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Public administration higher education in Lebanon: An investigation into the substance of advertised courses

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ABSTRACT

This article examines public administration education in Lebanon. Using data collected from university course catalogues, the article considers the extent to which advertised public administration courses address topics and competencies associated with NASPAA's curricular guidelines and the seven principles of New Public Service. Using data collected from focus groups comprised of students and professionals, the article also reviews several themes related to the state of public administration in Lebanon. Although Lebanon's institutions of higher education are involved in public administration education, the findings reveal gaps in the curriculum related to human resource management, information and technology management, program evaluation, ethics and accountability, research methods, decision-making, citizenship, and community engagement. The findings also reveal insufficient coverage of Lebanon's bureaucracy, and more broadly, a mismatch between the content of the advertised courses and the challenges that exist within Lebanon's bureaucracy. The article considers several recommendations that explore how public administration higher education in Lebanon might be strengthened.

KEYWORDS

Core competencies;
curriculum; public
administration education;
Republic of Lebanon

Introduction

The capacities and capabilities of Lebanon's administrative agencies and public administrators have often been called into question. Lebanon's Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR, 2011), for example, reports that the country's public bureaucracy is hindered by deficiencies in policy making and planning, excessive centralization, obsolete administrative structures, and a lack of support for administrative development and reform. OMSAR (2011) has also expressed concerns about Lebanon's public administrators, reporting that individual administrators lack a comprehensive understanding of knowledge domains that include strategic management, decision-making, public budgeting, program development and evaluation, ethics, and human resources.

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The conventional wisdom is that Middle Eastern countries can overcome deficiencies such as these by undertaking bureaucratic reform and strengthening the competencies of those who work within the public bureaucracy (Jreisat, 2002). This perspective suggests that public administrators, indeed all public officials, should learn about basic principles of public administration and topics such as leadership, ethics, transparency, and participatory decision-making. In recent years, scholars have even suggested that public sector reform might depend on whether public administrators understand, implement, and promote the principles of democratic governance (Carrizales & Bennett, 2013; Newcomer & Allen, 2010).

This line of thinking reflects the observations of Crow and Iskandar (1961), who, in their exploration of administrative reform in Lebanon, foresaw the connections between administration, democracy, and education. In making these connections, Crow and Iskandar (1961, p. 307) noted that reform would depend upon “new attitudes and values on the part of the civil servants and the skilled and trained personal [needed] to implement the reforms.” Despite the emphasis on education as a means to strengthen the capacities and capabilities of administrative agencies and competencies of public administrators, the public administration literature provides little insight into the substance and scope of public administration education in Middle Eastern countries. As a result, little can be said about the roles that institutions of higher education play in facilitating the skills, attitudes, and values referenced by Crow and Iskandar (1961) and Jreisat (2002).

To address this gap in the literature, we explored the state of public administration education in Lebanon through an analysis of the public administration courses advertised by Lebanese institutions of higher education. More specifically, we present the findings of an investigation into two general research questions. First, what is the substantive content of the public administration courses advertised by Lebanese undergraduate and graduate institutions? Second, to what extent do these advertised courses provide public administration students access to the knowledge and competencies needed to address deficiencies within Lebanon’s administrative system? Although this article does not evaluate hypothesis about the relationship between the content of public administration courses and public sector performance, we hope the findings encourage researchers to further investigate the state of public administration higher education in Lebanon, and more broadly, to consider how public administration higher education might contribute to the development and reform of the country’s administrative system.

Literature review

The challenges associated with the practice of public administration in Middle Eastern countries have been discussed at length in the public

administration literature (Ahmad Al-Qarioti & Al-Enezi, 2004; El-Zein & Sims, 2004; Hatem, 1994; Iles, Almhedie, & Baruch, 2012; Jreisat, 1970, 1989; Kisirwani, 1997; Nakib & Palmer, 1976; Wickwar, 1958). Scholars have also explored the processes and difficulties of administrative development and reform in Middle Eastern countries (Bachir, 1997; Crow & Iskandar, 1961; Hassan & Sarker, 2012; Jreisat, 1990, 1999, 2006). Discussions about administrative reform and development in the Middle East, however, are often driven by assumptions that western-oriented administrative theories and perspectives have utility for Middle Eastern systems of public administration (Onder & Brower, 2013). In line with these assumptions, this literature review will highlight some of the central themes expressed by three western-oriented public administration perspectives: old public administration, new public management, and the new public service. The literature review will then explore how these themes relate to the competencies and principles that can be emphasized in the public administration courses and programs offered by institutions of higher education.

Public administration theory: From administration to service

As government has evolved, so too have perspectives about how to address issues of organization, administration, and management within the public bureaucracy. The foundation for the modern study and practice of public administration emerged during the early 20th century. This foundation, characterized by Denhardt and Denhardt (2011, pp. 11–12) as the Old Public Administration, was supported by three central ideas. First, that distinctions should be made between the political and administrative domains (Wilson, 1887). Second, that rules and authority can be used to exert control over the bureaucracy (Weber, 1968). Third, that the principles of scientific management can facilitate the efficient delivery of public goods and services (Taylor, 2015). As they relate to the public sector, these ideas emphasized the direct delivery of public services, rational decision-making, hierarchy and command-and-control, specialization, the neutral implementation of the law, and the organization of activities around planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting.

