

## SCUPSO Annual Meeting (II)

**Author :** Mike Smith

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There were a number of interesting sessions at today's SCUPSO meeting. I enjoy these meetings because hearing about the work of other public service units is an opportunity to reflect on our own work. We have a much higher percentage of state funding than most of our SCUPSO colleagues, which provides significantly greater budget stability for us—especially when you factor in the traditional reliability of local government membership dues. I come away from these meetings feeling incredibly fortunate. Many of these folks have had to scramble to survive, and that has been true long before the current recession. One consequence is that they always are exploring different program opportunities—they have to be creative and entrepreneurial. SCUPSO is an excellent place to learn about experiments in the laboratory of public service—it is a chance to learn from them and to share our own innovations (I talked this afternoon about our work with blogs, Twitter, and Facebook).

The first session was a series of presentations titled "Re-Thinking Your Mission." David Valentine (The Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri) talked about the mission shift for their Institute for Public Policy, which is a public service unit within the School. The original plan was that it would be fully funded by the university and wouldn't rely at all on grants and contracts. That was before the recession. 95% of its operating budget now comes from grants and contracts, and that funding model is its future. The original plan also assumed that the Institute would rely on doctoral fellows who would respond to legislative requests for help on policy issues. Instead, the new legislative leadership (Republicans became a majority after 50 years in the minority) felt like they already had the answers and did not want any help from the university on public policy issues. The Institute as a result shifted its focus from policy development to policy implementation—it relies on professionals with masters-level training to help public officials implement and evaluate policy changes. There are many cautionary tales embedded in this story, but one is the challenge of doing public policy work. I believe we bring some natural advantages to policy work, but I'm glad that our strategic planning implementation committee is taking a careful



approach in designing our work with policymakers.

Another presenter on the panel was Jeff Michael, a friend who is the Director of the Urban Institute at UNC-Charlotte. Their mission is focused on the greater Charlotte region and they have been thinking about how to communicate with and deliver information to their stakeholders. The Institute worked with a grant from the Knight Foundation to help newspapers in their region learn about pressing issues facing their communities, but one of the challenges was the media's declining interest in covering government and their work on those issues. The Urban Institute has decided to take a more journalistic approach and they are re-designing their website to function somewhat like a newspaper. They hope to use their website to tell stories about policy issues, and they will be relying on faculty members and others to develop the content. One question they are wrestling with is how much commentary to include about issues, which may present political challenges for them even though it would be consistent with a traditional journalistic approach. Jeff plans to go live with their new website this summer. He readily concedes that this is an experiment that may not work, but I think it is an interesting and worthwhile approach. It is consistent with our mission as educators to try and keep people informed about the pressing issues facing North Carolina. I look forward to following the Urban Institute's website when it is unveiled. Jeff and his colleagues do great work and I'm sure that all of us will learn from their new venture.





Jeff Michael, UNC-Charlotte



David Valentine, University of Missouri