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## CHAPTER 3

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# EMERGENCE OF SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC POLICY: REFLECTIONS BY A FOUNDING DEAN

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GRAHAM ALLISON

I AM grateful to have been the fifth in a succession of deans of Harvard University's Graduate School of Public Administration, housed in the Lucius N. Littauer Center of Public Administration building. But I am honored to have been designated as the "Founding Dean" of the modern John F. Kennedy School of Government in recognition of my role in leading the School in the period in which it emerged as a major institution. Formally, the School's name was changed in 1966 to honor President John F. Kennedy, a Harvard graduate in the class of 1940. But when I became dean in March 1977, the School had no buildings, fewer than a dozen full-time faculty, a student body of just 200 who took classes mostly from other faculties, no research centers, and no executive education programs.

At the 1977 meeting of Harvard's Overseers Visiting Committee to the School at which President of the University Derek Bok announced my appointment, I responded with remarks later published under the title "Seven initiatives for the John F. Kennedy School of Government." There I reminded the audience of British historian Lord Acton's image of a "remote and ideal objective" that captivates the imagination by its splendor and simplicity and thereby evokes an effort that cannot be commanded by lesser and more proximate goals.

\* The author expresses special appreciation for the extraordinary research in preparation of this chapter to Micah Zenko, and to my colleague Mark Moore for a thoughtful review and suggested revisions of the first draft.

At that event I articulated what came to be known as our “canonical objectives” for the Kennedy School of Government in the decade ahead:

- To become a *substantial professional school* that does for the public sector much of what Harvard’s Schools of Business, Law, and Medicine do for their respective private professions.
- To become the *hub* of a university-wide Program in Public Policy and Management, mobilizing the rich intellectual resources in all the faculties of the University and focusing them on critical issues of public policy.

Those with first-hand knowledge of the Kennedy School in 1977 understood how well the stated objectives met Acton’s test of remoteness. Toward these objectives, I stated seven specific initiatives for the School in the years immediately ahead:

- Completing and occupying the new building: When efforts to build the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Cambridge failed, Harvard, nonetheless, managed to hold on to the three acres of land facing the Charles River. In eighteen months, we built the major building for the Kennedy School. The classrooms, offices, and other facilities gave us a physical identity and allowed us rapidly to expand the student body and faculty.
- Consummating the marriage between the Institute of Politics and the School: The Institute aspired to become Harvard’s link between the rough and tumble of elective politics and the academy, but remained isolated in the “little yellow house” at 79 Mount Auburn Street. The new building allowed us to bring the Institute within the walls of the Kennedy School, assuring interaction.
- Establishing Executive Programs in Public Policy and Management: Taking a page from the Business School’s advanced management programs, we developed our own curriculum and programs for training senior government executives.
- Building mutually rewarding relations with other faculties in the University: To become the hub of public policy research at Harvard, we had to establish alliances with other major faculties and institutes from which they gained.
- Consolidating the core curriculum: In training future government leaders, we decided that formal analytical tools would be the foundation of our instruction (economics, statistics, and decision theory), but that beyond this base, preparation for leadership in government required inventing new courses in organization, politics, and management.
- Creating centers of competence in public policy research and analysis: To assure that our faculty and curricula were grounded in real-world problems of public policy, the invention of what we called “problem-solving research centers” would assemble critical masses of faculty and researchers from the School and the University to identify ways to resolve significant public policy challenges. Policy analyses of significant challenges that drew upon insights from faculty across the University should also be an important product of the School.

- Communicating the mission of the School effectively and concisely: On the eve of the Reagan revolution, government was coming to be seen more as a problem than as a solution. We needed to articulate both the necessity for competent government, and the case for the School's programs for training competent and effective public servants.

Twelve years later, when I stepped down as Dean of the School, the Kennedy School had 750 full-time graduate students, 700 participants in a dozen executive programs, and nine problem-solving research centers. At least in the specific case of Harvard's School of Public Policy and Government, I count myself proud to have been "present at the creation."

This chapter thus offers an insider's view of the emergence of one school of public policy, together with reflections on developments in the larger enterprise of which it is a part. The first section of the chapter presents a brief historical overview of this field, beginning with its roots as a distinct profession reflected in Woodrow Wilson's seminal article, "The study of administration," published in 1887, to the works of E. Pendleton Herring and the "policy sciences" of Harold D. Lasswell, to the growth of professional graduate schools in the 1970s when a number of first-class programs of public policy emerged. This is not meant to be an exhaustive history of the discipline, but rather to note key thematic shifts within the fields of public administration and public policy in the century ending with the 1980s.