Perspectives on public administration evolved during the 1970s, as social and budgetary pressures gave rise to concerns about whether a reliance on authority and rules maximized government efficiency and effectiveness (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). These concerns prompted the emergence of the New Public Management movement, which stressed productivity and efficiency, the use of market mechanisms, such as contracting and privatization, and the treatment of citizens as “customers” who make choices about their service delivery options (Kettl, 2005, pp. 1–2). This movement also called for administrative practices such as decentralization

and deconcentration, the empowerment of individual managers to meet the needs of citizens, the indirect delivery of public services, and the measurement and evaluation of program outputs and outcomes. In contrast to the Old Public Administration perspective, which emphasized hierarchy and control as the means to promote public sector responsiveness and accountability, those who ascribed to the New Public Management movement emphasized public choice and free-market ideas. Although utility of the New Public Management movement has been questioned (Barzelay, 2001; Hood & Dixon, 2015), the movement's ideas remain central to the contemporary public administration education and practice.

In recent years, scholarship has begun to consider alternatives to the Old Public Administration and New Public Management perspectives. One of the most prominent alternatives is the New Public Service perspective, which argues that public administrators should work to overcome, or at least navigate, the tensions between democracy and bureaucracy. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2011), public administrators should not be restricted to the neutral implementation of public policy, nor should they be guided solely by free-market principles and public choice theory. Rather, public administrators should be encouraged to strengthen democratic institutions and processes by empowering citizens to govern themselves. As argued by Box (2007) and his colleagues, this means that public administrators have a responsibility to increase and maintain public participation in the development and implementation of public policy. Within this context, public administrators would take an active role in democratic governance, including (1) upholding democratic values and citizen rights, (2) promoting the public interest, (3) managing and administering public institutions in accordance with democratic values, and (4) being professional, moral, ethical, responsible, and reliable (Hamilton, 2007, p. 14).

Public administration education

Notwithstanding the significance of the debates about theoretical paradigms within the field of public administration (Lynn, Jr., 2001), the ideas championed by the Old Public Administration and New Public Management perspectives have influenced how institutions of higher education prepare future generations of public administrators. In terms of graduate education, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) uses curricular guidelines to accredit public affairs programs. Prior to 2009, NASPAA's accreditation standards required academic programs to possess a curriculum that emphasized eight competencies organized around three components: (1) the management of public service organizations; (2) the application of quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis; and (3) an understanding of the public policy and organizational

environment (NASPAA, 2008). After 2009, NASPAA began to use an updated accreditation standard. The updated standard emphasizes five universal competencies, which are to be tied to a program's individual mission and public service values (NASPAA, 2014). NASPAA adopted these five universal competencies to improve student-learning outcomes and to strengthen the accountability of the institutions involved the education of public officials. **Figure 1** identifies the core competencies emphasized by NASPAA's pre-2009 and post-2009 curriculum standards.

NASPAA's curricular requirements provide public administration programs with flexibility with respect to the design of their curriculum and their substantive areas of emphasis. This is because NASPAA does not want to oblige public administration programs to offer specific courses. Despite this flexibility, both public administration graduate and undergraduate programs tend to focus their education efforts on several central topical areas. These areas include public administration, budgeting and finance, economics, public policy, organizational theory, law, quantitative methods, and ethics, as well as areas of specialization such as human resources, nonprofit management, international development, and state and local government administration (Dougherty Jr., 2011; NASPAA, 2014). Although there remain unanswered questions about the focus and purpose of public administration education (Denhardt, 2001), topics and specializations such as those identified above serve as the intellectual touchstone for academic programs involved in the training of future public administrators.

The processes of globalization and the internationalization of public administration education have also given rise to questions about whether

PRE-2009 NASPAA CURRICULUM STANDARDS

1. **The Management of Public Service Organizations**
Human resources
Budgeting and financial processes
Information management, technology applications and policy
2. **The Application of Quantitative and Qualitative**
Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation
Decision-making and problem solving
3. **The Public Policy and Organizational Environment**
Political and legal institutions and processes
Economics and social institutions and processes
Organization and management concepts and behavior

POST-2009 NASPAA CURRICULUM STANDARDS

1. To lead and manage in public governance
2. To participate in and contribute to the policy process
3. To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions
4. To articulate and apply a public service perspective
5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Figure 1. NASPAA curriculum accreditation standards: pre-2009 and post-2009.

western perspectives, courses, and competencies are appropriate for the education of public administrators in non-western contexts (Noori & Anderson, 2013; Samier, 2014). While Middle Eastern and Western countries share common administrative features, Jreisat (2002) points out that there are also important differences. For instance, unlike their Western counterparts, public administrators in the Middle East encounter challenges related to low levels of administration integration, deficits in administrative data and knowledge, the challenges of authoritarian governments and over-centralized bureaucracies, the lack of transparency and accountability, and self-serving ruling elites. Given this reality, while educational programs in non-western countries may offer courses with titles, such as public administration, budgeting, ethics, and human resources, it is critical that such courses also be tailored to address local contexts and administrative needs.

