

# MPA and MPP Students: Twins, Siblings, or Distant Cousins?

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## ABSTRACT

To address ongoing discussions about the convergence of MPA and MPP curricula and students, data were collected on career values and goals of 175 MPA and MPP students, very similar in terms of their ages, gender, and work experience and matched on university location, tuition costs, and local job market. On none of the multiple measures of *altruism*, *intrinsic*, and *extrinsic* job characteristics did the two groups differ to a statistically significant degree. Along with sharing a very similar career ethos and temperament, MPA and MPP students did not differ in their interest pursuing jobs in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors. Yet these siblings were not identical twins. Most MPAs seemed to already think of themselves as administrators, ranking management issues highly, while most MPPs were analysts who wanted to master quantitative analytical techniques and critique public policies. The findings have implications for MPA and MPP curriculum design and for recruiting the next generation of public servants.

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The Master of Public Administration (MPA) is the longest standing and most widely conferred public sector professional degree, and the Master of Public Policy (MPP) is the “most prominent” of the related degrees (Henry et al., 2009, p. 129). Their enrollments are growing. The number of graduates of masters programs in public administration and public policy has nearly doubled since 1990 from 6,127 to 11,832 in 2008, according the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2010). To attract appropriate students and design educational opportunities to meet the need for talented public service professionals, it is helpful to better understand the values and preferences of students who choose to enter these two key programs. Examining the orientations of these two groups

of students will also inform the ongoing conversation about the redundancy and distinctiveness of the two degrees which, despite their unique origins, have considerable curricular overlap.

#### THE MPA AND MPP DEGREES

The MPA degree has roots in the Progressive Era, a period of political reform that sought to separate administration from politics. According to Stokes (1996), the intellectual foundations of modern public administration were firmly established by the 1930s. MPA professional degree programs subsequently were established widely around the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. The primary professional associations representing public administration are the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). In 2009, among schools with NASPAA membership, there were 143 accredited MPA programs and 57 unaccredited programs (NASPAA, 2009a) as well as a substantial number of programs in schools that were not members of NASPAA.

NASPAA characterizes the MPA as a “professional degree for people who want a public service career in management” and states that MPA programs “develop the skills and techniques used by leaders and managers to implement policies, projects, and programs that resolve important societal problems while addressing organizational, human resource, and budgetary challenges” (NASPAA, 2009b). Along with a field of specialization, MPA core courses, typically include

human resources, budgeting and financial processes, information systems, policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation, decision making and problem solving, political and legal institutions and processes, economic and social institutions and processes, organization and management concepts and behavior, and ethics. (NASPAA, 2009b)

In the early 1970s, the MPP degree was developed amid widespread views that governments needed more sophisticated analysts with improved technical skills and that public programs needed to be evaluated critically (Rivlin, 1971). Some schools changed from offering the MPA to the MPP degree, and others established new MPP programs (Stokes, 1996). Their development may, in part, have been stimulated by many public administration programs having moved out of political science departments (Henry et al., 2009). According to Chetkovich and Kirp (2001):

Unlike the early field of public administration, which had insisted on maintaining neutrality about both the ends and the political means of government action, public policy would pay explicit attention to the

substance of policies as well as the political and leadership dimensions of the policy universe. (p. 284)

Generally, MPP programs have been more closely identified with the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) than with NASPAA, although some MPP programs have applied for and earned accreditation from NASPAA. In 2009, among schools affiliated with NASPAA, there were 15 accredited MPP programs and 14 unaccredited programs in the United States (NASPAA, 2009a), along with at least two dozen other MPP programs at schools unaffiliated with NASPAA but listed at <http://www.gradschools.com>. NASPAA defines the MPP degree as putting an emphasis on “analyzing and evaluating information to solve policy problems” and working “with quantitative and qualitative information and data to develop, assess, and evaluate alternative approaches to current and emerging issues” (NASPAA, 2009b). Along with a field of concentration, typical core courses usually include “statistics and data analysis, public finance, microeconomics and macroeconomics, research design, program evaluation, public policy, organization and management concepts and behavior, and ethics” (NASPAA, 2009b).

NASPAA’s basic characterization of the two degrees is consistent with Averch and Dluhy’s (1992) findings when they examined whether programs were converging or diverging in core subject matter, or whether they had, at that time, reached a stable equilibrium. Based on syllabi from 35 NASPAA (then mostly MPA) schools and 16 APPAM (MPP) schools, they found evidence of both differential emphasis and substantial overlap. NASPAA programs were more likely to require coursework in organization theory (100% vs. 75%) and budgeting (97% vs. 56%). In contrast, all APPAM programs required an economics course as compared to only 34% of NASPAA programs. Otherwise, the degrees were fairly similar, and Averch and Dluhy concluded that “the amount of differentiation in curriculum in both NASPAA and APPAM schools is too low” (p. 542).

More recently, Koven, Goetzke, and Brennan (2008) contrasted, among other things, core courses required by 46 MPA programs and 18 MPP programs of the top 50 universities in the area of public affairs, as ranked by *US News & World Report*. MPP programs were much more likely to require courses in microeconomics and intermediate/advanced quantitative methods.<sup>1</sup> MPA programs were more likely to require organizational theory, leadership, budget and finance, human resource management, and public administration. Otherwise, the overlap was considerable and the researchers concluded that the programs “do not differ dramatically in their curricula” (p. 704).<sup>1</sup>

Hur and Hackbart (2009) contributed to this debate by examining the differences in curricula between MPA and MPP programs based on information from websites and surveying program directors. In areas other than the policy process and research methods, they found that the two degrees had distinct

curricular emphases, except in schools and departments that offer both degrees. They concluded that while MPP and MPA programs “are still different (p. 409) . . . the distinction between the two programs appears to fade when both are offered by the same school or department” (p. 410). Directors from seven programs offering both degrees told them that the two programs attract students with different interests; MPP students are more analytically oriented (57% agree) while MPA students are more interested in nonprofit management (43% agree). While the directors reported “minimal employment opportunity differences,” they offered both programs primarily to be responsive to student career objectives (88% agree).

