

Managers Who Teach or Would Like to Teach

by **Martin Vanacour and Robert Denhardt**

When you think about it, teaching should come naturally to managers. Although it is not written into their job descriptions or performance contracts, managers constantly teach. A manager teaches when writing reports, explaining complex issues to elected officials, helping the staff become politically savvy on issues, familiarizing newly elected officials with the budget and council protocols, or giving them the history of a project and discussing the best alternatives for them to consider.

Most elected officials at the local government level serve part-time in their positions, and their expertise comes at least in part from the manager's reviews of what has happened in the past, explanations of currently acceptable practices, and knowledge of which innovations are on the horizon. Elected officials look to managers for advice and guidance.

Other examples of where, how, and when managers "teach" include working with neighborhoods and community leaders, speaking before the local chamber of commerce or civic organizations to clarify policy issues, and answering questions about local projects and programs. As Mark Levin, city administrator of Maryland Heights, Missouri, noted, "Many city managers frequently serve as trainers of elected officials, staff, and other professionals. Explaining the city's approach to zoning or budgeting to a citizens' committee requires many of the same skills as those needed in today's classroom." These teaching opportunities can be a natural progression toward teaching part-time at a college or university or thinking about full-time teaching after retirement.

In this article, we would like to review some of the reasons that city and county managers give for wanting to teach formally at colleges and universities, and then suggest some ways managers who are thinking about teaching can get started.

Teaching at college or university level offers ample benefits to local government managers, as some administrators have reported:

- It is enjoyable.
- You are returning something of value to the profession and to the community at large.
- It is intellectually stimulating.

- You can further assist in training the next generation of local government administrators, a noble and worthwhile activity.
- It can help you build bridges with local educational institutions.
- You have the opportunity to supplement the knowledge of students by bringing real-world experience into the classroom.
- Teaching part-time as a manager will give you the experience and training to possibly continue with this activity after retirement, as many managers have done.
- There is, of course, also the factor of the extra financial compensation. While the range of pay varies greatly, the difference may mean having enough extra money to do something special for yourself, your family, or someone else that you might not otherwise be able to justify, like taking a long-deserved vacation, buying a new car, or making contributions to charities and community organizations.

As Sam Gaston, city manager of Mountain Brook, Alabama, told us: "The best part of teaching is the interaction with the students and the satisfaction of preparing the next generation." He is pleased that several of his students have decided to pursue a career in local government. Reflecting on his experience, he commented that he "would definitely do it all over again and highly recommend that other managers use their talent/background to educate young people about professional local management and career opportunities."

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Similarly, Lloyd Harrell, retired city manager of Chandler, Arizona, told us that he teaches for two reasons: "First, teaching allows me to give back to the profession. The opportunities to transmit information to young professionals and, in some cases, influence their career aspirations are very rewarding. Second, the opportunity to interact with students is extremely exciting and stimulating. I find this is a great way to keep me current with professional developments and expand my knowledge base."

Seven Steps to Teaching

Managers who have an inclination to teach should pursue this adventure. We propose seven practical pointers on how to go about it. Specifically, we outline a series of steps that a current or retired manager or assistant might take in order to begin teaching at a local college or university. (Here, we assume that the manager only wants to teach part-time, a course or two a semester, though many of the same steps will apply to someone interested in teaching full-time.)

1. Get an appointment to meet with the person who administers the graduate program in public administration at the college or university.

Depending on the school, this might be an M.P.A. program director, a department head, a school director, or the dean of a college. If you are unsure whom to call, start with the dean, then try a school director, then a department head or chair, then the M.P.A. program director.

Feel free to call or write and suggest a meeting, maybe lunch, that will give you a chance to get better acquainted. If you don't already know this person, the meeting will be an important contact for both of you. Tell the person in advance that you'd like to talk about the possibility of occasional teaching. Offer to go to the campus, not just because it will be more convenient for the director but also because it will give you a chance to check out the facilities.

2. Prepare for the meeting.

Look at the courses the department or school offers, primarily those at the graduate level and, indeed, any that you might be able to teach. (This information is probably available online, but if not, ask to have something sent to you before your meeting.) Identify those courses that you could teach and would like to teach. If there are existing courses related to urban management, these would likely be "naturals" for you, but also think about courses in fields like human resources or budgeting and financial management.

If you don't see courses listed that fit your background and interests, outline a course you'd like to design. Maybe your experience is strong in public works and civil engineering. If so, ask about a course in "urban infrastructure." Or perhaps your experience would fit a course on "public entrepreneurship." Whatever you choose, develop a short, written course description and an outline of likely topics to be covered. A page or two will be more than enough.

3. Think about schedules that would work for you, and make sure you have the time to devote to teaching.

Most M.P.A. programs offer their courses once a week in the evenings, though there are many other patterns. One that is being used more and more often is the weekend intensive program, or three days a week (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday), twice a semester, with assignments before, between, and after.

Think, too, about preparation time and grading time. Some people estimate that teaching takes at least two hours outside class for every hour spent in class. Teaching any course is a big commitment. Especially if you are continuing to work full-time for the city or county, make sure that you can reasonably undertake a class.

