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# Leading by Example: Modeling Global Public Service Excellence

Nadia Rubaii
*Binghamton University--SUNY*, nadia.rubaii@binghamton.edu

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NASPAA Presidential Address
Annual Meeting, Kansas City, MO
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# Leading by Example: Modeling Global Public Service Excellence

Nadia Rubaii
*Binghamton University*

I am truly honored to assume the presidency of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), and I thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility. Being selected by my peers for this position is incredibly humbling. The ranks of prior NASPAA presidents include so many individuals whom I hold in high regard, people who are true giants in terms of their scholarship and stature in the profession, and in terms of the contributions they made to shaping NASPAA over the years.

I want to begin by thanking Fran Berry for her leadership as president during the past year, and Jeff Raffel for his role as immediate past president. Together these two individuals have set the bar high for the level of engagement and commitment as well as the work accomplished during their respective tenures. They have also been a delight to work with as part of the Executive Committee. I also want to extend my thanks to Rex Facer for agreeing to serve as chair of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) in what will be the first year of full-scale implementation of the competency-based standards, and to Susan Gooden for her foresight in articulating the need for the Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) initiative and for developing a specific proposal for a NASPAA-led response. I also want to acknowledge and express appreciation to all of the NASPAA staff. I consider myself particularly fortunate to have had the opportunity to work closely with Laurel McFarland, Crystal Calarusse, and Stacy Drudy; I look forward to continuing working with them and also to working with the rest of the staff in the coming year. And, without mentioning names, I want to thank all those people who have—over the years—mentored me, provided me with opportunities, trusted in me, and worked alongside me in support of NASPAA's mission.

NASPAA is an association dedicated to goals and values that are personally and professionally central to me, and I am excited to have this opportunity to lead the Association in the coming year as it continues to redefine how best to enhance the quality of public affairs education in a changing world. I would like

to discuss what I see as the most important areas of activity for the coming year to build upon the work of my predecessors and to help the Association realize its full potential in this ever-changing environment.

I have identified six guiding principles for my year as NASPAA president. They are (1) Walk the Walk; (2) Diversity and Social Equity Matter; (3) Global Leadership and Partnership; (4) Our Work Doesn't End at the University Doors; (5) United We Stand; Divided We Fall; and (6) The Whole Is Greater than the Sum of the Parts. These will be my mantras; I will repeat them often, to others and to myself. Before I explain each of these principles and describe how they will guide my activities in the coming year, let me share my thoughts on the context in which our profession and Association currently operate.

I stand before you at a time when our Association is strong—yet all around us there are reasons to be frustrated, disillusioned, pessimistic, and downright depressed. In newspapers, on television, and via the Internet, we are bombarded with accounts of the collapse of markets, high rates of unemployment, environmental degradation, unsustainable levels of consumption, incompetent and unethical conduct, and bankrupt pension funds. Public life in the United States is characterized by intense partisan divides and the erosion of civility within much of the political discourse. Financial resources are being expended on wars while other forms of international and domestic aid are being slashed. Environmental resources are being depleted through unsustainable levels of consumption by individuals and societies that value consumption and short-term gains above all else. On many of our campuses, public affairs programs are increasingly being pressured to justify their existence in terms of net revenue without consideration for public good. It can feel overwhelming when our universities, community organizations, local governments, states, and nations are all struggling, and many people are living or, tragically, in some cases dying in hunger and abject poverty.

Despite those circumstances, I view the coming year with tremendous hope and optimism, and this is how I will approach my role as NASPAA president. I would ask you to consider: How can we not be optimistic when witnessing democratic uprisings in nations with long-standing repressive dictatorships as we have seen in a host of countries as part of what has been labeled the Arab Spring? How can we not be hopeful when we see how well people around the world can mobilize to help distant neighbors when natural disasters bring destruction to entire communities? How can we not feel a sense of the possible when we see the peaceful and practical ways that the Occupy Wall Street protesters have organized and how their message has resonated elsewhere in the nation and world? And, how can we not be excited about the future when we experience the creative energies and intense levels of commitment to public service that our students bring into our classes every day?

