Historical Thinking as a Skill in Public Affairs Graduate Education

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ABSTRACT

This article suggests how historical thinking, as a skill, might be integrated into MPA, MPP, and similar programs. I compare three modes of historical thinking—as a warehouse of analogues, a set of historical institutionalist models of stability and change, and as a "stream"—in terms of the likelihood that they provide useful skills for MPA/MPP graduates. I conclude that historical institutionalist models possess the greatest potential for skill building. Historical analogizing, though obviously a useful skill, is likely to be less portable than historical institutionalist models, and less useful as a tool for navigating the fragmented organizational terrain of the new governance. I argue as well that the potential of "thinking in time streams" is not as a skill, but rather as an ideal point against which skill at applying historical institutionalist models, and historical analogizing, might be judged.

> … it came as a revelation to me that history could be more than a chronicle of past events—that it could be a tool of analysis and criticism.
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> —Richard M. Nixon (1978, p. 15)

It is in some sense simply a truism that history is an important component of an education, including one in public affairs. As Dwight Waldo (1956, pp. 50–51) put it, "That we learn from the *past* strikes me as axiomatic; the human enterprise does not begin afresh at every sunrise with learning how to unbutton our pajamas [emphasis in original]." And yet, as Waldo says:

> The discipline we know as public administration was born of the conviction that historical as well as legal studies of government are narrow, bookish, and sterile…There were very real and pressing problems to be solved, actual on-going administration to be studied. Why try to reconstruct the Roman administrative system—it failed, didn't it? (pp. 51–52)

This bias against history was later reinforced as graduate programs moved from "administration" to "policy," and increasingly emphasized statistics, economics, and decision analysis—temporally static "skills" or "tools" that an "analyst" might apply to any situation.

My purpose in this article is to explore the extent to which historical thinking might be taught as a skill in public affairs graduate

education. More so than knowledge or enlightenment, skills sound like palpable things that MPA/MPP programs might provide students in exchange for tuition dollars. The Network of Schools of Public Policy and Administration (NASPAA), for instance, claims specifically that MPA programs teach "the skills and techniques used by managers to implement policies, projects, and programs" (NASPAA, 2013). Heinz College at Carnegie Mellon goes so far as to claim a comparative advantage in skill building in its Master of Science in Public Policy and Management (MSPPM, its equivalent of an MPA/MPP), in explaining that "While most public policy graduate programs focus on theory, we offer a skills-based curriculum." Yet Heinz provides no further elaboration of what is meant by a skill, and the MSPPM core curriculum looks similar to other MPA/MPP programs, with courses on economics and finance, statistics, management, and political science (Carnegie Mellon University, 2013). An examination of the websites of the other top-10 MPA/MPP programs reveals no program that promotes a focus on theory, especially at the expense of skill building.

In the context of MPA/MPP programs, *skill* is often vaguely defined, or used interchangeably with *technique*, *tool*, *competency*, *capacity*, or *knowledge*, as in the case of the Maxwell School, which describes the goals of its MPA core curriculum in terms of "skills/knowledge" (Syracuse University, 2013). Thus my first task in this article is to define what is meant by *skill* (or what I treat here as its synonym, *expertise*), and the role that skill building has played in public affairs education. I make five main points: (a) that expertise is a combination of automaticity and knowledge; (b) that the distinction between automaticity and knowledge is at least roughly reflected in the early debate within public administration, between a specialist or generalist orientation; (c) that the collective decision to emphasize the generalist over the specialist orientation raised relatively deep problems regarding what should be taught in MPA programs and how the politics-administration dichotomy could be preserved;

(d) that the advent of the "policy analysis" orientation in the 1960s resolved the dilemma over what to teach in MPA/MPP programs by replacing the generalist orientation with specialized skills, though ones that had general applicability; and (e) that the rise of "third sector" and networked governance replaced any lasting concerns about the politics-administration dichotomy with concerns for building skills that adhered more to individuals rather than organizations (i.e., "portable" skills) and that helped individuals navigate within a fragmented organizational environment.

