

MPA Portfolio Narrative

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Introduction

Public service began early on in my life with volunteering and community involvement. I learned that it takes everyone working together to create a clean, safe, fun place to live. After college, I entered the Americorps program in disaster relief which further instilled my passion for public service and the belief that everyone is a part of an intricate community. I have been a part of several for-profit organizations as well but I have continued the thread of being in positions in which I am helping to bring people together in helping uplift a community. Throughout my time in the MPA program at Virginia Tech I have enjoyed learning how to better serve the community by completing the performance objectives required for the degree.

Objective 1: Communicate effectively through writing.

Respectable writing skills is one of the most critical tools a professional can have. For me, the written language is not only a vehicle to get your point across, it is a passionate art. Throughout the last ten years, I worked in communications in non-profit organizations in which my job involved writing, editing, and designing. I am excited to exercise my passion for writing as a public administrator. I am also enthusiastic to write pieces that may make a difference in government. The MPA program taught me to write brief and concise pieces that got my message across to a specific audience in an effective way. Writing in public policy is not just about how well you can write but also about getting your message across in a factual, cohesive way. In the following artifacts I

demonstrate my ability to describe an issue clearly through concise, professional writing, use written language and graphical displays to convey complex ideas and information.

Artifact: Memo: Cost-benefit analysis applications to public works projects.

This artifact demonstrates my ability to describe an issue clearly through professional writing that is concise. This memo gives an overview of what cost-benefit analysis is and then emphasizes the importance of including uncertainty and risk in the analysis. For the class we were to write a memo to a council member and their chief of staff about applying cost-benefit analysis to a public works project. We were told that the fictional town we were writing about had an aging pipe system. Although brief, this memo explains why uncertainty and risk are prevalent in a public works project and why they should be considered. I then give a few options and recommendations to the council member for moving forward.

Artifact: The Effects of Organizational Restructuring, How They Can Be Mitigated and a Case Study of a Small Trade Association

In this artifact I show my ability to convey complex ideas and information. In PAPA 5316: Systems Skills we were tasked with picking a topic and becoming an 'expert'. For my topic I chose restructuring. In my paper I address why and how organizations restructure and the effects on employees. Recently my organization informally restructured and I used that experience as a case study for analyzing the restructuring process. This paper, and the course, offered me a great opportunity to take a hard look at my own organization and the systems within. I came out of the course with a different opinion about my organization than I had when I went in.

Artifact: Public Administration and Useful Scholarship

This artifact demonstrates my ability to get my message across in a cohesive way. In the introductory course to public administration we read several author's thoughts on the field of public administration. In this assignment we were to reflect on the field and its useful scholarship in the broader sense. I was able to discuss several authors arguments while also stating what I believed about the profession. In reviewing the piece for my portfolio I felt like I wanted to re-create the assignment and see how my views and writing skills have changed.

Objective 2: Communicate effectively through presentation.

Public speaking and giving presentations are essential for talking about a subject, teaching others something new or explaining a topic. One of the most important skills to have in order to give an effective and engaging presentation is to know your audience. Tailoring a presentation to an audience ensures that they can understand the concepts clearly. Using words and ideas that the audience can relate to can helps the audience stay attentive and to grasp the meaning of the presentation. It is also important for a presentation to be concise and well-timed. Taking the care to time a presentation in a way that guides the audience through a journey into what you are presenting can help the audience really understand what you are saying. A presenter must always be sensitive to how others will experience the presentation they are giving.

Prior to entering the MPA program I had extensive public speaking training and experience. These presentations were extensively rehearsed before being given before an audience. I learned how to write a script paying close attention to timing, flow, facts. In the MPA program I wanted to hone in my skills of learning how to think quickly on my feet and use more dramatic and effective language and tone to get my message across.

