Reimagining Public Administration Education in a Digital World: Aligning Expectations of Students, Faculty, and Employers

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Abstract: The accelerating digital transformation of higher education challenges universities to redefine their roles, pedagogical models, and relationships with society. Public administration programs, in particular, face a dual imperative: to equip graduates with the digital skills required for modern governance, while preserving the public service ethos and critical thinking that remain central to the profession. This paper explores how universities can navigate this transition by empirically examining the expectations and perceptions of three key stakeholder groups—students, faculty, and employers—regarding the future of public administration education in a digital world.

The study is based on a mixed-methods design combining survey data and semi-structured interviews across several European universities and public sector organizations. It investigates how each group values various dimensions of digitalization in education, including the role of online and hybrid teaching formats, the integration of data literacy and AI tools into curricula, and the perceived relevance of digital competencies for employability and public sector innovation.

Preliminary findings suggest a misalignment between stakeholder groups: while students emphasize flexibility, digital skills, and interactive learning environments, faculty members express concern over academic integrity, workload, and the erosion of in-person engagement. Employers, meanwhile, highlight the need for graduates who can combine digital proficiency with ethical judgment, teamwork, and policy reasoning—skills not easily transmitted through purely digital means.

The paper argues that bridging these gaps requires a renewed social contract between universities, educators, and the labor market—one that reframes digitalization not merely as a technological shift but as an institutional transformation affecting values, governance, and accountability in higher education. The presentation concludes with policy recommendations for curriculum reform, stakeholder co-design of learning outcomes, and institutional strategies that ensure digitalization strengthens, rather than fragments, the mission of public administration education.

Keywords: digital transformation, public administration education, universities, stakeholder expectations, employability, higher education reform