Section 2 offers a personal perspective on the emergence of the Kennedy School of Government. Celebrating my tenure when I retired in 1989, President Derek Bok called the School "one of the brightest stars in Harvard University's crown." As he said: "I can't think of anything in Harvard's history that is comparable to the extent of growth and development that has taken place under one brief span of a single dean's leadership" (Lambert 2003). From last place in all measures of performance among Harvard's ten independent faculties in 1977, by 1989, the School was widely recognized as the fourth among the University's major professional schools, alongside the schools of Business, Law, and Medicine.

## 1. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC POLICY

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### 1.1 Early Schools of Public Administration

The American post-Reconstruction period was characterized by a diversification and expansion of the administrative tasks of the federal government. Faced with the unification of the continent, economic industrialization, and the emergence of international commerce, America required increased capacity at the national

level to meet these challenges. New responsibilities led to the federal regulation of the transcontinental railroads, the development of a national Postal Service, and the marshaling of a professional standing army. As summarized by Stephen Skowronek in his history of this era, this national transformation required *Building a New American State* (Skowronek 1982). Skowronek described the transformation: “To cope with categorically new demands for national control, the nature and status of the state in America had to be fundamentally altered. National administrative expansion called into question the entire network of political and institutional relationships that had been built up over the course of a century to facilitate governmental operations.” Nothing less than “an extended assault on the previously established governmental order” would be required (Skowronek 1982, 9, 35).

To staff an enlarged and empowered federal government, a new vanguard of specialized workers was necessary. Previously, government employment was only secured through patronage—the primary reward system of political party incumbency. Passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883 established the federal civil service, and weakened the political party machines. In theory, the Pendleton Act guaranteed that bureaucrats would be hired on the basis of merit and professionalism—as determined by competitive exams—and would receive protection from partisan influence.

Among the first academics to wrestle with the development and complexity of the new American state was the future President Woodrow Wilson. In 1886, Wilson delivered a lecture at Cornell University, “The study of administration,” later published in the *Political Science Quarterly* (Wilson 1887). With his essay, Wilson sought to refocus political science away from the noble but perennial chestnuts about political ends to more mundane, operational questions about how government can be practically administered. He recognized the necessity for more practical knowledge in the modern era because, in his words, “It is getting harder to run a constitution than to frame one.” Publication of Wilson’s essay is generally regarded as “the beginning of public administration as a specific field of study” (Carroll and Zuck 1985).

Wilson was the first to articulate clearly his now famous dichotomy between “politics” and “administration.” In keeping with the spirit of neutral bureaucrats envisioned by the progressive reform movement in the Pendleton Act, according to Wilson, “administration lies outside the proper sphere of *politics*. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices.” While elected officials should establish the “broad plans of governmental action,” Wilson’s role for the disinterested public administrator was almost to mechanistically implement the “systematic execution of public law.”

Anticipating Fredrick Taylor’s principle of eliminating all unnecessary movement from manufacturing processes, Wilson also called for the scientific management of government. Modern public administrators needed to understand “first, what government can properly and successfully do, and secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible cost either of

money or energy.” Recognizing that models of efficient government would not be found at home, Wilson also declared that America’s public administrators should look beyond our borders to borrow from the forms and practices of government employed by European states. He urged identifying the best practices in governing extracted from the politics surrounding them, or from the particular policy results. As Wilson evocatively described his goal: “If I see a murderous fellow sharpening a knife cleverly, I can borrow his way of sharpening the knife without borrowing his probable intention to commit murder with it; and so if I see a monarchist dyed in the wool managing a public bureau well, I can learn his business methods without changing one of my republican spots.”

In the late nineteenth century, graduate programs in training public administrators emerged at a handful of schools, notably: the Institute of Public Administration at Columbia University, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, the Training School for Public Service at the New York Bureau of Municipal Research, the Public Administration Clearing House in Chicago, and Johns Hopkins University (Blunt 1988). In 1939, 150 scholars from these fledgling institutions broke away from the American Political Science Association to form the American Society for Public Administration, the first stand-alone organization in the United States dedicated to improving government performance (Guy 2003, 641–55).