The need for highly competent public service professionals has never been greater. By that I mean that we need public administrators who are passionate

about helping to improve the lives of all people and especially of those who are disadvantaged by social, political, and economic systems. We need public service professionals who view global interdependencies, cultural and linguistic diversity, and technology as opportunities to be embraced rather than as changes to be feared or avoided. We need a generation of leaders who are well equipped to engage in ethical, competent, innovative, and compassionate public service. So what better time to be in this profession and in a position to help prepare that next generation of leaders or to help the current generation retool?

The blurring of lines—across sectors, across levels of government, and across international boundaries—is indisputable. The next generation will not only sector shift, but break down traditional borders, and will utilize technology in new and exciting ways. Many of our students feel the kinship of "friends" around the globe whom they may never have met in person. They accept that knowledge can be generated from the masses through open-source processes. And they do not expect to operate in the narrow confines of an organization, city, state, or nation. The graduates of our programs work in organizations, agencies, or departments; but it is not where they work that defines them, it is the work that they do. And the work they do influences the world.

Increasingly, we are preparing the global citizen and the global public administration professional. We need to ask ourselves, are we doing this well? Are we doing this competently? As programs and as an association, how can we expect our students and graduates to grapple with and respond competently to the tough questions of diversity, internationalization, and inter-organizational collaboration, unless we are ready and able to do it ourselves?

Earlier, I mentioned six guiding principles. Let me now explain what they mean and how they shape my goals for the year.

### Walk the Walk.

By this I mean that NASPAA has a responsibility to model what it expects of accredited programs. That is, NASPAA must be mission-driven, grounded in public service values, and accountable to its stakeholders. The Association must collect, analyze, and use data to evaluate its effectiveness and to inform its decisions. And it must be transparent in its decision-making and assessment processes and outcomes.

This coming spring, I will lead the Executive Council in a strategic planning session that will evaluate NASPAA's accomplishments and prioritize its goals for the next 5 years. The overarching framework for this is NASPAA's twofold stated mission of (1) ensuring excellence in education and training for public service and (2) promoting the ideal of public service. Like programs preparing their accreditation self-study reports, NASPAA will be forced to systematically assess its actions and its outcomes in the context of its mission and the changing environment in which it operates.

I have asked NASPAA committee and section chairs for their assistance in this strategic planning process. Specifically, I have asked that each committee and section identify what they see as their own priorities and major concerns for the next 3 to 5 years and what they would like NASPAA to address. These ideas from member programs that bubble up from the committees and sections will inform the council's strategic planning deliberations.

The council will also examine the big-picture issues, such as whether NASPAA's name—particularly the use of the term National in our name—still accurately and appropriately reflects the Association's expanding membership and the context in which it is pursuing its mission. In 2009, Jeff Raffel raised this issue in his presidential remarks as something that NASPAA would need to look at "one day," and I am pleased to announce that that day has come. In the coming year, Jeff will lead a task force to examine options and gather input from NASPAA members that will inform the Executive Council and may generate a formal proposal for consideration by the membership one year from now.

Diversity and Social Equity Matter.

We cannot simply do things the right way at NASPAA, we need to do the right things and promote the right values. NASPAA must be a leader in ensuring representativeness, promoting the values of diversity in its many forms, and advancing the cause of social equity. The MSI initiative should be expanded in the coming year and then institutionalized to provide ongoing support not only to HBCUs and HCIs, but to other member programs that may benefit from technical assistance.

It is also time for us to direct our attention outward to promote public policies that advance greater social equity and to speak out against those that are an affront to social justice. In the spirit of the cautionary advice of Edmund Burke, that "the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing," we cannot be silent on the social issues of our time. Many professional associations aspire to be apolitical, and while being nonpartisan may be a reasonable goal, apolitical is no more value-neutral than efficiency, and we debunked that notion years ago. NASPAA need not convert to a lobbying or advocacy organization, but neither can we can simply pretend that nothing is happening when, for example, blatantly discriminatory anti-immigration policies are being enacted across the country.

NASPAA should be partnering with professional organizations committed to social equity and diversity such as the International Hispanic Network, the National Forum of Black Public Administrators, ASPA's Conference of Minority Public Administrators, and NAPA's Task Force on Social Equity and Governance. I would like to see the newly merged Diversity and Social Equity Committee take the lead in advising me and the council on appropriate NASPAA-level actions in this area, and to have panels at next year's conference that include representatives of these organizations and address these issues.

Global Leadership.