In the second section of this paper, I identify three modes of historical thinking: (a) the past as a warehouse of potential analogues, (b) a historical institutionalist focus on relatively simple models of stability and change, and (c) "thinking in time streams" (Neustadt & May, 1986). Other modes of historical thinking that I do not examine here, such as counterfactual analysis (MacKay, 2007) or reiterated problem solving (Haydu, 1998; see also, more generally, Howlett & Raynor, 2006), may have even more relevance to public affairs. In later research, their eligibility for inclusion in MPA/MPP training and curricula might be tested in much the same way as I test my three modes of thinking here. This article represents only a first step in exploring the potential for historical thinking to be taught as a skill in public affairs graduate education, and thus my conclusion, that historical institutionalist thinking holds the greatest promise as a skill in comparison to the other two modes of historical thinking I examine, is only tentative. Other modes of historical thinking that I do not examine here might hold even greater promise as a skill to be taught in MPA/MPP programs, and this article hopefully provides a tool by which that potential might be recognized.

The purpose of creating criteria to identify the potential for historical thinking to be taught as a skill is, first, to provide a new tool by which instructors who teach in MPA/MPP programs can better explain the relevance of historical studies to their students' professional goals. As the other essays in this symposium suggest,

historians who teach in MPA/MPP programs, and even social scientists who are not particularly historically oriented but who want to make use of valuable but older research, often grapple with this task. The second purpose of thinking about historical thinking in terms of skill building is simply to increase the potential skills available to MPA/MPP students; the third purpose is to provide a new link between teaching and historically oriented research in public policy and administration. While it may be true that "the policy literature has taken a definite historical turn, with the stochastic models favored . . . in the early years of the policy sciences largely falling by the wayside" (Howlett & Raynor, 2006, p. 13), the available evidence suggests that stochastic modeling is still the dominant methodological orientation in MPA/MPP curricula (Morçöl & Ivanova, 2010) and thus the "historical turn" has not yet made its way down to the level of the classroom. Providing the means by which historical thinking might be understood as a skill might produce a link between historically oriented policy research and teaching.

This article focuses not on history in the sense of what has happened in the past, but rather on how to think about the relevance of past events to contemporary or future events—or, in the words of Neustadt and May (1986), how to "think in time." Some modes of historical thinking are relatively atemporal in the sense that the sequence, timing, and context of past events are not considered important—indeed, Paul Pierson (2004, p. 1) has claimed that most contemporary social scientists work with models in which "'variables'… are ripped from their temporal context"—but in other modes of historical thinking, time is a key component. The three modes of historical thinking examined in this article form a continuum in terms of the extent to which time is a core component in each mode. Thinking of history as a warehouse of analogues is relatively atemporal, because the analogues are typically taken out of their historical context and compared directly to a contemporary event. Historical institutionalist thinking takes time more seriously in the sense that its goal is to

explain how and why history unfolded the way it did, and thus how events might unfold in the future, yet it is atemporal in the sense that it is relatively reductionist, relying on simple (or "parsimonious") explanations of the passage of time (e.g., path dependence, critical junctures, or punctuated equilibrium) that can be applied to myriad events.

A more inherently temporal approach than the historical institutionalist thinking employed by social scientists is the non-reductionist approach more typical of historians. At its most extreme, this method would conceive of every event as a product of its specific moment in time, and thus incomparably unique. In this mode of thinking, past events and decisions by themselves are not useful guides for contemporary decision makers, because every significant decision and event is unique, yet the historical unfolding of these decisions and events might itself serve as a guide. Although decisions and events that define major changes might be understood as the means by which we can discern the passage of time, time might also be understood as an independent force that moves forward of its own volition—or, as Neustadt and May (1986) call it, a stream—opening up new spaces for new events to occur. In this latter way of thinking, the ability to use history as a guide for policy making thus does not depend on knowledge of past events so much as it depends on understanding of the movement of time itself.

