

2.1 Statement of Research Record, Intellectual Agenda, and Future Research Plans

My research focuses on a range of theoretical and managerial questions lying at the nexus of governance, government-nonprofit relations, and coproduction of public services. I am particularly interested in (1) the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision, and (2) the impact of the nonprofit sector on creating a more effective and equitable public service provision system. My overall research challenges the assumption in the existing public management scholarship that the role of nonprofits is limited to the implementation of public policies through service delivery and funding flows unidirectionally from government to nonprofits. I aim at providing new empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to conceptualize the roles of nonprofits in society beyond the widely accepted ‘tools of government’ approach that views nonprofits primarily as public service delivery mechanisms (Salamon, 2002) ¹. As such, my research indicates that nonprofits can play important roles in financing and creating public services, and they have a consequential impact on how local governments allocate their resources and who benefits from these public services.

As public managers at different levels of the government experience extensive challenges in sustaining the desired level of public service provision, my research has important theoretical and practical implications for efforts to promote citizen participation and cross-sector solutions to complex social problems. By merging my substantive and theoretical expertise with some of the most important issues facing our world today, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic, social equity, and climate change, my research highlights the important roles nonprofits play in society and provides practical guidance regarding how government at local, state, and federal levels could better leverage their strengths and collaborate with nonprofits in public service provision and governance. Here below, I discuss my overall research philosophy, my research trajectory and themes, and future directions.

Research Philosophy

I am an interdisciplinary public and nonprofit management scholar who uses multiple methods and actively engages students and practitioners in my research. My research addresses some of the most fundamental questions in public and nonprofit management research: What are the roles of nonprofits in public service provision? Who benefits from the nonprofit sector? How should the government effectively work with nonprofits and citizens in joint service provision? My research contributions often arise from active engagement and cross-pollination of multiple disciplines and fields of study, in particular public policy, management, urban affairs, environmental studies, sociology, and political science. While I often orient my research in major public and nonprofit management journals, I also actively outreach to other disciplines through my collaboration with other scholars so these important questions can be more broadly understood and explored.

¹ Salamon, Lester M., ed. (2002). *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

I have equipped myself with a broad set of social science methods and applied them to my research (statistical analysis, comparative case studies, longitudinal case studies, systematic literature review, meta-analysis, process studies, field research, semi-structured interviews, and survey methodology). This diverse methodological toolbox and skill set allows me to approach research based on the research question, rather than a particular type of methodology. It also allows me to construct a more comprehensive and balanced picture from different types of evidence.

I have a deep commitment to engaged scholarship and research apprenticeship. Over the past few years, I have prioritized building relationships with community groups and collaborating with scholars who understand how genuine community-based research can be done. Thanks to Humphrey's strong ethic, history, and models of high-quality, engaged scholarship, I have been able to forge these relationships effectively even in my relatively short time in Minnesota. I also regard it as my ultimate responsibility to engage students in research apprenticeship and cultivate the next generation of public affairs scholars. Since I joined Humphrey, I have published eight peer-reviewed articles with doctoral students, including two current Humphrey doctoral students.

Summary of Research Career Trajectory and Accomplishments

I received a B.S. in Environmental Science from Zhejiang University, China in 2010. After many field trips to local NGOs during summer breaks and one year of service in Rural China for two Chinese NGOs after graduation, I realized that the key to environmental protection is not only in science and engineering but also in how citizens can effectively self-organize to maintain their resources. I came to the United States and obtained my M.A. in Philanthropic Studies in 2013 and Ph.D. in Public Affairs in 2017 from Indiana University. Before joining the faculty of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in 2018, I served as a Visiting Assistant Professor for the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Bloomington. In addition to my appointment at the Humphrey School, I am a faculty affiliate at the Institute on the Environment and the Minnesota Population Center. I also serve as an external affiliate faculty for the Ostrom Workshop at Indiana University.

