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A Proposal to Create Public Administration Field Placements for Online Universities

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A Proposal to Create Public Administration Field Placements for Online Universities

A Master Capstone Project

Submitted to the Faculty

of

American Public University System

by

Gilbert Glenn Harvey Jr.

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Public Administration

April 22, 2018

American Public University

Charles Town, WV
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to the brave men and women of the United States Armed Services who have dedicated their lives in support of freedom, democracy, and the American way of life. It is my hope that this research project will create additional educational opportunities for those who deserve it most.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for providing me with the opportunity, perseverance, and cognitive ability to start and finish a Master’s Degree at the age of 56. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephen Schwalbe for putting up with my hard-headed attitude, never ending questions, and constant rantings. Without Dr. Schwalbe’s support, guidance, and knit picking insistence on perfection this project would have been lost.

The incredible facility at American Military University has made my journey to a master’s degree challenging, thought provoking, and hair pulling at times, thus, preparing me for a new journey as a public administration professional.
This research project is a proposal that fully online universities, specifically American Military University, should establish partnerships with city governments to create field placement opportunities for students of public administration. This was accomplished by reviewing the most current peer-reviewed articles on field placements for traditional universities and by disseminating a brief 10-question survey to 100 cities across the United States having a council-manager form of city government. The findings from the literature reviewed noted that universities, host organizations, and students all benefit from field placement programs, in that the host organizations gained needed staff augmentation, the universities gained additional credibility by producing higher quality graduates, and the students gained the hands-on experience needed to establish successful careers. The data gathered from the 10-question survey found that most city governments are interested in establishing field placement opportunities with online universities, had confidence in the abilities of online students, and would consider hiring online graduates after successful completion of a field placement.

Keywords: field placement, practicum, internship
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A Proposal to Create Public Administration Field Placements for Online Universities

Introduction

In 1835, while sailing aboard the HMS Beagle, the now famous Charles Darwin, observed that the finches of the Galapagos Islands were able to adapt their beaks to differing shapes as resources became scarce, thus enabling them to feed from another resource and continue to survive. Little did he realize that centuries later his ‘Theory of Evolution’ could be observed not only in the world of nature, but also, in the world of business. However, businesses evolve much faster than fauna or flora. Sometimes a new invention designed to do one thing, ends up changing how other things are done throughout the world. For example, mail delivery has gone from the Pony Express to trucks, airplanes, and now the Internet. What once took weeks to be delivered is now delivered in seconds. The same can be said about the evolution of education. In 1800, there were only 23 colleges in the United States, by 1897, there were 821, and today there are over 5,300. However, that is only the beginning of the evolutionary path taken by education.

Universities were once far off institutions of higher education only accessible to the privileged few. However, today most students live within 100 miles of a university and federal grants and loans are now available to people from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Even the delivery of college courses has evolved over the past century to include correspondence courses, computer-based learning, and now over the Internet. As the Internet evolved so did access to education through fully online universities. Thus, students no longer need to leave home and live in expensive dorms or apartments to receive a quality education. However, the cause and effect of evolution is always competition for resources. Evolutonal pressures are continuously
changing the face of education today. With so many traditional brick and mortar and online universities feeding from the same source (students), online universities must evolve like Darwin’s finches or go extinct.

Traditional universities have enjoyed decades or in some cases a century or more of historic recognition and reputation within their communities and across the country. Whereas, fully online universities are fairly new to higher education, thus giving traditional universities a better position to claim resources. For example, colleges like the University of Memphis have partnered with local nonprofit organizations, city, state, and federal agencies within their area to offer field placements and internships to their students in many fields of study. Further, a traditional university can simply add online courses or degree programs to its curriculum in order to expand its accessibility and its reputation. In addition, most traditional universities have already obtained numerous specialty accreditations for their degree programs.

Therefore, it is imperative that online universities adapt their educational models to include specialty accreditations and the creation of educational partnerships with organizations to compete with traditional universities. In addition, online universities must evolve further and increase their efforts and credibility by incorporating some of the strategies and programs that are already being used by traditional universities. This research project proposes that online universities, such as American Military University, should implement field placement programs where possible to give both traditional students and working professionals; such as, active-duty, retired, and former members of the military the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in their fields of study.
The focus of this study will be to prove that by creating partnerships between online universities and city governments, students seeking degrees in public administration will be better prepared to enter the public-sector workforce. As the field of public administration encompasses a wide variety of components spanning human resources, organizational management, leadership development, and health policies, city governments offer endless opportunities for learning. In addition, online universities are actually in a better position to offer field placements than traditional universities. While many students of traditional universities struggle to balance school, family, and employment, online students have a greater amount of scheduling flexibility because classrooms, lectures, and assignments can be accessed anytime anywhere (Hemy, Boddy, Chee, & Sauvage, 2016). This is especially important for non-traditional students, working professionals, and those serving on active-duty in the Armed Forces.

Further this project will prove that by partnering with city governments, online universities will increase their reputation and credibility by producing higher quality graduates who will be better prepared to enter the public-sector workforce. In addition, this study will prove that partnerships between city governments and online universities for field placements of students of public administration will be beneficial to the city governments, the universities, and the students; in that the city governments will gain needed staff augmentation, the universities will gain additional credibility, and the students will gain the hands-on experience needed to establish successful careers. This will be accomplished by reviewing the most recent peer-reviewed literature available on field placements from the point of view of the students, the universities, and the host organizations. In addition, data will be gathered using a 10-question survey designed to test the project’s hypothesis, which states, “Online universities can create
field placement programs for their students of public administration by building partnerships with local governments to ensure online student receive the same learning opportunities that traditional university students currently enjoy.” The survey will be disseminated to city governments across the United States and analyzed to discover the probability of creating educational partnerships for field placement positions.

**Literature Review**

Academic learning at the bachelor or master’s levels provide an excellent baseline of knowledge for starting a new career in any given field of study. However, classroom knowledge seldom provides the necessary hands-on skills required to be successful on the job in the real-world. While many traditional universities offer field placement opportunities for programs such as social work, nursing, public health, education, and public administration, these opportunities are rarely if ever offered to students attending online universities. However, online universities are in a far better position to offer field placements opportunities than traditional universities. While many working professionals and students of traditional universities struggle to balance school, family, and employment, online students have a greater amount of scheduling flexibility because online classrooms, lectures, and assignment are always open.

Further, as almost every community in the United States has an active local, state, or federal governmental agency of some type, it is imperative that online students of public administration receive the same valuable field placement opportunities as their traditional university counterparts. In addition, while most traditional universities have obtained program accreditation in many fields of study, such as, education, healthcare administration, public health, and public administration, most online universities have failed to incorporate these
specialty accreditations into their curriculums, which makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to create educational partnerships with public-sector agencies at the federal level. Research into the establishment of field placement programs for online universities has not been attempted yet. Therefore, this paper will examine the findings of previous studies focusing on traditional universities; primarily from the fields of social work, public administration, public health, and education on the effectiveness and benefits of field placement programs and specialty accreditation for students, universities, and host organizations.

With the technologies of today a person can play football, basketball, or baseball sitting in their recliner at home without breaking a sweat. However, if this person never physically plays any of these sports, the likelihood that they will be proficient on the field is near zero. Smith, Cleak, and Vreugdenhil (2015) examined in their article, “What Are They Really Doing?” the outcomes of field placements as pertaining to practiced competencies of social work students using 14 key learning activities (p. 516). The goals of field placement programs are to help students gain field of focus identity, build self-confidence, and gain firsthand knowledge of the practical application of academic studies in a supervised environment. While textbooks and lectures provide lists, definitions, concepts, and theories on how a given field of study is supposed to functions, they cannot give the student the experience of observing and participating in the use of these competencies.

The authors used questionnaires designed to assess the skills being learned through observation and practiced hands-on experiences of students participating in field placements. In addition, students were asked to reflect on their feelings toward their role assisting experienced social workers, the use of constructive feedback, and their ability to adapt to service delivery
protocols (Smith, Cleak, & Vreugdenhil, 2015, p. 521). There were two main conclusions that presented as a result of these questionnaires.

First, students consistently describe their field placements as the most memorable and noteworthy component of their educational experience. Second, they recognized field placements as a key vessel for learning core skills, developing field of study identity, and learning professional ethics and values (Smith, Cleak, & Vreugdenhil, 2015, p. 515). Given the positive impact that field placements had on the students involved in this study, it would seem to suggest that students of online universities may be missing out on a valuable learning experience.

