The Bureau of Municipal Research and the Development of a Professional Public Service

Bruce D McDonald, III

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and the Development of a Professional Public Service

Bruce D. McDonald, III
Department of Political Science
Indiana University - South Bend
2171 Wiekamp Building
South Bend, IN 46634
brucemcd@iusb.edu

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Abstract

This paper explores the professionalization of public administration in terms of its relation to the New York Bureau of Municipal Research. The formation of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research in 1907 served as the catalyst for the creation and expansion of a professional public service. Though public administration has failed to transform into a profession, this paper shows that the Bureau contributed to professionalization by (1) developing a body of knowledge and theory for the field; (2) developing a school in which to train persons in that knowledge; and, (3) promoting a place that the training and knowledge can be applied.
I. Introduction

Beginning in the 1920s, an ongoing debate has been occurring within the public administration literature regarding the professionalization of the field (Bowman, 1983; Green, Keller, & Wamsley, 1993; Pugh, 1989; Waldo, 1975; White, 1948; Willbern, 1954). Within this debate, three sides have emerged. On the first side are those such as Green, Keller, and Wamsley (1993) who argue for a profession of public administration that is centered on democratic governance. Alternatively, White (1948) raised doubts about professionalization, expressing reservations on the “clarification of function in the total task of administration”. Waldo (1975) wrote that he didn’t believe that “public administration…is, or is about to become, a profession in any strict sense. I don’t believe that it should, if it could, given many contemporary factors pertaining to epistemology, ideology, politics, and what not” (pg. 223), a sentiment echoed by Pugh (1989) and Schott (1976). Some even suggest that growth of a public administration profession is a threat to democratic governance due to an incompatibility between desire for a democratically controlled government and the characteristics of a profession that would take government control from the people and give it to a select minority (Cooper, 1991; F. Mosher, 1968, 1978; Willbern, 1954).

As early as 1938 Mosher (1938) writes that we have already failed to developed the field into a “well-recognized professional calling”, although Waldo (1968) suggests that until the debate is settled we should “try to act as a profession without actually being one and perhaps even without the hope or intention of becoming one in any strict sense” (pg. 10). A third side of the debate on the idea suggests that, regardless of whether public administration should or should not be a profession, it is possible that public administration has already obtained the status (Bayles, 1989).
Having been unable to successfully settle the issue of a public administration profession, attention within the literature has turned from the debate since 1993. Sherwood (1997), for example, noted that the debate existed, but, unable to provide a solution, moved to discuss issues of professionalism within government work. More recently, Noordegraaf (2007) contends that the understanding of professionalism in the public sector suffers from a level of ambiguity. Thus, agreeing on whether public administration should be a profession is not as important as understanding that professionalism can exist outside of a pure professional model.

Despite the lack of agreement on professionalization, what is certain, however, is that public administration has undergone steps in that direction (Burke, 1988; F. Mosher, 1968; Ostrom, 2008; Pugh, 1989; Waldo, 1980). This movement towards professionalism can not only be seen in the formation of professional associations such as ASPA, ICMA, the National Academy of Public Administration and, the accrediting body, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, but also in the formation and lasting impact of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research (henceforth referred to as the Bureau).

Formed out of the urban reform movement at the start of the twentieth century, the Bureau acted as a catalyst for professionalization, establishing the first training schools in public administration, writing some of the first texts on government administration and developing a market for administratively trained labor. The Bureau emerged during a period when scholars deemed the development of an improved profession of public administration to be a remedy for the fixing of society’s problems. Although the history of the Bureau has been discussed within the literature, typically given to the Bureau’s work on efficient citizenship and its role in the New York City School inquiry (see Schachter, 1995, 1997b; Stivers, 1995), history has managed to gloss over its influence on the development of the field of public administration. This paper fills
the gap in the literature by using established models of professionalization to demonstrate the assistance that the Bureau gave towards transforming public administration into a profession.

To accomplish the above goal, this paper proceeds in four sections. The first section, the introduction, has outlined the purpose and aims of this paper. Section II lays the groundwork for understanding the actions of the Bureau. This is accomplished by discussing the formation, projects and end of the Bureau while outlining its political, administrative and philosophical views. Section III discusses the characteristics of professionalization while demonstrating how the Bureau contributed to the development of public administration. Finally, this paper concludes with remarks on the Bureau’s impact, its historical importance, and notes on future research.