My research agenda on the changing roles of nonprofits and their impact on effective and equitable public service provision began with an invitation by my former mentor Beth Gazley to join her research team in 2015 studying coproduction in parks systems. Out of that collaboration, we coauthored one article before I was hired at Humphrey (Gazley, Cheng & LaFontant, 2018) and two articles since (Gazley, LaFontant, & Cheng, 2020; Gazley & Cheng, 2020). Out of this topic on charitable support for public service provision, I also developed an independent set of research questions and datasets for my dissertation. My dissertation was subsequently published in three single-authored articles in *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Public Administration and Theory*, and *Public Performance & Management Review*, all in 2019. I have since continued my research into this topic as the lead author with doctoral students (e.g., Cheng & Wu, 2021; Cheng & Li, 2022; Cheng, Yang, & Deng, 2022) and collaborators with scholars at other institutions (e.g., Cheng, Shi & Andrew, 2020; Cheng, Yu, Shen, & Huang, 2020; Wang & Cheng, 2021). Of special note is that senior colleagues have also sought me out to collaborate on research into coproduction and the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision (e.g., Brudney, Cheng, & Meijs, 2022; Cheng & Sandfort, under review).

Since I joined the Humphrey School in 2018, I have published 21 peer-reviewed journal articles and two book chapters in the most visible and well-respected venues in public and nonprofit management research. I also actively outreach to other relevant academic disciplines and fields. I am the sole or first author on 13 of these 21 published peer-reviewed publications and I have four papers currently under review. According to Google Scholar², my publications have been cited 297 times as of June 2022 (297 since I joined Humphrey in 2018) and my citation has shown steady growth over the last four years (19 in 2019, 59 in 2020, 123 in 2021, and 91 in 2022 as of June 15th). I have an h-index of 7 (meaning 7 publications with at least 7 citations) and an i10-index of 7 (meaning 7 publications with at least 10 citations). I am committed to making my research accessible not only in English but also in other languages. The main contents of nine of my articles have been translated into Chinese (links to translations are provided in my C.V.).

My 2019 *Public Administration Review* (PAR) article on the changing role of nonprofits in public service provision is listed as one of the Highly Cited PAR Articles³. My 2019 *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (JPART) article on the funding interaction between the government and nonprofits is listed as one of the Highly Cited JPART Articles⁴. My research has been recognized by many awards, including the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) Best Conference Paper Award, Wen Wang Best Young Scholar Paper Award, the Felice Davidson Perlmutter Best Paper Award of the ARNOVA Theory, Issues, and Boundaries Section, the ARNOVA Emerging Scholars Award. My work has been supported by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Faculty Interactive Research Program, Ostrom Research Award, and Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy Research Fund. Currently, I serve as the Managing Editor for *PAR*, one of the top public administration journals, and the Editorial Board Members for *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (NML) and *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*.

Major Themes of Scholarship and Publications

In this section, I summarize my scholarship and accomplishments on two interrelated themes: (1) the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision, and (2) the impact of the nonprofit sector on creating a more effective and equitable public service provision system. My research makes an important contribution to the existing literature by presenting new evidence about the prevalence and permanency of public service reliance on private philanthropy, articulating the theoretical mechanisms through which nonprofits may influence the distribution of public services, and using innovative methods to assess the impact of the nonprofit sector on effective and equitable public service provision. I briefly describe how this research agenda develops and use selected articles to demonstrate my major contributions.

Changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision

Public and nonprofit management scholars have made significant progress in understanding the diverse patterns of government-nonprofit relations, especially through conceptualizing the role of

² <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=BMsacpoAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao>

³ [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1540-6210.highly-cited-par-articles)

⁴ This paper is listed as one of five Highly Cited JPART Papers from JPART's 2018 and 2019 issues.

nonprofits as providers of public services. My research advances this area of inquiry by bringing new empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to investigate the antecedents, processes, and consequences of nonprofit organizations becoming important players in creating, planning, and financing public services. Existing research tends to focus narrowly on the effects of government funding flows on nonprofits while overlooking the impact of nonprofits on government through, for example, private funding, planning, and co-design of public services. In other words, nonprofits are framed as a neutral tool for government to use in service delivery. By recognizing the political roles nonprofits play in the upstream of the policy-making process, my research suggests that nonprofits play critical roles in determining who gets what, when, and how. They can also influence the behaviors of local governments via multiple mechanisms beyond direct political advocacy. The policy and management implications are huge as governments at all levels and around the world are suffering from extensive budget cuts and financial losses.