The creation of multiple, similar degrees can be viewed as having both positive and negative ramifications. On the positive side, it gives students more options; it also gives universities more products to market to potential students, who are perceived by administrators as having distinctive interests according to Hur and Hackbart (2009). It can enrich academic discourse, attract good scholars, and encourage academic innovation (Henry et al., 2009; Raffel, 2009). On the negative side, this multiplicity of programs can cause confusion among potential students, employers, and the public.<sup>2</sup> While the MPA and MPP degrees were born in different eras and grew out of differing value structures, many have argued that they have become increasingly similar, and that MPA programs have abandoned their original mission as a professional program for public administrators. Harvey White, then president of ASPA, feared “an increasing propensity to subvert MPA programs to prepare students for almost everything except careers in public administration.” He said, “This trend suggests dreadful consequences for our profession” (White, 2007, p. 16). White convened the Task Force on Educating for Excellence in the Master of Public Administration Degree, which identified two fundamental problems: First, the “proliferation of degree programs” whose “diversity of purpose and substance” has obscured “uniqueness of public administration as a career commitment and intellectual enterprise.” The resulting “complex array of degrees and curricula,” the Task Force concluded, “has blurred the core mission of public administration, the MPA, and the values that ground it” (Henry et al., 2009, pp. 118–119). Second, professors and university administrators “too often fail to recognize that their mission is to provide professional education for public service, not to provide education and socialization in an academic discipline” (pp. 118–119).

To be sure, this introspection is nothing new. Roeder and Whitaker (1993) noted that public administration “seems to be in a perpetual state of self-examination and reflection” about its place in the academic world and in society and how it is “distinguished from or related to other disciplines and professions” (pp. 512–513). Lowery and Whitaker (1994) suggested that if there are “only very minor differences in emphasis then we must ask ourselves whether separate programs and professional associations are warranted *or* whether differences should be restored” (*italics in original*, p. 26). Along these lines, the recent ASPA Task Force

complained that the proliferation of degree programs “has produced confusion about the differences among them, and obscured what we believe to be the core mission and values of academic public administration and the specific focus of the MPA as a professional degree” (Henry et al., 2009, p. 120). They especially blamed the declining distinctiveness of the MPA on marketing efforts to maximize recruitment by trying to appeal to all interests and all careers. They called for a concerted effort to “reassert and re-clarify” the “mission and values” of the MPA degree as “distinctly different from those [degrees] in the realms of policy, [generic] management, and public affairs” (p. 121).

The degree debate has been more intense regarding the MPA, but similar issues have surfaced about MPP and the extent to which management and leadership skills are essential to public policy education (Lynn, 1994; Schall, 1995). Nevertheless, the APPAM website links prospective students to <http://www.PublicServiceCareers.org>, which explicitly minimizes distinctions between the degrees:

Today the general differences between the MPA and the MPP often are few. Over the past twenty years, their respective curricula substantially have converged and now it is important for students to look past the degree titles to understand how each educational program might serve their career goals. In general, an MPA/MPP program will offer all students advanced instruction in public policy analysis, public management, leadership, economics, and quantitative methods, along with courses on specific policy and administration topics. (PublicServiceCareers.org, 2009)

Are today’s MPA and MPP programs indeed essentially the same degree, serving very similar students headed for approximately the same careers? Although Lowery and Whitaker (1994) noted that “stark differences between public administration and public policy programs seem to have eroded with time” and are “less pronounced” than they were in the 1970s (pp. 25–26), they still identified four important ways in which MPA and MPP programs might differ beyond modest differences in curriculum: the psychological dispositions of students admitted to each program, differences in socialization through the curricula, differences in job placements, and differences in subsequent career satisfaction. They noted that public policy, including jobs as analysts and researchers, was described in the literature using terms such as *skepticism about programs, contemplation, optimization, detached, interest in ideas and abstractions, long-term acquisition of knowledge, and intelligent*. In contrast, public administration, including jobs as managers and practitioners, was described using terms such as *commitment to programs, action, satisficing, concerned about people, building up and promoting, inspirational, loyalty, and social skills*. From these premises,

Lowery and Whitaker proposed—but did not test—various hypotheses that might differentiate the clientele of the two programs. Some of their hypotheses ventured into areas far beyond the scope of this research on students' preferred job characteristics; but of relevance to our study, they hypothesized that MPA students would be oriented to “social skills” and “managerial tasks” while MPP students would have a more “detached” and “intellectualized” analytical style and care more about analytical tasks.

DeSoto, Opheim, and Tajalli (1999) addressed two aspects of the differences suggested by Lowery and Whitaker: differences in admitted students and socialization during the programs. They hypothesized that public administration students would be more concerned with people and day-to-day running of operations, prefer to work as part of a team, and place more emphasis on personal loyalty and social skills. In contrast, public policy students were predicted to value long-term acquisition of knowledge; prefer more isolated work where a specific, final answer is expected; and have a more evidence-based, less emotional approach to problem solving. Testing these and other psychological dispositions among 638 students, DeSoto et al. (1999) were surprised to find that entering MPP students differed little from MPA students in many respects and were actually somewhat more concerned about the feelings and emotions of coworkers, more accepting of government intervention, and had a more positive view toward government performance than did entering MPA students. However, those differences narrowed or disappeared later in graduate school. DeSoto and his colleagues concluded that “Lowery and Whitaker’s suspicion that perhaps the differences in the two traditions have diminished seems to be well founded” (1999, p. 88). Indeed, their findings suggest that “the integration of the two traditions has become even more complete; that is, public administration programs now include elements of objective policy analysis and evaluation, whereas public policy schools routinely offer training in management and organizational behavior” (DeSoto et al., 1999, pp. 88–89). If program selection is not predicted by attitudinal predispositions of entering students, they speculate that “program selection is related to factors—such as race or perhaps proximity to one’s place of residence, perceived job market, and school tuition—other than psychological dispositions” (pp. 88–89).

