



## **TURNING THIRTY: CURRICULUM CHANGES OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES OF THE LBJ SCHOOL MPAFF PROGRAM**

*Draft, for Discussion*

Prepared for the LBJ School of Public Affairs Faculty Workshop  
April 13, 2001

Sponsored by the LBJ School of Public Affairs 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee

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## Executive Summary

During the first thirty years of the Masters Program in Public Affairs (MPAff) the curriculum has substantially evolved although some elements have remained relatively unchanged. The pace of curriculum reform during the three decades has been uneven. Very substantial reforms were made during the first 10 to 12 years but since the mid-1980s changes in the curriculum have been incremental in nature. Commitment to interdisciplinary training, to the policy research project, an independent research paper, and internships in a professional placement were introduced in the first years of the program and remained relatively constant elements during the three decades. The specific content of the core courses, required of all students, has evolved substantially and continuity from the early years is much less clear. The two most dramatic changes, however, are the expansion in courses in specialized policy or management topics (today the PA 388 courses) and the more rigorous and advanced coursework in the core interdisciplinary fields.

Two primary sources of curriculum change have been identified. The demand and supply of students and professors, particularly the growth in the numbers of each, led to change in the 1980s. As the School reached a student body of two hundred and fifty and the faculty reached over twenty, the range of courses offered could expand. Altogether new topics started to be offered and more specialized courses in advanced topics became common. During roughly the 1990s, the size of faculty and staff membership no longer affected the curriculum as it once did, but rather, curricular changes can be linked to changes in the public sector itself. Decentralization, privatization, demands for public accountability, fiscal austerity, the computer and telecommunications revolution, and the expansion of interest groups and non-profits in policy making and service provision have affected the types of skills and competencies needed by professionals and have expanded career opportunities for public service. The LBJ curriculum has evolved in part to better prepare graduates for these opportunities.

The impacts of the curriculum changes on graduates of the MPAff program are of two principal types. Much greater flexibility in a student's program of study is today available to LBJ students, permitting a fairly high degree of specialization. The availability of joint degree programs, the ability to enroll in elective courses outside the LBJ School, the optional second PRP, a menu of advanced courses in some core areas (such as AQAI, PEII), and a broad array of topical seminars create an opportunity for students to achieve to great depth of knowledge and competency in field, if the student so chooses. The ongoing curriculum development for non-profit management further expands the range of options. Second, the specific range of skills developed in the core courses has evolved and in several areas has reached a much higher degree of sophistication. A priority on training in computer skills, writing, public speaking, group dynamics and independent research can be observed in many courses but the development of such skills occurs in other venues as well (Camp LBJ, Short courses, brown bag seminars, etc.), some of which were organized by students themselves.

## **Introduction**

During this thirtieth anniversary year, the LBJ School of Public Affairs has occasion to reflect on the evolution of the Master of Public Affairs (MPAff) program. The curriculum embodies fundamental aspects of the School's philosophy and mission. In the analysis that follows, curriculum changes are traced over time and factors that have shaped the school are discussed, as well as the effects of these changes. Given the impact of recent curricular changes, "Skilled Generalism" may no longer adequately characterize the LBJ School program. However, the School would be neither the first nor the only school to weigh these issues, as a recent *Journal of Public Affairs Education* (J-PAE) article observed:

MPA programs are caught in the tensions between specialization versus general education, career versus liberal education, and intellectual versus affective competencies (White 2000: 77).

In addition to these long-standing curriculum issues, new challenges and opportunities have emerged as a result of changes in the nature of the public sector and the growth of the School.

## **The Early Years of the LBJ School**

Formal planning for the Presidential Library and School of Public Affairs began as early as February 1965, to address the lack of a facility to train public servants in the southwestern United States. Planning of the new school involved the White House including Mrs. Johnson, University of Texas administration, and the deans from five of the leading Public Affairs programs who served as consultants to the initial planning committee. This committee was comprised of about a dozen faculty members from across the University of Texas campus, and they researched other public service programs and submitted their recommendations to the Board of Regents; a second, smaller committee implemented what the Board approved. Professor William Livingston of the Government Department chaired both of these committees, and the Board of Regents generally endorsed the Livingston Committee recommendations.

In 1969, John Gronouski, the LBJ School's first Dean, proposed his vision for the School and described a course of study, which has remained generally intact for more than thirty years, and was largely in line with the vision of the Livingston Committee:

In broad terms the curriculum will fall into two categories, one of which will be a basic program of “tool box” courses designed to provide the student with the analytical tools needed by those serving in middle and high-level government positions. These basic courses will be developed by LBJ School personnel working in close cooperation with professorial staff of the relevant departments or schools ... The other curriculum category will consist of a series of research seminars on current federal, state, local and international problems. The objective is to make the basic program of the School problem-oriented and interdisciplinary (Gronouski 1969: 3).

The first component of the curriculum is essentially the curriculum today, and the second describes the Policy Research Project (PRP), which remains the cornerstone of the LBJ School course of study. Dean Gronouski also proposed a summer internship program, a basic program of research, roles for distinguished policy practitioners as visiting faculty, a placement office for students, and an eventual doctoral program.

An important point of disagreement between the Livingston Committee’s suggestions and the Gronouski proposal concerned the structure of the faculty. While the Livingston Committee supported the extensive use of joint appointees, Professor Gronouski believed the School would benefit from a core of full-time faculty, which would be solely dedicated to the LBJ School. This affected the curriculum by introducing some inflexibility into the course offerings, and invited some later criticism that the School isolated itself from its larger University context. Only when LBJ School students were permitted to take courses outside the School and more joint appointees were hired into the faculty did the curriculum become more flexible (Austin et al 1976, Livingston 2001).

Concerning the overall philosophy of public affairs education at the proposed School, a broad consensus was reached fairly early on. The LBJ School of Public Affairs would train policy practitioners in all aspects of policy, and not focus on the somewhat narrower range of skills found in schools of public administration. Public affairs education at the LBJ School would address a broader audience of public servants, including those in elected office, advocacy and special interest organizations, and agencies and budget offices. The LBJ School philosophy is not unlike that of the other public affairs programs that were founded in the late 1960s and

early 1970s, as observed by Peter Bell in his research on the eight policy programs supported by the Ford Foundation:

The new public policy programs responded to student pressures for greater “relevance”, to faculty realization that public problems do not arrange themselves along disciplinary lines, and ... were also reactions against earlier, long-established programs in public administration (Bell 1981: 4).

That is to say, the curriculum was to emphasize *interdisciplinary* scholarship on practical problems of policymakers in the *real world*, and students were to produce results of research that could be *communicated to* and *implemented by* policy practitioners. In addition, the Ford Foundation shaped the overall approach of these eight schools by emphasizing practical, community-oriented projects over a more abstract, theoretical approach. Over the past thirty years, the Policy Research Project (PRP) continues to meet this practical, community-oriented approach, but other important curriculum changes have occurred that have had the effect of undermining the “tool box” concept of the Skilled Generalist curriculum.

