

**Ethics Codes and their Administration:  
A Particularly Illustrative Case Study and  
a Call for Collaboration**

**Manfred F. Meine and Thomas P. Dunn  
Troy University, Florida, USA**

**Ethics Codes and their Administration:  
A Particularly Illustrative Case Study and a Call for Collaboration**

**Manfred F. Meine and Thomas P. Dunn**

**ABSTRACT**

*There can be no doubt that ethical lapses at all levels of government, both for politicians and public administrators, have always been endemic to the public sector. With the “information age” having now become the “instant information age,” via the electronic media, and with the undeniable centrality of “investigative reporting” in the focus of newly-minted and seasoned journalists alike, ethical transgressions seem to play out daily on both the national and international stages. In this environment, tools to help public servants maintain the proper ethical focus are more important than ever. Despite debate about their value and the need for enforcement, ethical codes are widely used by professional organizations as external controls.*

*As one of the preeminent professional organizations for public servants, the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) has an impressive Code of Ethics that enjoins its members to maintain the highest ethical standards, but that code does not contain an enforcement mechanism for promoting compliance. Other organizations with a public sector focus, such as the International City/County Management Association and the American Planning Association (APA) also have extensive ethics codes, to include well established enforcement mechanisms, fueling the debate about the need for code enforcement.*

*Although not focused on public service, The American Sociological Association (ASA) which, not unlike ASPA, is widely recognized as being the premier professional association in its field and throughout academia, also has an extensive ethical code and a well developed enforcement mechanism. While a commitment to the promotion of ethical competence among their members is clearly viewed as being central to the accomplishment of their missions, the ASA and ASPA’s techniques for doing so include both similar and unique initiatives.*

*Incorporating a review of the ethics-related programs of the ICMA, the APA, the ASA and ASPA this paper uses the ASA and ASPA ethics approaches as a model to consider the potential benefits to be derived from collaboration between professional organizations in the ethics arena, especially in the area of code enforcement. It is the purpose of this paper to justify and support the call for such collaboration among appropriate professional associations and, in so doing, to expand the focus on professional ethics throughout the public sector and to use the process as a possible springboard for updating the ASPA code and its ethics approach.*

**Key words:** Ethics codes, collaboration, enforcement, professional ethics, corruption

**Ethics Codes and their Administration:  
A Particularly Illustrative Case Study and a Call for Collaboration  
Manfred F. Meine and Thomas P. Dunn**

**Introduction**

Corruption and ethical violations by public servants is a global problem, sometimes to the point of endangering the economic well being of nations (United Nations Public Administration Network Website, 2010). While the problem may not rise to that level of severity in the United States, considering the constant barrage from the media, there is certainly no dearth of ethical lapses at all levels of government in this country, despite the existence of countless ethical codes and laws. The frequent occurrence of ethical miscues in the business community and by politicians and professional public servants at the federal, state and local level may well be responsible for what has been called a crisis in confidence in societal institutions (Norberg, 2009). In this environment, tools to help public servants maintain the proper ethical focus are more important than ever. Despite debate about their value and the need for enforcement, ethical codes are widely used by professional organizations as external controls. Incorporating a review the ethics-related programs of the ICMA, the APA, the ASA and ASPA this paper uses the ASA and ASPA ethics approaches as a model to consider the potential benefits to be derived from collaboration between professional organizations in the ethics arena, especially in the area of code enforcement. It is the purpose of this paper to justify and support the call for such collaboration among appropriate professional associations, to expand the focus on professional ethics throughout the public sector and, in so doing, to use the process as a possible springboard for updating the ASPA code and its ethics approach.

**Ethics Codes**

Ethics can be described as being based on principles such as honesty, justice and the public interest and their implications for conduct in particular situations Cooper (2006). The question is, “what are the most effective mechanisms for encouraging the appropriate ethical behavior by public sector professionals?” Public employers frequently have internal organizational ethics codes which might arguably be intended to focus employees on behavior consistent with the principles noted by Cooper. These employers are empowered with tools at their disposal ranging from reprimands to dismissal and even criminal prosecution to enforce proper behavior, and yet there appears to be no shortage of ethical problems.