After finding only modest differences between MPA and MPP students, DeSoto et al. argued that differences in the career interests and skill sets between MPA students at certain universities and MPP students at other universities may be due to factors such as tuition costs, location, and local job market rather than the differences in student self-selection and MPA/MPP curricula. Thus studying MPA and MPP students in the same city, at the same university, ought to control for those alternative explanations. Further, according to NASPAA (2009b), the most important criteria cited by students in selecting a graduate program included location (78% reported it as “very important”) and quality of faculty (63% “very

important”). Studying students attending MPA and MPP programs within the same university would control for these factors. As a fresh way to revisit the issue of MPA/MPP differences, this single site–dual programs approach will help us better understand the similarities and differences in the students entering these two important channels for future leaders in public service and also will contribute to the ongoing conversations among members of ASPA, NASPAA, and APPAM about the distinctiveness of the two degrees.

#### METHODS AND MEASURES

The George Washington University (GW) provides a good venue for comparing MPA and MPP students in order to hold constant the location, tuition, university appeal, job opportunities, and a host of other potentially confounding factors. As of 2009, GW and American University were the only two universities offering both MPA and MPP degrees accredited by NASPAA. The MPA and MPP at GW’s Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration (TSPPPA) reflect the differences noted in the NASPAA characterization of the degrees, as seen in the following excerpts from the program descriptions posted at <http://www.tspppa.gwu.edu>:

The MPA program [at GW] provides an opportunity to study management and policy issues in an intergovernmental and intersectoral context. The program focuses on developing critical intellectual capacities, sound analytical skills, and sensitivity to the ethical and value concerns that are central to the traditions of the field of public administration.

Public policy education [the MPP] at GW provides students with the ability to think clearly and analytically about social and economic problems and public policy. Students not only learn the basic analytical and methodological tools to engage in policy analysis; they also develop an understanding of the political processes through which policy is made and the social, economic and historical context in which problems arise and are addressed (Trachtenberg School, 2009).

The curriculum of each program also reflects these differences. While both programs require the same number of academic credit hours, the MPA core has more emphasis on management and leadership while the MPP requires more microeconomics and statistics. A wide range of fields of concentration are available to students in both programs, and both conclude with a similar capstone research experience.

In the spring and fall semesters of 2009, a survey was completed by 212 students enrolled in core courses required for MPA and MPP students in the

Trachtenberg School as part of a larger, cross-national study (Infeld, Adams, Qi, & Rosnah, 2010). Students who completed the survey in the fall were instructed not to participate in the spring. The overwhelming majority of those surveyed (81%) were first-semester or first-year students. Excluding those from other degree programs such as international affairs and women's studies left completed surveys from 95 MPA students and 80 MPP students.

Surprisingly, but happily for the purposes for this analysis, no statistically significant differences were found between the MPA and MPP students on any of the collected demographic variables. As is true nationwide according to NCES data (2010), women outnumbered men; but the ratio (roughly 3:2) was nearly identical in both programs. The mean age of students in both programs was close to 26, and, as suggested by that mean age, they typically had just over three years of work experience. Thus these MPAs and MPPs were not only matched in terms of their university, but they were quite similar in other important life-cycle respects as well. The questionnaire did not ask for students' racial or ethnic identity, but school records and familiarity with the groups did not suggest any notable difference in that regard.

Like all case studies, to be sure, this single site limits the external validity of the findings. A broader and more ambitious multicampus study would be useful. However, comparing MPA and MPP students at a single university, particularly when they also match on demographic attributes, has the extremely important advantage of holding constant location, tuition, and many other potentially confounding factors. In addition, there is reassuring evidence that the GW MPA students are unlikely to be odd outliers. In the data collected by Adams (2000a), GW MPAs did not differ to a statistically significant degree from over two dozen other programs around the country in overall demographics or in how they prioritize their career objectives.

The questionnaire drew heavily from the Lyons Work Value Scale (2003), an instrument grounded in the vocational work values literature that focuses on how and why people make employment choices, with a goal of ensuring improved work satisfaction. Based on a review of 12 work values measures, the Work Value Scale (WVS) has been found to successfully distinguish among Canadian employees working in the private sector, public sector, and "parapublic" (a Canadian term for "nonprofit" and mixed public-private) sector (Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006). Our study includes the four main factors identified by Lyons and his colleagues: *intrinsic*, *extrinsic*, *altruism*, and *social* values.

To assure its applicability to public service in the United States, the items were reviewed against Denhardt and Denhardt's conceptualization of motivations for public sector work (2007). Lyons' *extrinsic* variables match the perspective of Old Public Administration, where motivation is driven by pay and benefits. His measures of *altruism* relate to the New Public Service, where motivation is based

on the desire to contribute to society. However, none of the Lyons measures touched on values of the New Public Management (NPM), so three items were added to assess issues associated with this business and entrepreneurial orientation to public management. In addition, 12 skill areas that are usually part of MPA and MPP programs were addressed by asking students to indicate how important they thought each skill would be in their future career. All responses were based on a 5-point scale from “extremely important” to “not very important.” Altogether, this research examines 33 variables that measure students’ preferred job characteristics and values as well as their perceptions of skills they will need in those preferred jobs. Tables 1 and 2 provide the exact wording of each item.

#### FACTOR ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESES

Using a standard factor analysis (principal axis extraction with varimax rotation), eight factors (with eigenvalues greater than one) were extracted and cumulatively explained a healthy 51% of the variation in career goals, values, and expectations. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was a respectable .78, and Bartlett’s sphericity test was easily passed as well ( $p < .001$ ). Table 1 reports the results of all variables that loaded higher than .40.<sup>3</sup> These factors will serve as a logical organizing tool for the hypotheses regarding MPA/MPP differences. Having used the factor analysis results for sorting purposes, results for the individual items (not the factor scores) are reported in order to stay closer to the data and to reveal some interesting specific cases of MPA/MPP differences and similarities.

