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## Transforming the curriculum for Public Administration at Unisa<sup>1</sup>

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### **Opsomming**

#### **Transformering van die kurrikulum vir Publieke Administrasie by Unisa**

Dit word algemeen aanvaar dat die grondwetlike en politieke omgewing van Suid-Afrikaanse openbare amptenare oor die afgelope aantal jare grondig verander het. Hierdie veranderinge vra onder meer vir nuwe oriëntasies en vaardighede, en veral vir 'n nuwe werketiek by openbare amptenare. Opleiding 'n verneme rol speel in die vestiging van veranderende houdings en kweek van nuwe vaardighede. Die universiteit is een van talle instansies wat betrokke is by die opleiding vir die openbare diens. Hierdie artikel gee 'n oorsig van hoe die Departement van Publieke Administrasie aan die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika (Unisa) tans sy leerplan transformeer om aan te pas by die eise van 'n veranderende omgewing. Die vertrekpunt van die hele proses is die strewende om wetenskaplik geïnspireerde professionele opleiding vir die Suid-Afrikaanse openbare sektor bied. In die proses van kurrikulering is onder meer aandag gegee aan die Departement se unieke studente profiel en die behoeftes van die breë spektrum van belanghebbers. Vyf prominente temas is geïdentifiseer wat weer in 'n beskrywende model geïntegreer is. 'n Nuwe kurrikulum is daarop ontwikkel bestaande uit 'n leerplan, 'n hiërargie vaardighede asook 'n onderrig en leerkode. 'n Aanvang is reeds gemaak met die ontwikkeling van die nuwe studiemateriaal. Die doel van die hele proses is om te verseker dat die wetenskaplik

geïnspireerde opleiding wat Unisa se Departement van Publieke Administrasie verskaf, relevant is en sal bly in die steeds veranderende openbare omgewing.

## Introduction

It is generally accepted that the constitutional and political environment of public officials, specifically in the Republic of South Africa, has changed fundamentally over the past few years. In addition, the acceptance of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as an overarching governmental policy in South Africa, has placed fresh emphasis on the delivery of public service. These changes call for renewed orientation and new skills, and specifically for a new work ethic for public officials.

It is also accepted that training plays a vital role in learning to adapt to the working environment and in the creation of occupational skills. The implication of this is that the transformation of the orientations and skills of public officials depends on changes to training for the public sector. Although various institutions are involved in training for the public sector, this article will focus on only one type of institution, namely the university. The aim of this article is, as a case study, to give an overview of how the Department of Public Administration at Unisa is currently transforming its training for the public sector.

In order to understand the concept *training* in this context, its various connotations need to be explained. Bearing in mind the different institutions involved in training for the public sector, questions will also be asked about the substance and scope of the role of a university in training, before the efforts made by the Department of Public Administration at Unisa to transform its curriculum to meet the needs of a changing public environment, will be discussed

## Training

A review of the applicable literature shows that there are different definitions of the concept *training*. Although training is sometimes seen as an activity separate from education (Cf. Lee 1987; Peters 1973: 240), the concept of training may be taken to comprise the following areas: (i) non-formal training, which proceeds voluntarily in a planned, but highly adaptable manner in institutions and in areas outside the work situation; (ii) informal training, which takes place spontaneously; and (iii) formal training, which is planned and undertaken at recognised institutions, such as schools, colleges, technikons and universities (Loxton 1992: Par 7.6).

For the purpose of this discussion, the meaning of the concept *training* will be restricted to training offered by way of formal education at an institution such as a university.

Furthermore it is accepted that formal education, like all education, is aimed at guiding students towards realising their full potential as human beings and fully developing their talents (South Africa 1989: 1). An educated person is one who not only possesses specific know-how but also a considerable body of knowledge together with understanding (Peters 1973: 240). He or she has the capacity to connect different interpretations of his or her experience so that some kind of cognitive perspective is achieved (Peters 1973: 240).

It is accepted that formal education is not only aimed at producing educated people in general, but also at producing educated people for specific occupations or employers such as the public sector. In other words, formal education also makes provision for professional training, which results in the maintenance and transformation of the best existing knowledge (Pauw 1995b: 17).

### University training

As we take for granted that formal education includes professional training, we also accept that a university, as a formal training institution, provides training for specific occupations and employers. The crucial question is: is it really possible for a university to provide occupational training and to be scientific at the same time?

Oakeshott (1961: 303) makes a sharp distinction between university teaching and occupational teaching. According to him university education is a 'specific sort of education, in some ways distinguished by its elementary character; ...it is both important and unique' (Oakeshott 1961: 303). He believes that university education aims at mastering an open discourse in order to, *inter alia*, understand various aspects of life. However, he believes that occupational training aims at mastering the best knowledge of an existing practice. Therefore, according to Oakeshott, university education is always about the acquisition of specific ways of thinking and communication rather than mastering specific knowledge.

