

State of the art of teaching in public policy

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GWD: Good morning! It is a great pleasure and an honor to address you all today!

No doubt, it is an exciting day! Here we are at last! The Master of Research and Public Policy is about to become a reality at twelve African top universities! At the outset of this last workshop before the actual kick-off we want to take a few moments of your time to remind us all of the nature of our common project. Different from what you might expect we do not want to tell you about other schools, other programs and other places or what others might consider to be the state of the art in public policy teaching. Rather, we want to highlight why we believe the MRPP **to be state of the art in public policy teaching**. We want to remind us why we all can be proud to participate in its development and why you can be proud to teach it!

I have been involved in the development process almost from the very beginning, Jodi has joined more recently; we both come from very different schools and background in the context of public policy education in the US and Europe, but we are united in the belief that the MRPP will be second to none – even on a global scale. Let us tell you why. We want to look at five different aspects: (1) the subject matter of the MRPP, (2) its regional roots, (3) its collaborative nature, (4) its nature as a professional education program and finally (5) its teaching methods.

JS: (1) Let us begin with a look at the **subject matter of the MRPP**. The title says it: It is about research and public policy. While social science research methods are a standard subject of teaching around the globe, public policy is not. In fact, it is a rather young and strange animal in the zoo of academic subjects. Pretty much every academic has an idea what physics is as an academic subject, or law, or even philosophy, but public policy? For a long time, public policy was rather considered an art that could not be taught but had to be exercised (by more or less stately statesmen). The idea that public

policy could be taught in a systematic fashion saw the light of day in the United States in the 1960s. The idea slowly proliferated internationally, but the nature of the respective programs still differs widely. There is often a focus on statistics (a long-term effect of the behaviouristic revolution in the social sciences of the 60s and 70s), but aside from this, there are programs where public policy is almost co-terminus with economics; sometimes, public policy is mostly taught as some form of applied political science; less commonly you will find an emphasis on domestic or international law. The MRPP combines it all. The program is well-balanced between all these academic subjects without ever losing sight of the fact that these subjects are not taught in their own right but are to be *used for the purposes of public policy*. That is already quite unique. Even more special, however, is the nexus between research and public policy built into the MRPP. The program offers both a research track and a public policy track within the same framework. This two-tier approach recognizes the fact that the early public policy programs were somewhat naïve in their assumption that there could be an automatic connection between better research and better policy. Better research will only lead to improved public policy if (a) research is conducted in light of the specific nature of politics and if (b) political practitioners understand the nature of research. The MRPP offers the unique opportunity to educate both types of experts – in a collaborative fashion, in the same classes. We know of no other school or program in the world in this field that is so carefully designed to make this possible. That is part of why each of us has chosen to be involved. This is a major step forward in curriculum development and pedagogy internationally in public policy education.

GWD: (2) Second, we would like to consider the **regional roots of the MRPP**. Let us begin by taking a brief look at the global map of public policy education. Not surprisingly, there are many “dots” on this map in North America – where the idea originated. Some schools are better, some are worse and the quality of the teaching programs or the effectiveness in terms of professional education does not always correlate to the overall reputation of the respective universities. Some rather good schools and programs are located in South America, most notably in Mexico, Brazil, and Chile. Some true highlights on this map are to be found in Europe, most notably in Paris and London and you will also find some significant “dots” in Australia and New

Zealand. In East Asia significant public policy programs have started to develop during the last decade. Worth mentioning here are Japan and Singapore.

However, to date, two large areas on this global map of public policy education remained mostly void: The Indian sub-continent and almost the whole of Africa. The situation in India is truly surprising given its close ties to the Anglophone world and the wide variety of good business schools but it does not look as if anything much is going to happen there anytime soon. The situation in Africa, however, is about to change. The MRPP will – quite literally – put Africa on the aforementioned map. And it will not do so as a single dot. It will do so as a closely-knit network between twelve well-established universities teaching a jointly developed program that remains open for even more participating institutions. There is much more to this than just geographic symmetry – as desirable as it may be. We would like to highlight two specific aspects: First, the MRPP will fundamentally change the incentive structure for aspiring young African academics interested in public policy. No longer will they have to consider North America or Europe for education in this field; the MRPP should develop into the program of choice of all young Africans who see their professional future in public policy in Africa – be it on the research side or on the side of politics.

