

## A Message from Dr. Robert Myrtle

Dear Colleagues:

Professor Joanna Yu and I were talking the other day about extra challenges our international students are facing as the result of Covid-19. It got me thinking about the extra sacrifice our IPPAM students (and other international scholars at USC and elsewhere) are making to get their graduate degree. Having been away from my family for 18 months or so when I was serving in the US Army overseas it seemed like every day I wondered “is this worth it”. I suspect most of you feel the same way from time to time—and maybe every day as well. While I cannot provide you with an answer to the question “is it worth it” my conversations with Dr. Yu got me thinking that in times of crises the IPPAM degree is even more important now than at any time in the past. So, I thought I would try to make the case “why this degree matters and why it matters now”. The attached paper is my attempt to say why I believe your sacrifice is more important than ever and that with this degree you will be at the forefront of leaders who can lead, make policies or manage organizations in “normal time” as well as in “exceptional or novel times”. It is more academic than what I had hoped it would be. But as I began thinking about the degree and its relevance to today’s world I recalled some work we did on how health care systems responded during times of crises. What made this research unique—at least to me—was we studied responses to crises in several different nations several of which experienced the same crisis months or years after the first incident. This allowed us to look at leaders and how they learned or did not learn from their experiences as the result of similar disasters. It is also somewhat unique in that many of the researchers who worked on this project were international students. They brought insights and experiences that helped faculty learn through their eyes about leadership and responses to crises.

I hope you find these ideas useful. If you ever needed a reason to say “this was the toughest of times but also the best of times” perhaps this effort has been worth it.

Bob



## **Why Today More Than Ever is the IPPAM So Essential?**

On April 17, 2020, The Worldometer Online reported 2,230,197 Covid-19 cases, resulting in 153,178 deaths and the recovery of 568,355 infected people (Worldometer, April 17, 2020, 20:32 GMT). Nearly every country in the world has experienced significant social, political and economic costs. Perhaps at no other time in the last 100 years has a disease had as significant impact as this Novel Virus. With a highly connected world, no region, country, state, city or town has not felt the impact of this highly infectious disease. The increasing globalization of the world's social and economic systems has placed greater and greater demands on governmental and business leaders to have a more synoptic view of the forces and factors that have an impact on their goals and objectives.

The IPPAM Program is designed to provide current and future policy makers and leaders with the knowledge, skills and abilities to develop a more holistic view as they lead governments, governmental and nongovernmental organizations and private sector firms. An important component of the degree is providing the tools and the methods for developing, implementing and evaluating policies that are designed to meet the challenges of an ever changing world. However analytic tools and methods are only

part of the skills and competencies needed. Another essential part of the degree is to provide means and processes to ensure that enacted policies are implemented. Management competencies that include organizational planning, the development of governance systems and processes, creation of feedback mechanisms through information systems and data analytic capabilities. Budgeting is also important, but even more so of importance is the selection, mentoring and rewarding of the people that carry out the plans that have been developed. Since change is the essence of any plan or policy, leadership becomes the indispensable element in integrating the policy making processes with the management processes so that the desired outcomes are met.

Generally, the policy, management and leadership processes take place in relatively stable or predictable environments. Yet as Covid-19 demonstrates, even with good policies, competent management and effective leadership there is another essential skill—that is the skill of learning. While not explicit in the degree itself, learning how to learn is one of the most overlooked and yet critical elements of this executive degree. It is easy to focus on acquiring new knowledge, new tools, new approaches to responding to the challenges that all societies and their organizations face. But what happens when the challenges are novel, unexpected, and perhaps even overwhelming of systems and governmental or leadership processes?

A multi-year research study by several Price and Viterbi School scholars examined the responses of policy makers, political and organizational leaders to significant crises. Ainoya and Myrtle (2005), Myrtle, Masri, Caffrey, Lee, Oztas, and Chen (2002), Bryer, Oztas, and Myrtle (2004) studied how leaders responded to significant crises during and following earthquakes in Japan, Taiwan, Turkey and the United States. Leaders—political, governmental and organizational—who were more effective did more than learn from the immediate experience. While learning from experience is important, in new or novel situations this learning strategy, sometimes referred to as single looped learning, is often insufficient. In these situations, highly successful leaders adopted a different learning approach. They use insights from what is being experienced and the effectiveness of existing responses to the crisis to challenge the assumptions behind the typical response and the norms, policies or processes that are embedded in that response. Argyris and Schon (1978) call this approach double looped learning that is somewhat analogous to today's exhortation of "out of the box" thinking.

However, as Bryer, Oztas and Myrtle (2004) discovered, learning during crises requires a broader focus than individual or organizational learning. They found that to develop an effective response to crises, responses must include learning at the individual, organizational and interorganizational levels. Ainoya, (2012) reported that where individuals or organizations or networks of organizations focused more on the single looped level of learning, the effectiveness of responses to similar crises were not as successful as when individuals, organizations and

members of interorganizational networks responded in a way similar to the double looped learning model of Argyris and Shon (1978) (Bryer, Oztas and Myrtle, 2019).

Myrtle, (2018) notes that since all knowledge has a shelf-life, what we believe to be true today is now being replaced with new insights, theories and practices. This transformation of what we know has led to an increased recognition of the importance of learning and in an interconnected world, this learning must take place at the individual, organizational and network or interorganizational levels. Never is the need to learn more crucial than in times of crisis. Bryer et al., (2019) found that when leaders pursued a more holistic learning strategy that considered the interdependence between individuals, organizations and networks of organizations a more successful response to crises emerged.

I believe that what makes the IPPAM degree different from the more traditional degrees is its focus on learning from an international perspective. Every year leaders and policy makers from a wide variety of countries that have different economic systems, different political systems, and different cultural norms and experiences engage in their educational journey. As such it provides a “natural experiment of sorts” where we can use each other’s experience, not to evaluate which is better and in what ways, but rather to deduce experimental insights that may challenge our closely held beliefs. In leadership as in life, there is no “one best way” but rather many different ways that the very successful policy maker, political leader or organizational

executive or manager should draw upon to challenge what they believe to be true and perhaps become a leader who learns quicker and more profoundly than their contemporaries. The IPPAM degree can be more than “just another degree.” It can become a transformative experience that will propel your success and effectiveness today and in the futures to come.

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