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Special Issue: Learning to Lobby

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Volume 4 Number 1



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# Interest Groups & Advocacy

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*Interest Groups & Advocacy* will engage broadly with the politics of interests. It will record and analyze how advocacy by groups, movements and lobbying professionals shapes policy, and it will address important debates about how such interests are mobilized and maintained. It will cast a wide net across politics and society to identify the forces, strategies, and tactics that determine policy change. Open to diverse methodologies, it welcomes studies that address theoretical issues, reports rigorous empirical work, and delivers insight on the range of change agents, and their behaviour and impact.

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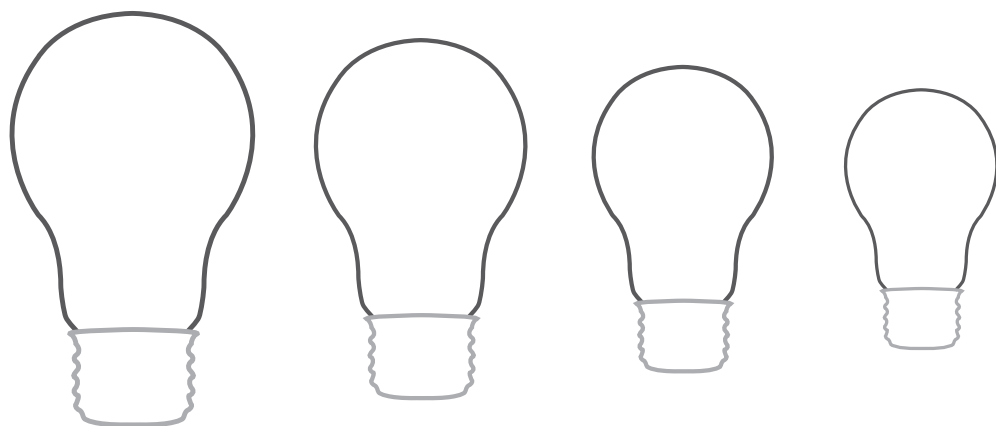
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## Editorial

# Learning to lobby

*Interest Groups & Advocacy* (2015) **4**, 1–6. doi:10.1057/iga.2014.22

We often hear – in scholarly work, in the mass media, and at practitioner conferences – of the ‘lobbying profession,’ but I argue (McGrath, 2005) that although lobbying is now a well-established occupation it still falls far short – everywhere – of having attained professional status. Jordan’s (1991) direct challenge could be asked with equal validity in any nation: ‘Lobbying in Britain may be increasingly professional in that more and more decision making rests on complicated arguments about non-obvious impacts of policies on particular clienteles. But is it a profession?’ (p. 41).

Among the key elements of any profession are: a set of common values; membership in strong representative organisations; adherence to professional norms; an intellectual tradition and body of knowledge; and technical skills acquired through professional training (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Cutting across several of these factors is the question of how lobbyists are educated and trained, in terms not only of the specific policy and process knowledge they need but also of the way in which they are socialized into the industry’s standards and expectations. In a classic text, Berry (1977, p. 92) noted that, ‘No one has interviewed the people who actually hire staff lobbyists or lobbyist entrepreneurs to ask them about what qualities they look for. It is entirely possible that employers have no clear idea either of what qualifies a person to be a lobbyist.’ We have some anecdotal insight into a number of the personal qualities and characteristics which an effective lobbyist appears to need (McGrath, 2006), but there is still very little systematic empirical evidence which might answer the question posed by Berry. Nor can we say with any certainty how best lobbyists or aspiring lobbyists can gain the skills, knowledge and qualities necessary for successful advocacy.

These are issues which the older and more traditional professions have already wrestled with and essentially resolved. Other industries have also been taking steps in the direction of professionalisation for some time. One closely related field, that of public relations, has been much more proactive in this area than has lobbying. The Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, for instance, publishes an occasional monograph series on ‘Teaching Public Relations’ ([www.aejmc.net/PR/teach.htm](http://www.aejmc.net/PR/teach.htm)). The Global Alliance

for Public Relations and Communication Management has been instrumental in the production of a number of reports on undergraduate and post-graduate curricula (Tench and Deflagbe, 2008; Toth and Aldoory, 2010; Commission on Public Relations Education, 2012), all of which build upon earlier studies (IPRA, 1982; Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006).

In addition, it is noticeable that other academic disciplines have engaged in much more vigorous debate than has the field of interest groups / lobbying over the content – and desirability – of a generally recognised core curriculum. Even if we look only at political science, we can find such discussions around EU studies (Rumford and Murray, 2003; Umbach and Scholl, 2003), public administration (Henry *et al*, 2009), international studies (Breuning and Quinn, 2011) and political economy (Stilwell, 2005), for example. Unfortunately, we see few signs to date of similar conversations taking place among scholars of interest groups and lobbying. Certainly, none have provided such a sustained contribution as has been made in the related field of public affairs by Fleisher (2001, 2003, 2007; Fleisher and Blair, 1999).

The contributions collected in this special issue reflect on the issues surrounding the education and training of lobbyists from a range of perspectives and experiences. The issue opens with a piece by Thomas Holyoke, Heath Brown and Timothy LaPira, who note that almost 90 per cent of registered lobbyists in Washington DC are over 35 years of age, and thus argue that specialist lobbying education is best suited to the (post)graduate level. Holyoke *et al* point to three broad areas which can be taught to aspiring lobbyists – knowledge (both of the political process and of policy domains), communication and messaging (such as how to most persuasively frame an argument), and relationship management (which for them includes the ethical standards lobbyists must follow). They conclude by outlining the topics which students might encounter in both a lobbying simulation and an overall Master's curriculum. The practical, real world, emphasis of their suggested programme is highlighted by the inclusion of a compulsory internship or practicum component.

Shifting from the United States to the Netherlands, Arco Timmermans' review of developments in public affairs there over the last 15 years connects university programmes with the process of professionalisation. One feature of this special issue is that it reflects our collective inability thus far to agree on terminology – so three of the articles contain 'lobbying' or 'lobbyist' in their title, while two refer instead to 'public affairs' and another deals with 'public policy advocacy'. This divide is mirrored geographically, with two of the three US-focused articles using 'lobbying', and two of the three EU-based articles preferring 'public affairs'. Here, Timmermans notes evidence that while 'lobbying' was increasingly used in the last century and became a more popular expression than 'public affairs' in the mid-1970s, that situation has more recently been in reverse with 'public affairs' gaining in usage. In the case of the Netherlands, the Dutch Association for Public Affairs (BVPA) which was loosely formed in 1999 and more formally established in 2002, has since grown to over 600 members. The goals of BVPA would be familiar to all similar

national associations in the field – to encourage professionalisation, to promote the lobbying industry and enhance its reputation – but the group has also taken an innovative step in collaborating with an university to establish and fund a Chair in Public Affairs, which Arco Timmermans holds. From this unique vantage point, Timmermans concludes from surveys of Dutch practitioners that a more systematic approach is needed to develop the skills, knowledge and competences required by lobbyists. He argues that our body of knowledge should be focused on three principal elements: strategic intelligence on policy issues and venues; the impact of social and political capital on trust and reputation; and the internal organisational embedding of public affairs. Until these components are built into interdisciplinary Master's programmes, Timmermans suggests that it will be problematic to make substantial progress on the professionalisation of the industry (including potentially the accreditation and licensing of practitioners).

Echoing, in a US context, Timmermans' call for more expansive engagement between academics and professionals, Patrick Griffin and James Thurber draw on their experience of having run American University's Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute (PAAI) for almost a quarter of a century. Outlining their curriculum, Griffin and Thurber draw attention to how practicing lobbyists can be used as more than simply occasional guest speakers, by serving as mentors to groups of students as they develop practical assignments to formulate lobbying campaigns. Indeed, the whole PAAI curriculum is built around what Griffin and Thurber term 'The Campaign Mindset', in that each module focuses on a component of a comprehensive lobbying strategy, aiming to produce ultimately a multidimensional and dynamic advocacy effort capable of achieving policy change in the real world. Importantly, in addition to imparting knowledge about policymaking and technical skills for effective advocacy, Griffin and Thurber recognise that lobbying is an art, which apprentices can only fully understand through exposure to more experienced and seasoned craftsmen and women.

Returning to Europe, the next article in this special issue reveals how a successful public affairs programme in Austria has been developed. Julia Wippersberg, Nicole Wagner and Klaus Lojka offer an overview of their model of a part-time, two-year, Master's course. Although many such programmes around the world provide a blend of academic theory and professional expertise, the focus is often primarily on the practical; here, though, the course is explicitly designed with a very thorough theoretical foundation. So, the entire first year of the programme is dominated by topics such as communication theory, economics, sociology, psychology, history, politics and international relations, law and business, before moving on in the second year to the lobbying tactics and techniques which are more common to other programmes. The establishment of this course marks a significant point in the progress towards professionalisation in Austria, and interestingly (even, unusually) students must undertake an entrance exam (including writing a lobbying position paper) in order to be accepted onto the programme.



We next return to a US perspective this time one offered by a practitioner. Howard Marlowe, a two-time former president of the American League of Lobbyists (now renamed the Association of Government Relations Professionals (AGRP)), regards a core body of knowledge as taught by reputable educational programmes as essential if lobbying is to advance to professional status. He describes the content and purpose of the AGRP's Lobbying Certificate Program that has run since 2006, and suggests a novel route by which this course – and others offered at university level – could potentially be recognised by Congress, with successful completion required of all those lobbyists who must register under current disclosure legislation. Marlowe notes that someone who works as a barber in Washington must attend a prescribed course, pass exams, and undertake continuing education throughout their career in order to be licensed to offer their services to the public. Not so for a Washington lobbyist.

The final article in this special issue (and the most empirical), by Marco Althaus, takes up the theme of what competences and knowledge lobbyists need to possess, in the German context. He begins by examining the various entry routes into the industry (including apprenticeship models and traineeships), and goes on to analyse the skills requested in job ads placed by lobbying employers (associations, companies and consultancies). Althaus sees lobbying as essentially boundary spanning, a blend of art and science, and finds little consensus across the industry on even the most basic terminology. His research provides some of the most concrete evidence we have to date on the human capital dimension of the lobbying industry, and could usefully be replicated in other nations.

The efforts of all the authors included here to produce their work to a relatively strict deadline are much appreciated, as indeed are those of the authors whose submitted articles could not be included. Thanks also to those who reviewed submissions for this special issue: Steve Billet, Justin Fisher, Phil Harris, Ron Hrebenar, Grant Jordan, Peter Koppl, Bird Loomis, David Lowery, Christine Mahoney, Kevin Moloney, Danny Moss, Gill Morris, Tony Nownes, Ian Somerville, Clive Thomas and Stuart Thomson.

This special issue can only accomplish so much in itself, but the editors and contributors offer it as a starting point for a more sustained conversation between academics and practitioners over the coming years. For myself, I regard the professionalisation of the lobbying industry as the single most fundamental question with which the industry has to engage. No fundamental element of the public policy-making process can expect to survive unscathed indefinitely if it is broadly regarded by the public as illegitimate. In its annual survey of perceptions about the honesty and ethics of various professions, Gallup (2008, 2013) generally finds lobbyists at the bottom of the list – in 2013, only 6 per cent rated lobbyists as 'high' or 'very high' for ethical standards compared with 82 per cent for nurses, and in 2008 lobbyists hit a record across all professions with 64 per cent saying that their integrity was 'low' or 'very low'. Similarly, a 2014 *Vanity Fair* poll saw lobbyists top the list (with 26 per cent) of the 'greediest' professions.





The only way in which lobbying can achieve greater public legitimacy is for the industry to make progress towards greater professionalisation (McGrath, 2005). That encompasses a wide agenda – including more transparency and accountability, effective professional associations, a greater willingness by lobbyists to educate the public about the virtues of interest representation, the articulation of a common set of professional norms and values. One crucial element in the professional edifice is certainly the development of recognised higher education courses and qualifications. No consensus yet exists as to what a lobbying curriculum should contain, or how academic content and experiential learning can be balanced. We continue to debate whether lobbying skills even can be taught (Goldman, 2012) – although the authors included in this special issue all believe that they can. The path to professionalisation depends upon greater dialogue taking place between the academic and professional communities. One useful advance would be to establish an international association bringing together lobbyists’ associations and academics who research and teach lobbying, but that first requires some entrepreneurs with seed funding to get such a group off the ground. Each of us, though, scholars and practitioners alike, can individually contribute by giving voice to our own thoughts and perspectives – in articles and conference papers, in departmental curriculum meetings and in professional groups. If this special issue can help stimulate increased discussion around the education and training of lobbyists, it will have played a useful role.

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## Original Article

# Learnable skills, or unteachable instinct? What can and what cannot be taught in the lobbying profession

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**Abstract** In this article, we make the case that there is a critical set of knowledge, skills and abilities that can be taught to pre- and early-career lobbyists at the graduate professional training level. We acknowledge that, as with any profession, there are intrinsic personal qualities and life experiences that improve the ability of lobbyists to represent their clients and contribute to the policy process. Yet, we also identify three basic areas of lobbying in the literature that can structure a curriculum to prepare prospective professional lobbyists to be effective and ethical advocates for their clients' interests. First, recent research on interest group politics and lobbying can offer students and practitioners insight into the structure and dynamics of lobbying communities. Second, the literature highlights three useful kinds of knowledge – political process, substantive policy and analytic – that can be systematically taught. Third, the consensus among political scientists that lobbying plays primarily an informational role implies that students should master oral and written communication strategies for effective advocacy. And finally, best practices in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders in the policy world can be modeled. We then recommend a curriculum that offers training in these areas through a combination of seminars, simulations and a practicum experience that may be delivered in person, online or through a hybrid course.

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‘It’s all about good instincts, and instincts can never be taught’, said veteran Washington lobbyist Mike House of the prominent firm Hogan Lovells when asked by a *Washington Post* reporter whether lobbying can be taught (Goldman, 2012). We do not know how widespread Mr House’s belief is in the lobbying community, but we suspect it is widely held by practitioners of a profession so dependent on good people skills and instincts for political combat. Yet somebody must believe that some part of the lobbying business can be taught because there seems to be a small, but growing, industry issuing degrees and certificates in lobbying and political management. Washington-based universities offer training programs, as do professional societies like the Public Affairs Council, the American Bar Association, the Congressional Management Foundation, the Association of Government Relations Professionals, the Digital Advocacy Institute and the American Association of Political Consultants. Presumably the people running these programs, and the people and employers paying money to enroll in them, must believe that something about lobbying can be taught. What might it be? In this article we offer an answer.

Before we get started, though, there are three caveats. First, we do not believe that everything a student needs for a successful lobbying career, or advocacy career for those preferring the arguably broader term, can be taught in the classroom. We have no doubt the Mike Houses of the world are right in the sense that experience, as much as training, is the key to success, just as it is in any profession. But as political scientists who study the influence industry, who have led earlier lives in and around this industry and who actually teach the subject of interest groups and lobbying at the undergraduate and graduate levels, we have good reason to believe that many aspects of lobbying can be taught. On the basis of our own experiences and conversations with practitioners we know, we argue that, yes, much of the profession of lobbying can be taught; just not quite all of it. Just as a fish does not know it is surrounded by water, we suggest that even the most seasoned lobbyists can learn a great deal by taking a step back to understand recent advances in the empirical study of lobbying and interest group politics.

Second, when we say teaching ‘lobbying’, we mean more than just teaching students about legally defined lobbying, which is going to the capital in designer clothes to meet quietly with lawmakers and staff. We would be doing our students a terrible disservice if we limited ourselves to artificial statutory definitions of who qualifies as a lobbyist under the current registration rules (see LaPira and Thomas, 2013). Of course we mean the contract lobbyist at a major K Street firm representing a handful of Fortune 500 companies as much as we mean an activist-turned-lobbyist working on a shoestring nonprofit budget. Yet we also mean the professional advocate who transforms an interest group’s membership into a well-oiled grassroots machine with targeted messaging, phone calls, marches and angry visits to district offices and town hall meetings (see Kollman, 1998). We mean the regulatory expert who focuses exclusively on the rule-making process inside a single, obscure agency (see Golden, 1998). We mean the coalition broker who can identify all of



the organized interests with a stake in an issue and negotiate common ground among them to form a powerful lobbying coalition (see Hula, 1999). We even mean the public relations consultants so crucial to our new era of technology-driven politics (Lathrop, 2009; Parti, 2014), who can reframe an issue in a compelling way in the early morning, get it before members and supporters in the late morning, connect them to their proper members of Congress in the early afternoon, jam the phone lines, email servers and Twitter accounts by later afternoon, and go on to an evening fundraiser knowing they have fundamentally re-shaped the way a sleepy issue is understood in Washington DC. There is no such thing as the model lobbyist; rather, there are varieties of lobbyists. Our aim, then, is to envision a curriculum that addresses what is common across them, but that is flexible enough to allow students to specialize.

Finally, we know that the chances of any student, graduate or undergraduate, getting their degree and going right into a high-powered lobbying position is not particularly realistic. Freshly graduated bachelors-degree holders do not just walk into lobbying, any more than a new graduate of the biology department can expect to perform surgery. Of the roughly 30 000 people in Washington DC who more or less were lobbyists (even though it rarely says that on their business cards) in 2012, only 12 per cent are younger than 35 (Rehr, 2012). Roughly 52 per cent have gone through the so-called revolving door from government to the lobbying industry; among them, 48 per cent have held two or more positions in government to prepare them for careers in lobbying (LaPira and Thomas, 2014). Indeed, undergraduate political science programs are arguably not in positions to certify lobbyists like law schools prepare students to practice law. Like most liberal arts degree programs, and unlike graduate level professional schools, producing students with well-rounded sets of skills suitable for a variety of jobs, political science tries to train students with skills useful in all political fields, which perhaps explains why most departments have ‘Interest Groups Politics’ courses rather than ‘Lobbying 101’ courses and certificate programs. In other words, what we can do is to prepare our students well enough to get those jobs that can lead to the lobbying field, and develop specific, targeted training programs informed by academic political science as part of a graduate-level professional degree program to better prepare them after they earn some experience. In making this argument, we assert that lobbying is a type of profession with a growing body of knowledge and increasing specialized training.

## What Perhaps Cannot be Taught

In response to the assertion that lobbying cannot be taught because it is all about ‘instincts’, it is hard to imagine in the twenty-first century that *any* profession can be learned on the job without the benefit of a university-level education. There is no reason to believe a lobbyist is that different from the banker and investor, laboratory scientist, attorney, military officer, health care practitioner or administrator,

architect, civil engineer and so forth. Jobs in these professions cannot be earned without significant higher education; in some professions, their own accrediting bodies (like the bar association) do not allow it. Perhaps nineteenth century influence peddlers like William Chandler, Grenville Dodge and self-styled King of the Lobby Sam Ward could succeed in Washington by just feeling their way through a situation (aided perhaps by a little bribery), but today it is far too large, complex and sophisticated, with too many rules and too many rivals for any single person to make it up as they go. Even in the 1920s, political scientist Pendleton Herring (1929) found that the capital city's lobbying corps had become highly professionalized, employing sophisticated strategies and tools to win political influence. Politics today is big business requiring a big education, and we argue that good instincts are as much the result of good training as they are experience or any natural ability to attune oneself to other people.

Having said that, we recognize that in lobbying, as in all other professions, experience plays a significant role, and so too does personality. Experience allows a lobbyist to make quick decisions because they have either made similar decisions before, or have been in the room when they were made. Much of lobbying is about relationship building, and the experienced lobbyist knows which lawmaker is likely to be receptive to a persuasive argument and who should be left alone. Experience helps a lobbyist effectively formulate strategy for an advocacy campaign because many of the circumstances confronting clients are ones the lobbyist has witnessed before.

Experience also teaches a lobbyist about the idiosyncrasies of the people he or she must deal with in order to wield influence. A student can be taught how important the House Rules Committee is for getting anything done in Congress, and, given what they were taught, may feel that the committee chair ought to be responsive to information regarding the constituency the lobbyist represents. Yet experience may also tell the lobbyist that the chair is a miserable bastard who wants nothing to do with you and the people you represent, even though on paper he or she should. Best to stay away from such people. On the other hand, from working in the field you may learn that this same cantankerous committee chair changes his or her tune when swigging single-malt scotch or when asked about how the children are doing in school. Yet the theme that emerged at the 2014 conference by the Digital Advocacy Institute assessing all of the new advocacy technology was that 'advocacy even in this digital age was still fundamentally about cultivating and building upon the interpersonal relationships. The work of digital advocacy, then, is the same as it was in the analog era. Or the horse and buggy era for that matter' (Nehls, 2014). In other words, technology comes and goes, and so do the people advocates have to work with, but the basic methods of lobbying remain the same. Any fundamental rules undergirding how a profession is practiced can be taught, it is just a matter of figuring out what they are and how best to teach them.

As for personality, some of this can be overcome with good training and determination. Nothing, though, can make up for an individual who is fundamentally unable to keep his or her mouth shut when necessary, who is unable to be anything but rude or say the socially awkward thing, or who cannot look another person in the



eye when speaking to them. The professor may advise such a student to avoid the lobbying profession, or any people-oriented and sales-oriented professions (lobbying is basically a sales job).

## What Can be Taught

So what about the lobbying business can be taught? How much of what *appears* to be natural talent is actually something that can be learned at the university or in professional training seminars? Drawing on our own research, our experiences in the field interviewing lobbyists, talking to both practitioners and other teachers, and even drawing on our own personal memories of past lives we spent working in politics rather than teaching it, we identify three basic areas of the lobbying profession that we believe can be taught. Specifically, we identify three different sets of skills or abilities essential to the business of lobbying that we strongly believe can be taught: knowledge (which we sub-divide into specific types), communication and messaging and relationship building.<sup>1</sup>

### Knowledge

While serving in the US Senate, Kennedy (1956) was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, ‘Lobbyists are in many cases expert technicians and capable of explaining complex and difficult subjects in a clear, understandable fashion’. Kennedy’s perception of the work of lobbyists suggests that the most obvious contribution of the classroom to students wishing to be lobbyists is knowledge, both factual information and knowledge on how to leverage what they know to advance their careers. The authors of the Constitution deliberately created a complex form of government, and each subsequent generation has contributed something toward complicating the lawmaking and implementing process. Ironically, this benefits lobbyists *and* those who teach lobbying because it makes knowledge regarding the political process valuable.

We cannot teach anything about the idiosyncratic personalities of the people involved in lawmaking any more than our colleagues in business can prepare students for any variety of quirky CEOs, but we can teach a great deal about the structures of the three branches of government and how officials there work within a complex web of rules and norms. We label this *process learning*. The more lobbyists know how policies are really made and executed, the better they are at influencing them and the more they are valued by others wanting to be influential. For instance, why is the House Rules Committee so incredibly important to the passage of legislation? How does the Senate filibuster really work and what does it mean to say the Senate Majority Leader fills amendment trees? What is the difference

between authorizations and appropriations? How do new members of Congress get on the committees they want? What is the importance of regulatory scoping hearings? Why might you want to influence an agency's record of decision? Who is in charge of appointing key agency officials during a transition of presidential power (see Brown, 2012)? How do you know the right way to read the vast *Federal Register*? All of this and much more can be taught and certainly incorporated into a curriculum.

How to comply with lobbying laws and regulations also can be taught, and is a part of process learning. Several professional organizations already do this, such as the Association of Government Relations Professionals, but for graduate-level lobbying programs classes can be taught regarding compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA), the Honest Leadership and Openness in Government Act (HLOGA) and various executive branch regulations regarding lobbying and contact with government officials. It would actually be a worthwhile thing to do, considering that a study a couple of years ago by Rehr (2012, pp. 6–7) found that about 37 per cent of lobbyists surveyed in Washington DC knew next to nothing about what LDA and HLOGA required of them. An additional reason for this is to make certain courses in lobbying do not drift into cold cynicism. Lobbying regulations may not be perfect, but they can provide students with an entry point into a discussion of ethical norms and expectations about professional behavior.

