

## **Public Administration and Disability Issues: Teaching Opportunities and Challenges**

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### Abstract

Government agencies need people who are familiar with disability issues. And people who work for government agencies need to be familiar with disability issues. However, we were unable to locate any NASPAA accredited MPA programs that integrate disability issues into their curriculum. This is a shortcoming that should be addressed.

Disability laws and regulations impact government agencies. These include the landmark Rehabilitation Act (1973), the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and the 2008 Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act.

With the exception of the Rehabilitation Act, this recent disability related legislation was spearheaded by a coalition of disability-related special interest groups. This policy coalition's power continues to grow. The number of people with protected disabilities is estimated at 57 million. This figure is increasing as the population ages and veterans with disabilities return home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The current problems with obesity and low birth weight babies have also increased a wide range of disability-related health issues. In addition to increased numbers, the disability rights movement has become increasingly assertive and politically active, suggesting that further legislative and administrative efforts will be undertaken to integrate people with disabilities into society.

Our nation's future public leaders and managers need to be aware of disability issues. In addition to accommodating their own employees and people they serve, many public agencies, such as those that oversee public schools, will implement disability legislation.

Awareness isn't enough: we argue that public administrators need to be actively engaged in promoting the rights of people with disabilities.

Expanding the inclusion of issues in curricula isn't going to be easy. Many faculty members think their curriculum is fine the way it is and will resist change. Others will argue that the inclusion of new topics will mean that some other things that are currently being taught will have to be scaled back or cut. Still others will say that other new topics should have a higher priority, or that this is a subject that won't have much appeal to nondisabled students. We will suggest how these objections can be overcome.

We will also examine how an MPA program that includes disability issues will be attractive to people with disabilities. Among these groups will be returning veterans who have disabilities. Many veterans have entered the military because of a desire to serve the nation. When they leave the service, they seek careers with public agencies, especially public safety. MPA programs that include disability issues in their curricula will be attractive to these students. We will conclude by showing how this can be done.