

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 563

SO 034 282

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TITLE A Lesson "In" Government: Connecting Theory and Practice in the Study of Municipal Government.
PUB DATE 2001-08-00
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (San Francisco, CA, August 29-September 2, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizen Participation; *City Government; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Politics; Program Descriptions; Seminars; Student Experience; *Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Ohio (Springfield); Program Objectives; *Wittenberg University OH

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a unique city government internship program that combines a full-time internship experience with seminar sessions to foster the connections between the theory and practice of municipal government administration. The paper notes that the program was developed as a way of providing a richly textured and rigorously conducted experiential component to the author/educator's efforts to teach undergraduates about city government and politics. The program's portability lends to easy duplication, and the belief is that it serves as a model that could be adopted by other institutions and cities. The paper explains that students at Wittenberg University (Springfield, Ohio) have the option of doing an internship with the city of Springfield during the academic year, or with their own, or another city government over summer break. It cites several examples of student projects in different cities. Contains 12 references. Course syllabi are appended. (Author/BT)

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**A Lesson "In" Government: Connecting Theory and Practice in the Study
of Municipal Government**

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**Prepared for delivery at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political
Science Association, San Francisco, California, August 29-September 2,
2001.**

SO 034 282

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Abstract

This paper describes a unique city government internship program that combines a full-time internship experience with seminar sessions to foster the connections between the theory and practice of municipal government administration.

“When I go home and ride my bike past [city hall], I will know what goes on inside. I learned so much about city government” (Student journal entry, Grand Island, Nebraska, 1994).

Introduction

The argument that city governments significantly affect people's lives on a daily basis seems to be nothing but a tired, old aphorism. What's the big deal anyway? Patch a few potholes here, conduct a few ribbon-cutting ceremonies there, and for the most part, remain invisible to the average citizen. That's city government for you, particularly the small and mid-sized variety. It's national and international government and politics that command citizens' attention, at least for those citizens who pay heed. Tax cuts, military engagements, campaign finance reform, Presidential maneuverings, and national scandals get the lion's share of media coverage in the wake of the Post-Watergate/Vietnam cynicism and distrust of government. Who cares or even thinks about inside city hall? Is this assessment too harsh? Probably, but experience has demonstrated to me that undergraduate students in particular have rarely thought much about city government, and consequently have an extremely simplified, or inaccurate, understanding of it. I am also convinced that these knowledge deficiencies can't be fully remedied in the classroom setting where theory and description are often vacuous substitutes for the real world. An experiential component is required before students can achieve a critical understanding of the complexity and nuance of city government administration and politics. Given this pedagogical predilection, this paper describes a unique city government internship program I

developed as a way of providing a richly textured, and rigorously conducted, experiential component to my efforts to teach undergraduates about city government and politics. Its portability lends to its easy duplication, and I believe it serves as a model that could be adopted by other institutions and cities.

John Dewey, Muscatine, Iowa, and Slater, Missouri: Linking Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Municipal Government

Those of us who continually attempt to bridge the gap between the applied and theoretical worlds of political science tend to maintain a constantly critical view of theory as explanation. Our epistemological perspective usually flows from a kind of unspoken query such as: “That theory sounds interesting, but does it hold true in practice?” Standard methods of empirical research help focus our scholarship toward answers, but how is our teaching affected by this fundamental question? At least for me, teaching must be, and typically is, guided by the philosophy of John Dewey and his profound insight that “we learn best by doing” (Dewey).¹ Translated to the world of undergraduate teaching in public administration, urban politics, and state and local government, this fundamental insight has moved me to develop various experiential components for my courses. These have included simulations, trips to local city council meetings, research projects that require the comparison of state and local government documents, and the periodic use of guest speakers who are able to provide an “insider’s view” of state and local government and politics. Different learning styles of students notwithstanding, I have found that these techniques have the

¹ Actually, this was rather intuitive for me from the beginning. It was only later in my academic career that I had the occasion to read Dewey and discover his ruminations on the importance of experience as part of the educational process and the development of democracy.

broadest appeal in terms of engaging students' interests regardless of whether they are taking my classes for major credit, general education credit, or elective credit. Since engaging students is half the teaching battle, perhaps even the full battle, the development of these techniques seems a worthy venture. With this in mind, it's worth noting that the unique experiential approach to the teaching of municipal government and politics described here has its roots in one of my own formative experiences as an undergraduate.