II. Historiography and Philosophy of the Bureau

By the end of the nineteenth century, urban reformers had begun to see and understand the political ramifications of their work (Kahn, 1997). Having witnessed the problems in urban America and the corrupt nature of the government’s around them, reformers sought to eradicate what they viewed as an inefficient government process. While the reformers had been urging for increased efficiencies since the 1880s, it was not until the establishment of the Bureau that we see the first application of scientific management to evaluate a city’s work technique and improve the agency’s efficiency.

The Bureau got their start from the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), an organization that spearheaded the New York movement to improve the quality of life for the nation’s poor. Working to improve the lives of the city’s indigent people, the AICP tried to apply pressure on the New York City government to accept an increased responsibility. In its early years the AICP was met with some success in the establishment of recreation centers, but
by 1901, they began to realize the importance in improve the operations and understanding of civil affairs. To meet this need, Frederick Cleveland, a staff member of the AICP and a professor of finance at New York University, developed a prospectus for the “Institute of Municipal Research” recommending the formation of an organization to investigate the dealings of the city government (Potts, 1978; Waldo, 1984).

Initially established by Cleveland and William Allen, an AICP member since 1903, and Henry Bruere, formerly of the McCormick Family’s welfare projects, as the Bureau of City Betterment in 1905 (Henry Bruere, 1912), it was not until Allen gained funding in 1906 from a group of New York philanthropists that they incorporated as the better known Bureau of Municipal Research (Rich Men Backing Research Bureau, 1909). Operating with a staff of eight and a budget of $12,000, the Bureau encouraged efficient citizenship, operating on the idea that an informed citizenship encourages administrators to act ethically and efficiently (Beard, 1919). Promoting progressive politics, Bruere (1913) wrote that “only through efficient government could progressive social welfare be achieved.” The goal of the Bureau was to then harness the work of government, “the work of social betterment”. A good government consistent of “decent tenements, clean streets, attractive parks, pure milk, and educational opportunities” rather than “the glad hand and cheap bounty in the form a Thanksgiving turkey, shoes, or burial money”. It was believed, however, that good government could only be achieved by an independent electorate.

As the first attempt to evaluate New York City work techniques to increase agency efficiency, it was believed that bringing Taylor’s notion of scientific management to bear on city government would increase in the awareness of citizens to the activities of their elected officials and public administrators. By having an active citizenry, the Bureau hoped to make “democracy
a living, vital thing” (Allen, 1949/1950, p. 159). Demonstrating the Bureau’s dedication to the science of government, the subtitle of Efficient Citizenship, the Bureau’s periodical, was “To Promote the Application of Scientific Principles to Government” (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1912, 1914). The Bureau did not limit itself to efficiency, however, as Henry Bruere (1947), one of the former directors of the Bureau, said that “[a]ll was historically logical in what we undertook” (pg. 46).

The early years of the Bureau were focused on conducting a survey of the condition of the city. By going into the field to observe work processes and study how those processes might be improved, the Bureau formed an approach that was “realistic, pragmatic and objective” (Dahlberg, 1966, p. 231). Although the Bureau had a charter and common-law right to public records and meetings, they were refused entrance to City Hall and denied access to the records of the Manhattan Borough. Rather than seeking access through court order, the Bureau sought to conduct a study on government responsiveness by looking at the failure of the Manhattan Borough president to follow through on his official responsibilities for the condition of the streets and other public usages. The purpose of the Bureau’s inquiry had been to determine the facts behind Borough President John Ahearn’s administration and to develop recommendations for its improvement (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1907). Conducting a survey of the streets, the Bureau documented instances in which money was spent for street repair but the streets had continued to remain in disrepair. Promoting a hands-on approach to research, assistants to the Bureau later recalled that significant portions of time were spent counting bags of cement (Dahlberg, 1966). After the study was completed, however, the Bureau was presented with difficulty in getting city officials to focus on the findings. As a solution, they chose to turn the findings into their first publication, How Manhattan Is Governed. It was from this publication
that the Bureau would become broadly known. Upon publication, Ahearn filed suit against the Bureau on grounds of libel, but the public outrage created by the pamphlet led the governor to demand his resignation (Ahearn Did Not Know, 1907). Ultimately, the success of the pamphlet led to the opening of agency doors previously closed to Bureau staff, bringing with it the label of “Bureau of Municipal Besmirch” by disgruntled bureaucrats (Gill, 1944).

