

# A Public Service Education: A Review of Undergraduate Programs With a Community and Service Focus

Tony Carrizales  
*Marist College*

Lamar Vernon Bennett  
*Long Island University-Brooklyn*

## **ABSTRACT**

Public service education has been a continued area of research, specifically at the graduate level. At the undergraduate level, programs have focused primarily on public administration and public policy education. However, a growing number of undergraduate programs today underscore service and community in addition to the more traditional areas centered on the policy process and management of public organizations. Undergraduate programs now offer bachelor degrees or a major in public service with program missions that are distinct from process and management. This paper reviews the current trends of undergraduate public service programs and outlines the program missions, requirements, and structure that emphasize service and community as their core values. The paper contributes to the exploration of undergraduate public affairs education and provides an early review of programs that prioritize service and community over other values.

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Public service is a critical component to a public administration education. Through service learning, students learn management skills and policy processes as well as public values. Public service as a practice for public administration students in MPA programs adds value to their education, typically with an internship or service-oriented project. The importance of public service and its practice is also well established in programs throughout the country at universities and colleges designed to give students opportunities to conduct service projects. Although these programs may not be integrated into specific MPA or degree major programs,

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*Keywords:* public service, community service, undergraduate education

they are often a curricular component. A public service education, traditionally associated with management and policy processes, also encompasses the practice of community involvement and appreciation for the values of service. For the purposes of this research, we narrowly define a public “service” education to focus on community and service. Based on this working definition, many programs offer a degree in service, by name, but only a few offer an education founded on values of community and service. This is especially the case at the undergraduate level, where only a limited number of public service programs have missions and curricula that reflect the importance of service for, and involvement in, local communities.

This paper discusses the existence of current undergraduate public service programs and outlines the program missions, requirements, and structure that emphasize service as their core value. This focus on service as the primary mission at the undergraduate level is critical, because programs of public administration and public policy education have historically underscored the policy process and management of public organizations. This review of programs contributes to the exploration of undergraduate public affairs education and provides an early review of programs that prioritize service over other values.

We begin with a literature review of service education and the value in public service, helping to frame the driving force behind programs that have chosen to establish undergraduate programs in the field. Following the literature review, we present a search and summary of existing programs outlining where and how undergraduate programs are underscoring public service. We conclude the paper with recommendations and considerations for the future of undergraduate public service education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Public Service

The link between public service delivery and an appreciation for the value of service is critical to the future of public affairs education. Recent public sector reforms underscore private sector management values and principles. A shift away from a public service ethic in education can have a lasting impact on public service delivery. Noting an emerging challenge to the public service ethic, Perry and Wise call for further research to clearly define and understand the motives of public servants amid the “crisis in government service” (1990, p. 372). These authors point out how national initiatives may be the needed trigger for public service motivation, such as a charismatic leader’s call for public service or legislation that provides opportunities for young adults who want to pursue public service occupations (p. 372). Such efforts may best be exemplified by the recent legislation, Serve America Act (2009), which reauthorizes and expands national service programs. This act also promotes the use of specific efforts in engaging youth and putting them on a path of service.

Public service values that include, but are not limited to, accountability, integrity, and impartiality are distinct from private sector values such as profitability, innovation, and enterprise. As Rayner, Williams, Lawton, and Allison (2010) note,

public sector reforms that shift toward private sector management have significantly and negatively affected the public service ethos, leading to a renewed focus on the importance of service (p. 28).

Haque argues that in the academic discourse of public administration, the “publicness” of public service has diminished with regard to the representation of public interests when compared to business management (2001, p. 65). Haque further suggests that a market-driven mode of governance has become the primary focus diminishing the concern for the status of public service worldwide in what has become a businesslike transformation for public service. Addressing the challenges facing the publicness of public service can, in part, be done through academia. Haque concludes that academics and practitioners need to introduce “serious critical studies and debates on the use of private sector concepts, values, structures, and techniques in public service” (2001, p. 75). Based on Haque’s assessment that market-driven public sector reforms have undermined the meaning of public service, it could be argued that a renewed focus of the public sector ethos can improve the quality of public service education.