A few years ago, I was involved in one of several efforts I make annually to line up internships in local government for interested students. As is fairly typical elsewhere, students at Wittenberg University are encouraged to seek out internships in their fields. Over the years, I have made several connections with local government officials in Springfield, Ohio and students have the option of doing an internship with the City of Springfield during the academic year, or with their own or other city government over summer break. In this instance, I was trying to help a student arrange a summer internship with her hometown of Muscatine, Iowa.

In a practice that again is fairly typical, students at Wittenberg can receive academic credit for their internships by linking an academic component such as a paper and/or a reflective journal to the internship. While the paper and/or journal can be closely monitored for academic integrity, the quality of the internship as a learning experience is always potentially problematic. If great care is not taken to ensure that the student has meaningful work assignments, as opposed to mere clerical types of work, and that there is sufficient supervision in the workplace for

the student to feel involved and needed, internships can be disastrous from a pedagogical perspective. Making sure these things are in place when the internship site is in another city, let alone another state like Muscatine, Iowa, is a challenge requiring clear and consistent communication with the site supervisor. Ways of doing this are numerous, and detailing them is not the purpose of this paper. However, the challenge of ensuring a quality internship experience for this particular student was what led me to consider more innovative ways to create experiential learning opportunities for students interested in local government administration and politics. Additionally, my own experience as an intern, and then as an Assistant to the City Manager and Acting City Manager in Slater, Missouri during the early to mid 1980s reminded me of two critical notions: 1) from an intern's perspective, being able to point to a significant project, or projects, completed during the internship is a valuable resume-building, and learning, experience; and 2) from the perspective of a typical city administrator, there are always significant projects sitting on the shelf that require attention, but remain on the shelf for lack of personnel or time to devote to them. In short, my experience had taught me that a truly positive internship experience would have to satisfy the interests of three significant stakeholders: 1) the professor, or more generally, the university and the academic department, 2) the student intern, and 3) the city. With this in mind, I began to consider how I might design an integrative internship program in city government that would allow students to make continual linkages between the theory and practice of local government. It seemed that an ideal scenario in this regard would be one in

which student interns would be integrated into an administrative structure of a city on a relatively full-time basis, but would also be able to constantly dovetail classroom theory with what they were doing and observing as interns. Additionally, I knew from my own experience that in order for the students to feel like they were making a significant contribution while not getting lost in a massive bureaucratic maze, the size of the city was going to have to be small to moderate—somewhere between 10,000 and 75,000 in population.

Specifically, I conceived of a program consisting of an internship component combined with a seminar that could be portable, i.e., conducted in any city around the country. Students would be placed as interns in one of the city departments and given one or more projects to complete by the end of the program. My role in this regard would be one of being accessible at city hall each day for students to consult on their projects, to troubleshoot any issues that might arise in terms of supervision, and to help facilitate the independent work that would be required for the students to complete their assignments. Students would also take a seminar from me two nights a week in city hall, and be required to attend regular city council meetings and as many staff and other meetings as appropriate. For this to be mutually beneficial to the students and the city, the program should be operated at a minimum level of about 8 students. The internships would be unpaid. Therefore, since students would be paying tuition and fees to register for the program, and most likely giving up a significant portion of their summer jobs, the only way it could be financially feasible for them would be for the city to pay for housing and basic utilities. With these essential

components in mind, I called a friend of mine who at the time was the City Administrator of Grand Island, Nebraska and proposed the idea. He was ecstatic and immediately jumped at the proposal and we began to plan for an initial piloting of the program with 13 students during the summer of 1994 in Grand Island. I have since conducted it two other times—Fernandina Beach, Florida in 1997 with 15 students, and again in Grand Island, Nebraska in 2000 with 9 students. Fernandina Beach has invited us back for the summer of 2002. As it has now evolved, the program consists of the following components:

1. It is a 9-week intensive program wherein students are placed as interns in city departments and given projects to complete by the end of the 9 weeks. The number of students varies, but the maximum is around 15 from a logistical point of view.
2. Students work Monday-Thursday 8-5; and Fridays 8-12 as unpaid interns.
3. A professor is on-site (in City Hall or other facility where interns are placed) full-time to help with trouble-shooting and to assist students as they work on their projects. For the first two iterations of the program, I did this myself. Then, for the third go-round, I recruited one of my colleagues in the Wittenberg Urban Studies program to split the duties with me.
4. Students take a course—Introduction to City Administration—from the professor(s) two nights a week in one of the City Hall conference rooms.
5. Students are required to attend regular city council meetings and other staff meetings as their supervising department heads require.
6. Students receive 8 hours of college credits for successful completion of the program, and each pays full tuition for the 8 hours of summer session.
7. The host city is responsible for providing housing for the students and professor(s) during the period which would include basic utilities except for long-distance telephone. In the previous three iterations, this expense to the cities has averaged about \$5,000.

