

Perspectives

An Occasional Series Published by
The Office of the Dean

School of Public and Environmental Affairs • Indiana University



11

“Transforming the Public Service
in a World Without Boundaries”

Adam W. Herbert

Published May 2004

The Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) presents here the 2004 Donald Stone Lecture delivered by IU President and SPEA faculty member Adam W. Herbert at the annual meeting of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), in Portland, Oregon on March 30, 2004.

ASPA was established in 1939 in response to major changes in the developing field of public administration. In its 60+ years, ASPA has both influenced and been influenced by the field and profession of public administration, specifically in three areas: professionalism in public administration—both domestically and internationally; public administration education, theory, and research; and advocacy for public administration and public service.

The ASPA Endowment, Inc., sponsors the Donald C. Stone Distinguished Guest Lecture at the ASPA National Conference each year. Don Stone (1903-1995) is legendary among public administrators. His remarkable public service career included developing procedures for the Civil Works Administration and planning and implementing the Works Progress Administration. He helped draft the United Nations Charter and his efforts were instrumental in the success of the Marshall Plan in rebuilding Europe after the Second World War. He went on to become the founding dean of the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of International Affairs, as well as one of the founders of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and a charter member of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA).

When the Endowment established the Donald C. Stone Fund shortly after Stone's death, the Board determined to sponsor a special lecture at the ASPA Annual Conference in Stone's honor.

President Herbert is the ninth key public administration figure to be chosen to deliver the prestigious address at ASPA's premier event. Other Stone Lecturers have included SPEA Dean Astrid E. Merget; Herbert Simon, Nobel Laureate in Economics; Richard King, Mellon University Professor of Computer Science and Psychology Carnegie Mellon University; and Harlan Cleveland, former ASPA President, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, and former dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

Adam W. Herbert Jr. became Indiana University's 17th president on August 1, 2003, coming to Indiana from the Florida higher education system, where he was Regents Professor and executive director of the Florida Center for Public Policy and Leadership at the University of North Florida. He served as the president of UNF from 1989 to 1998. From 1998 to 2001, Herbert led the nation's second largest university system, serving as the sixth chancellor of the State University System of Florida. In this position, he oversaw a \$5 billion budget and 250,000 students.

Herbert was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma., in 1943, and earned a BA in political science from the University of Southern California in 1966. He continued his education at USC, earning a master's degree in public administration a year later, followed by a PhD in urban affairs and public administration from the University of Pittsburgh in 1971.

He began his professional career as a faculty member in the USC School of Public Administration and the Center for Urban Affairs. In 1972 he moved to Virginia Tech, where he served as the chair of the urban affairs program and as associate professor of urban affairs. Herbert was named one of 15 White House Fellows in 1974 and served as special assistant to the U.S. secretary of health, education, and welfare, and to the U.S. under-secretary of housing and urban development. After a stint at the Joint Center for Political Studies in Washington, DC, and a return first to Virginia Tech as professor of public administration and then as the first director of Northern Virginia Programs for the university's Center for Public Administration and Policy, Herbert joined the Florida university system in 1979 as professor of public administration at Florida International University in Miami. From that time until 1989, he also held posts as dean of the School of Public Affairs and Services, associate vice president for academic affairs, and vice president of the North Miami campus.

I must begin my comments this morning with an expression of appreciation to our president, Walter Broadnax. Thank you very much for the invitation to deliver the Donald Stone Lecture. Of much greater importance, thank you for your outstanding leadership of ASPA over the past year and for your distinguished career of public service at all levels of government and in higher education. Your impressive career and the commitment to excellence you have consistently demonstrated reflect the highest standards and values of our profession. We are very grateful for the example you have established in service to the public good.

National conferences such as this are so important for our field because they afford us the opportunity to explore new ideas and challenge old ones, reconnect with old friends, and establish new relationships and to learn from those who have preceded us in the field. They provide hope for the future as we meet the next generation of public administration leaders and scholars.

As all of you know, it is a special honor for any ASPA member to receive an invitation to deliver the Donald C. Stone lecture. This privilege is especially meaningful to me because of the personal relationship I was fortunate to have with him. Each of us in this room can identify a small number of faculty members who have greatly influenced our intellectual development, values, perspectives, and commitment to public service.

