Duplicate Presentations in a Dual World: A Perspective from a Public Administration Political Scientist

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When I first was asked to write this piece about "double conferencing," I immediately went to my vita. Looking at the evidence Nelson Dometrius presented introducing this symposium and placing myself on the degree year list, I found I was in the center of the controversy, having received my degree in 1998. Had I committed the crime of presenting the same paper at two conferences? I skimmed my CV, and yes, there it was: an identically titled paper at both a national and a section conference. Granted, this was the only one I could find on my CV, there was only a month between the two conferences, and we had made some changes based on feedback. However, there was more than enough overlap to place me among the group of violators.

I thought about my almost 15 years in academia, from graduate school to the rank of associate professor. Had anyone ever discussed this with me? Had my mentors ever told me, "don't do this," in my years of training at Chapel Hill? While I do not recall anyone overtly and intentionally bringing this to my attention, I do know that somewhere across my six years of graduate school I unconsciously adopted the understanding that each conference paper should be a different or unique product. However, from talking with others, I know that they did not receive the same impression. Many operate on the "get enough feedback to make your paper impervious to reviewers" philosophy. Others want to be seen at every conference to get their names and work known, even if it means presenting the same or a slightly revised or refocused paper more than once. I suspect that counting only papers with the same title as double conferencing vastly underestimates the practice. A title change fitting the next conference theme is all that is necessary to have a "new" paper, and many would find this action perfectly legitimate. Currently, both perspectives seem to be held as conferencing norms in our profession. And, I must confess, my own thoughts have changed across the years—even in the past three months as I have been thinking about this question.

Part of my task in this symposium is to ponder the issue from the perspective of a public administration scholar. Although some of my arguments may be applicable to any field in political science, I confess that after a decade as a publishing professor and as a scholar at the intercept of theory and practice, I have come to think that double conferencing is (especially) appropriate in public administration if presenters maintain their integrity and ethical intentions. Borrowing from Paul Appleby, public administration is different because government is politics … and institutions, representation, policy processes and analysis, management and leadership, globalization, federalism and collaborative networks, and public service. In short, public administration *must* encompass both the theoretical aspects of most fields of political science and the practical nature of governance. Very simply and perhaps most importantly, public administration research *must* include both the academic and the practitioner. The uniqueness and complexity of this field may require norms of research presentation and publishing that are slightly different from other areas of political science.

For many presenters, taking the same papers to a large national conference and a subfield conference risks repeating them to overlapping panel and audience members. In contrast, presenting a paper at the APSA and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) conferences will often yield quite different audiences. Though many public administration academics will attend both, the ASPA audience adds a substantial number of practitioners to panel attendance. Further, panels occurring at the ASPA conference are divided into narrow sub- or even sub-sub-fields of public administration. At the APSA conference the section panels often remain quite broad, especially in the smaller sections.

Not only do the panels and audiences at the APSA and the ASPA conferences often differ significantly, but many public administration research papers need input from these multiple audiences before they are ready for journal submission. Take, for example, the burgeoning study of election administration. Since the 2000 presidential election, *Bush v. Gore*, and the passage of the Help American Vote Act, election administration and implementation has become the focus of politicians, practitioners, and public administration scholars alike. The Auburn University MPA program, in conjunction with the National Election Center, offers the only national certification program in election administration. Thus, our faculty regularly consult academic research on elections and a range of election officials from county clerks to members of the secretaries' of state offices.

 doi: 10.1017/S1049096508080463

I focus attention on this area to emphasize the great importance of sharing and vetting research in this field with multiple audiences. It would be appropriate to take this research to a national political science conference, consulting with scholars in both comparative and American electoral politics. However, a follow-up appearance at a major conference in public administration and/or subfield conferences on implementation or evaluation is also necessary. Finally, one should take the paper to a meeting of election officials. Very few changes between these conferences would be necessary (although they may be warranted) for the participant to gain critiques and suggestions from multiple viewpoints and for the paper contents to be disseminated to different sets of people. There would probably be very little overlap among the audiences at the different conferences.

For a paper to even approximate reality, research in election administration must match description and explanation with practice. For instance, empirical research findings that poll worker training is key to improving voter accuracy with a recommendation to "train poll workers better" seems right on target. However, when listening to election officials discuss older poll workers' reactions as they learn to use new equipment or even use a cell phone, one understands that it just is not that simple. As I learned while teaching a seminar, maybe the answer is not better training but different training—one district pairs tech-savvy high school volunteers with older volunteers who understand the polling processes. Thus, understanding political science research on voting requires input from and interaction with practitioners; hence, multiple conferences are warranted. Creating a national identification card or state-wide voter registration system may seem logical in the abstract but may be difficult, complex, perhaps even impossible to administer when practitioners face the political issues of states' rights, home rule, intergovernmental relations, political culture, and representation along with the practical administrative problems of staffing, information technology, unfunded mandates, budget constraints, goal conflicts with other legislation (such as the Motor-Voter Act), and administrative capacity.

Of course most of the examples above fit within the "different audiences" exception noted by Dometrius, where most would consider duplicate presentation of the same paper not only acceptable but actually desirable. Public administration scholars must deal with different audiences on a regular basis. It is a necessity for the accuracy of many public administration studies, not simply a choice of presentation.

Broadly, for political science as a profession, there are good reasons to create a professional norm, regardless of whether it is for one paper-one conference or for author discretion. Such a norm could be vital to those entering the profession, as navigating the conference/publication streams is most perplexing and problematic in the academic "formative" years. Learning how to identify papers that are or will become "publishable quality" is extremely difficult. Many senior faculty still scratch their heads over their submissions' (1) one very favorable, (2) one mediocre, and (3) one unfavorable review. It is not surprising, then, that graduate students and junior faculty are leaders in double conferencing papers according to Dometrius's data. These more junior scholars may be caught up in the "maybe I should get one more round of conference comments before sending it off to a journal" cycle. This is a problem all young scholars face, but it is especially difficult for those outside of established publishing departments or without strong mentorship. From the perspective of a public administration/political science scholar, the publishing questions may especially need the aid of multiple conference audiences. In particular is the question of the journal itself. Is this a paper for a mainstream political science journal—will it have broad appeal and appear important across fields of political science—or is it a journal for a mainstream public administration journal, or even a more specialized serial? A norm that appreciates the dissemination of information to, and integration of input from, various audiences as part of the research process seems appropriate for aiding public administration scholars as they improve their articles' quality and choose appropriate journals.

There is another facet of academic research that pushes me to accept duplicating conference papers—the energy, expertise, and extremely long hours put into long-term and/or complex data sets. Many of us write several papers using the same data, variables, even very similar models, focusing on variations of a theme. Some of us use longitudinal data that we slice and dice several ways. For instance, I am involved with collecting data for a long-term survey of state administrators, from 1964 and counting. The 2008 survey will take most of a year to plan, prepare, collect, enter, and clean the data. I can describe public administrators' attitudes, attributes, and activities longitudinally and cross-sectionally, descriptively and analytically. One recent paper focused on bureaucratic representation of women across time and across agencies. Another focused on their salaries, and a third conference paper tried to tie the proportion of women agency heads with a state's governmental performance levels (with enough success that the project lives on, as we revise it for the 2008 Midwest conference). Each grappled with a different question and used distinct arguments and approaches to address them, despite significant overlap in data, models, and variables. Complex and time-consuming studies usually contain enough data to generate multiple papers that, while similar, qualify as distinctive and different. However, even when scholars duplicate papers from these data sets at difference conferences, I can understand wanting to share the output and outcomes from your blood, sweat, and tears with multiple audiences. If the intent is to disseminate your results broadly, I must conclude that a norm of two conferences for identically-titled or the same/slightly revised paper is acceptable in our profession.

An argument raised against taking duplicate papers to multiple conferences is that double conferencing reduces the number of slots available to other scholars to present their work. If I present the same paper at both the major conference and a section conference, I have taken at least one slot away from a colleague with similar interests and research as well as delivered my paper to at least a portion of the same audience. Thus, my colleague's production is slowed if she relies on conference feedback to help shape the paper for publication. This seems to be counterproductive not just to my colleague but the profession as a whole. However, if we adopt a norm of limiting papers to one conference, we may be arbitrarily limiting the presentation of very important research. Currently, papers for conferences are vetted through our peers, many times through persons highly active in the research areas themselves. Should two groups of scholars choose to place the same paper on two different conference schedules—especially conferences with limited spots—then there is obviously something appealing about the submitted proposal. If the proposal is accepted at two major conferences (for public administration scholars that would be the APSA or Midwest and ASPA) then there is a theme, a question, or data two (probably) different sets of scholars deemed important that appeal not only to a single field of political science but multiple scholarly arenas. While this may disadvantage junior scholars in the short term, it also aids their development by disseminating (hopefully) the best and most current research they can build on. While the best papers may not always be selected, replacing the discretion of our peers with an arbitrary limitation would be more disadvantageous to our profession when all papers are said and done.

The final point I would like to raise involves the intentions of conference presenters. Early in this essay I stressed the point

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096508080463 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that double conferencing was acceptable *but* dependent on professionalism and integrity. When I originally entered into this writing project, my intentions were to oppose double conferencing. Perhaps it was the fact that my vita reflects this trend too, or that I now more fully appreciate the merits (and problems) of double conferencing, but I hold the opposite view now with certain caveats of presenter intention and professional integrity. All of the above arguments falter if intentions fall by the professional wayside.

The first step I pursued as I thought about double conferencing and this essay was to talk with colleagues about the issue. One colleague's immediate response was the question of the intent or intentions of duplicating papers. There are several possible motivations of double conferencing. As discussed above, the first intention, particularly applicable to public administration, is to take the paper to two or more conferences to gain multiple perspectives and comments, both for the sake of practical applicability and revisions before journal submission. A second favorable goal of presenting duplicate papers is to share the information with as many audiences as possible. This is especially true if the research was complex and time consuming, and the results are new and significant. These two purposes are what make our profession political science.

Conference presenters may possibly also have other reasons for double conferencing—reasons that may or may not be professionally acceptable. Other intentions might be to "be seen," pad a vita, lobby for a new job, socialize with old friends, have meetings with colleagues/coauthors from other states or countries, or simply to learn about current political science research. The question of a professional norm, then, may hinge on individual ethics. Is your purpose for going to a conference professionally legitimate?

Many of us attend several conferences each year for various reasons. And, as was mentioned in the introduction to this symposium, many times our universities will not pay for travel unless we are presenting. How then do we get to a conference? We present a paper, perhaps a paper that has not seen many, if any, substantial changes. Of course, this is a very pragmatic way to look at the issue. Here the presenter's intention is not necessarily to gain feedback. It may not even primarily be to disseminate research findings. Attending a conference to learn about current research in your field(s) is certainly a legitimate goal, but what if even professional improvement is not your primary reason for attending a conference? We all want to visit with friends, and many of us may want to gain employment or change jobs. However, presenting the same paper at a second conference, taking up space on a conference panel, and preventing one of your colleagues from receiving feedback or presenting new findings, with the *primary intention of personal gain*, adds nothing to the professional whole. It actually has the unjustifiable effect of potentially detracting from the profession as a whole and other researchers individually. Further, attendance at a conference primarily for job climbing or socializing is not an ethical reason for spending the university's and department's money. Although these are not the primary considerations of most members of our associations, I am enough of a believer in "economic man" to think that self-interest does govern at least a few individuals.

In the end, though, the determination of when to double conference is an individual one, just as the acceptance of a duplicated paper at one, two, or even three conferences is a professional decision. A single paper can be legitimately delivered at multiple conferences—increasing knowledge in two different fields of political science or seeking input from multiple, varied audiences such as academics and practitioners. This is not only legitimate but desirable. For political science and public administration, one of the keys to growth in our fields of study is the continued inculcation of a norm advocating a professional ethic that makes conference participation primarily about enhancing our profession and not as a means to a personal end.

Reference

Dometrius, Nelson C. 2008. "Editor's Introduction: The Evolving Norms of Conference Papers." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41 (April): 287–288.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096508080463 Published online by Cambridge University Press