PUBA Professor Pratt Attends National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) Conference in Seattle, USA

Date: October 2007

PUBA is a member of NASPAA and Dick Pratt attended the annual conference in Seattle in early October. Most of those attending are the chairs, directors and deans of graduate programs in public service. Topics focus on issues facing the field of public service education, and include curriculum, the quality of research in the field, accreditation standards and the future of public service.

A couple of sessions were of special interest to Dick. The first was a presentation by Rosemary O’Leary from Syracuse University about her book THE ETHICS OF DISSENT. The research looks at what she refers to as “guerilla government” – career public servants who act against the implicit or explicit wishes of their superiors. She is interested in the extent to which these acts occur, the reasons that individuals decide to go guerilla, and how they do it. Reasons include an over-riding sense that a public interest is being violated or the belief that the spirit of a policy is being undermined. The worthwhile point of the book is to shed light on a common dilemma for people in public service: how to balance respect for their organization’s authority structure with their commitment to doing what is in the public interest.

Another session of special interest organized a dialogue about the arena that is variously called “indirect government, cross sector collaborations, third party government and issue networks.” The panelists focused on what we know about how the networks operate, what education and training will help them to be public-regarding, and what challenges these networks present for how we think about public organizations. This is all still quite new and, as one panelist from the Humphrey School put it, “quite a mess.”