It is time for NASPAA to stop talking about becoming a global leader in quality public affairs education and accreditation and accept that it already is. We are in demand, we are sought out, and we are recognized. Now we have a responsibility to serve the profession in this expanded role. We need to approach this task both with confidence and humility. We should be confident because we have a longer history and a more sophisticated accreditation review system for public affairs programs than any other nation or region, and so we have much to offer. And we must be humble because we have much to learn, including how to define concepts of diversity, accountability, transparency, and democratic governance in a non-U.S. context.

NASPAA needs to show more resolve in promoting global cooperation and exercising global leadership with the associations around the world who share our commitment to enhancing the quality of public affairs education, such as EAPPA, INPAE, IASIA, NISPACee, and CAPPA. Each of these associations operates in a unique environment, so a one-size-fits-all approach to partnering with NASPAA is not realistic. Instead, we need to develop individually tailored agreements to advance our mutual goals in ways appropriate to the specific contexts of each association. At a minimum, we should formalize ways to have regular communication among association leaders and participation in each other's conferences. In some cases, we may go so far as to arrange for coordinated accreditation reviews, as we did under the terms of the recently approved MOU with EAPPA. In the coming year, I will engage in dialogue with the leaders of these other associations with the goal of improving communication, exploring opportunities to work collaboratively, and developing individualized MOUs with each of them.

Our Work Doesn't End at the University Doors.

NASPAA must be proactive in ensuring career paths for graduates of public affairs programs by enhancing the prominence of and promoting the value of professional public service education.

NASPAA's efforts to ensure that graduates of our programs have good jobs available to them requires that NASPAA work with practitioners to better understand what competencies are expected and demanded; that we collect, analyze, and share data about the unique competencies of our graduates; that we negotiate ways for our students to be recognized for these competencies; and that we keep students and graduates informed of the opportunities available to them. Promoting quality public affairs education is not just about what is done within the classrooms in our member programs.

During the coming year, we need to continue to be vigilant regarding the Pathways to Federal Careers to ensure that the implementation of the regulations within federal agencies reflects the key provisions that NASPAA worked so hard to have included. And we need to expand our development of specialized

competencies such as those being developed for Local Government Management in collaboration with ICMA, and those for Budgeting and Finance. The Nonprofit Section has been busy identifying competencies, and I hope that in the coming year they will transition to operational definitions and assessment measures; I have asked the Health Care Section to begin that process. By the 2012 conference, we should be ready to have an Accreditation Institute session on competencies for a range of specializations under Standard 5.3.

United We Stand; Divided We Fall.

Just as the diversity and the rich immigrant heritage of this nation's population is one of its greatest strengths and yet also the basis for conflict and controversy, so too is the diversity of our member programs one of NASPAA's greatest strengths and also one of the characteristics that has the potential to divide. Our programs differ in many ways. They differ in terms of degree titles (MPA, MPP, MPAff, etc.), relative emphases on management versus policy analysis skills, and specific subfields of focus. They also differ in terms of institutional arrangements within their various university and geographic settings. The NASPAA membership consists of small programs and comprehensive schools, programs located in large urban areas with numerous other NASPAA programs within the same geographic area as well as programs that have no geographically based competition, programs at public universities, private religious universities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Ivy League Universities. Some of our member programs focus exclusively on professional master's level education, whereas others also support undergraduate, doctoral, or other public affairs programs. Most of our programs utilize a conventional face-to-face classroom delivery mechanism, others are entirely online, and an increasing number are employing hybrid formats. A majority of our member programs are within the United States, and an increasing number are from all regions of the world. Not all of our member programs want or seek accreditation, but many do. Not all have an explicit international focus, but an increasing number do; and, I would argue, all must include some emphasis on globalization and international interdependencies to prepare their graduates for the world in which they will work.

Despite these differences, NASPAA's role is to facilitate our recognition of what unites us and to foster the relationships to promote collective advancement. We need to stop focusing on all the ways our programs or our associations are different, and instead focus on what we have in common. NASPAA needs to closely examine why some large and prominent schools of public affairs are no longer closely affiliated with or actively engaged in NASPAA, having chosen to "go it alone" rather than to be part of the collective. Similarly, NASPAA and its sister organizations—ASPA and APPAM, in particular—have notable differences in missions and membership, and thus there are often tensions and differences

of opinion on how to proceed. These differences are understandable and appropriate, but they cannot become the basis for division because we also have common elements of our missions and some overlapping memberships.