The curricula of these early public administration programs focused on providing the future administrator with a tool kit of business-oriented techniques for effectively managing government programs. Courses included: budgeting and accounting methods, finance, standardization of procedures, performance assessments, and industrial organization (Moscher 1975; Stivers 2003, 37). Wider considerations of the efficacy of policies and the needs of the citizenry were not much researched or debated by these early administrators. Such judgements would emerge through the constitutionally established political process with mandated check and balances—the province of elected officials, not federal administrators.

## 1.2 The Postwar Boom in Public Administration

With the New Deal and the Second World War the size of the federal government expanded exponentially. Until 1920 federal domestic spending never reached 1 per cent of gross domestic product. By 1930, it had tripled to 3 per cent. Two decades later the national budget accounted for 15 per cent of all US economic activity (OMB 2004, table 1.2). By 1950, even after the postwar demobilization, the federal government had a net gain of one million civil servants, doubling the 1939 total (Porter 1994, 279–85). The growth of the welfare state through New Deal programs, and postwar social policies, created more interest groups and constituencies invested in protecting and

expanding their benefits. Inverting Wilson's hierarchy of politics before administration, programs now shaped politics (Lowi 1972, 299).

This second wave of public administrators, autonomous from the influence of partisan politics, developed a strong sense of proprietorship for the programs they managed. Scholars of public administration recognized this desire of government employees to protect their programs and meet the demands of affected constituents. The classic treatise on the subject of administrators as arbiters of the public interest was E. Pendleton Herring's 1936 work, *Public Administration and the Public Interest*. Herring introduced the subject of administrative discretion, in which "Congress passes a statute setting forth a general principle . . . The bureaucrat is left to decide as to the conditions that necessitate the law's application" (Herring 1936, 7). The bureaucratic decision maker, therefore, was given the additional burden of interpreting the public interest, a task that could not be accomplished in a value-free manner. Herring recognized this potential shortcoming, but contended that well-educated bureaucrats were best positioned to manage societal shifts and the evolving needs of targeted interest groups. As Herring described in stark terms: "Public administration in actual practice is a process whereby one individual acting in an official capacity and in accordance with his interpretation of his legal responsibility applies a statute to another individual who is in a legally subordinate position. The public as such is not concerned in this process" (Herring 1936, 25).

Harold Lasswell sought to go beyond Herring to what he called the "policy sciences." The policy sciences approach sought to employ all of the available tools of social science to understand all relevant inputs in a policy issue area, including knowledge of the policy-making process itself. In practice, Lasswell's goal was for a more muscular and integrated version of Wilson's appeal for the scientific management of government. By understanding the larger picture of policy-making, the policy sciences method sought to ultimately "diminish the policy-makers' errors of judgment and give greater assurance that the course of action decided upon will achieve the intended goals" (Rothwell 1951). Recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of this endeavor, Lasswell and his colleagues called for the merger of the discipline of political science with insights from sociology, economics, business, law, and also to reach out to physicists and biologists (Lasswell 1951, 3–15). Public administrators were to be educated in this approach through taking courses in a range of traditional academic disciplines, and also through a mix of historical case studies, simulation exercises, and professional on-the-job training (Lasswell 1971, 132–59). While Lasswell's project to rationalize further the policy process was well received in some parts of the scholarly community, his ambitious concept was never much embraced in the curricula of public policy programs.

### 1.3 From Public Administration to Public Policy

In 1960 John Kennedy was elected President of the United States. In staffing his administration, Kennedy sought the "best and the brightest:" from Harvard, Dean of



Arts and Sciences McGeorge Bundy and economist John Kenneth Galbraith; from the RAND Corporation, Charles Hitch and Alain Enthoven; and from the world of business and industry, most notably, the president of the Ford Motor Company Robert McNamara. These “new frontiersmen” brought with them a confidence that intelligence and the most advanced techniques for optimizing choices could improve the performance of government. Nowhere was the impulse to clarify policy options through quantification more pronounced than in the Secretary of Defense McNamara’s Pentagon. McNamara’s “whiz kids” implemented the Policy Planning Budgeting System (PPBS), which applied a cost–benefit analysis framework developed at RAND for decisions about weapons acquisition and war fighting (Enthoven and Smith 1971). President Lyndon Johnson regarded PPBS as so successful that he ordered all federal agencies to adopt it in 1965.

