

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



Recap of 11/19/20 Discussion with Charles E. Menifield

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

Our collegial conversation with Dr. Charles Menifield, Dean of the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University-Newark, was an essential dialogue about how groups that possess *two different kinds* of knowledge, experience, and expertise can connect meaningfully in service to the greater good. It occurred among current and retired government employees and an academic whose relationships with Paul Posner and Marvin Pfaup were instrumental in shaping his boundary spanning mindset. Dr. Menifield remains actively involved with local government in the Newark area today.

Why connect research and practice?

It became clear that our guest was habitually crossing all sorts of boundaries to make things happen long before he met either man. However, that tendency was developed further by his friendship with [Posner](#), who began popularizing the use of “pracademic” (someone who is both an academic and an active practitioner in their subject area) in 2001. Posner clued him in to the usefulness of internships in government and connected him with his first Visiting Scholar gig at the Congressional Budget Office. [Pfaup](#), who directed the Financial Studies/Budget Process group at CBO while he was there, encouraged his research on state implementation of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

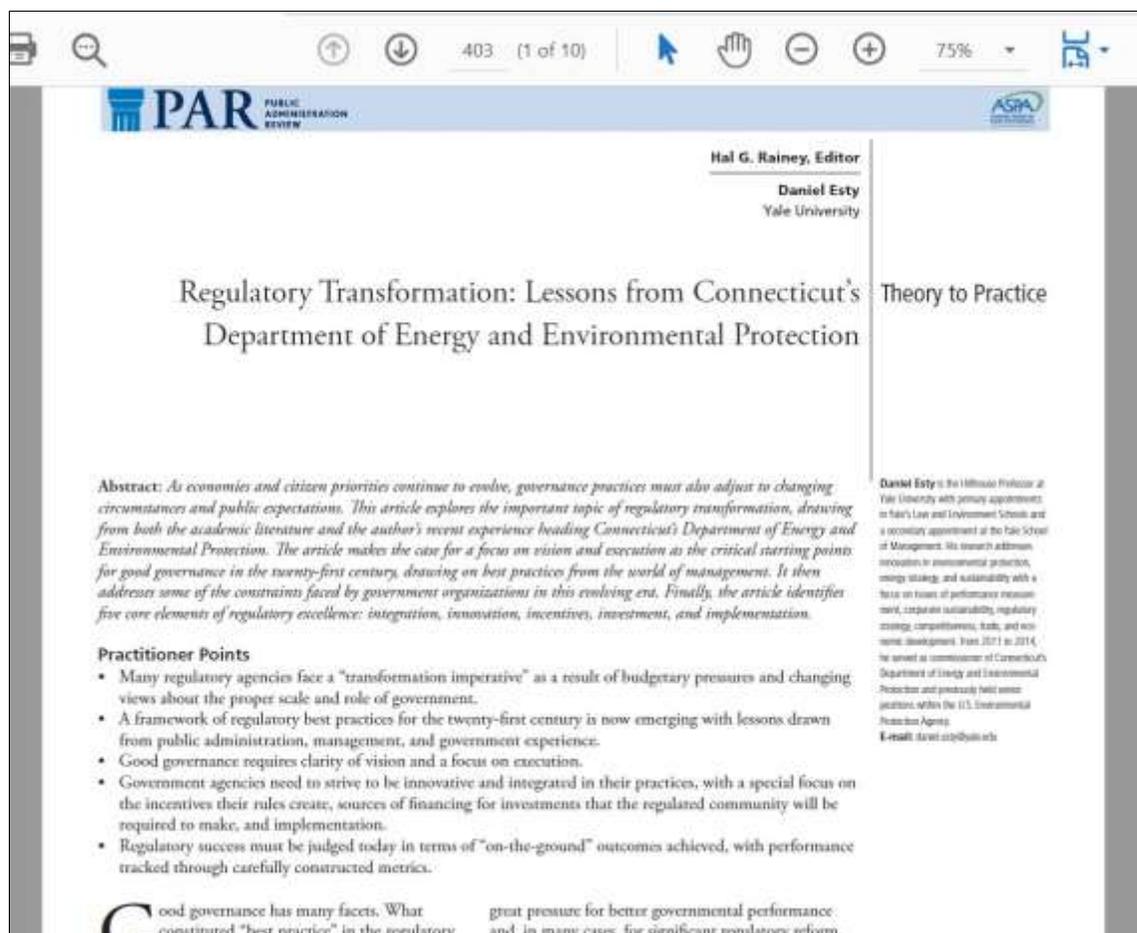
Because he got tenure at one university, gave it up to go back into government, and then got tenure elsewhere later, Dr. Menifield would be a good interview for those who do not accept that there is only one way to progress in academe.

He would also be a good advisor for human capital experts who see the benefits of personnel exchange between government and private sector organizations.

He encourages his students to work in government so that they gain a better understanding of how it works and how to work with it. For example, one of the things he discovered while at CBO was how easy it was to get data from other agencies.

He made the point that public administration as a whole does not facilitate dialogue between academics and practitioners, before mentioning two exceptions:

He thinks that the [National Academy of Public Administration](#) (where he is a Fellow) does the best job of convening cross-cutting dialogue. Also, he screen-shared an article in the [American Society for Public Administration's Public Administration Review](#) journal to show us the "Practitioner Points" that the editors began requiring a few years ago:



Note that a subscription to the journal accompanies membership, as does the opportunity for both academics and practitioners to write for the *PA Times* newsletter.

Input from the practitioners in the room

One of the questions that came up was, "How do you see academe and government coming together to make change?" Dr. Menifield, who began looking into policing this

year (there's been a lot of work in New Jersey on gun violence), told us a little about it and answered, "It's complicated," and "You need the practitioner piece." Given the prevalence in our current media diet of sound bites, easy answers, and dopamine hits, my initial reaction as a media consumer was disappointment. However, my more nuanced retired fed perspective was and is that we need the research piece to minimize unintended consequences as working solutions are designed with stakeholders.

A colleague who founded the Center for Public Administrators on his own time observed that there is a lack of incentive for that sort of dialogue in the ivory tower, and asked whether professors are even interested in connecting students with public service careers (a timely question, given the Volcker Alliance's Government-to-University Initiative). On his [blog in the past week](#), he also wrote "that public administration researchers in academia should engage with real practitioners, rather than imaginary ones. The public administration research community frequently expresses a desire to engage with practitioners but rarely does so."

A participant who had an extensive academic career before she spent a second career managing the editorial function at a cabinet agency mentioned feeling disconnected from our dialogue. We were focused on public administration, whereas her field was French Literature. This generated more discussion about the academic-practitioner interface or lack thereof. It would be valuable to think about where, and how, every subject area shows up in government. Each presents continuing opportunity for the invention of dialogue among academic researchers and government practitioners.

Finally, we welcomed back a colleague who spent 20 years as a Nuclear Submarine Officer for the Navy. His second career has involved the improvement of leadership within nonprofits in the Hampton Roads area. A few weeks ago, he underwent a successful kidney transplant. Mark encouraged us all to look into organ donation (which saved his life).

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
Center for Public Administrators
Charlestown, RI Town Council
Department of Education, Retired
Department of the Interior
Department of Veterans Affairs
Federal Communications Commission
Professional Development Consortium of Hampton Roads
Rutgers University – Newark
U.S. Army

Participants joined from Newark, NJ, Colorado Springs, CO, Wickford, RI, and the DC Metro Area. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley



[Charles E. Menifield, SPAA Dean, Rutgers-Newark](#)

Header photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kayakers_in_Redwood_City,_California.jpg