This version of non-reductionist historical thinking is admittedly a caricature (and one that few historians are likely to prescribe). Yet it is useful for my purposes because it defines one end of the continuum, with a similarly extreme version of historical analogizing at the other end, in which cases are studied without any consideration for their historical context (which, as Pierson suggests, is a mode of thinking that many social scientists actually do prescribe). Neustadt and May (1986, ch. 14) do in fact offer a relatively extreme view of non-reductionist historical thinking, which usefully reveals that, unlike the collection of facts about past events and decisions that defines the

conscious accumulation of historical knowledge, thinking of time as a stream is a potential means of developing a mode of historical thinking that is both more thoroughly temporal and also more automatic and reflexive than either historical analogizing or historical institutionalist thinking. I argue that thinking in time streams is also ultimately an unrealizable ideal, more akin to at least some depictions of thinking in four dimensions. Though unrealistic as a skill, thinking in time streams might serve as an ideal benchmark for comparison of more practicable modes of historical thinking.

Converting the major themes I had previously identified in the history of skill building in MPA/MPP programs into criteria by which my different modes of historical thinking might be evaluated as skills, I question the extent to which each different mode of thinking (a) can be learned and deployed as either an "automated subroutine" (Rasmussen, 1983) or as conscious knowledge; (b) can be considered as part of either a generalist or specialist orientation; (c) might provide skills that benefit to a greater or lesser degree either individuals, or the organizations for which those individuals work; (d) provides portable skills that individuals might carry across organizations; and (e) provides navigational skills that individuals might use in the context of the new governance. In the conclusion, I suggest that the most useful avenue for introducing history into MPA/MPP programs might be to conceive of history in historical institutionalist terms, as a series of events that can be identified and categorized by general models of stability and change.

SKILL BUILDING IN MPA AND MPP PROGRAMS

To become skilled or an expert in some domain requires the development of both automaticity and knowledge. Automaticity refers to the routines or functions learned through consistent and repeated performance that become second nature and that serve as the building blocks for learning more complex functions. Knowledge refers to the conscious mental map used to deploy the automatic routines toward some specific goal. As Jens Rasmussen (1983) has put it:

> Human activities can be considered as a sequence of…skilled acts or activities composed for the actual occasion. The flexibility of skilled performance is due to the ability to compose, from a large repertoire of automated subroutines, the sets suited for specific purposes.

The proper mix of automaticity and knowledge depends on the context in which expertise is developed and used. Someone with well-developed automated subroutines yet with little knowledge might be unable to respond successfully to new or changing environments, because they have not learned how to deploy their routines strategically or creatively (Hallam, 2010; see also Logan, 1985). Yet an emphasis on automated subroutines at the expense of knowledge might be appropriate in a specific organizational context. Indeed, such a skill set might describe the classic conception of the good civil servant, who, due to a relative lack of knowledge and an inflexibility engendered by technical training, was uniquely unsuited to the subtleties of the political sphere and whose training thus maintained a division between politics and administration. As Paul Appleby (1947) noted of career civil servants in the period immediately after World War II:

> They all feel themselves to be technicians in greater or less degree…They feel themselves politically unqualified, and often say, in leaving a political judgment to a political officer, "I don't know anything about politics."…The rigidity that in other connections is sometimes charged as a fault of civil servants in these connections surely is a great virtue. (p. 93)

Skills and expertise are typically not promoted within MPA/MPP programs, because they might actually disempower students by inculcating within them an intellectual rigidity and thus maintain the dubious dichotomy between politics and administration when those students become public servants. Indeed, Appleby was actually using the ostensibly apolitical nature of administrators as a foil to call on

universities and governments to train present and future public servants to be more politically aware, to turn away from the training of technocratic specialists, and to emphasize a generalist orientation. In doing so, he was joining what at the time was the winning side of the relatively long-standing debate, known by at least some as decisive balance (Golembiewski, 1965), over the importance of a generalist versus specialist orientation to public administration. Jump (1947) described this debate, specifically with regard to university training:

> Practitioners frequently observe, whether correctly or not, that graduates who enter the public service reflect an overexposure to the more theoretical or stratospheric aspects of public administration. Another complaint, in the opposite direction, is that, in an effort to escape that kind of overexposure and meet the supposed public service demand for people with "practical" training, some graduates show an overdose of the procedural aspects of administration, amounting in some instances to a dogmatic fixation on points that have to be unlearned or dislodged because they are inapplicable to the job in which the graduate finds himself. (p. 211)

By the 1950s, university programs in public administration had evidently moved away from the specialist orientation and more toward the generalist orientation and the teaching of "stratospheric aspects of public administration." As Fesler (1958) described the rationale for the generalist orientation:

> A bright higher administrator could master quickly the vocabulary and concepts of the specialized subject matter; and…he could readily draw on the specialized competence of his staff to compensate for his own deficiencies in the area. "The expert should be on tap, not on top" maximized the argument. (p. 370; see also Cohen, 1970)

From the standpoint of training future administrators in university public affairs programs, the generalist orientation posed at least two dilemmas. First, if "specialized subject knowledge" could be learned on the job, and might in any case doom a promising administrator to lower-level jobs, it was not worthy of graduate education in public affairs. Yet if public affairs education was to be devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, with little focus on technical training, what should be taught? Appleby's frustratingly vague answer to this question suggests the lack of a good response; acknowledging that "educational institutions clearly cannot turn out young graduates ready to serve or acceptable in top positions," he claimed:

> They can hope to turn out larger numbers of young people qualified in the course of years to go higher and to serve better at higher levels. They can hope also to contribute constantly to the widening of horizons, the raising of standards, the elevation of aim. (Appleby, 1947, p. 97)

A quarter-century later, one survey of MPA curricula concluded:

> We…produce a relatively diffuse collection of individuals who have demonstrated an interest in something abstract called "public administration," some of whom have apparently had in-depth exposure to multiple administrative tools and concepts, some with cursory exposure to multiple administrative tools and concepts, and some with a potpourri of neither. (Medeiros, 1974, p. 255)

The focus on knowledge rather than technical training also opened the field up to the criticism that it was "preoccupied with institutional description rather than analysis" (Elmore, 1986, p. 70) and that it was simply promoting an elitist amateurism reminiscent of the British civil service (Presthus, 1964).

This first dilemma was resolved, in part, starting in the 1960s, by turning generalist

knowledge itself into a technical field through the advent of "systems techniques" (Hoos, 1973) that defined the new programs in public policy and that included a greater emphasis on economics, statistics, and decision analysis tools such as linear programming and game theory. Where the generalist orientation had relied on broad knowledge as the primary skill in making executive decisions and responding creatively to problems, systems techniques recast the decision to be made or problem to be solved as a quantifiable model from which a concrete answer could be derived. As Wildavsky (1985, p. 28) put it, "The capacity to build big models implied the ability to understand large national problems by measuring (and then minimizing) the loss of economic efficiency among the various alternatives to existing policy that were considered."

The new focus on "analysis" to some extent simply repackaged the decisive balance debate, because systems techniques were criticized as being too rigid, and as requiring too simplistic assumptions, to really handle the kind of large and complex decisions that confronted government executives (see, e.g., Dror, 1967; Hearle, 1961). Yet if the new systems techniques repackaged the specialist orientation, they did so in a way that allowed the specialist orientation to predominate over the older generalist orientation. Although the older version of the specialist orientation had been defined by a modesty of ambitions and a narrowness of scope—Perkins and Sessions (1951) referred to specialists in the federal bureaucracy as polyps—systems techniques, as Hoos (1973) and others have pointed out, possessed a kind of hubris in believing that large and ultimately value-laden problems were solvable through technical expertise. With the new specialists on top rather than on tap, there was really no need for the generalist—or the generalist had at least been reformulated as someone with specialized skills that were generally applicable. Second, though the specialist orientation was tied to a bureaucratic model in which specialists were necessarily parts of large organizations (much like polyps adhere to coral reefs), systems