In my 2019 solo-authored paper in *Public Administration Review*, “**Exploring the Role of Nonprofits in Public Service Provision: Moving from Coproduction to Cogovernance**”, I present a theoretical framework for understanding nonprofits’ involvement in co-governance, or the planning and design of public services, as compared to coproduction which emphasizes the involvement of users in service delivery and production. Factor analysis of various supporting activities of these nonprofits suggests that co-governance is a distinct type of nonprofit support for public services. Moreover, nonprofits are more likely to get involved in co-governance when they are younger, larger, and operate in communities that are more resourceful and stable, and have a lower level of social capital and government capacity of providing corresponding public services. This article presents one of the first empirical assessments of the conditions under which nonprofits go beyond the production and delivery of public services to also consider what has become a key area of my research, namely the important roles nonprofits also play in creating, planning, and financing public services. This article is included in *PAR*’s virtual issue of Highly Cited Papers and was awarded the Wen Wang Award for Best Young Scholar Paper by the China-America Association for Public Affairs. Its content has also been translated into Chinese.

Based on the understanding of nonprofits have become key players in financing and creating public services, I went on to examine how local governments manage their collaboration with these nonprofits and how nonprofits respond to changes in public spending on services. In “**Governing Public-Nonprofit Partnerships: Linking Governance Mechanisms to Collaboration Stages**”, I did fieldwork and conducted interviews in major cities in the Ohio River Basin Region to understand the mechanisms through which these government-nonprofit partnerships are governed and how various governance mechanisms are connected to different stages of the collaboration continuum, namely philanthropic partnerships, transactional partnerships, and integrative partnerships. This paper adds to the much-needed scholarship on the forms and intensity of nonprofit collaboration (Gazley & Guo, 2020)⁵. Regarding how nonprofits respond to government budget cuts, assistant professor at the George Washington University Lang Yang and I published a paper in *American Review in Public Administration*, titled “**Providing Public Services without Relying Heavily on Government Funding: How do Nonprofits Respond to Government Budget Cuts?**” While we assume that nonprofits would

⁵ Gazley, B., & Guo, C. (2020). What do we know about nonprofit collaboration? A systematic review of the literature. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 31(2), 211-232.

fill in the gap when there is a cut in the overall public spending on park services, it is an empirical question regarding whether and how nonprofits would do so. In addition, government spending cuts are often both a signal for gaps in public service provision and revenue loss for nonprofits. We find that park-supporting nonprofits increase fund-raising efforts and diversify revenue portfolios in response to incremental changes in the government spending environment. Facing a dramatic government budget cut on parks and recreation, nonprofits are more likely to reduce administrative expenses and spend more on programs to fill in the gap. These findings about the nuances of nonprofit responses to reduced government funding are an important element of my contributions to our recognition of the important role of nonprofits in not only delivering public services, but also in defining, planning, and financing public services.

Building on my substantive expertise in the subsector of parks and recreation services, I have extended this line of inquiry to other policy domains and geographical contexts, including urban climate governance (Cheng, Park, & Krause, under review), human services (Cheng & Sandfort, under review), the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheng et al., 2020; Wang & Cheng, 2021), and government-nonprofit relations in China (Cheng & Wu, 2021). I bring new streams of literature, theory, and approaches to these inquiries. This is significant not only for empirical reasons but also for theoretical reasons. For parks and recreation services, government capacity is relatively low while nonprofits have been documented as powerful players in raising private funds to finance public park services. It is, therefore, a great starting point toward understanding nonprofits' role beyond service delivery. However, is this just a special phenomenon in one public service subsector? For the studies I highlight below, I strategically chose contexts where government capacity is believed to be strong as compared to their nonprofit partners (e.g., human services, government-nonprofit relations in China, and COVID-19 responses in China). By conducting research at the two ends of this continuum, I aim at providing theoretical insights into the changing roles of nonprofits that travel across public service subsectors and geographical contexts.

