that might have been added to the mission statement.

Inclusion of values in description of competencies

The analysis of the self-study reports was extended to examine whether the description of the five universal competencies included a reference to the values identified by the program in the mission statement. The assessment was made independently by the two authors and differences were reconciled. The complete breakdown of the percentage of values not mentioned is summarized in [Table 3](#).

For one program in six, the identification of values and the content of competencies were largely disconnected with over half of the values not covered by the description of the competencies. In addition, one program in four failed to refer to a fairly large portion (25–49%) of the values they had identified. On the other hand, almost two programs in five connected all of the values to the content of the competencies. The “missing” values may be covered in courses that relate to a competency, but they were not mentioned in the universal competency description. When considering the consistency between the mission and the description of competencies, it is fairly common for programs to not clearly cover all of the values in the description of the competencies.

Values that could be added to the mission statement

The second aspect of examining competencies is identifying values that are related to topics that are covered or implied in the competency but are not included in the mission statement. For example, one program failed to include either “leadership” or “critical thinking” in its list of values in the mission statement. In its explanation of the managing and leadership competency in Domain 1, however, the program states that its students will possess the skills necessary for critical thinking and leadership. Critical thinking is defined broadly to include

the capacities to gather, evaluate and analyze relevant information; to take ethical and defensible actions based on all available information; communicate these actions and results to a variety of audiences; and to adapt to feedback, evolving circumstances, and emerging information.

In addition, “strong leadership entails the capacity to envision public value and to pursue it with the passion and commitment necessary to motivate

Table 3. Percentage of values not included in description of universal competencies.

Percent of values in mission not included in competencies	Number of programs	Percent of programs
75% or higher not included	4	3
50–74%	16	14
25–49%	28	24
8–24%	26	22
Zero values not included	44	37
Total	118 ^a	100

^aFor seven of the programs, the description of the competencies was not available.

others.” Despite these definitions that go beyond merely learning about how to think critically and the characteristics of leadership to inculcating a commitment to act in a value-based way, neither critical thinking nor leadership is identified as a value emphasized by the program. The definition also states that managers are expected to undertake the “development and pursuit of new policy initiatives,” but advising superiors and being an agent of change are not identified as values.

In other cases, there is no mention of a value related to a topic that is covered in the competency. A program develops “the ability to work productively with diverse constituents, colleagues, employees and clients” in Domain 5, but does not include involving and engaging citizens as a value in the mission statement. Another teaches about “legal institutions” in Domain 2, but the value of law is not included.

Thus, this portion of the analysis was intended to identify values that are or could be developed in the curriculum of a program that are not included in the list of values related to the program’s mission. The values identified are not ones that the authors recommend adding to fill a gap in a program’s curriculum. Rather they are values that could be added to the mission because the program appears to be including the value in its teaching already or because a topic is taught without a necessarily examining its value implications.

Both authors independently suggested values that could be added to the mission statement based on the content of the competencies, and we reconciled our choices. The results are displayed in [Table 4](#).

The top nine values were more often implied in the description of the competencies than they were identified as part of the program mission. Thus, it appears that they were included more in the curriculum than in the mission. A possible explanation for the greater attention given to these values results from the way one of the domains and universal required competencies are described in the NASPAA standards. Five of the top nine—diversity, internal and external collaboration, involve the public, and decision making based on all perspectives—are related to the values stated explicitly in Domain 5: “To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.” The competencies include specification of the knowledge and skill that should be mastered and also often incorporate the intention or commitment associated with the competency. The possible competencies for the domains in the NASPAA standards include some examples that may guide programs to emphasize both mastery and value commitment. These differing characteristics are reflected in these “Examples of Competency Statements” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 66–68)¹: Some are “neutral” stating only a capability. Others express values that should be advanced by the competency. For example, in Domain 1. To lead and manage in public governance, two examples are

Table 4. Values implied in description of competencies that could be added to the mission statement.