## **Curriculum Changes since 1970**

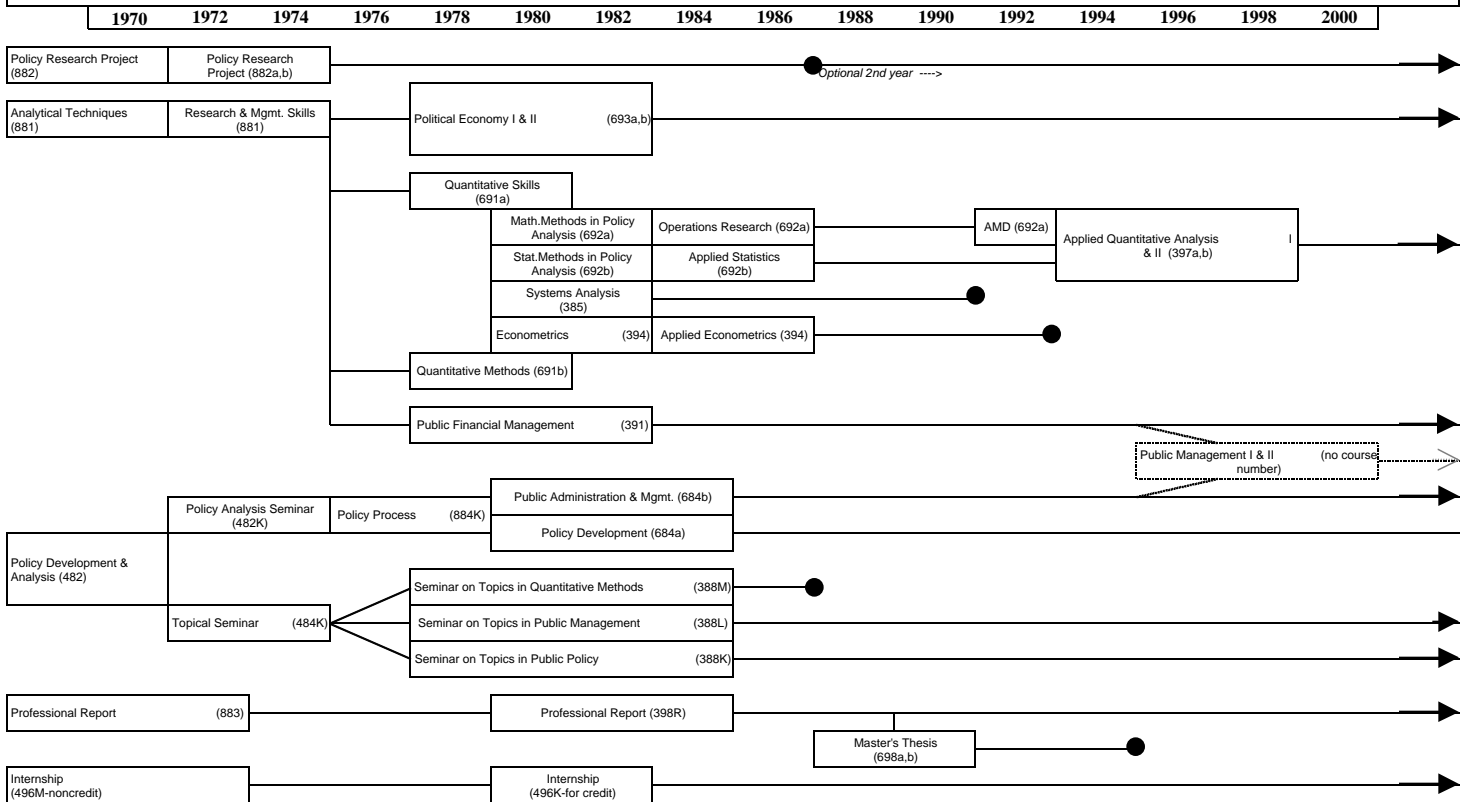
The LBJ School MPAff program has always been decidedly “generalist” – that is, rather than producing subject-matter specialists, this program has always emphasized general training that could be applied to the broadest range of policy areas. Table I, “LBJ School Curriculum Changes and Approximate Dates of Change, 1970-2000” illustrates changes in the MPAff degree program since the beginning of the School. The curriculum is discussed in the context of the following groups:

- Policy Research Project (PRP)
- Analytical Techniques
- Policy Development and Analysis
- Professional Report (PR)
- Internship

Many public affairs programs share these elements, as well as their distribution over a student’s two-year program. In his analysis of several public affairs programs between 1975 and 1980, Bell found the curricula shared the following:

The first year is highly structured and intensive, importantly involving microeconomics, operations research, economic modeling, and statistics, plus varying amounts of political

**Table I: LBJ School Curriculum Changes and Approximate Dates of Change, 1970 - 2000**



Sources: "Curriculum Changes, 1970-82" chart by Lodis Rhodes, "Curriculum Changes to 1990" by Marilyn Duncan, NASPAA Self-Study Reports, 1984, 1991, and 1998, and course schedules.

analysis, public management, organizational behavior, law and ethics. The second year is more flexible, permitting more elective courses in substantive policy areas and in advanced concepts and techniques of policy analysis. A key element in both the first and second year is usually an integrative workshop or project seminar ... in the summer between the two years, students in the master's programs are required to serve internships, usually in public agencies (Bell 1981: 25).

The LBJ School curriculum has undergone a great deal of change within the Analytical Techniques and Policy Development and Analysis groups, but relatively little in the PRP, PR, and Internship. Changes within these groups are discussed individually, then, at the end of each section, the impact of these changes is discussed.

### ***Policy Research Project***

This component is *the* distinguishing feature of the LBJ School program, and corresponds to the second “curriculum category” described by both the Planning and Implementation committees and by Dean Gronouski. This component also articulates the part of the overall school philosophy relating to practical problems of real world practitioners and results of research that can be implemented. In a 1979 working paper, Blissett, Schmandt and Warner conducted an in-depth analysis of the role of the PRP in the LBJ School (Blissett, Schmandt and Warner 1979). Table I shows one change – in late 1971-early 1972, the name of this component was changed from the Policy Research Seminar to the Policy Research Project or PRP to raise the profile of this component and entitle it in a way that more reflects its nature – that is, a project unto itself that can involve clients and publications, and not simply a seminar, and to emphasize that it is a yearlong project, not a single-semester class. Two significant, subtler changes have occurred, which are not depicted in the table.

First, during the first few years, three faculty members led PRPs, while today, one and sometimes two administer them. In 1976, an analysis conducted by Professor David Austin of the UT School of Social Work and about a half-dozen faculty from other departments. The “Austin Report” found that the administration of PRPs had been unwieldy at times, and recommended that the number of faculty involved in individual PRPs be reduced to two at most.

Second and perhaps more significantly, although the PRP is a requirement for all MPAff students and therefore still a part of the curriculum, since 1989, students are no longer required to participate in a PRP during *both years* of the MPAff program. Students may enroll in three elective courses of similar theme in lieu of the second year of the PRP; however, most students still elect a second policy research project. Mid-career and joint program students are required to participate in only one policy research project. Today, the PRP remains devoted to organized group research on a policy issue of concern to an external client, which is most often a public sector entity.

In the ideal case, the format for a policy research project is a research team of one or two professors and from ten to twenty students, divided about evenly between first- and second-year students. Ten or more projects are conducted each year on a range of topics selected according to the needs of clients, the fields of competence of the available faculty and their policy interests.

During the course of the project, students share responsibility for organizing the available talent and resources to accomplish the research, for making day-to-day decisions affecting the progress of the research, and for developing the final research product. Through its emphasis on interdisciplinary research on real policy problems, the policy research project enables students to develop and integrate their analytical and quantitative research skills, experience the realities of the administrative and legislative processes, experience the impact of political pressures and conflicts, and learn the requirements for effective oral and written communication with nonacademic practitioners (LBJ School 2001). In theory, students participate in all phases of the research project, including helping to define its objectives and methodology. In practice, however, oftentimes the same students take responsibility for most tasks. This “free rider” problem remains an issue of concern for the PRP.