When I was a graduate student at the University of Southern California, Chet Newland was a force in my life, as was Don Stone at the University of Pittsburgh. My first memory of Dean Stone dates back to the fall of 1967, when I entered the doctoral program in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Pittsburgh.

All new students in the School were invited to his home. It was called “Stone’s Throw.” The house was isolated among trees on the hill above the “Cathedral of Learning.” You could see for miles in every direction. Many of us thought that such a setting was particularly appropriate for an academic leader with the comprehensive vision he possessed.

At “Stone’s Throw,” Don and Alice welcomed groups of students from throughout the world and across America as if we were part of their family.

It was clear they cared very deeply about their students. As a Hoosier, I am very proud to note that this dynamic team first met in Bloomington at Indiana University in 1925.

There was no question of the Stone commitment to GSPIA and to the importance of public service. He was truly a leader who personified the best of our profession: the selflessness, the high intellect, the strong appreciation for and commitment to the public good. In a sense, he was a modern Renaissance person. He had an incredibly wide-ranging career that included city management, directorship of the Public Administration Service, a college presidency and deanship, leadership positions in the Bureau of the Budget, the Marshall Plan, and the Mutual Security Agency. He was a consummate public servant.

It was consistently clear that he possessed a profound understanding of the dynamics of organizations, the evolving environment of public enterprises, and the impact of those environmental changes on both public policy and day-to-day enterprise operations. He was then able to apply that knowledge and understanding to multiple functional areas and levels of government.

But at the foundation of all his work was a very strong set of core values. As founding dean of GSPIA, he stressed the importance of responsive, effective government, as well as the obligation to provide effective leadership and stewardship in all our public service activities. He once said that the underlying concept of GSPIA was to be an intercultural center in which persons of all sexes, religions, and nationalities would be educated to have an integrated approach to world problems. He also emphasized that the job of every faculty member was to break down barriers of discrimination.¹

I continue to be inspired by Don Stone's vision, the breadth of his interests, his extensive administrative experience, the depth of his analyses of management practices, and the many observations and points of advice he shared with students about the dynamics of public enterprises. Among the many such observations he shared with us were these five that got my attention. I have never forgotten them:

1. Before accepting an appointment to a new post, be sure you follow a “stinker.”
2. To assure success, select people more competent than you are and give them any resultant credit.
3. If a highly centralized organization isn’t working well, the solution is to decentralize it. If it is already decentralized, then the remedy is centralization.
4. The success of a meeting depends on the comfort and arrangement of chairs.
5. If you wish to live long and joyfully, never retire.²

In short, Don Stone taught the fundamentals of effective decisionmaking and administration. He insisted that we be trained to deal simultaneously with both detail and the abstract. He helped us understand that vision without strategy or strategies without vision are generally ineffectual. Finally, he stressed that public *service* must truly be for the public good. The opportunity to prepare for a public service career in an educational environment with such strong and principled academic leaders has had a great impact on my life. I am sure that each of you could make a similar observation based on your own experiences.

Building the Future on the Foundations of the Academy

In her Stone Lecture last year, my colleague Astrid Merget provided an excellent analysis of some of the major currents of changes impacting our society. The major changes she identified included: the globalization of our political economy; technology; the importance of public, private and nonprofit partnerships; a renewed and amplified view of institution building; the challenge to manage complexity and change; and the importance of policy predicated on research. She also identified the special assets of the field of public administration that enable us to embrace those changes.³

Although my comments do not directly reference each of the currents of change identified by Professor Merget, I share her belief in their importance. This lecture will focus more specifically on values and fundamental obligations of the Academy, the field of public administration generally, and

each of us as individual public servants. It reflects a strong belief in some of the core ideals that Don Stone and many of the other giants of our field have sought to instill for over 50 years.

The Academy in Historical Perspective

A half-century may seem like a long time in the American memory, but to put educational ideals in their proper perspective, we must reach much farther back in time. It was more than 2,400 years ago that the public square in Athens was a gathering place where people met, bought, and sold goods, traded gossip, and listened as Socrates asked questions about truth, virtue, and wisdom.

His student, Plato, moved these philosophical debates to a more formal setting and founded the Academy. Like his mentor, Plato challenged his society. He believed that the intellectual discipline developed by studying certain subjects would lead students to eternal Truths. Plato believed that how we think and what we take to be real play an important role in how we act. The Academy clearly was a unique place in which both wonder and questioning were consistently encouraged.

