

# Teaching Collaborative Governance Online: Aligning Collaborative Instruction with Online Learning Platforms

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on the value of aligning course content and delivery in online instruction. It expands our conceptualization of online learning platforms and multiple instructional roles in the context of teaching collaborative governance. The School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Arizona has developed a Collaborative Governance Program for graduate and professional students to learn how to work together more effectively across institutional, geographic, economic, and social boundaries in different policy domains. In this article, we present the two basic pedagogical building blocks that support the program's online instruction—collaborative capacity and collaborative learning—and describe how the program is integrating multiple online learning platforms with multiple instructional roles. We conclude by discussing how to generalize from these experiences and how the program is working to evaluate the effectiveness of these instructional approaches.

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## **KEYWORDS**

Collaborative governance, online learning, collaborative learning, learning platforms, instructional roles

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For the past three years, at the University of Arizona's School of Government and Public Policy, we have been teaching courses on collaborative governance that provide a concentration for graduate students earning their Master of Public Administration (MPA) and, with additional coursework, a Graduate Certificate in Collaborative Governance. This is a unique program, not only because of the subject area, but because it is taught through a combination of two to three online courses and an intensive skills-based training course. (See [www.collaborativegovernance.arizona.edu](http://www.collaborativegovernance.arizona.edu).)

In this article, we describe this program and its efforts to teach collaborative governance online, which necessitated a significant shift and expansion of both instructional roles and the understanding of learning platforms. What is striking is just how well suited online platforms can be to learning about collaborative governance through putting into practice the program's underlying pedagogy of collaborative capacity and collaborative learning.

Online learning can be difficult for many students and can result in suboptimal outcomes

## BOX 1.

### Components of the SGPP Collaborative Governance Program

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#### Teaching and Training

- The Collaborative Governance concentration is offered for MPA students and other professional schools on campus.
- The Graduate Certificate in Collaborative Governance provides online instruction and workshop training for students and professionals on and off campus and at a distance.
- Interactive seminars and workshops designed for specific audiences are also available to extend the capacity of those in the public and nonprofit sectors to work in complex networked settings, manage conflicts, and collaborate effectively.

#### Projects and Service

- SGPP faculty work on a variety of service projects to facilitate collaborative governance. These efforts can include situation assessments; process or system design; evaluation, convening, and facilitation; and mediation services.

#### Research

- SGPP and other University of Arizona faculty study collaborative governance and conduct research on how collaboration works, how public-private partnerships and public service networks function, and how to improve collaborative governance systems through design and evaluation, among other research themes. This ongoing scholarship contributes to the quality of collaborative governance instruction as well as its effective collaborative governance practice.

#### Civil Discourse

- SGPP also houses the National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD), an initiative directed by Carolyn Lukensmeyer, to build civility and respectful deliberation among members of the U.S. Congress and within state legislatures, media, and the public (see <http://nicd.arizona.edu>).
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and high course attrition rates. Online instruction is often confined to delivering basic content with minimal complexity and nuance and minimal instructor interaction. Teaching collaborative governance online, however, is considerably complex and nuanced, where the challenge is to activate students' motivation to work across boundaries and strengthen their collaborative

competencies (Emerson & Nabatchi 2015; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012; Emerson & Smutko, 2011) as well as to demonstrate the value and enact the experience of collaborative learning, an essential component of successful collaboration dynamics (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013).

At first glance, this challenge appeared insurmountable, but as described in this article, the online format required program faculty to expand their repertoire of instructional roles in order to convey collaborative concepts and engage students in learning about collaborative governance. In this article, we provide an overview of the Collaborative Governance Program, discuss the basic pedagogical building blocks of the curriculum, review some of the relevant challenges to online instruction, present the program's instructional roles and how they are enacted, and conclude with current and future efforts to evaluate student outcomes.

### OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE PROGRAM

The 21st century workplace requires productive collaboration across different organizations, professions, and sectors. Executives, managers, and professionals, whether they work in the public, private, or nonprofit sector, are being asked to collaborate with their colleagues down the hall, across town, and around the world. New skills, strategies, tools, and institutions are needed in order to share resources, solve complex problems together, and leverage experience and knowledge (Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Morse, 2010; Morse & Stephens, 2012).

Civic leaders and public managers must also foster cross-boundary collaboration in the public arena, which has become increasingly polarized and divisive. They are being called on to express themselves and represent others, participate in work groups, task forces, and coalitions, and lead and serve on committees of stakeholders with widely divergent interests and values. They must negotiate professional relationships, contracts, and employment disputes as well as

engage with the public as public officials, community leaders, and voters. At home, at work, and in the public square, they need to be practiced in civil discourse, conflict management, and collaborative leadership (Bryer & Cooper, 2012; Crosby & Bryson, 2010; Gray, 1989; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Mingus & Horiuchi, 2012; O'Leary, Choi, & Gerard, 2012).