Another issue of concern is when the instructor does not follow the protocol described above; nullifying any decisionmaking role for students and making them feel like technicians carrying out the order of the instructor. Yet another issue is when the project is so unstructured and there is so little guidance that the students either do not know what decisions need to be made or their decisions become moot due to constant scope creep.

In 1989, the second PRP became optional. Students argued that exposure to a single PRP in the first year achieved the learning objectives for some students and enrollment in three topical courses in the second year would prove of greater advantage than would a second PRP. Faculty members tended to agree with the change since capacity for staffing PRPs was being stretched. In recent years, about 60 to 65 percent of second year students enroll in a second PRP and a significant share have only one faculty member serving as director. The impact of this change has been to increase the amount of programmatic flexibility in the MPAff course of study. The significance of greater flexibility is discussed in “Significant Curriculum Changes since 1970”.

### *Analytical Techniques*

Courses in this group provide the quantitative skills thought necessary for policy practitioners in any aspect of policymaking and analysis.

The quantitative work was designed to give students an understanding of the uses and limitation of formal techniques of analysis by making them apply these techniques to policy problems (Cooksey 1977: 34).

This group of courses has undergone numerous changes over the history of the School. These changes reflect the School’s expectations of its graduates in terms of their ability to analyze policy problems rigorously and professionally, and demands in the market for public servants with sophisticated analytical skills and increased computing power. In the fall of 1971, Formal Problem Solving became Research and Management Skills after “students expressed displeasure with some aspects of the program, stating that the training was too academic and needed more practical application” (Cooksey 1977: 38). The change to Research and Management Skills integrated case study analysis and other management techniques into Formal Problem Solving.

Significant changes to this curricular group occurred in the mid-1970s, when three major subgroups developed within this curricular group: research methods, political economy, and public finance. The curriculum was separated into Quantitative Skills and Methods, a Political Economy (PE) series, and Public Financial Management.

### *Political Economy*

The PE series differed from Research and Management Skills by separating instruction in political economy into, first, a single-semester course unto itself, then, a two-semester series of courses to emphasize the economic effects of policy, beyond what might have been covered in the Econometrics and Applied Statistics courses at the time. The first course in the PE sequence is normally taken during the first year of the MPAff program, and it acquaints students with the ways in which economic analysis bears on public policy issues. The first part of this course covers microeconomic theory with particular emphasis on determining price and output under perfect competition and other forms of market structure; general equilibrium and welfare theory; and the concept of market failure, including public goods, externalities, and imperfect market structure. The second part provides a rigorous coverage of the methodology of cost-benefit analysis and demonstrates its application through examination of specific case studies.

The less-obvious and perhaps more interesting change within this group is the ability for students to create a policy concentration in their MPAff degree, while still meeting the requirements of the “generalist” program. For the second course in the PE sequence, students can select among a set of courses focusing on the application of economic theory and techniques to a specific area of public policy. Course options include macroeconomics, public finance, regulation, international trade and finance, natural resources and environmental policy, health policy, transportation policy, human resource development, urban and regional economic development, international development, education policy, social policy, and labor economics (LBJ School 2001). The ability to select different PE tracks within the second year, coupled with the second-year PRP option, allows students to create substantive policy concentrations in their program of study, yet remain within a generalist format.

### *Quantitative Skills and Methods*

Quantitative Skills and Quantitative Methods were separated in order to focus on theory and technique separately, and in far greater detail. In roughly 1980, these two courses were further divided into Mathematical Methods, Statistical Methods, Systems Analysis and Econometrics. In the early 1990s, Operations Research, and Systems Analysis were consolidated into Analytic Methods in Decisionmaking.

In 1994, all the quantitative courses were consolidated into the Applied Quantitative Analysis (AQA) series that exists today. AQA-I focuses on how basic quantitative tools are used in policy analysis. The major concepts discussed include modeling, optimization, sensitivity analysis, confidence intervals, and estimation and prediction, and its objective is to give students a broad exposure of techniques and an appreciation of their contributions and limitations in policymaking.

For the second course in the AQA series – AQA-II – students can select from a set of courses focusing on the application of quantitative theory and techniques to policy analysis, as in the PE-II case. Its goal is to provide students with an in-depth understanding and hands-on experience with a specific quantitative method useful in policy analysis. Topics offered vary from year to year but might include econometrics, systems analysis, and economic indicators (LBJ School 2001). Similar to the curricular changes that have resulted in the PE sequence, the ability to select different AQA tracks in the second year allows students to create substantive policy concentrations in their program of study, yet remain within a generalist format – particularly if a student opts out of the second-year PRP in favor of a policy concentration.

#### *Public Financial Management*

This subgroup was separated out to emphasize the purposes, characteristics, processes, and operations of financial management systems and to analyze financial operations and the financial resources of public entities. Topics in PFM include the economic, political, and administrative environment of financial management systems and operations, budgeting theory and practice including program and performance budgets, accounting and internal control, financial reporting, auditing, debt management, treasury and cash management, and revenue or tax administration (LBJ School 2001).

#### *Impacts of Changes*

For a number of years after public financial management became its own course, the topics listed above were covered in a single semester, often with a hands-on case study as a practical project for the entire class. Over time, the PFM course was consistently cited in alumni

survey as among the most useful elements of the LBJ curriculum, and current students recognize the value of PFM, as well.

However, by the mid-1990s, both faculty teaching in the PFM area and students taking the course felt that there was too much content for one semester. In addition, there was also concern that the separate coverage of financial management and organizational management in two different courses might result in a false dichotomy that does not exist in the world of policy practice. As a result, a curriculum review effort undertaken jointly by the PFM and PAM faculty as well as by student representatives recommended that a new “combination course” be offered on a trial basis that would integrate the essential elements of PFM and PAM. Students could take this combination course, alternatively called Public Management I, along with an additional seminar on public management as a sequence in lieu of the PAM/PFM requirement.

Begun in 1997, this combination course has been codified as a regular Public Management course that today co-exists with the traditional PFM/PAM offering. Questions remain whether other topics should be included in a Public Management sequence, such as acquisition management and other human resource management issues. Whether the course is offered depends on faculty availability. A student’s ability to select different tracks in an advanced PM course during their second year, along with the second-year PRP option, would allow for a substantive policy concentration within the generalist program of study.

### ***Policy Development and Analysis***

As was the case in the other groups, an early change occurred in the fall of 1971, when two subgroups emanated from this group: general policy analysis and substantive policy seminars. Instruction in these areas was separated into Policy Analysis seminars and other topical seminars. These changes were “aimed at integrating the political, legislative, executive, administrative and judicial aspects of policy making” (Cooksey 1977: 39).

### ***Policy Analysis***

In roughly 1976, the Policy Analysis Seminar became a course in Policy Process, to focus on legislative and administrative processes. Shortly thereafter, the Policy Process course was separated into Public Administration and Management (PAM) and Policy Development (PD).

PAM focuses on administrative policymaking and implementation, and covers organization structure and bureaucracy, the political environment, management issues and processes, managerial psychology, managing diversity, leadership, strategic planning, inter-organizational relations, administrative law, human resource management, labor relations, personnel administration, performance measurement, program evaluation, and the ethics of the public service. PAM employs case studies, simulation exercises, class visitors, and practical exercises to complement the assigned readings and class discussions.