Artifact: 2015 American Mental Health Leadership Conference Presentation entitled “State Chapters and Technology”

This artifact shows the importance of knowing your audience. This presentation was given at 3pm in the afternoon after lunch and a full morning and afternoon of conference sessions covering everything from bylaws to finances. The audience was in their mid-afternoon slump, drained from cramming material and needed a fun, interactive session to liven them up and get them jump started for the closing session. It was important for me to make the session interactive to get them moving around and talking to one another. By adding in an area where they gave me feedback and another area where we worked together to complete a task I was able to successfully keep the audience moving and teach them a new skill.

This artifact also shows how a well-timed presentation can take the audience on a journey with you. First, I showed the possibilities of social media with evidence and success stories. I then had them explain to me how they used social media and what they used it for. Some shared their successes as well. I explained the many other ways social media could be used, gave examples and anecdotal ideas. Next, I had the audience interact with each other by taking a selfie and posting it with our hashtag. At the end I showed the audience how to search for our hashtag so they could understand the concept.

Artifact: Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster Analysis of Response and Recovery Presentation.

This artifact was a presentation for a course on emergency response and recovery. Each classmate had to pick a national disaster and analyze the response and recovery in a 45-minute presentation. With permission, I chose to analyze an international incident, the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster in Japan. This disaster was a very complex event that began with a large earthquake and subsequent unprecedented tsunami. My task was to analyze how the Fukushima

Daiichi nuclear power plant handled both the natural events that happened as well as the power blackout that happened in the aftermath. In this artifact, I first give background about nuclear energy and Japan, the regulation of nuclear energy in Japan, background on Tepco, the company that owned the Daiichi plant, and then finally, the details of the Daiichi plant itself. I breakdown the details of the earthquake and analyze how the plant responded. I then go into the facts of the tsunami and analyze the readiness of the plan as well as the country for such an event. I use emergency response language to describe four main problems with the response to the event. I then look at where we are now with the recovery and incite a discussion with my classmates. For this presentation it was necessary for me to take a lot of complex information from many different sources and compile them into relevant points for our class. Timing the presentation was important. I wanted to take the audience through the highlights of the disaster in a way that showed the audience how fast the events occurred and how much was happening at the same time. In hindsight I realize I could have added information to the timeline of events that specifically emphasized my four main critiques of the event. This presentation gave me a great opportunity to learn more about a country, industry, and event that I was interested in. Since giving this presentation I have stayed abreast of nuclear disaster responses around the world and continue to read about the accounts of 2011 and the ongoing recovery efforts happening today.

Artifact: Normative Discussion with Classmate

A classmate and I were tasked with demonstrating how to have a serious but civil discussion about a topic we were both passionate about but had opposing views to. My classmate, Joshua, and I chose to discuss illegal immigration. Joshua's view was that illegal immigration laws should be stronger whereas I believed immigration laws should be weaker. We first described to each other the reasons we for our beliefs. Then, after discussing a few facts and ideas, we dug deeper and explained

to one another a personal event that led us to our belief. Joshua described reading articles about the crime in border towns and his pride in our country having trust in law enforcement. I told a personal story about my Aunt and Uncle who live near the border and had their house broken into. Both Joshua and I were able to have a sustained discussion about our views on the topic and conclude about how each of us could compromise a little to agree on a policy.

Objective 3: Use qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Without data and research, a professional would be relying solely on their own experiences to perform their job. A professional's decision-making skills are easier, and sometimes more complicated, by having data and research available to help them learn from other's mistakes and successes. A good administrator is not only able to see a problem or the potential for a problem, but is also able to collect data and research in order to assist in coming up with the best solution. In the following artifacts I demonstrate my ability to reason clearly and logically to form a research question, as well as conduct research and tie decisions to evidence.

Artifact: Regression analysis of the effects of K-12 expenditures, the number of legal immigrants in a state and gallop poll results on GDP.

This artifact demonstrates my ability to reason clearly and logically as well as form a research question and use research methods to investigate it. For the assignment in the course Policy Inquiry we were given a file of datasets. The task was to select a dependent variable and several independent variables, formulate a hypothesis, and then test that hypothesis using regression analysis. I chose to use GDP per resident as my dependent variable and k-12 expenditures per resident, number of legal immigrants per resident, those who responded to a Gallup poll as being affiliated with the Democratic Party as my independent variables. I analyzed the data and determined that my paper

would be incomplete without including the Gallup poll data for the Republican Party. Omitted variable bias could have affected the results. I revisited the hypotheses and revised them to include the Republican Party as a fourth independent variable. I ran a second regression model with the Republican Party data in order to yield a more complete explanation of the situation.

Artifact: Policy Analysis of Texas' New Abortion Law.

This artifact displays my ability to link a decision to accumulated evidence and research. In this paper I cover the history of abortion in the United States and the consequences of the law introduced in Texas. Using criteria that I created and explain, I evaluate each alternative and present a recommendation. For this topic, it was necessary for me to be very factual and straightforward in my writing in order to get my point across because the topic is heavily debated.

Objective 4: Apply theory to practice.

A public administrator will need to apply theory to practice often. The concepts taught in public administration programs are applicable to multiple professions and across all industries. The application of theoretical understanding and analytical methods in real world settings (such as class simulations, internships, and employment) develops the capacity for similar or larger scale contributions to public management and policy processes after graduation.

Artifact: The Role of Organizational Theory and Behavior in the Office of Family Health Services within the Virginia Department of Health.

This artifact demonstrates my ability to connect course concepts and professional experiences. In this paper I researched the Virginia Department of Health organizational structure and history. I then conducted an interview with a Christopher Hill, MPH, CPHJ in the Office of

Family Health Services in order to gain personal insight into the challenges of both the department as a whole and the analysts on the ground. I took the course concepts such as the role of political power in public policy, shrinking budgets, organizational goals and effectiveness, and communication and conflict along with my interview with Mr. Hill and used them as a lens with which to analyze the Virginia Department of Health. I concluded that, although there have been budget constraints and political pressures, the Office of Family Health Services has been able to mitigate and thrive in their mission.

Artifact: Budget Projections for Bromidia, Coastalina Medical Clinics Memo

In this artifact I demonstrate my ability to apply theory to practice. For this project I analyzed the proposed budget agreement for a fictional medical clinic to determine if the Board of Directors should proceed with the agreement or make suggestions. I first looked at the baseline budget for one year, then made two additional budgets with adjustments to the contribution and to the number of clients a nurse can see. Then I looked at the baseline budget for year two and made the recommendation that adjustments such as increasing the amount of patients a nurse can visit per day or increasing the amount the government provides per client visit, there will be not be sufficient revenue to sustain the clinic in year two.

Artifact: 2017 NASPAA-Batten Student Simulation Competition on Food Security Certificate of Participation.

This artifact shows my ability to put theory into practice and to use course concepts in a real-world simulation of a global problem. Each year since 2015, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), holds a competition in which students of public policy and public administration work together in teams at locations around the world to tackle a real-world problem in the hopes of learning more experiential learning. In 2017 the topic addressed

food security. The competition took place on the same day around the world, February 25 (February 26 for China). In the competition, 400 graduate students gathered to eight university locations to participate in a computer simulation. In teams of 16-20, students analyzed data, made policy proposals, reacted to the computer simulated results, drafted memos, and presented their strategy recommendations to local site judges. Judges selected winners from each site and the top winners advanced to the next level to be judged by “super judges.”

In this event my team, World One, broke into smaller groups of four to cover different areas of the globe. Our area was Southeast Asia. We were given information to read before the competition about the topic of food security and on the competition day we spent a few hours reviewing the issue of food security and performing practice simulations.

In Southeast Asia, food security relies on the ability to maintain crops. This means that the food security of the area is dependent on the weather and natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and flooding. In our group, it was important for us to increase our infrastructure and storage capacity before beginning to focus on agricultural policies. Without a solid infrastructure and methods of storing our food we would not be able to share resources or be resilient to natural disasters. After completing the simulation in four rounds that spanned a decade each, we were required to write a policy memo giving recommendations and present to the rest of the competitors and judges at our site.

