

Using Multi-Media Learning Objects in Public Affairs Classrooms:  
Global Experiences with Hubert E-cases & E-Studies

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February 2016

forthcoming in a special symposium “Leveraging the Power  
of Information Technology to Bolster Interactive Learning,”  
*Journal of Public Affairs Education*

We would like to thank the many students who engage with us in our classrooms for the insights they have brought to us about the noble profession of teaching. Without their passion for using public policy to improve our world, we would not have developed the insights contained in this paper. Any omissions in this account, however, are the responsibilities of the authors.

## **Abstract**

This paper describes the development and implementation of multimedia learning objects to improve the relevance of public affairs across three national contexts – Kenya, United States, and China (Hong Kong). We explore how written cases have evolved into a new generation of multimedia learning materials that provide context-specific information to hone public affairs students' critical thinking and pragmatic social skills. Then, drawing upon the authors' experiences, we describe the particular pedagogical strategies used to assure the materials can be effective resources in creating dynamic classrooms within each context. In this way, this article introduces themes relevant to understanding how open access learning objects interact with particular contexts, suggesting new avenues for practice and research in public affairs education.

Across the globe, the goals of public affairs education are ambitious. Given so many knotty public problems, students need to learn both the analytical abilities for investigating these problems and political and social skills for advancing solutions in nuanced settings (Agranoff 2008; Blomgren, Sandfort, and O’Leary 2008; Neubauer et al. 2011; Posner 2009). This complex learning demands that students integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve problem solving (van Merriënboer, Kirschner, and Kester 2003). It also requires that instructors draw upon the latest knowledge to design and apply the interactive pedagogical methods known to be most effective for adult learners (Caine & Caine, 2011; Conner & Clawson, 2004; National Research Council, 2000).

While most of our scholarly attention is focused on building our content knowledge about the subjects we teach – human rights, rural development, child poverty, intergovernmental relations, public budgeting – this article focuses on advancing our understanding about the processes of teaching in public affairs classrooms where faculty aim to create interactive experiences. Many pedagogical methods are available for instructors to foster engagement with course content, such as interactive lecturing, small group exercises, and problem-based assignments. In this instance, we focus our attention on use of a new generation of teaching cases, which present information through multimedia formats. We describe and analyze our shared experiences of using public affairs e-cases and e-studies in public universities but doing so in very different institutional and cultural contexts – Kenya (Kisumu), the United States (Minneapolis), and China (Hong Kong).

The *Journal of Public Affairs Education* and other public affairs field-journals have published essays by many proponents of a case-based pedagogy throughout the years

(Harney & Krauskopf, 2003; Kenney, 2001; Rivenbark, 2007; Robyn, 1998; Gilmore & Schall, 1996; Lynn, 1999; Kenney, 2001). However, in their zeal to promote case teaching as an alternative to conventional lectures, many overlook their central value. Educational scientists see cases not as a special tool but a type of more general “learning objects.” In this article, we probe this frame, and explore the science that underpins the effective use of learning objects, specifically e-cases and e-studies. While laboratory studies has a tradition in educational research, we do not employ it in this article because of our more modest, exploratory intent (Brown 1992). Instead, we provide a brief description of the institutional position of public affairs education in Kenya, the United States, and China, as well as vignettes about how the multimedia materials and classroom discussion are implemented across these contexts. We then systematically compare how we each have used the common tool in our classrooms. In this regard, while we each deploy these learning objects to increase active learning, variations in institutional context and investment, as well as classroom processes, exist across these different national and cultural contexts. Further research about interactive learning in public affairs education must take this into account.

### **Learning Objects that Promote Classroom Engagement with Relevant Context**

There are numerous pedagogical methods employed in public affairs classrooms to increase interaction and active learning. However, case-studies, which originated from the study of administrative law (Rosenbloom, 1995; Yeung, 2007), are a notable “signature pedagogy” (Shulman 2005). Applied in both public affairs and business education across the globe, a teaching case tells a story of a knotty problem provided in a particular context.

It is often written in a creative way that attempts to bring the situation to life and some end with a “decision forcing” situation that ask students to decide what they would actually do next if they found themselves in the situation. These learning tools enable students to grapple with the ambiguity that often surround practical problem solving and, therefore, have been a staple in public management teaching. Public affairs instructors teaching other subjects also regularly use news accounts, public budgets gleaned from state or local governments, official documents or evaluation reports to bring policy problems to life. While not providing the contextual-detail of cases, instructors often use these resources to highlight the significance of the course topic or analytical method being taught and motivate students to engage (Finney and Pyke 2008).

When analyzing both types of contextual materials, part of what public affairs students need to learn is the tacit knowledge practitioners demonstrate (Agranoff 2008; Salamon 2005). Students value relevance. Statistics, budgeting, human resource management, and network governance all become more salient when placed into particular situations and connected to specific policy problems. In this regard, cases, news accounts, or official documents operate as learning objects – artifacts that focus student attention on a key concept or a particular learning objective (Alford 2002: Carey & Hanley, 2008; Verbert & Duval, 2004). Conventionally, students are asked to brief themselves in the content of the learning object as part of preparation for a class session. In the classroom, instructors employ an array of techniques to stimulate interaction around the materials: ask the large group a series of questions to stimulate new ideas and connect to other course concepts; divide the class into small groups to tackle specific analysis; or draw upon the materials to spark a simulation. Instructors also use case- or current-event learning

objects for course written assignments, for example asking students to create action-oriented memos or complete final exam questions drawing upon the material. Thus, relevant learning objects become a tool for engaging students in active learning. They establish a tangible shared experience upon which students can interrogate their implicit understanding of the situation and transform it into explicit knowledge (National Research Council 2000; Sheckley and Bell 2006).