Professions and professional organizations also tend to rely on ethics codes to focus their members on appropriate ethical principles and behavior, but their enforcement tools are significantly more limited. It may be useful, therefore, to consider and compare the ethics codes of several professional associations to assess how they are implemented and in some cases enforced, and to consider if collaborative relationships between such organizations especially in dealing with the question of enforcement could lead to more effective use of their respective codes.

Ethics codes tend to focus on guiding practitioners and enhancing their professional status and identity, with many codes providing a mechanism for professional regulation. Frequently, professional codes of ethics have a utilitarian focus and approach to ethics (Pattison & Wainwright, 2010). Ethics codes can encourage discussion and debate and serve to raise awareness of expected behavior, without necessarily detailing all such behavior. In other words,

codes will likely have an aspirational focus. Ethics codes may be intended to elevate the status of a profession or organization in the eyes of the public (Reynolds, 2000), but while there is little agreement on their effectiveness at producing more ethical behavior, some have argued that they can, and in fact do exactly that when such codes include disciplinary processes. This school of thought suggests that codes with enforcement mechanisms may be more successful in shaping behavior than those that do not include enforcement processes (Pattison & Wainwright). On the other hand, while it would seem logical to argue that codes without enforcement are weaker in their effect than those with enforcement, Menzel (2010) suggests that “unethical officials are likely to be unethical regardless of whether a code exists,” but he suggests that those who want to be ethical find a code helpful. Menzel’s position is shared by Ki & Kim (2010) who conclude that there is no significant association between penalty enforcement and the frequency of violations. These divergent arguments make it clear that the debate about the value and appropriateness of code enforcement by professional associations remains unsettled.

Despite the debate about the value or impact of ethics codes, it is the purpose of this paper to provide a comparative overview of four associations’ independently successful ethics programs, with a view toward determining if the establishment of mutually beneficial collaborative relationships might be worth pursuing for any of these organizations. The American Society for Public Administration, the International City/County Management Association, the American Planning Association and the American Sociological Association, are each preeminent in their respective fields, and interestingly, three of the four use code enforcement mechanisms for ethical violations by their members. Other professional organizations, such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) also rely on aspirational codes without specific enforcement mechanisms (ALA & GFOA Web pages accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010). In an effort to compare different approaches to ethics codes and potential code enforcement efforts, a look at the ICMA and APA ethics codes and their enforcement efforts, will begin with a review of their summarized ethics codes and their approaches to enforcement. This review will be followed by a comparative look at the ASA and ASPA, often described as the premier professional organizations in their respective areas, to compare and contrast the strengths of these organizations ethics efforts as a mechanism to look for collaborative opportunities in response to calls by former Presidents of ASPA and leaders of ASPA’s Ethics Section for updating the ASPA code and for collaboration with other organizations (Ethtalk, 2009). The ASA and ASPA comparison will be used as a case study for potentially improving the ethics focus of such organizations and to look for collaboration opportunities.

### ***The International City and County Management Association (ICMA)***

According to its Website, The International City/County Management Association serves to advance professional local government worldwide. “Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management of local government. “The International City/County Management Association, provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect 185 million individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas” (ICMA Website accessed May 27, 2010).

The ICMA explains its core beliefs which are supported by its code of ethics and which were

reaffirmed in 2008 as:

- Serving as stewards of representative democracy.
- Practicing the highest standards of honesty and integrity in local governance, as expressed through ICMA's *Code of Ethics*.
- Advocating for professional management as an integral component of effective local governance and community building, with council-manager government as the preferred local government structure.
- Building sustainable communities as a core responsibility of local government.
- Networking and exchanging knowledge and skills across international boundaries.
- Ensuring that local governments and the association reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.
- Committing to lifelong learning and professional development.
- Building up the quality of the profession and the association through an engaged network of members personally committed to that end.

ICMA takes as its mission the creation of excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. To support this mission, the ICMA uses an ethics code which includes 12 tenets enjoying its members to (ICMA Website accessed June 1, 2010):

- Be dedicated to the concepts of effective and democratic local government by responsible elected officials and believe that professional general management is essential to the achievement of this objective.
- Affirm the dignity and worth of the services rendered by government and maintain a constructive, creative, and practical attitude toward local government affairs and a deep sense of social responsibility as a trusted public servant
- Be dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in all public and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the respect and confidence of the elected officials, of other officials and employees, and of the public.
- Recognize that the chief function of local government at all times is to serve the best interests of all people.
- Submit policy proposals to elected officials; provide them with facts and advice on matters of policy as a basis for making decisions and setting community goals; and uphold and implement local government policies adopted by elected officials.

- Recognize that elected representatives of the people are entitled to the credit for the establishment of local government policies; responsibility for policy execution rests with the members.
- Refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. Refrain from participation in the election of the members of the employing legislative body.
- Make it a duty continually to improve the member's professional ability and to develop the competence of associates in the use of management techniques.
- Keep the community informed on local government affairs; encourage communication between the citizens and all local government officers; emphasize friendly and courteous service to the public; and seek to improve the quality and image of public service.
- Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities, believing the member should be free to carry out official policies without interference, and handle each problem without discrimination on the basis of principle and justice.
- Handle all matters of personnel on the basis of merit so that fairness and impartiality govern a member's decisions, pertaining to appointments, pay adjustments, promotions, and discipline.
- Seek no favor; believe that personal aggrandizement or profit secured by confidential information or by misuse of public time is dishonest.

ICMA describes its enforcement process on its Webpage as requiring all ICMA members to adhere to the Code although they indicate that only Tenets 1 and 3 apply to individuals who are elected officials, fully retired or not serving in local government.

As a professional association, ICMA enforces the Code of Ethics with its members through a formal review process administered by a peer review body, the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct. The Rules of Procedure for Enforcement of the Code are designed to provide a reasonable process for investigating and determining whether a member has violated the Code, and to afford each individual member who is the subject of an investigation a full and fair opportunity to be heard throughout the process. The confidential review process begins when a written complaint is filed with ICMA accompanied by sufficient supporting documentation.

As demonstrated by its enforcement description, it is clear that the ICMA is serious about enforcement which is further supported by the fact that in 2007, ICMA reviewed twenty four ethics complaints, resulting in one membership bar, two public censures with membership bar, six additional public censures, eight private censures and seven closed cases (Menzel, 2010).

### **American Planning Association (APA)**

The American Planning Association is the professional organization for the planning profession in the United States. It is closely linked with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), with the executive director of the APA also serving as the executive director and ethics officer of the AICP.

In order to be recognized nationally as a professional in the planning field planners must be certified through the AICP. The AICP maintains standards for professional planners in areas such as ethics, professional development, planning education, and the standards of planning practice through its certification process. The AICP maintains the planning code of ethics to which planners are expected to before being certified as a professional planner (APA Website, accessed June 1, 2010).

The AICP code of ethics is divided into three sections, including aspirations, rules of conduct, and procedures. The Section 1 heading, “The planning process must continuously pursue and faithfully serve the public interest,” is supported by seven “should” statements; the Section 2 heading, “Planning process participants continuously strive to achieve high standards of integrity and proficiency so that public respect for the planning process will be maintained,” is supported by 13 “should” statements; and the Section 3 heading, “APA members who are practicing planners continuously pursue improvement in their planning competence as well as in the development of peers and aspiring planners. They recognize that enhancement of planning as a profession leads to greater public respect for the planning process and thus serves the public interest,” is supported by twelve “should” statements.

Clearly the APA/AICP code is multi focused, and it too is supported by an enforcement mechanism managed by the Executive Director/Ethics Officer with appeals of decisions submitted to an ethics committee. During the period 2005 to 2009, 55 ethics complaints were made to the AICP with all but seven resolved in one way or another at the Ethics Officer level.