We can also teach students quite a bit about specific areas of public policy – what we call *policy learning*. It is in the interests of would-be lobbyists to take these courses. Lobbyists are valuable to lawmakers and other lobbyists because they are experts on particular areas of public policy, as well as how government works (Hansen, 1991; Wright, 1996). Many spend large portions of their careers working in one or two policy areas (LaPira *et al*, 2014), most of which are exceedingly complex, with intricate statutes which are then implemented by codes of administrative rules that would make Tolstoy feel inadequate.<sup>2</sup> University-based courses in different areas of policy would give students a leg up in the job market. Faculty experts on environmental policy may not be able to teach students all the facets of environmental laws like the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), but they can broadly show how these laws work and why listing species as threatened and endangered under ESA is a powerful tool, or the important role that environmental impact statements and reports mandated by NEPA play in starting and resolving environmental conflicts.

Because lawmakers (and their staff) rarely have time to learn much about laws like ESA and NEPA and how they are implemented, they often find themselves in the uncomfortable position of casting votes on bills amending these policies without fully understanding what they are doing and how it might impact their constituents (Kingdon, 1973). To cope with this unknown, as well as their cognitive limitations, they build relationships with lobbyists whom they can call on for advice regarding these policy domains (Hansen, 1991). Learning something about an area of policy,





presumably one interesting to the student, thus becomes as important for a lobbying curriculum as learning about the rules and norms of Washington. This also opens doors to incorporating lobbying education into other courses in political science and across university curricula where departments of education, criminal justice, and health sciences and business schools teach about public policy. In addition, business schools may find value in teaching lobbying, especially as corporate managers need to learn that businesses are only successful in politics when they earn broad public support (Smith, 2000). Moreover, corporate managers need to be prepared to deal with significant changes in how their interests are represented; corporations once relied heavily on associations to lobby on their behalf, whereas more recently they have become much more likely to establish their own presence (Drutman, 2015).

We also know that the research processes and data interpretation have become increasingly important in advocacy and lobbying (Hall and Deardorff, 2006). Lobbying firms increasingly hire economists and statisticians to craft the set of facts they use to advocate for policy change. If lobbyists and their research staff are doing policy analysis for members of Congress, political science departments may need to boost the research methods and quantitative reasoning parts of their curriculum to improve what we call *analytical learning*.<sup>3</sup> Masters programs, in particular, may be ripe for courses focusing on the kind of applied data analysis useful for lobbying, with an emphasis on the graphical presentation of analysis and how to produce so-called ‘infographics’ that visually represent complex ideas.

Different kinds of knowledge are not just a suite of tools lobbyists use in their work, they are the products lobbyists sell. Knowledge is power, and whoever has it is valuable to others. Political science professors have long known that the truth about access and influence in politics is that lawmakers grant it to lobbyists who know things they do not know or are otherwise difficult and costly to learn. Indeed, the whole theory of access and influence in politics is built on the assumption that lobbyists know more about structure, content and process than lawmakers, and as lawmakers need to know these things they invite lobbyists into their offices (and their lives) to act as counselors (Milbrath, 1963; Hansen, 1991; Wright, 1996). This is why new members of Congress tend to hire certain types of lobbyists as their chiefs of staff (Farnam, 2011). Smart, knowledgeable lobbyists also attract the attention of other lobbyists. To the extent that coalitions and networks are important in Washington, and it seems they are, individual lobbyists are more attractive to other potential coalition partners if they bring to the table information the others lack but badly desire (Hula, 1999). Thus it should come as no surprise that we believe most of lobbying can be taught. The more students focus on learning the intricacies of government structure and functioning, the intricacies of specific areas of policy, and the art and use of data analysis and presentation, and the better job faculty do at teaching it, the better job prospects students are going to have when they enter the advocacy job market.

## Communication and messaging skills

The second area of lobbying that we believe can be taught to a significant degree is communication. Lobbying is not only about being a trusted provider of information; it is also about formulating and delivering effective messages. Those who win political conflicts are the ones who do the best job at framing issues, presenting them to lawmakers and the public in ways that appear sensible and consistent with broadly held social values (Baumgartner *et al*, 2009; Tarrow, 2011). With the Washington community becoming ever more crowded with advocates, effective framing and messaging is an increasingly crucial skill to have. A whole industry of public relations consultants is emerging to do it, to a considerable extent pushing aside traditional lobbyists who are more comfortable in smoky backrooms (Lathrop, 2009). Fortunately most of these skills can be taught.

Part of what we need to teach, of course, is basic writing competency, a skill even many undergraduates do not master prior to graduate school. Good grammar and the ability to write clearly and concisely, sometimes with carefully crafted nuances, are absolutely essential to the success of any advocacy campaign. If a political message is long, awkward, rambling and otherwise painful to decipher, it will never be read. A few years back the Congressional Management Foundation calculated that each congressional office receives about a foot and a half of paper a day in reports and letters, and countless emails and communications from social media on top of that (Goldschmidt and Ochreiter, 2008). Only the most persuasive and catchy writers using good grammar are going to get their messages through to lawmakers and their overworked staff. Students *must* learn to write well.

Concise messaging strategy is also a must, and can also be taught. Time is a precious resource in politics, and the less time lawmakers and staff have to spend learning what a lobbyist is trying to say, the more likely they are to read a message and remember it. Not all classroom writing has to be long term papers, which is good news for professors who typically do not enjoy reading them any more than students enjoy writing them. Courses in political communication and public relations often emphasize very short writing assignments.<sup>4</sup> Get to your point fast, with as few complicated words as possible. Leave a clear message for your reader and then end the communication. Try even to fit it in a message sent on Twitter.

Not only must lobbyists have good grammar and the ability to write concisely under pressure, they must also be able to write persuasively. Of course the entire point of lobbying is to persuade another to take an action you, and the people you represent, desire. A good message needs to let the lawmaker know quickly that the action you wish them to take is in their interests, perhaps because it will endear them to a constituency crucial to re-election, or one crucial to election to higher office (Fitch, 2010). It must also be a message the lawmaker, or even the lobbyist if it is hard to get lawmakers to listen, can take to the public.



Writing must also connect audiences. Much of the public tends to be uninformed and quiescent, so lawmakers pay them little attention (Arnold, 1990). Part of a lobbyist's job is to make certain their group members or clients do not fall into this category. They need to keep the people they represent informed and engaged. Lobbyists, after all are really just professional go-betweens, agents acting on behalf of principals in the public, even if they often do so with a significant amount of autonomy and discretion (Ainsworth and Sened, 1993; Kersh, 2002). Thus a good message should not only move lawmakers to want to serve the constituency the lobbyist represents, but to get members excited about pressuring the lawmaker into doing it. Most of this can be taught. However, are we prepared to be the ones teaching it? The writing norms learned in a doctoral program may not overlap with the expectations of a lobbying firm. Political scientists might consider re-training to improve our teaching of professional writing. In other field, such as law and medicine, there is a long tradition of mandatory continuing education to update skills. Just as we maintain our methodological skills with short courses on the newest statistical techniques, the same approach may be needed to better teach about effective writing for lobbying.

Good political communication and messaging is not just content and quality, it is also effective targeting and delivery (Fitch, 2009). Generally speaking, people involved in interest groups are more likely to contact their lawmakers than people who are not (Holyoke, 2013), but some methods of communicating are more effective than others under particular circumstances and the means of delivery often shapes the type of message delivered (Lathrop, 2009). When is it best to use Facebook or other types of social media? When to use email? When to have members and clients go old-school and write letters and make phone calls, and when to actually bring people to Washington for personal meetings or hold a 'lobby day'? Even e-petitions are becoming somewhat more precise in terms of what constituencies are mobilized and which lawmakers their opinions are targeted at (Nehls, 2014).

If an issue important to association members is about to be voted on, the lobbyist may want to quickly tell members, and provide them with a message they, in turn, can send to their representative in Congress through the internet. If possible, the lobbyist can help members personalize the message before they email it, post it to Facebook, or tweet it because personalized messages are far more effective than duplicate messages (Fitch, 2010). If the lobbyist's group or clients are known and trusted by the legislator, his or her staff may regularly monitor the group's website or Facebook site, which makes communicating this way quick and easy. Many congressional offices have a staff person who spends at least some of his or her time going through the Facebook sites of interest groups the office considers important to read.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, if an organization is trying to gain the attention of lawmakers because they are new to politics or are otherwise marginalized, their lobbyist may be

well advised to stay old-school and encourage members or clients to telephone their lawmakers or to visit Capitol Hill as these make a personal impression on lawmakers. If all else fails, the lobbyist may want to stage an old-fashioned protest. What faculty can do for students is teach them which method of message delivery is most appropriate given the political circumstances surrounding an issue. There is a growing body of research on the practical dimensions of digital politics and organizing on which we can base this instruction (see Karpf, 2012; Han, 2014).

Another aspect of communications and messaging that can be taught is the value of follow up. Grassroots advocacy, real or virtual, is generally used to get the attention of lawmakers so that a foundation is created allowing the lobbyist or a few especially motivated members to meet with key lawmakers (Kollman, 1998; Nehls, 2014). That means lobbyists for the interest must personally follow-up while the message communicated from the grassroots is still relatively fresh in the minds of targeted lawmakers. Even more entrenched interests not needing large-scale grassroots advocacy will still often signal to a lawmaker's office that an issue is important to them by having a prominent member of the organization, who is also a prominent person in the lawmaker's constituency, call first.

This at least suggests that when it comes to targeting messages, it is often best to have interest group members and clients target their own elected officials. Showing the constituent connection always helps a lobbyist make a case because members of Congress at least say that nothing persuades them like communications from constituents, especially when that communication contains a personal story from the constituent connected to the issue at hand (Fitch, 2010). Students can be taught these new kinds of best practices in messaging, just as they can be taught other little bits of wisdom. For instance, they can be taught to stay away from certain kinds of allegedly grassroots-oriented technology, like the e-petition companies which do nothing more than send worthless identical messages to Congress and may be more interested in selling the contact information of the people who sign such petitions (Fitch, 2009; Shih, 2011).

### **Relationship building**

Although knowledge and communication can be taught, the third area, relationship building, starts to straddle the line between what can and cannot be taught. The value of relationships, and how to maintain them, can be taught, but some of what is needed for knowing how to build relationships perhaps cannot be because it is too much a part of an individual's personality. Who the lobbyist knows is very much a part of measuring her value in Washington (Blanes i Vidal *et al*, 2012). Perhaps more than anything, a lobbyist's market value, especially if they work for a private, for-hire lobbying firm, is their portfolio of relationships. They are retained by individuals, corporations and interest groups, often for significant amounts of money, because



they have built relationships with powerful, influential individuals in Washington. By doing lots of little favors for lawmakers, such as connecting them with important constituencies, supplying valuable information, helping plot strategy and being generally useful, a lobbyist builds a reciprocal relationship based on trust and mutual need and even a sense of obligation (Wright, 1996; Susman, 2008). The danger, which we can warn students of, is that these relationships can end up being more important to lobbyists than the people they are supposed to represent (Holyoke, 2011).

So what can we teach students about relationship building? Arguably, five elements of relationship building are teachable. First, what can be taught is that relationships with lawmakers are not like real, personal relationships or even many relationships in business. They are built on mutual need, the ability of each person to provide the other with something they have to possess to achieve their goals. Second, relationships are targeted, and lobbyists must know with which lawmakers they need to build relationships to get their work done. A particular lawmaker should be targeted because the lobbyist has something to offer the lawmaker, who, in turn, will offer the lobbyist a crucial point of access to the lawmaking superstructure. Students can be taught, to some extent, to identify which lawmakers might be responsive to the information they can offer, and who have an electoral-based interest in aiding the constituency the lobbyist represents. Or perhaps the lobbyist and lawmaker have a mutual interest in the same areas of public policy.

Students can be taught to identify these links. Just as with communication and messaging, they can be taught best practices in identifying targets and how to approach them. They can even be taught to respect a lawmaker's precious time, learning the best time to approach a lawmaker, like when an issue important to both the lobbyist and lawmaker is about to come up, and when to stay away, such as when there is no chance the issue of concern to you both is going to come up. Lawmakers and their staff rarely have time for small talk, except perhaps at fundraisers.

Third, it is vital that any student who hopes to have a career in lobbying better learn to at least look like they are enjoying spending time with other people. Sometimes time spent socializing for the interest group needs to be balanced with time spent with friends or family. Even if going to a fundraiser in the evening is the last thing you want to do and you are sick of small talk with other people, it still needs to be done. To be seen by the lawmaker shows that you value the legislator, and helps build the sense of obligation. The same goes for calling other people to also come to the fundraiser and give. And if you feel conspicuous because the smile on your face at the event is fake, take comfort in knowing that you are almost certainly not the only one!

Fourth, nearly every student we teach will do an internship or practicum, often more than one. The first professional relationships can be built during these semester long experiences, but students may need to be reminded of this during advising. Reinforcing the long-term benefits of building a professional network can complement teaching about relationship-building in class.

Finally, the ethics of relationship building, such as they are, can be taught. A curriculum on professional lobbying, like law or medicine, must incorporate a code of ethics, such as the one adopted by the American Government Relations Professionals.<sup>6</sup> What can we teach about ethical behavior? Not lying, the most basic rule of all in lobbying (Jankowsky, 2006), can certainly be taught (though it might surprise students to hear it). Similarly, students can be taught the importance of confidentiality. If they understand the importance of reciprocity and mutual need defining the lobbyist–lawmaker relationship, then the crucial importance of honesty ought to be self-evident. They can also be taught that there is a crucial exception to the confidentiality rule of the lawmaker–lobbyist relationship – the lobbyist is, first and foremost, an agent of an organized interest or client employing them and that they, not the lawmakers, are a lobbyist’s first responsibility. This may mean the ethical lobbyist cannot promise the lawmaker confidentiality if something comes up crucial to the people the lobbyist represents, even if the relationships furthering their professional ambitions are better served by prioritizing the lawmaker’s needs. Of course good lobbyists make sure there is never a conflict between what their members and clients know and what lawmakers knows so there is no confidentiality problem. Mastering this balancing act, though, is something one has to learn on the job; it cannot be easily taught.

In addition, teaching standards of ethics should focus on the role many lobbyists play in raising and contributing campaign money, at least in the American national setting. Students can examine the empirical research on the role and impact of campaign finance to learn that evidence suggests its impact to be, at best, mixed (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998). Moreover, studies show that very few lobbyists actually engage on campaign finance activities, and those who do are partisan (Koger and Victor, 2009), whereas most industries vary in their partisan distribution of campaign money (Bonica, 2014). In short, campaign finance matters less in lobbying than popular imagination believes it to. Yet, the overlap between lobbying and campaign finance can raise significant ethical questions. A lobbyist, as a professional advocate, would be unethical if he or she did not use all of the available tools, including strategic campaign donations, if it will advance members’ or clients’ interests. A curriculum on lobbying should explain the *status quo* that money is a widely accepted legally permitted tool, and give students the knowledge they need to determine for themselves if using the tactic is appropriate for the interests they represent.

Moreover, ethical training ought to address the need to balance the public interest with their clients’ specialized interests. After exploring conceptually whether there is such a thing as an objective common good or public interest, future lobbyists can learn how it may be no more their responsibility for achieving it than it is for a lawyer to see his or her client convicted when they, in fact, are guilty. Put another way, just as an ethical lawyer must see that a client’s due process is followed if she or he knows they are guilty, so too must an ethical lobbyist vigorously advocate the interests of



the group of citizens, nonprofits or businesses that are paying the lobbyist to petition the government for a redress of grievances as guaranteed under the First Amendment of the US Constitution (Allard, 2008; Holyoke, 2015). The ethical lobbyist is a faithful advocate for the political interests of others, not the interests of the entire polity. A republican form of government lays the responsibility of determining the public interest on elected officials, not contractually obligated lobbyists.

## Value of Simulations

The classroom is not only a place for learning knowledge and information, but also a place for developing skills, and one way of doing that is through simulated experience. If the job is to teach one to be a lobbyist, then it makes sense to practice being a lobbyist, even if everyone is still in the classroom. Dr Alan Rosenblatt (who was interviewed for this article) had for 20 years used simulations to teach digital advocacy to graduate students, practitioners and even undergraduates.<sup>7</sup> Significant parts of his courses involve requiring students to design whole lobbying campaigns from start to finish (at least to the extent that any lobbying enterprise has a start and finish) within a political context he provides. Though specific simulation assignment prompts ought to be tailored to the course and faculty members' preferences, some possible modules may include (and are certainly not limited to):

- Process learning:
  - recruiting clients for a lobbying firm;
  - seeking policy priority inputs from senior managers and boards of directors;
  - learning advanced budgeting, legislative and bureaucratic procedures;
- Policy learning:
  - determining lobbying strategies and identifying stakeholders, such as coalition partners, primary competitors and policy champions inside government;
  - conducting detailed policy histories and detailing policy alternatives and arguments;
  - Expanding lobbying strategies to include:
    - policy implementation beyond the legislative setting;
    - policy development at the state and local or international institutional settings;
- Analytical learning:
  - collecting, organizing and analyzing relevant data to support lobbying strategy;
  - drafting 'white papers', and preparing testimony for public hearings;
  - reporting results and recommending future actions back to the client or to senior organizational managers.

Hypothetical assignments introduce students to the complexities of a lobbying campaign and can also serve as a professional portfolio when they enter the lobbying and advocacy job market. Although simulations often cannot capture the unexpected and unpredictable swings of political warfare, they nonetheless give the student a chance to put all of the pieces together to see how different strategies under different circumstances might bring a favorable conclusion.

## Curriculum Thoughts

There are several good textbooks on interest groups and lobbying that are written at a level accessible to undergraduates and graduates (for example, Berry and Wilcox, 2008; Lowery and Brasher, 2011; Nownes, 2012; Holyoke, 2014), and several good collections of scholars' work on various aspects of the topic are similarly accessible (for example, Petracca, 1992; Cigler and Loomis, 2012; Grossmann, 2014). Yet these are only starting points in a lobbying curriculum, texts that give broad overviews of how interest group politics works. A curriculum that teaches the skills needed for lobbying and similar forms of political management and consulting needs to go much further than these. So what recommendations can we make any regarding the curricula based on what we have presented here? We offer three thoughts which suggest an approach, but not a steadfast instructional rule. First, actually teaching the profession of lobbying is best focused at the graduate level, supplemented later by continuing education programs. Undergraduate education is often still covering the fundamentals of American government and research methods, mainly what we called earlier process learning and analytical learning, and it is doubtful that even upper-level classes on interest groups, lobbying, Congress and the executive branch could cover everything in enough detail for students to really be qualified to be even an apprentice lobbyist. Lobbying can be incorporated into those courses, but likely not taught as a stand-alone course as at the graduate level. A student who excels in these broader classes at the undergraduate level, however, should be in a good place to study the advanced material in a graduate program, probably one that really specializes in teaching lobbying, advocacy and interest group management. This is especially the case if the undergraduate student supplemented their experience with a political internship.

Second, in graduate courses, a curriculum following our three basic topics should work. Traditional graduate lecture courses or in-depth seminars have a role to play simply because there is a lot of information and knowledge which still needs to be provided. Of course that also means having faculty on staff who are themselves specialists in the three branches of government as well as lobbying, organizational management, and communications and public relations. Public relations courses on the crafting and delivery of messages are also a must, and this includes a course on





effective use of social media. We hope that a less tradition-bound, set-in-her-ways professor can be found for such instruction. University curricula are probably not full of courses on relationship building, but an innovative faculty member in a program on political management might be in a good position to take this on. All of this should be supplemented with simulations, and a good capstone course would require students to design and execute through simulation an entire lobbying campaign. Such capstones need not be static assignments, rather we can enliven the simulation with dynamic elements such as where the professor throws surprise barriers at the student to be overcome across the course of the semester. Finally, graduate-level internships for full-time students or practicum experiences for working professionals would be a must, especially because they could lead to actual placement at the end of the graduate program.

Finally, it is, of course, worth pointing out that experience and a university education can go together, as exemplified by the internship. Working for a semester, or even just a summer, gives a student significant exposure to the intricacies of the rules and folkways of Washington DC, and even some insight into the different personalities of key lawmakers on Capitol Hill.<sup>8</sup> Whether it is interning in a congressional office, with one of the parties, or in an actual lobbying or consulting firm or interest group, such opportunities provide students with enormous insight into how the political system works, and may even provide them with a few crucial contacts so necessary for achieving much of anything in Washington, including the landing of one's first job.

Still, it is always fun to speculate about just what a lobbying-focused curriculum would look like. Courses would focus on the structure and function of institutional politics at the national, state and local and supra-national levels of governance. Emphasis would be placed on the idea that the institutional context may determine the degree that lobbying is relationship-dependent and professionalized. A curriculum leading to a master's degree or a more condensed graduate-level certificate program would most likely be training people already in the lobbying profession, and could focus on:

- Interest group politics
- Legislative politics
- Executive branch politics
- Judicial politics
- Course specializing in an area of policy (one or two of these, the second replacing the second internship or practicum course)

Courses emphasizing communication and messaging might be:

- Writing in public relations
- Political communication and advocacy
- Communicating through digital technology and social media

Courses helping students understand, and actually build, political relationships are a blend of experience-based internships or practicums along with actual classes:

- Political management
- Internship or Practicum (one or two of these, the second in place of a course specializing in a policy area)
- Capstone (using simulations to pull all of these elements together in a professional portfolio)

Regardless of the targeted audience or the specific delivery method, there is clearly much that political science can do to train the would-be lobbyist.

## Notes

- 1 The idea for these divisions was suggested to us in an interview one of the authors conducted with Dan Hurley, a government relations and communications specialist with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, on 25 August 2014. We also need to acknowledge the work of Lee Drutman (New America Foundation) and Ray Scheppach (University of Virginia) who joined a round table discussion of these ideas at the 2014 American Political Science Association meeting in Washington DC, as well as the helpful comments of those in the audience, including Craig Holman (Public Citizen) and Jacob Straus (Congressional Research Service).
- 2 Unfortunately this is not just a poor attempt at humor. A recent study of local government budgets in the United Kingdom found that it required fewer years of education to comprehend Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and Isaac Newton's *Principia* than what is needed to understand many council budgets. See: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2805454/Council-budget-Call-Einstein-Study-finds-takes-time-understand-texts-published-genius-scientists-learn-decipher-local-authority-documents.html>.
- 3 It perhaps goes without saying that if students better understand how statistics will serve their career aspirations, we may mute the famed moaning-and-groaning ('Why do I have to take research methods if I don't want to be a political science professor?') that dominates most methods courses.
- 4 Or so we have heard from colleagues who teach these classes.
- 5 An assertion made in an interview with Brad Fitch, President of the Congressional Management Foundation, on 4 September 2014. The assertion is supported by a communication from Nicole Folk Cooper of the Congressional Management Foundation, dated 11 September 2014, on file with Holyoke and available on request.
- 6 The American Government Relations Professionals Code of Ethics may be found at <http://giprofessionals.org/join-all/code-of-ethics/>, accessed 21 October 2014. Of course, only members of this association are bound to uphold this code, and as lobbyists are not required to belong as with traditional bar associations, there is little enforcement.
- 7 Interview on 11 September 2014.
- 8 Internships in state legislatures can teach many of the same skills, and there are a lot of lobbyists who do very well in the states.