The controversy surrounding the ideas of these philosophers raised two very important questions that remain relevant today for higher education institutions and for schools such as those in which we have been trained: Should the Academy conserve and transmit established cultural values and prepare the young for leadership in their society, or should it instead question and transform those values?

Although a great deal has changed over the past 2,000 years, I am struck by the continuing relevance of these fundamental questions within the modern Academy. They assume a space between instinct and reflection. The attempt over the centuries to answer them helps to explain the turbulence and tension that arise from time to time between the Academy and the greater society of which our institutions are such an important part.

It is my belief that American higher education has a particularly critical role to play during these times of turbulence, as Dwight Waldo described them. The Academy cannot operate isolated from the broader context in which our institutions exist. Should the Academy *conserve and transmit* established

cultural values and prepare the young for leadership in their society, or should it instead *question and transform* those values? I believe that the answer to both of these questions is “YES.”

We must engage in the public cultures of our society. We must focus attention on the conservation of our core cultural values. Simultaneously, however, we must participate in efforts to transform some of those values as our society evolves in the face of rapidly changing economic, technological, and social realities, many of which are now generated or impacted by the significant global level changes Professor Merget discussed last year.

As he looked back over the past 2,000 years, the distinguished scholar Louis Menand noted in his article, “The Marketplace of Ideas,” that

What has not changed . . . is the delicate and somewhat paradoxical relation in which the university stands to the general culture. It is important for research and teaching to be relevant—for the university to engage with the public culture, and to design its investigative paradigms with actual social and cultural life in view. . . .⁴

These are extremely important responsibilities that we in the academy and, more specifically, our public policy and administration programs, can and must assume. Our policy research can make a difference. Our investigative paradigms focused on major trends, issues, and problems at all levels of government can better inform both administrative and political decisionmaking. As with Plato, our teaching does impact how our students think, what they take to be real, and ultimately how they act in the fulfillment of their citizenship and professional responsibilities. As a result, the focus of our teaching takes on even greater significance.

Complicating the fulfillment of these responsibilities are two fundamental challenges to the core values of our society. First, we are living in a period of ongoing and often fierce competition between the definition of public good and private interests. Increasingly we are seeing a tendency to shift even further away from the *public* good to address *private* “wants.”

Government can work for the people of this nation only if private interests do not transcend the public good. Keeping the public good at the forefront of our government’s agenda is difficult to achieve in a climate of growing

“We are living in a period of ongoing and often fierce competition between the definition of public good and private interests.”

partisan politics and the rapidly rising influence of private interests successfully clamoring for attention and limited public resources.

O. Glenn Stahl stated the issue very effectively almost 15 years ago, when he observed that:

Along with major elements in our citizenry, are we prisoners of an individualistic philosophy that elevates personal “rights” so far above the common good, the general interest, the welfare of others, that we forget enforcement of social “obligations”? We approach irrationality in our defense of “freedom” from social controls, in our resistance to constraints on the unbridled pursuit of self-indulgence and self-aggrandizement. Our system certainly complains against expropriation of private wealth far more insistently than it objects to expropriation of the welfare of future generations. We in public administration, all too often, fall prey to the easy way out, to the psychologically disabling notion that this is the “American way.” I had thought that the real American way was an ever-present primary concern for mankind’s general welfare.⁵

Appropriately, Stahl concluded his observation with this challenge:

The United States is yearning for leadership that challenges the good and noble in our citizens. We must assert our own true place in democratic government—that of a public interest profession, not just an army of implementers! If enough others are not willing to take it on, then why not ourselves?⁶

Second is the rise of political movements that encourage the elimination and, in many cases, significant curbing of the role of the public sector in addressing major societal problems. A vivid illustration of this comes from my former home state of Florida. Governor Jeb Bush’s 2003 inaugural address described some of the social and economic problems facing the state. He asked his audience to shape society with the values of kindness and caring, which he juxtaposed with the cold, impersonal hand of government. Through this sense of caring, he argued that government would be less necessary and government buildings would end up “. . . empty of workers; silent monuments to the time when government played a larger role than it deserved or could adequately fill.”⁷

Leaving aside the question of whether government has indeed played a larger role than it deserves or can adequately fill, the argument that government is impersonal, uncaring, bureaucratic, and wasteful is growing. The argument, with its obvious political overtones, challenges the values, the credibility, and record of performance of our profession over time.

The continuing movement toward privatization and actual downsizing of government has threatened access to health care, housing, and many other essential human services, particularly for the poorest of our citizens. Simultaneously, we have seen CEOs extravagantly enriching themselves while laying off thousands of workers, impoverishing families, and endangering communities. They show little concern for the impact of their actions on those around them. The aggressive quest for an ever-bigger piece of the pie is unrelenting and those who have a piece do not want to give up a crumb, irrespective of the broader societal consequences.

Implications for Public Affairs Education

What does this mean for our profession and the manner in which we educate the next generation of professionals who respond to the opportunity for public service?

Allow me to begin by addressing the latter question first. Ironically, I find a publication focusing on the liberal arts to be a particularly appropriate starting point for exploring ways in which we might best prepare our students to fulfill their societal obligations. In a report entitled *Carnegie Challenge 2000: Liberal Arts Education for a Global Society*, it was observed that the Academy must focus on the challenge of preparing all of our students, regardless of academic field, to fulfill their citizenship responsibilities.

How many college graduates today have an understanding of the meaning and values of history or science or the humanities sufficient to make sense of the forces unleashed by the combination of technological innovation, the free market, and globalization? To prepare all students for effective participation in today's society, we need a contemporary curriculum bridging the arts and sciences and the professional disciplines connecting past to future and theory to experience, providing the basis for conversation across cultural

differences and professional specialization, and developing the capacity for critical inquiry and understanding.⁸

Few events in the history of this nation have reinforced the importance of such an education for the next generation of Americans more than the tragedy of September 11. That event, coupled with the growing diversity of our nation and increasing levels of international communication and interdependency, reinforces the need to educate our students to understand cultural differences while avoiding the temptation to succumb to cultural relativism, to understand boundaries yet reach beyond them.

It also reinforces the importance of expanding the capacity of our students to engage in critical inquiry, to understand increasingly more complex issues, to find ethical alternatives, and to resolve core values conflicts. We must challenge ourselves and educate our students to find, as Aristotle would have urged, the golden mean between the extremes of fanaticism and indifference.

Tools for the Public Servant

A world without boundaries clearly describes the nature of our work as an academic field. The boundaries that previously defined what it meant to be a public administrator and shaped the space in which we functioned are continually changing. Those boundaries have shifted so much that we must continually think critically and carefully about the skills, qualities, and values needed for public service.

On the one hand are the skills and traits normally associated with successful executives. Those are a *given*. Those must remain as core elements of the education we provide. What our times increasingly seem to demand, however, is greater attention to the spiritual and moral dimensions of leadership.

Moral Imagination

Aristotle has written that good leaders must have the *intellect* to develop good ideas and to fashion solutions, the *heart* to identify what people need, and the *ability* to communicate their ideas in spoken or written form. Aristotle also believed that the arts, especially tragedy, could help us develop another

essential characteristic—our moral imagination. By feeling empathy for characters as they suffered and pity for their misfortunes, audience members were enlarging their circle of compassion. They would then leave the amphitheater changed by the experience.

Moral imagination is required if one wishes to be an innovative leader who acts with sensitivity and responsiveness. The more pluralistic the community, the more important is the role of moral imagination in creating harmony from diversity.

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum once noted:

We are all born naked and poor; we are all subject to disease and misery of all kinds; finally, we are all condemned to death. The sight of these common miseries can, therefore, carry our hearts to humanity—if we live in a society that encourages us to make the imaginative leap into the life of the other. . . . Human personhood, by which I mean the possession of practical reason and other basic moral capacities, is the source of our moral worth. . . .⁹

Instead of leading based on the fear of differences in race, religion, and cultures, we must find ways to create meaningful connections among us. Cultivating the moral imagination in our programs is one way of encouraging those meaningful connections. This is being done increasingly in the classrooms of the nation’s leading professional schools.

At the University of Chicago Law School, Professor Nussbaum uses Charles Dickens’ novel, *Hard Times*, to discuss economics and distributive theories of justice. At Harvard Medical School, Pulitzer-prize-winning child psychiatrist Robert Coles asks students to read William Carlos Williams, the acclaimed American author and physician who practiced among the urban poor. In the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, we have asked nonprofit managers to reflect on ethics and fiduciary responsibility by reading the nineteenth-century novel, *The Warden*.