Jonathan Brock and Jon Alford (2014) share our concern that historical debates about the legitimacy of case teaching have stymied our field's understanding of the way such learning materials can transform a classroom. They write: "[In public affairs]...case discussion is only one form of interactive teaching and...the case study is only formal form of [learning] object. A [learning] object is anything that is set up to constitute or prompt the subject matter of an interactive teaching session" (pg. 2). In their articles about this topic (Alford & Brock, 2014; Brock & Alford, 2014), they highlight how interactive classrooms focus upon engaging students, enable self-efficacy around learning, support mutuality between students and instructor, and introduce variety into the process. Learning objects act as a resource to instructors, enabling them leverage other pedagogical practices, such as lectures or group activities.

In fact, fueled by the revolution in information technology in the last twenty-years, considerable advances in understanding and applying learning objects in classrooms is occurring. Because they can be developed and stored digitally, learning objects now can be tagged and retrieved by others, allowing them to be shared widely among instructors. In this regard, learning objects exist at different levels of granularity; technically, they can be a single photograph, a video clip, text, or other graphical representations. However, most

learning objects bundle these assets to achieve particular learning objectives and are digitally tagged as a 'whole.' This process enables efficient retrieval by others, as part of the global movement towards open education.<sup>1</sup> Large collections have emerged in content areas largely outside of the realm of public affairs scholars, such as Merlot (Malloy & Hanley, 2001), the Open Learning Initiative at Carnegie Mellon, and Connexions (Dholakia and King 2006).

However, in 2011, the Hubert project was started to provide a platform to promote more interactive teaching among public affairs instructors globally. Launched at the University of Minnesota, the project's international partners are the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research based in Kenya and the University of Hong Kong in China. The collection includes video briefs, e-cases, and e-studies, all focused on public affairs issues that can be used by instructors implementing traditional face-to-face classes, as well as blended or fully on-line courses (see: <http://www.hubertproject.org>). The materials are held in an indexed database which allows users to find and access products for their own courses and training programs; each is accompanied by the usage note and can be downloaded or hyperlinked to in any course management software program. The portability of these materials and the ability of faculty to use them to teach whatever content is relevant in their own curriculum makes them distinct from other open educational collections, that often enable the sharing of whole curriculum or textbooks.

The Hubert materials build upon the public affairs traditions of both in-depth case study and relevant examples from policy and management practice for the classroom, but

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<sup>1</sup> Open educational is a movement to create and share in the public domain resources for learning. Some examples of open educational resources include textbooks, course outlines, modules, streaming videos, tests, and software (see Littlejohn, and Pegler, 2014; Casserly and Marshall 2010).

introduces the principles of open education (Schweick et al. 2011). Through video or audio, important documents, and photographs, *e-cases* make more immediate the knotty problems traditionally recounted through written cases. Through assembling similar digital assets, *e-studies* curate policy reports, news accounts or data sets in a more integrative and reusable format. While studies of the impact of such materials in public affairs are rare (Sandfort and Brooks 2012), research in other professional fields, such as medicine (Gallagher-Lepak, Scheibel, & Gibson, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2004; Kumta, Tsang, Hung, & Cheng, 2003; Sandars & Langlois, 2006) and education (Bruce and Reynolds 2009; McCrary and Mazur 2010; Richardson and Kile 1999), suggests this type of multimedia content can bolster complex learning of professional competencies.

In fact, Spicer & Husock (2000) suggest that such multimedia materials improve the immediacy of public affairs learning by providing more complete information, more dynamic sequences of events, and more realistic accounts of people and processes. They also are 'reusable,' so that instructors can rely upon them at different times or in distinct courses. However, in and of themselves, such learning objects do not guarantee an interactive learning experience. As we have each witnessed, it is possible for instructors to take the information contained in a Hubert e-case or e-study and lecture to students about it. In fact, these multimedia learning objects are like any other reading or exercise: their significance depends upon how instructors bring them into use by structuring interactive classroom activities that engage students.

Learning science suggests that faculty facilitation, learner-learner interaction, and emotional engagement are all important dimensions that shape learning processes and results (Gibson 2005). Students take cues from others, both consciously and

unconsciously. They need to be challenged but not experience helplessness, threats or fatigue (Caine & Caine, 2011). In fact, course elements that leverage the social dimension of learning, require students to make choices and reflect upon them, engage with puzzles and problem solving exercises, or work with others on products, actually alter the adult brains' neural pathways (Cozolino and Sprokay 2006; Fink, 2003). This literature stresses without attention to social interaction, even the most artfully designed multimedia learning object will have little impact (Salmon & Jones 2004, Fink 2003, National Research Council 2000).

Yet, our collective experiences using comparable materials from the Hubert collection suggests there are important nuances in how to generate such social dynamics in the public affairs classroom.