PD emphasizes how public policy develops and is adopted in the American governmental system, within substantive policy concerns such as social security, school desegregation, resource and environmental regulation, and national health programs to explore how individuals and institutions initiate or give legitimacy to public policy, including the executive and legislative branches, the courts, interest groups, and individual citizens. Reading assignments and class discussion focus on case studies, legislative hearings, policy-issue briefs, court decisions, and theoretical works which highlight and explain the development of particular public policies. Both PAM and PD remain part of the curriculum (LBJ School 2001).

Public Management is a new sequence offered at the LBJ School, which synthesizes elements of PFM and PAM, as described earlier. This sequence is an integrated introduction to management skills for public and nonprofit organizations, and covers concepts in financial management, information management, and other management topics

### *Topical Seminars*

Also around 1976, the Topical Seminars were divided into Seminars on Topics in Quantitative Methods, Public Management and Public Policy. Topics in Public Policy have involved environmental and natural resources policy, health-service delivery policy, transportation policy, science policy, regulatory policy, international affairs, national security, labor and human relations policy, social welfare policy, urban and regional growth policy, intergovernmental relations, and public sector ethics and values. Topics in Public Management have involved personnel management, women's issues in public management, public financial

management, computer-aided decision making, organizational theory, management information systems, emergency management, and cutback management. Chart I shows the increase in the number of topical seminars offered roughly each year since the early 1980s as well as the type of seminar offered each year – whether Public Policy, Public Management or Quantitative Methods – PA 388K, 388L and 388M, respectively. Note that, since the early 1980s, the PA388M course listing is no longer in use.

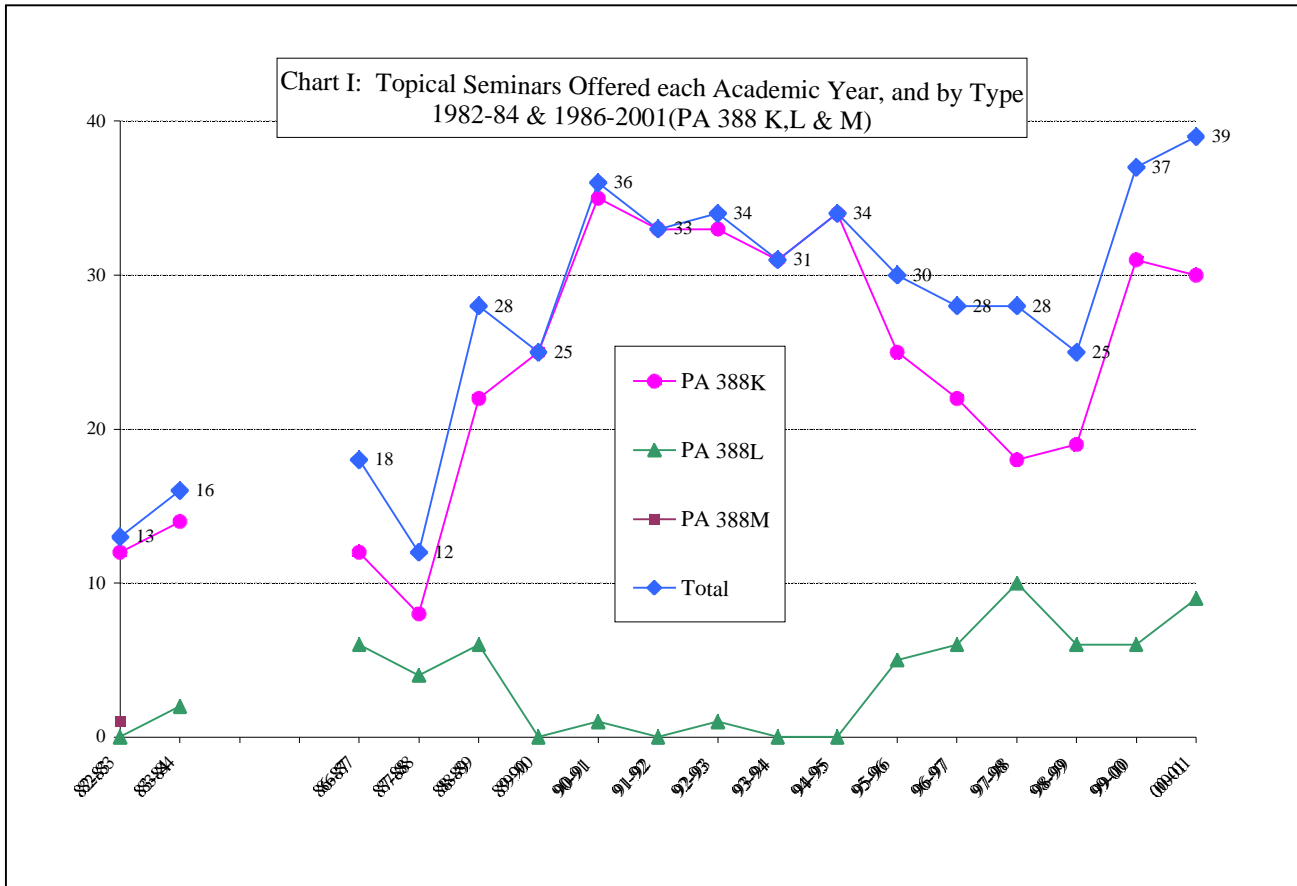
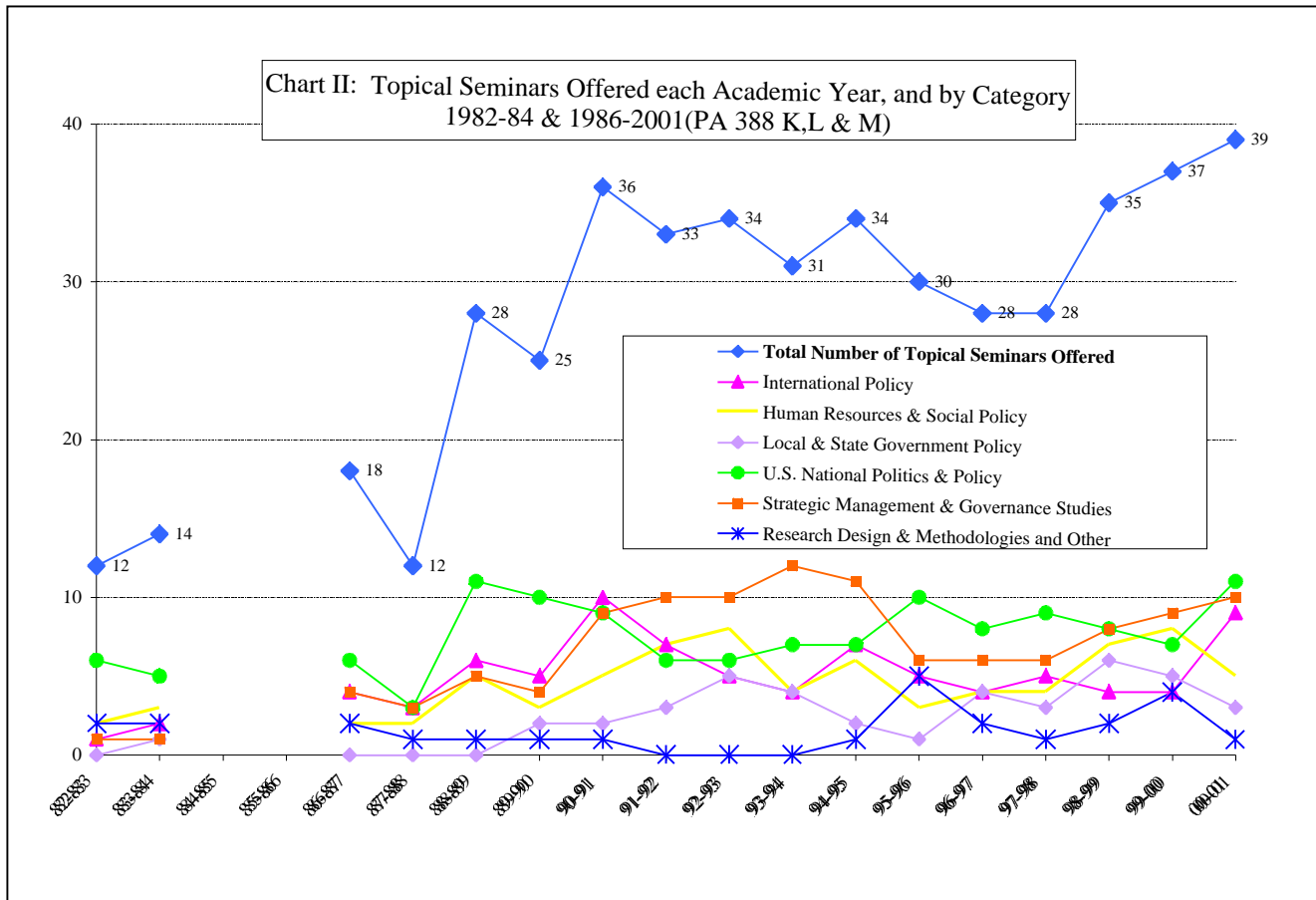