techniques were portable; skills or tools possessed by analysts that could be deployed in different contexts. As Hoos (1973, p. 158) pointed out, the main attraction of these new techniques was "their ubiquity, the ready-mix feature that renders them instantly applicable to almost any problem, especially if it is big and complicated."

A second dilemma inherent in the generalist orientation of the 1940s and 1950s was whether graduate programs in public administration were designed to provide government with able administrators, and thus improve the performance of government, or to provide better jobs for students—two objectives made incompatible by the combination of the generalist orientation and the politics-administration dichotomy. As suggested by Appleby (1947), the disempowering impact of technical, specialized training was good for government because it maintained the politics-administration dichotomy. The benefit to students in graduate programs in public affairs, however, of being taught techniques of their own disempowerment so that they might have dead-end careers in government, seems somewhat questionable, as suggested by the focus on the generalist orientation, and in numerous later declarations that MPA/MPP programs needed to start teaching "leadership" (Revell, 2008; Ventriss, 1991, pp. 7–8; Wildavsky, 1985, p. 33). Yet before the full-scale assault on the legitimacy or practicability of the politics-administration dichotomy (which, as many authors have noted, has largely survived the assault), to teach anything but the disempowering techniques of administration would be to teach people how to be political administrators. It seems that the oxymoronic pursuit of an apolitical but generalist orientation in public affairs education was achieved by simply assuming away the problem and imagining that administration, by definition, was apolitical (see Sayre, 1958, p. 102).

The rise of the third sector and networked governance resolved the dilemma over whether the government or students were to be the primary beneficiaries of public affairs education.

It moved the focus away from the skills required to work for a single employer (the federal government) to those required to compete in a marketplace of potential employers, including governments, quasi-governments, public-private partnerships, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In this new context of smaller employers with fewer resources, and employees who might move to new organizations more frequently, on-the-job specialized training was replaced by the need for employees with portable skills that might be useful across multiple contexts, learned to the point of becoming automatic so that they defined the individual apart from any specific organization. At the same time, generalist knowledge also became more important: People looking to work in the public sector had to navigate a more complex network of potential employers, and, once employed, they needed a working knowledge of the external organizations with whom their employer interacted (see Cohen, 1970, for an early discussion of the generalist orientation and portable skills). What might thus be considered problematic political knowledge in the context of a single dominant government became an important and valuable navigational skill in the context of numerous organizations participating in a system of shared governance.

Relatively recent evidence supplied by Morçöl and Ivanova (2010) suggests that, of the techniques most closely related to automaticity and thus the development of portable skills, those taught in public affairs programs (at least in the MPP and related programs they surveyed) that were also most relevant to potential employment (in the sense that an earlier survey found that they were also commonly used by "policy professionals") were courses on quantitative research methods, and more specifically "Surveys, regression analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and (quasi-) experiments." The authors also found that quantitative methods courses were far more prevalent than qualitative research methods, despite claims of a recent trend toward more qualitative methods in policy analysis (pp. 269–270). These findings are likely true for MPA programs as well, given

Hur and Hackbart's (2009) findings that there is no longer much of a meaningful curricular difference between MPA and MPP programs (see also Infeld & Adams, 2011).