The practice of and scholarship on collaborative governance have skyrocketed in the past decade, leading the University of Arizona's School of Government and Public Policy (SGPP) to develop a Collaborative Governance Program. The program is designed to meet the growing needs of government, nonprofit, and corporate managers who are seeking better ways to work together across institutional, geographic, economic, and social boundaries in many different policy domains, such as natural resource management, public health, urban planning and economic development, and energy and public utilities (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Carlson, 2007; Emerson et al., 2012; Gerlak, Lubell, & Heikkila, 2013; O'Leary & Bingham, 2007).

The SGPP Collaborative Governance Program builds on the experience and expertise of multiple instructors, practitioners and researchers working across four program areas summarized in Box 1.

In this article, we focus on the three online courses summarized in Box 2 that were developed as part of the core for the graduate MPA concentration and the Graduate Certificate in Collaborative Governance. These core online courses are accompanied by several offerings in skill building delivered in a classroom or workshop format. For more information on the overall Collaborative Governance Program and the graduate curriculum, see [www.collaborativegovernance.arizona.edu](http://www.collaborativegovernance.arizona.edu).

As happens with many innovations, serendipity and timing led to the development of these online courses: funding from the University of Arizona's Outreach College to encourage dis-

tance learning opportunities within the graduate curriculum became available just as Emerson and Smutko (2011) completed their report on collaborative competencies for the University Network for Collaborative Governance. At the time, the challenges for teaching collaboration online were not fully appreciated and were counterbalanced in any event by the opportunity to start building the program and making it accessible not only to the school and the university community but to other institutions and distance learners.

## **BOX 2.**

### **Summaries of Three Online Course Offerings in Collaborative Governance**

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**PA 620A Collaborative Governance in Theory, Practice, and Research** provides students with a foundation in collaborative governance: the underlying theories that support it; how it is practiced in various policy arenas; and recent findings from research to improve its use. In this course, students critique the use of collaborative governance in different case studies, apply principles of practice to simulated contexts, and develop alternative collaborative approaches to hypothetical or contemporary governance challenges.

**PA 622A Institutional Design and Learning for Collaborative Governance** provides an in depth exploration of institutions and learning in collaborative governance. Attention is devoted to the diversity of institutional structures and processes; key elements and features of institutional design; collaborative learning and innovation; and matters of institutional performance in cross-boundary collaborative governance that takes place in interagency, intergovernmental, cross-sector, and civic engagement settings. This course features a broad range of cases, including economic development, human services, health care, education, environmental policy, biotechnology, and emergency planning.

**PA 624A Collaborative Governance Tools** introduces students to the array of tools and technologies available to assist cross-boundary governance and collaborative management, including tools for project coordination, information sharing, knowledge management, visioning, public engagement, conflict management, collaborative geographic information systems (GIS), participatory budgeting, decision support systems, and collaborative monitoring.

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### **BOX 3.** **Collaborative Competencies**

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#### **Leadership and Management Competency**

1. Strengthening Collaborative Leadership, for example:
  - Effective leadership roles
  - Collaborative leadership styles and skills
  - Political and entrepreneurial skills
2. Planning, Organizing and Managing for Collaboration, for example:
  - Designing and managing collaborative problem solving and conflict resolution processes
  - Planning and building collaborative networks, partnerships, and cross-sector institutions
  - Designing and sustaining deliberative civic engagement and public participation

#### **Process Competency**

3. Communicating Effectively, for example.:
  - Listening skills
  - Presentation, persuasion, and assertiveness
  - Communicating in different modes and media to different kinds of groups
  - Cross-cultural communication skills
4. Working in Teams and Facilitating Groups, for example:
  - Understanding group dynamics and building working relationships
  - Facilitating group deliberation and decision making
  - Participating in teams effectively
5. Negotiating Agreement and Managing Conflict, for example:
  - Two-party negotiation and conflict management styles
  - Interest-based negotiation and conflict resolution in multiparty settings
  - Managing conflict constructively in groups in different roles

#### **Analytical Competency**

6. Applying Analytic Skills and Strategic Thinking, for example:
  - Situation assessment and issue analysis
  - Understanding the political, legal, and regulatory context for collaboration
  - Decision analysis for negotiation and agreement seeking
7. Evaluating and Adapting Processes, for example:
  - Measuring outcomes and impacts of collaborative processes
  - Setting group goals and indicators of success for performance evaluation
  - Assessing and adapting ongoing progress