My co-authored paper with University of Maryland doctoral candidate Zhongsheng Wu, **“The Contingent Value of Nonprofit Political Connections on Private Donations: Exploring the Moderating Role of Transparency”**, explores the moderating role of transparency between political connections and private donations in over 2,000 foundations in China. It also won the Felice Davidson Perlmutter Best Paper Award in the ARNOVA Theory, Issues, and Boundaries Section. In 2020, I co-organized an International Workshop on Coproduction of Public Services in Comparative Perspectives at Zhejiang University, China, and served as the guest editor for this special issue in *the Journal of Chinese Governance*. In my editorial essay **“Bridging the Great Divide: Toward a Comparative Understanding of Coproduction”**, I outline how the concept and theory of coproduction transform how we think about government-nonprofit relations in public service provision and how to achieve greater synergy to guide effective public service provision and institutional design.

In the human services subsector, my former Humphrey colleague Jodi Sandfort and I use a process-oriented inductive study of Minnesota's 2-Generation Policy Network to track how government agencies rebuild trust with nonprofit organizations serving Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) communities. As compared to variance studies which focus on the cause and effect, process studies focus attention on how and why things evolve and develop over time. This paper, titled **“Public Management Reform to Overcome Institutional Racism:**

Exploring Government's Trust Building Tactics to Renew Relationships with Nonprofits Serving BIPOC Communities", won the 2021 ARNOVA Best Conference Paper Award and is currently under Revise & Resubmit at *Public Administration Review*. We find that local government's intentional tactics both inside the bureaucracy and with BIPOC-serving nonprofits allowed them to create new collaborative infrastructures that both changed organizational routines and built power to address racial inequities in the existing human service system. We contribute to the existing literature by building a conceptual model that recognizes that while trust operates as a resource in public service collaborations, it must be purposively built through cascading administrative tactics. This research is supported by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Faculty (CURA) Interactive Research Program which aims at cultivating collaborative research projects between faculty members and community-based organizations in Minnesota. I have also presented the key findings from this study to the city council of Mounds View to facilitate their efforts to better engage their BIPOC residents. It shows my commitment to conducting community-engaged research and I expect to do more of that in my future research.

As countries around the world were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, I also quickly shifted my research to shed light on this critical challenge facing human society, particularly from the lens of how nonprofit organizations work with government to coproduce quick and effective responses to the pandemic. In my 2020 co-authored paper in *Public Administration Review*, "**Coproducing Responses to COVID-19 with Community Organizations: Lessons from Zhejiang Province, China**", my collaborators at Zhejiang University and I argue that solely crediting the central government for the early success in containing COVID-19 in China is not only dangerous on ideological grounds but also misleading in terms of how the world can learn from the experiences in China. We show strong evidence from the case of Zhejiang Province that community-based organizations were actively involved in all three stages of Zhejiang's response to COVID-19. Since its publication in 2020, this article has been cited 63 times and is used as an important reference for understanding the role of nonprofits in China's COVID-19 responses. In another co-authored paper "**Cross the River by Feeling the Stones: How Did Nonlocal Grassroots Nonprofits Overcome Administrative Barriers to Provide Quick Responses to COVID-19?**", assistant professor at the Remin University of China Xiaoyun Wang and I found that grassroots nonprofit organizations were able to overcome administrative failures and provide quick pandemic relief during the Wuhan lockdown by leveraging social media platforms, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and using online tools for trust-building. Working with the former director of the Ginkgo Foundation Xueshan Zhang, we actively translated our findings into practitioner-oriented venues because of the practical significance of our research, writing for US nonprofit leaders in *Nonprofit Quarterly* (Cheng, Wang & Zhang, 2022) and Chinese audiences in *Social Innovators* (Wang & Cheng, 2021). I was invited by the US Government Accountability Office to present my COVID-19 research in 2022, demonstrating the impact and reputation of my research in the US and globally.