Public administrators, whether located in the Middle East or any other region of the world, may also need new approaches to their administrative problems. One alternative might be the New Public Service perspective, which encourages scholars and practitioners to move beyond traditional perspectives of public administration. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2011), the New Public Service perspective consists of seven overlapping and mutually reinforcing principles. These principles encourage public administrators to emphasize the public interest; to treat the public as citizens, not customers; to think strategically and act democratically; to value people and productivity; to serve, rather than steer, the public sector; to recognize that accountability is complex; and to value citizenship to Denhardt and Denhardt (2011). The seven New Public Service principles are summarized in Figure 2.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2011, p. 201) stress that the New Public Service perspective “requires that we rethink organizational processes, structures, and rules to open access and participation to those we serve in all phases of the government process.” This does not mean that the knowledge and skills emphasized by the older paradigms are no longer of any utility. Rather, it means that the goals set forth by the New Public Service will require knowledge, skills, and abilities that surpass those possessed by contemporary administrators. Public administrators that seek to “serve, rather than steer” will need to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities that include brokering, shared leadership, conflict resolution, facilitation, citizen engagement, and agenda setting (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). At its core, the New Public Service perspective echoes the argument that administrative reform will depend upon whether public servants have the appropriate blend of skills and perspectives (Crow & Iskandar, 1961, p. 307).

Methods

This article investigates the content of the public administration courses advertised by Lebanese undergraduate and graduate institutions and whether

1. **Serve, Rather Than Steer** An increasingly important role of the public servant is to help citizens articulate and meet their shared interests, rather than attempt to control or steer society in new directions.
2. **The Public Interest in the Aim, Not the By-Product** Public administrators must contribute to building a collective shared notion of the public interest. The goal is not to find quick solutions driven by individual choices. Rather, it is the creation of shared interests and shared responsibility.
3. **Think Strategically, Act Democratically** Policies and programs meeting public needs can be most effectively and responsibly achieved through collective efforts and collaborative processes.
4. **Serve Citizens, not Customers** The public interest results from a dialogue about shared values, rather than the aggregation of individual self-interests. Therefore, public servants do not merely respond to the demands of "customers," but focus on building relationships of trust and collaboration with and among citizens.
5. **Accountability Isn't Simple** Public servants should be attentive to more than the market; they should also attend to statutory and constitutional law, community values, political norms, professional standards, and citizen interests.
6. **Value People, not just Productivity** Public organizations and the networks in which they participate are more likely to succeed in the long run if they are operated through processes of collaboration and shared leadership based upon respect for all people.
7. **Value Citizenship and Public Service Above Entrepreneurship** The public interest is better advanced by public servants and citizens committed to making meaningful contributions to society rather than by entrepreneurial managers acting as if public money were their own.

Figure 2. The seven new public service principles (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2011).

these courses provide public administration students access to the knowledge and competencies related to the deficiencies that exist within Lebanon's administrative system. To address these questions, we focused our inquiry on four sub-questions. First, what is the number and nature of the public administration courses advertised by Lebanon's institutions of higher education? Second, to what extent do the advertised courses address the competencies central to NASPAA's pre-2009 and post-2009 curricular guidelines? Third, to what extent do the advertised courses address the seven principles of New Public Service? Finally, whether Lebanon's institutions of higher education could do more to prepare public administration students to meet countries' administrative needs?

To begin our inquiry, we acquired the 2012–2013 university course catalogs published by the 43 active institutions of higher education registered with Lebanon's Ministry of Education. The university catalogs were collected from institutional websites. If the relevant catalogs could not be downloaded from the internet, attempts were made to secure the catalogues through

telephone requests and site visits. In the event that we could not secure a 2012–2013 university catalogue, we secured a catalogue from a previous or subsequent year. We reviewed the catalogs and identified the number, title, and description of all public administration courses. We considered a course to be relevant if it related to one of the following topical areas: public administration, public management, public budgeting and finance, public economics and finance, public policy, organizational theory, public law, research methods, and public ethics.

For each relevant course, we then identified its language of instruction (Arabic, French, or English); its educational level (undergraduate or graduate); and whether it focused on the Middle East or the Lebanese context. To capture the substantive focus of each course, we compared its title and course description against the NASPAA curricular and the New Public Service criteria identified in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#). In doing so, we evaluated whether the content of each course addressed one or more of the thematic categories identified in our coding criterion. Our coding criterion were loose, meaning that a code was entered if there was a general fit between course title and description and a thematic category. We resolved questions about how specific courses should be coded through joint assessment (Krippendorff, 2004, 2013).

We also collected qualitative data through a series of six anonymous focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Four of these focus groups were comprised of public, private, and non-profit professionals who possessed expert knowledge about the state of public administration in Lebanon. The other two focus groups were comprised of advanced undergraduate and graduate students who were pursuing degrees in public administration. Given the difficulties related to the collection of valid data in Middle Eastern contexts (Clark, 2006), we purposeful sampling was used to select our focus group participants (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). These focus groups, which included a total of 29 participants, were asked semi-structured questions about their perceptions of public administration, the relationship between Lebanon's institutions of higher education and the country's democratic and bureaucratic institutions, and how public administration education in Lebanon might be strengthened. The questions posed to the focus group participants is provided in [Figure 3](#). While the participants were provided the opportunity to speak in either Arabic or English, most of the conversations occurred in English. These conversations were audio recorded, translated and transcribed, and thematically coded and analyzed using MaxQDA (Saldana, 2013).

Findings

The study's findings provide insight into the nature of public administration undergraduate and graduate education in Lebanon. At the time of this study, Lebanon's Ministry of Education reported that 43 institutions of higher

1. Could you tell us about yourself: for example, your educational background, your profession, how long you have lived and worked in Lebanon, and why you decided to join us today?
2. When you think of the Lebanese public sector, specifically its bureaucratic and administrative system, what are the first three things that come to mind?
3. What do you believe are the three most significant bureaucratic and administrative problems that are encountered by those who live in Lebanon?
4. Why do you believe these bureaucratic and administrative problems exist?
5. What do you believe should be done to moderate or eliminate these problems?
6. Assume you are in a position to hire a new recruit for a job located in Lebanon, other than substantive knowledge, what are the qualities that will be possessed by the successful candidate?
7. Assume you were given the opportunity to design a undergraduate program in Public Administration or Public Affairs in Lebanon:
 - a. What specific subjects should students know upon graduation?
 - b. What specific skills should students have upon graduation?
 - c. What specific competencies (set of behaviors) should students have upon graduation?
 - d. What teaching methods do you believe are the most appropriate for students?
8. Assume you were given the opportunity to design a undergraduate program in Public Administration or Public Affairs in Lebanon:
 - a. What specific subjects should students know upon graduation?
 - b. What specific skills should students have upon graduation?
 - c. What specific competencies (set of behaviors) should students have upon graduation?
 - d. What teaching methods do you believe are the most appropriate for students?

Figure 3. Focus group questions.

education were in operation throughout the country. In terms of the prevalence of public administration courses, we identified 22 institutions that advertised at least one undergraduate or one graduate public administration course. As the data reported in [Table 1](#) reveal, we determined that these 22 institutions advertised a total of 224 public administration courses. Of these courses, 160 (or 71.4%) were advertised at the undergraduate level and 64 (or 28.57%) were advertised at the graduate level.

At the undergraduate level, we detected 22 institutions that advertised public administration courses. Of these institutions, the American University of Beirut had the largest emphasis on public administration,

Table 1. Number of advertised courses by language of instruction and level of education, 2012–2013.

	Undergraduate courses		Graduate courses		All courses	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
English	83	37.05	45	20.09	128	57.14
French	50	22.32	14	6.25	64	28.57
Arabic	26	11.61	5	2.23	31	13.84
English and French	1	0.45	0	0.00	1	0.45
Totals	160	71.43	64	28.57	224	100

with 22 different public administration courses. Seven other institutions advertised between 8 and 19 public administration courses, while 12 institutions offered 5 or fewer courses. At the graduate level, we identified 11 universities that advertised public administration courses. Notre Dame University and Beirut Arab University had the largest emphasis on public administration, as they both advertised 15 or more public administration courses. The majority of institutions involved in graduate level public administration education advertised three or fewer public administration courses.

The findings also provide insight into the language of instruction used in public administration courses advertised by Lebanon's institutions of higher education. As [Table 1](#) indicates, English was the most prevalent language at all levels of education, as it was the language used in 128 (or 57.14%) of courses. This was followed by French, which was used in 64 (or 28.57%) of courses. The least prevalent language was Arabic, which is Lebanon's official language. In total, we only identified 31 (or 13.84%) courses that used Arabic, of which 26 (or 83.87%) were advertised at the undergraduate level. As an example of a course that used Arabic, the Islamic University in Lebanon advertised a course called "Public Administration", which introduced students to the basic functions and institutions of public administration.

The number of advertised courses by region of focus and level of education is presented in [Table 2](#). These data indicate that 188 (or 83.93%) of the public administration courses did not address any specific country or region of focus. There were, however, 28 (or 12.50%) course descriptions that mentioned Lebanon. Examples of such courses include the undergraduate course *Public Administration in Lebanon* advertised by the American University of Beirut (2012b) and the graduate course *Comparative Development and Administration* advertised by Notre Dame University (2012b). Generally, these courses would focus on the scope, environment, bureaucratic structures, and challenges of public administration in Lebanon. An additional 11 (or 5.91%) courses either referenced the Middle East or Arab states. In many instances, courses such as these would also refer to

Table 2. Number of advertised courses by region of focus and education level, 2012–2013.

	Undergraduate courses		Graduate courses		All courses	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Not Specified	128	57.14	60	26.79	188	83.93
Lebanon	24	10.71	1	0.45	25	11.16
Middle East	2	0.89	3	1.34	5	2.23
Arab States	2	0.89	0	0.00	2	0.89
Lebanon/Middle East/Arab States	2	0.89	0	0.00	2	0.89
Lebanon/Middle East	1	0.45	0	0.00	1	0.45
Lebanon/Arab States	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Middle East/Arab States	1	0.45	0	0.00	1	0.45
Totals	160	71.43	64	28.57	224	100

Lebanon. For example, the undergraduate course *Public Administration and Policy in Lebanon*, advertised by the University of Balamand (2012b), explored administrative trends in both Lebanon and the Middle East.

NASPAA competencies: Pre-2009 and post-2009

The findings indicate that the public administration courses in Lebanon do not provide students with comprehensive coverage of the competencies contained within NASPAA’s pre-2009 curricular guidelines. The extent to which the advertised public administration courses cover NASPAA’s pre-2009 competencies is reported in Table 3. These data reveal that the category *Public Policy and Organizational Environment* received the most attention, as this competency was detected in 188 (or 83.93%) of all public administration courses. Within this category, more than half the courses focused on matters related to *Political and Legal Institutions and Processes*. The courses that fell into this category tended to cover broad topics, such as constitutional law, administrative law, or the budgetary processes. An illustrative example includes the course *Constitutional Law*, which is advertised by the American University of Beirut. According to the course description, students enrolled in this course “examine the constitutions and the development of constitutional mechanisms and practices in selected countries, with a focus on the Lebanese constitutional system. Constitutional mechanisms in general and institutional variables are [also] discussed, as well as their impact on public policy, democracy, and political stability” (American University of Beirut, 2012c, p. 262).

The data reported in Table 3 also indicate that public administration students in Lebanon may have difficulties acquiring competencies that fall

Table 3. Number and percentage of advertised courses that offer content related to pre-2009 NASPAA Competencies, 2012–2013.

	Undergraduate courses		Graduate courses		All courses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. The Management of Public Service Organizations	53	33.13	23	35.94	76	33.93
- Human resources	7	4.38	5	7.81	12	5.36
- Budgeting and financial processes	46	28.75	18	28.13	64	28.57
- Information management, technology applications and policy	2	1.25	1	1.56	3	1.34
2. The Application of Quantitative and Qualitative	56	35.00	30	19.20	86	38.39
- Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation	51	31.88	28	43.75	79	35.27
- Decision-making and problem solving	22	13.75	17	26.56	39	17.41
3. The Public Policy and Organizational Environment	136	85.00	52	33.28	188	83.93
- Political and legal institutions and processes	115	71.88	46	71.88	161	71.88
- Economics and social institutions and processes	36	22.50	16	25.00	52	23.21
- Organization and management concepts and behavior	47	29.38	19	29.69	66	29.46

under the *Management of Public Service Organizations* category. This category received the lowest overall attention, having been detected in 76 (or 33.93%) advertised courses, a pattern present at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Students that take courses that fall in this category receive exposure to topics such as *Budgeting and Financial Processes*, a competency detected in 64 (or 28.57%) courses. The competencies related to human resources and information management received the least amount of coverage, at 12 (or 5.36%) and 3 (or 1.34%) respectively. Courses representative of the *Management of Public Service Organizations* category included *Public Management*, a graduate course advertised by the American University of Beirut (2012c) and *Survey of Public Administration*, an undergraduate course advertised by La Sagesse University (2012). In the course *Survey of Public Administration*, students cover the history of public administration, the theories and practices used in the field, and topics related to public policy, organizational theory, budgeting, human resources, and ethics (La Sagesse University, 2012).

Shifting to NASPAA's post-2009 curricular guidelines, the results presented in Table 4 indicate that Lebanon's public administration courses do not provide students with comprehensive coverage of NASPAA's five universal competencies. For both undergraduate and graduate courses, the most emphasized competency was *Participating in and Contributing to the Policy Process*, which was detected in 77 (or 34.38%) of advertised courses. Courses that addressed this competency tended to provide students with an introduction to the policy process or to policy analysis. Although the second most prevalent competency was *Lead and Manage in Public Governance*, detected in 55 (or 24.55%) of all advertised courses, courses that fell into this category covered topics, such as non-profit management, financial management, organizational management, public management, and human resource management. In contrast, we only identified nine courses that dealt with leadership or management as their central focus. At the other end of the spectrum,

Table 4. Number and percentage of advertised courses that offer content related to post-2009 NASPAA Competencies, 2012–2013.

	Undergraduate courses		Graduate courses		All courses	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
1. Lead and manage in public governance	38	23.75	17	26.56	55	24.55
2. Participate in and contribute to the policy process	51	31.88	26	40.63	77	34.38
3. Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions	26	16.25	16	25.00	42	18.75
4. Articulate and apply a public service perspective	10	6.25	4	6.25	14	6.25
5. Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry	20	12.50	12	18.75	32	14.29

the competency *Articulate and Apply a Public Service Perspective* was only covered in 14 (or 6.25%) courses.

These findings indicate that most public administration courses advertised by Lebanon’s institutions of higher education cover foundational public administration topics. Of the 224 identified undergraduate and graduate courses, 18 (or 8.03%) focused on introductory public administration topics, 52 (or 23.21%) focused on Lebanon’s legal and institutional framework, 57 (or 25.44%) focused on budgeting and finance, 16 (or 7.14%) courses focused on public policy, and 4 (or 1.78%) focused on introductory research methods. While these 129 (or 57.59%) courses do provide students with coverage of important material, a broader analysis indicates that Lebanese institutions of higher education provide limited coverage of public administration competencies related to human resource management, information management and the application of technology, ethics, accountability, and research methods. There is also limited coverage of topics such as the public interest, public service, and community engagement, which would provide students with insights into the principles of governance and the roles and responsibilities of public servants.

New public service principles

This study also investigated the extent to which Lebanon’s institutions of higher education cover public administration topics outside of the Old Public Administration and New Public Management perspectives. Although the public administration courses advertised in Lebanon do not provide extensive coverage of the seven New Public Service principles, the data reported in [Table 5](#) reveals the presence of these principles in 49 (or 21.88%) of the 224 advertised courses. Of these, 34 (or 69.39%) of the courses were advertised at the undergraduate level and 15 (or 30.61%) of the courses were advertised at the graduate level. The most prevalent principle was *Serve, Rather Than Steer*, which reflects the idea that public policies should be the results of the interactions that occur between

Table 5. Number and percentage of advertised courses that offer content related to principles of new public service, 2012–2013.

	Undergraduate courses		Graduate courses		All courses	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Serve, Rather Than Steer	14	8.75	7	10.94	21	9.38
2. The Public Interest is the Aim, Not the By-Product	4	2.50	1	1.56	5	2.23
3. Think Strategically, Act Democratically	5	3.13	2	3.13	7	3.13
4. Serve Citizens, Not Customers	2	1.25	1	1.56	3	1.34
5. Accountability Isn’t Simple	6	3.75	4	6.25	10	4.46
6. Value People, Not Just productivity	2	1.25	0	0.00	2	0.89
7. Value Citizenship and Public Service Above Entrepreneurship	1	0.63	0	0.00	1	0.45

different stakeholders in society. This principle was detected in 21 (or 9.38%) of all analyzed courses. An illustrative example is *Civil Society, Welfare State and Social Policy*, which is a graduate course advertised by Notre Dame University (2012a, p. 441). This course reviews the processes of social policy and considers how public, private, and nonprofit actors are involved in these processes.

The second most prevalent New Public Service principle was *Accountability Isn't Simple*, which suggests that public administrators can improve accountability through communication, citizen empowerment, and public engagement. This principle was detected in 10 (or 4.46%) of all analyzed courses. A relevant example includes *Citizenship and Democracy*, an undergraduate course advertised by the University of Balamand (2012a, p. 390). This course covers issues of citizenship, democracy, and democratic systems in states and societies, as well as civil society and the rights and obligations of citizens. The least detected New Public Service principle was *Value Citizenship and Public Service above Entrepreneurship*. This principle was identified in just a single undergraduate course, *Democracy, Civic Engagement and Leadership*, which was advertised at the American University of Beirut (2012a).

The course *Democracy, Civic Engagement and Leadership* also covered three additional principles: *The Public Interest is the Aim, Not the By-Product*, *Think Strategically, Act Democratically*, and *Value People, Not Just Productivity*. According to its description (American University of Beirut, 2012a, p. 262), the course “introduces students to the principles and processes of civic engagement and leadership within democratic and democratizing systems of governance, and will help them understand the theoretical and practical issues related to the practice of participatory democracy.” Students enrolled in this course also learn about civic engagement and the difficulties associated with citizen engagement activities. To complete the course, students must identify a unique social, economic, or political problem, identify the root cause of this problem, and then develop a strategy for resolving the problem. Throughout the semester, students are encouraged to engage relevant stakeholders in the problem-solving process.

Focus group findings

The focus group discussions contained themes that complement our findings that the public administration courses advertised in Lebanon do not provide broad coverage of the competencies stressed by NASPAA's pre-2009 curricular guidelines, NASPAA's post-2009 curricular guidelines, or the principles of New Public Service. The first theme was that institutions of higher education could do more to improve the capacities and capabilities of Lebanon's administrative agencies and public administrators. According to the focus group participants, Lebanon's institutions of higher education must

ensure that future public servants possess basic knowledge about administrative structures and processes. This would require institutions to provide more extensive coverage of foundational administrative topics, such as budgeting, economics, management, organizational theory, policymaking, and human resources. The focus group participants also stressed that institutions must do more to ensure that future public servants possess personal qualities that will enable them to execute their responsibilities and uphold and promote the public interest. Some of the qualities mentioned by the participants included: the interpersonal and communication skills needed to negotiate, exchange information, and work as a member of a diverse team; the entrepreneurial skills needed to solve challenges, be creative and resourceful, and take risks; and the commitment to serve the public. Finally, several participants indicated that future public administrators, and perhaps all Lebanese, should learn about citizenship and their individual rights, duties, and responsibilities.

The second theme centered on the proposition that institutions of higher education Lebanon must strengthen their public administration curriculum so that students are better prepared for employment in the public sector. The discussions behind this theme focused less on the subject matter of individual courses, and more on how institutions transfer public administration knowledge to their students. Some of the focus group participants indicated that institutions of higher education need to attract qualified faculty who have the knowledge and expertise needed to teach students about Lebanon's public sector. While the focus groups understood the role of faculty research, they stressed the importance of hiring practitioners who could bring their real-world experience into the classroom. There were also concerns about the use of outdated teaching methods, which emphasize the traditional lecture and rote memorization, and the lack of instructional resources, namely textbooks and case studies that address domestic topics and issues. Some participants also expressed the concern that there was an overemphasis on theory, especially "western" theory, in the classroom. Although there was disagreement, the focus group participants seemed to be less concerned about an overemphasis on theory than they were about the need for balance between substance and practice.