4. Don't expect to be hired on the spot.

University schedules typically must be submitted way up-front, as much as six months before the start of a new semester. And not all courses are offered every semester. The university representative will likely ask you for a vita and a

list of courses you could teach, then promise to get back to you when something opens up. To build your relationship with the university, offer to do individual class sessions at any time.

An instructor already teaching an urban management course, say, would probably be delighted to have you there for a session, and it would give you a chance to get a sense of what the classroom is like. It also gets your foot a little further in the door. You might also encourage students who are in need of class projects to call you and see if there is something you could give them to do in your city.

Ideally, the director will get back to you soon. Most M.P.A. program directors are delighted to offer classes taught by practitioners because this gives their programs a more distinctive flavor. And many students simply enjoy the perspective of someone who's been out in the "real world." NASPAA, the public-affairs accrediting body, requires that a program have at least half of its M.P.A. courses taught by regular faculty, but this stipulation is typically not a problem.

In any case, if you don't hear anything back in a month or two, don't be hesitant to send a gentle reminder or maybe an update by e-mail. Similarly, if you see the director on other business, remind the director of your earlier conversation and your continuing interest in teaching.

Look to ICMA

"Resources for Instructors," a section of ICMA's online bookstore, found at bookstore.icma.org on the right-hand side, provides a downloadable, free copy of *Managers As Teachers: A Practitioner's Guide to Teaching Public Administration*. Here you'll also find information about ICMA's free newsletter Academic Exchange, as well as a link to an Adjuncts' Corner Web site maintained by NASPAA that includes course syllabi.

ICMA's adjunct faculty discussion list is an e-mail list for ICMA members who teach—or would like to teach—as adjunct faculty in university-level courses in public administration and related subjects. Its purpose is to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information among these members. It can be accessed at ICMA.org by clicking on the "Interests Groups and Discussion Lists" tab in the left column, clicking on "Listserves," and then on "Adjunct Faculty Discussion List."

ICMA's Advisory Board on Graduate Education (ABGE) initiates and encourages ICMA's initiatives to support managers who teach. Karl Nollenberger, academic director of the public administration program at the Illinois Institute of Technology, is chair of the ABGE's subcommittee on managers as faculty.

5. If you are asked to teach, ask for a copy of the syllabus last used in the course.

You probably won't have to stick to this syllabus, but it will give you an idea of what other teachers have done with the course. You might also ask other managers you know who are teaching similar courses elsewhere for their recommendations. (Many syllabi can be found online.) Check out possible books for the class, and find out when book orders are due at the college. Design the course, and be ready for the first night of class.

6. Identify resources that can help you in the class.

Go to the ICMA Web site at ICMA.org, and link to "Managers Who Teach." The current list offers some 80 people you can contact for advice. Attend the ICMA annual conference, where panel discussions are held that are devoted to managers who teach or would like to teach. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet, face to face, with your colleagues and get their advice. These managers will be delighted to spend some time with you. Become acquainted with the many available resources for teaching, such as the University of Washington's Electronic Hallway, a repository of information on teaching public administration and a source of significant case studies you might want to use. Many universities and community colleges offer workshops on teaching, which can be extremely helpful.

7. Teach the class.

Enjoy it. Learn from it. Ask to teach it again sometime. You will probably find teaching a significant and rewarding experience. While some students may drift away from time to time, the majority will be right there with you every step of the way. Especially if you are teaching people who work full-time, they will have made a significant commitment just to attend, and, while their problems during the day may occasionally creep into their minds, they will really be there to learn.

Managers who teach will probably find that they are pretty good at it. After all, as we pointed out earlier, managers and assistants engage in a lot of education in their daily work with councils, staff, and citizens. They already know how to engage and motivate people, and this is a significant part of the classroom experience.

Most classes will be subject to student evaluations, which you will receive a few weeks after the class ends. These provide an opportunity to evaluate your teaching experience and think about ways to make it even better next time around. If you are like most manager-teachers, you'll get mostly favorable comments, with maybe one or two negatives. These ratings will likely be the ones you will focus on, but remember that they are a small number. You can recover from them.

Most important, engage in some reflection about the experience. Ask yourself, Did I enjoy this? Could I improve the next time around? Expect that it will take

teaching several courses to feel really comfortable, and know that many faculty, even the best, feel nervousness and anxiety about their teaching. But in the long run, helping to prepare the next generation of public servants and especially urban management practitioners is extremely rewarding work.

Conclusion

Teaching classes in urban management and related areas is something that many managers find both fun and deeply satisfying. Karl Nollenberger, retired county manager of Lake County, Illinois, who is academic director of the public administration program at the Illinois Institute of Technology, summed it up particularly well: "After 30-plus years as a practitioner, I retired from local government and have moved into academia. This role has provided me the opportunity to teach and give guidance to the world of public administration on a regular basis.

"The commitment to public service is a value, in addition to a skill. The value is heartfelt and sincere. The conveying of that love of public administration can take place in the classroom, just as the conveying of the skill set to perform in the field can be taught in the classroom. Seeing students from the past as topflight professionals in our field making an impact on the daily lives of citizens of their communities is the reward that we get for these efforts. What greater satisfaction could [people] have than when they reflect back on these efforts in the twilight of their lives?"

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