Value	Number of programs
Leadership	68
Objectivity/evidence-based decision making/unbiased	68
Diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural competence	57
Advise/address problems/formulating/make decisions/initiatory leadership/leadership through change/social change	56
Collaboration [internal]/team-building/cooperation	54
Collaboration [external]/working collectively	48
Involve/engage public/citizen self-governance/participatory practices	42
Law, respect for/rule of	37
Decision making based on all perspectives	35
Ethical awareness/standards/norms/public trust	31
Effectiveness/efficacy	31
Professionalism	21
Efficiency	21
Public interest/common good	15
Transparency/democratic process/openness	15
Accountability	13
Community/strengthen community/stewards of place	13
Equity/reduce disparities/social justice	13
Respect/sensitivity	13
Democratic governance/rep democracy	11
Integrity/character	11
Responsiveness/responsible leadership	11
Fairness/impartiality/due process	9
Serve the public/community [service to public good]	9
Beneficence/caring/compassion/benevolence	8
Excellence/growth/lifelong learning	8
Representativeness	8
Responsibility/trustworthiness	7
Innovation/commitment to solve problems/continuous improvement	6
Organizational change/performance excellence	6

to “manage projects” and to “manage information and networks.” An example that expresses a value-based approach is to “lead and manage people effectively, whether volunteers or compensated, fostering team building, commitment, creativity, and performance.” Such competency descriptions appear to be a distinct source of influence on the public service values that are promoted by NASPAA programs beyond those that are explicitly mentioned in NASPAA’s discussion of public service values. Still, often these values are included in a program’s curriculum but are not included in their mission statement.

The connection between values and the content of competencies is presented in [Figure 1](#). It is obvious that the competencies reflect a wide range of values that most programs should be advancing.² There is a contradiction between the inference that only selected values should be contained in the mission statement and the expectation that universal competencies will be developed through the curriculum. [Table 4](#) demonstrates that programs are

Values from Table 4	NASPAA Preconditions and Domains
1. Public interest 2. Serve the public 3. Accountability 4. Transparency 5. Competence Efficiency* Objectivity	Values in Preconditions for Accreditation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency • Serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity
6. Leadership 7. Innovation Accountability 8. Organizational change 9. Effectiveness 10. Efficiency 11. Stewardship 12. Leadership 13. Professionalism	Domains: Domain 1. To lead and manage in public governance
14. Advise 15. Objectivity /critical thinking	Domain 2. To participate in and contribute to the public policy process
16. Law 17. Excellence Critical thinking	Domain 3. To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions
18. Integrity / honesty 19. Ethical awareness 20. Fairness/impartiality 21. Equity	Values in Preconditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust. • Demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants. Domain 4. To articulate and apply a public service perspective; incorporate public values into decisions
22. Involve/engage 23. Responsiveness Transparency 24. Community 25. Democratic governance 26. Collaboration internal 27. Collaboration external 28. Respect/sensitivity 29. Diversity/ inclusiveness	Domain 5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Figure 1. Values relevant to NASPAA preconditions and domains.

*Value not numbered if listed elsewhere in figure.

or should be examining a wide range of values even though they are not explicitly identified in their mission statement.

Taken together, the analysis of the mission statement, values, and competencies indicates substantial variance across programs and discontinuities across elements of the self-study report that deal with values within programs. NASPAA programs are expected to be distinct and guided by their own mission within the broad standards that apply to all programs. The wide variation in the number and content of values included in vision statements seems to suggest that the relationship between unique and shared features is out of balance. There is some cohesion around the 12 values cited by

NASPAA as examples, but 8 of these are mentioned as program values by less than half of the programs. Internal linkages are also uneven. A minority of programs do not explicitly refer to all the mission values in the description of competencies, and many of the competencies promote values that are not included in those identified by programs as integral to their mission. There appears to be a need for greater integration of values and competencies, but before exploring ways to strengthen that linkage, it is important to examine one other relationship—how values are linked to ethical actions.

Linkages between values, competencies, and ethical action

The final issue to be explored is how programs prepare students to convert public service values into action and meet normative standards in the performance of competencies. Conveying ethical principles and standards is central to this aspect of public affairs education. There are limitations to relying on values alone as a guide to behavior. Values are beliefs, convictions, and ideas that orient and motivate a person, but they do not in themselves provide standards for behavior. Values affect behavior, but there is “extraordinary versatility” in how they are applied and whether they are applied to oneself and others (Rokeach 1973, p. 10). In part, uncertainty about application comes from variation in definition. Rosenbloom (2017) argues that “one would be hard pressed to find standard definitions or operational requirements” for values such as “accountability,” “common good,” “equity,” “justice,” and “professionalism.” In addition, a value may not be perceived by an individual as relevant to a particular situation or may be consciously or unconsciously overruled by another value. Consequently, that value will not influence action. Promoting efficiency in getting a new program developed and implemented may supplant the values of transparency and involvement of citizens.