In part, Rayner and colleagues define the public service ethos as “a function of individual motivation and values, such as honesty and altruism, organizational rules and process that accomplish accountability and impartiality, and goals that enhance the common good” (2010, p. 29). They have developed a multidimensional framework for a public service ethos based on belief, practice, and public interest—a framework that can help further research and the study of public service. The study of values and principles associated with service are well integrated in graduate MPA programs and curriculum. At the undergraduate level, however, they remain marginalized due to the importance of management skills and policy process knowledge. This study highlights the importance of integrating the public service ethos in the goals of any public service educational program.

Newcomer and Allen define the goal of public service education as preparing students to serve in the public interest. This is a distinct view of public service education; it underscores “serve” and “public interest,” especially when compared to goals such as effectively “managing” in the public sector. Newcomer and Allen provide a “Model of Learning Outcomes for Public Service Education” that can assist in furthering efforts to assess student outcomes as they conclude with the importance of public service education programs measuring the “right things, in the right way, to ensure that outcome assessment is credible” (Newcomer & Allen, 2010, p. 224).

### **Service Learning**

Dicke, Dowden, and Torres also highlight the growing interest in service learning among public service education, noting its support in furthering the missions of many MPA programs. They outline a framework of four distinct perspectives on using service learning: community service, moral, political, and instrumental (Dicke et al., p. 201). In their paper, Dicke and colleagues also argue that successful service learning projects go beyond community-based projects but are best designed

with clear learning objectives. Field and hands-on experience are critical to achieve deeper understanding of what it takes to succeed in public service (Karl & Peat, 2004). Moreover, educators have an opportunity to advise students to establish a “person-environment fit,” and ensure that the students’ awareness of their own values is in line with their chosen career field (Karl & Peat, 2004, p. 272). Although Lambright (2008) questioned how much affect service learning had on learning outcomes for students in MPA programs, he also found some evidence that service learning can be more effective than traditional classroom assignments in helping students master course material.

Integration of service-learning experiences with traditional classroom education has some promising potential for furthering student learning (Killian, 2004). D’Agostino (2008) notes the benefits of service learning in advancing civic engagement by suggesting that through MPA programs, universities can play an active role in local communities and that service learning allows students to become involved in community projects. D’Agostino concludes that MPA programs could further establish specific courses designed for service learning and also underscore civic engagement as a core program objective.

Strong collaborative relationships with local community organizations also can enhance the service-learning experience and strengthen public service programs. Whitaker and Berner (2004) contend that “doing meaningful projects for real clients challenge students to produce high quality work,” while underscoring the importance of working for the public good (p. 280). Campbell and Lambright (2011) note that when instructors design course projects, engaging with community supervisors and partners along with faculty will help maximize the project impact for community organizations. Nishisbiba, Nelson, and Shinn (2005) find that a sense of control over community outcomes can help in developing civic engagement among students. They call for providing students with success stories of civic engagement, supplying resources and information about civic leadership, and exposing students to diverse communities to develop diversity awareness (p. 276). Bryer (2011) highlights how service learning can help in developing collaborative relationships between universities and communities furthering students’ pursuit of public work. Finally, Carpenter (2011) calls for further research in service learning for nonprofit graduate students.

Federal initiatives have also fostered service learning. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency created in 1993 and now responsible for the expanded service programs. As the Corporation notes, in outlining new and updated provisions of the Act, there is now

a purpose statement for school-based funding under Part I, tying service learning to demonstrating impact on community needs while enhancing students’ academic and civic learning, and building infrastructure including the training and professional development of teachers, to expand service opportunities. (Current Law and Serve America Act, 2011, p. 1)

### **Public Policy and Affairs Education**

Brown and Behrman (2007) build on service-learning research for political science majors, whereby the reflection on a service activity may increase an understanding of course concepts. Their research found that the political science student participants gained from their experience, but the group was small due to the challenge of integrating an undergraduate service-learning course into the curriculum. Brown and Behrman's service-learning course for political science majors included interviewing prominent city leaders and local officials.

Smith (2008) notes the evolving challenges for schools of public affairs, "especially in the design of a curriculum appropriate to the new mixed world of public and private services" (p. 116). Major shifts in public service have created challenges for MPA curriculum, Smith points out, concluding that MPA programs need to make key changes to their curriculum that reflect the changing world. Such changes include (a) restructuring the core curriculum; (b) broadening elective offerings; (c) developing new case materials; (d) offering more concurrent or joint programs; and (e) expanding executive education (p. 122).