Rather than displacing quantitative methods, which provide students with readily apparent, demonstrable, and portable skills, there is some evidence that more qualitative, knowledge-based skill building has taken the form of courses in MPP/MPA programs that deal specifically with interpersonal, interorganizational, and interdisciplinary communication, including calls for a greater emphasis on teaching emotional intelligence and labor (Jaeger, 2004; Mastracci, Newman, & Guy, 2010) and cultural competence (Carrizales, 2010; White, 2004). Newander and Newander (2012) have also made a sophisticated argument in defense of interdisciplinarity in public affairs education—something that has often been used to criticize MPA/MPP programs as simply grab-bags of courses from other programs (Honey, 1967)—as helping to build cognitive flexibility as an important skill when dealing in the fragmented system of the new governance.

At least for the purposes of this article, a place for historical thinking is evidently missing from both past and present formulations of the recommended proportions of automaticity and knowledge in the process of skill building in public affairs education. The purpose of the following section is thus to suggest how training in historical thinking might be inserted into this tradition of skill building, and thus how historical thinking might be understood as a skill.

HISTORICAL THINKING AS A SKILL

Especially during the first decades of its formal organization as an academic discipline, public administration was in at least one sense historically oriented, though not consciously so. In one of the few early systematic attempts at understanding the role of history in the field, Harvey Mansfield (1951, p. 52) pointed out that scholars "fall back of necessity mainly on interviews and observation, on records left and compiled by others for other purposes—on the data of history, that is—and try to make what

sense of them we can." Derived as it was from nonexperimental situations, it was difficult to discern from this historical data the key causal relationships that might be helpful in understanding future situations. As Mansfield described the problem:

> The repetitions in history are…only recognizable similarities, seldom more, in situations challenging human action or decision, and in human responses to situations. From one event to the next, details in the environment change, personalities change, and the relative strengths of similar forces change. Any one of these may be the decisive factor; enough of them cumulatively will destroy the probability of any prediction; only the most general lessons are likely to survive transfer across extended intervals of time or space. So we are always left wondering in some degree whether it is the similarity or the variation we observe that is most significant. (p. 52)

History, though a necessary element in doing research, was thus not a subject of interest for public administration, but simply a vexation; the past served as a reservoir of experimental situations that were flawed by their lack of controls, so that "decisive factors" could not be isolated. The greater the extent to which contemporary events simply repeated past events in all respects, the more history could serve as a useful guide. Thus, for Mansfield, "The trouble with history as a teacher of administration is, of course, that events do not repeat themselves exactly" (p. 52).

Mansfield's conception of history, at least as it extended to public administration, was thus of a warehouse of potential analogues to which current situations could be compared. As Neustadt and May (1986, see esp. ch. 4) later noted, in one of the most extensive studies of how history is and should be used in policy making, historical analogizing was common among federal officials faced with the need to make quick decisions over high-stakes issues—

and historical analogies quickly drawn were a major cause of bad decision making. As an antidote to the unreflective deployment of historical analogues, Neustadt and May counseled a careful accounting of the "likenesses" and "differences" between the past and current events that were being compared.

Neustadt and May's discussion of analogues provides an opportunity to discern notions of historical analysis as an automated subroutine and as consciously applied knowledge in the process of policy making. Historical analogues are dangerous specifically because they are often deployed automatically with little reflection: They might have seemed obvious or at least compelling, they could have come from the officials' personal experience, or they were such a ubiquitous part of officials' collective understanding, or part of "folk history" (p. 49), that it wasn't even obvious an analogue was being used (see generally chs. 3–5). Automatic analogizing was not a skill, but rather a bad habit. The appropriate skill that could be automated was to recognize when an analogy was being drawn and to have that recognition trigger a conscious search for likenesses and differences between the current situation and the past event. The actual, conscious accounting of likenesses and differences would require specific historical knowledge about the past event that was being used as an analogue.