Ethical standards can address these challenges that arise from an exclusive reliance on values. As Cooper (2012, p. 21) states, “an ethical principle is a statement concerning the conduct or state of being that is required for the fulfillment of a value; it explicitly links a value with a general mode of action.” Lewis and Gilman (2012, p. 29–30) identify five core values and 17 “ethical principles or guides to ethical action” that define how they are put into practice. Ethical standards should be used as a guide to behavior in all situations to which they apply, and that connection is easier to make than calling up the appropriate value. When dealing with organizational processes, people, and money, there are distinct standards that apply. Furthermore, all relevant standards should be acknowledged and attempts made to reconcile them.

In the NASPAA standards, competencies are linked to both values and ethics. Competencies are “skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and capabilities” but

they involve more than the capacity to act. In addition, it is a goal of NASPAA that “competencies should ensure that students will be capable of acting ethically and effectively in pursuit of the public interest” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 34). Thus, the NASPAA guidelines contain the logic for a strong emphasis on ethics that extends across each of the competencies guided by the overarching value of pursuing the public interest. Values inspire competencies, and competencies require ethical standards.

This ethical dimension is asserted in many of the examples of competencies in the NASPAA guidelines, but programs do not necessarily incorporate the ethical standards in their definition of competencies. The material taught in each competency should make this connection explicit. Students should understand what ethical standards are relevant to each competency, how the competency is important to advancing the public interest, and why the ethical standard should be observed. Students should also receive a broad introduction to the nature of public affairs ethics, its foundation in philosophical models, its development and relationship to ethics laws, and approaches to ethics review used by professional associations. A separate ethics course expands ethical awareness (Menzel, 1997). Cooper and Menzel (2013, p. 7–8) argue that a “freestanding course devoted primarily to the development of a normative professional ethical perspective” provides the foundation for ethical awareness and should be a required course in public affairs programs.³ Jurkiewicz (2002) agrees, but based on her monitoring of courses offered by accredited programs she has determined that only 11% of NASPAA offer a freestanding ethics course—a decline from a high of 64% in 2002.⁴ It is possible that NASPAA’s standards adopted in 2001 started to reduce the number of ethics courses, and the 2006 reinforced the declining emphasis on ethics along with the increased focus on values.

Building on the foundation established in an ethics course, relevant ethical standards should be incorporated in the teaching of the full range of universal competencies. Jurkiewicz (2013) recommends that class components designed by an ethics expert be integrated in other specific courses (2013, p. 142). This approach increases the likelihood that “students will be capable of acting ethically and effectively”—NASPAA’s definition that should be applied to all competencies. To promote ethical competence, students should be taught to make sound decisions that “represent a prudent mixture of theory and skill” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 99). This approach needs to be taken in each course that contributes to developing a competency.

Acting ethically is identified as a public service value by NASPAA. Ethical awareness is included in the mission statement of two-thirds of NASPAA programs and is reflected in the description of competencies in another quarter of the programs. Often, however, it is not clear what the definition and scope of ethics is in the self-study reports. In the preconditions for accreditation, NASPAA links acting ethically to “uphold[ing] the public

trust.” One example of a statement for competency 4 is the following: “Behave ethically and with integrity: Tell the truth, keep confidences, admit mistakes, and do not misrepresent oneself, one’s goals or the facts for personal advantage.” This approach to ethics implies a focus on integrity and avoidance of bias, favoritism, or personal gain.⁵ This is a virtue-based orientation that emphasizes being rather than doing and avoiding unethical behavior rather than demonstrating ethical behavior. This orientation should be accompanied by teaching that elaborates principle-based, duty-based, and—used with caution—utilitarian approaches to ethics as well (Svara, 2015).

Codes of ethics in public service normally include integrity-based standards, but they also include principles and standards that identify responsibilities and guide positive actions that put values into practice in all aspects of administrators’ work (Svara, 2012). They reflect the shared commitment of the members of the association of professionals that developed the code and provide an external source of guidance to students. Professional codes of ethics incorporate a range of public service values and specify in more or less detail the standards of behavior that should be observed in order to actualize these values.

Programs should identify the ethical standards that are incorporated in the curriculum for all competencies drawing on one or more codes of ethics that are relevant to their mission. The way that a code clarifies ethical expectations can be illustrated using the ASPA Code of Ethics. As revised in 2013, it is based on eight core principles: advance the public interest and public service, uphold legality, promote citizen involvement, advance social equity, provide professional policy advice, demonstrate integrity, promote professional excellence, and build an ethical organization that demonstrates stewardship, openness, and inclusion. It presents standards that can be matched to NASPAA’s overarching values and universal competencies. An overview of the linkages is provided in [Figure 2](#).

