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An Overview of its First Decade

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SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT GSPA/SNU

In April 1959, a new Graduate School of Public Administration was established in Seoul National University. It was the first school of this type in the country. The first class of one hundred MPA candidates was enrolled, consisting of some 40 day students fresh out of college and some 60 evening students drawn on a voluntary and self-financing basis from the middle and top echelons of the civilian bureaucracy, government corporations and the armed forces. A little over two years prior to that, i.e., in February 1957, a contract between Seoul National University, the University of Minnesota and the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) of the United States had been entered to support this project. In accordance with this contract, a two-way traffic of personnel was initiated. In August 1957 eleven young SNU faculty members originating mainly from the College of Law were selected to go to Minnesota to pursue one to two year intensive training there. A second group departed one year later. On the other lane of the traffic, the Minnesota advisers came. The first adviser arrived in March 1958. During the ensuing four years and three months, somewhat more than 22 man-years of advisory reserve from 14 individual advisers was put in. The contract was terminated in June 1962. (1)

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(1) See Lloyd M. Short, Terminal Report: Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University, Seoul, June 1962. (Mimeo).
Now as of February 1969, ten years after the establishment of the school and seven years after the termination of the Minnesota contract, the GSPA/SNU is an ongoing institution with 683 MPAs in its alumni roster who are mostly working in the higher echelons of the Korean government and a 13-man full-time faculty plus an equal number of staff assistants who are under training for future faculty roles. In March 1968 the school has started within it a parallel program—a master’s program in urban and regional planning.

GETTING THE INSTITUTION STARTED

The setting

Now let us consider the implication of creating a new institution such as a GSPA in a country like Korea at a time like the end of the 1950’s. What was the meaning of a new graduate school of public administration in such a setting?\(^2\) It was not just adding a teaching unit to an existing education system. On the contrary, it meant creating a new disciplinary entity in a traditional, almost hostile, academic and bureaucratic setting. It meant creating a new group of scholars in an academic milieu in which academism per se was the norm and any new discipline was looked at with suspicion and disdain. It also meant a declaration of intent to produce new breed of bureaucrats in a bureaucracy in which traditional norms and precedents prevailed.\(^2\)

But the setting did not lack some elements—marginal as they were—which were favorable to the introduction of change. First of all, there were some people both in the universities and in the bureaucracy who were sensitive to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Some of these people had been exposed to the outside world earlier and who were doing something in the process of rebuilding the country after the Korean war. But as yet they did not possess any distinct institutional base of disciplinary identity. Particularly important in this situation was the presence in the government of some high-level administrators, both ministers and bureau directors, who were interested in improving the administrative system. Though small in number, they were aware that the task of rebuilding the war-torn country was big and required something more than the existing knowledge and skills which were inherited from the Japanese colonial administration.

A significant block in the building of the infrastructure for the GSPA was the organization of KAPA (Korean Association for Public Administration) in 1956. This group was composed of some professors who were teaching public administration and administrative law in several universities as well as some practicing administrators in the government who were interested in this movement.\(^{(3)}\) A propitious climate was thus created so that a meaningful meeting of minds can be obtained among people interested in a new society for public administration. Particularly important was the meeting together of people in administrative law and those in public administration. This bridge was very important because in the Korean context public administration had to come out of the confine of administrative law in a peaceful manner, and KAPA provided the climate.

All these elements were there, but nobody had enough command of resources in terms of professional competence and social recognition combined with the institutional base and financial resources to create a new institution. There had to be some kind of impetus, and under the circumstances the impetus had to come from outside. And that impetus was the Minnesota contract.

**The impetus**

There was a fortunate forerunner of this contract. Since 1954 SNU had an ongoing technical assistance contract with the University of Minnesota; the project covered three SNU colleges, i.e., Medicine, Engineering, and Agriculture and Forestry, and provided substantial inputs for these colleges in faculty training and physical plant and equipment. Very soon the benefit to these science and technology fields became so vivid to the university community as a whole that other parts of the university began to be interested in sharing some of the benefit. Thus, mounting a new school of public administration had a better chance here and then than otherwise.

Now within SNU there was the question as to where to base the new graduate school. Two alternatives emerged. One was to base it on the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the other was to mount it in the College of Law. There was no doubt regarding the principle that it had to be a separate graduate school but the initial anchorage was also important. Traditionally, law, for good or bad, was the stepping-stone to administrative career in

\(^{(3)}\) It should be noted here that Fred Riggs who was visiting lecturer at the National Officials Training Institute (NOTI) for a short time in 1956 was instrumental in the formation of KAPA.