



CUPSO Conference in Delaware

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Last week I attended the CUPSO (Conference of University Public Service Organizations) at the University of Delaware in Newark. Jeff Hughes attended to make a presentation and John Stephens did a poster session—Janet Holston also was there to learn about the work of colleagues at other universities. The conference was hosted by the Institute for Public Administration, a part of the School of Public Policy & Administration. They did a wonderful job.

It was fascinating to learn about Delaware and the politics in a state with three counties, and that is only 92 miles from one end to the other. They talk proudly about the “Delaware way,” which is the idea that they can get all of the right people in one room and get things done because the state is so small. They also have a “bury-the-hatchet” ceremony after each statewide election in which the winning and losing candidates ride together around a town square and then the party chairmen grab a hatchet together and together plunge it into a box of sand. It would be nice to think that folks in Delaware have cracked the code on political civility, but my guess is that the reality is more complicated.

I enjoy attending CUPSO to learn about the programs and activities at the different public service centers and institutes. For most of its history CUPSO was centered in the South, but in recent years it has developed a national membership (thanks largely to the leadership of our own Brian



Dabson). A sign of how much things have changed is that the new officers are from Portland State University and Wichita State University. This year there were interesting sessions on training and certificate programs, data visualization, public engagement, and internship programs (including legislative and judicial).



Every year I hear something that makes me think harder or in a different way about what we do or how we do it. This year was no exception. I was listening to a session on training by [Stacy Jones, who leads the Governmental Training, Education and Development Division at the University of Georgia's Vinson Institute of Government](#). They have a number of professional staff members who provide training, and they contract with other professionals to provide other instruction as needed. Stacy mentioned that the Vinson Institute is providing online training for Georgia public officials. She is responsible for identifying training needs and then developing programs to address them—and she determined that Georgia officials wanted online training and she made it happen.

The existence of a training division with a training director means that there is someone responsible for taking a comprehensive view of training—what is needed and how it is delivered. It made me think about how we would approach whether to offer online training for North Carolina officials. It is not any one person's responsibility, and our completely decentralized model makes it difficult for an individual faculty member—or even a group of faculty members—to move in that direction. I left CUPSO thinking that our overall training program could benefit from a similar structure and leadership.



Stacy Jones

The School's training portfolio is the sum of individual faculty decisions in different fields, and that has served us well. At the same time, however, it might be possible to close gaps in training and add needed instruction if we created a training division like Georgia's to complement the work of faculty members. The existence of Stacy's position gives the Vinson Institute the ability to be more flexible and responsive when there is a need for training in a new area. What if public officials have a need for training or information in a particular area, such as the nature of the opioid problem in rural communities? Or local public information officers ask us to develop a training program for them, which happened in the past. If we don't have a faculty member in a particular field, it is much harder for us to create customized courses to the same extent as the Vinson Institute. Stacy can pull together a team of experts in the field, develop a course, and offer it quickly for Georgia officials.

The Vinson Institute has a reputation in Georgia and nationally for providing excellent training. They do great work and have [a wonderful Director, Laura Meadows](#), who has continued to advance their long and proud history during her tenure. I can imagine that a training division at the School under the right leadership could provide instructional support for faculty and offer first-rate training that is needed and currently unavailable. There are many questions and issues to consider, including questions about quality control, but none of them make me think it would be a mistake to explore our options in this area. In fact, I think it would be a mistake not to consider whether and how a centralized training function might advance the School's mission.

Coincidentally, next year's CUPSO conference will be hosted by the Vinson Institute in Athens, Georgia on April 11-13. I hope a number of folks will decide to attend.