Although the AICP code is not also the formal code for the APA itself, it serves as the ethics guide to APA members, even those who are not AICP certified, and all APA members are enjoined to live by it, whereas AICP members are required to adhere to the code. As W. Paul Farmer, Executive Director and CEO of both organizations notes, “Adherence to our Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is central to our certification. “AICP” means that one has demonstrated a level of professional planning expertise through education, experience and success on the exam (success achieved by less than two-thirds of those who take it). But “AICP” also means that one practices with adherence to a code” (2006, APA Website accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010).

To assist certified planners and APA members alike, the APA/AICP Website also offers a “toolkit” which provides example scenarios and other tools for members to assist them in providing ethics training in communities (APA Website, accessed June 1<sup>st</sup> 2010).

### **The American Sociological Association (ASA)**

Since being officially adopted in 1971, the American Sociological Association’s (ASA) extensive Code of Ethics has been the centerpiece of the organization’s strong commitment to establishing and maintaining the highest of ethical standards among its members. The ethics tenets to which the association ascribes are: (ASA Website, accessed February 25, 2010). The development of a dynamic set of ethical standards for a sociologist’s work-related conduct requires a personal commitment to a lifelong effort to act ethically; to encourage ethical behavior by students, supervisors, supervisees, employers, employees, and colleagues; and to consult with others as needed concerning ethical problems. Each sociologist supplements, but does not violate, the values and rules specified in the Code of Ethics based on guidance drawn from personal values, culture, and experience.

## **General Principles**

The following aspirational General Principles serve as a guide for sociologists in determining ethical courses of action in various contexts. They exemplify the highest ideals of professional conduct.

### ***Principle A: Professional Competence***

Sociologists strive to maintain the highest levels of competence in their work; they recognize the limitations of their expertise; and they undertake only those tasks for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience. They recognize the need for ongoing education in order to remain professionally competent; and they utilize the appropriate scientific, professional, technical, and administrative resources needed to ensure competence in their professional activities. They consult with other professionals when necessary for the benefit of their students, research participants, and clients.

### ***Principle B: Integrity***

Sociologists are honest, fair, and respectful of others in their professional activities—in research, teaching, practice, and service. Sociologists do not knowingly act in ways that jeopardize either their own or others' professional welfare. Sociologists conduct their affairs in ways that inspire trust and confidence; they do not knowingly make statements that are false, misleading, or deceptive.

### ***Principle C: Professional and Scientific Responsibility***

Sociologists adhere to the highest scientific and professional standards and accept responsibility for their work. Sociologists understand that they form a community and show respect for other sociologists even when they disagree on theoretical, methodological, or personal approaches to professional activities. Sociologists value the public trust in sociology and are concerned about their ethical behavior and that of other sociologists that might compromise that trust. While endeavoring always to be collegial, sociologists must never let the desire to be collegial outweigh their shared responsibility for ethical behavior. When appropriate, they consult with colleagues in order to prevent or avoid unethical conduct.

### ***Principle D: Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity***

Sociologists respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people. They strive to eliminate bias in their professional activities, and they do not tolerate any forms of discrimination based on age; gender; race; ethnicity; national origin; religion; sexual orientation; disability; health conditions; or marital, domestic, or parental status. They are sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences in serving, teaching, and studying groups of people with distinctive characteristics. In all of their work-related activities, sociologists acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own.

### ***Principle E: Social Responsibility***

Sociologists are aware of their professional and scientific responsibility to the communities and societies in which they live and work. They apply and make public their knowledge in order to contribute to the public good. When undertaking research, they strive to advance the science of sociology and to serve the public good.

At the core of its proactive efforts in the ethics arena is the belief that in order to be the most effective in generating compliance with its tenets, the ASA Code of Ethics should contain a formal mechanism for enforcement, to include the authority to impose appropriate sanctions upon members whose behavior has been found to be in violation of the code. On the other hand, an informal conversation with the Sally Hillsman, Executive Officer of the organization (October 28, 2009), suggests that the ASA is able to resolve most ethics questions informally and only about one case per year requires a referral for more formal procedures. The fact that the ASA also maintains 103 teaching cases available on its Website (ASA Website, accessed February 25, 2010) may help in this regard and, of particular relevance to this discussion, the ASA leadership welcomes the opportunity for collaboration with other organizations for mutual benefit.