When asked about how to strengthen public administration education in Lebanon, the participants suggested that educational institutions make pedagogical adjustments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. These adjustments, as a participant from the mixed-sector focus group suggested, must be designed to ensure that public administration students acquire "a blend of hard and soft skills" (Participant, 2014). When asked to elaborate, the participants suggested that hard skills are theory and research oriented; meaning they are necessary to understand how the administrative system works and how the system could be reformed. Although the hard skills

mentioned by the focus groups reflected the traditional public administration education topics mentioned previously, there were two areas of divergence.

First, the focus groups suggested that students should take courses that expose them to comparative perspectives of public administration. While the participants noted that western perspectives are critical, given the commonalities shared among administrative systems around the world, there are also substantial and subtle differences. As such, students should also be required to take courses that emphasize countries outside of North America and Europe. More specifically, students should take courses that cover the structures, practices, and problems related to public administration in Lebanon. Second, the participants also suggested that students be required to take courses that would provide them an appreciation of concepts, such as democracy and citizenship, and how these concepts relate to public administration in Lebanon.

When asked about soft skills, the participants suggested that soft skills were practice oriented, meaning they reflect the skills needed to get work done within the administrative system. They suggested that public administrators need to acquire information exchange, negotiation, problem solving, and conflict management skills needed to effectively interact with the public. To encourage the development of such skills, institutions of higher education should not only ensure that students receive exposure to real-world situations, they should also encourage students to develop a sense of civic mindedness and a greater appreciation for the role of public administrators. Whether in the classroom, or through internship programs, students should be given the opportunity to participate in local case studies, to interface with the bureaucracy, to engage and learn from government officials and the citizens that they serve, and to develop the communication skills needed to interact with the Lebanese public.

Discussion

This study revealed that Lebanon's twenty-two registered institutions of higher education advertised two hundred and twenty four public administration courses during the 2012–2013 academic year. The majority of these courses provided students with topical knowledge about political and legal institutions and the public policy process. A smaller portion of courses covered topics such as public networks, public management, and citizen engagement. While the total number of public administration courses seems impressive, especially for a country the size of Lebanon, our findings also revealed that topics, such as budgeting and financial processes, information technology, human resources, decision-making and problem solving, citizen engagement, and the articulation of a public service perspective did not receive extensive coverage. These coverage gaps are problematic for two

reasons. First, they correspond to the administrative deficiencies that exist within Lebanon's bureaucratic system (OMSAR, 2011). Second, the gaps suggest that Lebanon's public administration students do not receive the opportunity to acquire many of the competencies stressed by NASPAA's pre-2009 and post-2009 curriculum guidelines.

We believe these findings indicate that Lebanon's institutions of higher education could update the content of their public administration courses. Doing so may not only help to provide Lebanon's future public officials with the legal, organizational and technical knowledge they need to perform their duties. An expansion of course content may also help to ensure that public "employees are socialized in the ethics and responsibilities of public service" (Jreisat, 2002, p. 95). While questions about specific curricular reforms were outside the scope of our study, the findings do provide general guidelines for those interested in updating specific courses or entire academic programs. First, given the diversity of Lebanon's administrative deficiencies, the findings suggest there is a need for courses that draw upon one or more of the major public administration perspectives. From the Old Public Administration perspective, there is a need for courses that emphasize the purpose of administration, issues of hierarchy and command and control, the rule of law, as well as the organization of basic administrative activities, ranging from planning, budgeting, staffing, and implementation. From the New Public Management perspective, there is a need for courses that emphasize flexibility, problem solving, and the tools that could be used to improve the efficiency and accountability of public officials and public programs. These tools include, but are not limited to, outsourcing, privatization, public policy analysis, project management, cost benefit analysis, stakeholder analysis, strategic management, program evaluation, performance management, and decision making. Any updates to courses and programs, however, must go beyond the principles derived from the public administration and public management perspectives (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011). Lebanon's public administration students could also benefit from courses that address ideas associated with the New Public Service paradigm, namely participatory democracy, the public interest, citizenship, civic engagement, community building, and collaborative governance.

The findings also suggest that Lebanon's institutions of higher education could do more to provide future public administrators with the substantive knowledge and professional competencies they need to be successful in the professional environment. While institutions should not all strive to fill the same niche, the focus groups findings indicate that institutions should provide, at a minimum, coverage of foundational administrative topics. Furthermore, institutions that possess the capacity to offer public administration degrees or majors might consider organizing their courses around the deficiencies that exist within Lebanon's administrative structures or the

capacities that are needed by the country's public officials, for example, personnel management, budgeting and finance, citizenship and civic engagement, accountability, public policy and analysis. Institutions of higher education might also consider how NASPAA's post-2009 accreditation standards might be used to influence the design of public administration courses and curriculums. Given the flexibility of the NASPAA accreditation standards, institutions could develop courses that provide students the opportunity to acquire not just general competencies, but the specific competencies that public sector employees need to operate within Lebanon's political and administrative contexts.

The connection between administrative practice and domestic context has received extensive coverage in the comparative public administration literature (Heady, 2001; Jreisat, 2002, 2012). This connection is especially important for Lebanon, where fewer than 13% of the advertised courses public administration referred to domestic matters in their titles or descriptions. While the focus group participants stressed that Western ideas should be covered in the classroom, they also noted that it is important that students be provided the opportunity to consider whether, and the extent to which, these ideas are appropriate for Lebanon. Moreover, students must also become versed in the history, political system, bureaucratic institutions, and administrative practices of Lebanon. This means that public administration students in Lebanon must learn how laws and regulations are made in Lebanon, not just how laws and regulations are made in the United States or European countries. Students should also be given the opportunity to learn how cultural context may impact understandings of principles such as the rule of law, accountability, and good governance. Relatedly, the language used in public administration courses is also of critical importance. In the present study, less than 14% of the courses analyzed were advertised in Arabic, Lebanon's official language. To address this gap, Lebanon's institutions of higher education might consider how to better integrate Arabic, especially professional Arabic, into their public administration courses (Noori & Anderson, 2013).

Lebanon's public administration students also need opportunities to acquire real-world knowledge and experience. This could be accomplished in two ways. First, institutions of higher education could expand the tools they use to bridge theory and practice. Here, the goal would be to provide students with a learning experiences that transcend textbooks, course lectures, and rote memorization. For example, there may be opportunities to enlarge internship programs, sponsor workshops and guest lectures, and enable students to participate in the resolution of local case studies. There may also be opportunities to hire additional faculty of practice, especially faculty that have extensive public sector experience, as well as full-time faculty whose research interests are specifically directed towards the

investigation of Lebanon's administrative institutions and practices. Second, institutions of higher education could expand the professional development activities that they provide students. This means that institutions must go beyond providing students with general introductions to the structures, practices, and norms of public administration. Likewise students should be given opportunities to develop and strengthen their leadership and management skills, and learn how to deliver presentations, conduct objective research, manage their time, work with others, solve complex problems, read and write professional Arabic, and if they desire, sit for the employment examinations offered by Lebanon's Civil Service Board.

Finally, Lebanese institutions of higher education could develop incentives to encourage their faculty members and academic units to take steps that would to strengthen public administration education. While we did not investigate incentive structures, the focus groups identified several areas that might be worth further consideration. First, incentives should be used to encourage the development of textbooks and other learning materials that focus on domestic and local matters of public administration. As stressed by many of the participants, at present, there is a deficit of course materials that cover the structure and practice of public administration, not just for countries, such as Lebanon, but for the Middle East as a whole. Second, institutions should expand their support for domestic public administration research, perhaps through the provision of individual research grants or the development of politically independent academic research centers. Finally, while related to larger questions about technology access and infrastructure available, institutions might also explore how public administration education can be brought online, which would open doors for students who live in rural areas or public officials who are employed full time and want take to graduate level public administration courses.

Conclusion

This article argues there is a mismatch between the content of the advertised public administration courses offered by Lebanon's institutions of higher education and the deficiencies and challenges present within Lebanon's administrative system. A comparative review of the titles and descriptions of the 224 courses included in this study revealed that public administration courses in Lebanon tend to focus on topics that introduce students to the legal and political processes of public administration, namely budgeting and finance, constitutional law, and administrative law. Moreover, when compared against NASPAA's pre-2009 and post-2009 curricular guidelines, as well as the seven principles of New Public Service principles, these courses had limited coverage of topics and competencies related to human resource management, information and technology management, program assessment

and evaluation, ethics, accountability, research methods, and decision making. Finally, the focus group participants revealed that public administration students in Lebanon do not receive sufficient training in the soft skills that are needed by public officials, do not get the opportunity to learn about the structure and practice of public administration as it exists in Lebanon, and do not receive adequate coverage of topics such as the public interest, public service, citizenship, and community engagement.

These conclusions suggest that Lebanon's institutions of higher education have yet to meet the aspirations of Crow and Iskandar (1961), who stressed that public servants would need new skills, attitudes, and values to strengthen the country's administrative institutions. Accordingly, we believe our findings reveal the necessity for research that explores the "big questions" of public administration education as they relate to Lebanon (Denhardt, 2001). As such, researchers must identify the specific knowledge domains, skills, and competencies that are needed within Lebanon's public sector, and by extension, the extent to which public officials and recent graduates possess such knowledge, skills, and competencies. To do so, however, scholars must go beyond the focus of this study, as Lebanon has experienced an expansion in the number of courses and programs related to public policy, civil society, and non-profit management (Haase & Haddad, 2015), which may add new insights to our understanding of public administration education in the country. Scholars can also seek ways to peer inside Lebanon's public administration courses and programs through investigations of course syllabi, learning outcomes, enrollment numbers, retention and graduation rates, and placement statistics. Finally, future research can also explore the methods used to recruit and select Lebanon's public administrators, and the extent to which students that complete public administration courses and programs are able to secure employment in Lebanon's public sector.

Finding answers to these questions such as these will require collaboration between researchers, educators, and those employed in the Lebanese public sector. This community of stakeholders must find the means to discuss research findings and the deficiencies and challenges that exist within Lebanon's administrative institutions. These stakeholders must also reach a general consensus on the knowledge, skills, and competencies that are needed within Lebanon's public sector, as well as the learning outcomes for public administration education, whether for individual courses or entire academic programs. Such activities would further our understandings of public administration education in Lebanon and make it possible to align the content offered by public administrative courses and programs with Lebanon's administrative needs.

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