Three caveats are worth noting about the hypotheses that follow. First, prior research is so limited that these hypotheses are somewhat speculative and suggestive rather than strict tests deduced from a developed body of literature; even when the exploratory hypotheses are nondirectional, we wanted to investigate the possibility of MPA/MPP differences. Second, hypotheses about “differences” are about degrees of difference, not necessarily extreme divergence; for example, MPAs might care much more about organization leadership (closer to 5: “extremely important”) while MPPs might be closer to the midpoint (3) rather than dismissing it entirely (1: “not very important”). Third, at first glance, many items may look so appealing that one can wonder who would not place the highest value on “good salary” and “intellectually stimulating” work; however, thanks to the 5-point scale and student discernment, they do in fact differentiate among degrees of importance. Not all students focus heavily on salary; not all put a premium on intellectual stimulation.

#### *Intrinsic Values*

The intrinsic values factor bundles five variables centered on engaging, challenging work that offers opportunities for creativity, intellectual stimulation, and continuous learning and development:

Table 1.  
*Rotated Factor Matrix*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Intellectually stimulating work	.655							
Interesting, exciting, engaging, work	.502							
Continuous learning & development	.725							
Work using creativity & original thought	.584							
Use abilities from education & experience	.666							
Analyze policy issues		.685						
Identify stakeholders		.696						
Analyze competing policy claims		.870						
Assess economics of an issue		.547			.482			
Analyze financial and tax issues					.757			
Use statistical analysis					.422			
Develop budget proposal					.571			
Analyze management problems			.422					
Manager/direct work of others			.590					
Leader/influencing org. outcomes			.463					
Provide organizational leadership			.761					
Resolve disputes among people			.603					
Opportunity for career advancement				.438				
Good salary				.623				
Job security				.658				
Good benefits				.722				
Make a contribution to society						.543		
Work consistent with moral values						.566		
Administer programs fairly & impartially						.634		
Respond to community needs & values						.562		
Use entrepreneurial approaches							.622	
Maximize organizational efficiency							.488	
Business methods for productivity							.557	
Agreeable coworkers as friends								.540
Lively and fun work environment								.733

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

1. Intellectually stimulating work
2. Exciting, engaging work
3. Continuous learning and development
4. Work using creativity and originality
5. Using abilities developed from education and experience

This grouping duplicates the findings of Lyons, who emphasizes this *intrinsic* factor of mental stimulation that is psychologically rewarding and found that public sector workers cared more about challenging work than did private sector workers (Lyons et al., 2006). Lowery and Whitaker hypothesized that MPP students are more focused on solitary, intellectual challenges, which might suggest that MPP students would score higher on this dimension. However, with a largely MPA sample, Adams (2000a) obtained a very similar grouping of variables also involving challenges, personal growth, and new skills and found that they were among the most important criteria that MPAs used to evaluate career opportunities. In the absence of any other data or theory regarding MPA and MPP students' differences on this factor, we offer a nondirectional hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** The MPA and MPP programs both attract and recruit students who want intellectually challenging careers offering ongoing opportunities for personal growth.

#### *Analytical Interests*

Two factors clustered two types of analytical interests—one consisting of general policy analysis and the other an explicitly quantitative grouping. The four variables that loaded on the broader policy grouping were:

1. Analyze policy issues.
2. Identify stakeholders.
3. Analyze competing policy claims.
4. Assess economic dimensions of an issue.

Economic analysis loaded a second time, reappearing on the quantitative factor to round out the following “number-based” quartet for utilizing economics, statistics, budget, and financial data.

1. Assess economic dimensions of an issue.
2. Analyze financial and tax issues.
3. Use statistical analysis.
4. Develop a budget proposal.

*MPA and MPP Students: Twins, Siblings, or Distant Cousins?*

Table 2.

*MPA and MPP Students' Career Values and Interests (Means)*

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	Mann-Whitney U Tests	MPA (n = 95)	MPP (n = 80)
<b>Intrinsic Values</b>			
Doing work that you find interesting, exciting, and engaging	n.s.	4.86	4.79
Doing work that is intellectually stimulating	n.s.	4.61	4.54
Having the opportunity to continuously learn and develop new knowledge and skills	n.s.	4.49	4.46
Doing work that uses abilities you have developed through your education and experience	n.s.	4.31	4.28
Doing work that involves creativity and original thought	n.s.	4.13	4.21
<b>Policy Analysis Interests</b>			
Analyzing policy issues	***	3.85	4.55
Analyzing competing policy claims	***	3.71	4.26
Identifying stakeholders in a policy conflict	*	3.88	4.20
Assessing economic dimensions of an issue	*	3.63	3.98
<b>Quantitative Analysis Interests</b>			
Assessing economic dimensions of an issue	*	3.63	3.98
Using statistical analysis	*	3.00	3.68
Analyzing financial and tax issues	*	2.79	3.15
Developing a budget proposal	n.s.	3.72	3.68
<b>Management Interests</b>			
Analyzing management problems	***	4.14	3.67
Providing leadership in an organization	**	4.33	3.98
Having the authority to organize and direct the work of others (be a manager)	**	3.83	3.41
Having the ability to influence organizational outcomes (be a leader)	n.s.	4.21	4.11
Resolving disputes among people	n.s.	3.93	3.71

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Table 2.  
*Continued*

	Mann-Whitney U Tests	MPA (n = 95)	MPP (n = 80)
<b>Extrinsic Values</b>			
Having the opportunity for advancement in your career	n.s.	4.79	4.59
Having benefits (for example vacation pay, health insurance, pension plan) that meet your needs	n.s.	4.56	4.46
Having job security	n.s.	4.28	4.12
Doing work that offers a good salary	n.s.	3.93	3.82
<b>Altruistic Values</b>			
Doing work that makes a contribution to society	n.s.	4.61	4.70
Doing work that is consistent with your moral values	n.s.	4.45	4.57
Working in a setting where policies and programs are administered with fairness and impartiality	n.s.	4.18	4.29
Being able to respond to the needs and values of the community	n.s.	4.19	4.13
<b>Entrepreneurial Values</b>			
Using entrepreneurial approaches in your work activities	n.s.	3.37	3.22
Utilizing your skills to maximize organizational efficiency	n.s.	3.91	3.85
Using business methods to achieve improved productivity	n.s.	3.22	3.02
<b>Sociability</b>			
Working in an environment that is lively and fun	**	4.19	3.85
Working with agreeable coworkers with whom you could form friendships	*	4.10	3.86
<b>Team Values</b>			
Working effectively in a team	n.s.	4.63	4.62
Having the independence to develop new ideas and programs	n.s.	4.22	4.21
Mann-Whitney U: * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 n.s. = not significant			