As a skill, then, historical analogizing consists of one automated response (the decision, triggered by an analogue, to account for likenesses and differences), and conscious knowledge of the past and present situations being compared. Relying as it does primarily on specific historical knowledge, analogizing thus seems more of a specialized rather than a generalized skill. Given the depth of knowledge necessary to make meaningful comparisons across two events, the ability to analogize as an expert would also most likely be limited to a relatively narrow field of subjects and thus would make this skill relatively non-portable and not very useful for navigating a fragmented organizational environment. One example of an expert analogizer is the in-house historian,

whose expertise is relatively inapplicable outside the agency for which the historian works and whose position is typically of low status or even seen as a form of internal exile (Neustadt & May, 1986, p. 242).

One unique characteristic of historical analogizing as a skill is that it is most likely more useful to the extent that it is less historical. As Mansfield noted, the further back in time one looks to find a past event that is comparable to a current event, the greater the risk of misinterpreting the past event. This is so because the contextual factors that help explain what happened in the past will be both more different from current contextual factors and more obscure. Historical analogizing is thus only circumstantially historical, in the sense that some event already must have occurred, and some time must pass before that event can be understood well enough for it to meaningfully inform decision making in the present.

A more inherently historical conception of history is one in which past and present events are not directly compared to one another, but are instead compared to, and categorized by, general models of temporal stability and change. Most of these models are drawn from historical institutionalist studies in economics, political science, and sociology, such as path dependence (Howlett & Raynor, 2006, pp. 4–6; Pierson, 2004), critical junctures (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007), punctuated equilibria (a model borrowed from evolutionary biology; see Howlett & Raynor, 2006; see also Gersick, 1991), incrementalism (Bendor, 1995; Lindblom, 1959, 1979), displacement, layering, drift, and conversion (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). All of these models conceive of time passing through various types of changes (or absences of change) to institutional and organizational rule systems that thereby change individual-level expectations and strategies.

In contrast to historical analogizing, in which history represents a challenge to be overcome in order to identify the similarities between events that occurred at different points in time, historical institutionalist models of stability and change take the passage of time as their subject. Their goal is to accurately identify a specific organizational or institutional configuration as manifesting characteristics of a general type of stability and change, to thus infer how and why that configuration might change, or not change, in the future. As Jeffrey Haydu (1998, pp. 340–341) has said of path dependency—which highlights the difference between this approach and Mansfield's conception of historical analysis—it "treats the idiosyncrasies of each historical period as resources for, rather than impediments to, causal explanation." Although the only automated routine required in historical analogizing is the conditioned response to account for likenesses and differences, historical institutionalist analysis has the potential for greater automaticity, because an analyst could be conditioned such that different organizational or institutional configurations or idiosyncrasies could automatically trigger the application of any of a variety of models of stability or change.

Relying as it does on general models, and thus less on specific knowledge of historic events, historical institutionalist analysis can be applied to a greater variety of situations, making it a more generalist and portable skill, less dependent on any single organization, as well as one that might be more helpful than analogizing in navigating a fragmented organizational environment. Indeed, Orren and Skowronek (2004, pp. 108–118) have argued that the primary goal of historical institutionalist studies in American politics should be the analysis of organizational fragmentation, or "intercurrence." One trade-off, however, is that although a more conceptually elaborate historical analysis can be applied to more situations, the relative lack of specific knowledge about any given situation makes it more likely that the conceptual apparatus will be misapplied, because the event itself is not properly understood. Thus the challenge for historical institutionalist models, at least as applied to decision making in public affairs, is to build their robustness to make sure that they can be applied accurately on the basis of a few easily identifiable indicators.

A final form of historical analysis is, in the words of Neustadt and May (1986, ch. 14), "thinking in time streams," which consists of three components that combine historical institutionalism with a more automated version of historical analogizing. The first two components are (a) "recognition that the future has no place to come from but the past, hence the past has predictive value"; and (b) "recognition that what matters for the future in the present is departures from the past, alterations, changes, which prospectively or actually divert familiar flows from accustomed channels, thus affecting that predictive value and much else besides" (p. 251). Put together, these two components of historical thinking are relatively vague suggestions for trying to identify the causes of stability and change over time, which historical institutionalist analysis has attempted to specify in more concrete models.