Besides addressing the challenges of integrating service learning into public service programs, schools of public affairs and policy have sought to teach undergraduates the skill and values needed to generate long-lasting social change. Nickels, Rowland, and Fadase . (2011) provide a pedagogical framework for public administration faculty in educating and developing undergraduate students to be effective agents of social change. They underscore the integration of intellectual content and identity development, offering the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM) within public administration programs. As Nickels and colleagues point out, the SCM seeks "to enhance student learning and facilitate positive social change" by promoting service and activism (p. 46). As they further note, applying SCM to public administration education furthers the call for public servants to recognize the importance of social equity and social justice. Through self-awareness, group/community-building projects, and engaged activism, the public administration curriculum can set the foundation for graduating "leaders who effect social change through transformative service" (p. 51).

The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) provided an initial guideline report in 1976 for baccalaureate degree programs in public affairs/public administration, followed by revised and updated guidelines two decades later (NASPAA, 1997). The guidelines are intended for professionally oriented undergraduate programs whose objective is "the education and training of persons for positions in the public service, with special emphasis on administrative and managerial functions" (p. 2). The guidelines further underscore the focus "upon the process and substance of public policy" and call for public administration programs to provide a "strong component of analytical and management skills relevant to the field of public management" (p. 2).

## METHODS

A review of existing programs in the United States that offer an undergraduate degree in public “service” was conducted. Data collected on these schools were summarized and are presented in the next section. The methods for collecting this information began with identifying schools that could be considered as offering a degree in public service whereby service is a primary or core value of the program. As discussed earlier, public service can differ from other public administration core values of management, leadership, and policy process. Identifying schools began with the name and type of degree offered. Any school that listed public service as part of a bachelor’s degree was sought. We used the following approach to determine whether a program could be considered a public service program with service as a core value.

A review of two recent and popular college guidebooks produced no results, because public service is still not an indexed major or degree among these books. Next we reviewed the Global MPA (2011a) list of undergraduate programs that offer a degree in public affairs, specifically those associated with administration or policy. The Global MPA Web portal was created and is maintained by NASPAA. This resource is designed to provide objective and comprehensive information for potential international students seeking an MPA/MPP degree (Global MPA, 2011b). The list includes just over 60 schools that offer an undergraduate degree in the area of public affairs. We used the list as a starting point for possible schools that offer an undergraduate degree in public service.

We also conducted an Internet Web search, which produced the most results. The Web search used various combinations of keywords focused on undergraduate education and service. We organized the list of possible programs. When no information was found via the website or college catalogues, we conducted follow-up communications with the programs. Communications were done via telephone, e-mail, and in person when possible. In general, because public service programs are relatively new to academia and no central resources are yet established, we encountered limitations to conducting a systematic review.

## FINDINGS

In all, we found 15 institutions that included the name “public service” in their undergraduate degree program. Of these 15 schools, four programs were identified as offering a degree in public service for undergraduate students based on the working definition of this research (Table 1). The remaining 11 programs did not necessarily exclude community or service from their curricula, but they prioritized the educational values of management or policy over service. A review of their program missions, confirmed by assessing their program curricula, underscored their priority to educate students in management skills and policy processes. These 11 programs are included in Table 2 for reference and comparison of the distinct difference among programs identified as public “service.”

Table 1.  
Public Service Undergraduate Programs—Community and Service Focus

School Name	Degree Type	About the Program
Florida State University	Bachelor in Social Science with a Public Service Concentration	The Social Science Interdisciplinary program provides an opportunity for students to acquire a broad background for <i>understanding public affairs and social problems with emphasis on public service</i> . The program is not designed to give specific occupational training but rather to supply the <i>generalist background</i> that is, nevertheless, attractive to many employers, particularly in agency work at state and local government levels.
Providence College	Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Public and Community Service	Consistent with the mission of Providence College and the Feinstein Institute, the major in public and community service studies involves a systematic and rigorous study of the major conceptual themes of <i>community, service, compassion, public ethics, social justice and social change, and leadership</i> . The principal goal of the major is to provide students the tools with which to become fluent in these conceptual themes in both their academic and practical dimensions: Students will learn community building and sustaining skills as well as community action research skills, and they will become fluent with models of leadership.
Rutgers University–Newark	Bachelor in Public Service	This program is an interdisciplinary degree designed to bring students to a deeper understanding of their roles as public servants. It is not an undergraduate degree in public administration or public management. Rather, the curriculum is rooted in the concepts of <i>civic engagement</i> and the common good. It will help foster an understanding of the <i>spirit of service</i> already evident among many students, and it suggests a broad array of career and voluntary pathways to public service.
University of Massachusetts Boston	Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Human Service	The College of Public and Community Service provides an empowering and effective education to people who are committed to working for <i>social justice</i> , and who want to promote positive development in their communities. The Human service major provides essential knowledge and skills required for the effective delivery of human services with a priority on direct service practice. The curriculum focuses on the <i>needs of communities</i> , the workforce, and the human services profession.

