

How To Use PAR Essays for Improved Classroom Teaching

During the last two decades Public Administration, both as a field of study as well as a focus of serious academic research, experienced what some scholars refer to as “a re-founding movement,” or a fundamental rethinking and redirection of its basic purposes, approaches, methods, and ideas. The causes of these re-founding trends remain unclear: were they due to the end of the cold war? Emergence of a global economy? The rise of America as the last global superpower? Shifting demographics? A pervasive information revolution spawned, in large part, by the creation of an easily accessible, instantaneous, world-wide web? The post-9/11 war on terror at home and abroad? Katrina and other monumental natural disasters? New challenges of environmental warming, a global AIDS epidemic, unchecked immigration, spread of nuclear weapons, and many more pressing issues that demand urgent public attention, discussion, and action?

Whatever the reasons, Public Administration is undergoing dramatic changes today in terms of its intellectual scope and intrinsic substance. In order to assist students, teachers, researchers, and practitioners make better sense of how such immense re-founding trends impact the field, gain better perspectives concerning why they are so pervasive and profound, as well as achieve a clearer, more up-to-date comprehension of where we are today plus headed tomorrow in Public Administration, the Public Administration Review offers free of charge this new,

on-line PAR series, “The Foundations of Public Administration.”

Over the next few years this first-of-a-kind, on-line series will systematically develop twenty contributions with critical reviews of the best PAR articles spanning nearly seven decades of the Journal’s history. Each one will be introduced by a leading academic(s) in that particular subject area, along with “model syllabi” and extensive reading lists for ready-to-use, instructional application for students and teachers alike. The selected topics represent a wide range of “bread and butter” courses, commonly taught in Public Administration programs today at both the undergraduate and graduate university levels. Every subject included within this new series is introduced by an established senior academic, most of whom have spent their entire university careers thinking about, teaching, as well as contributing significantly to its theoretical development. Ultimately, what all of these contributors offer are their own unique, summary perspectives shaped over a lifetime devoted to wrestling with seminal intellectual dilemmas within their respective areas of academic research: where have we come from? Where are we today? Where are we heading tomorrow with regard to this particular administrative topic?

As described below, the goals of this new on-line series are eight-fold and will be achieved as authors address a number of major questions.

Foundations of Public Administration Goals

- *Make available to teachers, students, and researchers materials that are often hard to gather, even to know what to look for, as well as permit easy access for their critical review and rapid “downloading”;*
- *Through thoughtful introductions by leading experts, sum up recent applicable scholarship plus the latest findings in readable, straightforward prose;*
- *Provide students and practitioners alike with a keener appreciation of the historic roots, intellectual development, and theoretical evolution of the particular topic under review;*
- *Allow students and others to read firsthand many of the original PAR essays that were instrumental to creating and shaping their field;*
- *Raise important questions and issues to encourage further reflection and research concerning seminal ideas in administrative theory;*
- *Enrich 21st century Public Administration dialogue by promoting further discussion and debate about key concepts, their contending points of view, relevance to contemporary issues, and the possible alternative directions they may be heading in the future;*
- *Highlight enduring ideas and theoretical conundrums that deserve further scholarly investigation, especially for doctoral dissertation research, which, in turn, individually and collectively, may serve to advance the overall intellectual framework for contemporary Public Administration;*
- *Offer “model syllabi” to improve practical classroom instruction by “mining” the rich conceptual treasure chest of published essays from the Public Administration Review since its beginning in 1940, which some scholars suggest houses the very best administrative library in the world.*

Questions to Be Addressed by Authors

- ✓ *What is the historic background of this topic, its key authors, seminal themes, and current issues?*
- ✓ *Why does this particular subject remain so significant to the field as a whole today? Its continuing worth and central purpose(s)? Main divisions and subdivisions of expertise and knowledge?*
- ✓ *How was this area of inquiry, along with its concomitant PAR essays, plus other relevant literature, shaped by the peculiar history in which it originated? Likewise, how did both its dominant and dissenting ideas points of view evolve?*
- ✓ *What primary values and perspectives central to this topic continue to be most relevant for analyzing today's problems confronting Public Administration?*
- ✓ *Where can the field find, incorporate, and apply the newest scholarship and latest empirical findings from related PAR articles and other serious literature on this topic?*
- ✓ *What are the central theoretical debates and controversies apparent nowadays within this academic arena and what germane issues do they raise for charting tomorrow's academic research agenda?*
- ✓ *How does this particular topic, as well as its contemporary, often diverging viewpoints, inform current intellectual debates and impact the general practice of the field?*
- ✓ *What is an up-to-date, comprehensive bibliography to assist present-day researchers and students for advancing the next steps involved with this area's broad intellectual framework?*

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

How to Use PAR Essays for Improved Classroom Teaching

Not surprisingly, developing this new series that addresses such questions for the full range of foundational topics in Public Administration is a major undertaking. In the short-term, this intellectual “mapping process” will remain partial and incomplete. Thus, not all subjects will be covered right away. However, stay tuned! New contributions will be added regularly over the next few years. As these collections continue to expand in the near future, what should you think about in order to take advantage of this wealth of impressive research and information for teaching purposes? In other words, practically, how can this series be used in the classroom to help instructors who are currently teaching students new to Public Administration as well as seasoned “old hands”?

