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Introduction

My desire to serve others began when I was a child and was instilled in me by my mother and church leaders. Caring for others serves to keep me humble and sensitive to an overarching purpose in society. I always imagined myself using this drive to help others, by working in government and striving to make a difference where needed. At times, I was discouraged because I knew there was so much to be done and only so much one person could do. As I grew and learned more about government and its systematic approach to addressing the needs of the public, I became all the more intrigued and my interest in serving became profound. When the time came for me to consider graduate school, I pondered over a number of programs that only covered certain aspects of government work and none seemed to fully consist of all that I was looking for. Finally, I was encouraged to consider public administration and, after some limited research, I was certain it offered all that I aspired to learn.

Now approaching graduation I see many opportunities ahead of me and many more goals that I can set out to achieve. However, throughout my professional endeavors I will hold true to what I have learned based on the fundamental values of management and public administration: political responsiveness, efficiency, individual rights and social equity. Examining these values throughout my Masters of Public Administration (MPA) experience has given me the ability to appreciate the importance of the role that each value plays in public administration; how they are often competing and conflicting; and more importantly, how each of these values is necessary and invaluable to ensure that public administration is a fully functioning system in America. As I have increasingly learned more about these fundamental values in the MPA program, I have enhanced my ability to inculcate these values in my work environment and the community. With a broader understanding of

government and its many functions, I will address three important concepts in public administration that are crucial to the success and survival of our nation. Prior to the MPA program, my understanding of the necessity of these public administration concepts; leadership, education and sustainability of government, was very limited. With a heightened understanding of these issues, I realize how much I have grown and will continue to add to my understanding through the resources the MPA program has placed before me.

As I reflect upon my MPA experience with the University of Kansas, I realize how little I truly understood about government and public service when I initially began the program. In trying to understand why I chose public administration, I realized I possessed a limited number of personal and professional experiences to which I could refer. Career advancement in local government was my professional aspiration; I was currently employed with the Shawnee County Department of Corrections and had completed undergraduate study in Criminal Justice. Personally, I had experienced challenges as a youth and I was exposed to a series of unfortunate circumstances that gave me the desire to change our communities for the better. Before I began the MPA program, I firmly believed that a country is only as strong as its *lowest* citizen. At that time, I credited this view to working many long hours in the drudges of a local detention facility, whereby hard-earned tax dollars are being spent. However, I still have the desire to be an agent of change, but my understanding of why change is necessary has taken a new form. My approach to addressing these many issues is no longer based on emotion, but now with what I have learned in the MPA program, I can also address these issues with objective facts and sound judgment. Once I considered fulfilling the goal of affecting change in the non-profit sector. Now I see plenty of opportunity in government and I remain open to the many possibilities that public administration has to offer. Today, I confidently say that I possess a solid foundation, which I can use to contribute in making our government's obligation to the

citizens more beneficial.

Leadership

Throughout my experience in the MPA program, the one concept consistently acknowledged as vital to this country is that of leadership. Before entering the MPA program, I carried the same opinion about the idea of leadership as many others. My experience with controlling managers and top-down management practices led me to believe that leadership was simply used to describe a glorified manager. However, today I realize this understanding is not only false, but is commonly used as an excuse for complacency. Unfortunately, some governmental officials continue to think about contemporary leadership styles as “ivory tower” public administration theory. Therefore, new leadership styles are not taken seriously nor are they being applied as needed in government work. The MPA program has taught me that true leaders are those who have a passion to promote public service and help those they are leading in this respect. Although good managers are capable of ensuring efficient processes and high productivity, I now understand why managers lacking leadership cannot achieve a vision and promote long-term goals. The MPA program has taught me that leadership involves earning the trust of citizens and those you lead. Leaders ensure social equity, transparency in political processes and making ethical decisions that are responsive to citizens as opposed to political constituents. Leadership also requires the delegation of power to make those you are leading successful in their roles, as well as creating positive and highly energetic work environments. Niccolo Machiavelli has said that it is better to be feared than loved. But I now believe true leaders would not settle for just fear or love, but understand that it is necessary to have both and would diligently work toward achieving a balance. I appreciate the MPA program for assisting me in achieving a greater understanding of the true essence of leadership and I will aspire to fulfill my role as a leader in the public sector.

In the past, I was excited about the rise of privatization and the possibility of services for the public being better and cheaper. However, the MPA program relayed some of the weaknesses in government services caused by privatization. One weakness is the lack of accountability, which has caused the concept of leadership to become obsolete. As government began to privatize more government services, this initiative birthed a network of contractors where government and private agencies cannot be distinguished one from the other in policy implementation. The MPA program led me to understand how privatization has added to the complexity already present within bureaucratic government systems. This understanding has provided insight as to why public officials are becoming more uncertain as to what their roles are, why they are apprehensive about assuming their responsibilities and why they refuse to accept responsibility for outcomes. The MPA program has shown me that the citizens of this country expect leadership in government officials; where there is competence and the willingness to accept responsibility for the work that is being done. However, due to this enormous complexity and extensive networks of contractors, often, no one knows who the leader should be. For example, Congress' report on Hurricane Katrina, *A Failure of Initiative*, revealed several weaknesses associated with complex government systems. Ultimately, when the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) joined the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the responsibility to consolidate federal emergency response plans was assigned to an outside contractor. Therefore, these agencies were not completely familiar with their responsibilities under this newly devised plan and led to an inefficient response to this disaster. This example is described by Donald Kettl, as the "fuzzy boundaries" problem in public administration, (*The Transformation of Governance*, 2002). Although, I realize there are benefits to privatization, government should complete several steps before deciding to establish a collaborative service: the service should be identified as appropriate for contracting out; contracting out

should provide a financial benefit to the agency; contracting out should be a more efficient method of service; and last, both the governing and contracting agency should establish a process for oversight and monitor the contract to ensure the intent of the contract is being met. Having these steps in place will assist administrators in assuring accountability of outcomes and identifying the leaders responsible for the results.

Education

Although I have always valued education and believed it to be necessary in competing for career advancement, I did not realize how it is indispensable to the future of our nation. The MPA program has taught me that public administrators and political leaders can work toward keeping education a priority in our country, first, by ensuring that it is adequately funded for the youth in our communities. There has been much debate between state and local government in Kansas, as well as equity and efficiency issues of educational opportunity. This conflict is associated with diminished local control of public school funding, as Kansas adopted a school funding reform that transferred taxing and spending decisions to the state. While there may never be a solution that will suffice all parties affected by any proposal designed to address the issue, it is still a much needed public service and should be given the attention necessary to deal with the problem. The professors of the MPA program have expressed the importance of compromise in public administration. When providing services to the public, those involved must learn that compromise is essential in achieving the greater good and may sometimes appear to be at the expense of one value, in order to attain another.

The MPA program has also revealed how education in the work environment can be provided to government employees in the form of training and staff development. These organizational initiatives facilitate communication about goals and objectives that link policy making to policy implementation. This approach also fosters innovative and positive work

environments where participants are knowledgeable about the strategic plan of the organization and the political leaders. It also gives participants ownership in organizational development, which produces a greater stability and commitment to government work and goal implementation. Furthermore, educating staff serves to build competencies in employees that will replace the knowledge and capacity that is soon to be lost as a large portion of our aging workforce approach retirement. As Assistant Training Coordinator with the Shawnee County Jail, I have experienced how lost knowledge and expertise has contributed to difficulties in managing the offender population. Utilizing more experienced staff to transfer knowledge to younger generations of employees has served as an invaluable tool in fulfilling the goals and objectives of the department.

Prior to the MPA program, I thought graduate school was a compilation of theory and seminars unrelated to any practical application in the real world. Nearing the completion of the MPA program, I take with me a valuable skill set. I firmly believe that higher education is an essential element to the vitality of our country. Frederick C. Mosher in his *Democracy and the Public Service* reveals the interdependency between education about public service and the public service itself, as both have evolved together over time. Although Britain and the United Kingdom established educational institutions prior to the United States, the US quickly began creating model institutions for education. In the late nineteenth century, the population in America grew and government began to develop administrative agencies. These agencies coordinated the implementation of legislation because the courts were no longer able to do so effectively. Today, in the 21st century, the service economy has grown profoundly; therefore, higher education is needed to ensure there are capable administrators managing these services. The MPA program has not only demonstrated this need, but equips aspiring administrators with the tools necessary to perform exceptionally within their roles. Political leaders should assist students in public schools by requiring that

they prepare for higher education. The MPA program has revealed that this initiative will instill these expectations in the young people of today, so they can step up and fulfill public administration roles that are left open by our retiring workforce.

Before experiencing the MPA program I did not fully understand the relationship between public organizations, the community these organizations serve, the administrators who lead the organizations and politicians who direct organizational leaders in response to the will of the people. Today, I have a better understanding of these relationships and believe it is important for government to implement a more aggressive process for educating citizens about policy issues. This process would also lead citizens to understand the political process that affects organizations and the services being delivered to the public. Policy decisions not only affect people who are aware of political issues, but they affect the uniformed within society as well. The MPA program has taught me that most citizens who are involved in, and therefore affect, the political process are the wealthier members of society. Even though the poor members of society have a responsibility to enlighten themselves, I believe they would initiate more involvement after they understand the process. Being included in the process is their right. The MPA program has also taught me that a political process that is truly representative of all classes within society can then begin to fulfill the value of governmental political responsiveness.

Sustainability

In addition to leadership and education, the MPA program has revealed several important concepts that are vital to the future of our nation. However, if a nation is to survive, it must have a government that can sustain and adapt as society changes. The MPA program has taught me that traditional government is no longer effective in today's world. In the MPA program I have learned that sustaining government requires public administrators to begin addressing issues of intergovernmental relations, flexibility in

government systems and globalization. Professors of the MPA program have taught me that addressing these issues will assist public administrators in transforming government to effectively operate in society today.