The literature on differences between MPA and MPP programs is replete with descriptions of the analytical basis of the MPP degree. Indeed, the MPP degree is said to have been created to train professionals with greater analytical skills. For example, Weiss (1972) described evaluation researchers as more interested in long-term acquisition of knowledge than public administrators were. In this vein, Lowery and Whitaker (1994) hypothesized that MPP students would “tend to intellectualize problems using generalizations and analytic categories more than public administration students,” without actually testing that hypothesis (p. 28). DeSoto et al. found a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students; public policy students were more disposed toward “cool detachment and an ability to intellectualize problems” (p. 80). NASPAA describes the MPP as emphasizing analysis and evaluation using quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, the hypotheses for policy analysis and quantitative factors are not surprising:

**Hypothesis 2:** More than the MPA, the MPP program attracts and recruits students who are more interested in using general policy analysis approaches.

**Hypothesis 3:** More than the MPA, the MPP program attracts and recruits students who are more interested in using quantitative tools of analysis.

#### *Management Interests*

This factor pulled together five unmistakably management-oriented interests, entailing leadership, supervisory activities, and administration.

1. Analyze management problems.
2. Be a manager directing work of others.
3. Be a leader influencing organizational outcomes.
4. Provide organizational leadership.
5. Resolve disputes among people.

This cluster coincides with a long-standing emphasis in MPA programs. As Roeder and Whitaker concluded in 1993, “Traditional public administration focuses on the roles of management of organizations, bureaucratic politics, and government institutions and processes” (p. 521). That focus appears to have continued to today. NASPAA’s description of the two degrees differentiates the MPA degree as the one that focuses on administration and management. Thus the managerial nature of the MPA makes the direction of this hypothesis clear:

**Hypothesis 4:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students with a disposition toward management and leadership roles.

*Extrinsic Values*

The factor involving extrinsic values assembled four elements that align fully with what Lyons termed *extrinsic* motivations and Adams called *affluence* goals.

1. Good salary
2. Job security
3. Good benefits
4. Opportunity for career advancement

Among MPAs, Adams found that an important predictor of wanting government careers was the desire for good benefits and job security, along with a decent salary. The Partnership for Public Service (2009) has found similar patterns for those wanting careers in the public sector. It may be a conventional stereotype that MPAs are more likely than MPPs to see themselves as ultimately working in secure government jobs with good benefits, and MPPs are somewhat more likely to work in the private sector for consulting firms where the potential for higher pay and opportunities offset the stability of a government job. However, no previous data could be found that compares MPA and MPP students in this regard. Consequently, the hypothesis here is nondirectional:

**Hypothesis 5:** MPA and MPP programs both attract and recruit students who are equally inclined toward secure careers perceived as having good benefits, good salaries, and opportunities for advancement.

*Altruistic Values*

Values that both Lyons and Adams termed *altruistic* cohered together in another factor.

1. Make a contribution to society.
2. Work consistent with moral values.
3. Work where programs are administered fairly and impartially.
4. Respond to community needs.

Studies have consistently found that a high priority is placed on altruism among people pursuing careers in the public sector (Lyons, 2003), among Phi Beta Kappa seniors who are attracted to the public sector (Adams, 2000b), among students in MPA programs (Adams, 2000a), and among those planning to work in the nonprofit sector (Partnership for Public Service, 2009). However, prior data-based research has not compared the altruism motivations of those in different degree programs. Lowery and Whitaker speculate at length that MPAs are more likely “to support activist government” than are MPPs (1994, p. 31),

but that does not automatically support a directional hypothesis here. After all, analysts who see a need to be skeptical of program efficacy may consider themselves making a “contribution to society” as well. Consequently, there is no clear basis for a directional hypothesis in this case.

**Hypothesis 6:** The MPP and MPA programs are equal in attracting and recruiting students who want to “do good” for society.

#### *Entrepreneurship Values*

The factor of entrepreneurship values grouped three priorities that coincide with New Public Management (NPM) and are summarized here as *entrepreneurship*.

1. Use entrepreneurial approaches.
2. Use skills to maximize organizational efficiency.
3. Use business methods for productivity.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) characterized NPM as a trend toward adopting private sector approaches to managing public organizations. NPM advocates a market efficiency model where the goal is small, decentralized public organizations in which administrators have “wide latitude to meet entrepreneurial goals” (p. 29). Given that this management approach centers on the activities of administrators and leaders, this category is expected to align more with those enrolled in the MPA program, and suggests this directional hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 7:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students who favor the New Public Management for promoting efficiency in public services.

#### *Sociability*

The final factor, sociability, coupled two goals that fit into Lyons’s notion of *social work values*:

1. Agreeable coworkers as friends
2. Lively and fun work environment

This factor was identified using these same two variables used by Lyons in the original Work Value Scale. He defines it as work that allows for social interaction with other people. Weiss (1972) described practitioners as “likely to be a warm, outgoing personality” and generally “intensely concerned about people, specifics, here and now” (p. 99). Lowery and Whitaker hypothesized that public administration programs would recruit students who value loyalty and social skills. Although DeSoto et al. fell short of attaining statistical significance for the

mean difference of MPA and MPP students on their measure of “social skill,” they did find MPP students were more likely than MPA students to have “cool and detached attitudes.” Consequently, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that MPAs will score higher on the interpersonal social values.

**Hypothesis 8:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students with an affinity toward warm coworker relationships and a sociable work climate.

Two important items were apparently so idiosyncratic that they failed to load strongly on any factor: “working effectively in a team,” and “independence to develop new ideas.” Because Lowery and Whitaker emphasized so strongly that MPAs would be more comfortable in large organizations and value social skills so highly, these two additional items were included in the subsequent analysis, although they did not load on any particular factor. Based on Lowery and Whitaker’s analysis:

**Hypothesis 9:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students who value team-based work over personal independence.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

The nine hypotheses presented above were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test for ordinal variation, two-tailed tests for nondirectional hypotheses, and one-tailed tests for directional hypotheses, although all but one (coworkers as friends) that were statistically significant would have passed a two-tailed test as well. The results, shown in Table 2, reveal an extraordinary degree of similarity between students in the two programs in terms of personal values and goals along with three important areas of divergence in terms of career interests.

**Hypothesis 1:** The MPA and the MPP programs both attract and recruit students who want intellectually challenging careers offering ongoing opportunities for personal growth.

Supported. While we might expect that everyone wants a job that has these characteristics, previous use of the WVS has shown that preference for intellectually stimulating and challenging work differs across public, private, and parapublic settings (Lyons et al., 2006). Therefore we were interested in examining whether a difference existed between MPA and MPP students. Even though MPP students may have chosen a degree that advertizes more technical skills, they did not outpace their MPA cohorts in wanting more lifelong intellectual challenges or in wanting interesting work involving creativity and originality. Students in both programs ranked those ambitions as quite important for their future careers. Indeed, this factor included the

variable with the highest mean scores for both MPAs and MPPs: “work that is interesting, exciting, and engaging.”

**Hypothesis 2:** More than the MPA, the MPP program attracts and recruits students who are more interested in using general policy analysis approaches.

Supported. Not surprisingly, regarding Hypothesis 2, MPP students put a higher priority on all four of these policy analysis items than did MPAs. Perhaps the surprise was that the differences were not larger.

**Hypothesis 3:** More than the MPA, the MPP program attracts and recruits students who are more interested in using quantitative tools of analysis.

Partially supported. Regarding Hypothesis 3, MPP students also surpassed MPAs in anticipating the need to analyze statistics, economic issues, and financial and tax matters. The one exception was “developing a budget proposal,” on which MPAs matched MPPs. Although budgeting clustered in the factor analysis with this set of quantitative tools, it is more directly management focused than the others. Otherwise, the analytical techniques stressed in the MPP curriculum were considered career necessities significantly more often by MPPs than by MPAs. While about two-thirds of these MPPs (65%) expected statistical analysis to be an important or extremely important career skill for them, only about one-third of the MPAs (35%) felt that way.

**Hypothesis 4:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students with a disposition toward management and leadership roles.

Partially supported. MPAs surpassed MPPs in their interest in the managerial role to a statistically significant degree in three of the five factors tested and were considerably more likely to want roles as organizational leaders, management problem solvers, and supervisors. This distinction coincides precisely with the long-standing MPA curriculum emphasis on management. Indeed, MPA students were more than twice as likely as MPP students to say that “analyzing management problems” was an “extremely important” skill for their careers (37% vs. 15%). MPPs were equally likely to want to “influence organizational outcomes” and to resolve disputes, but apparently not in the daily role of administrator.

**Hypothesis 5:** MPA and MPP programs both attract and recruit students who are equally inclined toward secure careers perceived as having good benefits, good salaries, and opportunities for advancement.

Supported. Results confirmed the nondirectional hypothesis of no difference between MPA and MPP students, and no statistically significant differences were detected here. Both groups were equal in their interest in all four of these measures, especially in wanting good benefits and opportunities for career advancement over a good salary.

**Hypothesis 6:** MPP and MPA programs are equal in attracting and recruiting students who want to “do good” for society.

Supported. Once again, the nondirectional hypothesis was supported fully. While Lyons et al. (2006) had found a difference across job sectors, MPP students were just as likely as MPA students to ascribe a high priority to making “a contribution to society,” having a career that reflects their “moral values,” showing “fairness and impartiality” in administration of programs, and responding to “needs and values of the community.” The MPPs were not cold, detached number crunchers, and MPAs were not unique in their self-reported *altruism*.

**Hypothesis 7:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students who favor the New Public Management for promoting efficiency in public services.

Not supported. We hypothesized that entrepreneurship would appeal more to MPA than to MPP students, dealing as it does with organizational administration. Perhaps the New Public Management’s concern with economic efficiency related to MPPs as much as its administrative focus appealed to MPAs. In any event, all three tested elements garnered fairly mediocre scores from students in both groups with no statistically significant differences.

**Hypothesis 8:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students with an affinity toward warm coworker relationships and a sociable work climate.

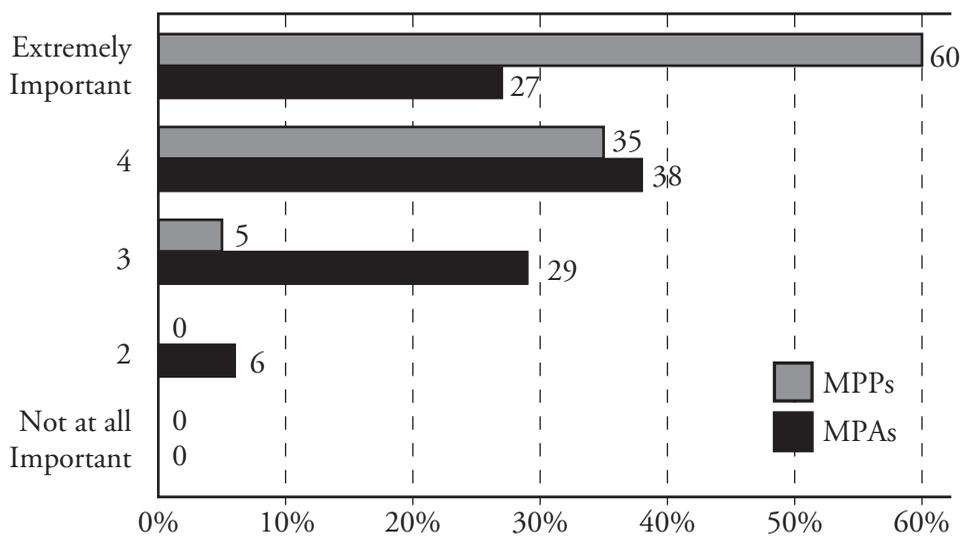
Supported. Modest but statistically significant support was found for the hypothesis that MPA students would more highly value sociable settings with congenial coworkers. Although the differences were not large, MPA students were somewhat more likely to favor a “lively and fun” work environment and were more likely to care about having likeable coworkers as potential friends. These sociable concerns are not the same thing as caring about professional teamwork, which did not show MPA-MPP differences, as noted below.

**Hypothesis 9:** More than the MPP, the MPA program attracts and recruits students who value team-based work over personal independence.

Not supported. Compared to MPP students, MPA students were not more concerned about effective teamwork on the job or less concerned about personal independence. Despite the MPAs inclination toward wanting coworker friendships, the MPPs were just as interested in taking advantage of working in teams in professional settings; that value ranked very high for both groups. Likewise, the two groups of students failed to differ in prioritizing personal independence.

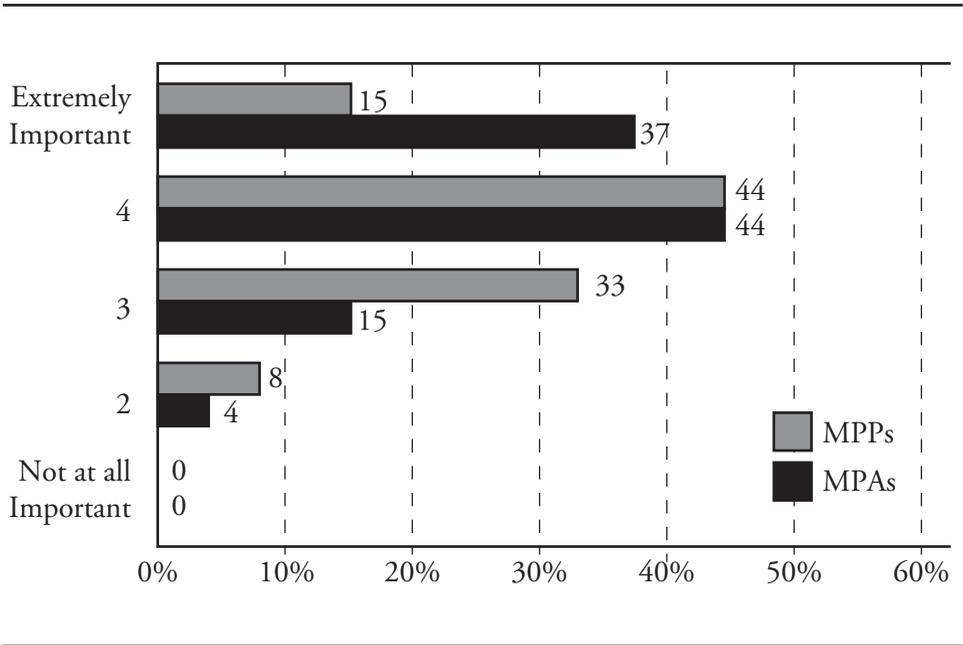
Overall, these MPA and MPP students showed considerable similarity in some areas while differing in others. Which variables, if any, predicted their degree selection? Allowing all the attitudinal variables in this data set to compete to predict MPA or MPP degree choice (using stepwise binary logistic regression), the most powerful three variables successfully predicted 71% of the degree decisions; other variables added no more than 2% explanatory power. The three key predictors were the future career importance of “analyzing management problems,” “analyzing policy issues,” and “using statistical analysis.” Figures 1 through 3 show the divergence (as well as some overlap) of students on these three items. While the two groups are not extremely polarized, they each have distinctive patterns. Regarding policy analysis (Figure 1) and management analysis (Figure 2), the variation is largely between the percent who consider each to be extremely important (5) rather than merely somewhat important (3). In the case of statistical analysis (Figure 3), some MPAs relegate it to “not very important.”

*Figure 1.*  
Importance of Analyzing Policy Issues—by Degree Program



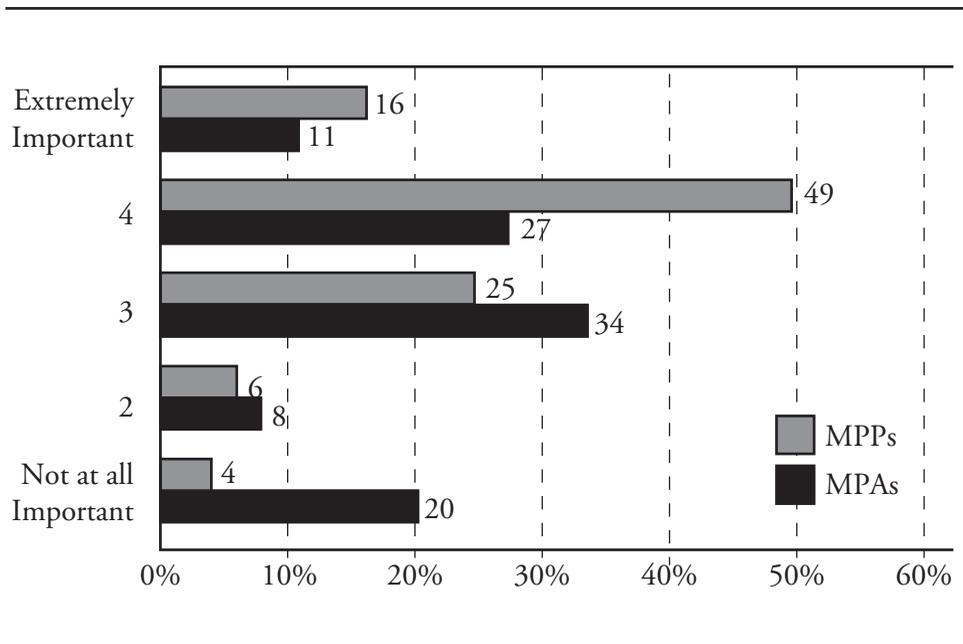
*Figure 2.*

Importance of Analyzing Management Problems—by Degree Program



*Figure 3.*

Importance of Using Statistical Analysis—by Degree Program



CAREER SECTORS AND DISCUSSION

How do the convergence in values and divergence in subjects relate to the preferred and actual career sectors for MPAs and MPPs? Among these GW students, no statistically significant difference was found in the sectors preferred by the two groups. Overall, as shown in Table 3, just over half wanted to work in the public sector (including federal, state, and local governments); one-third preferred the nonprofit sector; and the remainder preferred the private sector, including companies that consult with the government). These results are quite similar to the sector preferences of new students at Harvard's Kennedy School, where Chetkovich (2003) found 54% preferred public, 29% nonprofit, and 17% private.

Table 3.  
*Preferred Sector by Degree Program*

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	<b>MPA</b>	<b>MPP</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Public</b>	56%	51%	54%
<b>Nonprofit</b>	33%	30%	32%
<b>Private</b>	11%	19%	15%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%
No statistically significant differences			

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This distribution of postgraduation goals for MPA and MPP students in 2009 is similar to the actual distributions of job sectors employing recent GW graduates. A 2008 survey conducted by the Trachtenberg School Career Development Services found that 6 months after graduation (excluding those who had begun a doctoral or other degree program), a plurality were indeed working in the public sector, one-third in the nonprofit sector, and one-fifth in the private sector (Table 4). While 45% of 2008 graduates took jobs in the public sector, a slightly larger share (54%) of students on campus in 2009 say they want to follow in their footsteps. Time will tell whether this represents a trend toward the public sector or is a short-term effect during the economic downturn.

Table 4.  
*Actual Job Sector by Degree (6 months after graduation)*

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	<b>MPA</b>	<b>MPP</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Public</b>	44%	45%	45%
<b>Nonprofit</b>	36%	33%	34%
<b>Private</b>	20%	22%	21%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%
No statistically significant differences			

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We did not find reason to worry about whether the MPA is attracting students focused on management and leadership. However, our data do not mitigate the concern that many MPA graduates do not seek government careers. For those who believe MPA programs have a unique mission and should send more graduates into government work, these numbers have to be discouraging. Of course, optimists can view the hiring mix as healthy in that these graduates are attractive to other employers. Those who believe the public's agenda is accomplished by collaboration across nonprofit, proprietary, and governmental organizations can also be reassured by these findings. More noteworthy, for the purposes of this research, the MPA graduates differed little from the MPP graduates in their preferred or actual sector of employment.

On the subject of hiring, the findings have implications for recruitment efforts in governmental and nongovernmental organizations. These MPA and MPP students most highly valued jobs that are exciting and engaging (mean 4.83), allow them to make a contribution (4.65), provide opportunities for advancement (4.60), and are stimulating intellectually (4.58). Addressing and advertising these priorities will help public service organizations in their efforts to attract a new generation of public servants.

Despite ongoing discussions about whether MPA and MPP curricula and students are converging, these MPA and MPP students—matched in terms of their ages, gender distribution, work experience, university location, tuition

costs, local job market, and preferred career sector—still differed to a nontrivial degree in the types of work they want to do. Compared to MPP students, MPAs showed a markedly greater interest in managerial roles; and compared to MPA students, the MPPs evidenced consistently stronger motivations to master quantitative analytical techniques and to critique public policies. Following up the Hur and Hackbart findings (2009), our evidence shows that *even in a school that offers both degrees*, MPA and MPP students clearly differ in their substantive career interests, although not in most of their other motivations.

The MPA students, as hypothesized, scored slightly higher on the two *sociability* items, suggesting a slightly greater predilection among these aspiring managers to prioritize interpersonal relations in a work context. However, on none of the multiple measures of *altruism*, *intrinsic*, and *extrinsic* job characteristics did the two groups differ to a statistically significant degree. The findings here suggest that MPA and MPP students are matched on many demographic and other characteristics and share, to an extraordinary degree, a very similar career ethos and temperament. Yet these siblings are not identical twins. MPA students want to gain the tools to be administrators while MPP students want to acquire a different set of skills, those that allow them to be analysts. Moreover, their distinctive orientations did not vanish once they entered the workforce. Follow-up surveys conducted in the fall of 2007 with 156 GW alumni who had graduated in the past four years found that most of the MPA alumni recommended that the MPA core put even greater emphasis on program management (and relatively few called for more statistics, methodology, or policy analysis) while a majority of the MPP alumni suggested an even greater emphasis on program evaluation. The students may look extremely similar on the surface, but their career interests and professional needs are not.

One explanation for these differences would be that the separate degree programs had inculcated particular values and practices. While they may sit beside each other in several courses and go to parties together, they pursue, at least at this university, largely distinct curricula. And while that may have contributed to the divergence, most of those surveyed were entering first-semester or first-year students. An alternative explanation is that faced with the option of enrolling in the MPA or MPP, prospective students who sought some type of professional degree with an orientation to public service had to make a choice. When presented with management versus microeconomics, administration versus analytics, and implementation versus investigation, some may have found the choice easy. For others, as confirmed by talking with prospective students, the choice was more difficult. Then, having taken this initial fork in the career road, some degree of anticipatory socialization may have taken hold to reinforce and confirm that choice, as students soon began to think of themselves as future managers or future policy analysts.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Morçöl and Ivanova (2010) confirm that those public policy methods courses take a highly quantitative/positivist approach.
- 2 For more on the general public's attitudes toward careers in government, see Adams and Infeld (2009).
- 3 According to Ford, MacCallum, and Tate (1986), .40 is a tolerable minimum factor loading. Also, each set of variables in each factor had a Cronbach's alpha level of at least .71.

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*MPA and MPP Students: Twins, Siblings, or Distant Cousins?*

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