The third component of thinking in time streams is an attempt to make analogizing an automated routine, by engaging in "continuous comparison, an almost constant oscillation from present to future to past and back, heedful of prospective change, concerned to expedite, limit, guide, counter, or accept it as the fruits of such comparison suggest" (p. 251). Although the mode of thinking of history as a warehouse of events to which analogies can be drawn requires conscious knowledge of the details of those events, in the mode of thinking defined by constant analogizing, "knowledge of historic specifics, cannot substitute for (even though it supplements) the kind of mental quality that readily connects discrete phenomena over time and repeatedly checks connections" (p. 252). The focus in this mode of thinking is thus not on past and present events themselves, but rather on time itself—or rather on the ability to think across time.

The ability to think across time also implies the ability to transcend time. Thus characterized, thinking in time streams resembles, at least in an ideal form, the four-dimensional thinking of Kurt Vonnegut's imaginary aliens, the Tralfamadorians, in *Slaughterhouse Five*, who can see that

> All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist… hey can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever. (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 27)

Similar to the Tralfamadorian view, the ability to automatically engage in constant (and presumably accurate) historical analogizing is also, in its ideal form at least, an attempt to transcend, and thus exist outside of, time. As Mansfield suggested, historical analogizing is a problem because the passage of time renders knowledge of past events and their contexts incomplete, and analogizing is thus constrained because it is subject to time. Reflexive analogizing suggests an ideal state in which the constraints of time are lifted and analogies can thus be perfectly drawn.

Similar to Tralfamadorian thinking as well, Neustadt and May even suggest that thinking in time streams might be "either in the genes or not, and if not, nothing can be done" (p. 263). They reject this suggestion, but suggest only weakly instead:

> The majority of humankind, ourselves included, learn to think in streams of time as we learn to think mathematically—if we do either or all—from teachers and books. It probably also follows that the learning comes through pieced-together stories about real people better than through abstract constructions from philosophy or social sciences, or even through invented characters in fiction (a close question). We are not confident that anyone who reads can gain proficiency, if what he reads is history, and what he does is govern, but we cannot think of any better way. (pp. 263–264)

If the relatively inscrutable nature of thinking in time streams renders it incapable of being systematically taught, it seems relatively inappropriate as a subject to be taught in MPA/MPP programs, because it would confer no identifiable skill (and listing Tralfamadorian thinking as a skill on a resume might not be well received). Rather than a skill, I would suggest that thinking in time streams be taken in its perfect, Tralfamadorian, form as an ideal against which the level of skill in historical thinking, through institutionalist models, analogizing, or some other conception of history, might be judged. Thus a goal for future research into the role of history in public affairs education would be to provide specific criteria that would qualify as perfect thinking in time streams, against which specific curricula and instruction might be judged.

CONCLUSION

This article has provided a brief historical overview of some of the ways in which both skills and expertise, and history, have been treated and discussed in public administration, public policy, and cognate academic fields. My goal has been to suggest how historical thinking might be integrated, specifically as a skill, into MPA, MPP, and similar programs. I compared three conceptions of history—as a warehouse of analogues, a set of historical institutionalist models of stability and change, and as a stream—in terms of the likelihood that they might serve as the basis for useful skill building in MPA/MPP programs. My conclusion is that historical institutionalist models possess the\ greatest promise for integrating historical skills in MPA/MPP programs. Historical analogizing, though obviously a useful skill, is in most instances more likely to be less portable than historical institutionalist models and less useful as a tool for navigating the fragmented organizational terrain of the new governance. Thinking in time streams is not obviously a skill that can be learned—and if it can be learned, it is not clear how it could be integrated into MPA/MPP curricula; its potential lies instead, I have suggested, in its possible role of defining an ideal point against which skill at

applying historical institutionalist models, and historical analogizing, might be judged.

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