

New-Student Orientations: Supporting Success and Socialization in Graduate Programs

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ABSTRACT

While the literature demonstrates the importance of certain core elements of orientation programs in helping students achieve academic and social integration, it lacks application to the specialization level of the Master of Public Administration (MPA), the Master of Public Policy (MPP), and similar degree programs. Employing data from a survey of 296 graduate programs accredited through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), this research uses an orientation logic model to examine whether certain orientation program characteristics, such as resources and tenets, are associated with student retention, grade achievement, and socialization. We find that certain core elements of orientation programs are related with outputs of student retention and student learning and outcomes of student socialization. We suggest that certain core elements that support socialization and mentoring between faculty and students provide important opportunities to socialize students overall into the profession of public service.

KEYWORDS

Orientation, socialization, public administration, graduate school

Attaining a graduate-level Master of Public Administration (MPA) or Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree prepares students for a professional career in public service, for both government and nongovernment opportunities. The experience of either continuing from undergraduate to graduate school or from professional practice to graduate school may expose students to new demands to develop knowledge, proficiencies, and values critical for success in a professional career (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). In many cases, the MPA/MPP graduate school experience may be a student's first exposure to public service values, which calls attention to the importance of student participation in organized orientation programs at the start of any MPA/MPP program.

While orientation programs serve multiple purposes, this paper suggests that student participation in new-student orientation programs have a direct relationship with student retention, student learning, and socialization outcomes. There is little reference in the literature to the importance of graduate school orientation programs, yet research on the outcomes of undergraduate new-student orientation programs finds that student attendance at orientation programs results in higher rates of retention and socialization (Fidler, 1991; Poock, 2004). Additionally, concerning MPA and MPP programs, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) accreditation standards identify student awareness of public values as a major area of emphasis.

Important to this study is whether orientation programs effectively achieve NASPAA Standard 7, Matching Communication With the Mission, to ensure that students are aware of program expectations and are informed enough to make decisions relative to proceeding with successful participation in the program.

7.1 Communications: The program will provide appropriate and current information about its mission, policies, practices, and accomplishments—including student learning outcomes—sufficient to inform decisions by its stakeholders such as prospective and current students; faculty; employers of current students and graduates; university administrators; alumni; and accrediting agencies. (Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, 2014, p. 8)

An environmental scan of MPA and MPP orientation programs reveals the use of a broad range of sessions, from self-directed online options to weeklong programs involving lectures, team building, and social networking. For example, MPA graduate programs at both Columbus State University and the University of North Dakota direct new students to online orientation programs designed to orient students to faculty research interests, pertinent advice, and connections to important university resources (University of North Dakota, 2014). In pursuit of developing stronger bonds between students, some universities require student participation in longer half-day sessions that not only present the nuts and bolts of the program but also offer interaction with faculty and opportunities for social networking.

Programs at both the University of North Texas and Rutgers University offer examples of longer, more-interactive orientation sessions (Rutgers University, 2014; University of North Texas, 2014). Additionally, beyond the basic information, some graduate programs, such as those at the University of Texas at Austin and Brigham Young University, require participation in weeklong activities that give students opportunities to participate in extravagant team-building experiences such as

ropes courses and white-water rafting (Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, 2014; Marriott School, 2014).

One aspect of this research is to understand whether orientation programs effectively communicate the mission of the program and thus ensure compliance with NASPAA Standard 7. New accreditation standards require all MPA and MPP graduate programs to adopt and implement competency-based learning that supports the mission of the graduate program. Orientation programs can serve a purposeful role in ensuring that students understand core competency expectations and the mission of the program. Additionally, orientation programs may make students aware of the tools and support structures in the overall program design that will help them achieve these goals and socialize them into the program. While there is significant variation in orientation programs, an important question for this article is this: Do certain orientation program tenets facilitate student socialization?

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between types of MPA and MPP graduate school orientations and their emphasis on communicating program expectations and the program's purposive mission with overall student retention, student learning outcomes, and socialization into the graduate school program. The article begins with a discussion of previous research and the impact new student orientation programs have on retention, student learning, and socialization. A logic model represents the relationship between inputs of orientation resources, program tenets, and socialization characteristics, outputs of student retention and learning, and outcomes of socialization in the program and outcomes of employability in the overall profession. The model offers a tool for understanding the expectations for core competencies and student knowledge, skills, and abilities.

At this point, we analyze orientation program using data collected through a survey of NASPAA-accredited MPA and MPP programs. We discuss the extent to which orientation pro-

grams provide students with the information necessary for students to gain awareness of expectations and critical to impacting student retention, learning outcomes, and socialization. The final sections discuss conclusions and present opportunities for future research.