Taking into account the highly specialized skills required to develop and oversee the PPBS, the federal government required a new cadre of rigorously trained analysts (Stokes 1996, 160). To meet this demand, major universities responded by establishing programs training students in public policy analysis (Crecine 1971, 7–32). Between 1967 and 1971, graduate programs at the master’s or doctoral level in public policy were created at: the Institute of Public Policy Studies, University of Michigan; the Kennedy School at Harvard; the Graduate School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley; the School of Urban and Public Affairs, Carnegie-Mellon University; the RAND Graduate School; the Department of Public Policy and Management, University of Pennsylvania; the School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota; the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas; and the Institute of Policy Science and Public Affairs, Duke University (Fleischman 1990, 734; Walker 1976, 127–52).

In 1972, the Board of Trustees of the Ford Foundation, under the leadership of McGeorge Bundy, decided to focus on “helping establish or strengthen first-class programs of advanced, professional training for young people aimed at public service” (Bell 1981, 1). Over the following five years, the Ford Foundation provided multi-million-dollar general-support grants to eight grantee programs that were developing a concentration on graduate training in public policy. The Ford Foundation also awarded grants for summer conferences, seminars, and working papers that supported the self-study of America’s experience in public administration for models that could be applied for aiding economic development in Third World countries (Riggs 1998, 23–4). The Foundation’s initial seed money proved crucial in nurturing the incipient development of a new field in an era marked by deep distrust of government (Miles 1967, 343–56).

A key innovation within these programs was a shift in focus from “public administration” to “public policy.” Emphasizing policy, the schools addressed ends as well as means. This refocus required a greater understanding of the complex social and political environment within which policy is shaped and implemented. It also required training policy analysts—not simply public administrators—who could inform decision makers about the consequences of alternative policy choices. The insights involved budgetary cost and efficacy, but also issues of social equity, civil

rights, and quality of life (Fredrickson 1971, 364). Where traditional schools of public administration sought to train competent, neutral managers, schools of public policy faced the difficult task of identifying what specifically makes a good analyst. As the founder of the Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, Aaron Wildavsky, argued, policy analysis requires a balance of technical competence and a list of commonsense intangibles, such as persuasion, argumentation, intuition, and creativity (Wildavsky 1979; 1976, 127–52).

Not directly addressed in these early stages in the development of schools of public policy was the crucially important question of what role students of these schools would play in *making* public policy as well as advising about it or administering the organizations that implemented policies. On one hand, the schools of public policy wanted to distinguish themselves from the schools of public administration that had focused on the narrow questions of efficient administration of public policies established elsewhere by others. They did so by insisting on the relevance of analytic techniques to efforts made to develop and evaluate particular public policies and programs, by training students in the use of these techniques, and by championing the role of powerful staff offices in government agencies which hired individuals who could perform these tasks, and would allow them to become influential in public policy making and implementation.

But left open, however, were the answers to two further important questions: first, the extent to which schools of public policy intended to train individuals to participate effectively in the governmental process as policy makers as well as policy analysts; and if so, how individuals trained to be policy analysts, or policy makers (and whose expertise lay either in substantive knowledge or in abstract analytic techniques) who claimed to be useful in revealing the social or public value of governmental action, would relate to the political processes that were an inevitable part of policy making in a democratic society. The crucial question of where politics fitted into the making of policy, and how students prepared for work in government should both understand and engage in the politics that surrounded their work, had been avoided since Wilson established the distinction between policy and administration. The Progressives had enlarged the prerogatives of technically trained bureaucrats without seriously engaging the question of how increasingly powerful civil servants at national, state, and local levels should relate to what we eventually began to describe as their “political authorizing environment.” If schools of public policy intended to train only policy analysts who were concerned about the ends of government, then they need not be deeply concerned about influencing the politics surrounding the politics of their issues—only understanding them well enough to ensure that their advice was not completely irrelevant. If, however, they intended to train individuals who could become influential as leaders and managers of policy-making processes, and saw their graduates not only in elected roles, but in activist roles within government as policy entrepreneurs and innovators, then the schools would have to take seriously the questions about what individuals who sought to be policy leaders and entrepreneurs should know and do. And that might well be different from what policy analysts and putatively neutral bureaucrats seeking

efficiency and effectiveness in the achievement of established missions needed to know (Moore 1995).