Prior to the MPA program, I lacked any real understanding of intergovernmental relations or how public administrators would effectively apply it. However, today I realize as public administrators have begun to move toward privatization and establish networks in providing government services, the need for intergovernmental relations is increasingly important. The program has taught me that applying intergovernmental relations will require public leaders who have a specific skill set, including the ability to conceptualize network systems, the ability to integrate the network across all agencies involved in a network and also communicating and sharing knowledge across the network.

The MPA program has also taught me that sustaining government includes flexibility in government systems. This requires public administrators to devise systems that are not subject to unnecessary restraints and are able to be changed to accommodate a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society. These characteristics are nothing similar to traditional government systems. Therefore, public administrators must diligently combat obstacles related to organizational cultures and the hesitancy to conform. The MPA program has taught me that public employees must understand the necessity to be public value-oriented, rather than program-oriented to achieve mission objectives and sustain the changes society brings. Flexibility within systems allows government officials to make changes as they learn of more efficient ways of providing the service, rather than conforming to more efficient methods after policy has changed.

I have also learned the importance of globalization in the MPA program, as it involves the integration of economic, political and cultural systems across the world. It is important for public administrators to take steps toward globalization because it allows for

greater understanding of other cultures, the ability to access necessary resources and the opportunity to learn more effective methods to operating and providing services. Prior to the attack of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the common misconception among Americans was that the world loves our country. The reality is some nations actually hate American citizens and the freedom we represent. The MPA program has taught me that globalization will serve public administrators by combating some of these misconceptions. It is also possible that more diplomatic approaches to globalization may be useful in accomplishing our goals.

Conclusion

Prior to the MPA program, I believed my purpose in the public service was to work in corrections and strive to make a difference. Today, the MPA program has opened my mind to a world of possibilities and I am eager to begin applying what I have learned. I am able to apply the concepts that I take away from the program in all levels of government, as well as the non-profit sector, community organizations and even in ministry work. Throughout my endeavors I will promote leadership, education and the sustainability of government to further advance the fundamental values of public administration: political responsiveness, efficiency, social equity and individual rights. I will also promote these public administration concepts to fulfill my obligation and responsibility to government and this country.

As a leader, I will strive in conforming to contemporary leadership styles that assist me to be successful in a rapidly changing society. In applying contemporary forms of leadership, I will promote notions of inclusion, empowerment and innovation in my work environment. As an aspiring public administrator I will continue to adhere to and encourage traditions of merit in hiring processes and resist decision-making that is based on political affiliations, as these type of unethical decision-making practices lead to corruption and degradation of efficient government services. Additionally, I will utilize a more systematic

approach to managing complex systems within government to be successful and assist other leaders to be successful in their roles.

The MPA program has also revealed how promoting education as a public service, leads to competing and conflicting public administration values within government and society. With the understanding I have gained in the program, I am able to examine the political process for compromise as public leaders establish solutions to school funding issues. I will promote education in training and staff development initiatives, to gain commitment from employees to organizational goals. In addition to training on new developments and contemporary ideas, I will also encourage the sharing of knowledge between senior and new generation staff, as large portions of our aging employees prepare to leave the workplace. Additionally, I will assume the role of an educator among those in the public that I have direct contact with, pertaining to policy issues and the political process. I believe this step can assist in educating the uninformed within the society and promote the value of political responsiveness.

In sustaining government, I will continue to stay abreast of current public administration trends and attempt to inculcate these concepts in my work environment and the community. Prior to the MPA program I believed an understanding of larger issues pertaining to flexibility in government systems, intergovernmental relations and globalization were above me and did not directly affect me. Today, I understand that the reality of this is contrary to my prior belief. As I apply my new understanding within society, I will strive to work collaboratively with partner agencies to conceptualize the networked government systems. As I learn more about them, I will work to understand ways of creating systems that remain flexible to an ever-changing society. In managing these systems, I will adopt regular practices of intergovernmental relations and learn to master the process of communicating with all levels of government and non-government agencies. One professor

once said, the ability to identify key players and convene with a group of people to establish a solution to a problem is a powerful skill. I aspire to master this skill and apply it within work and community involvement to affect change as needed. Additionally, the program has taught me the importance of globalization and the ability to identify international issues. As a graduate of the program I will continue to stay aware of these issues and establish myself as a resource in my assessment of how they may affect citizens.

Finally, the MPA program has provided me with an education that allows me to better understand and assess the governing body that manages our country. I will use these important public administration concepts to lead effectively, promote education within society and assist in sustaining government, as it is crucial to the survival of our country. Ensuring these values throughout government and public organizations, will serve to fulfill our basic responsibilities introduced in the preamble to the United States Constitution: to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