ASPECTS OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

Orientation programs provide a framework for establishing expectations among newcomers, whether the programs are for students entering into a university setting or practitioners establishing a new position within a private company. For example, in the private sector, orientation programs serve to reduce the costs associated with high employee turnover (Dunn & Jasinski, 2009). Dunn and Jasinski (2009) argue that successful orientation programs introduce employees to a new work environment, familiarize them with the strategic mission of the company and integrate individuals into their jobs quickly. Through a case study of a high technology firm, the authors suggest that company investment in organized orientation programs that align an individual or work group with the strategic mission of the company will result in an increase in employee success. Some scholars indicate that orientation programs in a university setting may also be designed to inform students about institutional expectations, with a specific goal of improving student retention (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986).

Relationship to Student Retention

Studies have found a relationship between orientation programs that are designed to provide awareness about the program and integrate students into academic life and first-year student retention outcomes (Fidler, 1991; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrig, 2001). In a multi-institutional analysis of university orientation programs, Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim (2010) collected data from student participants in freshman university orientation programs from 2006 and 2007. The findings provide evidence that the design of orientation programs impact student performance and participation in the first few months of the freshman semester. A positive and significant association between student participation in

orientation programs and both academic expectations and academic transition is shown. Mayhew et al.'s (2010) findings suggest that the orientation programs provided students with the necessary information to develop study skills and meet the academic demands of their respective university programs.

Relationship to Student Learning and Socialization

Previous research has explained student learning as a connection between the learning process for the student and the context in which the learning occurs (Mayhew et al., 2010). Student learning is measured through verifiable outcomes relative to the agreed-upon objectives (Berger & Milem, 2000; Schuh, 2001). Mayhew et al. (2010) argue that orientation programs provide their own context of student learning by exposing students to academic and social lessons, which in turn are measured by verifiable success and participation in the program. The model for Mayhew et al.'s research suggests that academic learning that includes both student involvement with academics and faculty together with social learning that includes involvement in peer group activities increases student engagement. The authors provide evidence of a positive and significant relationship between a student's ability to access campus resources and a positive transition into the university setting. Concerning social learning, Mayhew et al.'s (2010) study found that smaller universities had greater success in helping students form bonds with others in their program and fostering participation in social aspects of the university. Students' self-reported ability to navigate campus resources and social expectations had a positive and statistically significant relationship with social learning. In other words, students who self-reported participation in new-student orientation programs had an easier time adjusting to the new social climate presented in the university setting.

Similarly, Williford et al. (2001) study social adjustment differences between university freshman who participated in an extended University Experience course and those who

did not participate. The purpose of the course was to help students adjust to the demands of the university environment. The findings suggest that on average, students who participate in new-student orientation programs tend to gain awareness and integrate into academic, social, and program environments. Williford et al.'s (2001) research finds that extended orientation programs for first-year students help them adjust to university life.

With respect to graduate school orientation, Poock (2004) looks at the differences between campus-wide orientation programs and specific graduate school orientation programs. The author suggests that campus-wide orientation programs affect the student socialization process in a way that may not be addressed specifically by a socialization process into a specific academic discipline. Poock's findings, from a survey of 191 graduate school institutions from the Council of Graduate Schools, reveal that a number of topics are addressed in campus-wide orientation programs. The study sheds light on the differences and the importance of campus-wide orientations relative to students' understanding of policies and resources that can assist in the management of their individual educational goals and plans. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that campus-wide orientations assist in socialization into the university, while specific graduate school orientation programs support socialization into the culture of a specific professional field. It appears that graduate students experience a dual socialization, into both the academic setting and their professional field of study (Weidman et al., 2001).

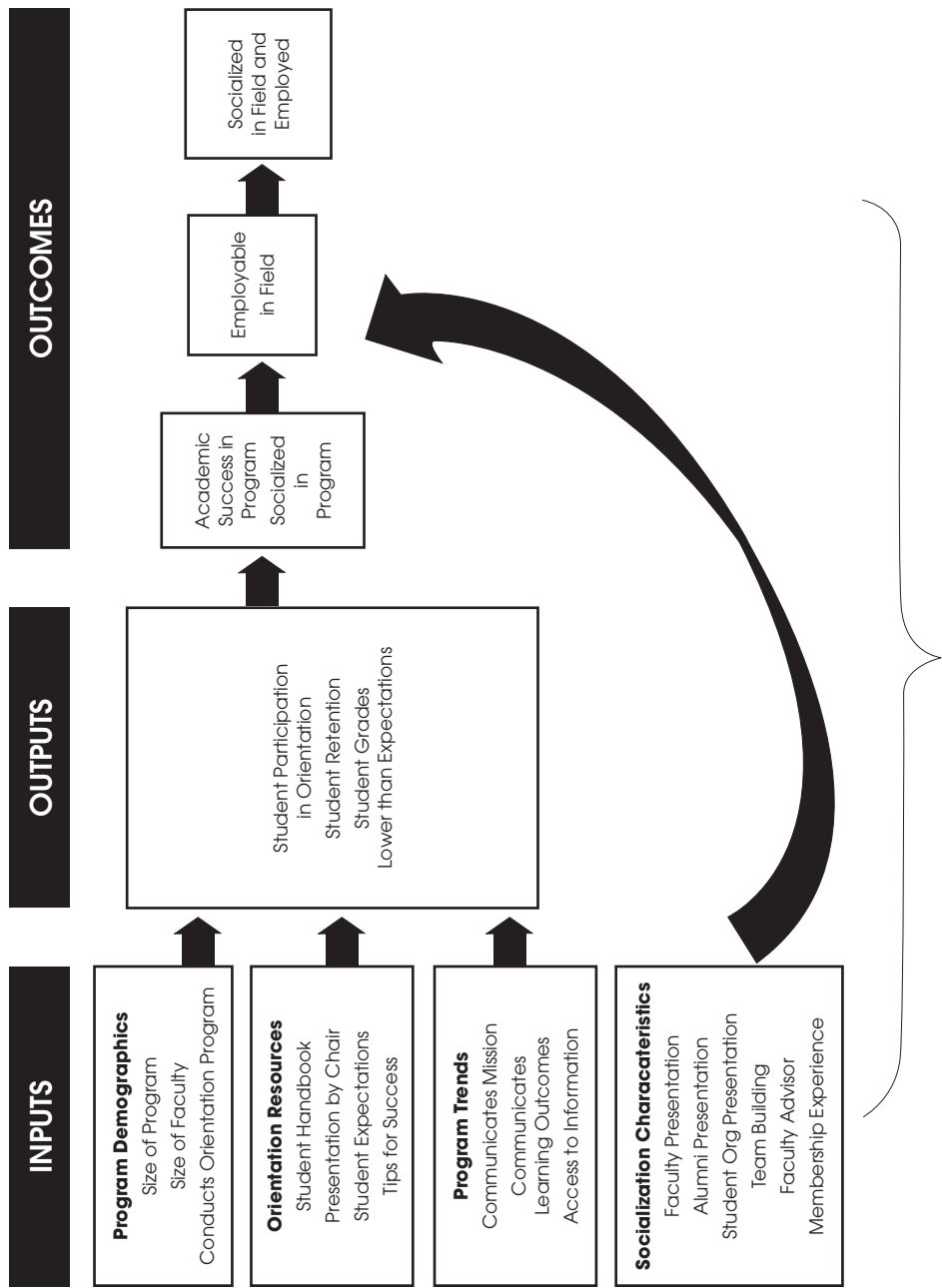
In the private-employee sector, Klein and Weaver (2000) examine the impact of attending a voluntary new-employee orientation and its relationship to multiple dimensions of socialization, including feeling part of the organization. Additional factors include comprehending the organizational mission, language, and tradition, and understanding the workplace standards. The analysis, based on a sample of newly hired employees from a large educational institution, provides evidence that attendees were socialized

relative to organizational goals, values, and history, but not to organizational language. While this research is based on employee participation in new-hire orientation programs, it demonstrates that orientation programs provide an opportunity to transmit organizational culture, norms, and values (Klein & Weaver, 2000).

It is also interesting to look at online orientation programs. Wesson and Gogus (2005) find some limitations to online orientation programs. Their study evaluated the differences between new-worker participation in computer-based orientation and some informal methods of orientation. They found that those who participated in computer-based orientation programs had weaker commitment to the organization and weaker understanding of organizational goals. Another growing trend in orientations is the adventure orientation. Vlamis, Bell, and Gass (2011) demonstrate the impact of adventure orientation programs on student development and socialization. For instance, they show a positive and statistically significant relationship between participants of outdoor adventure orientations. Their measures for the development of student purpose, the creation of student educational goals, and emotional and instrumental autonomy were all positive.

The previous research demonstrates that orientation programs are readily used at both the undergraduate and graduate school levels and that there is a positive relationship between orientation programs and student retention, learning, and socialization. The aforementioned studies also demonstrate the benefits of different types of orientation programs at the campus-wide and professional graduate school level. The purpose of this research then is to determine whether specific types of orientation programs and the corresponding content in graduate MPA/MPP programs provide students with the necessary information for them to gain awareness of expectations, specifically those defined by the NASPAA competency-based student learning outcomes, and whether the orientation programs include components that support student socialization.

FIGURE 1.
Logic Model for MPA/MPP Orientation Program Outcomes



A LOGIC MODEL FOR ORIENTATION PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Central to our research is the claim that certain organizational characteristics and program tenets give rise to student retention, student learning, and student socialization outcomes. While program orientation types may vary across universities, the assumption here is that integration of core components, expressed program expectations, awareness of resources, and opportunities to form social bonds are necessary features. The model for this study has student retention, student-learning resources, and socialization features as characteristics of structural determinants for student success. This study presents a logic model, depicted in Figure 1, as a tool for understanding the relationship between the context and the components of MPA/MPP orientation programs and overall graduate school outputs (i.e., student retention and student learning, and outcome, student socialization).

Orientation Program Inputs

There are specific styles and components of effective orientation programs. Dean, Thompson, Saunders, and Cooper (2011) argue that classroom training does not establish an environment that allows for a deep processing of orientation information. They suggest that elements of effective orientation programs include a mentor to share perspectives about unwritten rules, a coach to communicate performance expectations, and a human resources session on employee policies and procedures. Evidence suggests that the top three benefits of participation in orientation programs include the introduction of new staff to their colleagues, employee benefits, and a detailed explanation of job expectations (Dean et al., 2011).

Klein and Weaver (2000) argue that orientation program goals relative to socialization include helping new hires feel part of their organization. The authors further stress the importance of employees learning more about organization language, tradition, mission, and history. The authors suggest the use of an orientation handbook, a welcome from the president, and

a game or exercise to familiarize employees with traditions and norms. Our study predicts that the inclusion of these core elements into the orientation program, as depicted in Figure 1, will lead to higher levels of student retention.

Organizational characteristics are defined as both the components of the orientation program and the core competencies required in MPA/MPP programs by the NASPAA accreditation standards for competencies (Rivenbark & Jacobson, 2014). In 2009, NASPAA adopted standards requiring master's programs in public administration, public policy and public affairs to develop and adopt competency-based learning approaches. In a case-study analysis of the MPA program at the University of North Carolina, Rivenbark and Jacobson (2014) confirm the development and adoption of core competencies in the context of the program mission. The committee charged with advancing the competency-based learning standards enlisted the foundational public service values of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. They categorized 40 competencies into eight major public service areas. For example, two areas included the ability to lead and manage others in public service and to manage financial resources. Rivenbark and Jacobson's (2014) argument relative to our model is whether MPA/MPP orientation programs clearly articulate both their program's core competencies and its expectations for students in meeting the core competencies.

Because our study surveys only MPA/MPP program directors and not individual students, we adapted the model to include perceived student experiences such as knowledge, skills, and abilities relative to student learning outcomes and student proficiencies. The model suggests that the purpose of the orientation course is to help students adjust to demands of the university environment, including programmatic expectations as well as the available resources and tools for successful completion of the program. This element of the model addresses resources, program tenets, and the socialization characteristics of orientation programs.

Mayhew et al. (2010) argue that positive outcomes to academic performance and social experiences exist when orientations support students' academic and social transition to the next level of schooling. Our argument here suggests that, similar to Weidman et al. (2001), orientation to academic programs and integration into the

peer climate will affect students' socialization process into the master's level degree program. Here, our argument suggests that orientation programs that provide opportunities for students to learn about faculty teaching interests and hear from alumni and student associations sharing experiences result in higher levels of

TABLE 1.
Demographics of Responding Schools With and Without Orientation Programs

Characteristic	With orientation program (N = 108)	Without orientation program (N = 20)
Type of graduate program		
MPA	73%	80%
MPP	7%	10%
Both MPA and MPP	9%	5%
Other	9%	5%
Size of graduate program		
20–75	34%	40%
76–120	28%	30%
121–150	13%	15%
151 and above	24%	15%
Size of faculty		
5 or fewer	22%	25%
6–12	46%	65%
13–20	15%	5%
Over 21	15%	5%
Type of classes offered in program		
Face-to-face only	47%	25%
Online only	7%	20%
Combination of online and face-to-face	43%	40%
Other	3%	15%

socialization. To examine the relationship between inputs, outputs, and outcomes, we test the following hypotheses.

- Hypothesis 1: An MPA/MPP orientation program that includes resources for academic success is related to the overall percentage of students in the program that matriculate (student retention).
- Hypothesis 2: An MPA/MPP orientation program that communicates program tenets is related to a smaller percentage of students receiving grades lower than the core expectations at the end of each semester.
- Hypothesis 3: An MPA/MPP orientation program that includes socialization characteristics is related to program directors' perceptions of overall student socialization in the program.

RESEARCH METHODS

Quantitative Data

To respond to our hypotheses, we used quantitative analysis of MPA and MPP programs as well as a smaller qualitative assessment of graduate students. We designed and administered a 32-question survey to probe general features of MPA and MPP orientation programs and specific orientation resources, program tenets, and socialization characteristics (see Appendix A). In the summer of 2014, surveys were e-mailed to 296 schools with graduate programs accredited by NASPAA, via NASPAA's network. Department chairs in the NASPAA-accredited programs were asked to complete the survey questionnaire.

The initial survey was emailed to contacts and followed by a reminder email. A total of 146 schools responded to the survey, with a response rate of 50%. Overall, 20 schools indicated that they did not offer an orientation program. Additionally, 18 schools did not complete the entire survey. Therefore, the average final sample size used in our descriptive analysis to evaluate our hypotheses averaged 108, due to pairwise deletion on missing responses. An assessment of the survey responses does not reveal any systematic skipping of questions by respondents. We

did not detect response bias. The school size of respondents indicates a normal distribution.

Qualitative Data

We used a qualitative assessment of graduate students who participated in new-student MPA orientation programs at the University of North Texas to collect information about student perceptions of the orientation programs. We interviewed 36 graduate students in their final semester of the program. Interview topics included student experiences in the MPA orientation and student understanding of program expectations. We also inquired how student interviewees viewed the orientation program as a helpful mechanism for socializing them into the overall graduate program.

Narrative inquiry provides a foundation for understanding how knowledge is shared through stories, how stories explain concepts, and the nature in which these stories are socially constructed and institutionalized (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014). For example, student perceptions of participation in orientation programs would be difficult to capture in a structured online survey of MPA/MPP programs. Furthermore, the communicative exchange between MPA students and researchers created a connectedness between academics and practice and established an environment for mutual learning (Ospina & Dodge, 2005). Students served as our source of firsthand knowledge relative to their participation in a graduate-level new-student orientation program.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 compares demographic variables between responding schools with orientation and without orientation programs. MPA and MPP programs without orientation programs were likely to be smaller graduate programs. Moreover, schools without orientation programs tended to have a lower percentage of graduate programs with more than 151 students, and a higher percentage of online course offerings.

TABLE 2.**Descriptive Statistics for Characteristics and Tenets of Orientation Programs, Schools With Orientation Programs***

Survey question	N	Mean	SD**	Min	Max
The orientation program provides new students with a student handbook detailing information necessary to navigate MPA/MPP, or similar program, departmental policies, procedures and degree requirements.	106	4.415	0.9245	1	5
The orientation program provides a presentation by the department chair or program coordinator that reinforces program mission, student expectations and resources available to students.	104	4.663	0.7183	1	5
The orientation program facilitates student performance expectations.	104	4.307	0.7642	1	5
The orientation program provides resources for expected academic skills (for example, tips for effective writing).	103	3.971	1.07	1	5
The orientation program provide resources or tips for success in the overall program.	104	4.375	0.778	1	5
The orientation program communicates the mission of the MPA/MPP, or similar, to incoming students.	104	4.509	0.775	1	5
The orientation program communicates the MPA/MPP, or similar, competency based learning outcomes and expectations for student performance (based on 2009 NASPAA accreditation requirements).	102	3.764	1.153	1	5
Students of the graduate program have the opportunity to access the program website for additional resources for the content covered in the orientation.	103	4.446	0.977	1	5
The orientation program provides presentations by faculty for introductions and their teaching interests.	102	4.078	1.131	1	5
The orientation program provides opportunities for alumni to share experiences.	102	3.313	1.428	1	5
The orientation program provides opportunities for student organizations to provide insights on the program.	100	4.091	1.278	1	5
The orientation program provides opportunities to facilitate a team building exercise or ice breaking activities to engage students and familiarize them with each other and the faculty.	101	3.514	1.514	1	5
A faculty member is assigned to each student to serve as an advisor.	102	4.019	1.319	1	5
The faculty advising opportunity or experience lends itself to a mentorship experience.	102	3.752	1.082	1	5

Notes. *N= 108; **SD= standard deviation.

TABLE 3.
Frequencies for Orientation Outcomes, Schools With Orientation Programs*

Survey questions	Frequencies
For students that matriculated in the first semester of their program, generally how many dropped out after the first semester?	
Less than 5%	75%
Otherwise	25%
For students that matriculated in the first semester of their program, what is the percentage of students that received a lower grade than core/program expectations?	
Less than 5%	92%
Otherwise	8%
Please indicate whether students are notified after the first semester if their performance is below core/program performance standards.	
Yes	95%
No	5%
Please indicate the total number of students that achieved program expectations based on your program's adopted student learning outcomes (upon completion of the program)?	
60% or higher	86%
Otherwise	14%
Generally, do you feel the students have been socialized into your graduate program?	
Agree	45%
Otherwise	55%
Please indicate the percentage of the students that participated in the orientation program relative to the incoming class size.	
Less than 10%	5%
10% to 40%	6%
40 to 60%	8%
60% and above	81%
Have you ever received feedback on how the orientation could be improved?	
Yes	77%
No	23%

Notes. *N= 108.