Oakeshott's point of view is shared, in a sense, by an official South African policy document, *A qualification structure for universities in South Africa* (South Africa 1989: 1), which states that 'it is generally accepted that the main aim of South African universities, like that of leading universities throughout the world, is scholarship of a high order with a view to, *inter alia*, high-level professional preparation'. Professional preparation by a university is thus not ruled out — provision is made for a specific type of professional training.

According to Pauw (1995b) the practice of a profession is based to some extent on well-known technology and facts, but to a greater extent on skills (the tricks of the trade) and touch. Because of the practical nature of the foundations of professions, it is not possible for a university to teach the principles of a profession in the form of explicit statements. Pauw's contention is that a practice or an art is rather a set of skills than a warehouse full of propositions. His proposal is supported by a statement by Polanyi (1958: 53) that an 'art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice'. This leads Pauw to conclude that occupational preparation, and training at a tertiary institution (with the exception of the profession of the theorist) can never be adequate (Pauw 1995b: 9). This is supported by the fact that the more statutory professions are assigned to regulate articles, give training and examine candidates — in other words supply occupation-specific training in addition to the education offered by universities.

Where does a university fit in with this view? Pauw (1995b: 9) argues that the task of a university in the Public Administration sphere, is to offer scientifically inspired professional education in the field of public administration. The way in which persons with scientific skills think, adds value to occupations (1995b: 10). It is, therefore, necessary for a Public Administration curriculum at a university also to impart the less tangible aspects of science which find expression in skills, capacities, proficiencies, tricks, accomplishments, techniques, inclinations, methods, tastes, **handiness** and **headstrongness** (Pauw 1995b: 11).

In the process of developing a new curriculum for Public Administration at the University of South Africa (Unisa), we regard it as imperative to make provision for units of knowledge as well as the acquisition of scientific skills in the curriculum.

### Unisa: trainer of public officials

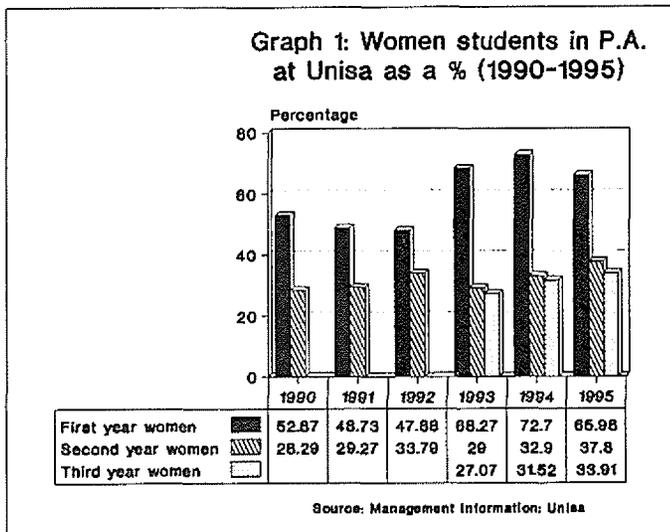
The University of South Africa (Unisa) has a distinct role to play in scientifically inspired professional training for the so-called disadvantaged section of South African society. Student numbers and the composition of the university as a whole, as well as the numbers and composition of students in Public Administration, show that Unisa is targeting a specific market. The University of South Africa came into being in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope, purely an examining body for other institutions. In 1946 the University of South Africa was formed as a distance teaching university. Today Unisa is one of the largest distance teaching universities in the world. Student numbers grew from 5 586 in 1955 to 128 198 in 1995. Unisa students were predominantly white in the

early years. However, the composition has changed considerably during the last two decades. In 1995, 60% of all students were not white. Furthermore, 54% of the total number of students at Unisa, were women.

Public Administration has been examined by Unisa since 1919 and taught at Unisa from 1947. As with the university as a whole, the composition of students in Public Administration has changed considerably during the last few years. For example, the number of black students grew from 63,47% of the total in 1990, to 79,74% in 1995. In addition, the number of women students is also increasing, as indicated by the figures for undergraduate students — especially second and third year students (see **Graph 1**). The slight drop in the percentage of women students in the first year may be ascribed to the fact that Public Administration is, with effect from 1994, no longer a compulsory subject in Nursing Science.

The average age of undergraduate students in Public Administration at Unisa reflects a downward trend, although it is still above 33 years of age. For example, the average age of the first year students drop from 39 years of age in 1990 to 34 years of age in 1995.

More or less 80% of all students in Public Administration at Unisa do not use their home language as the language of correspondence or language of. This is to be expected considering the high percentage of black students in the Department.

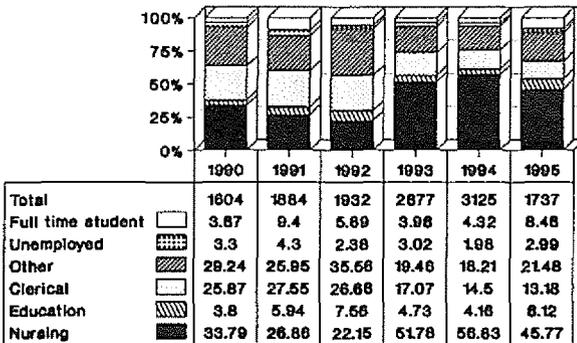


The Department of Public Administration at Unisa sees its main function as offering scientifically inspired professional education and training in the field of Public Administration. An analysis of the occupational status of the students indicates that the overwhelming majority are already employed in the field of public administration (see **Graphs 2 and 3**). Because Public Administration is an optional course for students studying Nursing Sciences, large numbers of nurses are first-year students in Public Administration (see **Graph 2**). An analysis of the largest second-year course over the past six years, shows that between 33% and 40% of these students have been employed in clerical positions while between 36% and 47% have been in a variety of other occupations (see **Graph 3**).

A final notable aspect of Unisa's student profile, is the fact that it has an 'open university' approach, in the sense that it is possible for students to study, irrespective of the fact that they do not possess full matriculation exemptions (see **Graph 4**). This means that special provision has to be made in the curriculum to accommodate those students who might not comply with normal accepted entrance standards. This must be accomplished without lowering the qualification standards.

It can be concluded that a typical student in Public Administration at Unisa is probably a black woman, between 30 and 40 years of age, already employed, who may not have full matriculation exemption. This is the profile of the typical student who will benefit from a new curriculum in Public Administration.

**Graph 2: Occupation of 1st year students in P.A. at Unisa (1990-1995)**



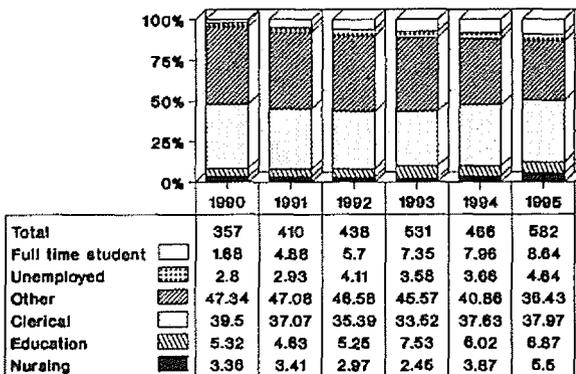
Source: Management Information: Unisa

## Curriculum development programme at Unisa

A curriculum is closely related to teaching and learning. It includes *inter alia* the *what* that is to be taught (Langford 1985: 75), in other words the knowledge and skills as well as the value framework within which teaching and learning will take place (Pauw 1995a: 45). Therefore, the curriculum development exercise has in mind the development of *units of knowledge* that are relevant to the community (as indicated by the above statistics) as well as the dissemination of *skills*. The aim is to inculcate a culture in which curriculum development will be dynamic, *i.e.*, that the current effort will be a sustained one. We specifically identified three main categories of skills that we wish to enable our students to acquire. These categories are *conceptual skills*, *human skills*, and *technical skills*. The conceptual skills component implies the sensitivity to perceive that any particular work function forms one part of a whole (departmentally, institutionally) and hence should be coordinated and integrated as such. This includes the development of sensitivity to change, and how this may influence the particular institution of which the functionary is a part. This of necessity requires the development of human skills in order to work in a group, and to understand and to motivate others. In addition, technical skills are necessary in order to empower individuals to utilize and apply techniques, procedures and resources optimally.

As has been explained above, the imparting of skills should not eclipse the primary function of the university, *i.e.*, imparting of scientific skills that will serve as the foundations for the technical, conceptual and human skills.

Graph 3: Occupations of 2nd year students in P.A. at Unisa



Source : Management Information: Unisa

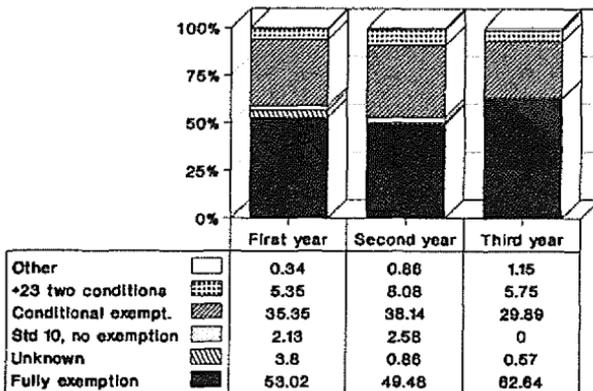
Against the above background, an overview of the prevailing activities of the Department of Public Administration at Unisa *vis-à-vis* curriculum development for a transforming South African society may be provided. At the risk of oversimplification, the explanation will be done under the following broad headings: purpose, method, and results of the curriculum development exercise.

### Purpose of the curriculum development exercise

The purpose of the curriculum development exercise at Unisa has briefly been spelt out above. In summary it can be stated that a need was identified to respond to the current changes brought about in South Africa by the new dispensation. It was imperative to recognize the major contribution the Department of Public Administration can make in the establishment of a public service personnel corps that is well-educated and trained to respond optimally to the needs of a society that has heretofore been deprived in various ways.

It was also recognized that a novel method of presenting of new course material should be pursued in response to the latest universal quest for *user-friendliness*. Course material should, in addition to being relevant, be *accessible*; and attractively so. The latter also has in mind the enabling of heretofore disadvantaged students in terms of educational opportunities.

Graph 4: Type of matric of pre-graduate students in P.A. at Unisa (1995)



Source : Management Information: Unisa

## Method of the curriculum development exercise

The Department of Public Administration at Unisa struggled for some time to establish a *modus operandi* for the curriculum development process. It was evident that there was a large measure of academic acumen in the subject matter in the Department. It was contended, however, that the curriculum exercises that preceded the current one were characterized by intuitive responses to what was needed to prepare a student for whatever job he or she was aiming for; in particular the public sector (see **graphs 2 and 3**). Some suggested a process of a so-called scientific curriculum development. A definition of what scientific curriculum development was, as opposed to intuitive curriculum development, was hard to formulate, and remains elusive. This is because of the contention that the intuition of a scientist is inspired by the particular science in which he or she is schooled and sensitized.

It was agreed that, in order to set the stage for the ultimate goal of relevant, user-friendly course material, the expertise of the Bureau for University Teaching at Unisa should be solicited. The content of a new Public Administration curriculum was to remain the responsibility of the academic members of the Public Administration Department.

### Task of the Department of Public Administration

A Curriculum Management Committee (CMC) was established in the department. Its primary task is to oversee and drive the curriculum development initiative. The committee, through departmental meetings, involved academic members of the Department in determining what should be included in a new and relevant curriculum.

The departmental meetings resulted in the formation of various departmental task groups. These task groups were comprised of four to five members of the Department. Each task group was assigned specific responsibilities that were identified during departmental meetings. Each member was a member of a number of task groups with different mandates at any one time. It should be noted that the work of the various task groups was to run concurrently, and to strict time schedules.

Broadly defined, the work of the task groups was to conduct needs analyses, develop aims and objectives, identify specific themes relevant to Public Administration, and design models for teaching Public Administration. The rationale for this method of working was founded on a six phase 'course map' proposed by the Bureau for University Teaching (BUT). The six phases proposed by the BUT were as follows: phase 1 — *needs analyses*; phase 2 — *developing aims and objectives*; phase 3 — *structuring the course*, phase 4 — *developing materials*; phase 5 — *implementation*; phase 6 — *evaluation*.

Each person involved in the curriculum development exercise was constantly counselled to attempt to break away from paradigm fixation, and to challenge the existing Public Administration paradigms in the light of the transformations in South African government institutions as well as in society, both nationally and internationally.

## Consultation

While the task of curriculum development fell primarily to the Department of Public Administration, it was recognized that broad consultation was needed.

### Reasons for consultation

Consultation was necessary to have a transparent process of curriculum development, in keeping it acceptable to all the parties that may be influenced by it. It was also necessary to prove false the extant criticism levelled against academics, namely that they are megalomaniacs lurking in their ivory towers. This could be overcome by broad consultation with all role-players and potential role-players. The realization that broad consultation would provide knowledge, expertise and wisdom that the Department might otherwise not have had access to, served as a pivotal motivating factor. This was true of theoretical input, but particularly of the development of the scientific skills component.

### Method of consultation

As far as possible a two-pronged approach was implemented to consult all relevant role players and potential role-players. An initial consultation served to inform the role-players of the curriculum exercise at the Department of Public Administration. It also made them aware of the goals of the exercise, and served to solicit their initial inputs. A second consultation that is currently in progress, includes the submission of a 'Proposed model for the teaching of Public Administration' to the parties originally consulted. This model, the result of in-house efforts together with inputs from the initial consultations, will have to be analyzed and criticized in terms of the needs of the particular party being consulted.

The role-players that were and are consulted include:

#### Extra departmental role-players

These consultations were conducted with parties not directly involved in the teaching of Public Administration at Unisa. They included:

➤ Current and past students of Public Administration at Unisa.

- Other academic departments at Unisa that may have a vested interest in what is being taught in the Department of Public Administration. These included, among others, the Departments of Political Science, Development Administration, Sociology, and Nursing.
- The input of neighbouring universities, such as the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand, was also solicited. This was in addition to informal discussions to canvass opinions and inputs from colleagues at other universities.

### Employers and interest and pressure groups

It was necessary to consult extensively with any party which has employed Public Administration students in the past, and could potentially employ such students in the future. As interest and pressure groups could also benefit from training in Public Administration, and could potentially also provide much-needed information in the curriculum development exercise, a random sample of the latter was also consulted. Government employers on central, provincial and local levels were consulted. These included, among others, Members of the Public Service Commission, the Office of the Public Service Commission, Department of Foreign Affairs, South African National Defence Force, the Department of the Minister without Portfolio (Reconstruction and Development Programme), Gauteng Provincial Administration, as well as the Johannesburg and Pretoria local authorities.

Interest and pressure groups which were identified included municipal institutes, the South African Institute of Public Administration (SAIPA), non-governmental organizations, and national institutes and associations.

### A parallel process

The whole process of curriculum development was not linear, but a parallel one. Invariably the consultations took place concurrently with the departmental discussions and debates. This allowed the various task groups in the Department to consider significant suggestions gleaned from consultations and to adapt the curriculum development process accordingly.

### Obstacles experienced

While the curriculum development exercise at Unisa is very rewarding, as many of the goals are actually being achieved, some problems have been experienced. As the exercise is an on-going one, some of these problems are still being experienced. Some of the more salient hindrances are:

### Time constraints

The curriculum development exercise is progressing slowly mainly because of its many facets. The progress, however, is not in keeping with the writing and printing schedule deadlines determined by Unisa. This will probably result in writing schedules not being met for at least another year or so.

### Work load

The members in the Department of Public Administration at Unisa have been working under constant pressure of curriculum development (and all that it entails), student consultations, marking of assignments- and examination scripts, personal research, and the perpetual threat of 'publish or perish'. All of those entail deadlines, some more obdurate than others.

### Paradigm fixation

Paradigms have a way of imprisoning their supporters. The tendency of paradigm fixation has been particularly overt during the early stages of the curriculum development process. In attempting to overcome, this a great effort was made to consult, and reach in-house consensus on all aspects relating to the proposed model for the teaching of Public Administration at Unisa. This was done without compromising the academic freedom or credibility of any individual in the Department. The discussions around changing paradigms also led to the elucidation of existing paradigms, as well as to identifying which paradigms are still helpful to understanding Public Administration.

Despite certain problems experienced during the application of the identified methods, very constructive results were derived that led to a positive outlook for the curriculum development exercise.

## Results of the curriculum development exercise thus far

The efforts of the curriculum development exercise thus far have yielded an assortment of results. The most important of these are the *identification of five prominent, yet broad thematic tracks* which formed the basis for the designing of a *model*. The broad thematic tracks were integrated into a *proposal* which was *inter alia* placed on the *Internet*. In addition to the latter, a *new curriculum* was designed which will form the basis for the development of *new study material*.

## Identification of five prominent thematic tracks

The thematic tracks that were identified, critically analyzed, and elaborated upon are:

### **Understanding the social contract**

Although the concept derives from philosophers such as Hobbes and Rousseau, its intent here is more basic; *viz.*, the agreement which derives from a clear understanding of the reciprocal responsibilities and rights between the individual, the community, the private sector and the government.

### **Role and function of government:**

A major emphasis, by virtue of the theory and practice of Public Administration, is placed on the role of government. Among the important roles and functions of government are provision of welfare and social services and the improvement of society.

### **Management and ethical dimensions in the execution of government functions**

It is increasingly recognized that public administration, in order to attain effectiveness and efficiency, needs to be based on sound management and ethical principles. This entails continued research and increasing sensitivity towards the latest developments and findings in management and other related fields.

### **Interaction of forces and phenomena within the context of public administration**

There is ample evidence that public administration does not take place in a vacuum. Supporters of *Systems Theory* have long recognized this fact. The global village effect of the 20th century should be recognized as one example of the important influences on the public administration of a country.

### **Public Administration as subject**

An important segment of any course in Public Administration is the consideration of themes such as theoretical aspects related to the subject, historical developments of the subject, and approaches to the subject.

## Designing a Public Administration Model

A model based on the above themes was designed that would reflect at a glance the interactive and dynamic nature of public administration (see appendix 1). The model has to be understood in the light of, and read along with, the *Proposed*

*structure of aims for the tuition of Public Administration at the University of South Africa.* A summary explanation of the model follows. The new Public Administration takes into account the fact that public administration takes place in a universal setting, i.e. whatever takes place within a particular state will inevitably be influenced by, and will influence, the environment of the state. This environment will include the regional, national and international environments. Events that may influence the activities of the state include crises, disturbances in the balance of power, political and social ideologies, the development of information and other technologies, and other international events. Within this setting any state or government also has to forge relationships with the parties within its state boundaries. For the purposes of public administration the focal parties to this relationship are the community at large and the private sector. Because of the whole political process, reciprocal responsibilities and rights arise between the government, the citizens (corporately and individually), and the private sector. For the purposes of the curriculum under discussion these reciprocal rights and responsibilities can be assumed to result in a type of social contract. Government is therefore contractually bound to give life to its political mandate, and needs to form whatever other relationships are necessary to achieve this goal. In the same way the citizenry and the private sector will also have to meet their contractual responsibilities, and enjoy the rights and privileges that flow forth from it.

The Government, through the public sector, in serving the parties to the social contract, needs to perform certain functions. These functions include welfare and social services and protection functions. In the performance of those functions the management dimension comes into play. The latter must be undergirded by important academic, technical and personal skills. It must also be inspired and guided by an ethical dimension, which in turn is influenced by, among other factors, personal ethics and morality and codes of conduct.

### Proposal

The above thematic tracks were integrated into a *Proposed structure of aims for the tuition of Public Administration at the University of South Africa.* The proposal will form the basis of a new Public Administration curriculum at Unisa. It also focuses on the transmission of scientific knowledge and skills.

The broad thematic tracks identified will enable the Department of Public Administration to develop new course material for all the courses currently offered, as well as to develop new courses.

### Opportunities to experiment with the Internet

The *Proposed structure of aims for the tuition of Public Administration at the University of South Africa* was placed on the World Wide Web in September 1995. The main purpose of this was to solicit further comment and suggestions for improvement. Perusal of the internet since September 1995 indicates that this is the first attempt by any academic department at a tertiary institution to develop its curriculum in such a veritable universal fish-bowl.

Recently the URL (i.e. the World Wide Web address) of the Department has been placed on various list servers and bulletin boards on the internet in order to advertise the curriculum efforts more broadly, and thereby canvass more inputs.

The internet site where the proposal may be perused and commented upon is: <http://www.unisa.ac.za/dept/pad/depart.html>

On the basis of inputs from various quarters, the proposal on the Internet will be updated periodically. This project has also produced enthusiastic support for the creation of a home page for the Department of Public Administration on the Internet.

### The new curriculum

The curriculum development exercise has gone through phase three of the BUT course map. The curriculum development team has painstakingly unpacked the various themes into years of study. The unpacking of the themes into years of study resulted from the fact that the goals of the proposed themes were refined and defined, taking into account the response received from the parties consulted, and the aims of the department. The papers or courses that resulted also take into account the abilities of the students at the various course levels. There will be an ongoing effort to accommodate progressive learning and conceptual skills from the lowest course level to the highest.

The curriculum consists of a syllabus spelling out the knowledge units to be taught in the three undergraduate years of study, a hierarchy of skills (see appendix 2) that will be facilitated, and a teaching and learning code (see appendix 3) which forms the basis of the curriculum. The code impresses on the students and the lecturers of Public Administration the seriousness of the academic project, and requires of both parties to espouse definite academic and personal values in their quest for, and dissemination of knowledge, wisdom, and skills.

The new first-year syllabus will be an introduction to the subject Public Administration. It will firstly provide the student with an overview of the nature, content and scope of public administration as an object of study, and secondly provide a broad picture of the structure and function of the public service.

During the second year emphasis will be placed on the foundations of public administration as a phenomenon as well as public administration as a service to the public. As part of the foundations of public administration, the focus will be on rights and obligations in public administration, as well as general government functions such as the treasury, central personnel authority and public works. In the service-rendering part, emphasis will be placed on the protection services (such as policing, correctional services and administration of justice), the wealth-creating services (such as commerce and industry, agriculture and forestry), welfare and social services (such as housing, health and social security), improvement of society (such as education, culture, science and technology) and environmental affairs.

The third-year course will be divided into three papers. These will comprise theory and practice of management in public administration, selected issues in public administration, and Reflective Public Administration. The first part will focus on public management skills as well as public management functions in the sphere of public human resources, public policy, public organising and public finances. Selected issues in Public Administration such as ethics, administrative justice and transformation will also receive attention. In the reflective part the focus will be placed on Public Administration as a subject, the interactional dynamics of public administration (role, place and impact of public administration in and on society and *vice versa*), the interaction between public administration, government and politics, as well as comparative Public Administration and Public Administration methodology.

The proposals for new undergraduate courses in Public Administration are to replace the current undergraduate courses in Public Administration. In the interest of rationalisation it is envisaged that the current undergraduate courses in Municipal Government and Administration will also be replaced by the new curriculum. The latter implies that the present subject matter of Municipal Government and Administration will be integrated with the subject matter of Public Administration.

### Development of study material

The completion of the unpacking of the themes into coherent levels of study, and the identification of which material needs to be dealt with in the various years of study has enabled the Department of Public Administration to embark on the phase of developing the study material, *i.e.* the actual writing of the material (phase 4 of the BUT course map). As the departmental members have all taken part in the development of the curriculum up to this point, it has been decided to write the actual study material in the same spirit of cooperativeness. It was therefore decided to follow the team approach. This approach requires that mainly one person writes the course material, taking into account the various

identified themes, as well as the particular year of study and the abilities and skills that can be expected from a potential student at that particular level of study. The other team members will be required to provide the author with material that they have researched on the relevant topics. The products of the author are continually monitored and criticised by the rest of the team. The team will monitor the difficulty level of the contents, and will measure it for consistency against the curriculum that has been developed.