#### **Knowledge Management Competency**

8. Integrating Technical and Scientific Information, for example:
  - Assessing information requirements for informed decision making
  - Developing methods and standards for collecting and analyzing information
9. Using Information and Communication Technology, for example:
  - Using computer-based decision support and spatial analysis tools
  - Using Web-based communications and social networking tools

#### **Professional Accountability Competency**

10. Maintaining Personal Integrity and Professional Ethics, for example:
  - Enacting/enforcing principles of fairness, transparency, and inclusive engagement
  - Reflecting on personal and professional effectiveness and seeking feedback
  - Balancing personal, professional, and institutional obligations with group or cross-sector organizational requirements

*Source.* Taken from Emerson and Smutko (2011).

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### **BUILDING BLOCKS: COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

The design of the SGPP Collaborative Governance Program rests on two basic pedagogical building blocks: collaborative capacity and collaborative learning. Across the program, through the various courses, instructors are trying to activate students' appreciation and motivation to work across boundaries and to strengthen their collaborative competencies to do so. While "collaboration is becoming the 21st century's governance tool of choice and necessity" (Emerson & Smutko, 2012, p. 5), it requires proficiencies in management and participation that are not fully recognized nor broadly realized (see Box 3).

These five collaborative competencies (and 10 skill sets) are consistent with guidance from the literature on graduate management education, including network management functions (e.g., Agranoff & McGuire, 2001), collaborative skills needed by emergency managers (e.g., Alexander, 2003), entrepreneurial strategies for interorganizational managers (e.g., Page, 2003), general capabilities for public managers (e.g., Bingham, Sandfort, & O'Leary, 2008), and knowledge and skills relevant to local deliberative practice (e.g., Carcasson & Bruns, 2009). In combination, the courses offered in the SGPP program work to build all these competencies.

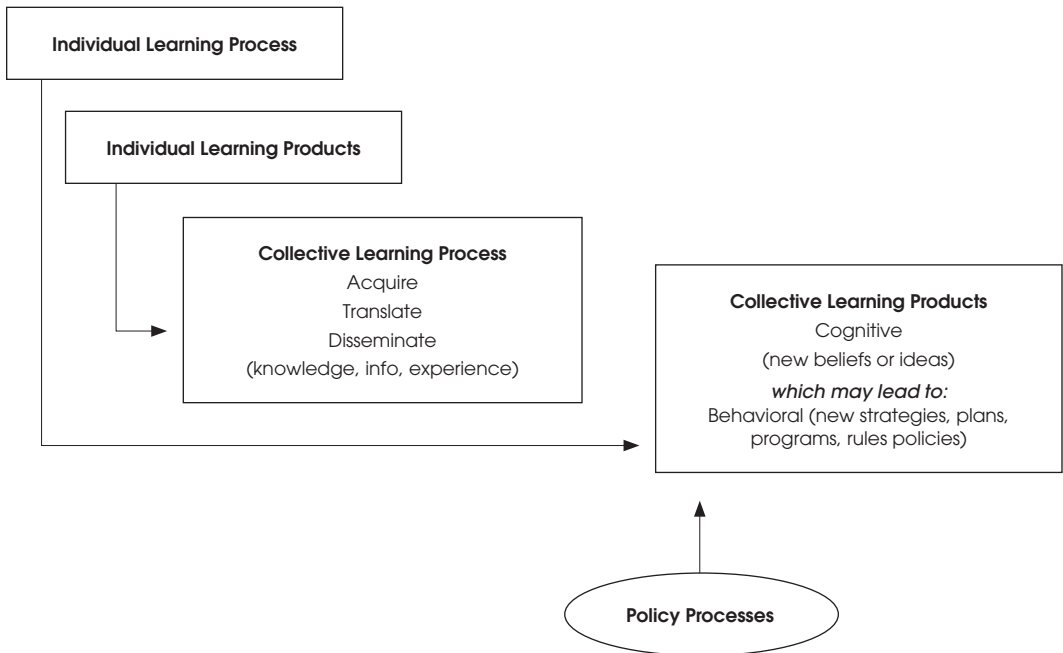
"The capacity for joint action," as specified by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), who draw on multiple frameworks for collaboration found in the literature (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bardach, 1998; Bryson et al., 2006; Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2006; Thomson & Perry, 2006; Wood & Gray, 1991), is a crucial component of collaboration dynamics and needs to be built and sustained over time across partners in collaborative governance. Those joint capacities include institutional and procedural arrangements, resources, knowledge, and leadership (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, p. 68). To train tomorrow's collaborative managers, the SGPP program tries to provide students with an understanding of the value and variety of these capacities as well as the skill base to practice and improve their own collaborative competencies.