### **Use of Hubert Materials Around the World**

There are some accounts of use of written teaching cases around the globe, in teaching public management (Robyn 1998b) and business ( Apaydin 2008; Jain 2005). The studies about business education stress that context matters for student engagement with the materials. Factors noted to be important include the choice and age of the case, students' backgrounds, norms about learning, and cultural interactions more generally. To begin to explore these ideas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public affairs context, we describe our own experiences using Hubert materials in classrooms in Kenya, the United States, and China. We do so to echo some emerging finding that cultural context influences the processes and outcomes of educational technology (Kawachi, 2003a; Ziguras, 2001). We begin by

providing some contextual information, then describing the pedagogical strategies and consequences, and finally drawing comparisons across these contexts.

### ***Public Affairs Education in Kenya***

Within the East African community, Kenya historically pursued a restricted, merit-based form of higher education in which admission was secured through competitive examinations (Hughes & Mwiria, 1990). After independence, primary and secondary schools expanded in numbers throughout the country during the 1970s and 1980s. The few existing public universities at the time operated at no cost to those qualifying for admission (Weidman, 1995). However, as students graduating from secondary schools increased in number, so did the people demanding access to higher education. As a result, the number of public and private universities has expanded dramatically in Kenya in the last thirty-years. Currently, sixty-six higher education institutions offer various curricula and degrees at the bachelors and postgraduate levels (Commission for Higher Education, 2015). This expansion mirrors growth throughout Africa and has created opportunities within universities to develop new postgraduate degrees in fields like public affairs.

In fact, in 2011, the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research, a non-governmental organization based in Nairobi, began dialogue with numerous universities across the continent to gauge interest in developing a coordinated Master's in Research and Public Policy (MRPP). Faculty from twelve universities in eight countries actively shaped a standard curriculum that both meets the needs of students and responds to the complex public policy affairs environment across the continent. A foundational principle was to use the new degree as an opportunity to promote interactive teaching in African universities. The basics of professional ethics, research methods, political economy, and governance

were to be taught through case studies, group discussions, simulations, and class presentations.

To develop relevant materials, faculty from across the twelve universities developed a number of e-cases and e-studies as a Hubert Project partner focused on African policy and management challenges. While there were technical challenges (such as volatile electricity and variable facilities), Universities were encouraged to invest in hardware that efficiently supported the development and sharing of these learning objects. They also sent faculty to successive training workshops to support the new interactive pedagogy; these training sessions focused upon aligning materials with course learning objectives, using prepared usage notes, and developing customized teaching plans. The training emphasized the importance of session and overall course design in which content is scaffolded, moving from basic to more difficult concepts so that students may comprehend and easily unpack the course material.

This investment in the development of both learning objects and interactive pedagogy, while supported by the science of teaching and learning referenced earlier, goes against vested instructor practices and conventional institutional approaches in Africa. In fact, Kenyan faculty regularly encounter increasing numbers of students and externally mandated course requirements, which can cause them to rely upon traditional lecture method as the primary pedagogical approach because it is more familiar. As a result, students casually attend classes and many pay little attention during the lecture sessions because they do not feel obligated to make any meaningful contributions. Because they can copy notes from the few attentive students, or use the hand outs given by their

instructors, their minds often are not fully engaged. Assessment of individual learning is typically through tests, research assignments, and class presentations.

However, in a professional degree like public policy, this approach is not aligned with the analytical or social skill needed by graduates. The curriculum developers of the new MRPP program needed to move beyond this traditional approach. We needed to bring 'reality' into the classroom to enable learners to critically investigate the cause and consequences of public issues. We wanted to create learning experiences where students developed viable solutions to policy-related problems and thought about how to implement positive change. This motivated faculty from the twelve universities to develop over twenty-five relevant e-cases and e-studies from various African situations to be used for professional education in public affairs.

#### *Using Multi-Media Learning Objects in a Kisumu Classroom*

Maseno University was one of the twelve universities where this new curriculum was implemented. At this public university located in Kisumu (Western Kenya), we began to use e-cases and e-studies during the fall of 2014 at the beginning of the MRPP program. In that first year, 16 students enrolled in the degree, most of which were working full time during their studies. While undergraduate class size at this University often ranges from 400-700 students, the class size in the MRPP courses is smaller (from ten to twenty-five students), which more easily enables faculty to apply interactive pedagogy. From the beginning, it was clear that the e-case and e-study learning objects resembled other learner-centered tools (Herreid and Schiller, 2013) that are used to stimulate interactive and small group problem solving activities. Yet, their effectiveness was not predetermined.

Initially, students had a negative reaction because the preparation of the materials required more work than merely listening passively to lectures. Master's students had not yet internalized the expectation that graduate, professional education was going to be more demanding than undergraduate where they only needed to occasionally attend classes or review notes prepared by other students.

To clarify faculty expectations in the program, Susan and her colleagues recognized they needed to do more than merely introduce the new learning objects, but that they had to alter their own classroom practices. Rather than assigning review of the materials before class, Susan announced she would grade student participation during discussions of e-case in class. She provided guiding questions in line with the objectives of the topic and encouraged them to meet before class for group discussions to better prepare the case. As a result, students began requesting access to materials in advance to enable them prepare for the sessions, which, in turn, allowed them to enjoy and benefit from the relevant content. Although many of the learning objects highlight policy dynamics in other African countries, the situations resemble those in Kenya because of the share history of colonialism and development. In the class meetings, students are invited to interrogate the Kenyan context in light of the e-case or e-study, bringing to light the similarities and distinctiveness of their own national context.