Witnessing the success of the Bureau in New York, government officials and citizen groups throughout the United States were encouraged to form bureaus in their own cities, establishing the survey as the foundation of bureau methodology. Using the Bureau as a model, these new bureaus created a demand for experienced staff to run the organizations. Seeing the rise of other bureaus and the corresponding drain on its own staff, the Bureau became aware of the need to “train men for the study and administration of public business” (Upson, 1938, p. 173). Founded in 1911 with $80,000 in financial assistance from Mrs. E.H. Harriman, the widow of a railroad executive who had been an early supporter of the Bureau (Mrs. Harriman, 1911), a training school was established that emphasized teaching scientific principles to those who had an interest in the public sector (Allen, 1945). Interest in the school was so high that the Bureau received four hundred eighty-five applications for the school’s first year, of which they accepted twenty-five.

The school promoted a curriculum of practical experience alongside education. Central to the education aspect was budgetary work. Coursework was later expanded to include the fields of municipal politics, law, and accounting, which the Bureau viewed as essential processes and functions of government and pivotal to understand in making administrative improvements. In 1913 the curriculum was again expanded to include a series of lectures and class symposiums. These lectures were often conducted by guests to the school, including field notables such as
Frederick Taylor and Mary Parker Follett, both of whom shared interest with the Bureau in scientific management and budgetary efficiency. Unlike traditional academic institutions, the Bureau’s program was organized so students would meet with the staff daily to work on a variety of assignments. After their first year of study, students would be paired with a staff member of the Bureau with whom they would work directly.

The training school underwent a second transformation in 1915 when Dr. Charles Beard was named director of the school. Upon taking over the school, Beard believed that “many students had not the background to plunge immediately into field work, or that they had experience that permitted only a narrow specialization” (Graham, 1941, p. 138), and needed a year of more systematic study prior to any practical work. Under Beard’s direction, the school moved from a curriculum based on fragments of various disciplines into an operation framework focused on developing an interdisciplinary curriculum comprised of public administration, management, and organization methods. It was under this transition that came the start of the training school’s courses in public administration as an academic field.

In its years of operation, the training school produced several notable graduates. Among these was C.E. Rightor, who was later appointed as the director of the Bureau of Governmental Research, A.E. Buck, the notable budgetary specialist of the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, and L.E. Meador, who became a professor at Drury College. Though not a student at the Bureau himself, it was reported that Luther Gulick, after his admittance to Columbia University, would sit in on Beard’s lectures on public administration and Taylor’s lectures on scientific management (Dahlberg, 1966).

By 1911 the Bureau was engulfed in a controversy of politics versus expertise during the debates of the role of New York City’s Board of Education. The controversy began with New
York City’s Board of Estimate and Apportionment forming a three-person committee to conduct a survey of city schools, intending to settle the debate over who should control the Manhattan public school system. Previously, educational functions had been under the purview of state legislatures, but in 1911 legislative reforms revamped school governance, placing school control under the authority of individual Board’s of Education. Elected in predominately at-large, nonpartisan elections, Schacter (1997) wrote that it created a system that “favoured a school-governance model that tended to limit popular participation in decision making” (1997, p. 55).

At a time when authority was given to the Board of Education and then extensively delegated to an appointed superintendent, the progressive educational administrators of the early twentieth century favored a model of school governance that placed limitations on popular participation in the decision making process. City politics, on the other hand, were seen as corrupted by the state legislature and thus separated from the governance of schools (Schachter, 1997b; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Paul Hanus, a professor of education at Harvard University, was hired by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment to oversee the study. With the ability to select twelve persons to oversee the different facets of the study, Hanus subsequently nominated Ernest Moore to conduct a report on the Board of Education. Although the Bureau eventually came to be at odds with those conducting the study, it initially supported the committee, going so far as to draft the board’s resolution that authorized the inquiry (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1913).