Besides the above-mentioned team members, representatives of the BUT will play an important role in the design of the material in order to facilitate user-friendliness and accessibility. Grammarians and translators from Unisa's editorial section will play an important role in monitoring the material for language usage, and gender sensitivity. Additional members of the team will be drawn from Unisa's printing and publishing section in order to assist in the graphic design of the material. External members of the team will provide additional important review and evaluation of the material produced. These team members will be drawn from public sector officials, and other interested stake-holders, as identified elsewhere in this article. The final level of review and evaluation will be provided by the students who will be taking the particular courses. It is envisaged that a well-structured questionnaire relating to how the students have experienced the format, style and content of the study material will be compiled. The questionnaire is likely to form a part of the students assignments.

In summary, the members of the team who will be involved in the researching, writing, designing, and evaluating of the study material to ensure that it complies with the curriculum that resulted from the curriculum development exercise are the following: author(s), other members of the Department of Public Administration, representatives of the Bureau for University Teaching, representatives of the Editorial Department, graphic designers, external reviewers (including past students), and students enrolled at the time of implementation of the course. The aims of the team approach are manifold, including relevance, accessibility, user-friendliness and legitimacy of the study material.

## Conclusion

It has been argued that the Department of Public Administration at Unisa aims to offer scientifically inspired professional education for the South African public sector. It has also been shown that because Unisa is a distance education institution, it has a unique student profile that requires a tailor-made curriculum.

This curriculum will need to grow and adapt over the ensuing years, hence an ongoing curriculum development exercise, and ongoing research and writing of course material is envisaged to meet an ongoing societal transformation.

With the aid of continued inputs from all parties interested in the successful education and training of public servants, it will be possible to revisit and improve the curriculum and course material as reflected in the model and to offer scientifically inspired professional education in the field of Public Administration of outstanding quality.

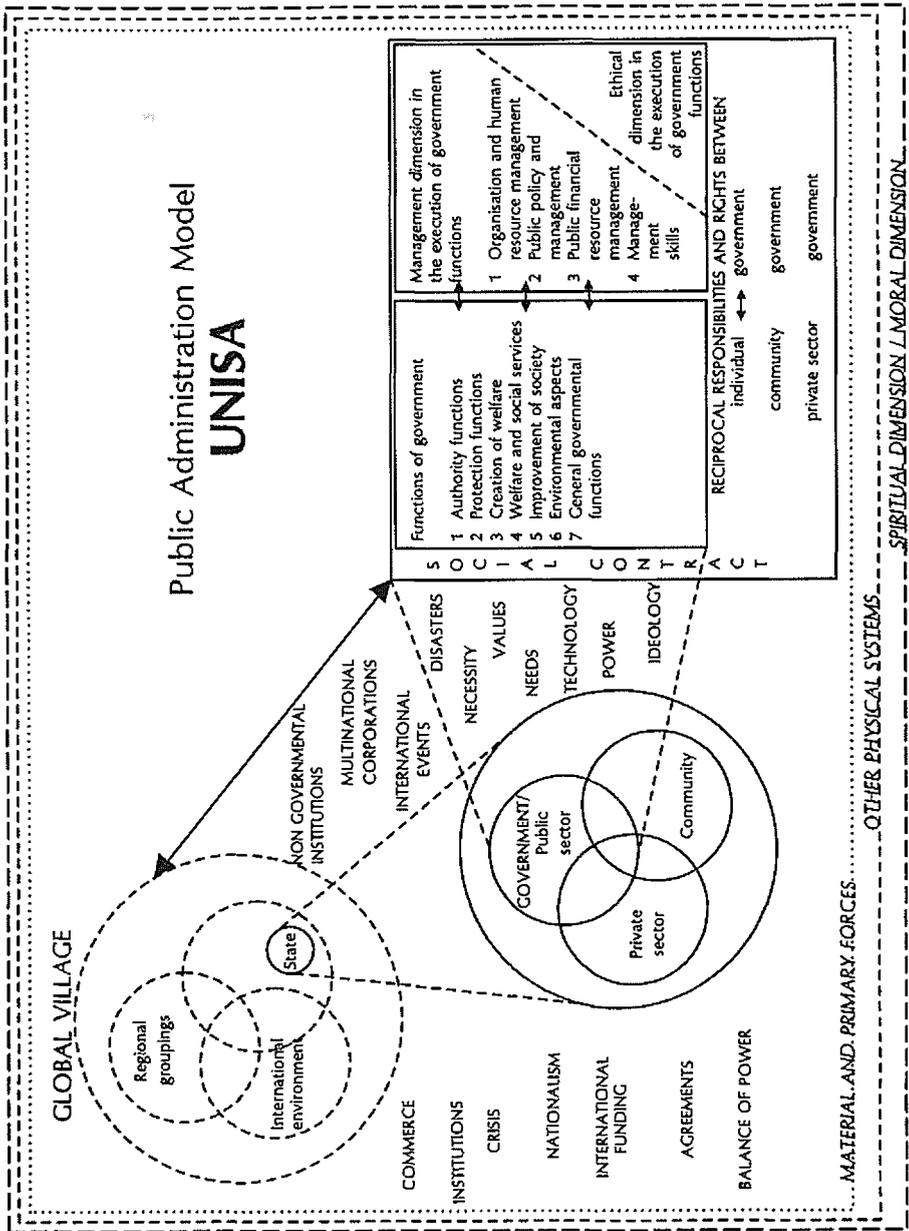
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#### Note

- 1 An updated version of a paper 'Professional education and training for public servants; the role of the university', read at the Conference of the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) at Durban, South Africa, on 2 July 1996. The authors wish to acknowledge the input of all the members of the Department of Public Administration at Unisa.

Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

### Skills in the Public Administration curriculum

#### Introduction

Determining the nature, level and quantity of skills facilitated by or taught in the courses that the Department offers, is just as necessary as determining the contents or themes in the curriculum.

In the curriculum, skills feature in three forms:

- A General academic skills that will be integrated with the contents of Public Administration, that is, the student acquires them in the course of mastering the contents of the syllabuses;
- B Scientific skills that will for some part be integrated with the contents of Public Administration — (A) and (B) overlap to a large extent — and for some part be taught as a research method module: in both cases the teaching mode is academic; and
- C Practical occupational skills that are distinct from (A) and (B) and that can only be taught in a practical situation.

This document restricts itself to (A) and (B).

The integration of skills and contents is very simple: all contents (knowledge items) are set in terms of behavioural objectives, that is, things that the student must **be able to do**; and to be able to do something in our context requires a skill. For example, if the objective in a certain unit is to **classify** a number of functions, it not only requires knowledge of the functions, but also the **skill of classifying**.

#### Getting the right spread

As far as skills are concerned, it is essential that skills acquisition is distributed right through the syllabuses. The distribution must meet two requirements: completeness (coverage) and appropriateness (mix and fit).

Completeness means that **all** the required skills are included in the curriculum as a whole. If this is true, then all the **levels** proper to university education will also be covered.

Appropriateness means that the distribution of skills will be such that the required skills fit the level of study in order to manifest learning progression and ensuring that the right standard is set at every level. This means that the first year will require less of the advanced skills than, say, the third year. By the same token a third-year course will have a lower percentage of lower level skills than, say, the first year.

## Hierarchy of intellectual and scientific skills

Based on the taxonomy of De Corte, we have ordered these skills in eight hierarchical levels. Some skills occur at more than one advanced level, depending on the material available to the student, how the material is structured and/or the degree of difficulty of the task.

### Level 1

Reading, observing, identifying

### Level 2

Describing, explicating, identifying, narrating, writing

### Level 3

Discussing, analysing, explaining, narrating, defining, distinguishing, exemplifying, specifying, classifying, explicating, summarising, abstracting, comparing, identifying relationships, understanding

### Level 4

Narrating, problem-solving, understanding

### Level 5

Defining, integrating, applying

### Level 6

Criticising, prioritising, evaluating, debating

### Level 7

Hypothesising, strategising, sniffing out problems, explicating hidden assumptions, debating

### Level 8

Designing, formalising, modelling, strategising, debating.

This hierarchy is simply a tool for gaining completeness and appropriateness of skills in the curriculum. It is not supposed to be either a straight-jacket or a contribution to cognitive science.

### Appendix 3

## Teaching and learning code

We, the lecturers and students of Public Administration, driven by a serious **quest for truth** and academic and professional excellence undertake to uphold the following teaching and learning code. This code expresses the values and attitudes that guide our endeavours and must be manifest wholly or partially in all our academic work, be it study, the curriculum, assignments, examinations, study material, and tutorials: in short, any form of teaching and learning.

Our academic activities are directed at **preparing ourselves to serve society** and to **promote science and scholarship** within a **culture of learning** and a **culture of effort**.

We as students accept that the work will not always be easy: we are not passive receptors but active pursuers of learning; we are the main determinant of our success. We as lecturers accept that we must support every student who works to the best of our abilities: that our success lies in the success of our students. We are thus all prepared to work hard at our subject which includes the effort involved in the **willingness to think** that always goes hand in hand with **open-mindedness** and a **tolerance** of views that differ from our own. At the same time students must be encouraged and helped to be *intellectually assertive* and critical. Students must learn to have a **critical attitude** towards the study material and to develop their own opinion on issues in Public Administration. **Originality** is encouraged and not suppressed by the lecturers.

However, science is not a field of intellectual licence but a discipline. Therefore, we must also uphold the scientific virtues of **exactness** and intellectual **honesty** at all times. Intellectual honesty requires that we always acknowledge our intellectual debt to others and never present work that is not our own as if we were the author.

We are encouraged by the fact that the values and guidelines of this teaching and learning code for a large part also serve a constructive purpose outside academe, specifically in public administration, and are therefore to the benefit of society as a whole.