The program's second building block is collaborative learning. Due to the complexity of the problems and organizational dynamics often associated with collaboration, the capacity for learning is an important feature for the endurance and success of collaborative arrangements (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Gerlak & Heikkila, 2007; Pennington, 2008; Weber, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2005).

Drawing upon a wealth of literature—ranging from organization theory, policy process and change, and network analysis—Gerlak and Heikkila (2011) established a framework of collective learning to guide inquiry about learning in collaborative governance settings. The framework guides the study of how learning processes and products are linked within a collaborative setting and provides insights into the structural, social, and technological features of collaboration that may foster or impede learning. Subsequent research has expanded these ideas to apply more generally to diverse collective contexts where policy decisions are debated, devised, implemented, and enforced, paying more explicit attention to the relationship between individual and collective learning as well as exploring in-depth the phases of the learning process and the factors that shape learning (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). (See Figure 1.)

Building from this research, the SGPP program positions learning as a central dimension of its instructional program; learning is explicitly the focus of the PA 622A course, as indicated in its title—Institutional Design and Learning for Collaborative Governance. This course introduces students to classic readings, such as Senge's (2006) "learning organization" and Wenger's (1999) "communities of practice." Students also become familiar with strategies to learn from failure (Edmondson, 2011), the larger role of information and technology in supporting learning in collaborative settings, and how learning processes in collaborative settings can support more adaptive governance.

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Linking Individual Learning to Learning Processes and Products in Collective Policy Contexts**



Source. Based on Heikkila and Gerlak (2013, p. 487).

In addition to its focus on substantive learning, the Collaborative Governance Program also embraces a learning approach to program evaluation and to making adjustments and adaptations over time. This is in line with research positing that collaborative capacity generates associated adaptive capacity, thereby enabling adaptation within collaborative governance regimes (Emerson & Gerlak, 2014).

**CHALLENGES FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION**

Several general challenges affect learning and participation in online coursework. Attrition rates in MOOCs (massive online open courses), for example, are widely documented, as is the decline in students’ active participation in online courses over the course of a semester (Clow, 2013; Yang, Sinha, Adamson, & Rose, 2013). The claim (often used as an incentive) that up-front investments by instructors in online course development will translate into

less teaching workload during the rest of the semester has proven false and can lead to diminished student-teacher interaction. These challenges, along with inadequate institutional support around hardware and software and training in course design and development (Nkonge & Geuldenzolph, 2006), have contributed to making online instruction far less gratifying for many instructors than face-to-face classroom interaction. These and other experiences with online teaching over the past 5–10 years have discouraged many high-quality teachers from experimenting with online courses. Nonetheless, the trend toward Web-based learning continues to accelerate (Kraiger, 2014; Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, & Wisner, 2006). This trend is in line with instructor roles in course delivery that are changing more broadly for both traditional and online courses (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010).

Perhaps the most significant challenge for online learning is the distance between the students and the instructor created by the intervening Web platform. Asynchronous teaching units leave students on their own to engage with the material when convenient for them, without direct and immediate interaction with instructors. While bringing flexibility and autonomy to students' learning practices, this interaction deficit can be problematic, as noted by the growing literature on instructors' social presence, or the lack thereof, in online courses (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Picciano, 2002). More blended learning or hybrid instructional models of instruction that integrate face-to-face with online learning experiences are one approach to mitigating some of this distance (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010).

A second challenge for online learning is student discomfort or lack of familiarity with the course technology. Students need to be familiar with the technology used in the course to be successful (Belanger & Jordan, 2000; Wojciechowski & Palmer, 2005). Earlier research suggests that students who report frustration with technology in online courses generally report lower satisfaction levels with the course (Chong, 1998).

A third challenge involves the diversity associated with the online classroom. Online courses are generally thought to enroll a more heterogeneous population of learners—in terms of student preferences, skills, and needs—than traditional college students who take classes on campuses (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). The great degree of diversity within the online student population (Cheung & Kan, 2002) can relate to professional expertise, age, gender, and culture, among other factors. This turns out to be the case for the University of Arizona SGPP student population as well.

#### **ALIGNING ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS WITH NEW INSTRUCTOR ROLES**

The Collaborative Governance Program online courses have attempted to address and mitigate these challenges to online learning while at the same time drawing out the opportunities

available through online technology to build collaborative capacity and collaborative learning. To do so, the program faculty had to expand their understanding of what online learning platforms are. They are far more than the course website itself and its structure. This static perception reinforces the view that online courses are simply “serve 'em up” courses, transferring content from the classroom to the Web, where more students can access information at will.