Throughout the New York City school inquiry, the Bureau was focused on the notion of schools run by those holding a vested interest in the students. As such, the Bureau preferred school functions to be under the control of individual cities. Should control over the school system remain with a non-representative Board of Education and the various school
superintendents, citizen-ownership would be lost and inefficiency would run rampant. Central to the Bureau’s philosophy was the efficient citizen concept – the idea that an informed citizenship encourages administrators to act ethically and efficiently. By applying scientific management principles to school management and citizen awareness, they believed that not only would the school system produce better educated students, but would be able to do so at a reduced cost (see How City Budgets, 1908; How to Find Room, 1909; Renews His Attack, 1909). As such, the Bureau was opposed to state mandated boards to oversee municipal utilities.

Allen met with Hanus to discuss the study throughout the summer, but the two men quickly realized their goals differed (Hanus, 1937). Despite the Bureau’s dedication to efficient citizenship, Hanus chose to support Moore’s belief in the model of educational administration, which argued that “the worst misfortune that can happen to a school system is to fall into the hands of City Hall” (Moore, no date). Advocating for a small Board of Education that would heavily rely upon superintendents, Moore viewed his role in the investigation as rescuing education from political manipulation. When drafts of Hanus report first appeared, the committee expressed their hesitance to accept Moore’s contribution. Believing that the Bureau, and Allen in particular, was the root of the strong stance against the report, Hanus and Moore urged Jerome Greene, manager of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, to save the proposal from “the machinations of Allen” (Greene, 1912).

The report was eventually published in October of 1912 by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, but with the exclusion of Moore’s findings. Although members of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment agreed with Moore on the issue of reducing the size of the Board of Education, they disagreed with Moore’s proposal to remove school control from the city and place it into the hands of professional superintendents. Upon questioning about the report, Moore
responded that his report “was not intended to verify your opinions…it was intended to teach you and your colleagues something about the proper way to administer a school system” (quoted in Schachter, 1997a, p. 46). Subsequently, Frank Goodnow and Frederick Howe were hired by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment to develop a second report on the Board of Education. In support of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment’s decision, the Bureau used its efficient citizenship mailings – a series of postcards mailed to the citizens of New York City providing the information they would need to take an active role in government – to gain better understanding of citizen desires and to foster support. In November, the Bureau distributed a mailing claiming that Moore’s insistence that an active Board of Education would hinder professional staff was not supported by factual evidence (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1912).

Hanus and Moore were outraged by the role of the Bureau in the school inquiry, leading them to conspire with Greene to use to the financial support of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., as a control over the organization. Prior to the Bureau’s involvement in the New York City school inquiry, Rockefeller, the single largest donor to the Bureau, had always expressed a positive and relaxed feedback on the work of the organization (Rockefeller Jr., 1909), though he had used his son, John Rockefeller, Jr., and the family lawyer, Starr Murphy, as intermediaries with the Bureau (Schachter, 1997b). By the fall of 1912, however, signs of a change in Rockefeller’s approval were evident when Murphy wrote to Allen about the Bureau’s education politics and the efficient citizenship postcards. Such activities, Murphy argued, were better left to professional decision makers (Murphy, 1912).

At the request of the Rockefeller Foundation, Abraham Flexner, the Assistant Secretary of the General Education Board, conducted an investigation into the activities of the Bureau (Research Bureau Assailed, 1915). Flexner’s report concluded that Allen stressed publicity
before accuracy reliability (Dr. Allen Quits, 1914). Chastising the Bureau’s notion of efficient
citizenship, Flexner also concluded that the public should allow professionals to make decisions.
After reading the report, Rockefeller continued to pressure the Bureau, particularly in regard to
education research and school issues. His continued financial support would be contingent upon
stopping “its out-of-town work and its postal car bulletins, divorce the training school…and stop
its New York school work” (Research Bureau Assailed, 1915). By 1914, the pressure had left the
Bureau increasingly uncertain of how to operate. Allen, believing that Rockefeller’s money was
dictating the direction and policy of the Bureau (Directors Fall Out, 1914), argued that the
Bureau should continue in its original path regardless of whether they would lose Rockefeller’s
support (Dr. Allen Quits, 1914). Cleveland’s alternative was to take a more cautious approach to
publicity (Schachter, 1997a). Unable to reach a compromise, the Bureau’s trustees sided with
Cleveland. Allen resigned from the Bureau of Municipal Research that September, believing that
a vote to remove him would pass at the trustees meeting in November (Directors Fall Out, 1914).