Practical Wisdom

Another important element of public affairs education in these times is the development of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom, as opposed to

Instead of leading based on the fear of differences in race, religion, and cultures, we must find ways to create meaningful connections among us.

theoretical wisdom, is a term Aristotle used to describe the capacity to live a good life, which he felt was at the heart of moral virtue. It has to do with a correct understanding of the world and one's experience in it. Specifically, practical wisdom is the ability to adapt the universals of morality and politics to particular and concrete situations, knowing exactly when to do what. For example, Aristotle once said that giving away money was easy, but knowing to whom one should give, at what time, and in what manner, this was the mark of a truly magnanimous person who possessed practical wisdom.

Clearly, practical wisdom is more likely to come from a broad range of life experiences in the world. Contemporary education offers another avenue to gaining at least a hint of it. This can be taught through a wide range of experiential learning, service learning, community service, or internship experiences. We must engage our students in the lives of their communities and the people who reside within them.

No matter the academic discipline or field, student exposure to the realities of community-based organizations, to the challenges confronting small businesses, to the operations of public agencies and to citizen advocacy groups can make a significant difference in the understanding of society and of citizenship responsibilities. The core values on which a democratic society are built will be more clearly understood. The importance of a commitment to volunteerism will be reinforced. Their lives will never be the same!

Like the doctor who possesses a good bedside manner, the leader in this shifting and more complex environment without boundaries needs both the characteristic of sensitivity and a commitment to responsiveness. This interpersonal element is even more important for the leader of innovative and responsive organizations such as those our future will demand. In this kind of setting, openness, trust, communication, ethical behavior, and collaboration are essential.

Conclusion

Providing public service leadership in a world with shrinking boundaries will not be easy. Sustaining core societal values will be a recurring challenge in the face of continuing demands for greater shares of the economic pie, irrespective of the broader impact on the public good.

*“The leader
in this shifting
and more
complex
environment
without
boundaries
needs both the
characteristic
of sensitivity
and a
commitment to
responsiveness.”*

At first glance, the world we inhabit may seem to be without boundaries. Unfortunately, we encounter them all the time, in the context of race, class, gender, religion, nation, and region. We divide ourselves according to these boundaries and often make public policy based on them. This is certainly one way to conduct the public's business. As for me, I prefer another path. In the words of Barbara Jordan: "A public servant does not confuse the public interest and private interest. His or her motivating ideal is selflessness and an ever-present awareness of our government's source of authority—the people. The public servant honors American ideals by actualizing rather than simply mouthing principles as sound."

If all of us here will dare to rise to this challenge, then we will truly succeed in transforming our nation and our world. Thank you.

Endnotes

¹ Donald Stone in *An Interview With Donald C. Stone*, Public Works Oral History Project, Interview Number 9, October 1992, p. 33.

² These same points were also included in a more extensive list he provided in Donald Stone in "The Changing Public Service," *Public Administration Review*, March/April 1990, p. 207.

³ "Times of Turbulence," Astrid E. Merget, *Perspectives*, An Occasional Series Published by the Office of the Dean, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, 2003.

⁴ *Reinvigorating the Humanities: Enhancing Research and Education on Campus and Beyond*, Association of American Universities, Jan. 2004.

⁵ O. Glenn Stahl in "The Changing Public Service," *PAR*, March/April 1990, p. 206.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁷ Governor Jeb Bush, 2003 Inaugural Address. Available at <http://www.myflorida.com/myflorida/government/mediacenter/news/speeches/inaug-01-07-03.html>. Accessed on 03/01/04.

⁸ *Carnegie Challenge 2000: Liberal Arts Education for a Global Society*, compiled by Carol M. Baker, Carnegie Corporation of New York, New York, 2000.

⁹ Martha Nussbaum. *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.

The Indiana University
School of Public and Environmental Affairs

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2002, the IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) is the largest school of public affairs in the United States. SPEA was founded on the premise that society's complex problems demand comprehensive solutions. The School's curriculum and research are distinguished by a vigorous interdisciplinary approach to education and problem-solving. In the most recent *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of graduate and professional programs at American and international schools, SPEA Bloomington consistently ranks in the top two or three programs.

SPEA has over 19,000 alumni and currently enrolls approximately 3,500 graduate and undergraduate students statewide at Indiana University campuses.

Making A World of Difference.