For example, in an introductory course on research in public policy, Susan uses an e-case about Uganda's experience implementing universal primary education.<sup>2</sup> This learning

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<sup>2</sup> Universal Public Education in Uganda. <http://54.72.213.104/MRPPCases/UgandaEducation/index5.html> Kenya, Cameroon, Burundi, Ghana and Rwanda all eliminated primary school fees in public schools in 2003; other countries Malawi (1994), Tanzania (2000), and Uganda (1997) were earlier adopters of this policy and can provide important learning opportunities for new policy practitioners.

object is used in the first course session, to show the usefulness of research to public policy decisions. The material begins with recommendations of two research commissions that formed the basis of Uganda's education policy change. It then summarizes both the successes and challenges of implementation, presenting media accounts, outcome data, and video statements by government officials that document the unexpected consequences of missteps in governance. By circling back to research evidence – about teacher training, cost expansion, and demand predictions – students see first hand how more careful consideration of policy research might avoid some of the dramatic challenges. This enables learners to reflect on a policy goal shared by Kenya – universal primary education – and enables them to analyze the challenges and opportunities presented in the case.

Another e-case on Social Welfare Protection highlights the relevance, politics, and varied interests of the issue in Kenya. It begins by exploring the meaning of social protection and uses video clips and charts to illustrate the politics and interests of different actors and stakeholders in defining the agenda. From their own experiences in local communities, many students are familiar with the social protection activities carried out by government or non-governmental organizations, such as USAID, World Vision-Kenya, UNICEF. By exploring the theoretical significance and showing how the politics within the social protection agenda affect delivery of services to the needy communities, students analyze the effectiveness of the policy and make critical suggestions on how it can be improved. Students' familiarity enables them to draw upon both community and work-related experiences.

As with any learning object, using such digital cases in the classroom hinges in large part on the instructors' skill in preparation and facilitation. In her classroom, Susan finds it

essential to prepare a clear teaching plan with sequenced questions framed out. Proper seating arrangements, that assure eye contact of more reserved students during participation, also can be specified in advance. Because it is possible for the talkative learners to dominate and steer the discussions in their own lines of thought, Susan discovered the importance of being clear on the session objectives. In the discussion of the Ugandan primary education and social welfare protection in Kenya cases, for example, the excitement in the classroom was fueled in part by learners' own experiences. She needed to be quite directive in helping them move beyond this personal experience to consider the public policy issues or the role that research could play in helping to move beyond the Ugandan and Kenyan challenges. To control the dynamic, she needed to remind them several times of the unit's objective by asking questions that were related to that content. In an interactive classroom, instructors often must use subtle cues to both encourage everyone to take part in the discussions and keep the discussion focused on critical issues. When well facilitated, classroom dynamics engage even those most quiet students. As one of Susan's colleagues reflected about his own use of the learning objects, "...the heated debates that some of the e-cases elicit cannot allow even the most reserved of the students to stay out of the discussions."

Other forms of planning also help ensure engagement around these learning objects. For examples, role-plays can be very effective. If students are assigned roles in advance, they can prepare the material and understand a protagonist or stakeholders' point of view. For example, Susan authored an e-study focused on Kenya Power's monopoly focused on

exploring the pros and cons of public service provision by private companies in Africa.<sup>3</sup> Using real time examples from the Kenyan context, this material illustrates how customers suffer due to lack of a competitive market in electric power provision. It documents how power units are sold for different fees to various clients and shares complaints filed against the company. Students can be asked to assume roles as managers, service providers, and customers. Since most, if not all learners will take part in staging the case and discussions, role-plays enable a level of interaction and evaluation of the analytical issues presented.

According to students surveyed for this article, not all instructors in the new Master's program use the multimedia learning objects or engage in interactive pedagogies. One student noted, "... there are times some instructors opt not to use the e-cases either because they are not ready, or they have been missing lectures and there is really no time to interact with the e-case. There are times we have had to discuss the e-cases in the absence of the instructors to make sense of how the case applies to the objectives of the course." For such students, there is excitement in using a multimedia learning object and its relevance motivates their engagement. In curriculum assessment sessions, students report that the interactive classrooms, which use teamwork and interactive discussions, enable them to develop their critical thinking, and analytical skills about real events. One student said, "...All I know is that through the use of this approach to learning, I am able to see the real world of policy issues without going out to talk to any stakeholders out there. I am also able to evaluate what is right or wrong about the policies displayed by the case.

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<sup>3</sup> Monopoly of Kenya Power in Service Provision. <http://54.72.213.104/MRPPCases/Case13-Maseno/index5.html#screen/8f6f00e5-21ee-4415-a81f-a5accf901555>

From such an experience, I can make recommendations on how public policy issues can change for the better.”

### ***Public Affairs Education in the United States***

While many readers of this journal have been impacted by the development of public affairs education in the United States, some might not be aware of the history or how pedagogical tools have evolved over time. The study of public administration in the United States evolved out of the ideas of scientific management, idealized bureaucracy, and administrative management present during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Lynn 1996; Rainey 2009). While the development of public policy schools during the 1970s and 1980s brought new tools of econometrics, formal modeling, and program evaluation into the curriculum, there remains a core of commitment to equipping professionals with the analytical and pragmatic skills necessary to engage in problem solving and citizen engagement around public challenges. In the United States, ‘public affairs’ encompasses schools that confer degrees in public policy, public administration, nonprofit management and urban planning. Over 175 U.S. institutions have master’s degrees accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA).

