

## **Integrating Collaborative Public Service Story-writing into a Case-based Public Affairs Course**

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*Abstract: In the fall semester of 2016 graduate students in the introductory course in public administration at Albany State University participated in an assignment that involved writing an original, fictional public-service short story in the form of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey story template. The intent of the assignment was to encourage students to approach the study of public administration with a whole-brain approach, as per Daniel Pink's assertion that the future "belongs" to those who develop skills associated with both hemispheres of our brains. The course was built around the Stillman textbook, including historic articles, commentary and cases. Most of the students embraced the assignment and several did so with enthusiasm. Building upon this experience the author proposes a network of student collaborations among ten or more NASPAA-accredited graduate affairs education programs beginning in the fall of 2016.*

While there is variety among our NASPAA (Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration)-accredited programs and among students within programs, it appears to me that in the age of the Internet and social networking the challenges we face as teachers are changing. In general, our students may not be reading as much as we did as students and their very brains may be changing as a consequence of the Internet and social networking (Carr, 2011). References to addiction to smart phones are increasingly common. To insist that our students turn off their phones is like ordering them to disengage a part of their mental apparatus. I (Neubauer) have observed that when trying to teach using the case method it is common that students have not read the cases and are unable to participate meaningfully in classroom discussion. Using the Stillman textbook (2009), many of my (Neubauer) students find the cases too lengthy, the historic articles long and difficult to understand, and the commentary not very engaging. From my perspective, the burden falls on me to try to

engage my students in discussions when most of them have not prepared to participate meaningfully.

Many of my (Neubauer) students were educated in the local public schools and at the undergraduate level using primarily standardized testing based on multiple-choice questions. I (Neubauer) am trying achieve the five NASPAA domains of competencies by engaging with my students at the higher levels of instruction, as documented by Bloom and others (Bloom, 1956, 1986). I continue to try innovative things to engage my students. Attempting to become a more effective teacher I have recently experimented with cases, a public-service story-writing assignment, and working in collaboration with Dr. Thomas Sinclair, a collaborative assignment involving students enrolled in programs on two campuses. I (Chen) was a student in the course at Binghamton University. To what extent are our students networked with one another? To what extent does the fact that a student's academic program is NASPAA-accredited mean that the student's experiences are enriched by instructional associations beyond her or his local institution? Does the "network" in the acronym "NASPAA" reach all the way to the level of our students? Why do we teach almost exclusively in institutional silos in the age of instant access to global information resources and when more people now have mobile phones than flush toilets, according to a United Nations report (Worstall, 2013)?

This conference presentation is primarily a description of a public-service story-writing assignment in the introduction to public administration course in the spring of 2016. This paper includes an invitation for others to join in an experiment in collaborative story writing involving perhaps ten different programs beginning in the fall of 2016. I see story-writing as a natural extension of the use of case studies in public affairs classrooms. We believe that collaborations among students in graduate public affairs programs at different universities have potential value and can serve to further operationalize the "Network" in the acronym, NASPAA -- the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration. Daniel Pink claims that the future belongs to those who have developed their "right brains." We in public affairs education tend to target the "left brains" of our students. As we reach for the higher levels of instruction, we may neglect to reach to promote creativity among our students. The thesis of this conference presentation is that we can and should incorporate public service story writing into some of our courses and do so in a way that involves our students in collaboration with students in other graduate public affairs programs within NASPAA. The experiences and suggestions presented here may serve to help launch such efforts beginning in the fall of 2016.

There is relevant literature that we believe could underpin the instructional use of stories in public affairs education. Ospina and Dodge (2005) explain how stories can

capture meanings regarding leadership, and the usefulness of narrative inquiry in public administration research. They cite many sources including Maynard-Moody and Musheno's book, *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service* (2003) and White's, *Taking Language Seriously: The Narrative Foundations of Public Administration* (1999). The references included by Ospina & Dodge (2005) provide a basis for further research regarding associations between the use of case studies and stories for instructional purposes. Bruner (1986) identifies two modes of thought. Campbell in *The Power of Myth* (1991) affirms the power of great novels to be wonderfully instructive. Schank (1990) identifies stories as cognitive information structures, and the ability of experts to draw upon a wealth of stories to interpret situations and plan actions. We are not presently aware of literature that distinguishes between the use of existing fictional stories in public affairs education and the creation of fictional public service stories by students. If there is literature more directly related to this presentation paper, we regret not knowing of it at this time and hope to become aware of it.