Seeing to solidify its identity as a stand-alone field, emerging public policy schools also created professional associations. In 1970, the former Council on Graduate Education for Public Administration was renamed the National Association of Schools of Public Policy and Administration (NASPAA). The creation of the NASPAA's Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation in 1983 provided a mechanism for the systematic self-evaluation of the field. The Commission became the specialized accreditor for over 135 graduate programs in public policy, public affairs, and public administration. In this capacity, NASPAA developed a core curriculum for public administration programs, with required courses in quantitative methods, public budgeting and management, organizational theory, and personnel administration (Henry 1990, 3–26). In 1995, NASPAA founded the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* as its publication for peer-reviewed articles on pedagogical and curricular issues. The Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) was formed in 1979 to support academic institutions training students for distinctive professional careers as policy analysts (Guy 2003, 649). In 1981, APPAM merged two journals, *Policy Analysis* and *Public Policy*, into the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, which served as an outlet for multi-disciplinary research into public policy issues, and as a sounding board for shifts in the profession.

## 2. LESSONS FROM THE KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

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Seventy years ago Harvard had no school dedicated solely to the study of public administration or for training students for careers in public service. Early in the twentieth century, Harvard president Charles M. Eliot proposed a school of business and public service. Lawrence Lowell, an influential Boston Brahmin, lecturer in the Government department, and future president of Harvard, found Eliot's scheme of little use. Lowell stated frankly: "We should be holding ourselves out as training men for a career that does not exist, and for which, if it did exist, I think our training would very likely not be the best preparation" (Bell 1980: 7). The opposition led by Lowell triumphed, and Eliot's proposed business and public service school was a false start. With the public service component explicitly dropped, in 1908, the Harvard Business School was created, the first Masters of Business Administration degree-granting program in the world (Cruikshank 1987).

At Harvard's Tercentenary in 1936, the major new initiative announced by the University was the creation of a Graduate School of Public Administration (GSPA). To make that new school of public administration possible, Lucius N. Littauer, a

wealthy glove manufacturer and former member of Congress, provided a gift of \$2 million—at that point the largest single contribution the University had received from an individual donor. The goal of the new school was to engage Harvard faculty members, primarily from the departments of Economics and Government, in training future civil servants. This concept was greeted with skepticism by many Harvard faculty and administrators, who saw this as a further threat to the University's intellectual standards, in their views compounding the mistake made in establishing the Business School (Roethlisberger 1977). In the early years of the GSPA, the School had no unique identity of its own, no set curriculum, and no faculty members dedicated solely to Littauer's vision of a school for "public service" (John F. Kennedy School of Government 1986, 19). Faculty from the Economics and Government departments enrolled students admitted to the School in their departmental courses, but the Law School and Business School were less hospitable to this questionable venture. Thus, when James Bryant Conant retired as president of Harvard in 1953, he identified the GSPA as his "greatest disappointment" (John F. Kennedy School of Government 1986, 36).

Conant's successor as Harvard president, Nathan Marsh Pusey, also recognized that the GSPA was an institution lacking in strategic vision, or sense of purpose. For a time, Pusey considered closing the School down. As Edith Stokey, a lecturer on public policy, former secretary of the Kennedy School from 1977 to 1993, described the GSPA in the early 1950s: "There was an institution, but it didn't have a curriculum of its own" (Lambert 2004, 5). Candidates for master's or doctorate degrees in public administration were left on their own in assembling a curriculum from the other parts of the University. Don K. Price, Jr., soon after becoming dean of the GSPA in 1966, received both an ultimatum and marching orders from Pusey: "Build it up or I will abolish it" (Lambert 2004, 5).

The GSPA's low status within the Harvard community was a major handicap. Thus, the desire of the Kennedy family to memorialize President John F. Kennedy after his assassination in 1963 played an essential part in the School's turnaround. In 1966 the GSPA was officially renamed the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and the Institute of Politics was created. Under that banner, Harvard recruited Richard Neustadt—a distinguished political scientist and author of *Presidential Power*—to become director of the new Institute of Politics within the new School. In time, Neustadt recruited an all-star cast of professors from faculty from across the University, including Francis Bator, Joseph Bower, Charles Christenson, Philip Heymann, Ernest May, Fredrick Mosteller, Howard Raiffa, and Thomas Schelling, to build a new curriculum for a new Public Policy Program.

Planning the new curriculum for KSG students involved a core of eight professors remarkable for their individual commitment and congeniality, and for their unimpeachable academic reputations. Five senior professors—Bator and Schelling in Political Economy, Mosteller in Statistics, Neustadt in Public Administration, Raiffa in Operations Research—and three junior faculty—Richard Zeckhauser and Henry Jacoby of Economics, and myself of Government—designed the core courses that have been the foundation of a KSG education to this day. That