Widely recognized as a leader in promoting ethics education throughout academia as well as encouraging ethical behavior among its membership, the ASA continues to demonstrate its commitment to promoting ethical competence through the following ethics initiatives:

- An internationally known and highly respected Code of Ethics ASA Web Page <http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm> (e.g., the inclusion of the ASA Code of Ethics by the General Assembly of the Swiss Society for Sociology in their deliberations working toward establishing their own code of ethics, {General Assembly, Swiss Society for Sociology, Bulletin 132, 2007}).
- A well-defined Committee on Professional Ethics (COPE) with clearly delineated Policies and Procedures, to include oversight of the high profile enforcement mechanisms. (<http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics/COPE.cfm>)
- A Task Force on Teaching Ethics throughout the Curriculum that has compiled an impressive inventory of ethics-related resources to include a Working Annotated Bibliography and 103 Ethics Cases suitable for use in ethics training and education programs throughout academia. (<http://www.asanet.org/ethics/index.cfm>)

### **The American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)**

As the premier professional association for both public sector professionals and academicians focused on various public sector professions, ASPA has long accepted the notion that a proactive focus on the promotion of ethical competence is central to its mission. It is important to note, however, that there has been recurring debate in ASPA's ethics circles (via, for example, its innovative ETHTALK list serve) regarding the possibility of developing an enforcement policy and procedure. While a sensitive issue such as ethics code enforcement may well attract the most attention, there are similarly significant considerations, such as the possibility of becoming a provider of ethics training and education, being raised by some among the ASPA membership as well (Meine & Dunn, 2010, pp. 51-59).

Although its membership includes large numbers of academicians whose teaching and

research interests are focused on the public sector, ASPA's mission focus is to be the premier association for all professions falling under the umbrella of public service. Historically, ASPA has maintained a strong emphasis on ethics as embodied in its aspirational Code of Ethics which states: (ASPA Website, Accessed February 25, 2010)

#### I. Serve the Public Interest

Serve the public, beyond serving oneself. ASPA members are committed to:

1. Exercise discretionary authority to promote the public interest.
2. Oppose all forms of discrimination and harassment, and promote affirmative action.
3. Recognize and support the public's right to know the public's business.
4. Involve citizens in policy decision-making.
5. Exercise compassion, benevolence, fairness and optimism.
6. Respond to the public in ways that are complete, clear, and easy to understand.
7. Assist citizens in their dealings with government.
8. Be prepared to make decisions that may not be popular.

#### II. Respect the Constitution and the Law

Respect, support, and study government constitutions and laws that define responsibilities of public agencies, employees, and all citizens. ASPA members are committed to:

1. Understand and apply legislation and regulations relevant to their professional role.
2. Work to improve and change laws and policies that are counterproductive or obsolete.
3. Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
4. Prevent all forms of mismanagement of public funds by establishing and maintaining strong fiscal and management controls, and by supporting audits and investigative activities.
5. Respect and protect privileged information.
6. Encourage and facilitate legitimate dissent activities in government and protect the whistleblowing rights of public employees.
7. Promote constitutional principles of equality, fairness, representativeness, responsiveness and due process in protecting citizens' rights.

#### III. Demonstrate Personal Integrity

Demonstrate the highest standards in all activities to inspire public confidence and trust in public service. ASPA members are committed to:

1. Maintain truthfulness and honesty and to not compromise them for advancement, honor, or personal gain.
2. Ensure that others receive credit for their work and contributions.
3. Zealously guard against conflict of interest or its appearance: e.g., nepotism, improper outside employment, misuse of public resources or the acceptance of gifts.
4. Respect superiors, subordinates, colleagues and the public.
5. Take responsibility for their own errors.
6. Conduct official acts without partisanship.

#### IV. Promote Ethical Organizations

Strengthen organizational capabilities to apply ethics, efficiency and effectiveness in serving the public. ASPA members are committed to:

1. Enhance organizational capacity for open communication, creativity, and dedication.

2. Subordinate institutional loyalties to the public good.
3. Establish procedures that promote ethical behavior and hold individuals and organizations accountable for their conduct.
4. Provide organization members with an administrative means for dissent, assurance of due process and safeguards against reprisal.
5. Promote merit principles that protect against arbitrary and capricious actions.
6. Promote organizational accountability through appropriate controls and procedures.
7. Encourage organizations to adopt, distribute, and periodically review a code of ethics as a living document.