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## Original Article

# The moving stages of public affairs in the Netherlands

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**Abstract** The Dutch system of interest representation in which lobbying and public affairs take place is dense, but has long given privileged access to traditional types of stakeholders. Changes in politics and society however put this semi-open system under pressure, and this is the context in which public affairs practitioners must operate and create and use windows of opportunity. In the past 15 years, views from within the field on competencies and skills for further professionalization point to the importance of knowledge about content and process, but recognition of the need for a systematic approach to such knowledge construction came more recently. This contribution presents three key components of a body of knowledge on which a learning program for the professionalization of public affairs can be based. It contains the outward look from a strategic perspective, the conditions for building and maintaining social and political capital, and an internal view on the organization as the home basis of the public affairs practitioner, where external and internal accountability must be brought in balance. A university-based program on public affairs must be interdisciplinary, with a core of systematic knowledge development, methods and tools for use and reflection on the normative front at which practitioners operate. Program development also connects closely to questions of accreditation and licensing – the formalization of professionalization through which quality control and public acceptance must be improved. Program development and formal status definition for public affairs not only are connected, they also must, in the coming years, be addressed together in a structured scholarly-professional engagement. *Interest Groups & Advocacy* (2015) 4, 25–39. doi:10.1057/iga.2014.26; published online 27 January 2015

**Keywords:** public affairs; the Netherlands; body of knowledge; program development

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## Lobbyists: The Image Between Ideal Type and Stereotype

Like the ideal husband, the good cop and the celebrated politician, there is the ideal lobbyist. A splendid package of personal characteristics can make someone a good



spokesperson of organized interests, persuasive without undue force. As McGrath (2006) says, the ideal lobbyist is a listener, communicator, builder of relationships and is a professional with high standards of credibility, integrity and honesty. Although scientific evidence for the impact of personal factors on successful lobbying is becoming more available (ibid., Fleisher, 2003), it has long been clear that such personal factors first of all have intuitive appeal. They are generic skills in human interaction.

As brilliant as the personal skills repertoire of the ideal lobbyist may be, in the real world there is much mistrust of this benchmark. The activity of lobbying and to some extent also of public affairs has a mixed and sometimes dark reputation. Images in the media contribute to this: reported cases of lobbying often involve political play at the border of information manipulation, inappropriate personalized pressure and behind-the-scenes entrepreneurship for or against policy proposals. Often, such portrayal concerns private sector interest representation – the ‘lobby industry’ allegedly armed with strategic information, large financial resources and smart campaigners. Although the reputation of organizations engaging in interest representation and advocacy may be self-sustained, stereotyping also plays a part. Lobbying and public affairs are a key element of politics, cutting across public and private interests, but often attract public attention only when questions are raised about a lack of visibility, transparency and democratic checks and balances.

Given this sticky image set against the public interest and democracy, the emphasis on a quality label of the lobbyist including personal skills, norms and values is understandable. There is a call for professionalization – both in strategy, value management and ethics. Professionalization is about competencies and skill development, about criteria for the good practitioner, and about the way in which assessment and accountability may be organized. What can we, and should we, expect from practitioners in the lobbying and public affairs domain in a changing society and policy-making system? What does it take to speak of public affairs as a true profession (McGrath, 2005)?

This contribution is about lobbying and public affairs as a developing field of theory and practice in the Netherlands. It presents the state of the art in the domestic playing field, the view on this professional domain by practitioners themselves, and indicates how the body of knowledge may expand and can be a basis for systematic learning to facilitate professionalization. Public affairs in the Netherlands sees moving stages, both in its development over time and in the way the involvement of actors, types of venues and the repertoire of tools are changing. Although personality profiles can be listed for fit and unfit candidates, the perspective on matters of professionalization must be broader: the development of the field in practice and the discipline of public affairs as it is evolving point this way. Systematic knowledge of content and process are becoming more prominent (Fleisher, 2007; McGrath *et al*, 2010). At present, there is wide variation in the educational background of practitioners, and professionalization requires that the best of the different worlds of background are brought together in a more systematic approach to learning.



When speaking of professionalization, the international literature on interest representation often refers to organizational development and the build-up of lobby equipment as such, including investment in in-house lobbyists or public affairs practitioners (Maloney, 2007; Lowery and Marchetti, 2012; Klüver and Saurugger, 2013). Individual skills development must be seen in such organizational context. Although face to face talk and business card collecting remain important, strategic intelligence and skills for analysis of the networked nature of stakeholders and their interests are moving more toward the forefront. In times of big data, systems for tracking and analyzing the flow of attention to issues and their images add significantly to the comprehension of which matters are risky to take up and which ones have tailwind, and to seeing windows of opportunity opening. Information detection about the political and social environment must be turned into effective internal messages to set or correct the organizational course of action.

Thus, public affairs is more encompassing than the traditional approach to inside lobbying. Skeptics may see use of the term public affairs as terminological clean up to avoid the loaded concept of lobbying, with its dark connotations, but the difference is not just one of words.<sup>1</sup> In the Netherlands, the past decade has shown a steady rise in attention to public affairs with a growing number of practitioners and the establishment of an Association for Public Affairs (BVPA) now with some 600 members.

In the following parts of this contribution, trends and views on professionalization of public affairs in the Netherlands are presented, addressing the repertoire of relevant competencies and skills of public affairs practitioners. Next, the focus is on how a learning program may be designed, based on a relevant body of knowledge. Public affairs is as much about content as it is about process, and about systematic knowledge as much as personal characteristics that make for ideal practitioners. Before turning to these matters, first the main features of the system of interest representation in the Netherlands are drawn. They are the context in which the game is played, in which professionalization must occur.

## **The Dutch Playing Field: Dense, But Not Everyone Is In**

The Netherlands is not only a country with a high population density, but also the population of organizations and groups for interest representation and advocacy is comparatively large. While research on this is still at the infancy stage, estimates are that some 2000 interest organizations of all kinds and sizes make their way to the centers of government and parliament in The Hague.<sup>2</sup> This may be much less than estimates about Washington or Brussels, but when country size and population are factored in, it is dense.

More important than number estimates are the institutional and behavioral characteristics of the system of interest representation and policy-making. This is where the interest traffic flow takes place. Existing structures and institutional rules on interest representation and decision-making in the Netherlands make it



semi-open (but not truly open) to access for public and private stakeholders. The country has a corporatist tradition; what is called the ‘polder model’ in policy-making entails strongly institutionalized relationships between government and organizations for economic, social and other interests. In different formal venues, governmental actors and those of organized interest sit together and negotiate policy decisions. The reference to ‘polder’ dates back to the early years of the Dutch state in which water and land management was arranged in multilateral decision-making (Hendriks and Toonen, 2002). As Lijphart (1999) has described in his seminal work on majoritarian versus consensus systems, this tradition of accommodation politics involves selective access, summits among leaders of intermediary organizations, and a level of secrecy to facilitate conflict management and agreement.

The intermediary organizations included in this process however are under heavy pressure – trade unions, organizations representing interests of specific economic sectors, associations of public organizations (municipalities, provinces and so on), as well as political parties are facing declining membership and function loss. Although the practice of negotiating agreements in the policy process is still very much alive, the shrinking support base of most of the individual organizations involved in this traditional mode of interest representation and decision making has meant that more actors need to be involved in order to assure legitimacy and implementation. At the same time, NGOs and citizen groups engaged in grass roots lobbying have become important players in setting the agenda and portraying problems. Purposive interest groups have expanded their mobilization capacity via the old and new media. They acquired veto power as political decision-makers face increased risks of public accountability for taking the ‘wrong’ decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The Dutch system of interest representation thus contains different or even disjointed spheres of interest articulation and representation. This has consequences for the way in which claims are converted from input to output, for the legislative process and its results. Interest groups do not all have the access or resources for entering the stage of policy preparation, softening up staff at government departments. When they do have access after the agenda is set, the political transaction costs for changing or reversing proposals have risen. The relative poverty of open consultation in the Dutch system has been criticized. Zweers (2011) states that economic and social policy-making has become inert due to the locking-in of traditional interest organizations and a narrowing scope of organizational self-interest. Van Schendelen (2013), places the Netherlands against the more pluralist benchmark of the EU consultation process and takes stock against the selective access in interest representation and the opaque nature of compromising in domestic policy-making. Empirical work on the United States by Baumgartner *et al* (2009) and Kimball *et al* (2012), and on the EU by Klüver (2013) has shown that bias exists in interest representation. Some interests have a systematic advantage over others. Similar work on the Netherlands is to be done to obtain a better view of the playing field of interest representation and the outcomes.





## What Competencies? Views from Within the Public Affairs Community

Compare the discourse on the professionalization of lobbying and public affairs with that on politics and policy analysis. To be a politician is an unlicensed job, and often those in executive office also take it without a direct electoral mandate. Policy analysis is mostly carried out on an unlicensed basis as well, despite academic training programs. This is what these domains of practice have in common with public affairs: it is, thus far, an unlicensed occupation.

In a survey among practitioners, de Lange (2000, p. 23) found that external activities directly connected to lobbying were the largest task cluster of public affairs professionals, with monitoring of information and internal communication coming next in estimates of time spent. This may seem to contradict the assertion made by Miller (1990, p. 127) that ‘every hour spent on research and monitoring is worth ten spent on lobbying’. The difference lies in what public affairs professionals do and what, according to analysts, they should do in order to be effective. On the basis of more extensive research among 60 practitioners, Linders and de Lange (2003, p. 7) reported that many activities of public affairs practitioners in creating images of the external world within their organization and vice versa are influential, but also are mostly done intuitively and implicitly. They have limited conceptual and methodical skills. Although knowledge is considered the second most important professional source next to relationship skills (Linders and de Lange, 2003, p. 97), much of the knowledge of practitioners is tacit and not shared.

Further, Linders and de Lange found that practitioners mostly think that organizational goals as stated by its leadership must guide their activities and that experiential learning is the primary source of skill development. Moreover, their respondents tended to agree with the statement that public affairs is a sub-discipline of communication, but that a high academic qualification (a doctorate) in any discipline was seen as less relevant (Linders and de Lange, 2003, pp. 105–106). Although practitioners did not consider public affairs to be at tension with openness and transparency, they showed little support for statutory regulation. Nor were they supportive of a more structural and methodical approach to professionalization.

In the past decade, public affairs in the Netherlands not only kept proliferating as a field of practice, it also obtained a platform with the establishment of an Association for Public Affairs, which in its Dutch translation is *Beroepsvereniging* (professional association) *voor Public Affairs – BVPA*. This naming implies signaling: a need for professionalization. While the BVPA as it developed since its statutory inception in 2002 was meant primarily to function as a platform, open to all practitioners in public affairs but not mandatory for them, it has moved toward a higher level of ambition by designing a code of conduct (2007) and deploying initiatives to facilitate learning and self-reflection within the community of practitioners. Thus far, it has not engaged in formulating more stringent criteria for what may be called ‘good public affairs’ or in putting together a package of required competencies and professional skills. Still, it



consistently carries the view that professionalization is necessary and indispensable for a broader public acceptance of lobbying in the Netherlands.

Recent reporting from the field of practitioners testifies to this view. The results of a study consisting of 30 in-depth interviews (FleishmanHillard, 2013) indicate that there is a stronger connection between organizational strategy and public affairs. Respondents also mention the importance of knowledge of content, insight into the playing field, and the social and political environment in which public affairs takes place. Compared with earlier inside views, the tendency is to support the idea of a more structural knowledge basis. As Van Schendelen (2011, p. 9) notes, a wider recognition of the need for a knowledge base will place the Netherlands more in line with other countries. Furthermore, corporate social responsibility and public acceptance have become prominent alongside the pursuit of narrower organizational interests – material or purposive. The new media are to be further discovered not only as a venue for communication, but also as a source of information on salience and the public image of issues. In the Dutch case, changes in political majority formation and the life cycle of political offices require a better orientation on the way ideas and claims appear from the ‘policy primeval soup’ (Kingdon, 1984), reach the agenda and then are or are not endorsed and implemented. Today, there are more venues, but this comes with increased complexity of the playing field and the connections between arenas in which stakeholders can win or lose their advocacy case and be famed or shamed by the broader public. The politics of attention has become a central part of public affairs: the game is not only about the stakes but also involves confrontation between those who want to suppress attention to an issue and those seeking to expand it (Timmermans, 2014).

These observations have implications for competence development and professionalization in the Netherlands. While public affairs continues to gain importance for organizations, it also becomes increasingly difficult for single organizations to be effective in it. This is the paradox of contemporary public affairs that confronts professionals. More than ever, learning public affairs requires systematic attention to the body of knowledge and its employment in the activities of practitioners. Recruitment of lobbyists and public affairs practitioners may include personality criteria, but analytical capacity and systematic knowledge for strategic advising are as important. Further, it is necessary that the ‘home’ organization shapes, embeds and supports the public affairs function in recognition of its added value.

## **Strengthening the Knowledge Base for Public Affairs**

In his classic essay on politics as a vocation, Weber (1919/1994) distinguished between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility. The latter, he emphasized, is crucial for the development of professional norms. Although conviction drives goals, the ethic of responsibility is about how the pursuit of these



goals is carried out, with an eye on consequences. The increased exposure of lobbying to media attention and public opinion underscores the relevance of the ethic of responsibility in professional life. Practitioners experience how their organizations are evaluated. At the same time, public affairs practitioners are agents of their organization, the principal, on whose mandate they must operate (Lowery and Marchetti, 2012). Acting from core organizational interests, public affairs practitioners must perform a balancing act in order to build social capital and increase public acceptance.

For such balancing to be on solid grounds, public affairs requires a more structural academic knowledge base and systematic learning. The body of knowledge as it has accumulated in the past decades provides a range of topics (see, for example, Getz, 2001; Meznar, 2001; Fleisher, 2007; McGrath *et al.*, 2010; Harris, 2013). This also is true for the Netherlands (Bennis *et al.*, 1990; Van Schendelen and Pauw, 1998; Van Venetië and Luikenaar, 2006; Van Drimmelen, 2014). Mapping and setting the body of knowledge for public affairs will always be vulnerable when done as a comprehensive and exhaustive project, but when following an open approach such an exercise is useful. Three main elements for the body of knowledge of public affairs must be central in a systematic learning program: (i) strategic intelligence on issues and venues, (ii) conditions for building social capital and (iii) organizational engineering. These three elements include knowledge about process and content. Public affairs involves social and political engineering, but it must incorporate issue specific expertise. The role of public affairs involves information provision to policy-makers, but is not merely technical in kind. Meltsner's (1976) typology of policy analysts applies here: learning to lobby is not about becoming a technician or a politician, but is about how to be a socially responsible policy entrepreneur in the pursuit of organizational interests.

### **Informing public affairs strategy: Learning from analysis of issue dynamics and venue access**

Practitioners in public affairs are beyond the newspaper clippings that some public and private organizations use as their basis of information about the outside world, but there are still gains possible from a more systematic approach. Estimates of preparatory homework versus active lobbying field work in the Netherlands are that just some 15 per cent of professional life happens in the corridors and tables around policy-making institutions (Van Schendelen, 2013). Issue management often is single case work, where practitioners move from one case to the next according to the way the professional portfolio is filled. But issues and their management vary; not all display the same pattern of attention and possibilities for containment or for pushing them onto the agenda. Effective and efficient targeting requires a more systematic knowledge of the driving factors behind the rise and fall of issues on the public and political agenda.



Such systematic knowledge is obtained through results from research on issue dynamics, and drawing lessons from it. For strategic intelligence, it is necessary to see how an issue occurs in a context where it must compete with other issues, and where it can be suppressed or elevated to become a high priority matter. This is done in the Dutch part of the Comparative Agendas Project (see, for example: Baumgartner and Timmermans, 2012; Breeman *et al*, 2015; Timmermans and Breeman, 2014). More than a decade ago, the need for a more systematic approach to issues management was signaled and debated (Hillman, 2001; Schuler, 2001; Heath, 2002). In the present time of information as big data it is indispensable for the professionalization of public affairs. Indeed, the development of digitized radar screen for issue information and early warning is becoming a core activity of a number of professional bureaus in public affairs in the Netherlands. Successful public affairs requires a clear and short priority list of issues to be addressed and better understanding of the dynamics of issue attention can inform drawing up such a list.

Further, for acquiring strategic intelligence, it is necessary to link analysis and lessons about issue dynamics to a more systematic view on the playing field and the access points for influencing the agenda. Increasingly, advocacy is coalition activity, and in part this coalition activity takes place *ad hoc*. Professionalization is strengthened by greater use of scientific research on the way stakeholders operate successfully in coalition building and in seeking access to policy-makers. This includes not just description through formal cartography of policy-making institutions and procedures. It is foremost about analysis of the process, to draw up the conditions for success and failure in seeking access and support for advocacy cases. To find causal connections, descriptive mapping of stakeholders and networks must be linked with relevant theory on exchange relationships (see, for example, Berkhout, 2013) and on strategies for access to policy-making venues (see Pralle, 2003) and goal attainment (Binderkrantz and Krøyer, 2012). As practitioners in the Netherlands have indicated that building inter-relationships and knowledge of content are the two most important elements for professionalization, a systematic approach to finding the key conditions of success in this can help the profession to move to a higher level of analytical and practical sophistication.

### **Informing reputation management: Learning from conditions for social and political capital**

Public affairs and issue management as a part of it are not a single-shot game. To be a partner in some alliance or advocacy coalition similarly will often be more than a matter of occasional choice and convenience. Given the aforementioned dark image of some parts of lobbying in practice, reputation management is key for professionalization. Although problem signaling usually comes with media attention and public opinion, dealing with reputation requires knowledge about the nature of social



capital – and about the way in which such capital can be built (which takes time) or wasted (which can happen overnight). Social and political capital forms the normative counterpart to the strategic intelligence in professionalizing public affairs.

The central concepts here are trust, accountability and transparency. Trust, a central element of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and defined by Hardin (1990) as ‘encapsulated interest’, requires not only moral awareness and ethics but also knowledge of how organizational behavior has reputational effects. Empirical survey work can provide information on the state of trust of public affairs professionals among the public, politicians and other types of actors. Members of the Dutch chamber of representatives (*Tweede Kamer*) for instance have appeared to trust lobbyists for the most part, but one quarter of them indicated a low level of political credit (Public Matters, 2007). Here, more refined time series research is useful for monitoring the level of trust, and, even more important, informing practitioners about the reasons for it in order to draw lessons.

Accountability related to social capital is about *external* accountability: how an organization (and a public affairs practitioner representing it) is named and famed or shamed for its behavior. The repeated nature of relationships requires more systematic knowledge of how public or private organizational behavior enhances or damages reputation. Such knowledge is provided by research on the types of goals pursued by organizations, and how they develop views on this. Thus, research on the success and survival of public and private organizations engaged in interest representation casts a systematic light on how, for example, commercial industries employing non-commercial activities and run corporate social responsibility programs to build social and political capital, and in this way strengthen the prospect of continuity in the long run (Bernhagen, 2007; Anastasiadis and Wagner, 2013; Den Hond *et al.*, 2014). Likewise, research on organizational survival of interest groups can inform decisions on what activities and investments will pay off (Halpin and Thomas, 2012).

Trust and accountability are connected to transparency. Indeed, in a recent handbook of public affairs in the Netherlands, transparency is even presented as a defining element (Van Drimmelen, 2014). In the Dutch case, democratic performance has been discussed widely for years, with an alleged decline in legitimacy (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011). This has placed the domain of interest representation more into the spotlight. For professionalization this means two things: the need to promote discussion in the field on normative benchmarks, and the provision of a better theoretical and empirical basis for such discussion. Thus transparency as a concept needs scrutiny and independent analysis in order to facilitate better informed decisions to define the problem and the best solution. Such analysis should include empirical work on the properties and effects of transparency registers, legislative footprints and codes of conduct, and on the way information is used when public affairs practitioners approach policy-makers, or policy-maker’s call on practitioners (see, for example, Holman and Luneburg, 2012). All can contribute to the public acceptance of public affairs.

## **The home base: Learning for securing autonomy, loyalty and organizational support**

Research and useable knowledge about the external world to facilitate learning for public affairs must be supplemented with a third main theme, which is the internal organizational perspective. If practitioners indicate that so much of their work is preparatory, the home base for this should be solid. Professionalization involves internal organizational engineering. There are three reasons why this internal perspective needs continued attention. First, surveys among practitioners have indicated that public affairs is expected to shift to more team work, with complementary competencies used in a mix. Second, to be effective, the public affairs function needs a strong internal embedding in or near the strategic decision center. And third, internal accountability of practitioners requires ongoing skills development as the organizational leadership may want to see how public affairs provides value for money. Success claims in public affairs must survive the fuzziness of the policy process in which often it is not clear where decisions come from. This requires a systematic approach to performance measurement, a scientific method for it.

An emerging domain of knowledge is about the nature of the relationship between the practitioner as an agent and the organization as its principal (Lowery and Marchetti, 2012). What kind of arrangement for delegation and accountability serves best to avoid drift away from the organizational interest base? How do in-house and hired public affairs practitioners differ in processing information and professional norm development toward the organization they represent? Although much of this topic has long involved experiential learning as well as infamous cases of delusion or manipulation as a negative benchmark, more systematic knowledge can help in dealing with dilemmas of loyalty, autonomy and support (Kersh, 2007; Stephenson and Jackson, 2010). Furthermore, internal consolidation requires better insight into effective resource mobilization within the organization, or in the case of grass roots lobbying, a strategy of crowd support and funding. In cases of limited organizational private capital, public affairs must be oriented strongly on social capital. Research on these matters should be part of the structural basis for learning and professionalization.<sup>4</sup>

The public affairs practitioner must stay close to the organization's or support group's base while the same time it is necessary to be grounded in the external world for transferring issue and reputation signals. Such balancing is fundamental to public affairs, and the terms will become more pronounced as actors become increasingly involved and the public becomes more vocal. Maintaining balance also requires that the three presented elements of the body of knowledge are dealt with together, and in this way form a structural basis for learning and professionalization.



## Program Development for Structured Learning and the Licensing Issue

Academic theory and empirical research may raise questions among practitioners about *so what?* Experiential learning raises questions about *so how?* These are questions concerning explication of tacit or hidden knowledge among practitioners and, crucially, the way to establish a more structural approach to learning. The study of lobbying in the Netherlands dates back to some 30 years ago, when Rinus van Schendelen began to lay the groundwork for more systematic attention to research and practice in this domain. The professional community has benefitted from initiatives to bridge scholarly research and practical work. In the past years, the Association for Public Affairs (BVPA) has expanded its scope of activities from regular member meetings and a bi-annual conference to a series of master classes. Furthermore, there is a constant demand for courses for professional learning, based on scholarly and experiential knowledge. For enforcing the code of conduct, there is a procedure for filing complaints and sanctioning noncompliance, which in 2013 was applied for the first time.

The way forward, investing in future generations of professionals, is to establish a more rigorous university-based program, elaborating the three presented components of the body of knowledge for public affairs. This is necessary because the educational background of practitioners varies widely, and thus far the best of these different worlds have not been brought together systematically. Professionals mostly are trained in house whenever they assume a public affairs position within an organization. Systematic training in an academic program should be realized in an ongoing dialog between science and practice (Timmermans, 2014). For such a learning orientation, a university program on public affairs is most usefully developed at the Masters level, which in the Netherlands normally is a 1-year program. A program truly on public affairs must square substantive knowledge about content and process with a repertoire of methods that extends beyond the typical political science, communication, or public administration method and technique packages. Public affairs academic training should include information and big data management, design and strategy methods, as well as evaluation and performance measurement. Further, for approximation of real world situations, systematic learning in a Masters program may include simulation through serious gaming and scenario development. And all this is to be placed in a democratic context – not just to learn how to overcome thresholds of access and find the way in multiple issue land, but also to learn to manage values and what it means to have a professional code of conduct.

Looking beyond that point, any idea or proposal for formal professional licensing needs advancement on program building and its consolidation in order to provide the necessary stability. Formally determining the critical body of knowledge should be an open business, the elements proposed in this contribution can serve as its core. For public affairs in the Netherlands (and probably anywhere else), movement toward a stage of licensing also means regulating a community of practitioners that only to



some extent is comparable to other licensed professions such as in medicine, law and real estate, and perhaps is more comparable to mostly *unlicensed* fields of practice such as political office, civil service, policy analysis and business consultancy. This however is not to downplay the relevance of the licensing issue. Academic program development based on a public affairs body of knowledge and design of a system of accreditation and licensing must happen together. And they should take place in continued academic-practical engagement.

## Conclusion

To many in day-to-day reality, working in lobbying and public affairs is life in the fast lane. Yet, for further professionalization of this field of practice, learning should become more systematic and more structured. This is extremely important as contemporary public affairs involves a paradox: more and more organizations and social groups acknowledge the importance of public affairs, but it also is becoming more difficult for single actors to be effective in it. The trend is toward more diversity in stake holders, more vocal actors in the arenas at different levels of governance, and uncertainty about who are allies and who may put obstacles in the way. For these reasons, use of the body of academic knowledge about the playing field for strategy, about mechanisms that enhance or destruct reputation, and about the internal organizational mandate for public affairs are indispensable. University program development must include methods for using this knowledge in practice and for further improving skills that enable the public affairs professional to balance between organizational interests and the common good, and between internal and external pressures for accountability.

This contribution has presented three key components of the body of academic knowledge. They are not specific to the Dutch case, but the observation that systematic knowledge use in this country has remained relatively low in recognition puts more emphasis on the need to employ them in training. For further structuring and active use of this academic knowledge, joint engagement of scholars and practitioners is necessary. Thus the way forward is to elaborate a teaching and learning program grounded in an interdisciplinary university environment, speaking to demands for skills from practice, providing a systematic approach to knowledge of the process and content of public affairs. The often unstructured and ‘wicked’ nature of issues on which lobbying takes place requires an open view on learning. Developments in society with greater exposure to a mobilizing public, cross-cutting linkages between private and public organizations and pertinence of accountability all add to the need for open and continued attention to professionalization of public affairs.

In her book *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013), Radin provides an original and sharp view on the development of professional policy analysis. She presents a discussion about old school and new school in this field of





practice, and about the inherent boundary tensions between the spheres of politics and analysis. The conclusion of *Beyond Machiavelli* is that a new generation of professionals above all needs skills for managing values that come from the diversity of interests in business, politics, the bureaucracy and society. Likewise, the future generation of public affairs professionals must be one of boundary spanners. Learning for such balancing involves analytical and normative equipment. This view on learning does not stress deficiencies in competencies and skills but rather lays the emphasis on a structured approach for using knowledge, developing talent and indicating ways for private and public organizations to make their interests compatible to trends in society and in this way secure their reputation and survival.

## Notes

- 1 A Google Ngram view on references in digitized books to the two concepts of lobbying and public affairs since 1945 shows a remarkable pattern. Lobbying has risen sharply in the post-war years and surpassed public affairs in the mid-1970s. But since the turn of the century the tendency is in the opposite direction: public affairs is rising and, for the first time since references were made in the literature, lobbying is going down. The Ngram contains book data until 2008, so a future update will tell us whether this reversed trend has continued since then.
- 2 The Dutch Chamber of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*) publishes a list of registered lobbyists with an entry pass. A count on 1 October 2014 shows 86 names on this list, which means it stays far from serving as some kind of transparency register as used in the EU.
- 3 Volatility in national and local elections is at unprecedented levels. In the municipal elections of March 2014, one third of the voters opted for a local party with no national branch. Such local parties often lack an apparatus for information processing, training and policy networking at intergovernmental levels.
- 4 The *Standing Group on Interest Groups* within the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) is an international academic platform where the research agenda moves toward such topics and questions, and places them in a comparative perspective. A next step is to bring academic initiatives closer to the audience of practitioners, and generate useable knowledge for skills development.

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## Original Article

# Teaching public policy advocacy by combining academic knowledge and professional wisdom

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**Abstract** Lobbying is a well-established occupation and has attained a professional status in the United States and other democracies in the world that can be taught in the university setting. This article discusses what lobbying skills can be learned in a university setting, and second what subjects are and should be included in the curriculum of public affairs and lobbying courses. From over 20 years' experience at American University's Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute (PAAI) in Washington DC and for the last 12 years in the European Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute (EPAAI) in Brussels, we know ethical lobbying skills and knowledge can be taught effectively in a university setting. With the help of professional lobbyists, we have taught technical skills, professional norms and ethics, and strategies and tactics of advocacy to over 1000 students, since the founding of PAAI in 1992. Effective lobbying strategies, tactics and ethics can be taught and learned with a combination of rigorous academic research and applied/practical wisdom from professional advocates. From our program we have launched hundreds of PAAI graduates into successful advocacy careers. The underlying approach in PAAI is 'The Campaign Mindset', an operational theory of change in advocacy and the policy process. Our curriculum instructionally mirrors the content and process that a comprehensive advocacy campaign would embrace, from conception through implementation, to conclusion. Specifically, our curriculum content is organized into six general interrelated and at times overlapping modules. The modules reflect the conceptual building blocks that are typically used in a major advocacy campaign. However, many important topics and tools critical to advocacy action plans are also discussed within each module. The PAAI Modules are: Political Environment Assessment for Strategy and Action Plan Development and Management; Direct Lobbying; Communications Strategy, Message Development and Execution; Coalition Building; Building and Using Grassroots and Grassstops Support; and Understanding and Operating Within the Ethical Laws, Rules and Norms Pertaining to all Aspects of Advocacy. We have integrated professional lobbyist



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mentors into PAAI who have helped keep the curriculum up-to-date (for example, especially social media) and essential in placing our students in the advocacy profession.

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This article answers several questions that are often discussed between academics and lobbyists: first, can effective lobbying skills be learned in a university setting ... are good lobbyists born or taught (Goldman, 2012)?; and second, what subjects are and should be included in the curriculum of public affairs and lobbying courses? Lobbying is a well-established occupation and has attained a professional status in the United States and other democracies in the world (McGrath, 2005, 2006). Almost 40 years have passed since interest group scholar Berry (1977, p. 92) wrote, ‘No one has interviewed the people who actually hire staff lobbyists and lobbyist entrepreneurs to ask them what qualities they look for. It is entirely possible that employers have no clear idea either of what qualifies a person to be a lobbyist’. Maybe 30 years ago the statement had some validity, but in modern day lobbying in Washington DC it is wrong and at best, dated. We know the art and craft of lobbying can be taught effectively and we have been doing it for over 20 years at American University in the Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute (PAAI) in Washington DC and for the last 12 years in the European Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute (EPAAI) in Brussels. With the help of professional lobbyists and scholars, we have taught technical skills, professional norms and ethics, and strategies and tactics of advocacy to over 1000 students, since the founding of PAAI in 1992.<sup>1</sup> Effective lobbying strategies, tactics and ethics can be taught and learned with a combination of rigorous academic research and applied/practical wisdom from professional advocates (Fleisher, 2001, 2003, 2007). From our program we have launched hundreds of PAAI graduates into successful advocacy careers.<sup>2</sup> We have had positive reactions and feedback from dozens of employers throughout the United States and in Brussels in the advocacy profession that our students are some of the best young professionals they have hired. We constantly update and improve our curriculum using evaluations from prospective employers.

We describe the approach we take in PAAI, EPAAI and our applied workshops (for example, Ethics and Lobbying Workshop, Social Media Workshop and Issue Campaign Management). All of these offerings have changed, often rapidly, over the years as the advocacy profession has modernized. We teach our lobbying institutes within a school of public affairs, but similar courses could be taught in business schools, communications programs and public relations curriculum (Fleisher and Blair, 1999).



A course applying academic and professional practical knowledge about lobbying should introduce the student to several distinct but integrated topics related to modern advocacy in the United States, although many elements of PAAI have been used in lobbying education in Asian and European countries.<sup>3</sup> It is advisable to do this through readings, academic presentations and practitioner speakers who have had many years of experience lobbying. By bringing in the best lobbyists to speak about recent developments in the advocacy field, we are assured that the institutes are relevant and realistic. Academic publications and evidence based research should be an integral part of a lobbying institute, workshop or seminar.<sup>4</sup> PAAI has also helped to generate research by the mentors, speakers and professors in the institute.<sup>5</sup>

The skill content required for effective professional advocacy is hardly a static body of knowledge. It has evolved, at times dramatically, over the last 35-plus years. Legislative reforms, such as the sunshine laws of the seventies, the introduction of TV in both chambers in the early eighties and rapid developments in technology to this day are but a few of the prominent forces that continually shape how lobbying is conducted today. PAAI remains current with all these developments and attempts to incorporate them in real time into each Institute. Two small examples of content that we have relatively recently included in our curriculum with special focus are the varying uses of social media platforms that affect multiple dimensions of advocacy and the increasingly changing and important role think tanks are having on all dimensions of the policy debate.

We have found that comprehensive advocacy efforts emerge either as a crisis response to an imminent policy threat or as a result of the vision, leadership and commitment of specific individuals or organizations to affect the direction of a public policy. The former is usually up and running within a short time, from a recognition of the problem, to commitment to act, to execution. The latter effort could take many months or years to mature from a compelling idea to a full-blown advocacy campaign. Whether the time frame from a commitment to act is condensed or lengthy, the fundamental elements necessary for launching and managing an effective advocacy campaign remain the same.

Often, many individuals who recognize that their personal or institutional objectives may require an advocacy agenda have limited or no knowledge as to how to professionally organize and implement such an effort.

As we cover in our Institute and later in this article, there are a myriad of factors that need to be considered, when organizing and managing substantial advocacy campaigns. Some are obviously and intricately related to the specific objectives of the effort, while others may appear external to the effort but are nevertheless relevant to how the project needs to be organized and managed

Those initiating or actually leading advocacy efforts that recognize the need for specific advocacy expertise early and move to integrate it into the formative thinking of what they want to accomplish are likely to increase the chances of overall



effectiveness and efficiency of their efforts. Those who wait longer or simply ignore the complex demands of advocacy are more likely to jeopardize their success and will certainly, at a minimum, increase their costs in terms of time, money and manpower spent on their efforts.

The theory of policy change in major advocacy campaigns recognizes the multi-dimensional dynamics of policymaking in Washington. We have dubbed it ‘The Campaign Mindset’. Its application requires detailed knowledge of the targeted policy, the institutional process that needs to be engaged to affect it, the key players, in and outside of government, with a stake in the issue, as well as the underlying political dynamics that might affect the outcome of the lobbying campaign. It also requires the leadership to build an organizational commitment to manage and fund the effort, as well as a strategic framework and action plan to guide its efforts.

The Campaign Mindset as operational theory of change is the underlying pedagogical principle of PAAI. Our curriculum instructionally mirrors the content and process that a comprehensive advocacy campaign would embrace, from conception through implementation, to conclusion.

Specifically, our curriculum content is organized into six general interrelated and at times overlapping modules. The modules reflect the conceptual building blocks that are typically used in a major advocacy campaign. However, many important topics and tools critical to advocacy action plans are also discussed within each module. The PAAI Modules are: (i) Political Environment Assessment for Strategy and Action Plan Development and Management; (ii) Direct Lobbying; (iii) Communications Strategy, Message Development and Execution; (iv) Coalition Building; (v) Building and Using Grassroots and Grass Tops Support; and (vi) Understanding and Operating Within the Ethical Laws, Rules and Norms Pertaining to all Aspects of Advocacy. Each of these modules is described in detail below.

## **Module One: Assessing the Political Environment for Developing a Strategy and Action Plan**

Before any serious action is taken in any major advocacy campaign, an exhaustive and comprehensive analysis is conducted of the critical elements of policy-making at the Federal level. Although there may be a number of legitimate frameworks for undertaking this exercise, we believe all essential activity and understandings necessary to fully inform a comprehensive advocacy campaign could be organized from the analysis of the four general categories of Policy, Process, Players and Politics.

The *Policy* section, among other things, would require a thorough analysis of the goals and objectives of the campaign and the problems they attempt to address, along with the justification for doing so. These goals will be assessed for internal consistency with the stated problem as well as with the intended legislative



objectives. It would also examine the scope of the policy, its budgetary cost, beneficiary impact and legality.

The *Process* analysis basically asks the question, where will the debate and decisions regarding the policy objective be joined institutionally? What official actions need to be taken to promote or defeat the initiative? Is this policy a Presidential initiative that would require interagency or regulatory review, or is it in some stage of Congressional oversight or formal action? The analysis would also include an explanation of the formal rules and customary behaviors associated with the actions of each of these institutions that may impact the policy's final disposition.

The *Players* analysis identifies and profiles all essential individuals and entities both in and outside of the Congress that would have a stake in whether this policy campaign succeeds or fails. We require students to do an extensive 'network analysis' or 'map' of the key stakeholders and champions for and against a policy or program.<sup>6</sup> It is essential to understand the motivations and relationships among the champions and those in support and opposition of a policy. At a minimum, it would include public officials in the executive or congressional branches of government and their staff that will be required or want to promote or defeat this policy initiative. The analysis would additionally examine individuals and organizations outside of government who may seek to shape the outcome of the campaign directly or indirectly. This might include individual thought leaders, think tanks, industry representatives, NGO's, various sectors of the media, including those that are issue or audience specific, as well those designed for mass consumption.

With respect to public officials, the analysis would begin to determine their current knowledge of the issue and their ability to develop full command of the topic, their motivation for participation and their ability to influence others and drive the debate. Outside non-media government players might be examined in terms of their ability to shape the substantive parameters of the issue, their effectiveness in influencing decision makers by opinion or grassroots mobilization. Media players would be evaluated primarily from a historical perspective in terms of how they might have covered this policy before, if at all, and their disposition and motivations for covering it in the prospective debate.

The *Politics* section requires a dynamic assessment, in that politics is an aspect of Washington policy-making, which is permanently in flux and must be monitored continually. It is an element of policy-making that has many dimensions, some more predictable than others, but all requiring careful review as they relate to the goals and actions of the campaign. Some of the more prominent dimensions are often straightforward, but essential to understand. For example, ideological association of the policy and correlation to the institutional power distribution in the Congress or partisan control of the White House is necessary to understand. Is the policy proposal a partisan issue? Is there or have there been strong public sentiments associated with this issue? Are its proponents, institutionally and individually, held in a high regard? Is there an apparent timely rationale for pursuing the issue? Are there prominent





distractions currently or on the horizon that would shift the public or decision maker's attention from fully addressing this policy?

There are virtually a limitless number of politically oriented questions that this analysis might pursue at both the macro and micro political level that could inform a campaign's strategy and game plan. Limited time and resources often constrain the inquiry in any given moment but it should never prevent this type of inquiry from continuing throughout the campaign. There is always more information to uncover. Once accurate data you may have collected in the past is just as likely to have changed or need to be refreshed. The intent of this module is to encourage an exhaustive examination of each of these categories individually as well as how they interact with one another at critical moments and continually over time as needed. Changes in any one of the four categories could significantly affect the overall interaction or substantive impact of any of the other categories.

This overall assessment is intended to provide the advocacy campaign its strategic foundation from which overall goals are clarified, strategy is formed, benchmarked objectives are identified, and lobbying tactics are designed and deployed. The completed process should provide a very rich snapshot of how to launch the effort, but is just the beginning of a longer campaign that demands continual engagement, review and adjustment as the lobbying battle unfolds. The campaign should be research driven, including an analysis of the political landscape analysis, definition of the policy problem, legal and policy analysis, plus justification of the policy goals.

## **Strategy and action plan development and management**

The comprehensive assessment suggested in the first module, should generate the information and insights necessary to develop an effective overall campaign strategy and action plan. It would do this by crystallizing the operational goals, assessing opportunities and obstacles to engagement, identifying essential resources and by providing political insights to help map a road to success. The purpose of translating an assessment into a clearly defined strategy and action plan is at least twofold. It defines and holds the four dimensions of the campaign together. The strategy reaffirms and delineates the general goals of what we are trying to accomplish. The action plan takes into account the campaign's available resources and timeline, as well as other factors not necessarily controllable and specifically describes how, when and where to execute the campaign. The action plan will identify the targets critical to making the campaign a success in terms of the decisions that have to be made throughout the entire process. It would then define the actions necessary to affect that outcome. These actions will utilize the latest tools (described later) that are most commonly used in major advocacy campaigns. The second reason why having a carefully delineated strategy and action plan is critical is that it becomes the primary management tool of the issue campaign. It not only defines the specific direction and



actions of the effort but as importantly, it provides the underlying structure for assigning those actions, coordinating their implementation, assessing their impact and adjusting their applications in real time whenever necessary.

The orchestration of these efforts is usually quite elaborate, requiring a comprehensive and sophisticated skill set. It usually requires an individual that will likely have an expertise in one of the conventional tools of advocacy, but is also able to simultaneously see how all the moving parts of these efforts must be arrayed, managed and harmonized among the participants, the targets of the effort, the media and those that are financing it and invested in the ultimate outcome for months and even years. Regardless of a specific task within the campaign, understanding the importance of having a strategy driven effort as well as the role and responsibilities of the campaign manager in driving the overall campaign, is essential for success.

## **Module Two: Communications Strategy, Message and Development and Tactics**

Developing and using research tested concepts in paid and ‘earned’ media as well as on line and off line is essential in complex large issues campaigns. While every tool used in an advocacy campaign is a tactic of the larger strategy, every tool should have a strategy framework of its own for all the same reasons the larger campaign does. Message development and communication activities must be bound and guided by a strategy and action plan. As a broad tool, the communications activities of a campaign are generally viewed as first among equals. A campaign should not knock on the first door of Congress or write the first press release without knowing how it wants to characterize its efforts. The strategic foundation of all communications activities usually sits on the answers to the following questions: what is the best way to describe the campaign goals and actions; what is the best way to describe the intentions and actions of opponents; how might opponents want to characterize themselves and how might they want to characterize us; and the plan should delineate the audiences critical to this debate and how to reach the audiences with the most effective message.

There are a myriad of activities that would constitute the tactics or tools of a communication strategy. Once the strategic messages are developed and the offensive and defensive directions are determined, the campaign decides which communication tools are most effective and which can it afford to use. This module specifically explores the most prominent and commonly used tools and activities. It includes the role of survey research and focus groups to refine the message, the use of paid media in all platforms like Internet (social media), cable, radio and broadcast; exploiting targeted earned media activities at the national and maybe state and local levels. Modern advocacy campaigns embrace the rapidly emerging role of social media. Although the term is used loosely, this module explores how the Internet uses various communication platforms like Facebook, tweeting, blogging, web sites and



other social media to promote, persuade or call to act to increasingly narrowly drawn audiences.

### **Module Three: Direct Lobbying**

Personally promoting specific legislative actions directly with members of Congress, their staff, as well as officials of the Executive Branch, is the most commonly known form of lobbying. The direct lobbying of an advocacy campaign is probably the tool or tactic that is most closely aligned with the overall strategy and game plan of the campaign. Direct lobbying potentially touches or at least contemplates each of the players (outlined in the network analysis) whose specific behavior could have an immediate impact on the outcome of the Campaign. The strategy question of this tool asks what is the most effective way to generally approach the decision maker and her institution. For example, should we employ a full court press in Washington or just targeted visits in the home state or district or some combination? The answer to this may reflect an overall approach or one that is adjusted case by case. The module then turns to tactics to elaborate on how best to conduct each of the visits. Given the specific target, which message might be most motivating, who would be most persuasive in delivering that message, where should we seek to have the visit and when. Often, direct lobbying meetings are enhanced by the strength of the personal relationship the lobbyist or institutional entity might have with key staff or the member herself. These relationships are built in any number of ways, such as being a former member or staffer who has worked alongside players in the targeted office, helping in re-election efforts, having a long history of working together on any given set of issues. In all cases the quality of trust that may benefit a lobbyist in a current interaction is a function of competency, reliability and trust in the previous interactions. In any event, these activities need to be informed and aligned with the overall strategy, as well as the tools and activities discussed and dictated in each of the other modules.

### **Module Four: Strengthening Advocacy through Coalition Building**

Building and leading support from like-minded and sympathetic organizations, individuals and institutions, is an essential part of lobbying in Washington DC. All large and successful advocacy campaigns use coalition building as one of their lobbying tactics. The goal of this tactic is to provide evidence of the depth and breadth of support for the goals of the overall campaign. Churches, think tanks, NGOs, businesses, celebrities, academics and former public officials are all potential partners of coalitions. Each partner potentially adds their validation by bringing substantive credibility to the proposed position as well as possible evidence of broad voter support from a particular constituency. Often coalition member targets are



obvious allies whose support is welcomed but expected. Occasionally, respected organizational entities and individuals are recruited as coalition partners who have no obvious connection to the issue in question. However, given the ‘strange bedfellow’ perception, they add a more provocative and possibly compelling credibility to the overall effort.

## **Module Five: Energizing and Mobilizing Grassroots and Grasstops Support**

As building robust coalitions adds credibility and strength to an overall campaign, mobilizing community leaders and their followers, among others, strengthens and enhances the effectiveness of your locally targeted efforts as well. These activities are typically undertaken to demonstrate local support for an issue or position to an individual target identified in your overall strategy. Multiple activities, such as conducting local meetings, generating paid, earned and social media, sending direct mail, phone banking, and so on, are used to inform, motivate and facilitate this engagement. The strategy and action plan of the overall campaign requires activating people in a timely and targeted fashion with the goal of building and maintaining support for the effort, while executing key advocacy actions for the duration of the advocacy effort and beyond.

## **Module Six: Rules, Regulations, and Norms of Lobbying**

The tactics and strategies of lobbying discussed above are numerous and complex. Understanding what these activities are, how they relate, and how they are conducted is important to being an effective lobbyist. However, although these understandings comprise a necessary condition for successful advocacy, they are not sufficient. We emphasize in PAAI that an accomplished and respected lobbyist realizes that his or her career will succeed only if it is conducted according to both the letter and the spirit of the laws and regulations affecting the lobbying activities. This is especially true after the lobbying scandals and after the passage of major congressional lobbying and ethics reforms in 2007. Students are taught that ‘playing close to the edge’ or ‘crossing the line’ (like Jack Abramoff) are illegal or at least untenable attitudes and behaviors that are easily identified and aggressively admonished by the legal authorities, as well as their professional peers. The purpose of teaching the role of ethics and lobbying in a democratic and pluralistic society is essential to a successful career in advocacy. We embed the rules and regulations governing lobbying and related activities (including the House and Senate lobbying reforms and President Obama’s executive order related to lobbyists); the guidelines for conducting ‘best practices’ as a professional; the role and impact of campaign



contributions on the process and the profession; as well as perspectives about the norms of public advocacy from academics and lobbyists on Capitol Hill. We have focused on the importance of integrating a strong element of ethical lobbying in advocacy campaigns. We require students to build and use ethical strategies, tactics and relationships within the letter and spirit of the law.<sup>7</sup>

## **PAAI Assignments**

The content of our institute on lobbying is conveyed through academic literature and the writings of professionals in the field of advocacy. Our lectures structure the class as well as presentations by distinguished advocacy professionals and thought leaders in the Washington DC area.<sup>8</sup> In addition, before the class commencing, a major legislative policy issue facing the United States (recently cap and trade, immigration reform, social security reform, regulation of chemicals, trade policy) is selected as a case study for student advocacy campaigns. The class divides into groups, half of which are assigned the pro-position while the other half, the con, related to the issue campaign. Each group is then responsible for developing a comprehensive and well-managed advocacy campaign utilizing the Campaign Mindset to promote their position. Each group is also assigned a lobbyist mentor who has considerable professional experience in advocacy to work with them in developing all aspects of their plans. They are expected to work collaboratively as if they were a full service lobbying organization, which could be hired to assist in executing a lobbying plan. On their last day of class, each group presents their plan to a hypothetical client that is looking for their services. Their presentations typically include a 30-page written report, PowerPoint slides and an organized oral presentation. They are evaluated and critiqued by us and by a panel of professionals who have acted as mentors. Each plan, a written report, is reviewed subsequent to the oral presentations, along with an individual essay on various assigned topics to be submitted several weeks after class is completed.

## **Conclusion**

The profession of lobbying and advocacy can be taught in a university setting as we have shown over the last 20-plus years at American University. We have demystified the lobbying profession for students by disaggregating the skills and knowledge that are necessary to be an effective and ethical practitioner while also showing the complexity and holistic perspective required to fully understand and engage in the advocacy process. We have found that an advanced applied lobbying course needs creative pedagogy using professionals and academics. Learning about lobbying should not be simply an occupational trade course. Students need to learn that the



substance and practice of lobbying is part art. Lobbying skills require the blending of practitioner wisdom, combined with theory and guided by practice. Historically the feeder profession into lobbying was first-hand experience in government and politics or the mythical relationship with the law profession. Others entered the lobbying profession through public relations firms. All of these are important, but not essential. Modern lobbying skills require more than on the job training and government experience. We have placed hundreds of young professionals in the advocacy/lobbying profession after graduating from our Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute and the European Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute. The sheer demand for well-trained professionals requires a systematic learning environment that universities provide to meet the current changes and challenges of the lobbying profession.