As Yeung (2007) describes, Harvard University began to first use teaching cases in 1919 and, during the interwar years, the Inter-University Case Program became an important venue for management training in business and public management. Instead of idealizing public organizations or scientific management, cases left the blemishes intact

and presented situations that were political, irrational, and deeply contextual. The goal of the cases was explicitly to teach decision-making skills, or, as Yeung (2007: 555) concludes from his close analysis of that point in history, “The case study offered the public administration student a chance to vicariously live the life of an actual public administrator.” Throughout the 1960s and 70s, casebooks continued to proliferate (Rosenbloom 1995) and within the new public policy schools, situational analysis continued to a hallmark of public management education (Lynn, 1996). With the advent of the Internet, collections of written case studies and simulations about U.S. context were developed and shared.<sup>4</sup> Policy schools at the University of Washington and University of Minnesota sponsored trainings to help faculty know how to more effectively use these tools to promote interactive learning in the classroom.

The Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota resembles many of the other top twenty public policy schools in the country; it was founded in the late 1970s from the University’s public administration department, focuses on graduate education, and offers a number of post-graduate degrees. The educational programs appeal to professionals interested in advancing the common good through work in the public, nonprofit and private sectors. The multi-sector orientation appeals to both faculty and students interested in making progress on an array of public problems, from education to rural development, sustainable energy production to labor relations. The students who

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<sup>4</sup> Collections that require a usage fee are: Electronic Hallway (<http://www.hallway.org>) at the University of Washington’s Evans School, and the case program at the Kennedy School of Government (<http://www.case.hks.harvard.edu/>). Those which are open access are: Syracuse University’s Maxwell Schools’ e-PARCC (<http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/parc/eparc/>) and Rutgers University Cases and Simulations Portal (<https://casesimportal.newark.rutgers.edu/>).

enroll in one of the Schools' six master's degrees, five graduate certificates or doctoral program are seeking education that provides diverse analytical and practical tools. To support this orientation, the school has invested in developing a Technology Enhanced Learning department that provides support for instructors. While the school has not invested significantly in fully on-line degrees, it does offer many courses in a partially online, 'hybrid' format combining face-to-face instruction with virtual engagement between students and faculty.

Graduate students in the United States are used to technology enhanced professional experiences, with most having considerable skills in social media, Internet-based research, and visually enhanced presentations (Mergel, 2012). Except for the mid-career students, who might have been out of higher education for twenty or thirty years, most students also are familiar with digital platform for their course materials (such as Moodle). Many instructors require students review podcasts to supplement readings, or participate in on-line reading forums to enhance face-to-face classroom debates. In fact, at the Humphrey School students preview a "foundations for success" on-line module to orient themselves before starting graduate school, enabling basic review in technical content (such as math, economics, writing, and excel) and a taster of University processes. Generally, students expect courses that actively engage them inside and outside the classroom. Many instructors employ pedagogical techniques such as case studies, simulations, and project based-learning that are interactive.

*Using Multi-Media Learning Objects in a Minneapolis Classroom*

While videos and podcasts of current events in the United States abound, content focused on the daily operations of nonprofit or public organizations, management decision-making, or policy making processes, is not easily found in the public domain. This is the value of e-cases and e-studies in the United States. The learning objects allow access to a level of detail about policy analysis, implementation, and evaluation rarely conveyed in media accounts of current events. They offer a window into the thoughts and actions of policy actors and managers, showing the interplay of analytical abilities and social skills required by politically charged environments (Agranoff 2008; Blomgren et al. 2008; Neubauer et al. 2011; Posner 2009).

When students encountered these materials for the first time in Jodi's classroom, they reported appreciation for the 'up close' accounts and relevance to their professional development. However, they generally expected such materials at a highly ranked public affairs school and were surprised to learn that this type of learning objects was a recent innovation. In fact, after the first semesters' use, faculty were surprised at the limited student reaction (one way or another) to the substitution of e-cases in place written cases in the school's core classes. As long as the content was professional – no typographical errors, technological glitches, or content overload – the students engaged with the material, preparing it as they would other assigned readings or material.

Jodi has embedded e-studies and e-cases in a number of courses, aligning their use with the overall learning objectives. In her course on policy analysis, she drew upon a number of e-studies that curated policy reports, investigative journalism, and research about a policy problem. Using a standard text for policy analysis (Bardach, 2012), students were required to delve deeply into the curated materials and apply the critical analytical

steps (defining a public problem, assembling some evidence, constructing and selection alternative interventions), showcasing their analysis in a succinct policy memorandum. In this use, the e-study provided a consistent source of relevant information that students needed to work through systematically to craft written professional memos. While the substantive topics varied over time – asset inequality, higher education, early childhood education, waste water treatment, retirement savings – the visual presentation of various materials, combined with the written assignments, enabled students to engage in ‘real world’ problem framing and solution development.

In a hybrid course on policy implementation, Jodi chose cases to illustrate key concepts and the distinct implementation roles carried out by practitioners. The model of implementation taught in the course spans multiple levels, from policy field to organization to frontlines (Sandfort and Moulton 2015). She began with an e-study on the U.S. Emergency Food Assistance Program that introduces the concept of a multi-level analysis.<sup>5</sup> Then, for each course module, she provided an e-case that illuminated the implementation tasks at these levels, complimenting the theoretical ideas in course readings. Topics varied from education to health care delivery, sexual violence to affordable housing.<sup>6</sup> While virtual lectures focused on the foundational ideas, each face-to-face class session provided an opportunity for students to work in small groups on a deeper analysis of the cases consistent with the analytical tasks at hand. Students practiced using worksheets that they

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<sup>5</sup> Multi-level Policy Implementation of the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Hubert Project, <http://www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/368/>.

<sup>6</sup> The specific cases vary over time. In 2015, they were “Safe Harbor: Minnesota’s Efforts to End Child Sex Trafficking” (<http://www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/225/>); “Can we Afford the American Dream?” (<http://www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/354/>); and “Reach Out and Read” (<http://www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/200/>), Hubert Project.

subsequently applied to their own field-based research projects of multi-level implementation.

To prepare for a particular class session, Jodi adapted a practice she used for teaching written cases – a teaching plan. Ahead of class, she reviewed the material, considered its role in the course at the particular juncture, mapped out critical questions for the students (sometimes shared in advance), and considered the ideal ordering of class discussion and activities. While some instructors like to make time allocations for various segments, she adopted a more flexible plan, staying open to where class discussion would evolve but also mindful of the key issues she wanted student to understand from the application.

In these examples, both e-studies and e-cases provided opportunities to systematically apply analytical concepts to specific settings. Students came to the courses expecting the use of multimedia learning materials. Assignments used digital material to focus and concentrate on mastering the basics of professional writing. The small group activities used social forces to motivate students to prepare the material and enabled them to practice carrying out analytical tasks they would later need to do on their own. These activities were scaffolded in the courses, complimenting other readings, lectures, and course experiences. Throughout, the learning objects served as a particular resource of relevant content that invited authentic student engagement. In course evaluations, students reported these materials served as important means for seeing the immediate applicability of course content to professional activities.

***Public Affairs Education in Hong Kong, China***

Hong Kong has diverse choices of post-secondary education institutions and several world-class universities. While five higher educational institutions existed in the 1970s, the number in the city has increased significantly in recent years, mirroring the significant growth of higher education throughout China. The government is committed to providing quality and diverse courses to meet the needs of the growing population and enable leaders to participate on an international scale. Higher education institutions feel pressure to develop and implement competitive and innovative programs within this context.

The University of Hong Kong (HKU) is one of the top universities in Hong Kong and in Asia (QS World University Rankings 2015/16). Since 1978, the Department of Politics and Public Administration has offered a Master of Public Administration (MPA), making it one of the long-standing MPA programs in Hong Kong. The program focuses on preparing graduates to be effective public sector leaders through an innovative curriculum about public policy and public administration, which includes courses in human resource management, public policy analysis, collaborative governance, and nonprofit management. In 2014, the school created a non-profit management degree and, in 2015, a Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) to respond to increased student demand. In these programs, there is frequent academic exchange with the top international schools for program design, external examination, and co-teaching in some core courses.

Through this international exchange, faculty recognized a significant gap in learning materials, as most available content focused on the United States and European contexts. For example, some public administration faculty were relying on a Kennedy School of

Government written case about Indianapolis.<sup>7</sup> The case focuses on exploring the criteria and decisions of outsourcing public services to the private sector in the United States, and brings readers to a decision point – the Mayor needed to decide which service the government should outsource given the conditions. While this is a relevant case in the United States, it is not that appropriate to Hong Kong because of the different institutional relationships. Additionally, the decision undertaken by the mayor hinges upon the time of year of events (spring) and how it impacted the underlying rationale of choosing street repair before snow removal. This basic mismatch – in setting, elected official status, accountability, and governance – limited the use of this and other similar materials. It motivated faculty to develop multi-media cases relevant to Hong Kong and Asia, more broadly. Since 2013, the Social Science faculty at Hong Kong University developed six e-cases, with more under development, as part of the Hubert Project.

### *Using Multimedia Learning Objects in a Hong Kong Classroom*

While the students in the school's Master of Public Administration program are mostly civil servants working in police and fire services, hospital authority, home affairs, professionals from non-profit or private for-profit agencies also enroll. Although the postgraduate courses have a smaller number of students than undergraduate classrooms, faculty are still challenged to encourage active participation. Indeed, students are familiar and comfortable with the conventional lecture method in classroom settings. Certainly, students are conversant with note taking, individual research and group discussion

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<sup>7</sup> "Organizing Competition in Indianapolis: Mayor Stephen Goldsmith and the Quest for Lower Costs (A)," Harvard University Kennedy School of Government Case Program. C18-95-1269.0

assignments; however, they can pay little attention during traditional lectures because the pedagogical approach is not learner centered. Students often just copy notes from the few attentive students or use the hand outs given by their instructors.

However, the School is committing resources to changing this practice among Chinese students. Hong Kong University made facilities improvements designed for the tools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to create truly student-oriented learning spaces. Helen and her colleagues now teach in classrooms designed to facilitate group interactions, with robust Wi-Fi and computer access (See Figure 1). Students also must learn to work with an electronic platform for their course materials (Moodle) and access digital learning objects such as the Hubert e-cases. The physical and virtual infrastructure helps to signal to students that professional education in public affairs offers new skills to respond to the challenges facing China today.