Chart II shows the range of issue areas covered in topical seminars offered each year, by policy area. As Chart II shows, the number and variety offered each year has increased.



### *Professional Report*

In the early 1980s, the Independent Research Project (IRP) became the Professional Report (PR). While IRPs could be team projects, PRs are expressly individual research projects. The PR is the capstone, or culminating, course in the MPAff program of study, where a student synthesizes her or his coursework into an individual research project. Students enroll in a PR course during the second year of their MPAff program, and, ideally, complete the report in the semester in which they graduate – the spring semester of their second year. The PR provides students with the opportunity to do supervised individual research on a policy issue and to prepare a formal report on a topic, methodology, and work schedule that has been approved by two faculty supervisors (LBJ School 2001). There has been some criticism that the standards of

PR output and the expectations for completing them are not consistent, and rely heavily on the preferences of the primary advisor. On one hand, formalizing the standards and expectations for PRs could increase the ability for students to complete in a quick and efficient manner – and could allow one to compare PRs across issue areas and time. However, on the other hand, increased standardization could also hamstring students and force them to approach all policy problems the same way – regardless of the research question at hand.

The relative flexibility of an acceptable PR research product could be at least part of the reason why a number of LBJ School students were not finishing their PR in the second year of their MPAff program. While delayed program completion is still an issue – and always will be for some – the number of students taking in excess of two years to finish the program has fallen over the past few years (Brown 2001). This pattern could suggest that the quality of PR advising has improved, and that the academic support services available to students indeed add value to their educational experience, as regards the PR. Moreover, very few MPAff students leave the LBJ School without completing the PR – that is, there are very few “all but PR” former LBJ School students (Brown 2001). While improvements to this area are always possible, it appears as though the PR is effective in allowing students to use the skills they have acquired in their analytical courses and topical seminars, and bring those skills to bear on a policy problem. It is important to note that the average time students took to finish the program decreased significantly when UT administration required all departments to enforce the “statute of limitations”.

### ***Internship***

Students have been required to serve as interns in public policy settings since the founding of the School. The sole change in this part of the curriculum occurred around 1980, when students began receiving course credit for their internships, when previously they had not. Each student in the regular program or a joint program is required to serve an approved internship of at least twelve weeks and register for the internship course, which is usually taken in the summer between the first and second years of the MPAff program.

The purpose of the Internship is to provide a student with the opportunity to participate as a full-time working staff member and observe the daily policy-related activities of a public, nonprofit or private agency involved with issues of public interest. Internships are also available in a variety of international settings, including U.S. embassies abroad, United Nations organizations, and agencies of foreign governments. Adequate supervision, and practical benefit to the agency and student are the ingredients of a successful internship. Objectives of the internship program include:

1. To provide an opportunity for a student to use the skills and experience gained during the first year of her or his academic program in a way that is mutually beneficial to the student and the agency, and
2. To provide a learning experience for the student which will enhance her or his academic work during the second year of the program.

Students may be prevented from competing for or accepting an internship assignment if they have not successfully completed five of these six courses: PD, PAM, PFM, PE-I, AQA-I or AQA-II. A student also may be prevented from completing the MPAff program if she or he fails the internship course (LBJ School 2001). Whether the internship should remain a for-credit course, and therefore require tuition and fee payments when there is no substantial faculty teaching involved is still an unresolved issue for some. Additional issues surrounding the internship include questions whether faculty supervisors should have any meaningful role aside from approving grades, and how the School should structure its financial support for internships.

## **Academic Support Services and Professional Development**

### ***Math, Writing Tutorials and Short Courses***

The longest-running academic service to entering LBJ School students is the summer quantitative review for those entering the LBJ School, which is held prior to the start of regular classes. This math tutorial is targeted toward students who had relatively little background in quantitative analytical techniques and statistical analysis in their undergraduate degree programs, as well as those who completed their undergraduate degrees several years prior to entering the

LBJ School. This math tutorial started as the result of student demand for assistance with math and statistics, since there is a certain amount of emphasis on these skills in the curriculum.

In the early 1990s, as the School began its first round of reforming the quantitative curriculum, the faculty recognized that the diversity of LBJ students in undergraduate preparations makes it difficult to increase the rigor of the sequence. The initial solution to this problem was “tracking,” whereby students were assigned to sections of the Analytic Methods for Decision Making course on the basis of their undergraduate coursework in math as well as GRE quantitative scores. While this made it easier to teach within each section, it did not help raising the level of presentation for the less prepared sections.

Around 1993 the quantitative faculty began doing a two-day workshop on algebra and modeling before orientation week. This was later expanded into a weeklong intensive review of algebra and calculus. When the current AQA curriculum was adopted, the faculty resolved to require enrollment prerequisites in calculus and statistics before a student is permitted to take AQA-I. In order to facilitate students’ preparation for the prerequisite exams, the pre-orientation review became a four-week formal course that would cover mathematical modeling, calculus, and statistics. At about the same time, LBJ students organizing orientation for entering students felt that the summer camp could be enriched if additional learning experiences could be added. Hence the name “Camp LBJ” was adopted to signal the broader scope of the summer camp. Currently, Camp LBJ includes three organized courses—quantitative review, professional perspectives, and financial management—as well as a number of workshops that deal with professional writing, information research, computer skills, and career services.

Second, the Writing Tutorial program is another academic support service available to students. Throughout the year, workshops and seminars are held to assist students in drafting memoranda, fiscal notes, opinion pieces, proposals and the PR. In addition to the formal group activities, the writing tutor is available for personalized assistance throughout the year, as well. This emanated primarily from instructors of the Policy Development courses, where writing skills are emphasized.

Third, in response to student demand and as the result of student effort, a series of professional development Short Courses began in 1998 to supplement the regular curriculum. These courses are now delivered in conjunction with the Governor's Center for Management Development at the LBJ School, but are still primarily student-run. Short Courses are one-credit-hour courses, and past courses have covered the use of technology in research and delivering presentations and media resources. For example, Bush Press Secretary Karen Hughes taught a short course on "Conveying Your Message through the Media" in the spring of 1998. Other Short Courses have involved Organizational Leadership, Negotiation Skills, and Strategic Issues Management.