Cleveland was chosen as Allen’s successor, serving as the director of the Bureau of
Municipal Research between 1914 and 1917. His tenure, however, was over a more restrained
organization. To keep Rockefeller money coming in, the Bureau was to detach itself from
partisan strife (Greene, 1913). No longer able to advocate for progressive reform and efficient
citizenship concepts; the Bureau was resorted to a research center that could only advise on
municipal administration. Witnessing the transition in the Bureau, reformers noted at a meeting
of the National Municipal League that “the [Bureau] movement is shipwrecked and has become
largely a private agreement between the board of trustees of the bureau and city
officials…without even letting the public know what was being done” (Fitzpatrick, 1916, p.
279). Additionally, limitations were placed on the circulation of publication that dealt with
budgetary issues and drafts of Bureau material were routinely sent to Greene for review prior to publication (Schachter, 1997a). In their last years, the Bureau tried to free itself from Rockefeller’s grip by pleading with Murphy to allow the organization to go to the public if the government failed to enact any of the Bureau’s recommended reforms. The Bureau, however, was never able to fully regain its operating independence from Rockefeller when Murphy replied that the Bureau should learn to stay away from propaganda and focus on the science behind administration.

Bruere also left the Bureau in 1914, taking a position as the City Chamberlain under New York Mayor John P. Mitchel. The intent of Bruere’s new position was to help implement the philosophy of the Bureau from the inside (Upson, 1938). After the resignation of Allen that same year, the Bureau remained unstable, running through a number of directors – Cleveland, E.P. Goodrich, Charles Beard and Luther Gulick. The nature of the Bureau had changed by 1921, as it moved away from its foundation in efficient citizenship to focus on the implication of public administration as an academic field (Dahlberg, 1966). While the Bureau had always been interested in administration in terms of municipalities, its purview had expanded, including a broad sense of administration. Accordingly, the Bureau reincorporated itself as the National Institute of Public Administration, arguing that while the governing executive was not able to do much harm to the country, he also had insufficient power to perform any good. The interest in and focus on public administration at various levels of government preceded the publication of Leonard D. White’s book, *Introduction to Public Administration*, by five years.

**III. Development of a Profession**
Once we understand who the Bureau was, how do we understand their impact on the professionalization of public administration? A profession, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is “a vocation in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or in the practice of an art founded upon it” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Adding to this definition, E.C. Hughes (1963) wrote that “a profession delivers esoteric services – advice or action or both – to individuals, organizations, or government; to whole classes or groups of people or to the public at large” (1963, p. 655). Ostrom (2008) argued that “[t]he practice of any profession depends upon the knowledge its members profess” (Ostrom, 2008, p. 3). It is also argued, however, that there is no set of characteristics for professionalization is maintained by all professions (Bayles, 1989; Goss, 1996).

The classical professions were rooted in religious and philosophical learning, learned through a series of studies, typically at a university (Pei, 1962; Pugh, 1989), with clergy, law, and medicine serving as common examples (Calhoun, 1965; Elliot, 1972; Pugh, 1989). Elliot (1972) and Marshall (1939) describe the professions as a way of life, requiring advanced education, along with a certain level of economic and social status. Describing the nature of professionalization, the literature has typically focused in terms of its correspondence to professional models. Bowman (1983), however, asserts that the concept of a profession is flawed, as the literature is filled with controversy over the definition and model of what constitutes a profession. While there is a no clearly accepted model of a profession, professions are distinguished from other occupations through their level of technical knowledge, specialized training and ethical commitment (Barber, 1984; Goss, 1996). To provide clarity in this paper, the term professionalization refers to the process of an occupation becoming a profession, whereas
professionalism refers to an “ideology and associated activities can be found in…occupational groups where members aspire to professional status” (Vollmer & Mills, 1966, p. viii).

