



## School of Government Update: Faculty Fields of Work

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Uncategorized](#)

Date : April 24, 2016



Last week I gave an update about the School of Government to the Municipal and County Administration Alumni Conference. Before talking about some of our current programs and activities, I offered the group a broader context by describing a major trend that has occurred over many years. This post elaborates on my brief comments to the Alumni Conference.

**Faculty Fields of Work.** There were 32 faculty members when I joined the Institute of Government in 1978, and 26 of them were lawyers—**81%**. Albert Coates was the quintessential lawyer and he had believed that law should be the Institute's primary focus. Keep in mind that as a law professor he originally wanted the Institute to be created as a part of the Law School. When I arrived in 1978, faculty members routinely referred to one another as lawyers and non-lawyers. Most of us didn't think much about it until we added more folks in other disciplines, who suggested that the "non-lawyer" description was not helpful and potentially divisive. My recollection is that it came to a head for me when Peg Carlson suggested in a faculty meeting that folks could refer to her as a "non-astronaut" if they wished to identify her as something other than a lawyer. It was

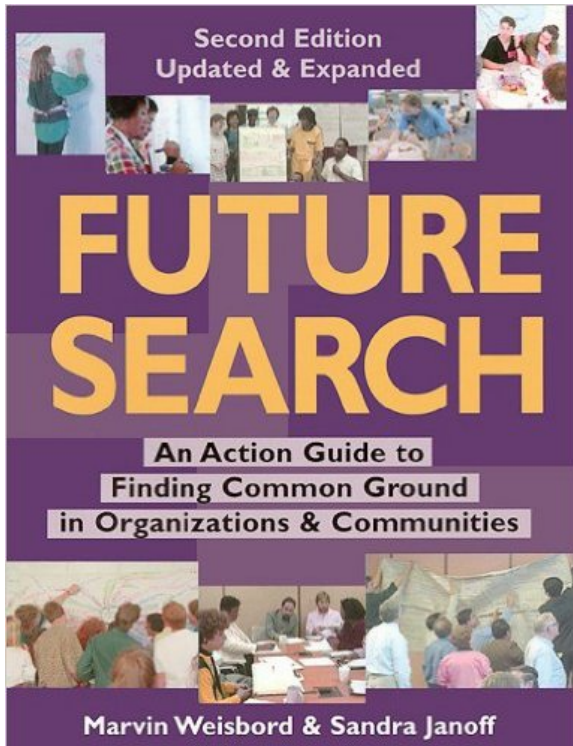


just as accurate, and being a non-astronaut also sounded a lot cooler.



The other fields represented in 1978 included budgeting (Jack Vogt), public personnel (Don Hayman), local government management, broadly defined (Jake Wicker), economics (Don Liner), and public leadership (Ron Lynch—who also was a lawyer but didn't work in a legal field—and Dick McMahon). I believe that all faculty members were in tenure-track positions, except for two who were lecturers. Of the 32 faculty members in 1978, 26 were men and six were women.

How do things look in 2016? There are 48 filled faculty positions at the moment, and 29 are lawyers—**60%**. This shift did not happen by accident. I remember talking about the need to diversify our fields of work, especially public leadership, in 1992 as a candidate during the selection process for Director of the Institute. We conducted a Future Search strategic planning process in 1995 with a carefully selected group of our public-official clients. There was a strong consensus that we needed to diversify our capacity to help public officials in areas other than law—and between 1995 and 1999 we hired eight new faculty members in fields other than law. Nine of today's 48 faculty members are in fixed-term rather than tenure-track positions. Of the current faculty, 24 are women and 24 are men.



The expansion into fields other than law has been even greater if you include EPA professionals who are doing faculty-like work—a category that did not exist in 1978. In 2016 there are 15 EPA professionals who are doing important work for the School. Only three of the 15 are lawyers—**20%**.

Finally, if you combine faculty members and EPA professionals who currently are doing faculty-like work with public officials, today there are 63 people and 32 are lawyers—**51%**.



What does this mean? For me it means that law continues to be the foundation for all of our work, just as it is the foundation for government. It informs and complements everything we do. At the same time, however, it also means that we have become a multi-disciplinary faculty that is better positioned to help public officials address a much wider range of challenges and opportunities facing North Carolina. Our mission has not changed. It is to improve the lives of North Carolinians by working to improve their government through engaged scholarship. How we carry out that mission has evolved over time and I am sure that it will continue to change.

It may be helpful to note that the decision to expand our fields of faculty work happened long before there was any thought about assuming responsibility for the MPA Program in 1997. The shift was happening slowly before I became Director of the Institute in 1992, and I worked to accelerate it based on feedback from the Future Search process. Our strong commitment before 1997 to become a more multi-disciplinary faculty for public officials made it easier to decide that the MPA Program was a good fit for the Institute of Government. Core MPA faculty members would help advance that goal because they were expected to do substantial work with public officials. It is unclear if we would have taken on any academic degree program if it had not aligned with our already-determined strategic direction. The fact that the MPA Program is a professional degree program focused on preparing students for practice also figured heavily in our decision to do it. It was a good decision for many reasons.



The addition of people in positions other than tenure-track faculty appointments also represents an intentional response to the expressed needs of public officials. Those officials value and rely on the engaged research and writing produced by our faculty, which is an incredibly important part of our work. At the same time, however, the demand for direct services related to that research—especially in certain areas—has caused us to hire faculty and EPA professionals who may do more teaching and advising and less research and writing. Both kinds of faculty positions are incredibly important to the work of the School.

Finally, we have made remarkable progress over the years in hiring women into faculty and other professional positions. We have not done nearly as well with under-represented minorities. I had worked at the Institute for 14 years when I became Director in 1992, and I had never had a minority faculty colleague. It was not for lack of trying, or for lack of making offers to minority candidates. We have hired minority colleagues over the years and for a host of reasons we have not been able to retain all of them. Hiring and retaining a more diverse faculty and staff continues to be a priority for the School. Special thanks to Maura Murphy for getting me the data I needed for this post.