Finally, the LBJ School learning environment also includes brown bag lunchtime seminars, community service, networking, school governance, and interaction with faculty members. These, in addition to the curriculum that is implemented within the classroom, comprise the "community of learning" at the LBJ School of Public Affairs. It is within this larger community of learning that the curriculum has evolved.

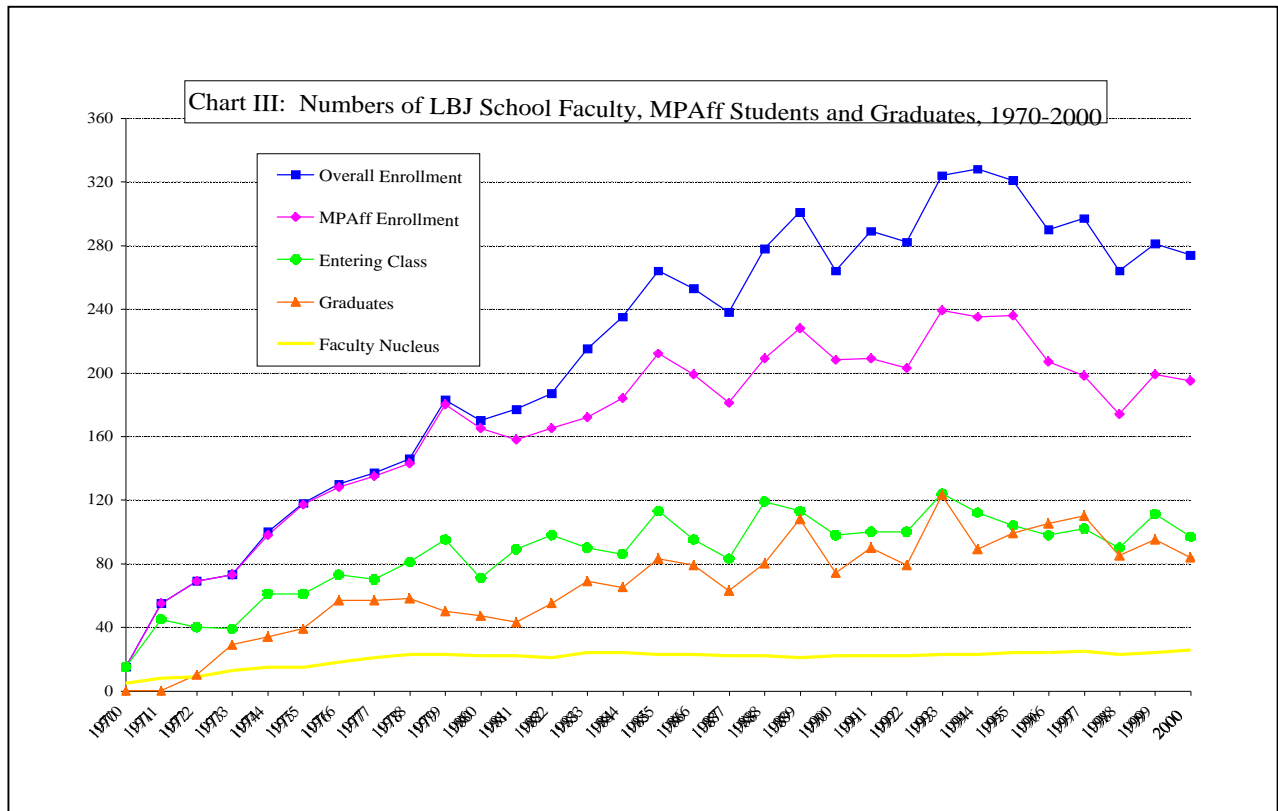
## **Eliciting Change**

During the first decade of the LBJ School – between 1970 and 1980 – the curriculum underwent changes that were rather radical in nature. During the 1980s, the curricular changes could be characterized as refinements to those earlier changes that were more sweeping and larger in scope. The third decade of the LBJ School has witnessed an even further refinement of the curriculum, which have been more toward "tweaking" than upending. In addition, the NASPAA accreditation self-study review occurs every seven years, which also provides the opportunity for the school to examine itself and open itself to external critiques via the accreditation process. Curricular changes have been brought about by two main influences:

- Demand and Supply of Faculty and Students
- External Influences, including changes in the nature of public sector employment and accreditation reviews

### *Demand and Supply of Faculty and Students*

Curricular changes have been triggered by the growth in the faculty and student enrollment. More courses can become part of the program when there are more instructors to teach them, and courses can become more specific as student enrollment increases and there becomes a critical mass of students interested in specific approaches within the groups. This latter effect – greater specificity of substantive subject matter within the advanced courses – is illustrated by the thematic tracks within AQA. The number and variety of Topical Seminars have expanded as the size of the faculty grew and there were therefore more instructors to teach different courses according to their preferences, and as the size of the School enrollment grew and therefore more students interested in different courses. Chart III, “LBJ School Enrollment, Graduates and Faculty, 1970-2000” illustrates the growth in both the size of the LBJ School student body as well as in faculty membership. In the NASPAA accreditation process, the core group of faculty is referred to as the “Faculty Nucleus”, and the information in Chart III uses that concept as well. The difference between “Overall Enrollment” and “MPAff Enrollment” includes those in joint-degree programs, part-time students, doctoral students and candidates.



### *External Influences*

The nature of the public sector has changed over the past thirty years, as well. During the 1980s, however, social services were dramatically reduced and the prevailing winds in the public sector included fiscal austerity, decentralization and the privatization of responsibilities previously borne by government. Decentralization has resulted in an emphasis on state and local governance, and greater transparency and accountability on the state and local levels, as well. Fiscal austerity has resulted in greater governmental accountability on all levels, an emphasis on ethics in government, and the demand for credentialed, specialized public servants in all aspects of the public sector.

Moreover, privatization has placed the public sector in competition with private sector entities, and therefore has created an expectation that government should adopt the efficiency standards of business. These trends endured through the 1990s, when the concepts of “reinventing government”, accountability, transparency and efficiency have permeated the public sector. These ideals have been further supported by advances in technology occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s, which have made transparency, technical analysis and efficiency possible in the public sector. Finally, the interaction of many of these forces – particularly privatization and fiscal austerity – has increased the number of consulting firms involved in issues of public policy, and therefore, the ability for graduates of the LBJ School to pursue consulting careers.

The LBJ School was founded at a time when the role of policy specialists in the public sector and community-based organizations was on the rise with the growth in social service provision by the government. In addition to the increase in the number of community-based organizations delivering social services, the number and influence of politically oriented “third sector” organizations – pressure groups or interest groups – expanded as well. Both trends have influenced public affairs education by increasing the numbers of players and agendae involved in policy development and implementation, and by expanding the potential career opportunities for MPAff graduates.

