2018 Public Administration Theory Network Doctoral Workshop

Exploring the Dynamics of “Epistemic (In)justice” in Contemporary Public Administration

From street-level work in police and social service agencies to complex multi-actor collaborations in global governance, public administration involves listening to and assessing claims made by members of diverse publics. The traditional critical discourse about listening to and engaging publics has concerned primarily with whose voices are included. However “being at the table” does not guarantee that voices will be heard or that all claims will receive an equal hearing. Particular voices and their claims may continue to be marginalized or dismissed because of the ways in which encounters between publics and administrators are constructed or the ways in which particular claims are communicated and perceived. If PA theory is to be a positive “generative force,” theorists must advance the field’s understanding of how dynamics of marginalization rooted in communication and credibility shape administrative realities and can be ameliorated.

To engage with these issues, this year’s doctoral workshop takes as its point of entry the recent work of philosopher Miranda Fricker (2013) on epistemic (in)justice. Epistemic injustice hinges on the way in which a person is aggrieved in their capacity as a knower or bearer of knowledge. Fricker examines two sub-branches of epistemic injustice that have particular relevance for the practice of public administration today. Testimonial injustice “happens when a speaker receives a deficit of credibility owing to the operation of prejudice in the hearer’s judgement” (p. 1319). Hermeneutical injustice “occurs at a stage prior to communicative activity . . . when a subject who is already hermeneutically marginalized (that is, they belong to a group which does not have access to equal participation in the generation of social meanings) is thereby put at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of a significant area of their social experience” (p. 1319).

Workshop participants are asked to read the article by Miranda Fricker listed below before the workshop and be prepared to probe the variable dynamics of epistemic (in)justice within contemporary public administration and public life. Sites for such exploration may include street-level bureaucracy, new social movements, political discourse, the workplace, and the classroom. Students are strongly encouraged to think about the concepts raised in the article in terms of their own experiences, research, and training.

All students attending the conference who are enrolled in a doctoral program are encouraged to attend. The workshop is intended to introduce and promote connections with fellow students and to build the community of scholars engaged in theoretical work in public administration. Participants do not need prior experience with the concept of epistemic (in)justice to successfully participate in the workshop.

Please feel free to contact Thomas Catlaw (ole55@cox.net) or Laura Hand (laura.hand@und.edu) directly for additional information.

References