

# Teaching Comparative Public Management and Policy – The View from Singapore

Created by Erik Devereux  
from remarks by Scott Fritzen on  
November 10, 2007 at the  
workshop, “Teaching Policy  
Analysis and Management in  
Cross-National Settings”



# Preface: Why No PowerPoint

- **Scott Fritzen:** “I have sworn off PowerPoint for a couple of months now. The final straw was a presentation of a policy analysis exercise by a student of mine a couple of months ago in which she had one of those fancy interactive effects. This particular one was interesting—every letter was flying in from the side of the page while she was giving the presentation. But that was not the only thing; it was, too, the sound effect of alternately—I’m not sure which—a typewriter or a machine gun.”
- To “turn a new leaf,” Fritzen did not use PowerPoint on November 10, 2007. Erik Devereux at the APPAM office kindly filled in to create this presentation.



# Context: The Lee Kuan Yew School

- School has three degree programs:
  - Master of ~~PowerPoint~~ Public Policy
  - Master in Public Administration
  - Master in Public Management
- Labeling of the curriculum components familiar to North America, but “it is where the content and approach comes in that we are trying to distinguish ourselves, but struggling in the process”
- Very diverse students (target: 20% Singapore, 60% rest of Asia, 20% rest of the world including the U.S.)



Nine “Controversies” that the Lee Kuan Yew School is working to address nine issues about its identity as a school and its curriculum

- One: “Are we a school of public policy in Asia or are we an Asian school of public policy, and what would the difference be?”
  - Seeking to define a distinctive approach in the context of a diverse student body
  - Current answer: “in practice ... we are a school of public policy in Asia, broadly speaking”



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Two: “Is it possible to have too little home country context in the curriculum?”
  - Home country context = “important glue for the students”
  - Students are drawn to Singapore because they want to learn more about its policies and management approaches
  - The school is adding more Singapore content to the curriculum.



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Three: “How can we ... draw [on] a broad range of case studies used very creatively, ... going beyond the Kennedy School case studies, to a broad range of approaches? How can we share these more effectively and with lower transaction costs?”
  - Tremendous amount of material awaiting entrepreneurs to turn into case materials
  - Use multiple cases together to create a comparative teaching approach
  - Use simulation exercises in the classroom to generate real-time experiences with issues



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Four: “What kinds of innovations on the theoretical side do we need?”
  - U.S. literature/textbooks assume a “democratic foundation of accountability systems in public management” that does not always translate well to other settings
  - Example: defining “public value” in the goals sought by the administrative state



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Five: “Can you teach leadership in a cross-national fashion?”
  - What would it look like to integrate leadership across different elements in the core curriculum and elective offerings, not just confining it to a course called Leadership or Leadership in Public Management?”
  - Lee Kuan Yew School faculty members interested in leadership now are working together to standardize and integrate their approach.





## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Six: “Sectoral tensions and expectations: Where are the major gaps in our public management curriculum?”
  - ❧ Jeff Straussman 2006 paper: “there [are] major gaps in such areas as the importance of regulation or the whole existence of the private sector” that apply to the U.S. and to the rest of the world.
  - ❧ How to identify the gaps and work cross-nationally and across schools to fill them (e.g., new forms for network governance)?



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Seven: Ensuring quality of the experiences in student projects
  - Projects often involve students from 20 different countries
  - Need to include sufficient contextual content so that the projects are of vital educational value
  - Projects need to anticipate different career trajectories (gov't, consulting, etc.).



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Eight: “Are we trying to cram too much into our curriculum? Could we get by with teaching less but actually getting better learning outcomes in the bargain?”
  - Varying student proficiency in English is a fundamental constraint
  - Faculty remain in flux over the quantity vs. quality trade-offs regarding curriculum content and expectations



## Nine Controversies – cont.

- Nine: “National sensitivities come up increasingly ... in all of our classrooms.”
  - Key issue: whether a professional school should use social science to critique policies and management systems, or not”
  - Courses will generate debates between students from widely varying political systems (e.g., India and China)
  - How far should the school “push the boundaries”



# A Last Word

“Many of the home country contexts of emerging policy schools are themselves grounded in very different political traditions. It will just be interesting to see how they manage that tension. So far, we are doing well in Singapore on this issue; I think we have maintained a fairly critical, robust response to our challenges, but this will continue to raise delicate issue as we address Singaporean issues and controversies more prominently in the years to come, and given that our students from the wide range of Asian countries also bring their own political sensitivities at times.”