Table 2.

*Public Service Undergraduate Programs—Management and Policy Focus*

School Name	Degree Type	Public Service Programs With Management and Policy Focus
Arizona State University	Bachelor of Arts with a Concentration in Public Service and Public Policy	The Bachelor of Science in Public Service and Public Policy (PSPP) prepares students for work in government at all levels and nonprofit organizations through comprehensive coverage of topics in <i>public policy, public leadership, and management and urban studies</i> . Students discover the challenges of management and learn how to lead a public organization and understand the process of policy development.
Hamline University	Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Public Service	Hamline’s political science major is grouped into two programs: the standard major and public service major. A major oriented toward public service is designed for students who wish to prepare for careers in <i>public administration or management</i> ; government service at various levels; or city, urban, and regional planning. The public service major prepares the student for respected graduate programs of public administration, planning, or policy analysis.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania	Bachelor of Arts in Government and Public Service	The Bachelor of Arts degree in Government and Public Service opens for you employment opportunities in federal, state, and local governments and with private civic groups, interest groups, and political groups. You’ll take a selection of required courses in your major. Among them are Public Finance, <i>American Politics, Issues in Public Administration, Public Policy</i> , and Political Sociology.
Indiana University Southeast	Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a Public Service Concentration	The goals of the program are to foster in our students an <i>appreciation of government and politics</i> and to prepare them to assume the duties of citizenship; to provide special knowledge and skills useful to those who plan to pursue public service; and to lay the foundations for the scholarly study of government, politics, and the law for those who plan to pursue graduate study or a legal education.
Macon State College	Bachelor of Science in Public Service	The Public Service degree in Human Services prepares students for entry into a variety of public and private sector situations. The degree is excellent preparation for students interested in pursuing graduate-level study, law school, and other professional endeavors. The fields of <i>law, health, and business</i> provide opportunities for other entry-level human services positions for which the degree is appropriate training.

Table 2.

Public Service Undergraduate Programs—Management and Policy Focus (continued)

School Name	Degree Type	Public Service Programs With Management and Policy Focus
Ohio State University	Bachelor of Arts in Public Affairs	At the John Glenn School of Public Affairs, the Bachelor of Arts in Public Affairs undergraduate program will provide you with the knowledge, skills, and values required for public service. The degree is built on a liberal arts foundation with a professional orientation in public affairs—the interconnection between applied <i>public policy and the management of the organizations</i> and networks that tackle public problems.
Southern New Hampshire University	Bachelor of Arts in Public Service	Southern New Hampshire University offers a Bachelor of Arts in public service for criminal justice graduates and law enforcement officers seeking to advance their careers. Concentration options include <i>accounting, business, communication, leadership, political science, psychology, and education</i> .
University of California Davis	Major in Political Science and Public Service	Political science majors develop research, analytic, and communication skills relevant to many professional fields. Major in Political Science: Public Service, your curriculum will help you focus specifically on how <i>policy is formulated, implemented, evaluated, and interpreted</i> . Or focus on a specific area of policy, such as urban or environmental policy.
University of California Santa Barbara	Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with Public Service Emphasis	The coursework in the public service emphasis focuses on the fields of <i>politics and public administration</i> and includes work in sociology and economics. Students in this emphasis are required to serve a one-quarter, full-time internship in a governmental or political office during their senior year.
University of Houston Clear Lake	Bachelor of Science in Public Service Leadership	This program provides knowledge and skills in <i>management, strategic planning, conflict resolution, organizational communication, and other leadership skills</i> . The program can point the way to many careers, but they all have something in common: leadership opportunities in a changing world.
University of Pittsburgh	Bachelor of Arts in Public Service	The major is designed to prepare students for a broad range of careers that are focused on the <i>resolution of public problems or the delivery</i> of public services. The major serves students who are interested in public issues as concerned and interested citizens and prepares students for a wide range of graduate programs related to public policy and management.