## **Today's MPAff Graduate: Implications of an Evolving Curriculum**

The more significant effects of the curriculum changes on graduate students at the LBJ School of Public Affairs fall within one of the following two categories:

- The Skilled Generalist Specializes
- Tool Boxes versus Skill Sets

### ***The Skilled Generalist Specializes***

Several important changes have allowed LBJ School students to create concentrations for themselves, while still meeting all the requirements of the “skilled generalist” curriculum. First, since 1975, LBJ School students could enroll in joint degree programs, which would have the effect of allowing students to concentrate on a particular type of policy. The joint degree program with the School of Law was the first, in 1975. Shortly thereafter, a joint program with Engineering followed, and today, masters students can enroll in these or joint degree programs with the Graduate School of Business, the College of Communication, the Center for Asian Studies, the Institute of Latin American Studies, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and the Center for Russian, East European, or Eurasian Studies. The current LBJ School information on joint degree programs acknowledges the benefits of concentrating in a substantive policy area while still fulfilling program requirements: “the blending of skills and subject matter in public affairs and an allied profession or world area concentration is excellent preparation for careers in specialized areas of public affairs” (LBJ School 2001). The joint degree programs are becoming increasingly important factors in shaping the LBJ School curriculum, as more students take advantage of these programs. An outstanding issue surrounding the joint degree programs is whether and how the School can improve these programs and make them truly integrated courses of study and not just “concurrent degree programs”.

Second, since 1975, LBJ School students have been permitted to take courses outside the LBJ School as electives – thereby expanding the pool of instructors available to them, and therefore their ability to specialize in certain policy areas, or at least increase the flexibility of their MPAff program of study.

Third, since 1989, LBJ School students may opt out of the second-year PRP and enroll in three similar-themed courses within or outside the School. The three courses that constitute a

coherent policy theme within the LBJ School can consist of a series of Topical Seminars, earlier described under Policy Development and Analysis. Finally, a student may focus on specific methodological themes within the AQA and PE series, as described under Analytical Techniques.

Finally, students are able to waive out of core courses if they exhibit significant academic and/or professional experience in an area. However, students who waive for example, a PE course, are not free from the curricular requirements of political economy, but rather, must substitute a more advanced course within or outside the LBJ School. A liberal waiver policy could allow an advanced student to specialize in a policy area or analytical technique. The waiver process was instituted to accommodate students at various skill levels in the absence of MPAff prerequisites. Other programmatic changes are discussed in Appendix A, and include the PhD and Mid-Career Programs.

Despite these curricular changes that can have the effect of graduating policy specialists from the LBJ School, the overall curriculum remains true to the “skilled generalist” thrust emphasized since the School’s founding, since students are not *required* to select a substantive policy concentration or track. On one hand, a student can pursue a generalist course of study and graduate with a broad array of skills in her or his “tool box” that can be applied in nearly any policy setting. On the other hand, a student could pursue policy concentrations through non-LBJ School courses, the second-year PRP waiver or the PE and AQA thematic tracks – or any combination of these options. The creation of the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service in 2000 signaled the School’s commitment to this growing field and discussions have begun for curriculum changes that would allow students to concentrate in this field. The faculty agreed to follow NASPAA guidelines on curriculum for training professionals for the non-profit sector. The programmatic specializations recognized in other schools of public affairs are discussed in Appendix B, and emphasize the most recent *U.S. News and World Report* rankings of graduate programs.

### *Tool Boxes versus Skill Sets*

What is in the toolbox? Can a skill set be identified that characterizes the minimum abilities every student who graduates from the LBJ School possesses as a result of the curriculum? The range of disciplinary material and structure in the seven core courses – PD, PAM, PFM, PE-I & II, and AQA-I & II – has not significantly changed since the late 1980s. The specific topics addressed and, more importantly, the level of competency required has evolved and, in some courses, dramatically so. The AQA and PE sequences achieve a considerably higher level of competency than they did a decade ago – a development made possible by higher levels of student preparation and the School-sponsored math tutorial, as described earlier.

The development of computer skills is found throughout the school curriculum, as well. Computers and telecommunications are used in quantitative and bibliographical research, database management, presentations, text processing and group communications. Computer proficiency has proven essential not only in the analytical techniques courses, but also in the PD, PFM and PAM courses. Recognizing the importance of writing, public speaking, group dynamics and teamwork as well as in independent research is observed in all courses, and improving these basic skills has been the focus of the Short Courses, as described earlier. Given the relatively sophisticated set of skills that is broadly concerned with analytical reasoning and problem solving in complex environments, the toolbox concept, as proposed by Dean Gronouski, no longer seems appropriate. Students graduate with the ability to frame questions, gather evidence, and propose solutions to policy and management questions in a broad range of contexts. LBJ School graduates possess the ability to approach complex policy problems and understand how and why certain techniques are brought to bear on a policy problem, not just the ability to use a budgeting procedure or mathematical technique.

However, certain questions still remain concerning whether, in defining the LBJ School program of study, we must identify a skill set for the public affairs graduate – a skill set that transcends substantive knowledge in a policy area plus basic skills including public speaking, independent research and proficiency with computers and telecommunications. Must we identify such a skill set, or can we effectively operate on a “We know it when we see it” basis?

## Appendix A – The LBJ School within the Context of Other Policy Programs

How is the LBJ School positioned in the context of other graduate schools of Public Affairs? Several sources help inform a preliminary response to this question:

- “Graduate Training Programs in Public Policy Supported by the Ford Foundation” by Peter D. Bell – January 1981
- “Evaluation of Public Policy Schools” by the GPAC *Ad Hoc* Committee on Curriculum Review – April 1994
- *U.S. News and World Report* rankings of graduate programs in public affairs – 2002

Bell observed, “despite their basic similarities in structure and content, each program has its own courses, or emphases within courses, that make it distinctive from the others: (Bell 1981: 26). Table II shows the comparative differences among several Public Affairs programs, using Bell’s findings, those of the GPAC *Ad Hoc* Committee on Curriculum Review, and the 2002 *U.S. News and World Report* rankings. Although the latter has since been viewed with skepticism, the rankings were based on responses to surveys completed by policy school deans, associate deans, department chairs and senior faculty members. Two surveys were sent to each institution, and the surveys asked respondents to rate 259 policy programs on “all factors bearing on excellence, such as curriculum, record of scholarship, and quality of faculty and graduates” (*U.S. News* 2001). Again, although these rankings have been criticized, they are still informative with respect to the comparative expertise among policy schools, as seen by administrators and senior faculty members in the discipline – and the academic community pays attention to them, for better or worse.

It is important to note that the survey respondents had to rank other schools for their excellence and expertise within categories that were already defined by *U.S. News*. One major policy concentration that the rankings ignore is that of International Policy.

Finally, under each subject area identified as an area of expertise in the *U.S. News* rankings, whether students are required to concentrate in particular policy areas is discussed. This is used as a proxy for determining whether the school’s curriculum can be characterized as “Specialist” or “Generalist” – if students are required to select specializations, one can assume that the school has the ability to meet specialized requirements.

**Table II – Comparative Expertise among Public Affairs and Administration Programs**

School of Public Affairs or Administration	Comparative Specialization or Distinguishing Feature
Harvard University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Public Management/Administration</li> <li>• Public Finance and Budget</li> <li>• Health Policy and Management</li> <li>• Environmental Policy</li> <li>• Nonprofit Management</li> <li>• Criminal Justice Policy</li> <li>• Social Policy</li> </ul> <p>Students are required to take 3 electives in a concentration in any of the above areas, and must enroll in a sequence in Ethics. Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> of 259 overall (tied with Syracuse).</p>