We came to conceptualize learning platforms as a complement of stages or spaces for learning that connect through a course architecture. For our purposes, those platforms all enhance collaborative learning and interactivity. The learning platforms we identified are the course syllabus and its structure; the course website; the online content, including narrated PowerPoint presentations (termed *e-talks*), video presentations, and accessible references; interactive assignments, communication flows, the class community itself, interactions with the instructor; and the integration of the content into the students' knowledge base and professional repertoire. These learning platforms have much in common with the multifaceted contexts in which professional managers find themselves. In public conflict settings or in cross-sector collaborative governance arenas, professionals must take the initiative to assess the available information, access multiple sources of additional information, consult with their colleagues and with experts, engage with stakeholders, manage communications with the public, analyze and integrate what they have learned, and recommend paths forward.

To orchestrate these platforms, several additional instructional roles are required to facilitate the students' encounters, not only with the content and requirements of the course, but with their classmates, the instructor, and their own learning experiences. These multiple roles extend beyond the conventional role of content delivery, conventionally practiced in the lecture hall or the classroom. Rather than serving only as the expert source of knowledge, program faculty had to design learning platforms in which students take on

**TABLE 1.**  
**Instructor Roles and Learning Platforms**

Learning platforms	Instructor roles				
	Content provider	Designer	Role model	Learning consultant	Connector
Course syllabus and structure	X	X	X	X	
Course website design		X		X	X
Online content: e-talks, video, references	X	X	X		X
Interactive assignments		X		X	
Communication flow		X	X	X	X
Class community		X	X		X
Instructor interaction	X	X	X	X	X
Integration		X	X	X	X

*Note.* An X indicates how the instructor role maps with the course architecture.

the responsibility for acquiring and synthesizing knowledge themselves, usually from multiple sources and media, not just the instructor’s lecture notes or PowerPoint slides. For the Collaborative Governance Program online courses, we identified additional roles for the instructor: as designer of learning platforms, as role model, as learning consultant, and as connector. All these roles support the multiple learning platforms in multiple ways, as illustrated in Table 1 and the following discussion.

**Instructor as Designer of Learning Platforms**

In designing these multiple online learning platforms, the instructor creates a facilitative learning environment and serves as an accessible on-call expert consultant for students. This designer role extends well beyond what most instructors in academia do when designing

their syllabi for lecture courses. Conventionally, instructors organize the content and produce lectures and connections to textbooks for the student to then follow and demonstrate mastery of. Public affairs instructors, however, are much more familiar with creating learning platforms in their applied practice courses, where students work in teams and produce deliverables and the instructor serves as consultant when needed. And those instructors who teach skills-based courses, like negotiation and conflict management and leadership, also know how to stage a role-play or simulation, assembling needed information, managing student role assignments, stimulating student engagement, and creating timelines for preparation, practice and self-reflection. Online instructional design is far more like the latter instructional model than the former conventional one.



The most significant opportunity for teaching collaboration online resides in the design challenge of creating new learning platforms that enable students to appreciate the value of collaboration, understand the components or working parts of collaboration, and experience collaboration with other students. Effectively, the instructor becomes a shadow partner with the students as they experience collaborative learning by design. The existing scholarship suggests that there is no discernible difference in learning outcomes, or students' perceptions of their learning, between traditional face-to-face university courses and *well-designed* and *-delivered* online courses (Braun, 2008; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; Topper, 2007). Nonetheless, instructors need to be "careful not to assume that teaching the same in both environments will create similar results" (Mullen & Tallent-Runnels, 2006, p. 264).

As previously described, the SGPP collaborative governance curriculum includes three online courses and one skills-based course. Specific collaborative skills are best developed through active practice and feedback in interactive exercises, role-plays, and simulation activities in a classroom or workshop setting. That said, the online courses are designed not only to deliver content about collaborative governance but also to foster collaborative engagement in the learning process. The program strives to build in community development and interactivity between the instructor and among the students, which researchers have highlighted as critical for successful online distance programs (Rofe, 2011).

The course website itself is the online classroom and, like its physical counterpart, it influences the interaction between instructor and students. The website's graphic design and the arrangement of course components as they appear on the computer screen convey a sense of organization, clarity, consistency, openness and accessibility, and dynamism and interactivity. The standard template requirements and Desire2Learn (D2L) software for online courses at the University of Arizona constrain the website appearance and architecture to some extent.