Our group won from our site and was selected to move on to the next level to be judged by “super judges.” In the second round the judges reviewed the eight recorded presentations of the winners from each site and selected a winner and a runner up. Our team did not win the competition but the judges commented on our “informal but competent” presentation (NASPAA, 2017).

Objective 5: Management and leadership.

Public administrators need to understand management and leadership because often they are responsible for policy formulation, development, and implementation. Throughout my coursework I have been fortunate to have the ability to test the managerial concepts I am learning at my workplace. My current position requires me to manage and lead my department as it applies to our mission and in service to our members. In the following artifacts I demonstrate that I am able to contribute to meeting team objectives and present realistic and achievable recommendations.

Artifact: Director of Communications of the American Mental Health Counselors Association Report to the Board of Directors, March 2017.

This artifact is my report to my organization's board of Directors about my department, communications. Since we are a small organization, the communications team is responsible for many different areas including branding, advertising, publications, public relations, and marketing. It is important for my board to get a clear picture of where my department has been, where we are, and what is on the horizon for the future. I first analyze different programs that I oversee, providing data to highlight the important information and images provide better clarity. I then go into what I am currently doing (slide 13) and the expected results of each project. This slide demonstrates to board members that suggestions they have made are being operationalized. In the next slide, my 5-year plan, I lay out a set of recommendations for the future of my department. I list each goal and briefly point out how to achieve those goals. I am showing leadership in my department by showing how I am currently improving programs and how I plan to expand programs in the future.

Artifact: Memo to BizLaunch Arlington – Group Project.

This artifact showcases my ability to meet team objectives and make realistic recommendations that can be evaluated. For this assignment, three of my classmates and I worked on a proposal for Arlington Economic Development (AED) to help improve their competitiveness in the BizLaunch program. AED was looking for assistance in developing ways to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. We were tasked with proposing how to do so. Our group proposal was to create a BizLaunch Alumni Association in which those who have taken part in program activities are called on to share their knowledge at other events, are provided quarterly newsletters to keep them engaged, are offered refresher courses, and are sent follow-up surveys periodically to obtain information about how their business is doing and ways in which BizLaunch has helped them. Our group took the time to learn about the database that BizLaunch was already using and develop recommendations that would require minimal changes to their current processes and no further administrative costs. It was important for us to acknowledge that the program operated on little resources and that any new recommended tasks could be easily implemented or would require minimal effort.

Objective 6: Normative Dimensions

Ethical public service is important and for me, ethics is very important. I was raised to be a very ethical person and always act with integrity. In public service there are many different stakeholders and levels of ethical responsibility that must be paid attention to. I strive to be an ethical person in each of my roles at my job and to those that I serve.

Artifact: Ethical Competence: From farm to city.

This artifact I articulate a personal commitment to ethical public service. I describe the multiple levels of ethical responsibility I have in my workplace. I talk about the different ethical codes that I am held to in my profession as well as the people I serve. I give examples of ethical violations and how I handled them. I then talk about a trait that means the most to me: integrity. I mention my own personal ethical code.

Artifact: Diverse Workforce Paper

In this artifact I demonstrate a few challenges regarding issues of cultural diversity. In our course we read “Building and Maintaining a Diverse, High-Quality Workforce: A guide for federal agencies” by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). While reading the guide, I felt that it served its purpose to guide individuals in the right direction. Working in a non-profit I am very conscious of budget constraints and realize that it is necessary for a manager to find creative ways to maintain a supportive, safe work environment in which employees have a good work-life balance. I suggest a few low-cost options that managers can use.

Conclusion

After I completed my graduate certificate in public administration from the University of Virginia I phoned my advisor and discussed my options. She suggested that I look into the program at Virginia Tech because the credits transferred and it was local for me. From the first information session I attended I felt I had found what I was looking for. I am grateful to my advisor for the suggestion. I am so appreciate of the professors at Virginia Tech for their passion about public administration and for pushing us to look deeper and be better.