8. As part of their experience, students are taken on 2 extended weekend excursions during which they are absent from work on Friday and Monday of those weekends. These are spaced roughly equally apart during the 9-week period. In the Grand Island program, these excursions include trips to the Black Hills/Mt. Rushmore, and Breckenridge, Colorado. The Fernandina Beach program includes trips to Key West and Atlanta.
9. The city is responsible for hosting a full-day orientation program for the students on the first Monday of the program during which the city manager/administrator, mayor, interested members of the council, and department heads meet with the students, provide information, and answer questions. Also included is a tour of the city and a reception at the end of the day for some socializing.

Selected Examples of Student Projects

The kinds of projects that students have completed have been challenging and quite varied over the course of the three program thus far. Below is a sample of the kinds of things students have done. Their commonality is that they have all been discrete, off-the-shelf projects that have greatly benefited the cities. This is a key aspect of the program for the cities. The ability to have several projects completed at once creates a dramatic impact, and is the essential reason the cities have wanted to host the program.

Grand Island, 1994

Legal Department: Updating of Fee Ordinances and Researching Delinquent Tax Assessments.

City Clerk: Survey of Citizen Attitudes on City Services and Developing a Guide to City Services.

Personnel Department: ADA Compliance and Essential Job Function Analysis.

Fire Department: 100-city Comparative Study of Staffing Patterns, ISO Fire Protection Rating Research, and a Study of Incident Documentation and Reporting.

City Administrator: Transportation Study and Economic Impact Analysis of Proposed New Civic Center.

Public Works: Comparative Sewer Surcharge Study, and Attitude Survey on Solid Waste Recycling.

Utilities Department: Development of Underground Electric Line Policy.

Parks and Recreation: 10-Year Playground Equipment Replacement Plan, Water Park Usage Survey and Analysis.

Planning Department: Development of Landscape Ordinance, and Updating of Land-Use Maps.

Fernandina Beach, 1997

Police Department: Research and Compilation of Documents for National Accreditation.

Fire Department: Community Survey on Fire/Rescue Services, and Emergency Medical Service Grant Funding Research.

Marina Department: Development of Maritime Museum Proposal, and Development of Computerized Customer Data Base.

Public Works: Evaluation of Efficiency of Sanitation Collection Route System.

City Manager's Office: Research and development of Marketing Plan for TV/Film Production Opportunities, and Development of a City Economic Profile.

City Clerk: Development of New Bid List Procedure, Election Date Survey and Analysis.

Legal Department: Development of Synopsis of the Annexation Procedures for Florida cities to be given to citizens, and Research (including FOIA request) for gaining ferry access to Cumberland Island, GA.

Grand Island, 2000

Planning Department: Conversion of paper land-use maps to GIS, and Updating of landscaping ordinance.

Legal Department: Comparison of 1st-class City Occupancy taxes, Study of handicapped parking compliance, development of Inter-local agreement for Law Enforcement Records Management Program.

Parks and Recreation: Revision of policy regarding licensing of vendors in the parks, and Creation of Public Property Permit Process/Procedure.

Building Department: Incorporated license agreements into appropriate Building Department files, and Analysis of Building Department's permitting procedures.

Community Development: Community Needs Survey (CDBG Program).

Emergency Management Department: Updated the Emergency Operating Guide, and Coordinated all agencies and departments in terms of emergency responsibilities.

Public Works: Sewer Rate Study, Study of Pavement Assessment Policies in Nebraska cities, and Solid Waste Telephone Survey.

Connecting Theory and Practice

The course students take twice a week has been the opportunity to get them to think critically about what they have observed as they've gone about their duties as interns. It's titled "Introduction to City Administration," and the principal goal is to provide essential theoretical and illustrative material to help the students put their internships into a theoretical framework for understanding more generally how cities are administered. The course outline is purposefully flexible to allow for guest speakers to be included at short notice. I also allow

generous time for extemporaneous classroom discussion of the political issues and controversies that come up while we are in the city. I've found that these discussions are some of the more enlightening for students as they eagerly anticipate being able to literally orally process their confusion and questions about the events and processes they have become intimately involved in as members of the city staff. The foundation for the course comes primarily from the public administration literature. However, for the third time around (Grand Island, 2000) I was able to recruit a colleague of mine in the Wittenberg Urban Studies program who teaches Economics, specializing in local public finance. His expertise, particularly some economic modeling concepts and methods, has been added to the course, significantly enriching the theoretical material for the students. The Appendix contains the syllabus for the course.