However, within those limitations, the program has tried to create a consistent graphic appearance across all collaborative governance courses and to make the site as user-friendly as possible. As one example, Figure 2 presents a Wordle on collaborative governance that appears throughout the courses.

The weekly online discussion forums described below are designed to foster deliberative discourse. Guidelines and grading rubrics provide incentives for students to take these discussion forums seriously. Earlier research suggests that when students engage one another in online discussions in a focused way, their behaviors enhance learner outcomes (Wilson, Pollock, & Hamann, 2007). In the program courses, early discussion assignments help the students get acquainted with each other (posting pictures and biographical information) so that the subsequent substantive discussions build on interpersonal bonds. For example, in all three online courses, students are asked at the outset about their personal and professional experiences, as well as their goals and where they expect to see themselves in five years.

The team presentations toward the latter half of the Collaborative Governance in Theory, Practice, and Research (PA 620A) course require students to collaborate in designing online presentations, creating discussion questions, and curating the discussion forum for the week of their presentation. For the Institutional Design and Learning for Collaborative Governance (PA 622A) course, the final group project gives students the opportunity to develop their own collaborative design to address a community or regional public policy issue in need of collaboration. Students work in small teams to develop a collaborative institutional design model that builds from and integrates course readings, lectures, and discussion forum posts. Students address design structure and processes, and they craft a visual representation of their model. In Collaborative Governance Tools (PA 624), students collaborate in discussion forums and on multiple assignments as they use various tools on simulated tasks: for example, com-

FIGURE 2.  
Collaborative Governance Program Wordle



pleting a social network analysis of a small data set; describing the six steps of joint fact-finding based on an assigned case study; creating a map interface for residents to document their community assets using Mapbox.com; sketching a community vision through question mapping for multiple stakeholders; evaluating participatory budgeting processes; exploring mass collaboration and crowdsourcing projects; and delving into collaborative modeling and decision support.

### Instructor as Role Model

Another important role of all instructors, in and out of the classroom, is the model they present to students in the way they themselves engage with the material, communicate it to students, demonstrate professional judgment and comportment, and interact with students individually and in class. How can this important role be enacted in online instruction, particularly with respect to the modeling of collaborative behavior and skills? Online instruction presents many opportunities to do this; instructors just need to recognize and intentionally reproduce them. For example, the following are opportunities for instructors to demonstrate and encourage collaborative competence:

- **Accessibility:** Before the course begins, the instructor communicates through e-mail with the enrolled students, directing them to the website and welcoming them to the course. Within the “Course Basics” folder for each course are several resources to help students get oriented to the course organization and technology. Frequently asked questions and tips for succeeding in the course (based on quotations from previous student feedback) are offered. A “How to Contact the Instructor” message encourages each student to e-mail, conference call, or visit the instructor before and during the course. Feedback is invited throughout the course and specifically with online course evaluations. This provides any students who may be hesitant or inexperienced with technology to describe their comfort level and reach out to the instructor.
- **Informal engagement:** The initial assignment is designed to familiarize students with the D2L discussion forums. Students introduce themselves by answering several questions and posting photos. To start the ball rolling, the instructor posts her own introduction in an informal, conversational tone; she might post funny pictures of her dog or a discussion of recent books read or trips taken or planned. Such modeling opens up the possibility for students to play with the assignment and present themselves more personably and candidly. Students are also asked to comment on each other’s posts, which generates further engagement as individuals, not just as classmates. In many cases, students get reacquainted with former classmates and colleagues. If they are meeting for the first time, they are able to connect over shared activities, interests, and courses.
- **Self-presentation:** Within the first week’s unit, the instructor includes a short video of herself reviewing the course requirements and explaining the syllabus. The instructor’s personable and energetic tone parallels the script, which emphasizes both the content of collaborative governance and how the course itself will foster collaboration among students and with the instructor through discussion forums and team projects.
- **Task clarity and demonstration:** The instructor responds to weekly student posts about discussion questions. Students are required to comment on two other posts as well, generating discussion threads based on each student’s original posts. The instructor’s initial comments on these discussion threads provide models for subsequent student comments. In addition, a rubric for grading weekly participation in the discussions articulates the instructor’s expectations of quality postings, citing of course materials, and drawing on direct experience or related cases or policy contexts. Thus students receive both explicit directions and examples of quality postings as models for communication in their online discussions.

### **Instructor as Learning Consultant**

Online courses in general lend themselves to less directive but more responsive instructional assistance. Online instructors facilitate students' learning experiences using design and modeling. They respond to students' inquiries by e-mail, on discussion boards, and in video calls or office visits. They offer additional readings or related case studies or connections to others on or off campus or in networks who might be useful sources of additional information. They provide expertise when asked and suggest other paths of inquiry. They are learning consultants, not just lecturers.

This facilitative role parallels in many ways the role of managing networks or facilitating multiparty negotiations or collaborations. Collaborative leadership is often described as facilitative, rather than directive (Linden, 2010; Morse, 2010; O'Leary et al., 2012). In many respects, teaching collaborative governance online requires the same skills as practicing collaborative governance:

- **Responsiveness:** Responding to individual requests by students, whether through e-mail or phone messages, is particularly important in online teaching. The lack of "presence" in online courses can be partially compensated for by quick turnaround and a "virtual presence" through responsiveness at all times. In the syllabus (and the instructor video at the outset), the instructor can note her standard response time and how accessible she will be during the week and on weekends. For students who live in town, or who travel to town, the instructor can offer to meet with students in person to make a more personal connection.
- **Timeliness:** Similarly, timely instructor feedback and grades on student work are particularly important in online courses, where weekly assignments and short deadlines are standard. It is easy for students to fall behind and they will be easily discouraged if the instructor does not herself keep up with the pace of the class.

- **Transparency:** To succeed in the course, students need to understand what the instructor expects of them. They want to clearly understand any instructions and then gauge their ability to deliver. If an online course lacks the capacity for in-person communication, instructions must be detailed, consistent across all course materials, and posted in many places on the course website. An explanation of how assignments are graded is particularly important to orient the online student to the instructor's expectations.

- **Fairness and inclusiveness:** Adhering to the course requirements and treating all students consistently and fairly should not be a stretch for any competent instructor, but this is critical in the realm of online instruction. As a simple example, when the instructor gives feedback on weekly discussion threads, she must comment on *all* threads or original posts. The instructor can also send sidebar e-mails to students who have not been contributing, to encourage their participation.

- **Redundancy:** In the Collaborative Governance Program, there is intentional overlap across the three online courses. The courses begin with a broad introduction to what collaborative governance means as well as overall trends in public affairs. A few specific readings are intentionally carried over from one course to the other, and the instructor explicitly calls attention to this. Each instructor also follows the same organizational flow and visual cues on the respective course websites, so students become comfortable with the technology and course material and see the intentional design of the program.

### **Instructor as Connector**

Finally, the instructor of online courses in collaboration has a special duty to connect the course content with students' professional interests and experiences. Professors in graduate-level public affairs and public administration programs can assume that students are enrolling in courses relevant to their professional interests,

not simply because of program requirements. In many if not most public administration schools, the range of prior work experiences among students is broad. At the University of Arizona, we have quite a diversity of students, from undergraduates completing a five-year Bachelor of Arts or MPA program, to returning Peace Corps volunteers, to seasoned midcareer professionals with 15–20 years of public managerial experience. Recognizing this range of experience and drawing out and applying those different experiences are familiar teaching skills to those who foster interactive learning in the classroom. These skills are also necessary when teaching online and paramount when attempting to teach collaborative governance online.

Working across boundaries in collaborative networks, while prevalent in much of today's public administration practice, can be opaque to students who have not yet worked in the public or nonprofit sectors. While the practice of collaborative governance makes conceptual sense and case studies can demonstrate its utility, it is easiest to grasp both its significance and challenges from direct experience. How does one draw out such student experiences and foster the essential connections between their experiences and course content in an online format?

In the SGPP program, we do this in three primary ways: through discussion boards, course case studies and readings, and assignments. For example, several of the e-talks in the introductory Collaborative Governance in Theory, Practice, and Research (PA 620) course include "Questions to Consider" slides. In the third week, after students have been exposed to basic definitions and principles of collaborative governance, along with some case illustrations, the instructor asks them to identify from their own experience a collaborative governance initiative that they were involved in or witnessed. In a subsequent week's discussion forum, the instructor asks students to describe that experience and "discuss the relevant challenges or barriers to collaboration you can identify based on your current knowledge of the case and with reference to the readings."

The rubric for grading these discussions includes the students' original postings and the required comments on others' postings. Weekly instructor feedback on these posts, referencing the students' experiences or observed situations, provides recognition and encouragement.

Instructors work to increase connections between course content and students' experiences through case studies and course readings. Throughout the Institutional Design and Learning for Collaborative Governance course (PA 622A), for example, the curriculum pays attention to boundaries—especially organizational boundaries—that are increasingly blurred in collaborative governance settings. The course also emphasizes scale; case studies reflect a variety of spatial scales, such as local emergency management, regional planning efforts, and international public health matters.