First, read with care the introductory essay. It is designed to provide an analytical framework in easy-to-read prose focused on the academic topic under review. Think carefully and critically about the important themes and ideas presented by the author. Select those that you find most compatible with your own style and approach to this particular topic. Since every instructor’s perspective on administrative subjects as well as teaching methods differ, it is essential to pick and chose selectively from the considerable range of theoretical concepts and seminal issues raised by the authors’ introductions.

Second, review carefully the entire list of PAR essays cited at the end of every introductory essay and download those from JSTOR, if published prior to 2000, or for those published after 2000 from the

Blackwell Website (see attached instructions for easy downloading). Make certain all those articles are directly related to the particular themes, ideas, and issues that seem most relevant to those you plan to emphasize in class. Essays should be read and reread thoroughly before they are assigned so that they fit appropriately into the instructor’s syllabus and ensure that each one is sequenced properly into the specific overall course plan. Do the chosen essays raise central problems germane to topics addressed? Frame effectively the historic context to the themes under review? Provoke discussion and debate? Enhance both breath and depth of student learning? Underscore key issues about current topics under investigation? Above all, do these essays challenge students to think about whatever subject is being taught?

Third, examine critically the related “model syllabus.” Again, since styles of teaching, modes of presentation, methods of pacing, emphases upon certain theoretical ideas, as well as selection of major issues to highlight within any aspect of Public Administration differ—often radically--it is vital to see these “model syllabi” as “models” only. Each requires adaptation to suit a particular instructor’s interests and approach.

Fourth, and most important, think of the audience. If the bulk of students are new to the field, fresh out of college, or even entirely made up of undergraduates, the range of topics, the pacing of their presentation, plus use of PAR articles as well as other primary materials should of necessity be limited. By contrast, advanced masters- or doctoral-level seminars as well as

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

How to Use PAR Essays for Improved Classroom Teaching

those classes consisting of mostly seasoned professionals should be significantly more demanding. Longer syllabi covering considerably more complex topics, in greater depth and breadth, along with more advanced readings and research assignments are essential for stimulating class discussions and for challenging more insightful conceptual analysis. The “model syllabi,” in brief, must ultimately be tailored to suit the specific composition and level of different student groups.

Fifth, look beyond the recommendations of these authors and investigate firsthand recent PAR volumes for additional suggestions to improve classroom teaching. For example, beginning in 2006, new regular PAR features can assist instructors with stimulating more up-to-date, lively, and germane class discussions through administrative case studies, administrative profiles, theory-to-practice applications, public document reports, expanded book reviews, important author interviews, international research innovations, senior-junior scholar exchanges on key conceptual topics, as well as academic-practitioner exchanges over major current problems in the field.

Finally, don't hesitate to contact the author(s) of the introductory essay and model syllabus for help. All are readily available for further assistance, should that be required in designing an effective syllabus. Remember: we in the public administration community share a common goal, namely to advance the field academically, professionally, practically. No small challenge in the 21st century! Therefore, the best

educational resource for assistance can be found nearby, namely from your own colleagues, most of whom today are just an email click away.

Good Luck!

Richard Stillman, PAR Editor in Chief

Instructions for Downloading PAR Essays

All PAR essays are available free of charge to ASPA members. To download essays:

1. Go to the ASPA site at www.aspanet.org
2. Be sure to log in, otherwise the websites that make the essays available might not recognize that you are an ASPA member.
3. Click on the PAR/PA TIMES link in the top bar of the main ASPA web page.
4. You will be taken to a page with the header “Public Administration Review and PA TIMES,” and below you will see a section called “Online Access to Public Administration Review (current ASPA members only).”
5. The essays are available in two different places. Essays published prior to 2000 are available on JSTOR, while those published from 2000 forward are available on the current publisher website (Blackwell).
6. Just click on the appropriate link and you will be taken to a search page to find what you need.

If you have any questions or run into difficulties, please contact Jim Heichelbech, the PAR Web Content Coordinator, at jheichelbech@mindspring.com.