### **The Prior "Living With Rivers" Experience**

Professor Thomas Sinclair of Binghamton University worked with Me (Neubauer) to create collaborations involving some of his students and some of my students. We had some success in this regard and together received NASPAA's Social Justice Curriculum Award in 2013. Both Binghamton, New York, and Albany, Georgia have experienced major floods. Professor Sinclair and I initiated a "Living with Rivers" assignment. We divided each of our respective classes into groups and pairs of groups were formed into collaborative teams. (Realize, Albany State University is in Albany, Georgia, not Albany, New York.) Collaborating across distance, each team of students wrote a collaborative paper about evidence of collective community learning derived on the flood experiences. The intent was to create a situation in which "the playing field was level" for our respective students, given that students were more likely to be familiar with their local realities.

We feel strongly that creating a network of collaborations among students in NASPAA-accredited programs (proposed below) is a worthy cause, especially for students in relatively small programs. But, from my perspective (Neubauer), the Albany State University - Binghamton University student collaborations were a stretch because of the different admissions standards of the two Universities and their graduate public affairs programs. Binghamton University (BU) has higher admissions standards than Albany State University (ASU). Most students in the MPA program at BU are full-time students. As a HBCU, the mission of ASU was to reach out to historically underserved student populations. (There is a consolidation of the historic ASU and Darton College into "the new Albany State University," in process now.) Almost all my students at ASU

have full-time employments and are part-time students. I think the students' collaborations in the "Living with Rivers" project were difficult *not* for reasons of racial or cultural diversity but because of differences in admissions requirements, and differences in employment responsibilities. I think these differences made a collaborative assignment requiring a traditional academic paper difficult for the students to complete.

Reflecting on the experience during exit interviews, my students (Neubauer) who have since graduated were positive about the Binghamton relationship and recommended that it continue, I have also heard reservations about the experience from some ASU students. I think some of my students' reservations related to differences in admissions standards between the programs. But the expressions I have heard were framed as the fact that the ASU students had more employment responsibilities than many of the Binghamton students, and therefore the ASU students had less time available to devote to the work.

The point of my explanation of the "Living with Rivers" collaboration here is to suggest that collaborative assignments involving writing short stories (rather than traditional academic papers) may facilitate successful collaborations among students in programs with different admissions standards. Writing a story is a creative activity, drawing substantially on "right brain" abilities. Writing a traditional academic paper is primarily a "left brain" activity. Public affairs programs that are relatively selective in admissions standards are likely to make admissions decisions based upon evidence of well-developed skills usually associated with the "left brain." (In contrast, the Savannah College of Art and Design is more likely to screen for more creative and artistic prospective students.) But creativity is also valuable in professions involving administration and leadership (Pink, 2006).

We are working now on the assumption here that the relevant capacities of students in different graduate public affairs programs are likely to be more nearly equal if the collaborative task requires creative skills, such as public-service story writing. Also, students may be less likely to adopt a "divide and conquer" strategy when writing a story together than if writing an academic paper together. It does not make sense to say, "Mary will develop the character of the protagonist, Jose will create the character of the antagonist, Roger will define the challenge faced by the protagonist, Alysia will create the plot," Hilda will write dialog, and Ali will write the resolution of the challenge faced by the protagonist. A story evolves from the interaction of its parts and is less easily divided into assigned parts than is an academic paper. This fact may force student teams to realize that they must work collaboratively in a highly integrated way rather than simply assign parts of the assignment to individual team members.

## **Prior work by Mary Hamilton and Rita Paskowitz**

As the fall semester of 2016 approached, I (Neubauer) realized that Professor Mary Hamilton of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and her colleague Ms. Rita Paskowitz had assembled a collection of videos of public service professionals available at [www.publicservicestories.com](http://www.publicservicestories.com) to be used for instructional purposes. The theme of these videos is, "Ask Me Why I Care!" It was the availability of those videos that led to my decision to initiate a story-writing assignment. The following URL provides information about the project and sponsorship of the project.

<http://www.unomaha.edu/college-of-public-affairs-and-community-service/community-engagement/public-service-stories.php>

I (Neubauer) began to think about how to incorporate these videos into the introduction to public administration course at ASU. I decided to ask my students to view at least several of the videos of the 23 people in public service, and then to pick one person. I asked each of my students to write a fictional story based on their perception of the character of one of the 23 people as the protagonist in a fictional story. I introduced my students to Joseph Campbell's explanation of "the hero's journey" story pattern. I explained to my students the concepts of protagonist and antagonist (Campbell, 1972). Professor Hamilton and Ms. Paskowitz visited my classroom virtually and interacted with each of my students personally via webcams. I also asked my students to consult with two writing specialists on the ASU campus who have authored novels and who were familiar with my assignment.

## **PADM 5011 - The Course and the Context**

The course in which I (Neubauer) introduced a public-service story-writing assignment in the spring of 2016 was PADM 5011 - Public Administration, Scope, Development and Ethical Environment. Program faculty as advisors try to assure that our students (especially the pre-service students) complete this course during their first semester if possible. The course is an overview of the scope of public administration as a field of study and as a profession.

On the first class meeting I usually show the students a YouTube video titled, "E61 CO2 Incident," an incident investigation review featuring the Special Hazards Unit of the Phoenix Fire Department. The video is available at the following URL and can also be viewed via smartphone using the following QR code accessible by smartphone. The same link by URL is below.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY\\_H-CMvw0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY_H-CMvw0)

This short video about a team of first responders answering a 911 call regarding an event at a McDonalds in Phoenix, Arizona is a good way to initiate a class conversation about the public and private sectors, formal and informal working relationships within an organization, protocols, decision-making, organizational learning and other relevant themes. To me, it is an important and relevant short case study available as an instructional video.

The first assignment in this course was to view several of the "Ask Me Why I Care" videos and to select one based on the student's interest in the speaker. I asked the student to try to identify the values of the speaker and her or his goals and apparent motivations. The second assignment was to write a short story (five pages or more) in which a fictional character (who could be loosely modeled on the person in the "Ask Me Why I Care" video selected) became the protagonist in a story based on Campbell's hero's journey structure. It quickly became clear that to at least some of my students, this was a very different kind of writing assignment. Several of the students became very engaged with their protagonists and possessive of their stories. Some others struggled to even begin the assignment.

I (Neubauer) was certainly on a learning curve also. I had a strong conception of what I wanted each story to "look like" in terms of structure and character development. In working with students I had to search for the line between affirming that their stories were in fact *their* stories while working to assure that the relevance of the assignment to one or more of the themes of public administration were incorporated into the assignment. Some students simply wanted to write a story and were not responsive to my requests that they do some research relevant to relevant themes of public administration and incorporate their knowledge of public administration into the story. As usual, some students were slow to get on board and I modified the original assignment during the semester to allow pairs of students to work together on one story. Although

several of my students selected to work in pairs, I did not have opportunity to observe the dynamics of their collaborative relationships.

### **Reflections on Experiences with Students regarding the Assignment**

I (Neubauer) observed that some of my students are very possessive of their stories and even appeared to be emotionally attached to their protagonist characters. Such attachments may become a problem in collaborative teams of story writers this fall and beyond. Just as in real experiences, every moment in the plot of a story is "quantum" in the sense that it can be the gateway to many possible scenarios. Major decisions made in administrative settings can be especially endowed with many possible futures. Collaborative story-writing may be difficult precisely because if students become highly invested in characters and plots they may find it difficult to coauthor a single story collectively. Some students may become frustrated if unable to have their way regarding character development, plot and resolution. But this risk is preferable to a situation in which students have little or no emotional investment in a group assignment beyond concerns about the grading of the outcome.

The suggestions in this section were provided by Mary Ann Scott. Mrs. Scott is a Writing Specialist II and she is also the faculty-graduate student liaison for Writing Realized at Albany State University. An aspect I did not anticipate when giving this assignment was that some students insisted on writing their stories in first person -- usually through the eyes of the protagonist. I personally find reading a story written in first-person to be unnatural and difficult. Mrs. Scott (2016) noted that use of first-person narration limits readers to knowledge of events and information that are privy only to the narrator story character. I think this may make weaving public service themes into the plot more difficult. Mrs. Scott informed me that while it is possible to shift between multiple points of view in a story it is more common in works longer than a short story. Working with my students, I decided, "who am I to give a creative assignment and then place multiple constraints upon artistic freedom?" I did try to insist that the story be relevant to public administration, and I cited the case studies in the Stillman textbook (2009) as examples of real stories relevant to one or more themes of public administration.

In working with my students I realized that the more specific I become regarding how to write the more I become responsible for teaching students how to write creatively. Having no formal background in creative writing, I chose to err on the side of trusting my students' artistic instincts. I did, however, find myself trying to insist that my students include a public sector work setting in their stories. Otherwise, the point of the assignment would be lost. As it is, at least one story I received regards the imagined

somewhat stressful and wayward youth of a fire department administrator, which I accepted but view as a stretch, given the purpose and context of the assignment. I am learning that my pre-service students have limited understanding of what it means to work in a modern organization. Or perhaps it is that although having experienced the dynamics of working in a modern organization some of my students do not yet have the capacity to reflect upon their organizational experiences. I did not anticipate this possibility.

One student wrote a story based upon the same real-life fire department administrator regarding the issues involved when one friend becomes the supervisor of another person within an organization when both aspired to be promoted. I see the exploration of *that* dynamic to be both important and relevant to the study of public administration.

I have thought about removing the part of the assignment that asks students to view some of the "Ask Me Why I Care" videos. My experiences so far suggest that that is a good part of the assignment. I plan to keep that part of the design of the assignment.

While I don't have fMRI equipment or the clinical background to ascertain that this assignment tapped the "right brains" of my students, I am of the impression that it did. My "evidence" are reflections on conversations about the assignment with students. Mary Ann Scott and I worked together with one student, whom I will identify as "Hilda" here. Hilda delayed initiation of the assignment until very late in the semester. She may have had reservations about meeting with me and Mrs. Scott. In my perception the meetings in Mrs. Scott's office had a bit of a clinical, therapeutic feel to them. Hilda introduced a prospective protagonist character named Rebecca. For no particular conscious reason, I immediately observed that the name Rebecca is the formal version of the name, "Becky." Hilda engaged with Mary Ann (as Writing Specialist) and me in a conversation about the imaginary Rebecca character. To my surprise, when asked about Rebecca, Hilda introduced details about Rebecca (A.K.A., "Becca") without hesitation or uncertainty. For example, Hilda said that Becca grew up with three older brothers. The student continued to speak about Becca with precision and confidence as if referring to a real person.

I am not a psychologist or counselor, but it seems to me that the student's ability to create the Becca character with such confident spontaneity may be evidence that the student has easy access to her creative cognitive skills, often said to be associated with the "right brain." I saw no evidence that the student was in trance, but she appeared to have full access to her imagination and creative side. Other students also spoke of their

imaginary characters easily, but with more evidence that they were engaging their analytical abilities (often associated with the "left brain") in the design of their characters. When I learned (from Hilda) that "Becca" was unemployed, I immediately objected that "Becca" needs a public-sector job for purposes of the assignment. To my surprise, in the following three-way meeting Hilda had abandoned the Becca character. The student made no mention of Becca in the following conversation with Mrs. Scott and me and offered no explanation for her absence. Being a teacher and not a therapist, I did not probe to try to understand the removal of Becca. But my takeaway is the observation that the student abandoned the character rather than modify the Becca character in order to fulfill my expectations (that she be employed) for the assignment. To me, it seems unlikely that a character shaped in the more analytical left brain would be so resistant to being modified.

Cultural aspects were very evident in Hilda's emerging story. Her use of names and words reflected particular regional aspects of African-American culture in the deep South. Her use of metaphor to represent the theme of socially-suppressed emergence of one's aspirations and potential was masterful. It was Mrs. Scott who immediately became aware of this student's creative abilities. My first impression was to become tangled in her use of first-person narration, which blinded me to the quality of Hilda's work. Thankfully, Mary Ann Scott and I were working with the student together and Mary Ann was the first to respond to the student's reading of the beginning of her story. In the absence of Mary Ann, I would have had difficulty hearing the story and realizing its quality. Mary Ann's assessment helped me reframe my first impression of the story. Mary Ann, who is a novelist, was teaching both me and the student. It is not always practical for a teacher and a writing specialist to work with a student together. But my experience suggests that the best way for a teacher and a writing specialist to "get on the same page" is to work together at least initially with at least some students. The understanding that emerges by working together with a student is better than the general understanding resulting from only an agreement between the teacher and the writing specialist.

Regarding rubrics and grading of creative assignments, Mary Ann Scott (2016) advised me as follows.

"Students in the academic environment are often discouraged from engaging creatively with their academic writing, so an assignment like yours can take them by surprise. Many of our students especially don't see the value in a creative approach and often feel their response to such an assignment is beyond any clinical judgement or assessment. However, if they have clear guidelines, they must hold to them and earn a grade accordingly. That said, those guidelines should give them (and encourage them to use) just enough structure to help

them thoroughly engage and think through the process of both the development of their story and the evolution of their thinking."

When I (Neubauer) try out a new idea as an assignment I always grade gently. I think the rubric for a public-service story-writing assignment should include the following criteria. The story needs an organizational setting which includes some aspects of organizational culture. The story needs a protagonist. The reader should become aware of the values and the protagonist and something she or he wants. The story should be written in the general form of Campbell's Hero's Journey. In other words, the protagonist needs to encounter a challenge or conflict that is relevant to a theme reasonably associated with the practice of public administration. The story should include both dialogue and actions. There must be some kind of a resolution of the plot. The story should leave the reader with "something to chew on" relevant to what it means to be a public administrator. There also needs to be a disclaimer saying that the story is entirely fictional.

What amazed me about this assignment was its potential to create opportunities for me to explore important, relevant aspects of public administration that would not otherwise have surfaced in the introductory course. I was literally brought to tears (in a good way) when working with particular students on their stories. I was disappointed that some students were unable or unwilling to implement my suggestions. But I reminded myself that this was, after all, an introduction course and that students were not expert in story-writing. I was not successful in leading classroom conversations about stories. I still have the same difficulty when teaching case studies, as indicated above. I would like to learn to replicate what I can do when working with students and their stories individually in the classroom setting.

When working with my students individually or in small groups I began with character development, by asking them about their perceptions of one of the real people featured in the "Ask Me Why I Care" series. I asked my students to work "from the inside out and from the outside in," using the metaphor of throwing a clay pot on a wheel. (I considered actually letting them throw clay pots in class, and decided that would be expensive, messy and not necessary.) But I wanted them to get the "feel" of creating a fictional character. I think the throwing a pot metaphor for casting a fictional character was not useful. The metaphor fell flat to my students, no pun intended.

Beginning with their impression of one of the people in the video series was helpful in that to have based their protagonist on a person they actually knew might have restrained the use of their imaginations. I discovered that they chose people with one or more attributes they could identify with. For that reason, I think the protagonists

in their stories tended to be reflections of themselves. This made it possible for me to ask questions and make observations about protagonists in their stories that might have been difficult to ask my students about themselves. However, on one occasion I guided a student to not make the main character too much herself. Although writing is sometimes seen as therapeutic, my purpose was instructional.

One student who I will identify here as Sarah created a young female protagonist who lost her job in Atlanta because she bumped up against rules and authority while working in Atlanta and returned to the Albany area to care for an elderly relative. Her protagonist became a volunteer at a local nursing home where she arranged activities for elderly residents, but again bumped up against authority in the persons of the nursing home administrator and a senior nurse. Sarah was very invested in her story and her protagonist. I tried to steer Sarah to think through issues involved when youthful passion encounters jaded authority. I encouraged her to read about emotional labor and burnout. I asked her to read Frankl's, *Man's Search for Meaning* (2006) hoping that that might help Sarah write a resolution to her story plot.

Sarah was *very* invested in her story but apparently not in the research I recommended to tie her story to the purposes of the assignment. I really wanted her to wrestle with issues regarding how careers change people. I hoped to see (in her story) evidence of the growth of the youthful, energetic protagonist who needed to realize that making a difference in a modern organization often requires assuming administrative values and responsibilities. I was hoping that the plot of Sarah's story might lead to a resolution in which the aged and hardened nurse might regain some of what the protagonist carried, through a rediscovery of the meaning of her work with the patients in the nursing home. I hoped the protagonist would work through her issues with authority and begin to make the transition to becoming an administrator. I was steering, hoping for the kind of content I think is relevant to an introduction to public administration as a field of study and as a profession. But I may have tried to steer too hard. Or perhaps Sarah was just not highly motivated to connect her story to the purpose of the assignment. Perhaps I was asking for too much. I literally cried in the presence of the student because I was emotionally touched by the "youth encounters authority" theme.

In another student's story, the protagonist was the administrator of a nonprofit organization with a local government contract to deliver home meals to elderly citizens. The antagonist was a volunteer who was less than dependable in the delivery of meals. This situation set up an opportunity for me to talk with the student about some of the challenges of being the administrator of a nonprofit organization that depends upon

volunteers and donations. The other two characters in the story were a client who wants meals delivered and a donor.

### **Students' Benefits from Inter-Program Collaboration**

Our proposal in this paper is that a growing network of students from multiple programs write public service stories together. From the perspectives of students there can several benefits of collaborating with students in other MPA programs. First, having opportunity to know students and professors from other MPA programs opens channels to span cultural distances. Through collaborations it is possible to learn how other programs work, the style and expectations of professors from other MPA programs, and the content taught in other programs. There are aspects to diversity that must be experienced to be learned. There is diversity among programs that students within any one program will not know or learn to appreciate without the opportunity to collaborate with students in one or more other programs.

Second, virtual collaboration with students in other programs requires the use of technologies to span geographic distances. These skills are needed in the practice of public administration in the 21st Century. In real-world working environments one always needs to coordinate with people in locations, often across time zones, and to accommodate conflicting schedules. Working with students from other programs requires working with differences in schedules, priorities, and expectations. It can require the use of both synchronous and asynchronous technologies that can be used for collaboration. It is not a matter of simply knowing what technological tools are available. It is a matter of being able to use multiple tools effectively and in combination with one another to complete work effectively. Public managers and administrators need these skills in today's environments in which work involves not just relationships within an organization but within dynamic networks of relationships among organizations at local, state, national and international scales.

Third, academic collaborations among programs can lead to enduring professional relationships beyond a particular semester and assignment. This paper is the product of the two authors who met and began to collaborate as a result of the Binghamton-Albany "Living with Rivers" collaboration about two years ago. I (Chen) was a Binghamton student in the experience and I (Neubauer) taught the course at Albany State University. Within any one program there is limited opportunity for students to form professional networks of relationships likely to shape careers. Through collaboration among programs, the pool of potential enduring professional relationships is larger. The ultimate goal of having a student collaborations within a network of MPA

programs would be to benefit all the students and provide expanded, enduring educational and professional opportunities through in-depth multi-level collaborations.

### **Anticipating Challenges of Student Collaborations across Programs**

Neither collaboration across programs nor collaborative story-writing will likely happen easily. If we do this, we want to allow students to discover their own ways to work together at a distance. But if we ask our students to collaborate we should help them by providing some guidance in *how* to collaborate. ASU Writing Specialist II, Mary Ann Scott (2016) offered the following suggestions. The assignment might include some pre-writing exercises to help the students get to know each other and to begin to think about the core elements of their story. We could have them work through a Google shared document or a wiki and each student to write a few sentences about a relevant theme or conflict/challenge in public administration that they might like to write about. We may want to provide them some collaborative infrastructure (such as a Google Doc) while not trying to prevent them from devising their own methods of communications. We might also suggest some typical public sector organizational settings to help them begin to brainstorm together. We should provide some guidelines including number of characters, structure (hero's journey) and the need for setting, plot, events, dialogues and resolution. We might provide them an example public service short story, with permission of its author(s). We should provide enough structure to a collaborative writing assignment, without wringing the creativity out of the assignment. The success of such an assignment is the students' taking ownership of the product.

As reported above, experiences this spring of 2016 suggest that some students become very possessive of their characters and their stories. This can be good, but may become a challenge in the context of a collaborative assignment. If each of four students becomes individually possessive of the story, there will be conflicts. A story needs to be internally consistent. If one author's plot preference is inconsistent with another author's design of a major character, something has to give. And there is the risk of factions forming within a team of authors working together.

A good story needs to emerge in some kind of iterative-incremental process. If the students share a collaborative platform (such as a Google Doc) they can work asynchronously and be mindful of the "big picture" while working on aspects of the assignment. The "chemistry" of a team is pretty much beyond our control. The faculty members involved in the creation of a particular team will have to decide how to manage (or not) the formation of teams. Teams of four students (two pairs from two universities) will be "safer" than a more ambitious approach involving teams of six (three

pairs from three universities). I recommend that every student have a local collaborator, to help avoid the risk of concerns about isolation.

We think that professors should suggest how teams should approach project management but not try to prescribe or require one approach. Good short stories can be complex – like software engineering projects in which different parts of a computer program must interact correctly with one another. To throw in another metaphor, we think the “chemistry” of the team is likely to determine their approach to project management. A story can emerge “bottom up” or “top down.” In other words, some teams may develop their major characters first and then build a plot and discover a theme. Other teams may tentatively agree upon a plot and then “back-engineer” their characters.

Mary Ann Scott has prepared an online tutorial regarding the challenges of assignments involving group collaboration.

<https://sites.google.com/site/asuqepwritingprogram/home/tutorials/group-projects-made-easy>



As we approach this we need to realize that when we require our students to collaborate across distance involved professors must also collaborate across distance. If writing specialists on multiple campuses are involved they too may need to collaborate with one another in support of students in teams. To the extent possible, professors should keep this simple. In our opinion, the professors involved in a team’s project across programs should agree that all active members of the team will get the same grade for the project, despite differences in admissions standards of the two programs. If this is not acceptable to the professors, this issue needs to be resolved between the professors up front. It may or may not be necessary to only create teams including programs with comparable missions and admissions standards. I believe to do so might compromise a part of the purpose of student collaborations across programs.

## **Conclusion**

NASPAA leaders and others are working to improve the quality of public affairs education in the United States and beyond. Each of the NASPAA-accredited programs

are challenged to achieve high standards through disciplined self-assessment, review and continual improvement. The Internet and related technologies continue to change potentials for the delivery of educational services. The students we serve are increasingly diverse. The variety of their needs and expectations are changing.

Imagine a day in the near future when a student's admission into a NASPAA-accredited program means not only that the local program is of professional quality, but that the student's instruction will include access to a network of instructive collaborative relationships with other public affairs students on a national or international scale. Our students have been collaborating with all kinds of people on Facebook™ and other social sites for years. Why not now with their peers who are also studying public affairs? We in the knowledge industry have a unique opportunity in history to expand the means by which our students acquire both information and knowledge, and apply creativity to the practices of public affairs.

Additional information about this proposal is available at the following URL.

<http://www.robertcat.net/spring2016/medt7461website/project5.html>

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