#### V. Strive for Professional Excellence

Strengthen individual capabilities and encourage the professional development of others. ASPA members are committed to:

1. Provide support and encouragement to upgrade competence.
2. Accept as a personal duty the responsibility to keep up to date on emerging issues and potential problems.
3. Encourage others, throughout their careers, to participate in professional activities and associations.
4. Allocate time to meet with students and provide a bridge between classroom studies and the realities of public service.

While ASPA does have an extensive ethics code, it has not developed an enforcement mechanism for that code despite enforcement being an available tool in its bylaws. ASPA last updated its ethics code in 1994 (Public Administration Review, 2010), but unfortunately it did away with its Standing Committee on ethics some time ago (Ethtalk, 2009). On the other hand, ASPA has an active and successful Ethics Section whose members are quite vocal in their debate about the future of ASPA's ethics focus, and who have consistently demonstrated the section's commitment to promoting ethical competence by establishing the following innovative initiatives:

- A proactive Ethics Section that has developed extensive resources in the ethics arena and maintains an aggressive posture in complying with its mandate to “stimulate innovation in Public Administration ethics.”
- The Ethics Compendium: An impressive collection of ethics training resources designed to support the promotion of ethical competence throughout Public Administration.
- *Public Integrity*: Written for scholars, practitioners, and concerned citizens, PI is the foremost journal on ethics and leadership in all aspects of modern public service.”
- Annual Awards: By formally honoring ethics-related achievements (Best Ethics Paper by a Student, Ethics in Practice, and Best Paper in PI) ASPA reaffirms its commitment to promoting excellence in the ethics arena on an annual basis.
- ETHTALK: This unique list serve provides an ongoing forum for the exchange of ethics-related ideas, viewpoints, and happenings among the ASPA membership.

## **The Comparisons**

Having inventoried the key components of ICMA, the APA, the ASA and ASPA ethics programs, the material that follows uses a comparison of the ASA and ASPA as two premier professional organizations with quite differing approaches to ethics to attempt to delineate specific areas of potential collaboration which might be deemed mutually beneficial for both organizations, and which could serve to reexamine the ASPA ethics code and its ethics focus in general to ensure it meets the demands of today's difficult ethics climate.

### ***Mutual Strengths:*** (ASPA & ASA Websites, 2010)

- 1) A firmly established commitment to promoting ethical competence among their constituencies as exemplified by their exemplary Codes of Ethics.
- 2) A well conceived and instituted administrative structure designed to honor that commitment.
- 3) An impressive collection of ethics-related resources designed to assist those who seek to promote ethical competence at any organizational level.

### ***ASPA Strengths:***

- 1) An active Ethics Section focused on encouraging a strong focus on ethics in the public service, which serves as a forum for spirited ethics debate, and which promotes national and international ethics focused forums.
- 2) A formal and proactive commitment to the professions within the ASPA umbrella and to the public service in general.
- 3) The establishment of several innovative initiatives in support of the ethics-related mission to include publication of their highly respected journal, *Public Integrity*, and the inclusion of an "Ethics Moment" in every edition of PA Times, ASPA's popular newsletter.
- 4) The Ethics Section's creation and maintenance of the ETHTALK list serve, which has become an extremely popular venue for discussing contemporary ethics issues and developments as they occur.

### ***ASA Strengths:***

- 1) A well-crafted enforcement mechanism that functions on occasion to formally resolve ethical issues, but more frequently serves to promote discussions that lead to the informal resolution of ethical concerns to the satisfaction of all concerned.
- 2) A Task Force with responsibility for promoting the teaching of ethics throughout the curriculum, to include the development of some innovative techniques for doing so (e.g.,

103 specific ethics cases designed to generate discussions of specific ethics-related, academic situations and an extensive, annotated, ethics-related bibliography.