Although the literature may treat what constitutes a profession in a variety of ways, it is possible to divide the characteristics into structural and attitudinal, dependent upon whether they apply to a professional group or to the beliefs and values of those claiming professional status. It is the combination of these attributes that define the professional model in that they provide an analytical tool for the understanding of professions. Looking at structural attributes of the professional model, Wilensky (1964) describes four predominate characteristics: (1) establishment of a full-time occupation; (2) the formation of a training school which develops and transmits a set body of knowledge and theory; (3) the create of a professional association with standards of membership; and, (4) the establishment of a code of ethics. Hall (1968) describes five attitude related attributes that are central to a professionalism model: (1) the formation and use of a professional association as a reference group; (2) a service orientation; (3) a calling to the field; (4) a belief in the self-regulation of the profession; and (5) autonomy of the practitioner from those outside of the profession. Goode (1957, 1969), on the other hand, suggests two characteristics are “sociologically causal”: (1) a lengthy and specialized training profession, and (2) a service orientation.

The debate over whether the field of public administration should be transformed into an exclusive profession has carried on for the greater part of the last one hundred years. When applying the concept of a profession to public administration, Leonard White (1926) (1926) wrote that “[u]nlimited opportunities for the elevation of the public service to the ranks of a recognized profession…await cultivation” (pg. 381). In the conclusion of his text, White further argued that one of the primary developments we could expect for the field was “the emergence
of the specialist and the expert, the origin of significant economic and professional organizations
of public employees” (pg. 475).

While we continue to debate whether we should or should not be a profession, it is
possible that we have already begun the steps of moving towards one. This progress is, in large
part, due to the influence of the Bureau of Municipal Research. The first attribute of
professionalization brought by the Bureau is their establishment of a school for the training of
new persons on the subject in 1911. Prior to the development of the training school, limited
courses in public administration were taught on college campuses. For example, both Columbia
University and Harvard University offered courses in public administration, but neither offered a
program or degree focused on the management of government. As the bureau movement spread
throughout the United States, the Bureau stepped up to meet the increased need for trained and
qualified staff at the new bureaus. The establishment of the training school placed the Bureau as
the leader in administration education. Reporting to the American Political Science Association’s
Committee on Practical Training for the Public Service, Beard wrote that the Bureau’s “Training
School fulfills every requirement of a university…In my opinion one year at the Training School
is equal in discipline and academic training to a year spent in any university with whose
graduates I am acquainted”(Bureau of Municipal Research, 1914, pp. 5-7).

For the first time students were being trained in techniques of government management.
What the program intended to instill in its students can be seen in the goals of the school, as
provided in its first announcement:

[t]o train men for the study and administration of public business.
To qualify men to meet the growing need for student and administrators competent: (a) to test and (b) to improve methods and results of municipal service.

To publish facts which may be incorporated in textbooks and lectures, in teaching the relation to the public service of: (a) political science, government and sociology; (b) accountancy; (c) engineering; (d) law; (e) public hygiene; (f) school administration; (g) journalism; (h) medicine, etc. (Training School for Public Service, 1911)

Subsequently, a curriculum was established emphasizing coursework in politics, law and accounting. The interdisciplinary approach of the Training School is important not only as the first program in public administration, but also because it had intended to give students, who were expected to have experience working in government, a knowledge set based on all of the functions and processes of government administration and a skill set of research techniques by which the processes could be approached. According to Harriman, the original financial backer of the school, a diversified curriculum served to train students for all areas of government work that they might encounter (Mrs. Harriman, 1911). Coursework was complimented with practical experience by pairing students with Bureau staff for assignments. This pairing intended to provide students with an intern/apprentice experience whereby they could conduct the business of the Bureau under the guidance of those experienced in government finances and administration. Ultimately, the Bureau’s success at producing qualified graduates led to the establishment of school’s curriculum as a template for other academic institutions to use in developing their own programs (Stone & Stone, 1975).
The diffusion of the Bureau’s training school around the United States was important to the professionalization of public administration in that it gave those who were not able to attend the school in New York, or who were not among the select few to be offered enrollment, to study public administration. The diffusion could be seen nationwide as, shortly after the Bureau’s experiment with a training school began, the University of Michigan began to offer a Master’s of Arts degree in public administration (Upson, 1938). The program, headed by former men of the Bureau, focused on government administration and included six months practical experience at the Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research. By 1915 the University of California at Berkeley was offering a Bachelor of Arts degree in public administration. The University of Missouri followed suit with a Bachelor of Science in 1917. Programs began to rise at the University of Kansas and the University of Minnesota by 1925, while institutions such as Harvard University and the University of Chicago continued to offer coursework in city government.