This comparison illustrates the importance of specifying ethical standards across the competencies using a code of ethics. Still, NASPAA does not mention codes of ethics in its guidelines.⁶ Only 11 self-study reports mention codes of ethics in the description of mission, values, and competencies, and only 1 specifically mentions the ASPA and the ICMA Codes. Programs could use a comprehensive code relevant to their program mission or the country in which they are located to more fully specify the overall ethical responsibilities that students should be committed to perform and the ethical standards associated with each of the competencies.

The competency-based standards are usefully taught in courses that cover the competency. For example, the ethical expectation to provide a complete and fair assessment of policy options to superiors and the ethical importance of advancing stewardship should be taught as part of a policy analysis and budgeting course, respectively. The discussion of ethical standards and their application to specific situations should not be confined to a single ethics course. Specifying the ethical standards taught across the competencies clarifies the public service values that are

NASPAA Preconditions and Domains	Corresponding Principles and Standards from ASPA Code of Ethics*
Values in Preconditions for Accreditation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency • Serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity 	1. Advance the Public Interest. Promote the interests of the public... [for continuation, see Domain 4] 8. Advance Professional Excellence: Strengthen personal capabilities to act competently and ethically and encourage the professional development of others.
Domains: Domain 1. To lead and manage in public governance	7. Promote Ethical Organizations: Strive to attain the highest standards of ethics, stewardship, and public service in organizations that serve the public. Practice b.** Act as stewards of public funds by the strategic, effective, and efficient use of resources; by regularly examining the efficacy of policies, programs, and services. [Also see Domain 5]
Domain 2. To participate in and contribute to the public policy process	5. Fully Inform and Advise. Provide accurate, honest, comprehensive, and timely information and advice to elected and appointed officials and governing board members, and to staff members in your organization.
Domain 3. To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions	2. Uphold the Constitution and the Law. Respect and support government constitutions and laws, while seeking to improve laws and policies to promote the public good.
Values in Preconditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust. • Demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants. Domain 4. To articulate and apply a public service perspective; incorporate public values into decisions	6. Demonstrate personal integrity. Adhere to the highest standards of conduct to inspire public confidence and trust in public service. 4. Strengthen social equity. Treat all persons with fairness, justice, and equality and respect individual differences, rights, and freedoms. Promote affirmative action and other initiatives to reduce unfairness, injustice, and inequality in society. 1. Put service to the public above service to oneself.
Domain 5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry	3. Promote democratic participation. Inform the public and encourage active engagement in governance. Be open, transparent and responsive, and respect and assist all persons in their dealings with public organizations. 7. Promote Ethical Organizations. Practice: c. Encourage open expression of views...and provide administrative channels for dissent. Protect the whistleblowing rights of public employees; Practice f. Promote proactive efforts to increase the representativeness of the public workforce and the full inclusion of persons with diverse characteristics.

Figure 2. Corresponding values and ethical standards in NASPAA preconditions/domains and ASPA code of ethics.

*For ASPA Code of Ethics, see <https://www.aspanet.org/ASPA/About-ASPA/Code-of-Ethics/ASPA/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics.aspx?hkey=feba3e2-a9dc-4fc8-a686-3446513a4533>.

**For Practices, see <https://www.aspanet.org/ASPADocs/ASPA%20Code%20of%20Ethics-2013%20with%20Practices.pdf>.

actually emphasized by the program in contrast to the vague and incomplete list often included in the mission statement. This approach to ethics instruction explores and supports the connection between effectiveness and ethics that the competencies are expected to reflect. Beyond formal instruction, understanding of the interrelationships among values, competencies, and ethics is advanced by encouraging students to identify value choices, ethical issues, and examples of meeting or falling short of ethical standards encountered in field work experience and research papers.

Conclusion and recommendations

Public service values are very important to shaping the outlook and motivation of the public administrator. They should be introduced and examined in all courses. Furthermore, they should be reinforced and actualized by the study of ethics throughout the curriculum and across the competencies. NASPAA should make it clear in its standards that all creditable programs are expected to incorporate a broad range of public service values in their curriculum. Indeed, the 12 suggested values in the NASPAA guidelines and the 16 others implied in examples of competency statements reflect this breadth. There are key terms in the standards, however, that can be interpreted to mean that programs should focus narrowly on a limited number of specific values. The preconditions instruct a program to “define the boundaries of the public service values it emphasizes,” as if it should be choosing a select group of values over others. In the mission statement, the program should indicate its “purpose and public service values, given the program’s *particular* emphasis on public affairs, administration, and policy.” Greater emphasis should be placed on defining their broad orientation and commitment that signals the shared purposes of all public affairs programs that differ from programs in other professional fields.