To the extent that we have a common interest in promoting public affairs education and enhancing the visibility and reputation of public service professions, we need to be united. In the coming year, NASPAA needs to determine how to build, enhance, and expand—or, if necessary, to restore or repair—its relationships with its sister associations and with schools and programs that have disengaged with the Association. NASPAA must take the lead in forging these partnerships and collaborations grounded in what unites us all.

The Whole Is Greater than the Sum of Its Parts.

What we do as individual scholars to apply a theoretical and evidence-based lens to the issues of public management and public policy, and what we do as deans and directors to ensure that our programs are designed to provide a high-quality educational experience to our students, and what we do as individual faculty in the classrooms to light the fires of public service passion and to prepare competent professionals are all vital contributions to the quality of public service. But our true potential is not in our activities as individual scholars or administrators or teachers, but rather in our collective energies.

We all know that history repeats itself, that economies are characterized by boom-and-bust cycles, and that periods of corruption and narrow self-interest are often followed by reform movements designed to restore public trust and professionalism. So, to the extent that we look around us and see lots of negative conditions and dysfunctional behavior, we can also see tremendous opportunities for improvement, but only if we act collectively. NASPAA has a responsibility to create the means by which we realize a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

As part of a philosophy of "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," NASPAA can and should look for opportunities to use technology, as well as the Association's convening capacity, to facilitate partnerships and collaborations that will allow individuals, programs, and associations to work together in creative ways to promote collective progress for the good of those we serve. The quality of services provided to people—whether they live in Washington, D.C., or Seoul, Korea; in Kansas City, Missouri, or Milan, Italy; in San Jose, California, or San Jose, Costa Rica—will be better if all programs that educate current and future public administrators are held to high standards and if those programs are able to work together to prepare graduates to address complex social, political, and economic challenges of the 21st century. As a result, NASPAA has a responsibility to focus on the common values that unite public affairs programs and to actively pursue opportunities for collaboration to achieve goals that could not be fully attained by individual programs acting in isolation.

These six principles—(1) Walk the Walk; (2) Diversity and Social Equity Matter; (3) Global Leadership and Partnership; (4) Our Work Doesn't End at the

University Doors; (5) United We Stand; Divided We Fall; and (6) The Whole Is Greater than the Sum of the Parts—will be my mantras for the coming year. They will guide me in my actions and decisions, and I hope that in so doing, I will be able to help lead NASPAA in a way that will serve the membership and public service more broadly.

There is just one more item of business I want to address as we look ahead to next year—our conference in Austin, Texas, in 2012. I am very pleased to announce that Jack Meek has agreed to chair the conference committee. And for helping us craft the theme for the conference, I want to thank Kurt Thurmaier.

The theme of the 2012 conference will be "Horizons in Public Affairs: Visions and Strategies." Within this general theme, there will be three broad tracks: (1) Affirming the Place of Public Affairs & Administration; (2) Understanding Changing Markets & Engaging Stakeholders; and (3) Dialogues on the Status of the Profession. The conference will be designed to have several key features, most notably: greater participation by practitioners; more international participants—from member programs outside the United States and from sister associations from around the world—throughout the conference and not only on panels with an explicit international focus; and a series of intergenerational conversations that bring together emerging scholars with our seasoned experts. Additionally, some presenters will be invited to prepare provocative position papers that will be distributed in advance of the conference to stimulate discussion.

Nothing is done on a small scale in Texas. So I expect that the conference will be big—with big ideas and big accomplishments and presented in a big Texas style. I have great confidence in our conference hosts at the LBJ School at the University of Texas—and particularly Dean Bob Hutchings and our long-time NASPAA colleague Ken Matwizack. I thank them for being our hosts next year, and I know that they will impress us with the reception venues and the keynote speakers.

Thank you again for entrusting me with this great honor.

Nadia Rubaii is associate professor and immediate past chair of the Department of Public Administration in the College of Community and Public Affairs at Binghamton University. She has worked extensively with the International City/County Management Association on issues of local immigrant integration and national immigration policy reform. Dr. Rubaii, who chaired COPRA for 2 years, served a previous term on the Executive Council, chaired the Education and Training Task Force for Standards Implementation, and for several years chaired the Diversity Committee and the Small Programs Committee, now serves as the president of NASPAA.