Perhaps most important of the outgrowth programs was the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs established at Syracuse University. Developed in 1924, the Maxwell School relied heavily on the Bureau for its existence. Many of the staff members for the new programs in public administration had previously worked in the Bureau’s training school. Understanding the importance of what the Bureau was accomplishing, the Maxwell School went so far as to choose William Mosher, who had previously served as director of the Bureau and as a teacher at the training school, to be their first dean. Many of the first students at the Maxwell School also came from the Bureau’s training school as transfer students.

The second attribute of professionalization brought by the Bureau is the development of a body of knowledge. In this regard, Charles Beard (1919) wrote that since the development of the Bureau,
a revolution has come in the body of our knowledge about city government… and it may be truly and modestly said that the founding of the Bureau of Municipal Research opened a new period in the methods of research in municipal administration by introducing the methods of natural science, namely the methods of first hand observation. (1919, p. 3)

More than the development of a method for municipal research, the heavy emphasis on research at the Bureau and the school resulted in an onset of new literature on the science of public administration. In 1913 the Bureau of Municipal Research published the first textbook on municipal accounting (Potts, 1978). Titled as the Metz Handbook of Municipal Accounting, the textbook covered a variety of topics, including the methods of city finance, accounting revisions and budget reform. Although the Bureau only published one textbook, Bureau men such as Allen, Cleveland and Bruere all wrote on topics dealing with public administration and each of these works were standard texts for the early public administration programs around the nation. Regarding the publications, John Gaus (1931) noted that “[t]he early contributions of the government research movement in the techniques of public management and the making of surveys are now paralleled by the issuance of books appraising observation and experience” (1931, p. 130).

The impact of Bureau on the publication of administration texts extends beyond the life of the organization. In the 1920’s, former staff and students of the Bureau produced a number of texts that became the accepted standard in administration. This included publications by Bureau men such as A.E. Buck, who wrote on budgeting, municipal finance, and state reorganization, Russell Forbes, who wrote on purchasing, J.P. Harris, writing on election administration, Dr. Carl McCombs, health administration, William E. Mosher, on human resource management,
Sarah Greer, who developed a bibliography of public administration, and Lent Upson, who wrote a textbook on municipal administration. By the time Leonard D. White published his textbook on public administration in 1926 there was enough literature in existence to substantiate the textbook, presumably with the assistance of the publications of the Bureau and its members.

The influence of the body of knowledge, however, does not end with their research and publications. Rather, it includes their association with the development of public administration theory. As an organization, the Bureau championed the notion of efficient citizenship and citizen owners, the idea that citizens operate as the owners of their municipalities and that government becomes more responsive when the citizenry becomes aware of its activities. To support this basis, Taylor’s principles of scientific management were adopted and the municipal survey was created. The municipal survey was developed around the notion that the problems of society cannot be fixed until government operation is improved. By finding the gap between needs and services with the survey, scientific management became the means by which the gap could be closed. The application of Taylor’s theory represents not only the Bureau’s attempt to apply a set of theories to the problems which they study, but it also represents the first attempt to use scientific management to solve governmental problems. Although at times the Bureau undertook campaigns for reform and spoke out against government actions, its training facility focused entirely on the running of a government rather than the theory of government. Following a strict separation of politics and administration, public administration became a study not of the policy or desires of the political arena, but rather a field of improving government responsiveness regardless of who was in charge.

The last attribute of professionalization brought by the Bureau is the provision of a place upon which the training and knowledge can be applied. This provision came in two forms. First,
believing that the field of public administration needs to be studied objectively, the Bureau operated on the basis that practical experience was as necessary to education as was the coursework. Second, the success of the Bureau in New York City encouraged citizen groups to form bureaus in their own cities and government officials to employ Bureau men for their expertise.

By going into the field to observe work processes and how those processes might be improved, the Bureau formed an approach that was “realistic, pragmatic and objective” (Dahlberg, 1966, p. 231). In order to include this objective approach, the Bureau’s training school required significant periods of practical work. Although it has been nearly one hundred years since the Bureau’s school was formed, the tradition of practical experience in conjunction with course study was not limited to the early programs of public administration. The continued influence can be seen in the internship requirements of many of the graduate programs across the United States. The empiricism created by the Bureau continues to remain the methodology of study for public administration in programs throughout the United States as compared to the European schools which have focused on the rise of experts in management.

As previously stated, the success of the Bureau in New York City encouraged government officials and citizen groups throughout the United States to form bureaus in their own cities. Using the Bureau as a model, the new bureaus created a demand for experienced staff to run the organizations, often relying on Bureau staff members and students to fill the need. The expertise of Bureau men in accounting, budgetary process and administration, along with the success of the Bureau, spawned the employment of former Bureau men within local
governments. Thus, the rise of Bureau men in government positions led directly to the development of the expert, or professional, as the public administrator.

IV. Conclusions

Within the historic literature on public administration, there is popularity for the idea of a professional public service (Green et al., 1993; Ostrom, 2008; Waldo, 1968, 1975, 1980). Since the start of the twentieth century the notion that the public sector should be lead by trained professionals has been growing, in part thanks to the rise of the municipal research bureaus and the advent of the city manager. Yet in reviewing the literature on professionalization, a disagreement over professionalization exists (Barber, 1984; Bowman, 1983; Burke, 1988; Cooper, 1991; Goss, 1996; Green et al., 1993; Pugh, 1989). Although the professionalization debate has encouraged a variety of approaches, those writing since World War II have focused on the philosophy and theory behind a public administration profession (for examples, see Green et al., 1993; F. Mosher, 1978; Waldo, 1968; Willbern, 1954). Absent from the discussion, however, has been a professionalization discussion based on the history of our field, including the formation of the Bureau of Municipal Research in New York City. In the few instances where the history of the Bureau has been addressed, we see an organization that was time limited rather than an organization that made a significant and lasting influence on the field of public administration (see Dahlberg, 1966; Schachter, 1997a, 1997b; Stivers, 1997, 2000). The intent of this paper has been to correct this deficiency by moving the discussion on the Bureau from a simple historical account and direct it towards the role of the Bureau on the development and professionalization of public administration in the United States.
As this paper has shown, the Bureau served as a catalyst for the expansion of a professional public service. Rather than its end, the withdrawal of the Bureau as a militant watchdog over New York proved to be the beginning of its contribution to public administration and effective government. To remove tensions and fears that a professional public administration would limit democratic control of government, the Bureau had sought to establish the efficient citizenship concept within all aspects of government work. The impetus behind the Bureau’s push for increased efficiency and effectiveness was the belief that by forcing the city to adhere to a set standard, the citizenry would begin to hold professional administrators accountable.

While the Bureau grew out of a time period in which professions such as law, medicine and accounting were establishing themselves, the field of public administration failed to transform into a self-governing profession. The Bureau, however, did manage to bring the field into a higher degree of professionalization than previously established, and it was this degree of professionalization that has made a lasting impact. In the more than one hundred years since the organization’s formation, we have seen its continued influence on public administration in the United States. It has risen up as the ideal example of a merger between the citizenry and the government, an example that serves as model for the citizenry of developing nations to ensure government accountability and efficiency. For those of us in the United States, a refresher course on the Bureau would serve to remind us of how to work for the people and remind us of how strive for better governments in times of financial hardship.

The story of the Bureau’s downfall, however, takes several paths. The first path is of those who chart its end with the scandal of the Rockefeller family on the Bureau’s scope and policy. Second are those who believe that the influence of the organization ended with the 1921 reorganization. The last of the paths is reserved for those who follow the Bureau beyond its
reorganization and who include Allen’s 1914 formation of the Institute of Public Service. The degree of impact one perceives the Bureau as having is determined by the path to which you adhere, but some measure of positive influence can be seen in each.

While this paper addresses the much ignored influence of the Bureau, there is still a need for additional research. As the first school for the training of public administrators, research should be conducted on the lasting impact of its curriculum on today’s academic programs. Detailed research also needs to be conducted on the impact of the use of scientific management, its lasting effectiveness in New York City, and its continued usefulness at improving government activities. Given the Bureau’s development around the concept of efficient citizenship and its failure to implement the concept beyond the 1912 New York City school inquiry, research needs to be done on feasibility of the efficient citizen concept. Lastly, as was argued by Allen (1945), the impact of Bureau staff members who have made record-breaking contributions to the field have been left out of the texts about the Bureau. The existing research would benefit from review with consideration for the individual significance and impact of individual Bureau members over the short and long term.
References