Field placement assignments can also have negative effects on students. Hemy, Boddy, Chee, and Sauvage (2016) examined the effects of field placement programs on students attempting to juggle academic studies, family, leisure time, employment, and other responsibilities. Field placements can be a source of stress and anxiety for students as they move from the structured atmosphere of academia into the hustle of the real-world workplace and the practical application of knowledge acquired in the classroom. Often reconciling these differences between academic theory and real-world practices can elevate stressors. In addition, learning to rearrange commitments to family and friends, finding time to study, attempting to have a social life, and making a meaningful contribution to the field placement program can take a toll on the student’s body and mind. However, field placements are widely described as a crucial component of the educational process in many fields of study (Hemy, Boddy, Chee, & Sauvage, 2016, p. 215).

Given the opportunity to participate in field placement programs, students of online universities may also experience elevated stress and anxiety levels. However, as classrooms,
lectures, and assignment are always open, students of online universities have a greater amount of flexibility which may decrease these stressors. While both traditional and online students may experience an elevated amount of stress at the beginning of a given field placement this would also be true of starting a new job, in fact, field placements may help students learn to manage the stress associated with professional development and career decisions. Therefore, Hemy et al. (2016) concluded that the stress and anxiety of field placements will allow students to grow as professionals by building skills in priority setting, multi-tasking, and problem-solving (p. 224).

The term ‘book smart’ has been used as a disparagement to describe people, usually leaders or managers, who have been hired and placed in charge of others who have been doing their jobs for many years. Lee and Fortune (2013) studied the linkage between academic, observation, and participatory activities of social work students in field placement programs to understand the importance of each activity (p. 646). The academic community is under constant pressure to produce higher quality graduates who are ready to join the workforce with a greater understanding of their field of study. However, classroom knowledge alone seldom provides the necessary skills required to be successful on the job in the real-world. Yet hands-on experience without academic knowledge is equally lacking. Thus, Lee and Fortune (2013) argued that field placements are essential for students to link theory and practice (p. 646). The authors asked the question, “Do we need more ‘doing’ activities or ‘thinking’ activities in field placements?” (Lee & Fortune, 2013). To understand the linkage the authors used a questionnaire asking students about their feelings toward learning activities, self-evaluations, work skill satisfaction, and field placement satisfaction. The results of the study concluded that students who both observed and participated in activities had a higher satisfaction when self-reporting professional development skills, thus suggesting that students should be both physically and mentally engaged in field
A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

placement program activities (Lee & Fortune, 2013, p. 650). Unfortunately, most students of online universities are missing out on this opportunity to gain hands-on experience via field placement programs, thus placing them in the category of just having “book smarts”. Additionally, this places online students at a further disadvantage when it comes to seeking employment, as field placements can be added to resumes as prior experience.

Accrediting organizations of a given field of study often set standards in both instructional and practiced program curriculums. For example, Oglesby, et al., noted in their publication that graduate students of accredited public health programs are required by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) to demonstrate through field placements or practicums that they can apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom to the real-world work environment (2013, p. 554). The value placed on these field placements or practicums by the CEPH is such that schools of public health cannot receive accreditation without having field placements or practicums as part of their curriculum. However, the CEPH does not specify how field placements should be worked into the curriculum. For example, there are no required number of credit hours to be earned or contact hour minimums for field placement activities.

Oglesby, et al. (2013) also evaluated the outcomes of field placements in relation to when the students were allowed to be placed in host organizations. As the CEPH does not regulate when field placement requirements should or should not be started, 57 percent of schools allowed placements to begin with no credit hours completed and 74 percent allowed field placements to begin without completion of any core classes (Oglesby, et al., 2013, p. 554). The authors argued that it is impractical to begin field placements without first gaining the basic knowledge necessary to work in the field of study. Thus, Oglesby, et al. (2013) concluded that
field placement should only be allowed after the student has successfully completed at least some core classes (p. 559). This conclusion would seem to support the study conducted by Lee and Fortune (2013) in that hands-on experience without academic knowledge is just as lacking as academic knowledge without hands-on experience.

The activities and experiences from a given field placement program may assist students in choosing a niche from their discipline that best fits their personality or interests for years to come. Sprague and Percy (2014) recognized that research seeking to understand the immediate impact of field placement programs on students had neglected to study the after-graduation impact (p. 91). The average time to earn a bachelor’s and master’s degree is approximately 5 to 7 years and the average length of a career can range between 20 and 35 years. Therefore, understanding the role and impact field placement programs have on career decisions can help universities focus their curriculums accordingly. Sprague and Percy (2014) studied the long-term impact on students seeking master’s degrees in public policy and public administration from 65 traditional educational institutions offering field placement programs in these disciplines (p. 91). The results of this study show that students who are given the opportunity to participate in field placement programs obtained a high level of technical and professional proficiency while being exposed to the differing aspects of their discipline, which can lead to career path decisions that are better suited for the student after graduation. In addition, students reported a higher level of satisfaction in learning from doing, an increased ability to handle real-world issues, and an increased commitment to the community (Sprague & Percy, 2014, p. 92). It seems apparent from this study (and many others) that field placement programs offer a wide array of benefits to students whose universities offer this valuable opportunity. With more and more students choosing to attend online universities it seems only prudent that online universities expand their
curriculums and prioritize the creation of field placement programs to mirror their traditional university counterparts.

To this point the literature review has focused on the benefits of creating field placement opportunities for online students. However, as field placement programs should benefit the students, the host organizations, and the educational institutions it is prudent to review the literature concerning the impact on the latter two. Sprague and Hu (2015) created a study to measure the value field placement programs have on host organizations and found a plethora of positive feedback (p. 264). For example, over half of the recommendations made by students of public policy and public administration were implemented at the host organizations, students were able to help host organizations to achieve their goals, and students provided the organizations with new tools and resources (Sprague & Hu, 2015, p. 264). The world of academia is constantly changing with new research being conducted, new theories being brought to light, and each year new students bringing fresh ideas and concepts to life using these tools. For example, in just the past few decades public administration concepts have changed from the Old Public Administration, serving clients, to the New Public Management, serving customers, to the New Public Service, serving citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Thus, an administrator working for a host organization may be able to learn new concepts to improve organizational policies or culture from students participating in field placement programs.

Additionally, when a field placement project or a recommended policy change created by a student is implemented it speaks to the quality of both the student and the university the student attends, thus adding to the credibility of the university. Sprague and Percy (2014) noted that it was not unusual for host organizations to offer a job to students who completed their field
placements at their organization (p. 92). Unfortunately, this adds to the ever-increasing list of disadvantages levied upon students of online universities who do not have this opportunity.

Creating a field placement program for any discipline requires a continual commitment by the educational institution and the host organization if each plans to benefit from the partnership. Pria, Taylor-Fefekos, Ikeda-Douglas, and Isaac (2014) examined the perceptions of field placement programs from the point of view of the preceptors and the host organization for Health Services Management degree programs. As field placement programs should be beneficial to all stakeholders it is important to understand the needs of the host organization and the on-site educator or preceptor. Pria et al. (2014) reported that the key to a successful field placement program partnership between an educational institution and the host organization is continual communication and support (p. 39). The educational institution must provide clear program objectives and a means of measuring the student’s progress, while the host organization must provide preceptors who have the necessary experience, have adequate time, and who are devoted to guiding and advising the students. The feedback provided by the preceptors allows educational institutions to focus their curriculum standards, improve student support, and strengthen placement goals. In turn the host organization strengthens the student’s abilities to apply academic theory to real-world outcomes. Pria et al. (2014) also noted that host organizations often reported that student projects had a positive impact on management and policy decisions (p. 37). These conclusions would seem to suggest that field placement programs are beneficial not only to the student, but also, to the host organization and the educational institution.
Traditionally, both field placements and practicums have required the student to physically go to the host organizations to participate in hands-on activities. However, the University of Nebraska at Kearney has recently incorporated an online practicum for educators wishing to earn a master’s degree (Lilienthal, Potthoff, & Anderson, 2017). In theory this concept works much like a capstone project; whereas, the student gains permission from a host organization to create a project that would solve an ongoing issue or create a policy to enhance organizational function. The educational institution provides the template and guidelines for acceptable projects that meet the host organization’s criteria and then the student completes the work online. While this practicum was created for students seeking a master’s degree in education, the concept could be adapted for many other disciplines, including public administration. For example, if the City of Memphis, Tennessee was searching for innovative ways to lower crime rates, a student of public administration located anywhere in the world might submit a project proposal to the city council to fulfill the practicum requirements. This concept offers an alternative solution that online universities can offer to student living outside the United States and gives online universities a significant advantage over traditional universities.

Now it is time to review the literature concerning program accreditation or specialty accreditation. Until recently online universities as compared with traditional brick and mortar universities were often perceived as less reputable. However, as more and more working professionals, including active duty military, lower income students, and students living in remote or rural areas have shifted from traditional universities to online universities, the tide is turning. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics over 2.9 million students are enrolled in fully online degree programs nationwide (Allen & Seaman, 2017, p. 4).
Therefore, it is time for online universities to increase their efforts and credibility by incorporating some of the concepts that are already being used by traditional universities. Today, while most online universities have earned regional accreditation and have been recognized by the United States Department of Education to receive Federal Student Aid in the form of grants and loans, few have earned program or specialty accreditations. Online universities have had difficulties obtaining program accreditations in some fields due to the guidelines of the accrediting organization. For example, Zimmerman (2015) noted that the Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) recently amended its policy requiring 120 face-to-face credit hours of instruction to ‘or’ 120 credit hours of synchronous instruction to allow online universities to qualify for program accreditation (p. 634). However, this method can still be a barrier to online universities who have students in multiple time zones or living on a different continent, such as, military personnel serving overseas. An improvement on this policy would be to allow 120 credit hours of asynchronous instruction. As computers and Internet technologies have evolved, much of the old rhetoric claiming students cannot receive a quality education online have been rendered moot. Thus, the push for online universities to obtain program accreditations has increased. Schulte, Coyne, West, and Garman (2015) noted that graduates from a CAHME accredited programs were more likely to obtain leadership roles in their organizations due to a higher understanding of key competencies and market standards (p. 622). It stands to reason that the online universities of the future will be those who break down the barriers keeping them a step behind traditional universities by failing to obtain program accreditations.

While not all programs or disciplines have accrediting organizations, those that do should be obtained by online universities offering these programs to ensure their students are receiving
the industries standardized and accepted curriculum of instruction. For example, in addition to the before mentioned CAHME and CEPH the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) are all organizations that accredit programs in their disciplines. In the field of public administration, most graduates will find themselves working for the public sector, which in the case of agencies like the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) means the student’s university must have regional accreditation and their field of study programs must have national accreditation, if available, which are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council on Higher Education Accreditation in order to be even be consider for a field placement (Office of Academic Affiliations, 2017). In addition, programmatic accreditation is required to obtain an academic affiliation agreement between government organizations at the federal level and a given educational institution, which is also required before universities can place students in field placements, internships, or fellowship programs.

In 1835, Charles Darwin observed that the finches of the Galapagos Islands were able to adapt their beaks to differing shapes as resources became scarce, thus enabling them to survive. Online universities are competing with each other and with traditional universities for the same resource, students. It is only through continuous evolution that online universities can survive. Therefore, online universities must adapt and incorporate many of the concepts that traditional universities already use, such as, obtaining program accreditations and introducing field placement programs into their curriculums. Currently 155 traditional universities are accredited through NASPAA and require students to participate in field placement programs for public administration at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. However, not one fully online
university has incorporated this valuable tool for higher education (see appendix #5). This project will prove that program accreditation and field placement programs are the tools needed for online universities to survive in the future.

**Background**

For centuries Ivy League universities have worked to build their reputations by creating new and innovative approaches to higher education. The mere mention of Harvard, Yale, or Princeton Universities instantly brings thoughts of educational royalty. Even state colleges, such as, the University of Alabama or the University of Tennessee are held in high regard because of their long-established reputations. For decades these institutions of higher education have offered field placements and internships for most of their programs, such as, social work, education, nursing, public policy, and public administration degrees. In fact, as of this writing 155 traditional universities (see appendix #5) offer field placement programs for students of public administrations in accordance with the standards for master’s degree programs in public affairs, public policy and public administration (NASPAA, 2017). Unfortunately to date, not one online university offers field placement opportunities in any of these fields of study.

On August 6, 1991, the World Wide Web became available to the general-public and the future of information, communication, and education was forever changed. The twentieth century is well marked by the advancements in technologies; in fact, the terms Information Age, Age of Technology, and the Computer Age were all coined in the latter half of the twentieth century. Television has evolved from 3 broadcasting channels that signed off at midnight with the American Flag fluttering in the wind while the National Anthem was playing in the background to hundreds of channels broadcasting 24-hours a day. Even computers have evolved
past the imagination of their original inventors. The once bulky monstrosities that took up whole
rooms and were available only to the government and a few universities are now carried by
school children in their backpacks. Telephones that were once limited to the length of the phone
cord can now fit in a pocket and go anywhere a person can go. In fact, these once limited
communication-devices have evolved into miniature computers called smartphones with more
processing power, memory, and speed than the computers on Apollo 17, the last manned
spacecraft to land on the moon. The technologies of the twentieth century have continued to
grow and have permeated every aspect of life in the twenty-first century.

In early 1995, CALCampus became the first organization to offer fully online college
courses in real time. In 1999, Jones International University became the first online university to
receive regional accreditation and the future of online education was again changed forever.
Unfortunately, as with most new things, there are those who will seek to pervert the technology
to their advantage and place profit over substance. The first decade of the twenty-first century
saw the number of online universities quadruple; however, many of these schools hired
unqualified instructors, enrolled unprepared students, and were dishonest about the value of their
degree programs (Shireman, 2017). Thus, until recently online universities as compared with
traditional brick and mortar universities were often perceived as less reputable or creditable.
Congressional investigations and the creation of better regulations over the last two decades have
brought online university’s standards more in line with their traditional university counterparts
(U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In addition, as more working professionals, including
active-duty military, have shifted from traditional universities to online universities and with the
acceptance of online degrees by more and more employers the tides are changing.
Studies conducted by Hemy, Boddy, Chee, and Sauvage (2016) and Smith, Cleak, and Vreugdenhil (2015) outlined the importance of field placement programs in the field of social work. As with all professions that require interacting with other people, academic studies can only provide half of the necessary skills needed to perform with a high degree of efficiency. The other half of the equation is practical applications. Field placements are the marriage of academic theory and practical application. For decades, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and social work licensing laws in most states have required graduates to earn their degrees from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited programs, which requires a minimum of 400 hours of field placement work for bachelor degrees and 900 hours for graduate degrees (Social Work Degree Center, 2018). Beyond the academic requirements of field placements is the intrinsic values and professional identity that the students will acquire working beside seasoned veterans in their field of study. The legal requirements governing licensing for social workers has spurred many online universities, who offer social work degrees, to seek accreditation and adapt their curriculums to stay competitive with traditional brick-and-mortar universities.

Even more than social work, public health and public administration touch every aspect of human existence. Yet for decades students of online universities studying public health have been required by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) to receive a minimum of 120 hours of field experience, while students of public administration have not had this opportunity (CEPH, 2015, p. 114). For example, American Public University Systems (APUS), which is accredited by the CEPH through 2022, has the requirement that, “Students must secure a supervised position prior to beginning this course” (APUS, 2017). ‘This course’ refers to the final core class of their Masters of Public Health Program, PBHE697 Public Health Practicum.
This suggests that APUS agrees with Lee and Fortune (2013) in that students who participated in hands-on activities are more able to connect the conceptual linkage between academic theory and practical application (p. 656). The facts are that real-world situations are often far more complex than classroom simulations or the ‘way it should be’ scenarios of textbooks; therein lies the need for field placement programs. Yet to date, APUS has not offered the same standard of learning for students in its masters of public administration (MPA) program.

The most recent data estimates that over 2.9 million students are enrolled exclusively in online degree programs across the country, which is up 3.9 percent from the previous year (Allen & Seaman, 2017, p. 4). Much like online public administration degree programs, health administration degree programs had also fallen behind when it came to obtaining accreditation and the creation of field placement programs; however, this has been remedied. In 2015, recognizing this shortcoming led to policy changes in the manner in which the Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) required students of healthcare administration to meet their 120 hour face-to-face instructional format (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 634). Other online fields of study such as nursing and education have also found their niche in online programs using similar tactics to ensure their students are receiving every opportunity to compete with students graduating from traditional universities. Between 2012 and 2016 enrollment in traditional universities dropped by one-million students, yet enrollment in online universities continued to steadily increase (Friedman, 2018). As online universities must complete with both traditional and other online universities it would seem logical to acquire accreditation wherever possible for all degree programs offered.
Within the last two decades many traditional universities have applied for and received accreditation from the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) for online public administration programs at the graduate level. NASPAA guidelines suggest that students of public administration should participate in field placement or internship programs for a minimum of 20 hours per week for 15 weeks for part-time interns or 40 hours per week for 8 weeks for full-time interns (NASPAA, 1977). While these guidelines were written in 1977, they are still current and are being utilized by over 155 traditional universities. For example, East Carolina University and Arkansas State University both require 300 hours of internship to complete a master’s in public administration degree (Arkansas State University, 2017; East Carolina University, 2018).

In the study conducted by Garris, Madden, and Rodgers (2008), 65 traditional universities having public policy and public administration programs were surveyed. Of these, 68 percent offered field placements and 72 percent of those required students to participate (p. 91). In addition, studies conducted as far back as 2008, have analyze the benefits of field placement programs for students of public policy and public administration. These studies concluded that both the students and the organizations benefitted from the experience not only in the short-term, but also, in the long-term (Sprague & Percy, 2014). As noted earlier, today, 155 traditional universities currently require students of public administration to participate in field placement programs (NASPAA, 2017). It would seem that an intersection of time and necessity have finally converged opening a door of opportunity for online universities to advance forward and meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.
Methodology

This research project used two methods to assess the benefits and probabilities of creating field placement programs for online universities. The first method was an in-depth study of the current peer-reviewed literature presented in the previous section of this paper. The second is the use of a brief survey created to gauge the responsiveness of city governments to online universities and their students for the creation of field placement programs, which will be presented in this section.

Survey Design

The purpose and design of the research survey was to test the project’s hypothesis, which states, “Online universities can create field placement programs for their students of public administration by building partnerships with local governments to ensure online students receive the same learning opportunities that traditional university students currently enjoy.” To that end, each question had a specific purpose.

Question #1 asks, “Does your city currently offer field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?” The purpose of this question was to determine how common the practice of using graduate students in field placement or internship programs are within city governments throughout the country and by region.

Question #2 was a follow-up question from question #1 and asks, “If Yes, how many field placement students do you currently have (a)? per year (b)?” The purpose of this question was to determine how invested city governments are in contributing to the educational outcomes of their local universities. If these cities are even slightly invested then the probabilities may be good that they would entertain the concept of creating field placements for online students.
Question #3 was also a follow-up question from question #1 and asks, “If no, would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?” The purpose of this question was to identify cities that do not currently offer field placement opportunities but are interested in doing so if the opportunity was available.

Question #4 asks, “Have you heard of American Military University (AMU) or American Public University (APU)?” This question was designed to discover which regions of the country were the most and least familiar with AMU and APU, which may contribute to the success or failure in establishing educational partnerships.

Question #5 asks, “Would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of accredited online universities?” This question began the fundamental shift in focus from traditional universities to online universities. The purpose of this question was to gauge the responsiveness of city governments to online universities. This question may also provide insight into the reputation of online education nationwide.

Question #6 asks, “Do you believe online graduate students can make a valuable contribution to your efforts?” This question was designed to gauge the level of respect that city governments have for both online universities and their students. This question can be seen as a continuation of question #5; however, it drills a bit deeper to fully understand the perceived value and acceptance of online students.

Question #7 asks, “Do you believe current technology can be used to offer field placement opportunities to graduate students of online universities?” This question was used as a two-pronged assessment concerning the understanding of city governments on the use of telecommunication applications. The first prong was to determine if applications, such as,
GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, Zoom, or Skype could be a plausible means for students outside of a given region to participate in city government without actually living near the given city. For example, could a student living in Tennessee participate in a field placement position with a city located in Wyoming. This is keeping with the premise that students can attend online universities regardless of their location. The second prong looks to the future where the use of a personal presence devises could be used by students to virtually participate in field placements.

Question #8 asks, “Has your city used applications, such as, Adobe Connect, Skype, GoToMeeting, or Zoom for meetings etc.?” This is a directional continuation question for question #7. It is one thing to understand the purpose of differing telecommunication devises and applications, it is another to have actually used them. Those cities that have used these types of telecommunication may have greater respect for universities that use this technology to promote higher education.

Question #9 asks, “Should an online field placement position be paid or unpaid?” The purpose of this question was to cause the respondent to take a deeper look at the answers they had supplied thus far. It is one thing to answer a survey and say yes to wanting to create online field placement positions, it is another to consider the logistics of such an endeavor.

Question #10 asks, “Would you consider hiring an online student who performed well during a field placement?” The purpose of this question was to re-qualify question #6 in that if a city believes an online student can contribute in a positive manner to the efforts of the city government should that student be offered a job, if available? As the last question, this question was designed to make the respondent rethink all previous answers. It is one thing to say yes to offering field placements, it is another to consider offering a job.
Participants

City governments having the following criteria were recruited via an e-mail to participate in the survey. Each city had to have a council-manager form of government. A council-manager form of government is one in which the legislative and executive branches of government are not separated. Instead the political and administrative functions of government are separated, in that the city council makes decisions concerning policy and the implementation of those decisions is the responsibility of a professional administrator or city manager (Smith & Greenblatt, 2016). In addition, each city had to be located within a 50-miles radius of a military installation. This criterion was established to ensure that commute times for active-duty personnel, retired military, and their family members would be within a reasonable distance, given that most active duty and retired military personnel live near military installations. Further, each city had to have an official webpage with e-mail addresses or a ‘contact us’ page capable of uploading the survey. This criterion was established to match twenty-first century technology; in addition to being faster, e-mail is more cost efficient and timely than sending surveys through the United States Postal Service.

A total of 100 cities were located using the Military.com webpage. Of the 100 selected cities, 31 were located near Army installations, 31 near Air Force bases, 30 near Navy or Marine bases, and two near Unified Command Centers. Seven states were excluded because none of the cities within the given 50-mile radius of a military installation met all the aforementioned criteria. These included Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, South Dakota, and Wyoming. In addition, eight other states were excluded because they did not have any military installations. These included Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Oregon,
Vermont, and West Virginia. Altogether, 35 of 50 states were selected as eligible to be represented in this study. Further, for the purpose of this study, military installations are defined as bases where active-duty Army, Air Force, Navy, or Marine personnel are stationed, thus cities located near National Guard, Air National Guard, and Reserve units were not considered.

**Materials and Procedures**

Using the Military.com webpage list of military installations within the United States, each installation was clicked on, which provides the user with an interactive map of the area surrounding the installations. Each city within a 50-mile radius was then entered into the Google search engine to locate an official webpage. If an official webpage was found then a search of the city’s webpage was conducted to discover if the city met the rest of the criteria of having a manager-council form of government and having e-mail addresses or a ‘contact us’ page capable of uploading the survey.

Once 100 cities were located each city was sent an e-mail which consisted of a recruitment introduction letter, a general consent form, and a brief 10-question survey (see appendices #2, 3, & 4). Both the introduction letter and the general consent form made it clear that no personal data would be asked for, that the survey was anonymous and voluntary, and that only the participant’s title and the name of the city would be used in the analysis, if needed. For example, the city manager of Goodtown, Tennessee responded positively to all survey questions. Further, to ensure identifiable markers were removed from all recordings and analyzing data sheets, each city was given a designated number between 1 and 100. For example, on an Excel spreadsheet the data would read: city number #1 answered yes to question number #1.
Survey questions #1, 3-8, and 10 were formatted as yes or no questions and were scored using a point assignment system to gain an average of all replies to each question. If the question was answered yes then the question received (1 point) and if the question was answered no then the question received (0 points). Therefore, each of these questions had a possible answer range of between 0 and 1 possible points. After all returned surveys for questions #1, 3-9, and 10 were tabulated using this method, all the points for a given question were added together and divided by the total number of returns, producing an average response. This information can be used to determine the average number of city governments willing to establish educational partnerships with online universities for the purpose of creating field placement opportunities. In addition, this allows for the quantification of one question to another. For example, hypothetically, if a responding city were to answer no to questions #1 and #3, and then answer yes to question #5, then this city may wish to only create partnerships with online universities.

Question #2 was a follow-up response question to question #1 and would have only been answered if the answer to question #1 was ‘yes’. Question #2 was scored using a graduated tier based point system as follows. If the answer selected was ‘1-2’ then a score of (1 point) was given, if the answer selected was ‘3-5’ then a score of (2 points) was given, if the answer selected was ‘5+’ then a score of (3 points) was given, and if there were no answer then a score of (0 points) was given. Question #2 has an answer range of between 0 and 3 possible points. However, as question #2 is a two-part question each part will be score separately, thus question #2 had a possible total range of between 0 and 6 points. After all returned surveys for question #2 were tabulated using this method, all the points for the question were added together and divided by the total number of returns, producing an average response. This information will be
used to determine the average number of students that the average city government will be likely
to consider in a typical year for field placements.

Question #9 required the participant to answer with either ‘paid’ or ‘unpaid’ Therefore, if
question #9 was answered with ‘paid’ then a score of (1 point) was given. If the answer selected
was ‘unpaid’ then a score of (1 point) was given. And if there was no answer then a score of (0
points) was given. If the participant checked both ‘paid’ and ‘unpaid’ then (2 points) were given.
Whether a field placement opportunity is paid or unpaid it is considered a positive answer, as the
student will receive valuable hands-on experience in either case. After all returned surveys for
question #9 were tabulated using this method, all the point for this question were added together
and divided by the number of returns, producing an average response. This information can be a
valuable tool to universities when attempting to place students within a given city government.
As all city governments are concern with budgetary issues, those answering ‘paid’ may offer
fewer position, while those answering ‘unpaid’ may offer more.

Each returned survey has a scoring range of between 0 and 16 possible points. All
surveys that have a total score of between 0 and 5 are considered to be least likely to accept field
placement programs, those scoring between 6 and 11 are considered likely to accept field
placement programs, and those scoring between 12 and 16 are considered most likely to accept
field placement programs (see chart below). Each question was tabulated and graphed using
Microsoft Excel for accuracy (see appendix #6).
There are several variables that may confuse the positivity of some questions, thus skewing the overall score of each returned survey. For example, if question #5, “Would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of accredited online universities?” was answered ‘no’ and question #6, “Do you believe online graduate students can make a valuable contribution to your efforts?” was answered ‘yes’ then while they appear to cancel each other out, the actual combined score of these two questions may be perceived as a positive factor. For example, while the city may not be interested in creating field placements today, they do believe in the abilities of online students, hence the issue may be current funding restrictions or policy issues. In addition, if question #9 was answered as ‘unpaid’, while the connotation may seem to have less value than paid, the actual perception should be seen as positive, as rather a field placement position is paid or unpaid the student is still receiving valuable experience. Further, even if the answers to question #2, “If Yes, how many field placement students do you currently have (a)? Per year (b)?” is ‘0’, if the city answered ‘yes’ to questions #3, “If no, would your city be interested in creating field placement
opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?” or #5, “Would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of accredited online universities?” then the zero can be considered a positive factor. Here the city may have not yet had an opportunity to create field placements and are looking to partner with an educational institution.

Results

The following section contains the results and analysis from the 10-question survey sent out to 100 cities across the United States. Each of these cities met the criteria of having a council-manager form of city government, an official webpage with e-mail addresses or a ‘contact us’ page capable of uploading the survey, and was located within a 50-mile radius of an active duty military installation. Of the 100 surveys sent out, 30 cities responded resulting in a 30 percent response rate. This return rate is a bit higher than the normal return rates for online surveys, which is between 10.6-19.3 percent (Scherbaum, 2009, p. 6). However, there was no available statistical data on return rates from city governments. Of the 30 responding cities, 7 replies came from East Coast cities, 7 from Southern cities, 7 from Mid-West cities, 3 from Western cities, and 6 from West Coast cities (see chart & map below). In addition, of the 30 responding cities the breakdown according to type of military installation is as follows: of the 7 responding East Coast cities, 3 were located near Army installations, 1 was near an Air Force base, and 3 were near Navy or Marine bases; of the 7 responding Southern cities, 1 was near an Army installation, 3 were near Air Force bases, and 3 were near Navy or Marine bases; of the 7 responding Mid-West Cities, 3 were near Army installations, 3 were near Air Force bases, and 1 was near a Navy or Marine base; of the 3 responding Western cities, 1 was near an Army
installation, and 2 were near Air Force bases; of the 6 responding West Coast cities, 2 were near Army installations, 1 was near an Air Force base, and 3 were near Navy or Marine bases (see chart below).

From the data collected on the geographical locations of the responding surveyed cities, it would seem the return rate per region represents an even balance with a mean average of 6 responses per region (see map below). The data sampling also suggests the type of military installation located near any given cities had null effect on return rates, as the number of responding cities near Army installations were 10, near Air Force bases were 10, and near Navy or Marine bases were also 10 (see chart above). As the return rate across the United States is well balanced in both regional and military installation samplings, it seems that the 30 returned surveys represent a well-balanced consensus on attitudes toward the creation of field placements for online students of public administration within city governments.
The first question on the survey asked the respondent, “Does your city currently offer field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?” The data collected indicated that 53 percent of the responding cities currently accept graduate students of public administration for field placements or internships. This information can be used by online universities for strategic marketing and overtures to create partnerships for higher learning.

Questions #2 and #3 were follow-up questions to question #1 depended on whether question #1 was answered yes or no. Question #2 asked, “If Yes, how many field placement students do you currently have (a)? per year (b)??” The data indicated that 53 percent of the responding cities currently have between 1 and 5 students working in field placement positions.
This information would seem to suggest that over half of the responding city governments are interested in contributing to the educational endeavors of higher education.

Question #3 asked, “If no, would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?” The data indicated that 37 percent of responding cities would be interested in establishing field placement opportunities. However, this answer became more significant when taking into account that 9 out of 14 (or 64 percent) of the cities who responded no to question #1, indicating they did not currently offer field placements, are interested in creating this opportunity. This data would seem to indicate that an untapped resource for learning is currently available and awaiting discovery.

Question #4 asked, “Have you heard of American Military University (AMU) or American Public University (APU)?” The data indicated that 47 percent of responding cities had heard of at least one of these universities. The breakdown by region of the 18 out of 30 cities reporting that they had heard of these universities is as follows: 4 East Coast cities, 4 Southern cities, 4 Mid-West cities, 1 Western city, and 5 West Coast cities. This information seems to suggest, with the exception of Western cities, that these universities are beginning to be recognized across the country. However, the question did not ask respondents to qualify their answers by indicating if they had heard of just one or both institutions or if they knew the two are essentially the same university with two names. This information can be used to target areas for marketing campaigns to increase awareness and hence enrollment.

Question #5 asked, “Would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of accredited online universities?” The data indicated that 60 percent of the responding cities are interested in creating field placement opportunities for online
students. In addition, of the 14 cities answering no to question #1, indicating they did not currently offer field placement opportunities, 7 (or 50 percent) of those responding indicated that they wanted to create field placement opportunities for online students. This information indicates the presence of an untapped market located in areas surrounding active-duty military installations, who would be interested in creating partnerships for online institutions of higher education.

Question #6 asked, “Do you believe online graduate students can make a valuable contribution to your efforts?” The returned data indicated that 90 percent of the responding cities believe that online students can make a valuable contribution to their efforts. This data is extraordinary, in that just a decade ago online universities were perceived to be less creditable than traditional universities. In addition, of the 12 cities responding no to question #5, indicating they did not wish to create field placements for online students, 9 (or 75 percent) still indicated they believed in the abilities of online universities and their students. Therefore, their response of no to question #5 may have been due to other consideration, such as, budget restraints or policy questions.

Question #7 asked, “Do you believe current technology can be used to offer field placement opportunities to graduate students of online universities?” The data gathered from this question indicates that 80 percent of responding cities agree that current technology can be used to create field placement opportunities. This information is good news for online universities, as technology is the instrument used to enable distant learning.

Question #8 asked, “Has your city used applications, such as, Adobe Connect, Skype, GoToMeeting, or Zoom for meetings etc.?” From the data collected 90 percent of responding
cities reported that their city has used at least one of these applications. This information is encouraging in that cities that are already using this type of telecommunication will have a much simpler time and be more receptive to incorporating this type of technology into field placement opportunities, which will open the door for online universities and their students.

Question #9 asked, “Should an online field placement position be paid or unpaid?” From the data collected 80 percent of responding cities reported that students should be paid, while 20 percent reported students should not be paid. However, 50 percent of responding cities report a combination of paid and unpaid positions could be available. This question offers no negative feedback, as whether a student is being monetarily compensated or not, the student is still being afforded the necessary hands-on experience needed for a successful career. In addition, whether a position is paid or unpaid it is still an offered position to work with city staff.

Question #10 asked, “Would you consider hiring an online student who performed well during a field placement?” According to the data collected 93 percent of responding cities said they would hire a student who performed well in a field placement position. This concurs with the study conducted by Sprague and Percy (2014) which indicated that it was not uncommon for host organizations to offer jobs to students who had completed their field placement within their organization. This information represents a positive aspect for both the student and the university. The goal of a good education is to prepare for and find a great career. Therefore, when a university offers better learning tools for success the student benefits from the field placement opportunity and the university benefits from producing higher quality students which in turn increases its reputation.
The data collected using this 10-question survey clearly indicates that online universities have move forward and started to build a reputation of respect and success. Therefore, it is only logical that online universities should continue to move forward by establishing partnerships with city governments to create field placement opportunities for its graduate students of public administration. It is also clear from the data collected that there are cities out there awaiting the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of online education.

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to present a proposal that online universities, specifically American Military University, should establish partnerships with city governments to create field placement opportunities for its students of public administration. However, this is not the original intended focus of this research project. The original focus was a proposal that online universities, specifically American Military University, should create partnerships with federal agencies, specifically the Veterans Hospitals, for the creation of field placement opportunities for graduate students of public administration. Unfortunately, the original investigative inquiries found that no research, interviews, or surveys can be conducted nor can field placements, internships, or fellowships be created at or with the V.A. Hospitals without an Academic Affiliation Agreement between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the educational institution per VHA Directive 1400.03 and 2004-066, which states in part:

The VA requires programmatic accreditation for any program having an available national accreditation (e.g., social work programs must be accredited by the Council on Social Work Education) before an affiliation agreement can be completed. The accrediting body must be recognized by the US Department of Education or the Council
on Higher Education Accreditation. However, some professions have no accrediting body (e.g., Biomedical Instrumentation Technician) and other programs are in schools where an accreditation is available but the school does not have that accreditation. To address the needs of medical centers to have well trained staff when they are not close to accredited training programs, a mechanism to waive the accreditation requirement is available (Latini, 2018; Shulkin, 2016).

For years the field of public administration has had a national accrediting body, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), which is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. However, as American Military University has not applied for this accreditation the research could not be accomplished in the given timeframe. Fortunately, this set-back led to a deeper area of concern, which became the focus of this research project.

The goal of this study was to prove that by creating partnerships between online universities and city governments, students seeking degrees in public administration will be better prepared to enter the public-sector workforce. In addition, this study demonstrates that partnerships between city governments and online universities for field placements of students of public administration could be beneficial to the city governments, the universities, and the students.

The data collected through the review of current literature and the use of a 10-question survey sent out to 100 city governments has produce overwhelming evidence that online universities are lagging behind traditional universities in both specialty accreditations and the use of field placement programs in all fields of study. Field placement programs are the marriage of academic theory and practical application. This marriage is precipitated by specialty
accreditation, which sets national standards for professional competencies throughout a given field of study (Smith & Greenblatt, 2016, p. 411). Having regional accreditation is no longer the standard but the minimum to becoming an institution of higher education. While regional accreditation is the instrument that allows students of a given university to apply for Federal Student Aid, it does not mean that specific programs offered by a given university are accredited or have the same value as an accredited program. For example, even a small local university like the University of Memphis has 28 nationally accredited programs, including its masters of public administration program, which is accredited by the NASPAA. The question online universities should be asking themselves is who would employers rather hire; a person with academic knowledge only or a person who has academic knowledge and actual hands-on experience in their field of study or with the organization itself. This is why the creation of field placement programs is crucial to the advancement of student knowledge and for the reputation of online universities. In the field of public administration this research project has identified a niche from which this can be accomplished.

City governments are not as restrained by the same policies as are federal agencies and have greater autonomy to create both field placements and internships as they see fit. In addition, local governments are more in line with the academic goals of public administration. According to the results from the 10-question survey 18 of the 30 responding cities are currently willing to create field placements with online universities, 7 of which do not currently host any students for field placements. While this number seems to be small, one must remember that the survey was only disseminated to 100 out of 19,505 cities nationwide. In addition, the survey was limited to cities located within a 50-mile radius of military installations. This means there are
opportunities to get in on the ground floor with these city governments and build new educational partnerships.

Over the course of this research it was observed that not one study had been conducted on the partnerships of online universities and city governments or any other entity for field placements programs. However, numerous studies on field placements have been conducted on the benefits to students, universities, and host organization, as pertaining to traditional universities. If there were no other evidence this alone demonstrates that online universities are falling behind their traditional university counterparts. In addition, many traditional universities are beginning to offer fully online and accredited programs lessening the chances that a working professional would choose an online university. For example, the University of Arkansas now offers a fully online masters of public administration program, which is accredited by the NASPAA.

The scenario being played out in the fully online versus traditional university struggle for resources is very similar to the truck driver shortage of the early 1990s. During this shortage thousands of truck driving schools popped up across the country claiming that for $1,500 and eight weeks they could train a person to drive a truck and find them a job. The problem was that over the eight weeks trainees only received 50 miles of actual driving time. The result was an increase in truck related accidents. Therefore, insurance companies stepped in and required more experience to hire drivers. To combat this issue larger trucking companies, such as, Schneider National, US Express, and J.B. Hunt started their own schools and paid trainees to attend. Trainees signed an agreement to work for the company for one-year and received $400 a week while in school and then $500 a week for 6 months while out on the road with a qualified
trainer. This was the trucking industry’s version of field placements, which also led to the closing of 80 percent of truck driving schools. With more traditional universities starting fully online accredited programs and requiring field placements, it will soon be difficult for fully online universities to find resources or compete with their traditional university counterpart. Those universities who do not adapt to the new standards may soon find themselves obsolete.

Recommendations

From the available literature reviewed during this research project it is clear that online universities must adapt to the changing standards of higher education. Two areas of grave concern manifested themselves during this research. First, there is a large gap in the number of specialty accreditations held by fully online universities and traditional brick and mortar universities. Most traditional universities have national accreditations for every program offered when available. However, online universities only obtain specialty accreditations for programs that require such under licensing laws. For example, degrees in both nursing and social work must come from universities who are accredited by the CCNE or CSWE respectively or students cannot be licensed. Second, these accrediting bodies almost always require universities to change their curriculums to include field placements, practicums, or internships under the direct supervision of a qualified preceptor. These field placements afford the students the opportunity to receive the hands-on or practical experience needed to perform outside of academia. The obtaining of program accreditations and the creation of field placement programs are beneficial to the host organization, the universities, and the students; in that the host organization will gain needed staff augmentation, the universities will gain additional credibility by producing higher quality students, and the students will gain the hands-on experience needed to establish
A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

successful careers. Therefore, it is imperative that fully online universities, such as APUS, take the necessary steps to obtain both of these valuable tools for higher education.

From the 10-question survey disseminated to 100 cities across the country, it is clear there are a number of city governments that are underserved by their local universities in the obtainment of student interns and stand ready to build educational partnerships with online universities. As the field of public administration encompasses a wide variety of components spanning human resources, organizational management, leadership development, and health policies, city governments offer endless opportunities for learning. Whether an online university chooses to obtain program accreditations or not, it is still possible to create educational partnerships with city governments for field placements that will allow online students to receive the necessary hands-on experiences needed to achieve discipline competency. This will also increase the long-term reputation of the university by producing higher quality graduates that are ready for employment. For example, when two graduates apply for a position within their local government and one has experience through a student internship and the other does not, the one with the experience will be more likely to get the job. In fact, Sprague and Percy (2014) noted in their study that it was not unusual for host organizations to offer a job to students who completed their field placements at their organization (p. 92). This is further collaborated by the survey conducted in this research, in that 93 percent of responding cities said they would hire a student who performed well in a field placement position. Therefore, online universities should make every effort to establish professional relationships with city governments to create field placement opportunities for their students of public administration.
The recommendations thus far have been directed at fully online universities in general; however, this research was done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of public administration for American Military University and as such the focus was on improving the educational outcomes for the students thereof. The mission statement of American Military University states:

The mission of American Public University System is to provide high quality education with emphasis on educating the nation's military and public service communities by offering respected, relevant, accessible, affordable, and student-focused online programs that prepare students for service and leadership in a diverse, global society (APUS, 2018).

As the mission statement and the name American Military University clearly points out the focus of this university is the educational betterment of those who are tirelessly serving or have served as defenders of freedom, democracy, and the American way of life. The survey used during this research project has two pertinent elements that are essential to achieving academic success for active-duty, former, or retired military personnel and their families. First, the survey was sent only to cities that were within a 50-mile radius of military installations. This was done because even after retirement most military families continue live near military bases to avail themselves of the many benefits offer to them, such as, commissary and bases exchange services and on-base public-sector employment. Therefore, by creating field placement opportunities in cities located near military installation, American Military University could become the educational instrument needed to make transitioning from military life to civilian life easier and decrease the unemployment rate for veterans.
The second essential element is found in survey question number 4, “Have you heard of American Military University or American Public University?” Less than half of the responding cities, 47 percent, replied yes. This indicates that even cities located near military installations are not receiving the necessary advertisement needed to promote the university. When the before mentioned trucker shortage occurred, trucking companies offering paid training sent out brochures to local unemployment offices, military out-processing centers, and workforce development centers to recruit veterans. This type of well-focused and relatively inexpensive campaign should be considered as a means to promote the university. In addition, today many online universities have started creating memorable catch phrases for television commercials, such as, the University of Phoenix, ‘We Rise’ referring to rebirth or Western Governors University, ‘WGU a new kind of U’ using the double entendre for U. The university should consider something like, American Military University, ‘Serving the finest since 1991’ as a possible catch phrase that is both complementing and memorable.

As no other research has been conducted investigating the benefits or probabilities of creating partnerships between city governments and online universities for field placement opportunities, specifically for students of public administration, further research needs to be conducted in areas not covered by this project. For example, no surveys were sent to cities located near National Guard, Air National Guard, or Reserve Units. In addition, this project did not attempt to discern the percentage of current online students of public administration who would be interested in participating in field placement programs as part of their educational experience. Moreover, a comparative 5-year study of online students who participated in field placement programs versus those who did not might make an excellent research project for a doctoral candidate of the future.
Conclusion

The goal of this research project was to test the hypothesis that, “Online universities can create field placement programs for their students of public administration by building partnerships with local governments to ensure online students receive the same learning opportunities that traditional university students currently enjoy.” To that end, an extensive review of the most current literature was studies and a survey was created to test the hypothesis.

The literature review proved conclusively that field placement programs are beneficial to the students who participate in them, the universities that support them, and the host organizations that provide the hands-on educational opportunities. Students have continually reported that field placements are the most memorable and educational portion of earning their degrees. In addition, host organizations have reported that it is not uncommon to hire a student who participated in a field placement at their organization. Moreover, universities have increased their reputations by producing higher quality students.

The research survey used in this project proved that online universities are lagging behind traditional university in their effort to provide field placement opportunities for their students of public administration. In addition, the study revealed that there are city governments awaiting overtures for creating educational partnerships with online universities. The survey also revealed that the reputations of both online students and universities are improving, thus opening the evolutionary door for further adaptations.

The world of technology is a more powerful force on human evolution than are the forces of nature. Natural evolution and adaptation takes hundreds and even thousands of years to effect change. However, technology can force evolutionary changes in a matter of months or years.
Looking at the technology in the beginning of the twentieth century and comparing it to the technology at the beginning of the twenty-first century is like comparing the cartoon “The Flintstones” to the science fiction series “Star Trek”. Even the advances in technology since the year 2000, as compared to 2018, proves that technology will not wait for those who fall behind. Online universities who do not wish to go extinct must adapt their educational models to match and exceed that of their traditional university counterparts.
References


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doi:10.1080/10437797.2013.812851


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http://www.naspaa.org/principals/resources/internship.asp


https://www.scribd.com/document/366059808/NASPAA-Roster-of-Accredited-Programs#fullscreen&from_embed


A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS


Appendix 1: IRB Approval Letter

American Public University System
American Military University
American Public University

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Application Number: 2018-046
Application Title: A Proposal to Create Public Administration Field Placements for Online Universities

Dear Gilbert Harvey,

02/27/2018

The APUS IRB has reviewed and approved the above application as Exempt from further review.

Date of IRB approval: 02/27/2018
Date of IRB approval expiration: 02/26/2023

The approval is valid for five calendar years from the date of approval. Should your research using human subjects extend beyond the time covered by this approval, you will need to submit an extension request form to the IRB.

Changes in the research design (e.g., recruitment process, advertisements) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented. If the revised research design is no longer Exempt, then the IRB committee will need to review the application and issue a new approval.

It is the responsibility of the investigators to report to the IRB any serious, unexpected, and related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems related to risks to subjects and others using the unanticipated problems notification.

Please direct any question to apus-irb@apus.edu. The forms mentioned above are available at http://www.apus.edu/community-scholars/institutional-review-board/apply.htm.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Douglas, PhD
IRB Chair
Appendix 2: Survey Letter of Introduction

Greetings,

My name is Gilbert Glenn Harvey Jr., I am a veteran of the United States Army and a current graduate student at American Military University majoring in Public Administration. My final Capstone Project is to discern the interest of city governments across the country in accepting online students for field placement opportunities in public administration. As most of American Military University’s students are active duty, former, or retired military personnel, I believe this project will greatly enhance their ability to make the transition from military life to public sector employment.

The goal of this project is to bring online universities in line with traditional universities and provide online students the opportunity to receive first-hand experience by observing and participating in local government. With the level of technology currently available, I believe students located anywhere in the world can observe and participate in local government via smartphones, Adobe Connect, Skype, GoToMeeting, or Zoom.

Attached you will find a brief 10-question survey that should not take more than 5 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very Respectfully,

Gilbert Glenn Harvey Jr.

gilbert.harvey@mycampus.apus.edu
Appendix 3: APUS Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Creating Field Placement Opportunities for Online Students

I, Gilbert Glenn Harvey Jr., am a graduate student American Public University, (APUS) and with the guidance of my instructor, Dr. Stephen Schwalbe, I have been approved by the APUS Institutional Review Board to conduct research on the interest of city governments to allow online students the opportunity to participate in field placement programs. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life).

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are located within a 50-mile radius of a military installation, well situated to give active-duty personnel, former service members, retired veterans, and their family members the opportunity to further their education.

Your participation in this research study is both voluntary and anonymous. If you decide not to participate, your city will not be penalized in my study. However, if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may choose to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Participation in the study typically takes no more than 5 minutes and is anonymous. Participants will complete an online survey. When data is reported, responses from individual participants will not be identified. Data will only be reported by the professional title of the participant filling out the survey and the name of the city where the participant is located. For example, the City Manager of Townville, Tennessee responded positively to each question on the survey.

All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. The data will only be shared with my instructor, Dr. Stephen Schwalbe.

This research has been reviewed according to American Public University System IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact: the IRB Chair at American Public University System, apus-irb@apus.edu.

By selecting DISAGREE, you do not wish to participate in the research study, and may exit your browser. However, by selecting disagree you are still providing me with valuable information; therefore, I request that you reply with the disagree highlighted or check.

By selecting AGREE, you consent that:

- You have read and understand the information above regarding this study;
- You are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and understand that you can opt out at any time without penalty; and
- You are at least 18 years of age.

Please select your choice below:

- AGREE
- DISAGREE

Thank you for your time and participation.
Appendix 4: Survey Questionnaire

Field Placement Survey

1. Does your city currently offer field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. If Yes, how many field placement students do you currently have (a)? Per year (b)?
   a. 1-2  3-5  5+
   b. 1-2  3-5  5+

3. If no, would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Have you heard of American Military University or American Public University?
   a. Yes
   b. No (If no please visit http://www.apus.edu/about/history/)

5. Would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of accredited online universities?
   a. Yes
   b. No
6. Do you believe online graduate students can make a valuable contribution to your efforts?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. Do you believe current technology can be used to offer field placement opportunities to graduate students of online universities?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Has your city used applications, such as, Adobe Connect, Skype, GoToMeeting, or Zoom for meetings etc.?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. Should an online field placement position be paid or unpaid?
   a. Paid
   b. Unpaid

10. Would you consider hiring an online student who performed well during a field placement?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Thank you for your time and participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail me at gilbert.harvey@mycampus.apus.edu
Appendix 5: List of NASPAA accredited Schools of Public Administration offering Field Placement Programs

**ALABAMA**

- Auburn University at Auburn 2018-19
  - Department of Political Science
  - MPA

- Auburn University at Montgomery 2020-21
  - Department of Political Science & Public Administration
  - MPA

- Jacksonville State University 2019-20
  - College of Arts and Sciences
  - MPA

- The University of Alabama at Birmingham 2022-23
  - Department of Government
  - MPA

**ARIZONA**

- Arizona State University 2017-18
  - School of Public Affairs
  - MPA

- The University of Arizona 2022-23
  - School of Government & Public Policy
  - MPA

**ARKANSAS**

- Arkansas State University 2021-22
  - Department of Political Science
  - MPA

- University of Arkansas Little Rock 2020-21
  - Institute of Government
  - MPA

**CALIFORNIA**

- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona 2019-20
  - Political Science Department
  - MPA

- California State University, Bakersfield 2022-23
  - Department of Public Policy & Administration
  - MPA
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H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business & Entrepreneurship
MPA

University of Central Florida 2018-19
School of Public Administration
MPA

University of North Florida 2019-20
Department of Political Science & Public Administration
MPA

University of South Florida 2017-18
Department of Government & International Affairs
MPA

**GEORGIA**
Albany State University 2017-18
College of Arts & Humanities
MPA

Augusta University 2021-22
Department of Political Science
MPA

Clark Atlanta University 2017-18
Department of Public Administration
MPA

Georgia College & State University 2022-23
Department of Government and Sociology
MPA

Georgia Southern University 2023-24
Institute for Public and Nonprofit Studies
MPA

Georgia State University 2021-22
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
MPA

Kennesaw State University 2017-18
Department of Political Science and International Affairs
MPA

Savannah State University 2022-23
Department of Political Science and Public Affairs
MPA

The University of Georgia 2021-22
School of Public and International Affairs
MPA
A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

University of West Georgia 2017-18
Department of Political Science and Planning
MPA

Valdosta State University 2018-19
Department of Political Science
MPA

HAWAII
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa 2023-24
College of Social Sciences
MPA

IDAHO
Boise State University 2021-22
Department of Public Policy and Administration
MPA

ILLINOIS
DePaul University 2018-19
School of Public Service
MPA & Master of International Public Service

Governors State University 2017-18
College of Business & Public Administration
MPA

Northern Illinois University 2020-21
Department of Public Administration
MPA

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville 2018-19
Department of Public Administration & Policy Analysis
MPA

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale 2021-22
Department of Political Science
MPA

The University of Illinois at Chicago 2020-21
Department of Public Administration
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University of Illinois at Springfield 2022-23
College of Public Affairs and Administration
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Department of Political Science
MPA

MARYLAND
Bowie State University 2018-19
Dept. of Management, Marketing, and Public Administration
MPA

University of Baltimore 2017-18
School of Public and International Affairs
MPA

MASSACHUSETTS
Bridgewater State University 2017-18
Dept. of Political Science
MPA

Northeastern University 2023-24
School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs
MPA

Suffolk University 2019-20
Department of Public Management
MPA

MICHIGAN
Central Michigan University 2023-24
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
MPA

Eastern Michigan University 2018-19
Department of Political Science
MPA

Grand Valley State University 2022-23
School of Public, Nonprofit, and Health Administration
MPA

Oakland University 2021-22
Department of Political Science
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Wayne State University 2019-20
Department of Political Science
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Western Michigan University 2017-18
School of Public Affairs & Administration
MPA
A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

MISSISSIPPI
Jackson State University 2018-19
Department of Public Administration
MPA & Master of Public Policy

Mississippi State University 2017-18
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
MPA & Master of Public Policy

MISSOURI
Missouri State University 2019-20
Political Science Department
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University of Missouri-Kansas City 2019-20
Henry W. Bloch School of Management
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University of Missouri-St. Louis 2021-22
Public Policy Administration Master’s Program
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NEBRASKA
University of Nebraska at Omaha 2018-19
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas 2017-18
Department of Public Administration
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NEW JERSEY
Kean University 2017-18
Dept. of Public Administration
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Rutgers University, Camden 2020-21
Graduate Department of Public Policy & Administration
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Rutgers University, Newark 2017-18
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Seton Hall University 2022-23
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NEW MEXICO
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Department of Government
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| Columbia University 2019-20 School of International Policy and Affairs MPA |
| John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY 2021-22 Department of Public Management MPA |
| Long Island University, Brooklyn 2022-23 School of Business, Public Administration and Info Sciences MPA |
| Marist College 2021-22 School of Management MPA |
| New York University 2017-18 Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service MPA |
| State University of New York, The College at Brockport 2018-19 Department of Public Administration MPA |
| Syracuse University 2020-21 Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs MPA |
| University at Albany, SUNY 2022-23 Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public Affairs &amp; Policy MPA |</p>
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<td>University of Dayton 2020-21</td>
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A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

Wright State University 2022-23
Department of Urban Affairs & Geography
MPA

OREGON
Portland State University 2019-20
Division of Public Administration
EXECUTIVE MPA
MPA & Master of Health Administration

University of Oregon 2018-19
Department of Planning, Public Policy & Management
MPA

PENNSYLVANIA
The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg 2017-18
School of Public Affairs
MPA

University of Pittsburgh 2021-22
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
MPA

Villanova University 2022-23
Department of Public Administration
MPA

West Chester University 2020-21
Department of Public Policy & Administration
MPA

PUERTO RICO
University of Puerto Rico - Rio Piedras Campus 2023-24
Roberto Sanchez Vilella School of Public Administration
MPA

SOUTH CAROLINA
College of Charleston 2020-21
Department of Political Science
MPA

University of South Carolina 2018-19
Department of Political Science
MPA

SOUTH DAKOTA
The University of South Dakota 2019-20
Department of Political Science
MPA
A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

TENNESSEE
Tennessee State University 2018-19
Department of Public Administration
MPA

The University of Memphis 2022-23
Division of Public and Nonprofit Administration
MPA

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga 2019-20
Department of Political Science, Public Admin and Nonprofit Management
MPA

TEXAS
Texas A&M International University 2019-20
Department of Social Sciences
MPA

Texas A&M University 2020-21
Bush School of Government and Public Service
MPA & Master of Public Policy

Texas Southern University 2017-18
Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs
MPA

Texas State University 2023-24
Department of Public Administration
MPA

Texas Tech University 2021-22
Department of Political Science
MPA

The University of Texas at Arlington 2018-19
School of Urban and Public Affairs
MPA

The University of Texas at El Paso 2018-19
Institute for Policy and Economic Development
MPA

The University of Texas at San Antonio 2019-20
Department of Public Administration
MPA
University of North Texas 2020-21
Department of Public Administration
MPA

UTAH
Brigham Young University 2017-18
George W. Romney Institute of Public Management
MPA

Southern Utah University 2020-21
Department of Political Science & Criminal Justice
MPA

The University of Utah 2019-20
Department of Political Science
MPA

VERMONT
The University of Vermont 2018-19
Department of Community Development & Applied Economics
MPA

VIRGINIA
George Mason University 2019-20
Scholar School of Policy and Government
MPA

James Madison University 2019-20
School of Public Policy and Administration
MPA

Old Dominion University 2023-24
School of Public Service
MPA

Virginia Commonwealth University 2023-24
L. Douglas Wilder School of Govt. & Public Affairs
MPA

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University 2022-23
Center for Public Administration & Policy
MPA

WASHINGTON
Eastern Washington University 2021-22
College of Business and Public Administration
MPA

Seattle University 2017-18
Institute of Public Service
MPA
University of Washington 2020-21
Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance
MPA

WEST VIRGINIA
West Virginia University 2021-22
Division of Public Administration
MPA
## Appendix #6: Survey Results

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A Proposal to Create Public Administration Field Placements for Online Universities

By: Gilbert (Glenn) Harvey Jr.
A Masters Capstone Project
For American Military University

Introduction

- Darwin’s “Theory of Evolution” can be observed in the past and applied to the future of online education.
- Advances in technology have changed how education is delivered.
  - Correspondence courses
  - Computer-based learning
  - Online universities
- Darwin’s finches adapted their beaks to feed on other resources, online universities must adapt their strategies.
  - Specialty accreditations
  - Field Placement Programs
- This project proposes that online universities should create field placement programs within city governments for students of public administration
A PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIELD PLACEMENTS

Background

Most traditional universities have reputations that date back decades and in some cases centuries.

Advancements in technology have forced educational evolution.

For decades traditional universities have offered field placements for their students of public administration. Yet not one online university offers the same learning opportunities.

Applications such as Adobe Connect, Skype, and GoToMeeting.

Methodology

- Design a survey to test the hypothesis, “Online universities can create field placement programs for their students of public administration by building partnerships with local governments.”
- Establish criteria for the survey:
  - Must have a council-manager form of government.
  - Must be located within a 50-miles radius of a military installation.
  - Must have an official webpage with email addresses or a ‘contact us’ form page capable of uploading the survey.
- Locate 100 cities nationwide.
- Send out surveys.
Q.1: "Does your city currently offer field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?"

The results indicate that **53%** of the responding cities currently accept graduate students of public administration for field placements or internships.
Q #2: “If Yes, how many field placement students do you currently have (a)? per year (b)?”

The results indicate that 53% of the responding cities currently have between 1 and 5 students working in field placement positions.

Q #3: “If no, would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of traditional universities?”

The results indicate that 37% of responding cities would be interested in establishing field placement opportunities.
Q #4: “Have you heard of American Military University (AMU) or American Public University (APU)?”

The results indicate that 47% of responding cities had heard of AMU or APU.

Q #5: “Would your city be interested in creating field placement opportunities for graduate students of accredited online universities?”

The results indicate that 60% of the responding cities are interested in creating field placement opportunities for online students.
Q #6: "Do you believe online graduate students can make a valuable contribution to your efforts?"

The data indicated that 90% of the responding cities believe that online students can make a valuable contribution to their efforts.

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Q #7: "Do you believe current technology can be used to offer field placement opportunities to graduate students of online universities?"

The results indicate that 80% of responding cities agree that current technology can be used to create field placement opportunities.
Q #8: “Has your city used applications, such as, Adobe Connect, Skype, GoToMeeting, or Zoom for meetings etc.?”

The data indicates that 90% of responding cities reported that their city has used at least one of these applications, Adobe Connect, Skype, GoToMeeting, or Zoom.

Q #9: “Should an online field placement position be paid or unpaid?”

The results indicate that:
- 80% of cities believed interns should be paid
- 20% believed they should not be paid
- 50% believed there should be a combination of both paid and unpaid positions.
Q #10: “Would you consider hiring an online student who performed well during a field placement?”

The results indicate that 93% of responding cities said they would hire a student who performed well in a field placement position.

Discussion
This study demonstrated:

- That partnerships between city governments and online universities for field placements administration would be beneficial to:
  - Students
  - City governments
  - Universities
- That there is overwhelming evidence that online universities are lagging behind traditional universities in:
  - Specialty accreditations
  - Field placement programs
Discussion

This study also demonstrated:

- That program accreditation is now the standard.
- That the creation of field placement programs is crucial to the advancement of student knowledge and for the reputation of online universities.
- That there are city governments across the United States who are underserved by their local universities in establishing field placement positions for students of public administration.

Recommendations

- Online universities need to:
  - Restructure their models
  - Accredit MPA programs
  - Prioritize field placement creation

- Further research needs to be conducted in areas not covered by this project.

- American Military University needs to increase its marketing in areas surrounding military installations.
The End

ANY QUESTIONS?