### ***Topics of Potential Collaboration***

- 1) The possibility of both organizations becoming providers of ethics training or expanding their ethics training focus.
- 2) The possibility of ASPA pursuing the development of an enforcement mechanism. Despite impressive evidence of a significant ethics focus, and the fact that many of the public sector organizations that employ PA professionals, as well as many of the professional organizations that are within the ASPA focus area, do have individual codes of ethics that include various levels of enforcement ASPA has not yet chosen to pursue the development of an enforcement mechanism for its code of ethics. As previously noted this lack of an enforcement mechanism exists even though ASPA's bylaws contain a never used provision for expulsion of members by the National Council for actions in violation of that code (Menzel, 2010). Obligatory caveats aside, an argument can be made that in order for a professional organization to espouse ethics as a core focus, it should consider the development of an effective mechanism to deal with members who violate its code of ethics.
- 3) The possibility of the ASPA, the ASA and other organizations collaborating in the difficult and ongoing task of defining and building mechanisms for developing "ethical competence" among their members, with ASA becoming more proactive in promoting such ethical competence among those engaging in the area of sociological practice, and ASPA doing likewise for those in the public sector.

### **A Call for Collaboration**

As this paper evolved it became clear that each of the four organizations examined and the ALA and GFOA each excel in various areas of promoting ethics and as a result may well have much to offer each other. It became apparent that discussions via the use of roundtables or focused discussion panels at their respective conferences or in separate settings, could create important cross fertilization, and could possibly lead to some mutually beneficial collaboration. As large and broadly focused professional organizations, the ASA and ASPA could take the lead and become models of such collaboration. For example:

1. The authors' *Public Integrity* article about the need for ASPA to step forward in providing ethics training (Meine & Dunn), could apply equally to ASA.
2. The recurring discussion and debate about ethics code enforcement in some ASPA circles suggests the organization could look to ASA for examples and a potential way forward in considering and eventually pursuing such an effort.

We maintain that an effort to develop a viable enforcement mechanism for ethics codes would be worth considering since an ethics code without enforcement may well be the three legged stool with a missing leg, and since the ASA for one, has demonstrated that the existence of a formal enforcement mechanism may well encourage informal resolution. The fact that we

open our newspapers on a daily basis and read about ethics lapses in many public and private sector fields, such as in the international debate regarding the validity of global warming data, national issues involving members of Congress and a seemingly endless list of perceived ethics related abuses by governors, mayors and professional public servants at the state and local levels, serves as a reminder that we must be ever vigilant in the area of ethics, particularly as the nation is once again focused on a disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, with potential ethics lapses by those overseeing offshore drilling already “bubbling to the surface” (Urbina, 2010). In describing a Department of the Interior Inspector General’s Report, Secretary Salazar noted that the “. . . report describes reprehensible activities of employees of MMS between 2000 and 2008.” Considering the current situation in the Gulf, is it really likely that “reprehensible” activities ended in 2008? In this turbulent and complex ethics environment and considering the comparative ethics code review contained herein, this paper contends that collaboration between the ASA and ASPA possibly, including any or all of the other organizations discussed in such a mutually important arena, is clearly worth pursuing if for no other reason than to reinvigorate the focus on ethics in professional organizations such as ASPA. With professional ties to both ASPA and the ASA, the authors stand ready to assist in any collaborative effort, and are engaged in discussions with ASA officials to explore the most potentially productive first steps. With its well established and proactive Ethics Section in place, ASPA seems well positioned to participate in the discussions with a view toward deciding whether to participate in moving the collaborative process forward.

### **About the Authors**

**Manfred F. Meine**, Ph.D., Professor of Public Administration, Troy University, Florida, is a member of the Troy University Public Administration graduate faculty. His research interests include public sector ethics, online education technology issues, and public sector budgeting issues. His most recent publications include "The Remote Proctor: An Innovative Technology Solution for Online Course Integrity," with Thomas P. Dunn and Judy McCarley, *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2010; "Distance Learning and Ethics Education and Training: A New Role for ASPA?" with Thomas P. Dunn, *Public Integrity*, Vol. 12, No 1, Winter 2009-2010: 51-59; "In Pursuit of Ethical Competency..." Multi-author article with Donald Menzel, et al., *PA Times*, October 2009 and "Testing Integrity in Online Courses: Big Brother Has Arrived," *PA Times Education Supplement*, October 2009.

**Thomas P. Dunn**, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of sociology at Troy University. His most recent research interests include professional ethics and the sociology of online education. His most recent publications include: "The Remote Proctor: An Innovative Technology Solution for Online Course Integrity," co-authored with Manfred F. Meine and Judy McCarley, *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2010; "Distance Learning and Ethics Education and Training: A New Role for ASPA?" co-authored with Manfred F. Meine, *Public Integrity*, Vol. 12, No 1, Winter 2009-10: 51-59.

## References

- American Library Association Website (2010). <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>, accessed June 1, 2010.
- American Planning Association Website (2010). <http://www.planning.org/ethics/ethicalprinciples.htm>, accessed June 1, 2010.
- American Sociological Association Website (2010). <http://www.asanet.org/about/index.cfm>, accessed February 25, 2010.
- American Society for Public Administration Ethics Code (2010). [http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index\\_codeofethics.cfm](http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index_codeofethics.cfm), accessed May 28, 2010
- American Society for Public Administration Website (2010). <http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index.cfm>, accessed February 25, 2010.
- “Code of Ethics,” *Public Administration Review* (2010). Inside back cover. Volume 70, No. 3 (May/June 2010).
- Cooper, Terry L. (2006). *The Responsible Administrator*, (5th ed.). San Francisco: Josey Bass.
- “Ethtalk,” ASPA Ethics Section discussion forum (2009), [ethtalk@aspaonline.org](mailto:ethtalk@aspaonline.org), accessed October 27-28, 2009.
- Farmer, Paul W (2006). Certified Planners and Ethics Memo of May 5, 2006 posted on the APA Website, <http://www.planning.org/aicp/index.htm>, accessed June 1, 2010.
- Government Finance Officers Association Website (2010). <http://www.gfoa.org/main/about.code.ethics.shtml>, accessed June 1, 2010.
- International City/County Management Association Website, <http://icma.org/main/bc.asp?bcid=75&hsid=1&ssid1=2530&ssid2=2716&t=0>, accessed May 28, 2010 & June 1, 2010.
- Hillsman, Sally (2010). Informal conversation discussing collaboration opportunities, October 28, 2009.
- Ki, E., & Kim, S. (2010). Ethics Statements of Public Relations Firms: What Do They Say? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91(2), 223-236.
- Meine, Manfred F. & Dunn, Thomas P (2010). “Distance Learning and Ethics Education and Training” *Public Integrity*. Vol. 12, No. 1.
- Menzel, D.C. (2010). *Ethical Moments in Government: Cases and Controversies*. Boca

Raton: CRC Press.

Norberg, P. (2009). "I don't Care that People don't Like What I Do" - Business Codes Viewed as Invisible or Visible Restrictions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 86(2), 211-225. retrieved May 1, 2010, from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 1675577221).

Pattison, S., & Wainwright, P. (2010). "Is the 2008 NMC Code ethical?" *Nursing Ethics*, 17(1), 9-18.

Reynolds, M. (2000). "Professionalism, ethical codes and the internal auditor: A moral argument." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 24(2), 115-124.

Salazar, Kenneth (2010). "IG Report on Abuses in MMS is 'Yet Another Reason to Clean House.'" Department of the Interior Website, <http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/IG-Report-MMS-Abuses-Yet-Another-Reason-to-Clean-House.cfm> , accessed June 8, 2010.

Swiss Society for Sociology, Bulletin 132, 2007.

United Nations Public Administration Network Webpage, "Governance World Watch." [http://www.unpan.org/directory/world news](http://www.unpan.org/directory/world%20news), accessed May 27, 2010.

Urbina, Ian (2010). "Inspector General's Inquiry Faults Regulators," *New York Times*, May 24, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/us/25mms.html?scp=1&sq=IG%20Report&st=cse>, accessed June 8, 2010.