Based on our interest in orientation programs, the following analysis includes only those MPA/MPP programs with orientation programs ($N=108$). Table 2 includes the mean, standard deviation, and range for the main variables that represent characteristics and tenets of orientation programs included in the analysis. MPA/MPP programs were more likely to offer orientation programs than not to offer orientation programs to new students in their graduate programs. As illustrated in Table 2, MPA/MPP programs were more likely to include than not include important orientation resource elements such as a program handbook ($M=4.145$), a presentation by the department chair ($M=4.663$), information on student performance expectations ($M=4.307$), and tips for academic success and overall success in the program ($M=3.971$ and $M=4.37$, respectively). Overall, based on the frequencies of our outcome variables in Table 3, more programs reported that less than 5% of students drop out of their programs after their first semester. (In other words, 95% of students are retained.)

Programs were more likely to communicate their mission ($M=4.509$) and to provide additional resources on their website ($M=4.446$) than to communicate competency-based learning outcomes ($M=3.764$) (see Table 2). On average, the MPA/MPP programs were more likely to report that a higher percentage of students received grades higher than expected (see Table 3). Additionally, the programs reported higher use of faculty presentations ($M=4.078$), presentations by student organizations ($M=4.091$), and faculty assignments as student advisors ($M=4.019$) than use of presentation by alumni ($M=3.313$), team-building experiences ($M=3.514$), and mentorship ($M=3.752$) (see Table 2). Respondents were also more likely to report that students were socialized in the overall program, and more likely to report that more than 60% of their students achieved academic expectations for student learning outcomes (see Table 3). Program size among respondents was likely to be smaller than 120 students, and faculty size was likely to be in the range of 6 to 12 members (see Table 3).

Our logic model identifies three orientation outputs—student participation in the orientation, the percentage of students retained after the first semester, and the percentage of students that achieved grade expectations during the semester—and one outcome: students socialized and employed. Generally, all schools indicated high percentages of students participating in the orientation program. Additionally, responses indicate high percentages of students retained after the first semester, and high percentages of students achieving grade expectations. As shown in Table 3, the survey findings indicate that 75% of programs had less than 5% of students drop out after the first semester; that 92 % of programs had less than 5% of students achieving grades lower than expectations; and that over 81% of programs had 60% or more of their students participating in orientation programs.

Quantitative Analysis

Our first hypothesis was that use of resources for academic success during the MPA/MPP program orientation would be related to higher levels of student retention. The analysis uses a cross-tabulation. As illustrated in Table 4, a presentation by the department chair was the only factor with a statistically significant relationship with student retention. In other words, our results suggest that when the department chair takes time to participate in the orientation program, students are less likely to drop out ($\chi^2=11.960$, $p=.008$). Overall, our results provide limited support for the literature that suggests a relationship between integrating students into academic life and student retention (Fidler, 1991; Williford et al., 2001). A cross-tabulation analysis that included both faculty size and program size did not indicate any significant relationship with the variable for retention.

The second hypothesis predicted that orientation programs that communicated tenets such as the program mission and student learning expectations and provided website access to additional information would be related to a smaller percentage of students receiving grades lower than core expectations. The cross-tabulation analysis, depicted in Table 4, shows a

TABLE 4.
Cross-Tabulation of Characteristics and Tenets of Orientation Programs by Student Dropout Rate, Students with Grades Lower Than Expectations, and Perceptions of Overall Student Socialization*

	Outcomes of orientation		
	Student dropout rate less than 5%	Students with grades lower than expectations less than 5%	Perceptions of overall student socialization
Characteristics and tenets of orientation programs	χ^2	χ^2	χ^2
Provide student handbook	6.253	2.926	15.705**
Presentation by chair	11.960****	17.965****	11.803**
Student performance expectations	1.471	2.426	22.193****
Resources for academic success	1.471	16.020***	9.925**
Resources for skills (e.g., effective writing)	1.79	4.271	11.901**
Communicates program mission	8.444***	16.831***	19.326****
Communicates student learning outcomes	0.991	0.555	18.303****
Access to additional information on the program website	1.131	1.391	7.031
Size of faculty	4.477	10.820**	1.273
Faculty presentation	9.002	2.513	10.869**
Presentation of alumni experiences	4.038	2.013	15.268****
Presentation by student organization	7.349	6.524	20.966****
Team building exercises	13.743**	5.534	31.961****
Faculty as an advisor	3.147	4.799	9.206
Mentorship experience	4.369	8.279	17.415***

Notes. *N= 101. **p ≤ .05, ***p ≤ .01, ****p ≤ .001 (two-tailed tests). Raw data available from authors upon request.

statistically significant relationship between the distribution of the orientation programs that communicate the mission and fewer students achieving grade expectations ($\chi^2 = 16.831$, $p = .008$). Table 4 indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the size of the program's faculty and the distribution of responding programs that indicated less than 5% of students received grades lower than expectations ($\chi^2 = 10.820$, $p = .05$). To clarify, our findings suggest that the size of the program's faculty may contribute to students' long-term success in the graduate program.

Our final hypothesis suggests that socialization opportunities in new-student orientation program are related to the program directors' perception that students are socialized into their MPA/MPP graduate program overall. As illustrated in Table 4, a cross-tabulation chi-square test was conducted to compare overall student socialization in MPA programs with orientation programs that provided a faculty presentation, an alumni experience presentation, a presentation by the student organization, team-building exercises, experience with a faculty advisor, and opportunities for mentorship. The analysis in Table 4 also illustrates statistically significant relationships between the distribution of five elements—presentations from faculty ($\chi^2 = 10.869$, $p = .029$), alumni ($\chi^2 = 15.268$, $p = .004$), and the student organization ($\chi^2 = 20.966$, $p = .000$); team-building exercises ($\chi^2 = 31.961$, $p = .000$); and faculty mentorship ($\chi^2 = 17.415$, $p = .002$)—and the distribution of respondents, indicating that students are well socialized in the program overall. The findings suggest that overall, new-student orientation programs that utilize a range of socialization techniques are more likely to shape students' attitudes toward a familiarity with the culture of the profession (Lynn, 1996).

In keeping with the logic of our model (Figure 1), as Table 4 further indicates, seven other variables depicting orientation resources and program tenets have statistically significant relationships with program directors' perceptions of student socialization into the program. First, with regards to orientation resources, findings

suggest that respondents' perceptions of overall student socialization are related to use of a student handbook ($\chi^2 = 15.705$, $p = .05$), a presentation by the department chair ($\chi^2 = 11.803$, $p = .05$), and information regarding student performance expectations ($\chi^2 = 22.193$, $p = .000$), resources for academic success ($\chi^2 = 9.925$, $p = .042$), and resources for extra skills (effective writing; $\chi^2 = 11.901$, $p = .019$).

Second, with regards to program tenets, findings suggest that communication of the mission ($\chi^2 = 19.326$, $p = .000$) and student learning outcomes ($\chi^2 = 18.303$, $p = .001$) are also related to the distribution of respondents that perceive students to be socialized in the program. These findings support the logic model interpretation that comprehensive orientation programs are more likely to support the overall social integration of students into their programs.

Qualitative Analysis

The MPA student interviewees viewed their orientation program as a helpful mechanism for socializing them into the overall graduate program. In terms of making connections, students indicated that the faculty shared their teaching interests and that all faculty seemed accessible to students both during the orientation and throughout the following term. A few student interviewees expressed a sense of intimidation in the orientation program due to a range of age differences among peers and a sense of knowing that their class was composed of top-performing students. In terms of learning from others, however, some students expressed appreciation for the insight provided by visiting alumni and members of the graduate student organization. Furthermore, there was consensus that the program should provide additional time for discussions on the tips and tricks to academic success, such as effective writing skills. The qualitative data is included in the discussion and conclusions section below.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research examined the relationships between certain types of orientation program and orientation program content on student retention, student learning, and student socialization

in MPA/MPP or similar programs. This paper advances the field's understanding of new-student orientation programs. MPA/MPP Programs that offer new-student orientations should note that there appears to be a relationship between educating students on the program tenets and the students becoming employable and socialized into the profession. Our findings illustrate that MPA/MPP orientation programs have the capacity to support MPA/MPP students' academic success as well as to socialize them into the broader profession of public administration. Our findings indicate that the quality of the content delivered during orientation is more important than the type (full-day, half-day, one-hour, online) of orientation program.

The findings from this research are important for several reasons. First, orientation programs provide an opportunity to expose students to academic and social lessons that may contribute to their success in the program (Mayhew et al., 2010). The results of our study show that the greater the extent that the orientation program communicated the mission of the program and the higher the rates of student participation, the more likely the responding program was to indicate a low percentage of student loss after the first semester. The outcomes were similar when orientation program content included socialization elements: the greater the socialization elements, the lower the loss to dropout. For instance, we found that the use of team building exercises play an important role in student retention (Table 4). Additionally, the findings suggest that communicating the graduate school's mission and student learning expectations matters to students attaining grade expectations. Our research shows that the greater the extent that the orientation program communicated the mission, as reported by respondents, the fewer students were reported to be receiving grades lower than expectations. Moreover, as shown in Table 4, we found similar outcomes when orientation programs reported using resources for academic success and presentations by the program chair. In other words, a comprehensive approach to orientation programs are important to overall student success.

Consistent with previous literature (Weidman et al., 2001), elements of an orientation program that focus on the peer climate are important to student socialization. Our logic model suggests an association between orientation program inputs and the outcome of student socialization into the overall graduate program. Additionally, we found a connection between respondents' perceptions of programmatic expectations of student learning achievement and socialization outcomes. One important component of this research is the extent to which orientation programs help to effectively achieve NASPAA Standard 7. The MPA student interviewees confirmed that the introduction of the required degree plan in their orientation program relieved early feelings of anxiety. The interviewees also indicated that their orientation experience made it clear they were expected to select a career track. Students expressed consensus that their orientation program provided guidance on the necessary classes to take per the student's area of focus.