## Notes

- 1 For each institute we have two to three prominent professional lobbyists as mentors for the students. Student teams develop lobbying plans with the guidance of the mentors and the mentors evaluate the plans at the end of the institute.
- 2 Over 1200 students and young professionals have taken PAAI since its inception in 1992. PAAI is based upon the Campaign Management Institute (CMI) started in 1985 at the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies.
- 3 Graduates of PAAI have recently started lobbying institutes in Ukraine, Hungary and Croatia. Educators from Asian nations have applied some lessons learned in PAAI to lobbying classes in their countries.
- 4 In the most recent PAAI, we have had the students read the following works: Ainsworth (2002); Andres (2009); Baumgartner *et al* (2009); Berry (1997); Levine (2009); and Luneburg *et al* (2009).
- 5 Andres *et al* (2000); Thurber (1996, 2002, 2006, 2011a, 2011b, 2012); Ingle (2007).
- 6 See Thurber (1996) for a description of mapping the stakeholders. Also see Browne (1990).
- 7 We also teach a special workshop on 'Lobbying and Ethics' for students and lobbyists each year.
- 8 See our website at [www.american.edu/spa/ccps](http://www.american.edu/spa/ccps) for videos of speeches by numerous speakers we have used in PAAI.

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## Original Article

# An academic program for public affairs in Austria

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**Abstract** Since the mid-2000s a need for well-educated public affairs professionals emerged in Austria. In 2006, the University of Vienna established a postgraduate Master of Arts program with an specialization in public affairs. The extra-occupational program runs for four semesters with a workload of 120 ECTS-points. The program consists not of practical training only, but is founded upon a theoretical framework. It successfully integrates real world, experiential, learning into higher education. To graduate students have to write a master thesis and pass a final examination.

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The professionalization of industrial sectors is strongly related with the proper training of new entrants, ideally at an academic level. Over the last 35 years in Austria, there have been attempts by both professional associations and universities to institutionalize the academic education for communication disciplines. In most cases professional associations took the initiative. In cooperation with the University of Vienna, the public affairs industry established the first academic program for public affairs in the German-speaking world.

Such a program faces various challenges: education for public affairs means educating for complexity; the political and economic environments are in constant progress; and societal acceptance for public affairs is – at best – ambivalent.

This article examines the background for an academic education for public affairs, details the curriculum of the Viennese public affairs program and highlights some findings from a survey of the program's alumni.





## Public Affairs in Austria and the Need for a Professional Education

Public affairs in Austria show a slow rise, with some political scientists even claiming that Austria's development of political management and the modernization of the country's interest mediation system is characterized by delay (Pelinka, 2011, p. 25ff).

Owing to the development of democracy itself in general (particularly the role of Austria's political parties and the social partnership), developments in the field of professional political consulting are far behind common standards in other democracies. The political system in Austria mainly recruits political consultants from among its own elites, especially evident in the number of former politicians who establish themselves as campaign and public affairs consultants. Therefore, the system remains a fairly closed shop, with consulting never developing as a discrete business that is independent from party lines. Until the late 1990s, a transparent political consulting market, driven by professionalism and competition, was neither encouraged nor wanted. Characterized by its specific interest mediation system, in Austria influencing policy took place mainly behind closed doors for decades. Professional public affairs had for a long time simply no room to develop, because it was not needed: the cooperation and coordination of interests between the federations was processed by the so-called 'social partnership'. The Austrian social partnership consists of four chambers with mandatory membership: the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, the Austrian Chamber of Employees, the Federal Union and the federal umbrella association of the agricultural sector. Since the 1950s, the federations and chambers worked in close contact with one or other of the two political parties, the ÖVP or the SPÖ, and created a solid basis for the exchange of economic and socio-political interests. The social partnership, their mandatory membership and their contributing role in political decision making were only established in the Austrian constitution in 2006. Until then, the social partnership was based on the free will of the players concerned. To a large extent, it was implemented informally and confidentially and was not normally accessible to the general public. The umbrella federations of the social partners had great influence on political opinion forming and decision making. Their cooperation has thus often been criticized as a 'secondary government'.

Different developments led to a decline of the Austrian social partnership (such as Austria joining the EU in 1995 and the transfer of essential competencies to the supranational EU, decreasing membership in interest organizations, the privatization of state-owned businesses and liberalization of key industries). A further advance took place when Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) came into federal power as the junior member in the coalition with the People's Party (ÖVP) in 2000.

The ÖVP cut its lines to 'its' social partnership institutions, and the FPÖ never had a backbone like this. This resulted in a gap of the representation of interests. In addition, the FPÖ requested businesses to articulate their own interests. A lot of



companies did not know how to do this on their own – actively and not via the federations of the social partnership – and asked for these services. So the year 2000 became the starting point for public affairs and lobbying consultants in Austria, using this window of opportunity to establish new services on the market. Besides, the political parties started to outsource policy-making, strategy consulting, opinion research, advertising and public relations (PR) to the independent political consulting market, thereby kick-starting it.

Quickly the economy was realizing the change in the interest mediation system, and the year 2000 is generally seen as the starting point for public affairs and lobbying consultants in Austria, using this window of opportunity to establish new services on the market (Lederer *et al*, 2005, p. 186f; Köppl and Wippersberg, 2014a, p. 31ff).

Thus, the first public affairs and lobbying consultancies were established on the market. Small independent firms were launched by individuals who were all socialized in working with the unique Austrian system. They knew the Austrian political system, and were able to deal with its characteristics. This shows that the big global networks did not come to the Austrian market. This specific Austrian development brought about a mixture of former party employees and professionals coming from related areas like PR, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade associations, law and even journalism. What they all had in common was the drive to fill the existing gap, thereby contributing to the policy-making process in Austria. Furthermore, companies started to establish in-house public affairs functions to enable them to professionally deal with the new political system and to profit from professional public affairs (Köppl, 2001).

This period from 2000 to 2007 can be considered as the first booming years of public affairs and lobbying in Austria. The reputation of the function was growing as fast as the business was growing. Since 2008, the public affairs function has come under pressure and the boom cycle has faded. But the development of the industry continues and public affairs does remain in place in Austria, both as a company function as well as a highly specialized field of consulting. A need for well-educated public affairs professionals resulted, as many companies needed employees for their newly established public affairs departments.

Unfortunately, the image of public affairs still suffers from some so-called ‘lobbying scandals’ in Austria (since 2009) – which also has a serious impact on the training of public affairs. Few students commit themselves to studying public affairs or aspire to work as lobbyists or public affairs experts although the demand is still there: public affairs experts see a still growing market in different industries, such as energy, health care, green industry, food production, infrastructure, NGOs and pharmaceuticals (Köppl and Wippersberg, 2014b, p. 9f).

To summarize, there are the following reasons for a professional education of public affairs: (i) a lot of former politicians now work as lobbyists, having a lot of experience of how politics work in Austria, but not in the field of professional public affairs. Being the ‘target’ of public affairs does not mean one automatically is able to



perform as a professional public affairs manager; (ii) more and more businesses need professional public affairs – on both the national and international levels; and (iii) a professional education is also needed for improving the public affairs industry's bad reputation.

## **MA in Public Communication – Public Affairs at the University of Vienna**

Despite the slow rise of public affairs in Austria and the ambivalent image of the profession, the University of Vienna recognized the development very early, and established a postgraduate Master of Arts program in Public Communication at the Department of Mass Communication with the possibility of an intensive specialization in public affairs.

Established in 2006, the program was the first in the German-speaking world that offered students the chance to focus on public affairs and the subject of public affairs was not just a small part within a course for political consultancy or PR. Naturally, though, the purpose was not to establish a single program for public affairs only, but to integrate it into a wider range of communication disciplines.

In Austria, access to public affairs jobs is not restricted and is therefore very liberal. As it still is a young profession too, the insecurity of employers is high concerning the question of whom to hire. An academic education provided by a well-respected university and the Viennese Department of Communication with 20 years of experience in similar programs serves as a proof for employees as well as for employers, sets the standard for any other education and so promotes professionalization by engaging in developing a curriculum featuring public affairs. This demonstrated a substantial step toward the professionalization of the public affairs industry in Austria. This article will not discuss the problem of public affairs being a 'profession' or a legitimate discipline (Fleisher, 2007, p. 282). In one sense, it is immaterial whether public affairs is declared a profession: a decent education always supports any kind of attempts of professionalization, as intellectual tradition and an established body of knowledge as well as technical skills acquired through professional training are characteristics for any recognized profession (McGrath, 2005, p. 125). On the path to public affairs becoming a well-established occupation or even a profession, it is evident that education is needed.

A typical question for a lot of professions is: Can it be taught or do you have to be born for it? The University of Vienna strongly believes that professional skills for public affairs can be both taught and learned (just as they are in PR or journalism).

Most public affairs professionals also favor a solid education, and consider a 'dual education' – consisting of an academic training, and learning on the job – as the best preparation for a career in the public affairs industry (Köppl and Wippersberg, 2014b, p. 97). In fact, by 2014, a large majority of public affairs managers (80 per cent) already had an academic education, with 25 per cent having some exposure



to public affairs subjects during their studies, and another 25 per cent of the interviewees having a specific education in public affairs (mainly academic education, that is, master programs) (Köppl and Wippersberg, 2014b, p. 47f).

## **The Demands for a Public Affairs Program**

What does a public affairs professional need to be able to perform well in the industry? According to a survey, the most important activities for public affairs professionals are collecting and preparing information for decision makers and different target groups, compiling arguments, bilateral talks with decision makers, the development of strategies and building networks. Other activities include maintaining relations with decision makers, internal coordination within the company or with the clients, establishing personal relationships with journalists, evaluation and measurement of success. When respondents were asked about the most important instruments in public affairs work, stakeholder management, government relations, lobbying, issues management, reputation management, media relations and CSR were ranked the most relevant. In addition, knowledge about policy-making, the political context and the workings of politics are necessary. Finally, a public affairs practitioner must have integrity, reliability, a good educational background and a general interest in world affairs (Köppl and Wippersberg, 2014b, p. 90ff).

To be successful in preparing students for the public affairs business, the subjects of the program have to meet all these requirements. It is strongly believed that all these subjects can be taught – except for the general educational background, the interest in world affairs and the desire to be up-to-date in current affairs, which are must-haves that every student has to bring to the program themselves.

## **The Program**

The Master of Arts in Public Communication offers an equally scientific-based and practical-oriented education. The whole program does not only focus on public affairs, but is the framework for different specializations (besides public affairs, the other specializations are PR, advertising, journalism and market research). The program runs for four semesters (2 years) with a workload of 120 ECTS-points,<sup>1</sup> and is organized in a way that students can attend the program alongside their employment. The courses take place in the evenings or on weekends to enable students to work and study at the same time.

The management of the program is convinced that a university curriculum at Master's level cannot consist of practical training only, but has to be founded upon a theoretical framework. Therefore, the main part of the first year of the program (so-called 'Scientific Frame') presents basic knowledge in communication science,



humanities, cultural studies, social sciences, economy and law, and incorporates academic theory into industry-driven training. As there is no ‘grand theory’ of public affairs (McGrath *et al*, 2010, p. 336) students are confronted with different theoretical debates and approaches. Only findings from all these fields that are relevant for the public affairs industry are taught, as the Scientific Frame is a condensed introduction into the scientific world that provides practicable knowledge. Afterwards, the students shall be able to understand the basic principles of different scientific fields to apply them in their public affairs work. This approach guarantees a high level of reflection of the professional routine.

The Scientific Frame mostly consists of lectures, and has to be attended by all students, no matter which specialization they have chosen. Therefore, the students with their different foci can interact with and learn from each other.

To provide an applied learning, the teaching of theoretical approaches has to be in tight coordination with practical training and cannot be an end in itself: more lively practical training starts in the first year, although it is not the main focus. In the second year, all the classes address tangible problems with a practical–professional orientation (seminars, practical trainings, simulations, project work).

Numerous examples, best practice and case studies provided by public affairs professionals show the practical relevance of the scientific background as well as the current challenges of the public affairs industry. That way the program successfully integrates real-world, experiential, learning into higher education.

To assure the quality of these specific requirements of the curriculum, adequate teachers have to be chosen. The academic lecturers are mainly selected from the scientific staff of the Department of Communication along with colleagues from various other departments. They all have to be able to anticipate the particular relevance for public affairs professionals of the general scientific background. The trainers for the classes in second year are public affairs professionals to guarantee that the most up-to-date skills and techniques are passed on. Public affairs practitioners know better than academics the concepts, methods, tools and techniques that are unique to the practice of public affairs. Therefore, they are the best teachers for this part of the curriculum. Both groups of teachers have to be well-selected to assure the best knowledge transfer possible.

As there is neither a definitive body of knowledge in public affairs nor a clarity about the scope of the field, but rather a lack of established programs and of scholarly consensus (Fleisher, 2007, p. 283; McGrath *et al*, 2010, p. 336), it was a challenge to design the program adequately to equip the students with the necessary skills for the current profession and even to anticipate future needs. The development of the program in 2006 was based on intensive discussions with the industry, members of professional associations and with the members of the scientific advisory board to fulfill all these needs.

Although there is no coherent, well-grounded conceptualization of the nature of the public affairs discipline, the program was designed for public affairs experts by



public affairs practitioners and sets the standard for public affairs education in Austria. It is a basic principle for the program to be able to adapt the curriculum very quickly as soon as new demands occur in the business. Thus, the program needs constant input from the public affairs industry.

The curriculum of the first year (Scientific Frame) consists of the following subjects and courses (Table 1).

The workshops on occupational profiles include all fields of practice: PR, public affairs, advertising, market research and journalism. Students get to know about typical skills needed in the different professional fields, and get their first chance to test typical activities and tasks in small projects.

In the second year the focus lies on public affairs. The courses are highly application-oriented: all about the planning, implementation and evaluation of public affairs strategies, applying the adequate tools and developing the relevant professional skills for public affairs. Students are trained to solve problems and manage tasks of the public affairs industry. Moreover, students are challenged to apply their scientific knowledge and the economic and legal framework when dealing with the business.

The curriculum of the second year (Public Affairs Skills) consists of the following subjects and courses (Table 2).

Two workshops form an important part of the second year's curriculum: Cross Communication (3 ECTS). These workshops are unique both in topic and didactics. One practical problem has to be solved from different perspectives, for example, from the viewpoint of public affairs, PR and marketing. The focus is on similarities and differences in handling of communication problems seen from different perspectives. The goal is to ensure mutual understanding of all players in the communication process and to illustrate that to solve a problem properly and globally requires different disciplines and the cross-disciplinary cooperation of the involved players. It also shows that all kinds of communication disciplines evolve from the same roots: to help achieving a company's goal. This approach also increases the employability of the graduates as they are facing constantly changing requirements in the communication industry.

Policies of practice and ethical standards do not form a discrete subject on their own, but – more sustainably and effectively – are a didactic principle informing the entire curriculum.

After graduating from this program, students will be able to:

- analyze politics and policies, and align both with corporate goals;
- manage issues, stakeholders, the media and crisis;
- write different sorts of texts according to the specific audience;
- advocate for political change;
- manage and coordinate cross-company issue teams including PR, marketing, legal; and
- plan and organize campaigns.

**Table 1:** Year 1 curriculum

	<i>ECTS</i>
<i>Basic principles of communication science</i>	
Communication science (reception and impact research, agenda setting, agenda building, agenda cutting, cultural studies and evaluation)	4
Media studies (media shift and media innovation, basics of political communication, actors and goals of media policy, structure and characteristics of the Austrian media, audience research and media economics)	4
Basics of communication practice (basics of all fields of practice: PR, public affairs, advertising, market research and journalism; typical requirements, career opportunities, tasks and activities)	4
Intercultural communication (intercultural differences of communication processes, differences and similarities, and local versus global strategies)	2
Total	14
<i>Basic principles of humanities and cultural studies</i>	
<i>ECTS</i>	
Contemporary history (history of the twenty-second and twenty-first century, learning from history and the significance of historical events as a framework of communication process)	3
Society analysis (social background of current affairs, interdependencies of society, economy and politics in Austria)	3
International relations (basics of international politics, European policy, institutions of international relations and International NGOs)	3
Political science (political systems and subsystems, social partnership, globalization, globalization, democracy and participation)	3
Total	12
<i>Basic principles of social sciences</i>	
<i>ECTS</i>	
Media psychology (theories of attitude and behavior, theories of perception, learning theories, information processing, psychology of personality and emotion)	3
Sociology of communication (overview of socialization theories, status and role, social action, interaction and social processes)	3
Macroeconomics (basics of macroeconomics, economic indicators and responsibilities of the financial and economic policy)	1,5
Business administration (organization theory, accounting, financing and taxes)	1,5
Marketing (basics of marketing and sales)	3
Total	12
<i>Basic principles of law</i>	
<i>ECTS</i>	
Constitutional and administrative law (basic terms of state and law, foundations of constitutional law, foundations of administrative law)	1,5
Communications law I (media law, broadcast law)	1,5
Communications law II (Internet law, data protection)	1,5
Labor law (drawing up of employment contracts, staff versus freelancers, conclusion and termination of employment contracts, holidays, severance payment, 'new self-employed', collective agreement in the communication sector)	1,5
Copyright (outline of the Copyright Act, definition of work, exploitation rights and limitations to copyright, trademark law)	1,5

**Table 1:** (Continued)

<i>Basic principles of communication science</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Unfair competition law (outline of unfair competition law, requirement of truth, prohibition of disparaging statements, distinctive signs protection)	1, 5
Private commercial law (foundations of contract law, billing of services in communication professions, contracts for work and services)	1, 5
European Union law (EU institutions, institutional EU law, regulations, directives, European legislation and legislative procedures (EU lobbying), selected chapters of substantive EU law)	1, 5
Total	12
<i>Workshops</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Workshops on occupational profiles (PR, public affairs, advertising, market research and journalism)	10
Total	10

To graduate from the program, students have to write a Master's thesis and to pass a challenging exam taken in front of a committee and encompassing all subjects of the whole program. In their Master's theses the students have to prove that they are not only able to solve a practical task (mainly setting up a public affairs campaign) but also can reason why the theoretical approaches help to resolve the problem. Students research different topics, mostly the campaigns are constructed for real-world clients. As most of the students are working in the field of public affairs already, they choose a task from their daily business. The range of topics is very wide, mostly the theses focus on the revision of statutes for different businesses or companies on different levels (national, EU, international). Students as well as employers find the theses very helpful as they deal with real-world problems; indeed, very often the campaigns are implemented. As the theses often deal with confidential information, the papers can be blocked from the public. Finally, the students receive the academic degree 'Master of Arts'.

## The Students

The program is designed for people who have an undergraduate degree already and who want to get an intensive training in public affairs to prepare for a career in the field of political communication and increase their employability.

The students have to show two qualifications: completed studies as well as some work experience in a communication profession. To prove their motivation and to test if they are suited for the profession of public affairs, all applicants have to pass an entrance examination. This consists of three parts: writing a position paper, a test of



**Table 2:** Year 2 curriculum

<i>Communication practices – Techniques</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Political communication and rhetorical devices (target groups, multipliers, public and non-public communication, politainment, management of projects, press releases, speech writing, ghostwriting, political rhetoric, debate preparation, interviews and position papers)	4
Lobbying and public affairs (role and opportunities of representing the interests of companies and associations, political system, arena analysis, mobilization (multipliers, members, employees, stakeholder groups), grassroots lobbying, coalition management and public lobbying (public events and media components of lobbying campaigns))	4
Issue management (collection and processing of information, information behavior and social sensitivity)	2
Methods of negotiation (game theory, persuasive communication and Harvard methods)	2
Market research (overview of questionnaire design, image analysis, evaluation of results and quantitative and qualitative research methods)	2
Coaching and political leadership (coaching as a working technique of policy advice, recognition of foreign communication behavior, recognition of foreign leadership behavior and consultation)	2
Total	16
<i>Communication practice – Fields of activity in political communication</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Political PR (managing PR for corporations, associations and conduction)	2
Political structures and analysis (analysis of decisions, processes of decisions, risk analyses, monitoring and early warning systems)	2
Strategy and message development (planning and development of key messages in political communication (message development) and strategy development)	4
Lobbying and public affairs in the EU (EU institutions, actors, decision-making processes, comitology, lobbying strategies in the EU, EU media work and EU issue management)	4
Political campaigning in the United States (overview of trends and developments in policy advice and the political campaigning in the United States)	2
Reflection on practice (best practice)	2
Total	16
<i>Conception and practice simulation</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Conception (basics of conception, preparation of concepts for clients, conception of lobbying campaigns, processes, structures and instruments of political campaigns, planning and budgeting, development of strategies and conflict control)	4
Project and resource management (basics of project management, management of political campaigns, management of NGO campaigns, specifics of NGO campaigns as well as the planning and implementation, fundraising, mobilization of sympathizers and case studies)	4
Practice simulation (development of a campaign (non-profit, political campaign) for an actual client; final presentation as pitch)	4
Total	16
<i>Workshops</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Workshops cross communication	3
Workshop presentation techniques	3
Total	6

**Table 2:** (Continued)

<i>Communication practices – Techniques</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
<i>Master thesis</i>	<i>ECTS</i>
Master thesis seminar (assistance for writing the master thesis)	4
Master thesis	6
Total	10

general knowledge and current affairs, and an interview to determine their professional and personal qualifications.

The studies completed before starting the public affairs program are varied, but the main fields of study are communication science, political science, economic science and law. Other subjects are very diverse, ranging from theology to biology, from architecture to landscape planning. Obviously in public affairs specialized knowledge in different subjects or different professions is as important as specific public affairs know-how.

The in-depth knowledge of different industries or the diverse academic background is clearly an advantage for the public affairs work. Public affairs experts prefer hiring people with a firm basis of expertise as well as an in-depth education in public affairs. They are convinced that this combination is the best preparation as such people bring a lot of expertise to the public affairs work and do not have to start to build up this knowledge for a company or a client. This approach definitively favors the alumni of the program.

As the program is organized extra-occupational, most students are working in the field (at least by the second year), most of them even in the public affairs industry or in another communication profession. A lot of students are ‘hired from the classroom’ by professors or are recommended to other public affairs professionals who are looking for adequate employees. Chances for the students/alumni to get a job in the field are extremely good because ‘they make a difference’, as a public affairs manager pointed out.

## Reality Check for the Program

A survey conducted among the alumni of the program in February 2014 shows that the subjects are highly relevant to the demands of the industry. Approximately half of the alumni currently work in dedicated public affairs roles, a quarter of the alumni have occupations with part-time public affairs responsibilities, while the remaining quarter of alumni work in other fields of public communication.

Obviously – and probably even a little understandably – the alumni remember the first year of the program (scientific frame) as being less interesting than the second year. Therefore, the first year is perceived as more challenging and tiring than the



second year. According to their rating, within the first year, those subjects directly related to public affairs such as the basics of law and political science were the most important for their occupation in public affairs. Of course the first practical experiences in the form of workshops were considered the most relevant for public affairs studies.

In the second year, practical training and application-oriented skills and techniques were the main focus in teaching, which – of course – was claimed to be the most interesting part of the program for the alumni. This also had the biggest impact on their professional activities. Best ranked were political issues (political PR and communication, political structure and analysis, political campaigning in the United States), soft skills such as negotiation methods or coaching and political leadership and – as would be expected – case studies in lobbying and public affairs (in Austria and EU) as well as strategy and message development and reflection on practice. Courses dealing with management skills (resource management, project management and issue management) were ranked slightly lower.

For both academics and professional associations it is of very high importance to know what potential content was missing from the program and which courses should be expanded. Alumni found that political issues (political relationship building, party building and party logic and special features of the Austrian domestic politics) as well as content regarding media changes (social media and online campaigning) should be included in the program. Alumni wish to see courses in soft and management skills expanded, but would primarily recommend even more case studies.