<<Insert Figure 1 about here>>

Since most students come from fairly segregated professions – regularly interacting only with others inside their bureau or field – they enter graduate school with that orientation and initially resist stepping outside of this role to make meaningful contributions in the classroom. Using multimedia learning objects provides neutral content around which they can all engage, thereby enhancing the quality of classroom discussion. In fact, rather than instructing students to “...turn to the page X, and read Y” (which is a conventional teaching method), the instructors can show the short clips of the video in the e-cases to initiate discussion. Faculty then pose particular questions for students to analytically grapple with the content and actively explore the underlying issues

presented in the material (Kawachi, 2003b). This is quite different than conventional experiences in higher education classrooms in Hong Kong.

The structure of these learning objects – which depend upon embedded videos along with text and other visuals – allow students to observe the emotion of actors in the policy or management situation. In her classroom, Helen encourages examination of these “characters,” so that students can better understand the actual situations where the case is set and experience more interest in resolving the presenting problems. For example, one e-case explores the development of a social enterprise that aims to achieve social good while making profits. Love plus Hope Fashion employs young designers and unemployed women to establish a domestic brand and revitalize the fashion industry of Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup> Through interviews with industry and social welfare leaders, the e-case establishes the importance of creating a clothing brand that achieves both social good and profits. When they watched the video sharing the fundamental values promoted by Love Plus Hope founder, students are moved and impressed because of the immediate relevance of the social problems close to their home.

In her non-profit management course, Helen uses another e-case, Collaboration Challenge, which features real live stories of low-income families who lived in Hong Kong public housing facilities.<sup>9</sup> It documents how social service providers from various sectors work together to resolve policy and management issues. Through a study of various stakeholders’ perspectives represented through videos, social media, and radio broadcasts, students must apply their research skills. They are required to cull information from

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<sup>8</sup> Love Plus Hope, Hubert Project, <http://www.hubertproject.org/hubert-material/241/>.

<sup>9</sup> Collaboration Challenge, Hubert Project. <http://www.socsc.hku.hk/ExCEL3/collaboration-challenges/>.

various sources to understand the presenting problems. This active engagement inspired many students to empathetic, both to low-income families' situation and to service organizations' issues and challenges. During class time, they were asked to assume roles representing the multiple stakeholders who needed to work together in the case and make presentations from these perspectives, proposing solutions to improve service delivery through collaboration.

Enrolled students express support for use of multimedia learning objects in the programme. Not only were the materials more engaging, they enabled a more robust understanding of different industries and sectors in society. For example, the social enterprise case inspired students because of the passions of leaders who described their visions of solving unemployment and poverty problems through rejuvenating Hong Kong's textile industry. The public housing case helped them understand the basic needs and challenges of those in need who face a fragmented service system. These materials not only exposed students to diverse communities but also provided a common experience of program delivery in Asia, particularly important for the international students in the class. By structuring the use of the case to focus on research, Helen enabled the students to develop new skills in using animated newspapers and social media. They also strengthened their critical thinking through initiating role-playing and discussions.

Nevertheless, there were some challenges concerning students' learning styles and technical problems with multimedia objects. Although most students enjoy learning through video and radio broadcasts, some students reported difficulties with taking notes simultaneously while watching videos. There sometimes are also technical difficulties (slow loading of videos). So while these multi-media e-cases have stimulated new ways of

learning and teaching in Hong Kong, faculty recognize they must attend to students' individual learning styles going forward and continue to find new ways to incorporate learning objects into their classrooms.

### ***Comparing Use of these Digital Learning Objects***

These three different accounts represent the deployment of similarly structured Hubert e-cases and e-studies -- robust learning objects that capture important topics for public affairs education. They showcase similarities and differences across the various geographical contexts important for scholars and instructors to keep in mind going forward. These differences are felt at both the institutional level and in classroom delivery. Table 1 summarizes the institutional-level factors across the settings, such as student expectations, technology platforms, and other institutional investments. These conditions provide a foundation upon which faculty and students build the effective utilization of any digital learning object in the public affairs classroom. For example, there are various types of institutional investments that can build capacity for effective use of digital learning objects. While all three institutions had invested in the creation of these materials, they had not equally invested in faculty training or facilities improvements to support interactive learning. While some instructors were trained in how to use learning materials to facilitate interactive learning, those who were not found it difficult to use the digital content effectively. In fact, while the curriculum used in Kisumu required use of e-cases and e-studies, students' evaluation reports indicated that some instructors never used them. In Hong Kong and Minneapolis, faculty who developed materials or sought out training were more likely to feel comfortable using them.

<<Insert Table 1 about here>>

Table 2 summarizes some key factors about classroom practices across these contexts. In the three contexts, we all discovered that although students were familiar with the traditional cases presented in written format, the use of e-cases and e-studies was novel. Especially in Kenya and China, student found digital multimedia tools to be a fascinating approach to learning. In both of these contexts, the learning objects were resisted at first because students were familiar with traditional teaching methods like lectures and handouts. In the United States, perhaps because of more familiarity with interactive pedagogies and technology enhanced learning, students were less surprised by the use of multimedia cases. In all three contexts, students valued the ‘real’ issues presented e-cases and e-studies that immediately enhanced the relevance of the analytical and evaluative skills being taught through other course materials.