A review of the language used by the programs at Florida State, Providence College, Rutgers University Newark, and University of Massachusetts Boston are quite distinct. The four programs also vary in the type of degree offered. Florida State's program is a Bachelor in Social Science with a Public Service Concentration, and Providence College offers a Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Public and Community Service. Rutgers University–Newark offers a Bachelor in Public Service. Finally, University of Massachusetts Boston has a College of Public and Community Services with various degrees, notably a Bachelor in Human Service.

Florida State reports that their program “provides an opportunity for students to acquire a broad background for *understanding public affairs and social problems with emphasis on public service*. The program is not designed to give specific occupational training but rather to supply the *generalist background* [emphasis added]” (Florida State University, 2011). Although Florida State notes that its program offers a generalist background, the program aims to provide an understanding of social problems emphasizing service. Similarly, Providence College provides “a systematic and rigorous study of the major conceptual themes of *community, service, compassion, public ethics, social justice and social change, and leadership* [emphasis added]” (Providence College, 2011). Rutgers University–Newark specifically notes that its program “curriculum is rooted in the concepts of *civic engagement* and the common good, and will help foster an understanding of the *spirit of service* already evident among many students, and suggests a broad array of career and voluntary pathways to public service [emphasis added]” (Rutgers University—Newark, 2011). Finally, the University of Massachusetts Boston's College of Public and Community Service provides an empowering and effective education to people who are committed to working for social justice, and who want to “promote positive development in their communities” (University of Massachusetts Boston, 2012a).

## PROGRAM OVERVIEWS

### Florida State University

Of the four programs, Florida State University's degree in public service is the only one that represents a concentration, rather than a major or bachelor degree. The concentration was part of a larger degree in social sciences that dates back to the 1960s. Because the program is a component of a large degree, specific data on concentrations were not available. Although internships are available for students in the degree program, it is not a specific requirement of the concentration. Furthermore, students are able to participate in public service projects coordinated by the university but not necessarily sponsored by the concentration program.

### Providence College

The Department of Public and Community Service at Providence College offers a major and minor covering the central theme and issues in “democratic

community, service, and social justice.” Courses in their program require students to participate in 2–4 hours of community service per week. The department is housed within the Feinstein Institute for Public Service, which was established in 1993. The Institute was developed with the intent to establish an “innovative academic program that would educate community leaders by integrating community service with academic study.” The Institute provides numerous means for community-student collaborations. The Institute offers reflection-based seminars and professional development opportunities for community leaders, students, and alumni. Community partner leaders are also invited to co-teach courses. The Institute also provides resources to meet community partner needs in the form of student/faculty research and consultations. Finally, they “manage a 1,500 square-foot storefront in the local neighborhood used as a ‘free space’ by Providence College and neighborhood residents for meetings, programs, events and gatherings that build leadership capacity and strengthen community” (Feinstein Institute, 2012).

#### **Rutgers University–Newark**

The most recently established of the four programs is Rutgers University–Newark, which offered its first courses in the fall of 2008. The undergraduate bachelor’s degree is offered by the School of Public Affairs and Administration. With the most recent graduation in May 2012, the program graduated 12 students, and their numbers increased in future classes. Currently, 100 students are enrolled in the undergraduate degree program. The program’s curriculum aims to engage the entire community, helping students understand their environment and recognize the contributions they can make (AAC&U, 2012). The program places significant importance on internships and requires students to complete two 4-credit internships. The internships total 300 hours to go along with a seminar course associated with the internship. In addition, the school hosts an annual public service week that includes a community engagement event. Students and community organizations have opportunity to meet, network, and discuss issues, ultimately creating new volunteer and internship opportunities for students.

#### **University of Massachusetts, Boston**

The program offered by the University of Massachusetts (UMASS)–Boston is a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services through the College of Public and Community Service. The College was founded in 1972 and notes that work beyond the classroom includes “service learning; internships; project-based learning; civic engaged research; learning in college/university-community partnerships; and other creative learning options” (UMASS, 2012b). It also offers a Community Studies major, which is in transition. The school started offering the major in 2006 as a completion-only program. This means that only students with 90 or more credits are allowed to enroll in the major. Due to lack of demand, the major was closed in 2010. The last students to complete a degree in community studies graduated in June 2012. Understanding the importance of

offering their students opportunities to pursue careers in public service, the School of Community Studies restored and reestablished the major, which was set to begin in September 2012. The new major aims to require students to engage in community service projects.

### **THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE EDUCATION**

Based on the analysis of the four public service programs, we conclude that all of the programs have a diverse approach to teaching public service and the type of degree offered. However, these programs have one thing in common: All of them require students to engage in community service projects in the local community. This evidence suggests that a central focus of public service programs is engaging the local community. Moreover, some general themes arise in reviewing program curriculums. Notably, the curriculum areas include topics such as citizenship and service, ethical public service, global and environmental, government and the nonprofit sector, leadership, and cultural diversity.

We also concluded that an area for future research could be to evaluate the impact and success of students in the public service field with a public service degree. Do these programs prepare students adequately for employment in public service occupations? As Behn (1995) succinctly laid out in his analysis of public administration education, for students to succeed in the public sector, they must receive training in the core concepts of public administration. That would include public policy analysis, management of public organizations, and management of diverse workplaces. It could be concluded that an appreciation and knowledge in the areas of service combined with training in classical public administration and public policy concepts could do a great deal to prepare student for employment in public organizations. As we have noted, programs may focus on public service as their core mission and key principle for education, but this does not mean they exclude other areas of public service education such as management and policy. Likewise, programs that focus on the latter areas did not exclude an appreciation for community and service. Therefore, additional research can look at the success path of students from undergraduate public service programs as compared to traditional public administration programs.

Although these programs are not undergraduate public administration programs per se, integrating these concepts into public service programs would go a long way toward helping to prepare students for productive careers in public service. Engaging the local community is an important step for students to understand how their work affects communities. However, an absence of training in core public administration and public policy skill will hurt students' ability to effectively apply the core element of public service to their future careers.

In conclusion, the research presented here highlights the existence of distinct programmatic goals and objectives for undergraduate degrees in public service. As noted, public service education has been an area of research, specifically at the

graduate level. But at the undergraduate level, programs have focused primarily on public administration and public policy education that focuses on the policy process and management of public organizations. These programs are limited in number, but should more institutions choose to approach majors or minors in their undergraduate programs, they can learn from these existing programs. This research survey of public service programs can benefit faculty and administrators considering similar programs. First, this study recognizes that there are existing and successful public service programs. Although some are new, two programs have existed for over three decades. Second, faculty and administrators can reach out to these programs for further discussion on the curriculum and design of programs. Each of the four schools outlined here provides a distinct approach to a public service education, and schools can reach out to those most reflective of their efforts and intentions. Third, programs can institute internships for undergraduates that call upon service-oriented research and work that are both rewarding and educational. Although many schools have undergraduate internship requirements, these four schools have found a way to integrate multiple internships into the curriculum while underscoring the value of service. Finally, our research indicates that only a few undergraduate programs of public service currently exist. This means plenty more opportunities are yet to be established for undergraduate students throughout the country. Faculty and administrators can work toward establishing what may be the first program of its kind in their respective states or regions.

We have presented an introductory review of current practices and goals of programs that underscore service and community in their curriculum. Although only a limited number of these programs now exist, as a greater appreciation of service education develops, we can look forward to future courses and programs across the country—programs reflecting an education that emphasizes the value of service.

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Tony Carrizales, PhD is an associate professor of public administration at Marist College School of Management. His research interests include e-government and diversity in the public sector. Dr. Carrizales is the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*. Dr. Carrizales received his PhD from Rutgers University–Newark and MPA and BA degrees from Cornell University.

Lamar Vernon Bennett, PhD is an assistant professor of public administration at Long Island University–Brooklyn School of Business, Public Administration and Information Sciences. His research interests are e-government, public governance, and citizen participation and engagement. Dr. Bennett received his PhD from American University and MPA and BA degrees from Rutgers University–Newark.