These findings are in line with those of a recent study on the status of the public affairs industry: both alumni at an early stage of their careers and well-established professionals see the significance of knowledge about the political system (in Austria and Europe). In recruiting processes in public affairs agencies, it seems to be almost essential to have a political background to be hired (with experience in active political functions – such as former elected politicians – or in a non-active political function – such as staffers), in particular because of the specific knowledge and the networks they bring, whereas experience in administration or journalism are stated to be of minor importance (Köppl and Wippersberg, 2014b, p. 82).

Another aspect of the reality check is the personnel changes that are observable in the public affairs industry: as professionally educated students enter the market, former politicians who worked in this field very often are beginning to be replaced. Now these new public affairs managers can shape the standards and processes of the public affairs industry. On the other hand this development leads to fewer job opportunities for former politicians.

## Future Prospects

The program helps young professionals to become more secure in their professional identity and to develop self-confidence for their occupation (which is regarded



as highly important by McGrath, 2005). Furthermore, the fact that the program is established at a university adds authority and supports the discipline in becoming a commendable and reputable profession.

So the lack of a definitive body of knowledge and the constant development of the industry is less an obstacle than an advantage. It is a big benefit for the industry as well as for a university if an institution of education like the Viennese Department of Communication is willing to track current developments and trends of an industry and to develop a curriculum for an evolving occupation.

As practitioners and academics are still defining and redefining the goals and boundaries of public affairs, and as the challenges from the real-world industry are changing according to new assignments, the subjects in the program have to be open for adaption in dialog with practitioners. Therefore the program fulfills not only the requirement of the public affairs industry but also a request by McGrath *et al* (2010, p. 340): ‘Perhaps, though, we should be more optimistic and take this as healthy evidence of the continuing vitality of public affairs. Practitioners are constantly expanding the function, and academics will face a continual challenge to keep pace with real-world developments. This is as it should be’.

## Note

1 European Credit Transfer System ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm)).

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## Original Article

# The role of education in advancing the lobbying profession

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**Abstract** While lobbying is not usually viewed as one of life's higher callings, those who engage in public policy advocacy are essential to the workings of any representative system of government. As a lobbyist, I view myself as a skilled professional who understands governmental processes and is fully aware of the laws that govern my profession. However, a profession is not just a group of individuals and requires a collective infrastructure. This article advances the proposition that, for lobbying to be considered a profession, a structured-educational program that teaches a common core of knowledge is critical. The Association of Government Relations Professionals (AGRP) has successfully sponsored its Lobbying Certificate Program (LCP) for a decade. This LCP has demonstrated that the essential knowledge base needed to be a lobbyist can be taught in a program operated by the professional association representing lobbyists in the United States. Using the faculty resources of the profession and the academic community, the LCP enables AGRP to provide a significant benefit to both new and experienced lobbyists while both furthering the professionalism of public policy advocates and producing significant revenues for AGRP. The article discusses the limitations of the LCP and argues for it to be sanctioned by the US Congress.

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A recent meeting I attended in a Federal courthouse building in Washington DC, helped me to focus on the importance of education in advancing both the effectiveness of lobbying and the public perception of the profession. Although the meeting had nothing to do with lobbying, it was my entrance to that very imposing building that was enlightening. There were several security officers, one of whom asked me if I was an attorney. It seems that lawyers are afforded a speedier screening and, perhaps more importantly, may keep their cell phones. I am a law school graduate but have never been admitted to the Bar of the District of Columbia or any other State of the Union and have therefore never practiced as a professional lawyer.



Had I answered the guard's question affirmatively, the officer would have required me to show my membership in the District of Columbia Bar as proof of my profession. One cannot be admitted to practice law without successful completion of the requisite courses at an accredited school of law followed by passing an examination and the issuance of a license that can be revoked for conduct that is unprofessional or illegal.<sup>1</sup> I could only meet the first of these requirements and thus had to be frisked and was required to part with my cell phone. As I awaited my meeting, I reflected on the law school courses I had taken. At least in my first and second years, most covered the same subject matter taught at every other law school. Torts, contracts, wills and such are components of a common body of essential knowledge for all those who intend to practice law. Upon graduation, there is a test, called a Bar examination, that must be successfully completed, in order to become a professional lawyer.

For most of the past 40 years, I have thought of myself as a professional lobbyist, being paid by clients to lobby to represent their interests before Congress and various Federal agencies. Not once has my knowledge of the governmental process or of the laws governing my profession ever been tested. My educational training for being a lobbyist consisted of fulfilling the course requirements needed to be awarded a Bachelor of Science in Economics with a major in political science. After squeaking through law school, I taught at the high school and college levels before good fortune brought me to Washington DC in the employ of a United States Senator. Throughout most of those years, I had no idea what lobbying involved and never entertained the thought that I might one day become a lobbyist.

## **What is a Lobbyist?**

Over the past two decades, lobbying has undergone changes that are more pronounced than 20 years before that. To a significant extent, lobbyists rely far more on technology to gather information and disseminate a message. Between college and law school, I had my first experience working in a political campaign for a candidate who sought to unseat a incumbent member of Congress. The opposition research I was paid to perform was done by the painstaking and time-consuming task of reading publications that listed the votes of our opponent or statements they had made on the floor of the House of Representatives. Not much had changed many years later when I got my first job as a lobbyist. I read through publications searching for information and then placing it into a word processor. Since I was new to the profession, I had little personal knowledge of how to target and gain support from my lobbying efforts and sought to use technology to help me fill the gap. I was able to get my employer to use a fax machine network to get actionable information to our affiliates in all 50 states and use 'personalized' postcards for the group's members to send to their elected officials in support or opposition to various measures before Congress.



These were cutting edge efforts at the time. Today, lobbyists can acquire information about votes, issues, members of Congress from many reliable sources. Nevertheless, we still use that information to persuade elected officials to take some action that pertains to legislation. The essence of our work has not changed; the tools we use to do it have. The same impact that I used to stir grassroots action via postcards is now done by highly targeted efforts using sophisticated traditional- and social-media campaigns. There are those who claim that the individuals involved in these types of efforts are also lobbyists. I disagree. They may be part of a lobbying program but they are not making direct contacts with elected officials. When I put together my postcard campaigns 35 years ago, I used a direct mail firm and a public opinion polling firm as essential components of those campaigns. They were no more lobbyists than are their higher-tech equivalents of the early twenty-first century. Lobbyists use different skills than those in public relations, media, or pollsters. We need to determine whom to lobby, how to reach the targeted officials effectively, when to reach them and so on. At the heart of our profession, we need to be experts on the legislative process and the elected officials and their staff aides because we are an integral part of that process. If there were an Advocacy University, it would have different sets of courses for lobbyists, communications, polling and the like.

## **Education as an Essential Component of Any Profession**

Had I wished to be a barber or a cosmetologist in Washington DC, I would have been required to attend classes for at least 500 hours and pass an examination before receiving a license. I would also be required to take six hours of continuing education courses every 2 years in order to maintain my license and presumably face the loss of that license for some act that is deemed unprofessional, unethical and unlawful. The educational requirements for barbers and similar professions exist to foster a basic level of proficiency. One can hang on an office wall a framed certificate that is tangible proof that the educational requirements of the profession have been met. While the juxtaposition of attorneys and cosmeticians may seem quixotic, there are essential similarities between these professions. Each requires a specific level of education provided by an accredited institution. Each also confers a license upon those who successfully meet these requirements, requires a level of continuing education, and has a mechanism for revoking that license for the purpose of professional punishment. Education, examination, licensing and enforcement of standards are the commonalities of these two distinctly different professions. To a significant extent, they are the commonalities of most occupations that can be justifiably called professions.

Lobbying lacks an accreditation process and a policing mechanism sanctioned by law for both admission and expulsion (McGrath, 2005). At least in the United States, the constitutional right to freedom of speech makes it impossible to deny anyone the right to lobby – or the right to be paid to lobby. However, that constitutional right

does not prohibit the regulation of paid lobbyists.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Federal government, each of our 50 States, and increasing numbers of local governments, all have laws regulating lobbying and each has differing definitions of who is covered.<sup>3</sup> None of these regulatory schemes has a training or testing requirement with the exception of those states that require lobbyists to take a one-session course or listen to a brief lecture on ethics and legalities.

It is often said that lobbying is the second-oldest profession. While I have never seen the two pitted against each other in an opinion poll, the verdict of the public is that there is no profession that has less honesty and lower-ethical standards than lobbying.<sup>4</sup> We have never been ranked anywhere near the top of the professional hit parade, but to be viewed at the very bottom of the list – just below members of Congress – is damning to each of us who is a lobbyist and a significant deterrent to our ability to attract young people into the field of public policy advocacy. Nevertheless, I hear no expressions of concern about this sad state of affairs from the lobbying community. Indeed, we let the criticism roll off our collective backs and make the obstinate assumption that we will survive the calumny with our incomes intact if we just stay below the radar. Lobbyists are too easy a media target for such a strategy to succeed. One can argue whether we should care about public opinion, but the consistent bashing of lobbyists in the media and from the mouths of some politicians has contributed to the early retirement of experienced lobbyists while negatively affecting the numbers and quality of new entrants to our profession.

The danger is that lobbyists will begin to emulate the tactics the public attributes to us which, in fact, are more akin to the style of lobbying in the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century that was based on money, gifts, and other activities that lower the standards of our profession (Jacob, 2010). The danger of retrogression is not far-fetched. It was not that long ago that the leaders of our craft were those who touted who they knew rather than what they knew. In my first job as a lobbyist, I was criticized for using a fact sheet to support my case and knew several lobbyists who never let the facts get in their way.

I was fortunate to have received so much of my on-the-job training under the tutelage of two men, both of whom had many years of experience and each of whom was happy to share with me their knowledge and wisdom. I take the same approach with my own staff. One does not learn unless he or she is put in a position to make mistakes. My mentors gave me both responsibility and authority. Undoubtedly I have made some mistakes, but to paraphrase the Frank Sinatra song, they have been too few to remember. The unpleasant experiences I recall are ones that taught me lessons about trust, or more accurately, the lack thereof. On two occasions, I gave members of Congress my own opinion about a legislative matter that differed from that of my employer. Although the matter was not one on which I had any lobbying responsibility and I had cautioned that my views were in confidence, they got back to my employer. Trust is important to many relationships, but it is critical to lobbying. Elected officials must know that they can trust my character and knowledge, and that





they can say things in confidence that I will not reveal. In the two blunders I made, I found that elected officials may not have those values. I have learned to take verbal abuse from members of Congress for acts committed by a client without revealing the true culprit.

Today, most lobbyists are valued for their knowledge of both the issues they work on and the legislative process. To be sure, there are a number of lobbyists who sell their access to particular elected officials as the key to their success (Bertrand *et al.*, 2011). There are others – an increasing number in the United States regrettably – who gain their access by raising political contributions for members of Congress. This type of lobbyist still needs to know enough of the substance and politics of the process so they can put their access to use in the most effective manner possible. While I have often said that lobbyists come in different sizes, shapes and flavors, all of us are working in an environment that is changing significantly with the decentralization of congressional power and the increasing sophistication of lobbying tactics and techniques. If we ignore these realities, we risk a significant loss in the quality of the work we do.

## **The Essential Role of Education for the Lobbying Profession**

The key to avoiding this pitfall is required training and continuing education for all lobbyists. The greatest obstacle to achieving that goal is the overwhelming number of lobbyists who would never voluntarily support such a requirement. It is often claimed that lobbying is the most regulated profession in the United States. Whether or not that is the case – and I doubt that it is – there is very little recognition in the lobbying community that effective lobbying requires each of us to possess a common body of essential knowledge. First on the list are the statutory requirements that apply to lobbying.<sup>5</sup> We are supposed to file registration forms and periodic reports with Congress stating who is paying us to lobby, how much we are being paid, and the specific issues on which we are being paid to lobby. While the glaring loopholes in the registration law at the federal level are not the subject of this article, those 12 000 of us who are covered by it must abide by it. Random audits are done to assess compliance. Egregious violations are subject to criminal penalties. Equally important are the laws regulating political contributions as well as the requirement that registered lobbyists report their political contributions to Congress. Finally, there is the somewhat infamous Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, passed in the wake of the scandal involving the so-called lobbyist Jack Abramoff. That Act has many Do's and Don'ts which essentially prohibit lobbyists from paying for as little as a cup of coffee consumed by an elected official or staff aide. As with all legislation, the devil is in the details. However the mere perception that we have crossed over a prohibited threshold can be quite harmful to the one attribute that is most dear, our reputation.



In addition to possessing a solid knowledge of the legislative process and of the laws that govern lobbying, there is also the need to conduct oneself in an ethical manner. More than two decades ago, the American League of Lobbyists adopted a Code of Ethics in order to ‘strengthen our image and enhance our role as a vital and respected link in the democratic process’.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the first of those two goals shows an understandable concern about the public’s perception of lobbyists as influence peddlers and the like. (As an aside, equally noteworthy is the fact that the American League of Lobbyists changed its name in 2013 to the Association of Government Relations Professionals (AGRP). It appears that the word ‘lobbyist’ comes with more baggage than even its national association can handle.) The Code has been viewed by lobbying associations in many of our 50 States as well as those in other countries as a worthwhile model that addresses essential issues such as honesty, integrity, avoidance of conflicts of interest and due diligence.

### **Can Lobbying be Taught?**

Many years ago, I worked with The American University in Washington DC to establish a Lobbying Institute to teach lobbying. While the Institute thrives,<sup>7</sup> albeit having dropped the word ‘lobbying’ from its name, I became acutely aware of my inability to teach a student how to be an effective lobbyist. One can no more be taught to be an effective lobbyist than he or she can be taught to be an effective lawyer.<sup>8</sup> There are a variety of nuances to the work we do that require a combination of innate abilities and experience. I once worked for a national association whose state affiliate had supported an unsuccessful challenger to a long-term incumbent. During the race, the incumbent was afflicted with a case of acute appendicitis. He blamed the state and national associations for putting him in the hospital and never again voted in their favor. On another occasion, I was in charge of a legislative amendment that had passed the House of Representatives. As it was being debated on the floor of the Senate, it became clear that it would not pass. A mentor advised that I act to pull the amendment so that it would not suffer a defeat. We succeeded in getting it included in the final version of the bill by focusing our efforts on the Conference Committee that resolved the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill we sought to amend. This is knowledge that can only be gained on the job. It cannot be taught. Nevertheless, there is a body of knowledge that should be taught as a requirement to be a registered lobbyist in the United States.<sup>9</sup> The curriculum should begin with the structure and functions of the various components of government and extend to the more complex details of certain governmental processes such as budgeting and procedural rules. Furthermore, the laws regulating lobbying and the consequences for failure to obey them are also well-suited candidates for an educational curriculum. It is equally possible to include courses in lobbying tactics and techniques in the curriculum.



## The Educational Role of a Professional Lobbyists' Association

Taking a significant first step in that direction, the American League of Lobbyists established a Lobbying Certificate Program or LCP in 2006, which is comprised of a very thorough curriculum of five core sessions and eight electives.<sup>10</sup> Registrants must complete only the five core courses and six of the eight electives within 2 years in order to obtain their certificate. The full package of courses costs over US\$1600 for association members and US\$1999 for non-members. Among the course offerings are ones covering the Budget and Appropriations, process Ethics, Congressional Rules and Procedures, and one titled the Business of Advocacy.<sup>11</sup> On more than one occasion in its earlier years, I taught the Budget and Appropriations Process course along with one or more of my colleagues. I was surprised to see both neophyte and experienced lobbyists in the room each time I taught the course, demonstrating that both experienced and less experienced lobbyists find it useful. Upon completion, a certificate is awarded. It is a piece of paper which carries with it the ability to place the letters 'PLC' (standing for Professional Lobbying Certificate) after one's name. There is no advanced level of certificated courses nor any continuing education or refresher course requirements. Like the Code of Ethics, the association has no ability to certify or de-certify one as a lobbyist. The lack of an enforcement mechanism is essentially a matter of money. Defending such suits as well as establishing a process to de-certify and hear appeals is quite costly. Ours being a litigious nation, anyone who was threatened with de-certification would file a lawsuit. At the very least, they would claim that the de-certification process was arbitrary, would have a chilling impact on their Constitutional right to petition the government as a professional lobbyist, and was in violation of US anti-trust laws.

Within less than 2 years of its creation, the success of the program overwhelmed the association's only paid staffer. At that point, the association went into partnership with a publisher of government relations directories. The program continues to grow and has become a significant source of revenue for the association. Before long, competition arose from for-profit and non-profits. None offered a lobbying certificate, but many enabled participants to take sessions on the legislative process, lobbying techniques, and legal/ethical issues for both basic and advanced levels of lobbyists, often using the same faculty as the LCP. There is also an excellent Master's degree program on the legislative-process program that is part of the George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management,<sup>12</sup> a suite of well-respected offerings at The American University,<sup>13</sup> and a Lobbying Certificate program offered by the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, in the face of this competition, AGRP's Lobbying Certificate Program continues to attract a strong base, in large part because of the prestige attached to its being offered by the profession's only national association.

Most new entrants to the lobbying profession come directly from Capitol Hill where they served as staff aides to members of Congress or congressional

committees. Some of the higher-level staffers are hired because of their close relationship to one or more elected officials. Others make the transition from Capitol Hill to lobbying as part of their career advancement. Those in the former of these two groups probably feel incorrectly they need no education, while those in the latter group soon find out how much they do not know about the process that has been the source of their employment. The increasing number of lobbyists who enter the profession without Hill experience, whether from business, academia, or the non-profit world, are equally in need of that fundamental body of knowledge that is essential to being a lobbyist.

### **Limits on the Association as the Sole Source of Required Training**

As ground breaking and successful as the LCP has been, the certificate issued to graduates is not a license nor does the professional association that issues it have the ability to de-certify a lobbyist for either malpractice or illegal conduct. Those limitations are not important at this stage in the evolution of our profession. What would be revolutionary would be an amendment to the Federal law governing the disclosure of lobbying activities that requires successful completion of a core curriculum as a condition of registration. Couple this with changes to the Lobbying Disclosure Act that expand its coverage so that at least 90 per cent of all lobbyists are required to register and file reports rather than the current guesstimate of 40–50 per cent and we would see a radical breakthrough in how lobbyists view themselves. If Congress also officially sanctioned those entities that were certified to offer these courses, there would be quality control of both the curriculum and the competence of the faculty. This proposal is not as radical as it may seem. In fact, it already has the support of Congress. The Honest Leadership in Government Act of 2007 contains this language:

It is the sense of the Congress that ... the lobbying community should develop proposals for *multiple self-regulatory organizations* which could (A) provide for the *creation of standards* for the organizations appropriate to the type of lobbying and individuals to be served; (B) *provide training for the lobbying community* on law, ethics, reporting requirements, and disclosure requirements; (C) provide for the development of educational materials for the public on how to responsibly hire a lobbyist or lobby firm; (D) provide standards regarding reasonable fees charged to clients; (E) provide for the *creation of a third-party certification program* that includes ethics training; and (F) provide for disclosure of requirements to clients regarding fee schedules and conflict of interest rules.<sup>15</sup>

With this provision, Congress was telling our profession what we needed to do to get our house in order and that education and certification should be our first order of



business. The challenge to the leaders of our profession is to take this opportunity to develop a training requirement that is affordable and effective. Equally, it is a challenge to Congress to work with us to accomplish that goal.

There are, however, significant limitations on the ability of the Association of Government Relations Professionals to carry out this educational role. As important as the LCP course offerings are, the overall curriculum, required reading and faculty have not been subjected to peer review or oversight. The course-delivery mechanism relies primarily on a classroom environment with distance learning limited to those listening via an audio feed. There is no testing, nor is there a requirement that those who receive an LCP also take refresher courses in order to retain their certificate. Each of these deficiencies can be corrected with sufficient time and money. However, the association is focused on deriving revenues from the LCP program and is loathe to make expenditures that will reduce its net profit, albeit presumably for the short term only. Its relatively small membership base does not afford the revenue base or the needed professional prestige to carry out this task.

As noted earlier, there are many others, both for-profit and not-for-profit entities, who have embarked upon providing individual courses or sets of courses when they saw the success of the LCP program. While none offers a certificate, these competitors often are able to charge attendees far less to acquire the same body of knowledge. The availability of a certificate is clearly important enough to attract a solid body of LCP students each year, but it is not as compelling a feature as it might be if the association were sanctioned by Congress to provide the certificate after the successful completion of an approved curriculum taught by approved faculty members. In my most recent stint as president of the association, I discussed the issue of developing an approved curriculum with staff of the Ethics Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate. They were clearly interested in taking on that role so long as they did not have to take on any teaching responsibilities. There was also a willingness on their part to develop a process to certify those universities and organizations, including our professional association, who would be approved to teach the courses. By providing the educational requirement for lobbyists with the imprimatur of Congress and coupling it with an examination, 'graduates' would be able to use their accomplishment as a tool for professional advancement as well as touting their expertise to prospective clients. Those entities accredited to offer the curriculum would naturally compete with each other both to increase revenue but also to acquire a reputation as being the best.

Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult for our professional association to take its excellent LCP program to the next level without the active support of Congress coupled with an infusion of money needed to develop the curriculum for each of the subjects, line up and compensate qualified faculty, provide quality control, and deal with such administrative matters as student registration and payment. Since Congress is unlikely to give it a monopoly, the association would also need to expand its

marketing efforts to compete with the large universities and for-profit entities that would also be certified to offer the curriculum.

## Conclusion

As daunting as these obstacles are, this competition for the delivery of essential educational courses would be a welcome development that can only strengthen the lobbying profession. While our professional association can continue to play a vital role in the delivery of what I have often referred to above as this common core of essential knowledge, it cannot do so as the only provider of the education. Nor will it be given the level of credibility and participation it needs unless the entire educational program is sanctioned by Congress.

## Notes

- 1 While the requirements to become a practicing lawyer differ by State, they all have these essential elements. See for example, admission requirements which apply in the State of California <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Pamphlets/BecomingALawyer.aspx#2>
- 2 This question was resolved by the US Supreme Court; *United States v. Harriss*, 347 US 612 (1954).
- 3 For an excellent history of lobbying and lobbying laws in the United States, see a speech made by the late US Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, 28 September 1987, [https://www.senate.gov/legislative/common/briefing/Byrd\\_History\\_Lobbying.htm](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/common/briefing/Byrd_History_Lobbying.htm). The Federal law is the Lobbying Disclosure Act, [http://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby\\_Disclosure\\_Act/TOC.htm](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/Lobbying/Lobby_Disclosure_Act/TOC.htm). For a compilation of the laws of the 50 states regulating lobbying and ethics, see <http://www.ncsl.org/research/ethics/50-state-legislative-ethics-and-lobbying-laws.aspx>. The lobbying disclosure requirements in various countries are discussed in Holman and Luneburg (2012).
- 4 See, for instance, the results of a Gallup poll on Honesty/Ethics in Professions taken in December 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1654/honesty-ethics-professions.aspx>.
- 5 Lobbyists practicing before Congress must abide by federal lobbying laws and regulations, while each state has its own laws for those practicing before state legislatures. In some cases, state laws are more stringent than their federal counterparts.
- 6 The text of the Code of Ethics of the American League of Lobbyists is available at <http://doa.alaska.gov/apoc/pdf/LobbyistCodeOfEthics.pdf>
- 7 <http://www.american.edu/spa/ccps/PAAI.cfm>
- 8 For a contrary view, see Goldman (2012).
- 9 The inadequate definition of lobbying coupled with lax enforcement of lobbying registration laws have resulted in thousands of unregistered 'unlobbyists', individuals who are paid advocates but have not registered (Ackley, 2012).
- 10 For a more detailed explanation of the LCP Program, see <http://grprofessionals.org/events-education/lobbying-certificate-program/about-the-lcp/>
- 11 See <http://grprofessionals.org/events-education/lobbying-certificate-program/class-descriptions/>
- 12 See <http://gspm.gwu.edu/>
- 13 See <http://www.american.edu/spa/ccps/PAAI.cfm>
- 14 See <http://www.uww.edu/aaec/certificates-and-modules>
- 15 Public Law 110-181, Section 214; 14 September 2007 (emphases added).



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## Original Article

# Recruiting the competent lobbyist: Career options and employer demands in Germany

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**Abstract** Germany likely employs Europe's largest national lobby labor force. This article presents a comprehensive study of German lobbyists' workplaces and employer expectations of competencies. It provides insights into emerging requirements for a qualified workforce in a diversified job market. Drawing on multiple sources of statistics, surveys and cases, the first section examines staffing and entry routes for the main employer types – associations, corporations and consultancies. The job market offers a broad range of career options. This includes an emerging set of junior training programs. German employers have devised fully paid apprenticeship models as structured practical learning schemes where rotating workplace assignments alternate with seminar learning. Some employers partner in training alliances. Traineeships are tailor-made and unregulated, but their existence points to a growing employer interest in formally developing a talent base and professionalism. The second section offers a job market snapshot based on 189 advertisements from 2012 to 2014. Job ads can be assumed to be an objective measure of employers' articulated intentions and expectations for a quality pool of applicants. The survey tabulates preferences for experience, academic degrees, knowledge areas, personal, social and method competencies, and specific political expert skills. Results demonstrate a complex interplay of qualifications and requirements. Ads also show great variety and ambiguity, suggesting that lobbying lacks standardized job classifications and a stable common vocabulary. Findings show that organizational settings influence task and competency combinations expressed in job ads. While all employers appear to follow similar recruiting patterns in regard to some qualifications, they also differ. For example, associations and businesses place more emphasis on policy concepts, organizational participation, coordination, administration and direct representation than do consultancies, while the latter stress advisory roles and strategizing. Corporations get less involved in campaign advocacy. Associations focus on members. Consulting firms tend to recruit younger, less experienced staff, and to less often request domain knowledge. Highlighting commonalities and differences, this article may help stimulate discussion on explicating employers' competency-based human capital management and recruiting practices. The results may help develop





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guidelines for apprenticeship schemes, continuing education, organized efforts of professional bodies and university curricula.

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Germany likely employs Europe's largest national lobby labor force. Its formation can be traced back to the late 1800s. At the dawn of Germany's 'century of associations' (Eschenburg, 1991),<sup>1</sup> a unique managerial class emerged: 'Verbandsbeamte', literally, association civil servants. Untrained, learning on the fly, they 'organized the interests which they themselves did not have' (Ullmann, 1988, p. 118). Developing human resources systematically came slowly and has not been the lobby's strong suit by German standards. It is a country which takes pride in quality work based on orderly career paths, vocational education and formal credentials, and where collective mental programming prizes uncertainty avoidance by relying on well-trained experts (Hofstede, 2014).

The question of what and how lobbyists should learn has gained attention in the past 15 years, spurred by the 1999 Bonn – Berlin capital move. More than a moving-van episode, it catalyzed culture. Sober scholars noted that the lobby 'Berlinized' (von Alemann, 2002). Young guns and self-styled barbarians engaged in hyperbole: the 'public affairs boomtown' Berlin meant 'a quantum leap' and the 'end of Bonn coziness', consultant Axel Wallrabenstein wrote in 2002 (p. 428). Looser, competitive, project-style direct representation and advocacy campaigns emerged as corporatism and association dominance waned: 'The Berlin Republic is noisier, faster and more chaotic than the Bonn Republic, but also more transparent and public' (Wallrabenstein, 2002, p. 428). The neopluralist market today is a crowded room. Bonn had counted 2000 lobbyists (Broichhausen, 1982, p. 35). Berlin estimates today are around 5000 (Alexander *et al*, 2013). The scene extends to 16 federal states, an EU and global network.

For Germans, lobbying is a loan word from English. Outside of professional parlance, Germans often say 'lobbyism' – note the 'ism' suffix, implying a whole system. In 1998, Ronit and Schneider held that state – interest groups relations 'are almost never described as of lobbying': it is 'a foreign word with connotations of secretive policy processes where illegitimate influence is sought' (p. 559). It implies influence seekers are state-unrecognized and not routinely involved in policy-making. Traditional preference is for the ballast-free term 'Interessenvertretung', or interest representation. To call it lobbying was a smear. Today's use is more liberal. 'The rise of the Anglo-Saxon term lobbying is a result of changes in the interest intermediation system', notes Speth (2010, p. 9).

Berlin also heard professionalization talk. The search for identity, quality, ethics, responses to scandals and regulation calls all raised the bar on talent development. The knowledge ecology changed. New trade media, practitioner ‘cookbooks’, collegial groups’ conferences, seminar vendors, academic studies and university programs increased knowledge dissemination and occupational learning to a level unknown in Bonn.

How far can such efforts go? Some believe the vocation is a chimera. ‘Lobbying even compared to public relations [is] a low-defined occupational field, in which less of an independent professional existence and need to demarcate boundaries is felt’, opines Olfe-Kräutlein (2012); it ‘is an umbrella term for diverse intermediary services, not based on special vocational knowledge’ (p. 56). She is right: it is a fuzzy work zone. But specialty careers often grow out of interdisciplinary combination. Whether lobbying has enough unique tasks separate from other occupations’ turf may be beside the point. Its essence is boundary-crossing work. It may be an ‘interdiscipline’ driven by an anti-boundary, plurality-promoting logic (Friman, 2010). A question remains what its core is if it does not guard a knowledge monopoly. Perhaps it is simply a practice, an eclectic portfolio of art, craft, and science defined by organization rules, employers’ recruiting rationales and practitioners’ skills.

This article studies the German workplace to distill insights on what lobbyists can and should learn. It will focus on vocational routes. The article is organized as follows. First, it provides a descriptive overview of workplace data, staffing patterns and entry models for lobbyists working for three employer types – associations, corporations and consultancies. The research rationale is to show the job market’s range of career options, diverse organizational settings, and growth trends. Of special interest is the formalized entry route via a junior training program. Germany is a country of vocational apprenticeships, and this includes employment sectors where university graduates dominate. This part of the study seeks evidence for a proliferation of apprenticeship-style training for lobbyist functions.

Recruiting the right lobbyists with the right skills and background is a key component of successful lobbying. It must be imperative for an employer to signal to potential candidates clearly what is expected. This second part of the study examines recruitment based on content analysis of online-job advertisements. How do employers describe duties, formal educational requirements, knowledge and competencies, and what do they most frequently request? Are there differences among employer types, especially regarding education, knowledge and political competencies? The article aims to identify learning areas on the ‘demand’ side and hopes to stimulate discussion on how to explicate expectations of what lobbyists should learn.

A note on language: German usage of the English term ‘public affairs’ (PA) is more circumscribed than in the original sense, where it encapsulates an organization’s full range of stakeholder relationships. The German meaning puts PA close to political interest representation, it always includes lobbying but may extend to



broader government relations and political communication in society. It is never used interchangeably with general PR.

## Workplace Staffing and Entry

This section studies the lobbying job market and employment trends for three main employer types: associations, corporations and consultancies. Lack of data makes it troublesome to track overall trends. Circumstantial evidence suggests the past half decade has seen growth. MSL Group's annual surveys of some 60 major companies and associations show that since 2010, pluralities of respondents indicated they had more PA staff than a year earlier. The proportion of those with staff layoffs was about half that size. The 4-year median of 'more' is 42 per cent and 17 per cent 'less'. On staff size, 5-year medians show PA units' modest size: 46 per cent stated they had 1–4 persons, 24 per cent had 5–15, and only 10 per cent more than 15; 12 per cent had no PA unit (PC, 2009; MSL, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010). One may infer that PA functions are placed in small units and lack deep specificity; flexibility, breadth and low-supervision work are normal; generalists take most jobs; demand for narrow expertise is low. Hierarchies are flat, which implies that career moves require lateral or employer change ('up or out').

The following will look at apprenticeship-style training programs as entry points and formal learning schemes. This does not refer to internships but to fully paid post-graduate training-focused employment of up to 2 years. They are a norm for example, in law (clerkships), public administration, teaching, or librarianship. They are called 'Referendariat'. Journalism and PR use 'Volontariat' or the English 'traineeship'. Standardization and regulation vary. Off-work seminars are normally part of the package, just as in Germany's 'dual system' for non-academic trainees who rotate from work to vocational-school sequences.

## Working for associations

German lobbying, one may say in Schattschneideresque style, was long unthinkable save in terms of associations. They still supply the bulk of lobby jobs. But few association jobs are political. Employment Agency statistics<sup>2</sup> reveal that interest-representing trade and employer groups retain 81 300 staff, employee groups 10 500. Civic, cultural, charity groups and parties have 352 000 (BA, 2014c). As for top positions, statistics list 7000 'directing staff of interest organizations' (of these, 42 per cent are university graduates) (BA, 2013). Under old definitions, the 2011 data listed 14 700 'functionaries, association secretaries' (28 per cent graduates) (IAB, 2014).

The German Society for Association Management estimates that there were 15 500 associations in 2012 (1990, 10,100); of these, only 8700 had full-time management. Around 1500 had a primary or secondary seat in Berlin (DGVM and DVM, 2012). This may be an indicator of political activity. Another is voluntary accreditation in the federal parliament's register, dubbed the 'lobby list' but only allowing associations. The November 2014 list had 2218 groups (Bundestag, 2014), up from 1600 in 1999 and 635 at the register's start in 1974 (Sokolowski, 2005, p. 33). It is often misconceived to be dominated by business groups. They made up half the list in 1974 but shrank to one-third by 2005 (Sokolowski, 2005, p. 38).

In secretariats, surveys count an average of five to seven persons; few headquarters retain over 20 (Busch, 2006, p. 8; DGVM, 2008; Russ, 2011, p. 80). A few peak groups employ more than 100, but many for general services. For instance, the Düsseldorf-based Association of German Engineers (VDI), a lobby heavyweight, has three persons in Berlin but overall 120 staff (with its commercial annex, 500) serving 150 000 members and 12 000 active volunteers in 600 bodies and 15 state chapters (Von Vieregge, 2012).

Kienbaum Consulting's long-running association surveys have always shown a hiring preference for law and business/economics majors. In 2011, 89 per cent of managers (all levels) were university graduates. Some 30 per cent of all academic workers were business/economics majors (2009: 27 per cent), 28 per cent (23 per cent) lawyers, 21 per cent (24 per cent) engineers or natural scientists, all others made for 20 per cent (26 per cent) (Heiden, 2011, p. 10; Kienbaum, 2011). The 'Verbandsjurist' or association lawyer holds a special place in traditional corporatist symbiosis with Germany's legalistic government culture. Jurists dominate the senior civil-service cadre (Schwanke and Ebinger, 2006, p. 233). Ministries expect lawyerly responses as they routinely call on associations to consult on draft laws. Groups also need lawyers for legal monitoring, member advice, litigation or collective bargaining. 'Verbandsjurist' jobs lure attorneys who lack the top exam grades needed to join state service or prime law firms. It is an attractive option for all-rounders who enjoy a mix of politics, communication and service (Foderà, 2009; Gottschalk, 2011). Associations also have a bias for executives with law degrees (Fleitmann, 2011, p. 7).

Russ (2011) found in a representative association panel that three-quarters did not believe they suffer from a lack of skilled staff, aging staff, high turnover or high wages (p. 80). Russ, like others, suggests that talent management is a low priority. 'What dominates is staff administration, less individual personnel development', notes Schneider (2009, p. 41). Compared with business, groups offer less pay and prestige. Career ladders are shorter. Thus, associations often recruit among themselves. An adage is, 'once in an association, always in an association' (Schneider, 2009, p. 40). Prejudice holds that 'those who can't make it in business work for the association' (Fleitmann, 2009, p. 10). Trade groups have an image of probity but also 'dullness, conceptlessness, and bite inhibition' (von Vieregge, 2010, p. 23). A negative job cliché is the 'background administrator, committee minutes-taker and



reserved one-track expert', notes Fleitmann (2011, p. 7). Busch (2006) cites a view of 'a refuge of conservative employment situations' that 'structurally resemble public bureaucracy' for 'experts with administrative orientation rather than entrepreneurial thinking' (p. 6).

Yet Russ (2011) found about half of associations invest in continuing education, up from 37 per cent 5 years earlier (p. 82). They can find commercial, non-profit and university vendors for multiple association-management topics. For example, the prominent firm Kölner VerbändeSeminare claims since 1996 to have trained 6000 staff in 'Management & Lobbying,' 'Communication & Marketing,' and 'Law & Tax' (KVS, 2014).

### **Apprenticeship routes**

Associations commonly hire university graduates directly for 'Referent' desk-officer jobs rather than through a traineeship scheme. If smaller groups employ trainees, they often do so by participating in a federal peak group's training alliance. Some have quite a history. In 1954, the Federation of Employer Associations (BDA) launched a junior directors training scheme, 'Geschäftsführernachwuchsprogramm' (GFN). It has 428 alumni (Rennicke, 2014). 80–90 per cent of BDA recruits are lawyers past the law clerkship ('Referendariat') so they are admitted to the bar, so the 2-year GFN is a second traineeship for them. While it is open for politics or economics majors 'who want to link rigorous academic work with political will to make a difference', the priority is to train lawyer-lobbyists who double as labor counsel. This is key at regional chapters where trainees spend most time (BDA, 2014). The Federation of German Industries has a 24-month plan. Trainees run the gamut of policy units, regional groups, Brussels or big-firm bureaus. They tend to legislation; support committees; draft position papers, articles, speeches; organize projects, events, and delegation travel (Knipper, 2009; BDI, 2012). The Diet of Chambers of Commerce and Industry runs a 12-month circuit of four 3-month posts (in Berlin, two local chambers, one abroad); trainee salaries are €1900 a month plus travel and foreign allowances (DIHK, 2014).

For senior staff from across the nation, these three peak groups jointly run an Institute for Social and Economic Policy Training (ISWA) in Berlin. It started in 1964 to upskill 4000 academic staff on the rationale that groups' continuing education was retarded (Franke, 1968, p. 107). Free-of-charge seminars come in two tracks: public policy and skill-building, that is, communication, lobbying, negotiation, law, services and management (ISWA, 2014).

The German Farmers' Association (DBV) has partnered since 1948 with Andreas Hermes Academy in Bonn and Berlin. Its association training program ('Verbands-Training-Programm', VTP) is for full-time junior staff of agrarian groups, often 1-year trainees with an agribusiness degree who serve at county, state, federal and

EU posts. A 32-day certificate curriculum teaches economics, food and farming policy, negotiation, media skills and group leadership. Regional voluntary leaders aged 22–30 sign up for an ‘Agriculture and Interest Representation’ program. Called ‘the long course’, it puts two dozen participants in a 2-month boarding school. Besides lectures and workshops, they meet experts in Bonn, Berlin and Brussels, and travel abroad. They simulate, role-play, and even practice social etiquette at mock political receptions. Alumni meet yearly for a congress (AHA, 2013, 2014).

Some groups with large communication units offer 1–2-year ‘Volontariat’ schemes with a PR focus but include PA-type work. Others choose to dedicate training to political work. For instance, the Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises in Berlin places a ‘trainee for public policy and economics’ for 18–24 months, offered to politics, economics or business graduates with policy analysis skills (BVMW, 2014). Labor unions, too, run traineeships, for example, metal workers’ IG Metall; energy, chemical and mining workers’ IGBCE; and hospital-ity, agriculture and food union NGG. In 12–18 months, trainees rotate to local and central offices, work on strategic projects, and attend classes in communications, politics and law. University graduates have become more numerous among ‘secretaries-in-training’ (Molitor, 2009). IG Metall, expecting 40 per cent of its 1100 staff to retire by 2017, launched its scheme in 2000; of 400 alumni, one-quarter came from university (Einblick, 2013, p. 5).

## Working for business

According to trade journal *Politik & Kommunikation*’s database, 145 German and foreign companies run a Berlin bureau (Sömmer, 2014; Personal communication with *Politik & Kommunikation* editor). The number is much higher than in Bonn. Reasons for this growth are geographical and political. Bonn was an association town, direct firm representation was the exception. If firms sought direct talks, Bonn was just a short ride from most headquarters. There was no need to maintain a capital bureau. By contrast, Berlin is far away from the country’s business hubs. Unlike most capitals, Berlin is not a major industrial and commercial city anymore. Most big companies fled west after 1945.

Around 2000, firms began to prioritize lobbying unfiltered by associations. This led to a build up of PA units at headquarters and capital liaison offices. Partially these were prestige projects during Berlin’s post-1999 boom. While most bureaus hide in modest places, and several DAX-30 blue-chip companies do not have a permanent post, a dozen major firms made architectural statements of stunning modernism or restored Prussian glory in the rejuvenated Reichstag quarter. They opened stylish conference centers, posh product showrooms or boulevard cafés humming with flaneurs: uniquely branded locations where lobbyists host the political class. Beyond socializing, active outposts with content-rich think-tank-style outreach programming



enhance voice and access; this justifies the extra cost (Aurich, 2012, p. 42). It also multiplies PA expectations of what liaisons do beyond lobbying.

‘Corporate representative offices, as they are today, are a Berlin phenomenon, not one transferred from Bonn’, states Olfe-Kräutlein (2012, p. 163). Behind opulent facades, she found mostly small teams, averaging 3.3 staff in a study of 17 DAX-30 bureaus. Three had a single person (p. 160). Most offices enjoy high rank but not autonomy. They tend to report to a headquarter’s PA chief rather than to boards. Rarely do Berlin units command all a firm’s PA. Only five could make strategic decisions alone (p. 200). A typical bureau ‘seems to be not more, but also not less, than a satellite assigned to an active but rather supporting, not strategically directing role for the firm’ (p. 221). Headquarters keep a strong role.

The corporate PA workforce has considerably grown. In a survey of 102 firms, Siedentopp (2010) found 70 per cent had a stand-alone PA unit, while 30 per cent placed PA in another. Almost two-thirds (62 per cent) had a Berlin post. Most units started life in the late 1990s (p. 241). Among 90 firms in the dataset, from 1999 to 2007 Siedentopp saw staff for German PA grow from 185 to 419 employees, and, with overlap, EU affairs staff from 90 to 250. Adding all indirectly involved staff, German PA grew from 516 to 1256, and EU teams from 357 to 957 persons (p. 235). Firms had on average 4.8 staff (median 3) charged with German PA (1999: 3.1, median 1), and with indirect staff, 12.5 (median 3; 1999: 7.5, median 1.5) (pp. 232–245).

Most staff hold an university degree. Siedentopp (2007) counted 91 per cent of department heads, heads of capital offices and others, with (mostly advanced) degrees. A quarter (24 per cent) majored in politics, 17 per cent each in business/economics or law, only 10 per cent in communication (p. 24). Olfe-Kräutlein (2012) found that of 17 DAX Berlin bureau heads, all were university educated: 41 per cent in law, 23 per cent in business/economics, 18 per cent in politics (p. 200).

## Apprenticeship routes

General management trainee programs for university graduates are popular among major companies. They get an occasional exotic bird keen on rotating to PA units or capital bureaus. But that is no routine and safe route to PA job entry. Few company traineeship schemes focus on non-market external affairs. Deutsche Post DHL (2013) has a ‘GROW’ program (18 months) in corporate functions, placing trainees in the CEO’s staff; those with prior politics exposure work in the Berlin bureau. Deutsche Telekom (2014) runs 15–18 month project-style CEO-area traineeships with a ‘Public & Regulatory Affairs’ track. Dow Chemical Germany (2013) has a 12–18 month ‘Public Affairs & Government Affairs Development Program’ deploying in communications, community relations and political posts. Large PR units may subscribe to ‘PR Volontariat’ with PA stages. Auto-maker BMW (2014) recently

added to its 24-month PR ‘Volontariat’ an 18-month ‘Trainee’ track with team projects and a half-year abroad, focused on ‘dialog with media members, the public, political institutions and organizations’. Recently online retailer Zalando (2013) sought a 1-year ‘Volontär Politische Kommunikation’, and gaming firm Schmidt Gruppe (2014) a 2-year ‘Volontär Public Affairs/Politische Kommunikation’. But such cases are too marginal to call it a general trend.

### **Working for consultancies**

Since 1999, Berlin has become a political consulting bazaar. Polisphere’s 2012 *Career Guide Public Affairs* lists over 100 communication agencies, most with a Berlin seat or branch (Busch-Janser, 2012a). They range from global groups to mid-size boutiques to small or solo firms. A few large ones have 30–40 staff but often bid for full-service government PR. Typical boutiques employ five to 15 persons. Pure ‘lobby shops’ are rare. An MSL Group (2013) survey asked companies and associations about external help: 52 per cent said they hire by project, 15 per cent on retainer, 58 per cent prefer a PR agency with PA ability, 41 per cent a PA consultancy, 34 per cent a law firm, 29 per cent an independent, 15 per cent a business consultancy (multiple responses possible) (p. 21).

Some 30 larger law firms are visible in Berlin. When Germany’s legal services market was deregulated in the 1990s and opened for non-local partnerships, it transformed into a field led by UK and US giants. They brought Anglo-American-style law firm lobbying to Berlin. In 2005, major firm Freshfields raised eyebrows by naming a unit ‘Public Affairs’, housing ‘a wealth of combined legal, political and PR knowledge’ (FBD, 2014). Most firms are more hushed, even if they hire prominent politicians as of-counsel. Law firm Noerr (2014) insists: ‘Advisory in governmental affairs, as we understand it, is not the same as lobbying’. But it offers client briefs for ‘preparing public policy decisions’, and ‘arranging and structuring conversations between decision makers in business, politics, and public administration’.

Consultancies may lobby for clients but often engage as coach, adviser, technical vendor or in other support roles. As roles are process-driven and adapt to situational demand, they may change on short notice (Fuhrberg, 2014, p. 1035). Short-termism, staff turnover and uncertain careers especially mark communication agency life. Klewes and van der Pütten (2014) explain that new mandates are hard to plan for but need instant staff deployment and hiring. The reverse occurs, too: projects end abruptly as clients switch priorities, resulting in staff overhang. Most firms are ‘chronically understaffed’ with a few experienced mid-level consultants backed up by a cheaper junior reserve. Few enjoy operational profit cushions which justify a human resources unit or long-term personnel planning (p. 1015). Law firms only hire lawyers, agencies recruit more broadly, favoring





political/social science and business/economics graduates (Stolzenberg, 2005, p. 92; Busch-Janser, 2006, p. 10).

## **Apprenticeship routes**

Post-graduate traineeships have become a normal entry to communication consulting. But there is great variety, even in length (8–24 months). The German Association of Political Consultants (degepol) has not yet discussed a model. National PR bodies, which also offer separate off-the-job PR certificates, only suggest non-binding content to employers. In 2010, the German Public Relations Society and the Federal Association of Press Spokespersons drafted a general ‘Volontariat’ path with an optional three-month PA post (BdP and DPRG, 2010). Most Berlin PA firms do not even use the label ‘Volontariat’ but prefer ‘traineeship’, a 2012 survey found. About half offered a structured plan. 37 per cent placed trainees in multiple stations, 28 per cent also in partner offices, even abroad. Some 81 per cent had internal, and 62 per cent external, seminars. About two-thirds offered a subsequent contract to more than half their alumni (Busch-Janser, 2012b, p. 113). Resources for training are dependent on the firms’ size. A PA market leader like KetchumPleon offers a diverse experience and an internal academy. Of seven German locations, Berlin is the PA hub. Since 2000, its 18-month program includes 15 months in Berlin units and 3 months’ worth of weeklong seminars at agencies across Germany. But there is only one one-week PA seminar. A mentored final exam project may be to draft a campaign plan and present to a client. Alumni get a certificate claimed to ‘enjoy an excellent reputation in the industry’ (Winter, 2012, p. 49). Trainees may, for example, write a monitoring report on legislation. In a quality and ethics block, they learn about codes of conduct, including rules on lobbying (Winter, 2012, p. 50).

Lawyers do not have much room for specialization in their 2-year ‘Referendariat’. Court-employed, they serve up to six clerkships and rotate to prosecutors, public administration, and private practice. Associations often offer placements to lawyers. The politically minded can also choose one in corporate PA, a ministry, parliament or an EU body. Lobby-law firms find this touch of political experience attractive (Geiger, 2005, p. 151).

## **Employer Expectations in Job Advertising**

Lobbying employers fill job pipelines in various ways: by unsolicited applications, networking, search agencies, and job advertisements. Want ads for such positions have become common. They are a solid primary source for research on what

lobbyists should learn, assuming that ads are objective indicators of employers' intentions and communicate expectations well.

## Method

The principal issue with ads is that they may not adequately portray employers' wants and needs. It would be naïve to assume that all employers formulate ads on a basis of definitive task descriptions, scientifically elaborated competency taxonomies and finely-tuned vocabulary. While there are general international and national classification systems for tasks and competencies, sophisticated application of such approaches cannot be expected for the PA work field, which is not well-profiled and is at best a marginal topic for most human resources departments – if there is any (not all associations or consultancies have one). Thus, ads may be unrealistic, unclear, implicit rather than explicit, mushy or full of plastic words.

German and European studies of communication job ads warn of problems. German ads have been diagnosed of 'certain flabbiness' in describing competencies (Klewes and van der Pütten, 2014, p. 1011). Research shows that communication job ads stress transferable personal, social and meta-level method skills over unique workplace tasks, and describe even craft-type skills (for example, writing) rather unspecifically and haphazardly. Studies point to the communication field's hazy contours and wobbly demarcations of unique skillsets (Huber, 2006; Laska, 2009; Schulte, 2011; Tench, *et al*, 2013). What is bad in PR can hardly be much better in PA. In the world of lobby job ads, problems start with job titles and basic descriptors. But almost no one advertises straight for a 'lobbyist'. The term is used informally but runs into semantic or sensitivity snags. To locate relevant job ads which include lobby activities in Germany or for Germans in Brussels on online portals, a search term list of 20 relevant root words in varied derivative German and English forms was created. Table 1 shows a clear hierarchy of terms for job, unit or organization in the sample.

**Table 1:** Key search terms in ad sample

<i>Search term</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Search term</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Interest representation	73	39	Advocacy	6	3
Public affairs	64	34	Government(al) affairs/relations	6	3
Lobbying	32	17	Regulatory affairs	5	3
Political communication	29	15	Corporate affairs/relations/functions	4	2
Political/policy advice/consulting	9	5	Political management	2	1
Issue(s) Management	6	3	Political/policy affairs	1	1

*Note:* Multiple entries possible. Aggregate table without all linguistic variants, including bilingual combinations (for example, 'Lobbyarbeit', literally lobby work). Not all terms have a direct translation.

**Table 2:** Ad sample

<i>Ad published by</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Employer type</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Employer direct	167	88	Associations	87	45
Headhunter (for anon. or named employer)	22	11	– <i>Of these</i> : Trade/business associations	58	29
			– Civic, ideological, single-issue	23	13
			– Other association	6	3
<i>Type of contract</i>					
Full-time	174	95	Business (corporate)	52	27
Part-time	9	5	Consultancies	47	24
			Other (for example, public bodies)	3	2
<i>Length of contract</i>					
Permanent (indefinite term)	139	79	<i>Economic sectors</i>		
Temporary: <3 years	34	19	Miscellaneous. business/services	76	40
			incl. consulting		
Temporary: >3 years	2	1	Health	21	11
			Energy, natural resources	17	9
			Communications, electronics	16	8
<i>Job region</i>					
Berlin	113	62	Misc. manufacturing	11	6
West Germany	57	31	Transportation	11	6
East Germany (excluding Berlin)	3	2	Finance, insurance, real estate	9	5
Brussels	8	4	Other	28	15

The final sample had 189 ads from online job portals, with live ads up to February 2014 and retired ads back to July 2012, for a 20-month total. Some 94 per cent of ads were in German, the rest in English. Part-time and trainee jobs were included, not internships. A key source (49 per cent of ads) was Politjobs.eu. The search used job sites of the trade journal *Politik & Kommunikation*, the political consultants' association degepol, Verbaende.com, and 20 general job portals (for example, Monster, StepStone, Jobleads or FAZjob). Major PR and law job sites surprisingly yielded almost no results. Full ad copy was screened for relevance before coding. Certain ads were filtered out. Media relations positions were discarded unless an ad had political keys. Second, most ads for 'regulatory affairs' did not fit. They may, for example, seek specialized lawyers or scientists to work with regulatory agencies, for example, in drug authorization. They may work with political colleagues in a firm's 'market access' team, but keep a separate profile. This is similar in energy, telecoms or transport. Third, most ads for business-to-government sales, procurement, tenders and grants acquisition were discarded. Most such ads sought technical, product, legal or process experts without political references. Fundraising and project acquisition jobs in civic groups also tended to have few overlaps with advocacy jobs.

Table 2 conveys a sample profile. Most ads were placed by employers directly and offered full-time jobs with indefinite contract length. Regionally, Berlin dominated. Almost half the ads were placed by associations supporting the hypothesis that the

bulk of lobbying jobs is provided by them. A quarter of ads each came from corporations and consultancies; unfortunately, almost no law firms were among them. This indicates that the sampling method may not have captured all relevant postings. Employers were coded by industry sectors using a simplified version of the US Center for Responsive Politics' OpenSecrets database (CRS, 2014). Where more than one sector fit, the dominant one was assigned. The largest and most heterogeneous category, 'miscellaneous business/services', includes all consulting firms.

Job titles varied greatly, but not a single ad wanted a 'lobbyist'. Titles were 51 per cent German, 26 per cent English (for example, 'Head of Public Affairs'), and 23 per cent were a German-English mix (for example, 'Referent Public Affairs'). Most frequent (32 per cent) was 'Referent', for entry- to mid-level staff. Only consultancies did not use it. Adviser/consultant was used by 15 per cent, typically consultancies. Some 12 per cent of ads sought a manager, 8 per cent a head/director, and 6 per cent a managing director. Among the dozen core titles were analyst, expert, counsel, assistant, associate, lead, account or project executive/manager, or simply employee ('Mitarbeiter'). Only 5 per cent of ads sought a trainee.

Because literature and professional bodies offer no satisfactory job prescriptions, a coding scheme was built inductively rather than from a pre-defined catalog. After data collection, ads were screened to draw out recurring patterns, keywords, phrases and attributes. This pilot content analysis generated an item list used for coding. Automated analysis software was not used, because non-standard copy demands context experience and a sense of one's finger tips. Admittedly, there are robustness issues, but the main aim was to produce a starting point for further exploration. Results were categorized into summative areas. A priority lay in not narrowing them too much so that the range and nuances of ads can be fully appreciated.

### **Experience, academics, knowledge**

Almost all ads explicitly requested prior experience. A plurality were unspecific or spoke of 'several years relevant'. Generally, ads for more junior positions were more specific on years. Consultancies had most junior jobs, and their ads included years most often. Associations included them least often. Only 4 per cent of ads requested a prior formal traineeship. (Table 3)

Some ads specified a type of prior experience. About a quarter requested in-sector practice (for example, transport). Others wanted prior experience with an employer type: associations, business, consulting, or politics/government were each named in about a quarter of all ads. By functional area, a third wanted prior exposure to political work. A quarter explicitly sought lobby-related experience, and the same share of ads asked for an existing contact network. The latter two occurred mostly in ads for mid- to senior-level positions. (Table 4)

**Table 3:** Experience

<i>Experience level</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Associations</i>		<i>Business</i>		<i>Consulting</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Several years relevant	40	22	14	29	12	27	7	16
Unspecified	67	37	16	33	10	22	6	14
Senior level:>8 years	3	2	0	0	2	4	1	2
Senior level:>5 years	13	7	2	4	6	13	6	14
Mid level:<5 years	25	14	10	21	10	22	13	30
Junior level:<3 years	20	11	5	10	4	9	8	18
Entry level:<1 year	14	8	1	2	1	2	3	7
	182	100	48	100	45	100	44	100

**Table 4:** Specific experience

<i>Prior employer experience with</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Prior functional experience in</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Associations	48	25	Political arena (generic)	63	33
Business	45	24	Lobbying-related	44	23
Consulting	44	23	Administrative	11	6
Government, public institution, or political	43	23	Communication and media	32	17
Media	0	0	Management, supervisory function	22	12
Other (specific)	6	3		—	—

A university degree was required by 87 per cent of ads. Only 12 per cent specified levels (10 per cent post-graduate, 2 per cent baccalaureate). This is surprising, given that the Bologna Process which reformed Germany's one-cycle degrees into a two-cycle bachelor-master structure has been underway for more than a decade. Either employers are ignorant, which is unlikely, or they are open for both, discounting advanced degrees, or they simply assume most applicants will have an advanced degree, either as old system graduates or because they belong to the three-quarters of Bachelors who transfer to Master's programs (HIS, 2012). One-cycle studies with a (post-graduate level) Diploma or state exam are still alive and dominate, for example, in law.

Employers were flexible on academics. Of 123 ads concerned with fields of study, 13 per cent named a single exclusive field (often law or business/economics), 19 per cent named one field but added 'or something similar' or 'relevant', and 68 per cent listed alternatives – typically two or three academic fields. But a quarter of multiple-option ads listed four to six alternatives. Such lists were often strangely eclectic, without obvious logic.

The first-named field likely indicates a strong preference. Politics, law and business were equally represented, named by about a quarter each. All others kept

under 10 per cent. A complex of politics, social sciences and humanities came to 40 per cent. Remarkably, corporate ads named business/economics first much less often than did associations. Consultancies rarely sought economic and legal minds. Aggregate data, disregarding rank order, generally confirms the ‘first-named’ tabulation. Recruiting patterns seem to favor graduates of non-technical disciplines that focus on public institutions and behavior. This data mostly matches prior findings on corporate PA and consulting (Stolzenberg, 2005; Busch-Janser, 2006; Siedentopp, 2007; Olfe-Kräutlein, 2012). Ads rarely advertised for engineers or natural scientists. For associations, this finding runs counter to Kienbaum (2011). An explanation might be that groups hire such graduates, but less for political work (not Kienbaum’s focus). (Table 5)

Ads primarily describe tasks or competencies but also mention domain knowledge, that is, applicants should ‘know’ rather than ‘be able to do’. Whether it was required or desired was left uncoded because of frequently nebulous ad copy. Employers highly value knowledge of their own environment and of the political system. The latter was usually put in general terms; it may be self-evident that this means German politics. EU politics was named explicitly by 15 per cent. Knowledge

**Table 5:** Academic disciplines

<i>First-named academic field</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Associations</i>		<i>Business</i>		<i>Consulting</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Political and social sciences, humanities	48	40	14	22	20	50	14	82
Law	30	25	18	29	11	28	1	6
Business, economics	26	22	22	35	4	10	0	0
Health and natural sciences	11	9	5	8	4	10	2	12
Engineering, engineering management	5	4	4	6	1	3	0	0
	120	100	63	100	40	100	17	100
<i>Subfields: Political and social sciences, humanities</i>								
– Political science, public administration	33	28	10	16	13	33	10	59
– Journalism, media, communications	11	9	1	2	7	18	3	18
<i>Cumulative frequency of academic field</i>								
Political and social sciences, humanities	127	46	38	29	45	50	44	81
Law	59	21	28	21	26	29	5	9
Business, economics	53	19	45	34	8	9	0	0
Health and natural sciences	23	8	8	6	10	11	5	9
Engineering, engineering management	15	5	14	11	1	1	0	0
	277	100	133	100	90	100	54	100

*Note:* Cumulative frequency means the field was named in the ad, regardless of rank order if alternatives were listed.

**Table 6:** Knowledge areas

<i>Knowledge domain requested (N = 189)</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Associations</i>		<i>Business</i>		<i>Consulting</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Employer's sector, policy field, market, competition	80	42	40	21	24	13	13	7
Political system, process (general and/or Germany)	74	39	28	15	16	8	28	15
Economic system, general economics	29	15	17	9	10	5	2	1
EU political system, process	29	15	14	7	6	3	8	4
Sector-specific political, legislative, regulatory process	27	14	8	4	12	6	6	3
Technology issues/context	21	11	9	5	12	6	0	0
Media, communication system	16	8	3	2	3	2	10	5
Legal system	8	4	3	2	5	3	0	0

of media and communications systems was named by 8 per cent, underscoring that this was not the focus of this job family. Only consultancies asked for it frequently. (Table 6)

### Generic competencies

Personal, social and method competency descriptors were placed in 42 summative categories. Some 30 had double-digit shares, but only one-third were found in more than a quarter of ads. Personal or social occurred more often than method skills. Many are related or overlap. General communication and presentation ability was top-ranked (74 per cent), and 71 per cent required English skills. All others were included in less than 50 per cent of ads. Among personal/social items, the top two look contradictory: 47 per cent of ads wanted team players and 41 per cent autonomy, that is, self-reliant, independent, self-starting candidates. The twin set is still plausible. Lobbyists succeed when they collaborate, yet PA units tend to be small: a few hands do a lot of work, discretion is high. This calls for people who do not wait to be prompted and can work on their own. (Table 7)

One-third of ads listed demeanor, poise, confident appearance, self-assurance or similar. This reflects on the nature of representative jobs. Lobbyists cannot be shy. They must get recognition and rapport, stand their ground on slippery parquets, need to keep diplomatic posture and avoid gaffes. About one-third wanted enthusiastic, motivated, or committed workers. It may be boilerplate, but eager people likely make better lobbyists. A quarter of ads listed stress resilience or tenacity. A quarter named flexibility, which carries multiple meanings. It probably includes time flexibility (set by 7 per cent specifically, some noting evening or weekend event attendance) and mobility. Indeed, 21 per cent of ads required travel.

**Table 7:** Generic competencies

<i>Competency (N=189)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Competency</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Personal, interpersonal, social</i>			<i>Method</i>		
Communication and presentation (generic)	140	74	Analytical thinking	74	39
Teamplayer	90	47	Project management	64	34
Autonomous, self-starter, self-reliant and so on	77	41	Organizing talent, planning, administration	59	31
Demeanor, bearing, confident, self-assured	68	36	Conceptual	54	28
Committed, enthusiastic, passionate and so on	58	31	Quick study, immersing in new problems	36	19
Tenacious, resilient, stress-resistant	48	25	Researching	36	19
Flexible	46	24	Complexity reduction	33	17
Proactive, initiating, dynamic	40	21	Strategic thinking	33	17
Supervise staff, leadership	38	20	Budgeting, accounts, finance, evaluation	32	17
Multidisciplinary, cross-functional work	32	17	Write/edit professionally	32	17
Networking, contact/relationship building	31	16	Commercial development, marketing, (client/contract) acquisition	24	13
Innovative, creative	30	16	Problem solving	22	12
Sensitive, diligent, careful, attent to detail	28	15	<i>IT / Computing</i>		
Persuasiveness/sales ability	28	15	Computing skills (any named, miscellaneous)	70	37
Entrepreneurial	24	13	Microsoft Office suite	42	22
Time managing, priority setting, multi-task	24	13	Social media	17	9
Social competence (generic)	24	13	<i>Foreign Language</i>		
Persevering, assertive	22	12	English required	135	71
Goal/result orientated	21	11	– Excellent level	82	61
Negotiation skills	21	11	– Good level	39	29
Customer / service orientated	20	11	– English+other language	8	4
Diplomacy, tact	19	10	Foreign study/work experience	14	7

*Note:* Ad language greatly varies in specificity. This makes it difficult to perfectly separate personal/social and method competencies. For example, communication and presentation can be interpreted as a generic personal/social competency; but it may also be seen as a method or craft-type skill. Many ads only include a generic description of communication skills, but some ads asked for specifics. In such cases, the generic variant was also counted, resulting in a double entry.

The top method competency was analytical thinking. The ability to structure situations and ideas is a prime asset in lobby labyrinths. About one-third of ads listed project managing, organizational, planning or administrative skills. Slightly fewer ads requested conceptual ability to draw up ideas, solutions and action plans. Computer skills were mentioned in 37 per cent of ads. Some named brand-name suites or applications (for example, Microsoft Office, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Access, SAP, Lotus Notes, Cobra Address) or software types (for example, word





processing, database, spreadsheet). Most ads were vague. Empty phrases like ‘computer affinity’ or ‘using standard applications’, ‘the Internet’ or ‘social media’ appeared often. Ads almost never stated precisely what computers would be used for. German lobbyists must be bilingual, it seems. English abilities were required by nearly three-quarters of ads; 64 per cent of these indicated a proficiency level but never named an assessment standard like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages with its A1–C2 scale.

### **Political expert competencies**

Separate from all-purpose skills are unique job skills, here called political expert competencies. Most are not fully unique to lobbying but useful elsewhere in politics. Often ambiguous, items were coded in 35 categories. Of these, 23 received more than 10 per cent of mentions, and 10 had more than 30 per cent. Almost half of ads wanted applicants to deal with strategy. Strikingly, two-thirds of consulting and business ads named it but less than one-third of associations. About one-third of ads named tasks related to policy preparation. This was less prevalent in consultant ads. Monitoring was relatively prominent, as was political analysis. Few ads specified this further in terms of techniques, for example, only 2 per cent named stakeholder mapping. Explicit referrals to advising and decision support were most frequent with consultancies. (Table 8)

Organizations have internal stakeholders to tend to. Some 40 per cent of ads asked to support, coordinate or manage committees, bodies, working parties and internal networks. A quarter placed similar demands in respect to external partners. A quarter also wanted applicants to themselves participate in organizational bodies, and a quarter spoke of representing the employer externally in bodies. These items were a domain of associations and business. Yet associations named such functions about twice as often as corporations, which are more hierarchical than member-based groups with their volunteer committees. All ads naming member support, association management, or work with volunteers and honorary officers were placed by associations exclusively.

Regarding lobbyists’ liaison skills, 42 per cent explicitly expected applicants to build and maintain contacts and relationships in political arenas. About the same share wanted candidates to be representatives to government, political and other target groups, or put them to advocate for the employer. Interestingly, these two latter functions were mentioned rarely by consultancies, indicating that they do less direct lobbying than is commonly assumed, or they prefer to conceptualize this as client support.

Various communication items featured prominently. Some 41 per cent of ads asked applicants to write or edit policy material. Ads often named tools, such as position papers or briefings. A quarter expected applicants to arrange or prepare

**Table 8:** Political expert competencies

Competency	Total (N = 189)		Associations (85)		Business (51)		Consulting (47)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Develop, recommend (political) strategy, concepts	90	48	25	29	32	63	33	70
Build, maintain relationships, contacts	80	42	33	39	26	51	18	38
Write, edit policy material	77	41	36	42	19	37	19	40
Support, coordinate, manage committees, bodies	76	40	48	56	26	51	0	0
Represent externally to government, politics, other	75	40	46	54	26	51	3	6
Monitor/report issues, politics, legislation and so on	74	39	26	31	24	47	22	47
Analyze, assess legislation, political initiatives and so on	74	39	38	45	24	47	11	23
Advocate positions	69	37	39	46	22	43	7	15
Coordinate, develop, recommend policy	67	35	34	40	28	55	3	6
Event planning, management	57	30	30	35	16	31	10	21
Support PR, media/external communications	56	30	33	39	12	24	11	23
Write/edit media materials	51	27	27	32	10	20	14	30
Represent externally in associations, committees...	50	26	31	36	19	37	0	0
Coordinate externally: coalitions, associations and so on	48	25	33	39	12	24	1	2
Participate in committees, bodies, working parties	45	24	31	36	14	27	0	0
Schedule, arrange, prepare top-level meetings	44	23	18	21	16	31	7	15
Advise, support decision-making	39	21	8	9	9	18	22	47
Support, service membership	32	17	32	38	0	0	0	0
Prepare, produce presentations	29	15	8	9	10	20	11	23
Represent externally to media, public	26	14	18	21	8	16	0	0
Stakeholder dialog/outreach/engagement	23	12	7	8	10	20	6	13
Campaigns – develop, implement, manage	23	12	9	11	2	4	12	26
Anticipate, identify emerging issues, risks	23	12	6	7	12	24	4	9

superiors' internal and external meetings. Almost one-third involved applicants in events. A similar share identified media and PR support. While a quarter asked to write/edit media materials (that is, news releases, newsletters, journals or website), only 14 per cent described a direct role *vis-à-vis* media and public. Few corporations asked for campaign management, but 11 per cent of associations and 26 per cent of consultancies did.

## Conclusions

This article has mapped a workplace topography for German lobbyists. Its findings provide insights into emerging requirements for a qualified workforce in an evolving job market. They can help stimulate discussion on explicating employers' competency-based human capital management and recruiting practices. The results may



help guide apprenticeship schemes, continuing education, efforts of professional bodies and university curricula.

The first part profiled a broad range of career options in different employer settings – some stable and conservative, some fluid and precarious, but normally in small units which are likely to look for flexible generalists. For junior entrants, options include an emerging yet still limited set of apprenticeship-style training schemes. Their existence points to substantial employer interest in formally developing a talent base and professional practice. However, the ‘traineeship’ model has proliferated most widely among PA consultancies, while associations and corporate employers seem to be more selective. Consultancies tend to recruit more young personnel and offer less stable employment situations. They have more limited in-house resources and are under strong cost pressure. This raises some questions about potential abuse of trainees as a cheap-labor reservoir. On the other hand, the apprenticeship idea comes to bloom where employers seriously commit to building a comprehensive learning experience.

The second part offered a job market snapshot based on 2012–2014 advertisements. It showed what employers look for in a quality pool of applicants. A complex interplay of qualifications and requirements emerged. Their demarcation appears blurred, however, as ambiguity in ads was high. There is not yet a stable common classification vocabulary.

Lobbyists perform tasks in different organizational settings, so employers show different preferences. There are commonalities, of course. It is generally expected of the applicant to have a university degree in a non-technical field, broad political knowledge, English proficiency, certain personal, interpersonal and social competencies, information analysis and communication skills. Highly specific method or technical skills are seldom emphasized overall. But attention needs to be paid to diverging employer needs. For example, association and business emphasize policy work, organizational participation, coordination, administration and direct representation more than consultancies do, while the latter stress advising and strategizing. Corporations get less involved in campaign advocacy. Associations focus on members. Lobbyists should learn about these differences and adjust their skill sets.

This study has limitations. The workplace overview drew on multiple sources but, for want of reliable statistics, could only be a sketch. While the problem of job market statistics is unlikely to be solved in the near future, emerging apprenticeship routes appear to be a promising subject for cross-sector, in-depth comparative studies of learning in this more structured environment. Future job ad studies should build a larger sample of industries and close the gap on law firms; they should also extend to a longer period of time. They may then be able to trace changes in the job market and better highlight differences across employer types. Job ad exegesis needs to be more robust. Only reading ad copy may not be enough. Perhaps a dictionary of most-frequent key terms can be developed to allow computerized content analysis. Future research should also employ focus groups and in-depth interviews with employers to

understand of what thinking is behind ads, and with applicants about how they read and respond to ads. Demand side analysis must be augmented by supply studies. In addition, it would be fruitful to study competency development on practitioners' vocational trajectories across employer types.

## Notes

- 1 All cited German sources have been translated by the author.
- 2 In the Federal Employment Agency's classification, lobbyist was not a coded occupation until 2010. Before 2010, public databases linked lobbyist queries to a class, defined in the 1970s, of 'functionaries, association secretaries' (managing employees of interest organizations, labor unions and parties), combined in a group of elected officials and top administrators (BA, 2005; BA, 2014b). Then the lobbyist was moved to media and marketing jobs, subgroup 'public relations, complex specialist function', joined by campaigners and fundraisers (BA, 2011, p. 1472). Databases now redirect a lobbyist query to a new entry 'political adviser'. Its profile, lacking lobby words, states it is to 'support political and societal actors in communication of interests'. The profile sees work in associations and 'Interessenvertretungen', and in law firms and PR agencies. Corporations go unmentioned (BA, 2014a). The functionary is alive in its old category, except that the profile now explicitly says an association manager/head is *not* to be named a lobbyist; even though she is to 'represent interests of the organization and its members to the lawmaker, the government or the general public, and negotiate in the organization's name' (BA, 2011, p. 1065).

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