<p>Syracuse University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Management/Administration</li> <li>• Public Finance and Budget</li> <li>• Information and Technology</li> </ul> <p>Students are required to select a concentration in areas including state and local government, financial management, public management, environmental and resource policy, technology and information management or social policy. Ranked 1<sup>st</sup> overall (tied with Harvard).</p>
<p>Indiana University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Management/Administration</li> <li>• Public Finance and Budget</li> <li>• Environmental Policy</li> <li>• Nonprofit Management</li> </ul> <p>Operates a large undergraduate program – specialization required, and topics include Environmental Management, Legal Studies, Management, Policy Studies, and Public Financial Management. Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> overall.</p>
<p>Princeton University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Criminal Justice Policy</li> <li>• Social Policy</li> <li>• Health Policy and Management</li> </ul> <p>Specialization is required in one of four areas, including international relations, domestic policy, development studies, and economics and public policy. Ranked 4<sup>th</sup> overall (tied with Berkeley).</p>
<p>University of California – Berkeley</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Social Policy</li> <li>• Information and Technology</li> <li>• Environmental Policy</li> </ul> <p>Relatively less attention is given to statistics and decision theory, more emphasis on political and organizational analysis. Curriculum includes legal research course. Students are not required to select a specialty. Ranked 4<sup>th</sup> overall (tied with Princeton).</p>
<p>University of Georgia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Management &amp; Urban Policy</li> <li>• Public Finance &amp; Budgeting</li> <li>• Public Management Administration</li> </ul> <p>Students may choose either to specialize in a particular area of public administration or the generalist component. Areas of specialization include Local Government Administration, Public Finance, Public Management, Organization Theory, Personnel or Human Services Administration. Ranked 6<sup>th</sup> overall.</p>
<p>University of Texas – Austin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Management &amp; Urban Policy (14<sup>th</sup> of 27 schools identified as having expertise in the area)</li> <li>• Criminal Justice Policy &amp; Management (Not Ranked – NR)</li> <li>• Environmental Policy &amp; Management (NR)</li> <li>• Health Policy &amp; Management (NR)</li> <li>• Information &amp; Technology Management (NR)</li> <li>• Nonprofit Management (NR)</li> <li>• Public Finance &amp; Budgeting (19<sup>th</sup> of 26)</li> <li>• Public Administration Management (19<sup>th</sup> of 39)</li> <li>• Public Policy Analysis (11<sup>th</sup> of 29)</li> <li>• Social Policy (15<sup>th</sup> of 19)</li> </ul> <p>Bell: “Service orientation toward the state-level, interdisciplinary faculty, emphasis on teamwork, problem-solving projects for real clients in government” in a large, autonomous policy school. Ranked 7<sup>th</sup> overall (tied with Carnegie Mellon, Michigan, and USC).</p>
<p>University of Wisconsin – Madison</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Policy and Management</li> <li>• Public Finance and Budgeting</li> <li>• Public Management Administration</li> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Social Policy</li> </ul> <p>Specialization is required – students must choose whether to concentrate in Public Affairs and Policy Analysis or Public Affairs Administration, then students have the choice to concentrate in substantive policy areas. Ranked 11<sup>th</sup> overall.</p>

Carnegie Mellon University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information and Technology</li> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Public Finance and Budget</li> <li>• Criminal Justice Policy</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum reveals a heavy emphasis on quantitative techniques. Ranked 7<sup>th</sup> overall.</p>
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Health Policy and Management</li> <li>• Environmental Policy</li> <li>• Information and Technology</li> <li>• Social Policy</li> </ul> <p>School is closely linked to the departments of economics and political science – research is within applied social science. Students can specialize in technology, education, energy policy, finance, gerontology, public health, state and local administration or urban development. Ranked 7<sup>th</sup> overall.</p>
Columbia University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Policy Analysis</li> <li>• Health Policy and Management</li> <li>• Nonprofit Management</li> <li>• Social Policy</li> </ul> <p>Specialization is required in a substantive policy area or in techniques of policy analysis, and includes policy analysis, public management and social welfare. Ranked 12<sup>th</sup> overall.</p>
Duke University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Policy and Management</li> <li>• Environmental Policy</li> </ul> <p>Students are not required to select a concentration. Ranked 19<sup>th</sup> overall.</p>

According to Table II, the LBJ School is recognized for its expertise in teaching the essential elements of policy analysis – Public Finance and Budgeting, Public Administration Management, and Public Policy Analysis. However, the School is not recognized as having a comparative expertise in any of the substantive policy areas defined by *U.S. News* except City Management and Urban Policy, and Social Policy.

Syracuse University remains well known for its Public Administration curriculum, and Harvard University is recognized as possessing expertise in all areas except City Management and Urban Policy. Indiana still is still acknowledged for its work in Environmental Policy, while the Health Policy and Management experts can be found at Columbia, Duke, Princeton, the University of Michigan, and the University of Wisconsin. The institute of government at the University of Georgia has established it as a place for research on City Management and Urban Policy. Carnegie Mellon remains well known for its emphasis on quantitative techniques, but is also noted for its Criminal Justice Policy work.

***Is curricular refinement positive or negative?***

Given the current context, the capacity to specialize appears to bode well for a public affairs program. *U.S. News* clearly rewards certain programs for developing specializations by publishing different sets of rankings under public affairs subgroups. Again, for better or worse, these rankings are widely read. Recent articles from the *Journal of Public Administration Education (J-PAE)* on the current state of the discipline also draw attention to programs that have responded to the needs of policymakers in areas such as nonprofit management (Young 1999), emergency management (Reddy 2000), and ethics in policymaking (Dubnick 2000,

Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2000, Rizzo 1998, Menzel 1998, Farmer 1998, Letcher 1998, Hejika-Ekins 1998, and Rice et al 1998).

Beyond the framework imposed on policy programs by U.S. News, however, one could still question whether curricular specialization is positive or negative. In the contemporary literature, the only pedagogical issue that can be characterized as within the policymaker's "tool box" is that of "experiential learning", which is essentially hands-on learning, as featured in the PRP (Devereux 2000, White 2000, Kettl 1999, Campbell and Tatro 1998, Kelley and Margolis 1998, and Donovan 1998).

## Appendix B -- Other Programmatic Changes

The Ph.D. in Public Policy program began in 1991, as a research-oriented doctorate emphasizing the use of interdisciplinary theoretical and research paradigms in analyzing public policies. Each doctoral student follows a program of coursework tailored to his or her individual needs and aims. During the first two years of the doctoral program, students take courses in the program sequence, in their area of specialization, and qualifying exams. After successfully completing these requirements, students create supervising committees for their dissertations and devote the remainder of their time to conducting research and writing the dissertation (LBJ School 2001). In instituting a PhD program at that time, the LBJ School was part of a larger trend among public affairs programs. In their survey of doctoral programs in public administration, Brewer et al found that “the number and size of doctoral programs have stabilized in recent years” after considerable growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Brewer et al 1998: 125).

Since 1975, the LBJ School has offered a mid-career option leading to the MPAff for individuals with substantial policy-level experience in public service. According to the most recent information on this degree option, to be eligible for the mid-career program, a student should generally have a minimum of ten years of work experience, with at least five years in a leadership position involving substantive policy-level or administrative work that is related to the public sector. Mid-career students take the required courses in the MPAff curriculum, participate in one PRP, take an elective seminar, and write a PR. Certain courses may be waived for students who can demonstrate equivalent education and experience. The mid-career option can be completed through full-time study, part-time study, or a combination of both (LBJ School 2001). The objective or role of the mid-career program has always been a bit unclear – whether it should remain very small in terms of total student enrollment, and whether it should be replaced by a higher-level “Executive MPAff Program”, or weekend mid-career option.

In addition, during the early years of the LBJ School, students were prevented from holding outside employment. Now, however, students managing work and school responsibilities have become the rule and not the exception. This change raises the question of whether the curriculum has been affected, by changing the quantity and quality of work expected from LBJ School students. Finally, at one time, students had the option to complete a Master’s Thesis instead of a PR, beginning roughly around 1989. The thesis option was eliminated in 1995, however.

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