As mentioned previously, the participation of the department chair in the orientation was significant to the success of the orientation program in terms of student retention. Nevertheless, there are other training techniques and activities that should be considered to facilitate student retention. For instance, programs that provided an MPA handbook were more likely to have a high percentage of students retained in their programs. Student handbooks provide students with the opportunity to learn general information, degree requirements, degree exit requirements, MPA program policies, and other information essential for student success in the graduate program.

Additionally, providing resources for academic success may facilitate student retention. Our study showed that the more resources provided for academic success, the more frequently the respondents indicated that over 95% of students were retained at the end of the semester. In other words, when orientation programs provide additional resources such as tips for success in graduate programs, individual meetings with academic advisors, and refresher courses such as a writing lab during the summer prior to en-

rollment, MPA/MPP programs may experience higher rates of retention.

These results suggest that new-student orientation into a graduate program has broad implications for the socialization of students into the profession and field in general. Lynn (1996) argues that the profession must prepare students for the field of public administration. He suggests that there is a responsibility among professionals to recognize that career and entry-level employees benefit from the insider wisdom of the community. Further, he argues that proper socialization in the field builds trust and cooperation among members. The profession benefits from student socialization because knowledge and theory are continually codified into the practice. Furthermore, student socialization to the overall field allows for the passing of informal rules within the craft (Goodsell, 1992). Professionals in the field possess valuable insights on values, regulations, administrative procedures, and other behavioral aspects relevant to the field, which are passed on through their interactions with students (Lynn, 1996).

The extent to which socialization techniques are used is essential. Faculty, alumni, and current students' interactions with incoming students and opportunities for mentoring tend to be highly important. Individuals who participate in positive mentoring experiences tend to demonstrate positive attitudes about their role and indicate higher commitment to the organization (Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragins, 2010). These experiences are likely to be pronounced when there is strong organizational support for mentorship (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2006).

Our survey asked participants to provide input on steps they have taken to improve the orientation experience based on student feedback. Some open-ended survey responses referenced the need for more general icebreaker sessions. Additional elements noted as important included changing orientation times, more presentations by faculty, adding statistics or math refresher courses, and refining sessions to better meet student needs. Consistent with past research, the integration of core competencies

into the context of the graduate program mission has an impact on student outcomes (Rivenbark & Jacobson, 2014).

The exploratory nature of this descriptive analysis limits generalization or inference to a broader population. However, this study provides opportunities for further causal analysis of orientation program characteristics. Future research should investigate the drivers of orientation programs and their effect on retention, student learning, and socialization. Lessons learned through interviews and open-ended responses from our survey suggest that more may be done to transfer more knowledge on course offerings and student opportunities. Another step may be to explore a combination of more objective data on graduate school programs and their respective new-student orientation program types. Student evaluations of different orientation program types may offer additional insight for comparison and to determine if orientation program type really matters. Different graduate school programs vary in how much time and financial resources they commit to new-student orientation programs. Our findings suggest that orientation program organizers may achieve greater benefits with attention toward components that encourage socialization and networking opportunities.

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APPENDIX A.

Survey Questions and Response Options

Survey question	Response options
Please indicate the type of graduate program at your university.	Master of Public Administration (MPA), Master of Public Policy (MPP), Both MPA and MPP, Other (Please explain)
Please indicate the size of this graduate program.	20–75, 76–120, 121–150, 151 and above
Please indicate the size of your faculty.	At least 5, 6–12, 13–20, Over 21
Please indicate the types of classes offered in your program.	Face-to-face only, Online only, Combination of online and face-to-face, Other (Please explain)
Do you conduct an orientation for new incoming MPA/MPP, or similar, graduate students prior to the start of any semester?	Yes, No
Please indicate if any of the following accurately describes the type of orientation program at your school.	Online student self-directed webinar, 1– to 2-hour course prior to fall or spring semester courses, Half-day program including evening networking, Weeklong event including lectures, teambuilding, and social networking, Other (Please explain)
The orientation program provides new students with a student handbook detailing information necessary to navigate the MPA/MPP or similar program, departmental policies, procedures, and degree requirements.	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
The orientation program provides a presentation by the department chair or program coordinator that reinforces program mission, student expectations, and resources available to students.	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
The orientation program facilitates student performance expectations.	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
The orientation program provides resources for expected academic skills (for example, tips for effective writing).	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
The orientation program provide resources or tips for success in the overall program.	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree
For students that matriculated in the first semester of their program, generally how many dropped out after the first semester?	Less than 5%, 6% to 10%, 11% to 15%, 16% and above (Recoded as “Less than 5%” = 1, Otherwise = 0)
The orientation program communicates the mission of the MPA/MPP, or similar program, to incoming students.	Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree