

# School of Public Policy & Governance

## UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

### **Rejuvenating the Public Service: How Universities Can Help**

Speaking Notes for Remarks at the Associate Deputy Ministers' Dinner  
Officers' Mess Hall, RCMP Headquarters

Ian D. Clark, November 21, 2007

It is a pleasure to be invited to speak with you, along with my university colleagues, Mark Stabile, the Director of the School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Toronto, and David Zussman, who in addition to being the Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management at the University of Ottawa, has this year assumed the presidency of the Canadian Association of Programs of Public Administration.

When Will McDowell phoned to invite me to speak to this group he wondered if I would expand on the comment I made at the Deputy Ministers' breakfast on April 25 to which the Clerk had invited me to discuss the findings of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Grants and Contributions. My comment was "Let me respectfully suggest that Ottawa could use more Toronto."

I was not referring to the Leafs or the Argos or the traffic. I was using the Canada's best-loved city as a metaphor to highlight four things that I thought the senior federal public service would benefit by getting better connected to 1) the non-government world where busy Canadians have less and less patience with process and red tape, 2) urban, multi-ethnic Canada, 3) real action on public service innovation, like that occurring in the Ontario Public Service, and 4) research universities.

We are here tonight to explore the fourth point. What can universities do to help with the renewal of the public service?

My colleagues and I will look at three ways we can help: 1) skills, 2) ideas and 3) comparative experience.

I will address the first issue: how universities can provide better preparation for those who you need to hire, and intellectual rejuvenation for those already in the public service. Mark Stabile will address the issue of how we can help with big ideas. David Zussman will speak about how we can help learn from what has worked in other governments.

On the matter of what and how we teach those you are about to hire, I have to say, as someone who has been a university professor for a full five months, we have not been doing as good a job as we should. The recently published book, *Policy Analysis in Canada: The State of the Art*, looks at how universities in Canada, the United States and Europe have addressed the profession of public policy in their respective countries. The authors pose the question of "why it took so long (a time lag of almost 40 years) between U.S. and Canadian sectors) for the policy analysis field and policy studies to develop within Canadian higher education institutions."

A good question, indeed. In 1969 Harvard University joined Princeton and Berkeley in investing heavily in the creation of a school of public policy by engaging leading practitioners and leading scholars from a

variety of disciplines within the university. I was an early beneficiary of the fruits of that investment: the Kennedy School's masters of public policy program. I think it is a great shame that it took almost 40 years for Canada's research universities to begin to follow suit? One can only imagine how many millions of taxpayers' dollars could have been saved if senior public servants in Canada had received MPP-level professional training.

Think how many flawed program designs, failed reorganizations, and surreal management requirements could have been avoided over the last three decades if more of the bright young people hired since the early 1970s and destined to rise to positions of authority in federal, provincial, and municipal government had possessed: 1) a solid grasp of microeconomics with a really good understanding of the nature of public goods and logic of collective action; 2) a reasonable familiarity with probability theory and the implications of decision-making under uncertainty; 3) enough understanding of the theory of institutional behaviour and political process to be able to anticipate the completely predictable reactions of real people and real organizations; 4) a familiarity with the social and political environment in the country; and 5) a solid foundation in the legal and constitutional underpinnings of Westminster government and Canadian federalism.

These things can be taught through master's-level professional education. The basic concepts of public policy and Canadian governance are well known and, with the help of research-oriented faculty and real-life examples provided by practitioners, could be taught to intelligent, motivated students in two years. But Canada's universities have not made as much progress as their American counterparts in professionalizing their policy analysis programs.

Universities are beginning to get their act together. The Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration (CAPPA) is acting on the review it commissioned by Iain Gow and Sharon Sutherland on masters level programs by creating an accreditation board to undertake mission-based, voluntary accreditation reviews of masters-level programs of member institutions.

CAPPA members, as well as the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, and other practitioners from the federal and provincial governments, will be working with the School of Public Policy and Governance in a project to identify the core concepts and skills associated with a masters curriculum by creating a "public policy and governance portal" to compile and refine the concepts and skills that students are expected to learn. The concepts will be ranked by both students and practitioners for their insight and real-world applicability. It is hoped to make a version of this portal public in early 2009.

I have spoken to some of you about this project and hope to get all of you involved. It has grown in ambition since I spoke with associates and deputies in the federal government and at Queen's Park. Paul Boothe at Industry encouraged us to use the network to make those big ideas more accessible. Michael Wernick and Indian Affairs encouraged us to design it in a way that could facilitate the development of policy networks across the country around specific issues. In the Ontario government, the policy deputy in the Cabinet office, Kevin Costante, is arranging for some of us at the School to take the appropriate confidentiality oaths and connect to their impressive Policy Innovation and Leadership network. I hope to persuade Ruth Dantzer, the president of the Canada School of Public Service, to provide similar access to the learning modules now available to all federal public servants.

To ensure that our material is useful to practitioners, we have on our steering committee a senior official from the federal government (Anne Scotton, Executive Director, Audit and Evaluation, INAC), one from the Ontario government (Marion Crane, visiting assistant deputy minister), one from the United Way (Jan Donio, Vice President and CIO), one from a consulting firm (Richard Harris, partner in KPMG), and David Zussman as president of CAPP. We hope that over the next three years the project will get results in four areas:

1. *professional core*: The set of concepts and skills that should represent the core of the material to be covered in Canadian professional masters-level programs in public policy will be delineated. This will likely be in the form of the “core list” of concepts and skills in the database which have been judged by students and practitioners to have high insight value and high practical value. New content in the form of case material from practitioners and theoretical commentary from scholars will add value to the curricula of these programs.
2. *professional development*: The participating practitioners will have learned a substantial amount from scholars, students and from each other. The material on the public portal will continue to be accessible to them and to others to reference as their professional work demands.
3. *communities of practice*: There will be lasting benefits from the personal contacts and informal networks stimulated by the project. These include ongoing links among practitioners and also links between scholars and practitioners. Although it is impossible to mandate a creative policy network, it is hoped that novel policy work will have begun as a result of such linkages.
4. *public dissemination*: Most of the material created in the project will have been made public through the launch of a public web portal late in the second year. The creation of the portal should help the public understanding of public policy management and, by developing a more common vocabulary, should help the public discourse on policy and governance matters in Canada.

The project will culminate, on a date near the first anniversary of the launch of the public portal, with a major seminar to review the findings.

So, those are some of the things we are doing to try to help on the human capital side. Let me turn to Mark to say how we think we can help with the big ideas. David will follow Mark with some brief reflections on how the federal public service compares on the innovation/action scale to those in other provinces, especially Ontario, and to other countries, especially Australia.