

TO: MPA 505 Students

September 30th 2009

FR: Donald J. Calista

RE: Opening Letter

We begin our MPA 505 adventure by recognizing that both internal and external challenges are dramatically affecting managers, workers and organizations, though fundamentals remain in place across all sectors. In particular, the impact of globalization and performance measurement, in a context of shrinking budgets, has made life especially “interesting” for the public sector—which Chinese consider to be a curse. While these changing conditions have produced some uneasiness, we do enjoy much overall stability.

As old timers to the electronic medium, no introductory comments are needed. You could probably teach me a thing or two. I am always learning new stuff, especially about the advances in the mechanics of online education. I hope the same is true for all of you. We are working on improving the software adopted by the college.

Maybe I should add that in its present form the 505 course is a relatively new offering. A couple of years ago—and somewhat madly—I volunteered—even welcomed—the task of integrating two former two fourteen week courses by organizing them as one eight week online course. (Writing this sentence caused me as much perspiration then as it may be causing people in reading it now.) Earlier observers and evaluators found that the content satisfies the pre-existing on-campus learning objectives, while not making the workload unmanageable. They also indicated that the prepared course Notes to be enjoyable and informative. Naturally, I am looking forward toward continued reciprocity on everyone’s part as well.

The course begins on October 26th and ends on December 18th 2009. Relax. Although we will be covering online course material in eight weeks normally completed in fourteen weeks, we are not rushing. During the first week we are principally going to get comfortable with one another and to learn about the structure of the course. There is even a topic in the Forum for anyone to raise questions regarding any course matter—so everyone can begin on an even keel. It is called: “What’s Happening?” We use this topic to make any point or to ask any question—and, we *avoid* using e-mail *or* messages—to ensure the integrity of online learning. Similarly, “What’s Happening?” also acts as a *substitute* for e-mail and messages in order to support the transparency of web-mediation. Think blogs.

This early getting acquainted experience is an integral part of the course, as it will also include spending some time communicating to make sure that we

are all familiar with the various expected outcomes. Like other online courses, this one benefits tremendously from interactions with one another in pursuing, digesting, and appraising the material.

It is very important that the first week provide us with the appropriate orientation to working intensively online. (Another way of putting it, students often let me know they are getting their money's worth out of my online courses!) Most of all, we need to accustom ourselves to the prominence of our mutual discussions as the centerpiece of the course. While there are customary weekly course notes for each session—in addition to reading materials—our focal point is the Forum. It is the instrument by which we engage one another fully and openly in regular in weekly exchanges.

A few days before October 26th rolls around—on October 23rd—not before, you can access the course from the account that has been set up for you. Instructions on accessing the course appear on the i-learn website. As you enter the course for the first time, you will find the Syllabus which shows the weekly readings and assignments. Each week, please refer to the Syllabus and prepare as directed. It serves as a Course Compass that indicate how we navigate our ship; it is a guide for weekly directions on completing the journey satisfactorily, and hopefully, pleurably.

As I've already said, during the first week we gain a conceptual and procedural glimpse into the course and complete any necessary clarification by raising questions regarding any matter. We also do our initial assignment. The Opening Notes and the first set of Notes for Week I will be released on October 23rd. They are found by clicking Lessons on the home page sidebar. Course Notes are released each week in the Lessons. Course Notes appear in the week prior to their consideration; so the notes for the second week will appear on Thursday at 5PM of the first week, and likewise thereafter. The course Notes complement the reading assignments. Please read the course assignments *before* proceeding to the course Notes, as the most economical way to prepare for each week's Forum.

During each weekly session you will find questions in the Forum related to the subject matter for which everyone will be posting responses—in a timely fashion—a discussion group-type conversational topics. Weekly Forum questions—and related matters—are located on the home page Forum sidebar and they also show up on Thursdays at 5PM for the following week's postings. A much fuller explanation of these matters will be found in the Syllabus and Opening Notes.

When you sign on to the course, the first thing you will be asked to do is to provide a personal profile, as "About Me and You," in Week I's Forum. Your profile should include: a work or home phone number; where you live (village, city, state and/or country); something about your current and previous

education/work experiences, and whatever else you want to share with the rest of us—short of what you might confess on *American Idol* or *YouTube*. This “Who Are We?” can be found in the Forum for Week I.

About the weekly Forum questions, you will notice they are organized by the eight weeks of the course. Like the weekly Notes in the Lessons, these questions are released on prior Thursdays at 5PM. They are central to what we do, as the centerpiece of our interactions. You will also observe in the weekly Forum topic called “What’s Happening?” It is the vehicle to present any point, to make information known, and to ask questions. It functions as an alternative to using e-mails or messages in order to let everyone know what’s going on. Please *resist* any temptation to use e-mail or messages, as we are all here to contribute and help one another by employing the electronic public space—which is the heart and soul of web-mediated courses. Hold any questions or comments for “What’s Happening?” when the course officially opens. People can e-mail classmates.

If people want to look at the underlying rationale for the perspectives adopted for this e-learning course, they may review a recent article I wrote: “The Transformational Nature of Web-Based Mediation: Constructing a Research Agenda for In-Service Public Administration Students,” *Public Performance & Management Review*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Dec 2006. Vol. 30, Iss. 2;p. 245ff.

If enrollment in the course warrants it, we will create sections, labeled by color-coded groups. They will be organized alphabetically. As needed, people will learn whether groups have been formed automatically, as they will see pre-assigned group’s color when they click on to both the Lessons and the Forum, which happens when they first sign on—and for every week thereafter. Each group will be color-coded. No student will have access to another group. People will use their own Forums. These color-coded groups will also conduct their own regular Chats, as necessary. If life-long friendships have been broken by the group approach, it is always a good idea to make new connections. The groups exist as mutual aid societies. In the language of this course, we operate as a continuous learning organization. Whether groups are in place will be announced when the course opens.

Here are the reading materials for the course:

- (1) H. G. Rainey, *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations* (Jossey-Bass, 2003, 3d ed.) # 0-7879-6561-8. [Unfortunately, a new edition is scheduled for November 2009, but the third edition can be referenced in other courses.]

- (2) S. W. Hays, R.C. Kearney and J.D. Cogburn, *Human Resource Management*. (Longman, 2008, 5th ed.) # 10-0-13--603769-0.
- (3) J. M. Shafritz, and, A.C. Hyde *Classics of Public Administration* (Wadsworth, 2009, 6th ed.) # 10: 0495189561. (May have been purchased for MPA 500, as 5th edition, however. Will *not* copy added articles in keeping with copyright rules.)
- (4) Selected articles, as noted in the Syllabus, from *Public Administration Review*, and other journals—can be downloaded from on-line library.).
- (5) Read a good daily newspaper; it can be done cost-free on the web.

Arrangements have made with the Marist College Bookstore to purchase these materials. You may telephone the Bookstore at 845-575-3620 or contact the Bookstore online at: marist@bkstore.com. To do the latter, you will need to provide your credit card number and expiration date; your phone number in case any difficulties arise; and the name and number of this course, but not the color of your eyes.

P.S. Some of the course focuses on the newly created multiple-agency, the Department of Homeland Security. As way to acquire currency and authenticity, people may want to get a taste of what we will be doing, so take a look at an article in the *NY Times*, “Homeland Security Would Share Duties for Disaster Response Under Proposal,” February 24, 2006, by Eric Lipton. Ask yourself: what is like to be manager and a worker in that type of situation? The article is available for free from the Marist Online Library, or, for a small fee directly from the *NY Times* website.