Assignments provide other opportunities to emphasize connections to students' experiences, past and future. The memo assignment in the PA 622A course is one example in which students can draw from their past experiences and interests or develop expertise in new issues they are interested in. In this assignment, each student assumes the role of a policy analyst and outlines the particular challenges, dynamics, and strategies of different elements of institutional design and learning in collaborative governance. To perform the assignment, each student develops his or her own hypothetical position in a nongovernmental organization or government agency and crafts a response to a policy issue. In the PA 620 course, students interview a professional manager in a position they aspire to, asking about the manager's experiences collaborating with other agencies and organizations. The last assignment in the PA 620 course asks students to craft a final statement "on the [course's] most useful ideas, cases, or research findings," including how students will apply them in current or future professional work. As a final example, in the PA 624 course students create and administer online polls of their classmates about public policy preferences they are interested in researching.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

After three years of course development, honing syllabi, and responding to students' feedback in the University of Arizona's SGPP program, we are impressed by how well the form of online instruction has come to fit the function of teaching collaborative governance. The constraints of the format forced us to rethink and expand our understanding of online learning platforms and instructional roles. We have come to understand that new online teaching platforms themselves enable and nurture collaboration and that faculty can and should intentionally and deliberately craft collaborative spaces to accentuate and heighten collaborative learning.

We expect that some of our strategies, course designs, assignments, and lessons learned may inform other instructors of collaborative governance courses and help advance the relatively nascent scholarship on teaching collaborative governance. We think these lessons are generalizable not only to other online courses but to graduate education in public administration more broadly. Indeed, our experiences in teaching collaborative governance online have put in high relief the value of multiple instructional approaches to public administration education both on- and off-line. Where the instructional goal is to advance active engagement with course content and co-learning among peers, instructors may well benefit from assuming a broader set of instructional roles as described above. Many public administration instructors are already using several interactive techniques in their classes. Reflecting on the instructional roles they play and how they might expand their repertoire on- or off-line may be a useful self-assessment.

Our own efforts to assess whether we are meeting our ambitious instructional objectives are still in the preliminary stages as we refine the content and delivery of our collaborative governance curriculum. We currently assess student responses to the online courses in two main ways: by using the university's standard

course and instructor evaluations and by administering tailored online course feedback surveys. Both evaluation processes are anonymous and voluntary. The average response rate to the university's standard evaluation is over 60%. Students rate several items on a 5-point Likert scale, chief among them statements about teaching effectiveness, comparative teaching effectiveness, overall course quality, overall amount learned, and the difficulty of the course. Over the past three years, the online courses have met and in most cases exceeded the mean responses for each of these key areas of performance compared to responses for a group of courses that are similar in subject, size, and level.

The tailored online course feedback survey has provided similarly positive responses. Students' report that the three SGPP program's online courses are more difficult than other graduate or online courses they have taken. The courses require more work and more time (the courses last 12 weeks instead of the full 15-week semester, so they are more generally intensive). In response to specific feedback on learning platforms (e.g., e-talks, assignments, readings, discussion questions), we have added additional e-talks, tightened up certain assignments, further developed the grading rubric, and established a "grace" week to provide more flexibility for weekly discussion requirements.

In the future, we would like to develop specific questions in our feedback surveys about the extent of collaborative learning in these courses and the extent of students' confidence in their knowledge and understanding of collaborative governance as a result of these courses. We also plan to formalize and standardize midcourse check-ins, to better account for student progress and feedback. As the program advances, we expect to actively keep track of students and encourage contributions to the program website about their experiences with collaborative governance. (See the "What People Are Saying" and "What People Are Doing" sections of the program website

at [www.collaborativegovernance.arizona.edu](http://www.collaborativegovernance.arizona.edu).) Further, we envision that within the next two years we will administer a rolling five-year feedback survey to graduates of the concentration and certificate program to explore how they have used their training, what aspects of their coursework had the most impact on their professional behavior, and what learning platforms and processes they continue to draw on. We also anticipate exploring more hybrid models of education, merging online instruction with select face-to-face interactions (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010).

The SGPP Collaborative Governance Program continues to evolve. We anticipate a more active practicum component of the program, which will create more opportunities for student internships and research assistantships. With more international students and more distance learners, we anticipate an increase in international case studies and more discussion around cross-cultural issues. Just as collaborative processes more generally need to adapt and learn over time (e.g., Emerson & Gerlak, 2014; Folke, Hahn, Olsson, & Norberg, 2005), we in the program expect to continue improving and adjusting to changing demographic, societal, and technological trends.

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