<<Insert Table 2 about here>>

For this value to be realized, instructors needed to change their own preparation and build skills to appropriately facilitate discussion and analysis. In all three applications, ample preparation, customized assignments, alignment of classroom activities such as group work and discussions with session objectives, were important for the learning object to have its desired effect. In Kisumu and Hong Kong, faculty encountered technical challenges that affected students when they were not physically in the classrooms. Power outages, Internet connectivity challenges, and limited access to hardware created barriers to some students in these sites. To mitigate some of these challenges, faculty in both sites developed the learning objects so that they could be accessed without Internet connectivity (for example, through flash drives); however, this created additional technical details to be

worked out between the instructor and students. When it was accomplished, students took the materials and ideas and applied them in innovative ways, through simulations and course projects.

Finally, across these sites, faculty developed different ways for students to display their new professional skills. In Minneapolis, Jodi required production of policy memos as a way of gauging students' analytical thinking. In Kisumu, Susan encouraged application of a particular case to Kenyan current public affairs debates, while in Hong Kong, Helen used role-plays to enhance the understanding of contextual issues. These approaches – customized to the context and desired learning outcomes -- engaged students at different levels of thinking and evaluation of the public affairs issues at hand.

### **Key Questions for Practice and Research**

As an exploratory investigation, this paper exploits the experiences of three teachers using the same type of multimedia learning objects with master's level public affairs students across different continents and higher educational settings. Through a close reading, some additional questions for practice and research in public affairs education come into focus.

For those instructors carrying out adult education in public affairs, these accounts suggest there is a natural interaction between the institutional context of our work, our students' backgrounds and expectations, and our own pedagogical techniques. The way we plan for courses and prepare for class sessions is important. As instructors, our actions structure what is the focus of students' attention and interactions. For example, the ways we communicate of social expectations – such as grading in-class participation, breaking

students into small groups for further analysis, or running simulations based upon case content – are significant. Although generally aligned with research stressing the significance of social interactions on adult learning (Caine & Caine, 2011, Gibson 2005, National Research Council, 2000), there are specific implicit adjustments made to assure that instructor technique is reasonable given students’ expectations. In preparing to use digitally enhanced learning materials, and assure they are more than an interesting diversion, as instructors we try to consider these questions.

- What is the learning purpose for including this multimedia learning object at this part of the course?
- Does the learning object address the unit/session objectives?
- What are the minimal goals in the session? What are the idealized goals?
- How might social interaction to motivate more engagement around the concepts?
- What are important content elements in the learning object? Given the context, what questions or exercises based on the e-case or e-study content could assure students learn as much as possible?

By doing our own preparation, selecting materials purposively, and facilitating engagement around the content, we try to improve the technical and social skills relevant to professional practice within public affairs.

For those interested in empirical studies of professional instruction, these account and variation between the contexts also suggest some basic questions worthy of systematic exploration. For example:

- What motivates instructor's use of multimedia learning objects in their public affairs classroom?
- What mediates their use? For example, does participation in communities of practice or engagement in learning networks influence this process? Does a commitment to the science of teaching and learning alter how these and other digital materials are used?
- Does exposure to these learning objects and teaching processes influence students' development of necessary professional public affairs competencies?

Empirically exploring these types of questions will increase our knowledge about how relevant learning materials affect the learning outcomes we desire in public affairs students.

Our comparison has focused upon use of a common type of multimedia learning object in public affairs. In doing so, we illustrated how student expectations and institutional context implicitly shape the processes we develop as instructors for using the same types of materials. This also echoes some emerging finding from more empirical studies that cultural context influences the processes and outcomes of educational technology (Kawachi, 2003a; Ziguras, 2001).

Thirty years ago, Donald Schon (1987) challenged instructors in professional schools to grapple with some of the questions raised by these account. While research provides professional schools with explicit content knowledge to teach, the value added in professional education is likely in the processes used to shape learning experiences. Because competent professional practice deals with ambiguity, students can't definitively taught what they need to know. Instead, in an interactive classroom, they can grapple with

important issues, practice what they need to do, and learn more about the contexts where public affairs work happens. As we have seen in the three accounts shared here, the specific details of this context will vary tremendously given the historical and institutional realities of the country. However, there is potential in using learning objects and engaged facilitation to focus student attention on critical professional issues in public affairs.

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**Figure 1 Classroom in Hong Kong University's Centennial Campus**



**Table 1: Comparative Factors – Context of Public University**

	<b>Kisumu, Kenya</b>	<b>Minneapolis, United States</b>	<b>Hong Kong, China</b>
<i>Professional Degrees</i>	Master's in Research in Public Policy (MRPP)	Six master's degrees including Master's in Public Policy (MPP) and mid-career Master's in Public Affairs (MPA)	Master's in Public Administration (MPA)
<i>Expanding demand for degree (s)</i>	Yes	Stable	Yes
<i>Student expectation of relevant content in multi-media content</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Widespread use of course management software</i>	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Institutional investment in creation of multimedia learning objects</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes

<i>Institutional investment in Faculty training in interactive pedagogy</i>	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Institutional investment in facilities improvement to support interactive pedagogy</i>	No	No	Yes

**Table 2: Comparative Factors – Classroom Practices**

	<b>Kisumu, Kenya</b>	<b>Minneapolis, United States</b>	<b>Hong Kong, China</b>
<i>Required more intense preparation by students</i>	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Required alteration of faculty preparation</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Needed to overcome technological or accessibility challenges</i>	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Enabled new formats of student assessment</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Changed interaction between instructors and students</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Enabled new professional skill development</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Facilitated innovation by students</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes