

Statement of Support for the Public Administration Department
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MPA graduate, May 2010
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Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of the University's Public Administration Department.

After spending the past three years going back to school, staying up many late hours studying, and engaging in stimulating coursework, I am disheartened to think that the University of Maine does not value a curriculum that trains public servants for employment in Maine and abroad.

I came to the University six years ago as an employee of the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center and recent graduate of Bates College. As an undergraduate, I was a recipient of the George Mitchell Scholarship, awarded to one senior per Maine high school on the basis of academic promise, financial need and most importantly, civic involvement. The Mitchell Institute and the scholarship has had a big impact upon me and it is safe to say that I probably would not have been interested in studying Public Administration if it had not been for inspiring Maine role models like George Mitchell and Margaret Chase Smith. But, I was also interested in the Public Administration Department because of its unique program offering a balance of both theoretical knowledge, practical skills, which adds relevancy to students' whole learning through both an internship requirement as well as a research methodology course. Also important to the department is a focus on the mission of public service and its emphasis of instilling a sense of ethics and fairness. I recall of one my classes where a student studying in another department was unable to recognize an ethical dilemma in a theoretical scenario presented to us. The Public Administration students were immediately able to pick up on this and were alarmed by the lack of ethical awareness from the other student.

We are a state dominated by nonprofits and where state and local government plays an important role in serving the public. It would be tragic to dispose of one of the oldest, nationally accredited programs in the country, and reckless as a land-grant University to eliminate a program which takes seriously the job of educating and training public servants for our American democracy. Furthermore, the department educates many older, non-traditional and female students. Closing the program would alienate these populations, as well as close off yet more educational opportunities for citizens living in northern Maine. Yes, it is a small department, but it has a significant impact and an important mission. Many of the program's graduates go onto serve active leadership roles at other colleges/ universities, serve as town/ city managers, work in state/federal government, hospitals, the military, or have key administrative responsibility at private corporations.

In closing, I am reminded of Governor Baldacci's 2010 UMaine commencement speech, in which he told the story of an ant having the courage to take on an elephant:

The moral to this story is NOT that, If you want to choke an elephant, you need bigger arms than an ant.
The real lesson here is that even small individual acts can make a difference.
That doing the right thing, making the tough choice, hanging on – even when you feel like you're alone – matters.
That you can inspire others, you can lead the way, and you can turn the tide.
One ant won't stop an elephant.
But one person can make the world a better place – Martin Luther King, Archimedes, Joan of Arc, Constantine.
History is marked by the names of men and women, courageous enough to make a difference.
Even small acts can send a ripple that travels around the world, changing lives.

<http://umaine.edu/commencement2010/commencement-address/>

I do take pride in the program and take public service seriously. In honor of Maine's history of exemplary public servants (George Mitchell, Margaret Chase Smith, Edmund Muskie, William Cohen, etc), I urge members of the reorganization committee to reconsider the proposal to eliminate and/or suspend both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

Thank you