But second, and even more importantly, the MRPP is an African program. No other program we know of offers such a clear and credible focus on the continent and its specific political challenges. This is so significant not only for the sake of regional expertise but because many African states put into sharp relief the public policy problems associated with statehood that significantly differs from what could be called “the OECD ideal type”. The issue is that this ideal type -- a strong, unchallenged, well-developed, capable and resource-abundant advanced Western state -- informs almost all public policy education world-wide. This is particularly striking given the fact that this ideal type is – and always was -- the exception and not the rule! Most of the states of the world were not, are not and never will be Denmark, France, or the US and whoever wants to learn about the specific public policy challenges associated with not being Denmark, France, Britain or the USA will find better answers in the MRPP than in any other program we can think of. This particular perspective is unique to the MRPP and it is important well beyond Africa!

JS: (3) Let us turn to the **collaborative nature of the MRPP**. From our perspective, this is an absolutely amazing feature of the program. The MRPP-network currently unites twelve universities and crosses no less than seven international borders. This is quite an achievement. We all know about (or can at least vividly imagine) the difficulties to get a new program through the formal approval process at a single university – from the department chair and the Dean to the Senate, the Vice-Chancellor and back... To pull this off at twelve universities – in parallel – is almost unheard of. But this is much more than a major achievement in university politics. It establishes nothing less than a new model of what public policy education can be about. Rather than cooperating, public policy schools usually intensively compete with each other for the best students in an increasingly globalized pool of brilliant young minds. To be sure, public policy schools do establish collaborative ties but usually after their institutions have matured and usually on the level of one-semester or one-year student exchange programs leading sometimes to joint or double degrees. Faculty exchange is rare; common faculty workshops are even rarer and joint discussions on the curriculum almost never happen. We would go as far as to say that the very workshop you are currently attending is pretty unique throughout the globe. Please note that this achievement is not only about the number of universities involved – it is about the depth of cooperation and it is also about the international nature of the project. It exemplifies the global movement towards open education and curriculum development, which we will talk about in a moment. As you all know, in public policy, national borders matter significantly. By developing the common curriculum, by pooling case studies, by sharing study material, the MRPP will allow faculty and students to gain insights from a variety of national contexts, to engage in both “best case” and “worst case” comparisons to enable learning and understand how institutional variation might matter in public affairs. In addition, the MRPP network provides the infrastructure for a cross-border discourse on issues of public policy that has no comparison in public policy education world-wide.

GWD: (4) Yet a different aspect of the MRPP is its nature as a program for the purposes of **professional education**. Professional education is a concept that combines the highest academic standards with the notion of application. It combines rigor and relevance, because frankly that is what the

problems of today require. Professional education programs qualify their graduates directly for the labor market, but they do so in ways that draws upon the best of research-based knowledge, both in the content that they communicate and how it is brought into teaching and learning. Early examples of professional education are medical schools and law schools. Because Public policy developed later the concept of professional education was, in a way, built into the programs from the start. The fundamental assumption is that program graduates participate in politics – be it as analysts, advisors, bureau or NGO leaders, or activists.

The MRPP takes this notion of professional education very seriously. All courses have the notion of application built right into them. And while there is a research track and a public policy track they are both united in this regard. This focus creates some new opportunities for scholars teaching in these programs. Some of us have played roles as policy actors, but it is not what we currently do if we are on a faculty. In our current roles, we typically focus our attention on research, teaching, and university governance. So this creates some tensions and opportunities that need to be navigated, and provides opportunities for innovation. And, like the other steps in the MRPP process, your success depends upon how well you turn to each other for training and support. The next week, we are focused on this goal – supporting you to become comfortable in the content and process of providing professional education in public policy.

JS: (5) Which brings us to our fifth and final point, the teaching methods used in the MRPP. In the curriculum development process, we have spent a long time on discussing teaching methods that go significantly beyond the standard “chalk & talk”-style lectures. In this regard, the MRPP wants to set itself apart from existing programs because of a commitment to drawing upon the last twenty years of research focused on the science of teaching and learning. Just as we want government officials to draw upon research-based knowledge in their decision-making, so do we want to draw upon research-based knowledge in how we form and deliver courses? There are a few key principles from this research we would like to emphasize.

First, the ***best teaching focuses on learning***. It strives to create significant learning experiences for adults, so that they are altered because of

their experiences in a class session, a course, a program. It is a 'people changing' technology. And, increasingly, the external environment will be holding us accountable for whether or not we actually change – and hopefully improve -- the people who come to our programs.

Second, to achieve this, we must think carefully about how to **most effectively engage adult learners**. In this era where resources are tight, information is plentiful, and distractions are many, this is not something that we can take for granted just because someone enrolls in a class or program. Research reveals the average adult attention span is 17 minutes. As you might have seen in the MRPP syllabi, the initial course developers were asked to identify teaching methods for each and every one of the fifteen sessions -- and "lecture" was not considered a satisfactory answer. Over the next couple of days, we want to take this process one step further. Today and tomorrow we will use separate workshops to take a closer look at six elements of innovative teaching methods for public policy. Each is focused on engaging adult learners. These six are: (1) Project-based learning, (2) written assignments, (3) personal learning networks, (4) teaching by dialogue and group work, (5) role plays and debates, and, last but certainly not least, (6) case teaching. Your task is not only to familiarize yourself with these concepts but to use the rest of the week to systematically apply them to the syllabi you will be working with.

Thirdly, the science of teaching and learning is clear – subject matter expertise is insufficient for professional education; it also requires **process expertise**. We certainly must bring our subject matter knowledge in research methods, economics, agricultural systems, health care, etc. to our classroom. But we also must invest our attention in improving our process expertise – the techniques of working with a group to further their ability to solve problems, problems that are messy and complex; problems that defy our traditional, linear ways of analyzing them. As we build process expertise, we start to build comfort with creating learning experiences rather than outlining courses. We realize that active learning demands interactive teaching. This week, by introducing the innovative teaching methods, providing you opportunities to discuss and debrief them, and then practice using them together, we are launching you on a journey to build out and use this new type of expertise. Needless to say, that such a careful design of cooperative and peer-learning in

public policy education, even at the level of individual syllabi is – to our knowledge – without precedence in international comparison.

The fourth and final principle from research relevant to the teaching approach you have embraced here is that it is, itself, a professional *practice*. Just as a musician or doctor must practice their profession, so must we practice our teaching. Like musicians who must study the notes, keys, and tempo, we must study these techniques for engaging our students. Like doctors who must apply this knowledge to individual circumstances, we must try to achieve the right fit for our particular learning objectives. But like any professional practice, there will be situations when things do not go well – when you make mistakes or unexpected things result from how students respond to the cases, projects, or simulations. We can't just proceed through a course on automatic pilot but must engage in reflection and, when needed, adapt our plans to better achieve the learning objectives we have for students. And, in this practice, you are so lucky to be joined here by so many other practitioners!

GWD: So, the **conclusion** of our brief *tour d'horizon* of the MRPP will come to you as no surprise: We are truly convinced that the MRPP is at the cutting edge of global public policy education: It seeks to be rigor and relevant in both the content it teaches and how it is taught. It is based on an amazingly dense and broad international network of collaborating institutions and it will use a variety of innovative teaching methods. It is a great program and, in our opinion, it takes the state of the art in public policy teaching to a new level. However, we also have to conclude with an important reminder: So far, everything in the MRPP's development process points into the right direction. But this workshop marks really where the rubber hits the road, where the vision turns to implementation. At the end of the day, it is up to **you**, the MRPP teachers, to realize its potential. The MRPP will only be as good as you – together -- will make it. In the coming days we want to equip ourselves with the tools to make it happen!

Thank you for your attention!