Given the rationale for the emphasis on values, it seems obvious that the NASPAA standards are intended to encourage the articulation of the shared commitments across all public affairs programs as well as some possible unique characteristics. Many self-studies, however, seem intent on attempting to demonstrate how they are unique and different from public affairs programs at other universities. Some mission statements present scattershot coverage of values that surely leave out other values that are integral (including some that are actually included in their curriculum). The analysis of self-studies shows that often values identified in the mission statement are not reflected in the definition of competencies, and values related to the competencies are not included in the mission statement. Is it possible that almost two-thirds of the public affairs programs do not cover public service as a value or that three quarters do not address the public interest? It is appropriate for all programs to indicate that they advance understanding and application of a broad range of shared public service values. It is worthwhile for universities to identify values that are given special emphasis in their program, but these values should not be stressed to the exclusion of others that are integral to public affairs. How can a quarter of the programs claim to cover only five or fewer values? The mission may identify values related to an area of specialization, for example, values relevant to public affairs in the community setting for programs that specialize in local government management or to professionals that focus on particular aspects of the field, such as human services or planning and development. The special emphasis on certain values, however, should not displace the broad

range of values that all programs should cover. Including a long list of values in the mission statement does not seem to be very useful. Program faculty could have a discussion to identify the values covered in their courses. This exercise might identify some gaps that the program would want to fill or differences in the way that values are interpreted that faculty members should be aware of. The results of the inventory could be provided as substantiation that the program's commitment to include a broad range of shared public service values is being carried out.

Beyond the mission statement, programs need to do a better job of defining the ethical expectations that are incorporated in the instructional program. Ethical principles and practices should be explicitly identified in the definition of competencies because they indicate what kinds of actions their students should be committed to and capable of taking in order to advance public service values. Codes of ethics and their supporting practices provide a framework for identifying the ethical standards that should be covered in courses related to the competencies, but most programs are failing to explicitly recognize them.

Codes of ethics help students understand how to put the values into action. Programs should examine the ethical expectations associated with each competency and specify the ethics code that they are following. The ASPA Code of Ethics is available, but programs could identify another source of the comprehensive ethical standards that their student learn. In well-developed professional codes, principles and practices are not narrow rules that tell administrators what to do and not to do but rather elaborate the range of responsibilities they should uphold. Administrators must give meaning to the standards and identify how they will be reflected in the actions they take. Students are more likely to develop this capability when they have a broad understanding of the nature of public affairs ethics and learn about the ethical dimension of each competency—why the ethical standard is important and why and how it should be observed. This approach will strengthen the linkages among values, competencies, and ethics, and better prepare our students to “be capable of acting ethically and effectively in pursuit of the public interest” and serving the public. Currently, the incorporation of public service values in NASPAA standards and programs is essential but incomplete.

Notes

1. The standards explain the nature of the examples in this way: “Examples of competencies in each of the required domains are provided below, stated in terms of specific expectations for student learning. A Program can include other competencies within each of these domains to meet NASPAA’s requirement of universal competencies” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 66).

2. “The emphasis that a particular program places on each of the domains of universal competencies should be consistent with its mission. A public affairs program might put greater emphasis on the domain, ‘managing public organization’ than on ‘participating in and influencing the policy process;’ the latter might be more the emphasis of a public policy program.” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 66)
3. A complementary strategy is to offer a course that combines a comprehensive approach to articulating public service values and professional standards across the curriculum in a course that develops “information literacy” (Turner, 2015, p. 45–46).
4. Carole L. Jurkiewicz, Presentation at NASPAA Conference 2017 and personal correspondence.
5. From Standards for the U.S. Executive Branch: “Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain.”
6. In the definition of “ethical practice,” NASPAA refers to “legitimate codes of conduct” as a source of guidance in addition to “moral duties and obligations” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 35). It is the only reference to “codes.” The only other mention of “ethical practice,” however, involves not learning objectives but conduct of the program: “the Program should provide evidence that communications with its stakeholders demonstrates accountability, transparency, and ethical practice” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 64). The other mention of “codes” is found in the Preconditions for Accreditation, programs are asked “since your last review have there been any changes to the code of conduct or other ethical expectations at your institution (Y/N)?” (NASPAA, 2017, p. 41).

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