Assessments: Students and Cities

A key academic aspect of the internship component is the requirement that students keep reflective journals documenting what they are observing and providing an opportunity for them to assess what they think they are learning, as well as convey their reactions—both positive and negative—to the program as it develops. At the outset, I provide the students with a “syllabus” for the internship component outlining the kinds of expectations I have for their successful completion of the internship. See the Appendix for a copy of this syllabus. Two essential goals are pursued: 1) trying to keep students cognizant of the fact that their “job” is to be students first, and employees second, and 2) emphasizing the need for students to be continually reflective as they write their journal entries.

My guide for this assignment has been a nice little article by Brooks (1993) that deals with these issues succinctly. Regarding goal number 1 above, his admonition that students should try not to “go native” (p. 12) is something I continually harp on throughout the course of the program. Although I check their journals periodically during the summer, reading them at the end of the program has consistently led me to believe that the two goals for the most part have been universally achieved among the students. The following excerpts from these journals over the years serve to illustrate several themes that have emerged in terms of student assessments of the program and what they believe they have learned. In fact, the themes have developed so clearly that it is possible to categorize student journal entries according to them. I therefore have organized the excerpts around these consistent themes.

Initial Trepidation and Fear. One common reaction that initially is expressed by some of the students, particularly when they are given their project assignments, is trepidation about being able to complete the projects. I remember one student in particular in the Grand Island, 1994 program who came to me the first night after receiving his project assignment. He was extremely agitated and concerned that he didn't know anything at all about the topic he was supposed to be working on. After reassuring him, he concentrated on learning as much about the subject, and in the end was able to do a very fine job for the city. For me, the most gratifying result was his greatly expanded self-confidence. Most students have experienced this type of significant growth process as illustrated by the following quote:

The greatest thing that has happened is that I've gained more confidence in myself. I can do the task at hand, whatever it may be, without constantly second-guessing myself (Grand Island, 2000).

I Now Know What I Don't Want to Do. This program is not designed to train future city administrators and politicians. While some of the former students who've participated in the program have gone on to careers in local government, several of them have concluded after their experiences that city government is not for them. Part of the intensity of this conclusion is linked to the degree of political turmoil going on in the city during the program. The most tumultuous programs were Grand Island, 1994, and Fernandina Beach, 1997. In fact, during our session in 1997, the city manager was actually publicly fired. This was a tremendous eye-opening experience for the students to see city politics at its fiercest. A few quotes are illustrative of the students' realizations that they don't want to work in local government:

Well, we went to our 3rd city council meeting last night and because of it I have come to many conclusions. I feel like I do not have the right personality to be involved in city government. All of the topics covered last night seemed so petty to me. I couldn't believe people were actually fighting about whether to have fireworks or not (Grand Island, 1994)!

After attending the first city council meeting...I can say that I won't go into local government, at least not one where there is a TV broadcasting the [meeting] throughout the area. I think if they removed the cameras, things would be less intense and would move along faster (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

The time has finally come for us to leave. I am not sure if I will ever end up working in local government after seeing what went on here this summer. It is definitely interesting and would keep me on my toes, but the

small town politics is something that I would not want to deal with on a daily basis (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

Being turned off of government is a good thing because at least I've realized it now as opposed to having my first 'real' job being this way. It's been frustrating, but still great (Grand Island, 2000)!

If I Hadn't Seen It, I Wouldn't Have Believed Politics Could Be Like

This. One of the most satisfying insights that nearly all students gain from this program is a much more nuanced perspective on the nature and intensity of local politics. Naïve and benign perspectives give way to more sophisticated understandings of political reality. This is one of the principal overall goals I had when I designed the program. This intense experiential understanding can only come from the kind of immersion experience the students get from being a part of the administrative staff full-time. Some of the more humorous quotes from student journals have sounded this theme as can be seen by the samples below:

The longer I am here, the more I realize just exactly how incompetent the city council is. I don't understand how some of these bozos have been elected. Today the [local newspaper] has an article about another councilman's legal problems. Apparently, [he] plead guilty to disturbing the peace. The newspaper reported he had been making harassing phone calls to a neighbor. Just another example of the widespread unprofessionalism of the council (Grand Island, 1994).

[Something] that is very noticeable within this organization is the tension among the supporters and nonsupporters of the mayor. Obviously, some people will not like the mayor, but I am very surprised about the tension among these groups. This seems very petty to me, almost high schoolish, but this is the real world outside of [college] and we are definitely getting a taste of it (Grand Island, 1994).

I have never in my life attended a city council meeting like the one I sat in on last night. The length of the meeting, un-orderly fashion, and unprofessional commissioners made this council meeting very unique to me. Some of the commissioners seemed to have their own political agenda, and I believe that a few are out for their own personal gain (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

I have learned many things I had no idea to expect. The foremost of these is how intense local politics can be. The suburb I come from has had the same mayor for 40 years, so local politics back home are basically written in stone. [Here], on the other hand, things are in a constant state of flux (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

We attended our second city commission meeting two nights ago. This was much better than the first, but that isn't saying a whole lot. It was two hours shorter for one thing, and there was no attempt to lynch anyone (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

Now that I have a more complete understanding of the political situation here...I am beginning to realize just how crazy things are. How wild is it that. . . citizens are up to date on the issues, and the most popular TV program in the city is the broadcast of the city commission meetings. The political situation here is unlike anything I have experienced before, and it is a little intimidating to be 'thrown into the fray' so to speak (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

Things down here have really been interesting. In a town such as this, you really see what small town politics are truly like. I think it is a shame to see people use politics to attack people they don't like. I know that sounds simple, but it seems that this has been a habitual trend in this little town. I am not being naïve because I know this happens at all levels of politics, but being in such a political hot bed all summer has really opened my eyes to the extent that it happens (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

As nice as it was for the city to let us come here, and to pay for our housing, this place is way too screwed up. They need to end all this corruption and stupid political games. I understand this stuff seems to go on everywhere, but this community is even more out of whack than I ever could have imagined (Grand Island, 2000).

I am very glad I spoke to city council earlier than later, but I think I will have to speak before council again. This time I will commend these gentlemen for doing thankless work that a majority of people take for granted. So many petty decisions are made, denied, remade... This type of inefficient planning is what I cannot understand (Grand Island, 2000).

Frustration and Disappointment. Unfortunately, not all students end up having a totally positive experience. This is due to a variety of factors including poor project design, inadequate interaction with their busy supervisors, or inability to keep busy due to insufficient workload. These negative experiences have been minimal, but a few students have expressed some concerns over the years. In most cases, I have been able to intercede and salvage the experience with some corrective action. Nevertheless, students who've been frustrated or disappointed pulled no punches in their journal entries as noted below:

Yesterday was a very frustrating day for me. Once again, I did not do hardly anything productive for the course, or my learning experience. I have to say I was really bitter as I left work yesterday. It is very hard to stay interested in a job when no one really seems to care if you are there or not. Knowing that I'm obligated to be there every day from 8 to 5 is very difficult when people treat me like I don't really need to be there at all. I just don't understand why someone wouldn't take advantage of basically free labor (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

[Our supervisor] hasn't checked in on us lately. I don't mind being left to work alone, but sometimes I feel as though we are in her way. The first couple of days she seemed very enthusiastic, but now our questions might be a little burdensome. I do wish that I was seeing more of the 'government' in action. Because my office is secluded, I don't have a good sense of what others are doing unless I get up and leave my office. I was hoping that I would be placed closer to [my supervisor's] office. Nevertheless, I am learning a lot, and everyday brings something new to my attention (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

In considering what I have done over the last 6 weeks, I wonder if the work I am doing is really useful or just for my own educational benefit? Do they really need me to do these projects? Are they just creating work for me to do? I had hoped that a project I completed might influence some policy decision put before the city council (Grand Island, 2000).

Idiosyncratic Insights. The final theme that has emerged from student journal entries concerns the surprises, or unintentional insights, students have revealed as they've reflected on their experiences. Often, these observations come in the later entries as they have come to know the city and city government more intimately, and they therefore tend to have a more global focus. For me, they are usually the most rewarding entries to read. Here is a sample of observations ranging from the importance of inter-city communications, to potential workplace gender bias, to the realization that city service delivery is so fundamental to city government.

To sum up all that I have learned is simply impossible, but I know I will remember for my future. I can say that I'm glad I was part of this unique experience. This has definitely been a learning experience about local government, and it has been a learning experience about life as well (Grand Island, 1994).

I am really happy about everything I am learning because I know I would never get such an experience anywhere else. I have not been bored or had nothing to do. The department is definitely very busy (Grand Island, 1994).

I am still surprised by the amount of fees the residents here have to pay. [The city attorney] said the amount of fees is also increased because of the city's utilities and electric plant. I am surprised half the citizens are not in debt yet (Grand Island, 1994).

I have noticed a very close bond between the women in th[is department]....I wonder if gender plays a role in the [supervisor's] attitude? I guess [he] wishes I was a man, because he would definitely treat me differently. The [assistant] is more open to me about her career... (Grand Island, 1994).

One thing I learned from this project was the [importance] of communication from city to city. I never really thought of the importance of daily communication from one city hall to another (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

I never really realized that the main function of local government is service delivery. I would have never expected the broad array of things for which city government is responsible. Above this, I never realized how complex delivering these services is. The neat thing is that employees cared about getting these services out to the citizens (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

I am noticing more the dynamics of the workplace here at City Hall. The administrative staff under [the city manager] and the city clerk is [sic] more easygoing than some of the other departments. [One of the] departments is pretty much a madhouse, and the people seem as though they are about ready to go crazy most of the time. I can understand that because of how busy their department is, but they are busy upstairs [too]. I think it really depends upon who is the department head (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

This summer meant a great many things to me. I learned a lot about city administration, both academically and firsthand, and I feel like I met my learning goals and then some. The best way to learn something is firsthand, and I did a whole lot of that this summer! (Fernandina Beach, 1997).

In summary, the student journal entries clearly have indicated to me over the years that the program has been successful. In spite of the occasional frustrated student, the vast majority of responses and reactions by students have been overwhelmingly positive. They have attempted to

take seriously their role as students, and to critically reflect on the things they are observing around them at city hall on a daily basis.

What about the cities? How have they assessed the programs?

The evidence I have points to strong positive reactions on the part of the cities. Toward the end of each program, I have surveyed the department heads and supervisors of the interns on their attitudes about the program. The consistent strong positive feedback I've received, and the fact that both cities have invited us back are indicative of the support the cities and their staffs have for the program in general.

Challenges

Organizing and conducting a program such as this is not easy, but an essential logistical boilerplate for the program was generated during the first go round, and it has served me well in the later experiences. An initial obstacle is obtaining the approval of a potential host city. This was easy the first time since my colleague was so enthusiastic. However, I have had two other cities—Jacksonville Beach, Florida and Glendale, Arizona—working with me to implement programs only to have them pull out during the planning stages due to snags along the way. Obviously, having had such positive experiences in Grand Island and Fernandina Beach has led to us being invited back, but I am constantly trying to expand the program to get other cities in the rotation.

One of the biggest hurdles is the issue of housing. While the cost has not been high for the cities (again, about \$5,000), finding this kind of temporary housing at such a low cost has been difficult in every instance. In fact, the initial

two experiences—Grand Island, 1994 and Fernandina Beach, 1997—saw some creative, yet controversial, solutions by the cities. In 1994, Grand Island had just completed a new city hall prior to our arrival. Housing was in such short supply that year the city finally decided to turn one floor of the old city hall, across the street from the new one, into a dormitory/loft arrangement. Offices were converted into bedrooms. The employee lounge was turned into a TV/lounge area, and the old employee kitchen was upgraded a bit for the students to use as a kitchen. Of course, there were bathrooms throughout the building, but only one shower existed in the old public works area. So, the city obtained memberships in the YMCA across the street so students could shower. Nine of the students lived there that summer, while the other four shared an apartment. In 1997, Fernandina Beach rented a three-story beach house and placed all 15 students there. In 2000, the housing situation was less of an issue as the city was able to find apartments for us.

Another challenge is recruiting students. Part of the goal of the program is to achieve a mutually beneficial experience for the students and the city. As noted above, the benefit for the city is to have such a large number of projects completed at once. This requires that at least 8 students participate, with a more optimal number being 12 to 15. I have found that I have to start talking with potential students at least a year in advance to get them interested and excited about the program. I then need to keep them on board so they'll follow through and register to participate. This usually requires monthly meetings to give them updates about the planning, and to keep them excited about the program.

Traveling to some other destination and having a quality internship project to complete is appealing, but the effort to generate interest is still part of the challenge of overseeing this kind of venture.

One final challenge is that of keeping the students focused during what can sometimes be the doldrums of the program. During the middle of the summer, when projects are underway, and we've fallen into a routine, students have to sometimes be reminded to stay on task. For many of them, this is their first professional work experience, and on those inevitably slow days, they can get frustrated.

A Lesson "In" Government

In spite of the challenges, the chance to develop close bonds with good students, and to see them bridge theory and practice has been a deeply rewarding experience for me. The program has also received its share of publicity over the years, which has been another source of satisfaction. Several newspaper articles have been written about the program with each iteration, including some blurbs in national publications such as *Nation's Cities Weekly* ("City Ideas That Work," 1994), and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ("Ohio Students Help Short-Staffed Nebraska City," 1994). The reference page includes some selected articles about the program. In 1997, we even had a camera crew from the regional bureau of CNN ready to come to Fernandina Beach to do a story. In the end this did not materialize, but it was exciting to the students to think that they were participating in something so unique that it had the potential of being national news. Of all the articles that have been written, my favorite is

one that was published in the Grand Island newspaper about a month after we had arrived in 1994. It was titled "A Lesson In Government" (Hooper, 1994). I've come to realize that it couldn't have captured the essence of the program any better. I think the students would agree.

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Appendix: Syllabi

POLI 229: Introduction to City Administration, Grand Island, Nebraska
Dr. Rob Baker and Dr. Jeff Ankrom
Summer, 2000

Course Objective

Over 9 million employees work in local government today including all jurisdictions from counties down to special districts. However, as the most basic link to citizens in our federal system, cities perform an indispensable role in the delivery of essential government services. Safe and clean streets, housing, parks and recreation facilities and programs, public safety, and utilities are services we count on and come to expect in postmodern America. When these services are present, we hardly notice them, but when they are absent, reduced, or poorly delivered, they become irritatingly obvious.

In cities across the country, the principal responsibility for delivering these services falls on the shoulders of city managers, administrators, and department heads. Under the supervision and guidance of city councils and mayors, these local administrators attempt to provide the services we need as professionally as possible within the limits of these local resources.

Given this key service delivery function performed by cities, the objective of this course is to help you meld the practical with the theoretical in terms of the administration of city government.

Course Structure

The class will generally meet twice a week in city hall. In the first part of the course, several sessions will be devoted to theoretical issues related to city administration, and will combine a lecture format with class discussion of the assigned readings. The political environment of city administration will be the focus. The second part of the course discusses planning methods, covering regional analysis, intraregional analysis, and project identification and evaluation. The emphasis will be on measuring income and employment flows within and between regions. The perspective will always be practitioner oriented, and will stress collection of data that allows for simple tests of the hypotheses presented in the text.

Required Texts/Readings

Bingham, et al., 1991. *Managing Local Government: Public Administration in Practice*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.).

Bendavid-Val, 1991. *Regional and Local Economic Analysis for Practitioners*, 4th Edition. (Praeger Publishers).

Course Requirements

The key assignments and their point values are as follows:

Reading Quizzes	30
Problem Assignments	50
Budget Analysis	50
Problem Research Paper	70
Midterm Exam	100
Final Exam	100
Participation	<u>50</u>
Total	450

Budget Analysis

Each student is required to obtain a copy of a city budget, preferably one from their hometown, and conduct an analysis that includes an assessment of at least the following budget components: 1) the classification scheme for both revenues and expenditures, 2) the overall presentation format, 3) the revenue forecasting method, 4) any special features, and 5) any problems or suggested improvements.

Problem Research Paper

Each student will be assigned to a group, and each will be required to choose a problem, or issue, currently affecting the city of Grand Island, Nebraska and prepare a research paper that details the problem's history and the city's efforts to solve it. The paper should include information such as how the problem emerged, how and when the city first recognized it, and what, if anything has been done to deal with it. Additionally, suggested solutions and prospects for the resolution of the problem should be discussed. City documents and records, as well as interviews with appropriate individuals should be used as primary source materials for the paper.

Course Outline

I. Overview of Public Administration and Local Government

5/22	A. Intro to the Course	Syllabus
	B. Models of the Public Sector	B ix-2
	C. PA at the Local Level	B 3- 30
5/24	D. The Structure of Local Government	B 31-58
	F. FOCUS: The City Manager Form	"

II. Dimensions of Local Administration

5/29	A. Intergovernmental Relations and the Legal Environment of Cities	B 59-74; 133-155
5/31	B. FOCUS: Guest Speaker from Municipal League	"
6/5	C. Overview of Public Budgeting and Finance	B 96-114
6/7	D. Budgeting (Cont'd.)	"
6/14	E. The "Art" of Revenue Forecasting	Handouts
6/19	F. Human Resources, Decision-Making, and Ethics In Local Government	B 75-95; 115-134 156-169
6/21	MIDTERM EXAM	

III. Local and Regional Economic Analysis

6/26	A. Income and Employment Dynamics Within a Region	BV Chp. 1-3
6/28	B. Regional Income and Product Accounts	BV Chp. 4-5
7/3	C. Balance of Payments & Economy Composition Analysis	BV Chp. 6-7
7/5	D. Economic Base Analysis and Input/Output Models	BV Chp. 8-9
7/10	E. Aggregate Social Accounts	BV Chp. 10-11
7/12	F. Intraregional Analysis	BV Chp. 12-14
7/17	G. Project Analysis and Cost-Benefit Analysis	BV Chp. 15-17
7/19	H. Regional Development Planning	BV Chp. 18-20

Course Objective

The goal of the internship component of the Grand Island City Management Field Experience is to allow you the opportunity to learn first hand about the day-to-day operations of a medium-sized city government. You will be assigned a specific project, or projects, to complete by the end of the summer, and will be expected to remember your role as a student attempting to learn and reflect on your experience.

Observation and Reflection as Means to Achieve Learning Goals

A successful internship is marked by the feeling of having learned something at the end of the experience. To promote this sense of accomplishment, there are several things that you as the student must keep in mind as you participate in this program. To this end, you will be asked to do five things related to the internship experience: 1) Set Learning Goals, 2) Refrain from Going Native, 3) Plan Times and Means for Reflection, 4) Document Your Learning, and 5) Seek Four Levels of Documentation. These are discussed in more detail below.

1. **Set Learning Goals.** At the beginning of the internship, you will need to set deliberate learning goals in the form of questions you hope to answer based on observations and experiences in the workplace. What do you want to learn? How will you examine the social nature of your interaction with colleagues? Setting learning goals up front will help you to remember to be a student (i.e., someone who is trying to learn something) in the midst of the day-to-day activities of which you will be a part. It's important to distinguish between learning goals and task or reward goals. Some of the benefits of being an intern are making contacts, gaining work experience, etc., but these are not learning goals. They are reward goals. "What do I want to *learn*?" is very different from asking "What do I want to *gain*?"

2. **Don't Go Native.** As an intern earning academic credit for workplace learning, you must keep a foot in both worlds and be of two minds. You will be tempted to "go native" or take on the new employee identity. Don't do this! Remember, you are a student, and as such, are expected to ask questions about your experiences and the confusing things you observe. You have not been hired simply to perform a job, but to learn. Your special status as a student means that you must continually ask questions, rather than just "do your job", as it were. Think of those around you as teachers, not simply supervisors and colleagues.

3. **Plan Times/Mean for Reflection.** In order to carefully direct your own learning, you must plan deliberate times to consciously, seriously think and write about the broader implications of your internship experience. To this end, you will need to keep a journal or log of your reflections.

4. **Document Your Learning.** As indicated, you will be required to keep a journal or log of your reflections on your experiences. To facilitate learning, consider these suggestions: a) reflect on a regular basis, b) don't write every entry the same way, c) keep a continually growing list of questions you want answered, d) add sketches, drawings, photos, and other illustrations to your journal, e) read previous entries and respond to them as things change and as you learn more, and f) take a moment to think about and jot down key ideas before writing so that your entries will be focused.

Remember, people love to talk about their work. Don't be afraid to ask questions, conduct informal surveys on key questions you have, or to gather a variety of opinions about a perplexing question you have been considering. The only caution is to be careful not to cross the boundary of confidential or sensitive information.

5. **Seek Four Levels of Documentation.** In recording your learning, seek the following four levels of documentation: a) Noticing--We tend not to notice what becomes routine, so the trick is to notice things before they become ordinary. This is especially important early on when you are trying to get your bearings; b) Remembering--We usually remember only part of what we notice, so it's important to save records and memos so that you can remember; c) Organizing--Making connections between observations is

crucial to understanding them more completely. This entails thinking about how your observations are related; and d) Explaining--This is the highest level of documentation, and entails a deeper level of analysis, perhaps by placing your observations into a broader theoretical context.

Grades for the Internship

Your grade for the internship will be based on two components: 1) the project(s) you complete, and 2) the journal you keep. They are both worth 50 percent of the grade. Although I reserve the right to collect journals for spot checks at any time during the summer, they are not due until the end of the program.

Final Considerations

How will you know if you learned what you set out to learn? This will have to be answered by you in a final integrative journal entry. Also, remember to describe and reflect on the things you learned that you didn't expect to learn! These can often be the most enlightening aspects of internship experiences.



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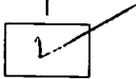
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