Built on my empirical work on the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision, I also begin to conduct knowledge synthesis and theory development work. By overlooking the role of nonprofits in creating and financing the provision of public services, public management scholarship represents nonprofits as tools of government and uses the voluntary failure theory to demonstrate the limitations of the nonprofit sector and justify why government funding and intervention are desirable. This is an incomplete understanding of nonprofits' roles and potential.

Working with the University of Minnesota librarian Maggie Parra⁶, Humphrey doctoral students Shuyi Deng and Ahmad Banamah, and assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh Huafang Li, I conduct a systematic literature review on the use of voluntary failure theory to explore how this theory explains some of the origins and impact of an overly narrow focus on service delivery. Among other implications, we find that few empirical studies seriously engage the voluntary failure theory and the theory is mainly used as a background for government contracting with nonprofits. Also, many studies use voluntary failure to say something completely different compared to the original four forms of failures (philanthropic insufficiency, philanthropic particularism, philanthropic paternalism, and philanthropic amateurism). The preliminary findings of this research have been presented at the 2022 Public Management Research Conference in Phoenix and we plan to submit this paper to the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.

The impact of the nonprofit sector on creating a more effective and equitable public service provision system

This line of scholarship grows organically from my research on the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision. As nonprofits become important players in the financing and planning of public park services, how do they influence the budgetary decisions of local governments? How do they influence the allocation of public funding? Do they promote or compromise the effectiveness and equity of public service provision? Assessing and evaluating the impact of the nonprofit sector has been a central yet less studied topic of nonprofit and voluntary studies, especially compared to the field's focus on the determinants of nonprofit activities. I contribute to this line of scholarship by bringing new empirical evidence, proposing new theoretical frameworks, addressing key methodological barriers, and conducting a meta-analysis of existing quantitative studies in diverse disciplines. I discuss these contributions in detail below.

In my solo-authored paper in the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART)*, “**Nonprofit Spending and Government Provision of Public Services: Testing Theories of Government-Nonprofit Relationships**”, I examine how the spending of these government-supporting nonprofits influences local governments' budgetary decisions. This 2019 article was published during a time when *JPART* has published little nonprofit scholarship in recent years. The findings indicate that spending by park-supporting nonprofits has a decreasing effect on the level of public operational spending on parks. However, there is a net gain in total community support for parks and recreation services. This article further proposes a research agenda for a two-way understanding of government-nonprofit funding interactions in theory building and testing. This article is recognized as one of five *JPART* highly cited articles published in 2018 and 2019. With assistant professor at the University of Hong Kong Zhengyan Li, my *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* paper, “**Government-nonprofit Partnerships outside the Contracting Relationship and Public Funding Allocation: Evidence from New York City's Park System**”, extends this line of inquiry from large U.S. city park systems to individual city park units in the New York City's Park System – exploring the relationship between government-nonprofit partnerships outside the contracting relationship and public capital funding allocation. Our findings indicate that park units supported by government-

⁶ <https://www.continuum.umn.edu/2022/02/joining-the-team/>

nonprofit partnerships are likely to receive more public capital project funding. The contrast of findings of these two studies indicates the importance of contextualizing government-nonprofit relationships in different levels of analysis and public service subsectors for future research. Taking the findings of these two articles together, it also suggests the importance of assessing the impact of these nonprofits on equitable public service provision. The overall decline of public funding for park systems and the increase of capital funding to park units supported by government-nonprofit partnerships may pose equity concerns for those parks that do not have support from those partnerships

While my research on how nonprofits influence local governments' budgetary decisions has important implications for effective and equitable public service provision, it is not a direct test of such impact. To assess who benefits from the increasing involvement of nonprofits in the planning and design of public services, I extend this line of inquiry in two distinct yet interconnected directions. On the one hand, the answer to the question of who benefits depends on which communities directly benefit from the services provided by these nonprofits. On the other hand, or one step further, the answer depends on who has better access to public services as nonprofits are increasingly involved in the financing and creation of public services.

In a co-authored paper published in *Public Administration Review* “**Does Coproduction of Public Services Support Government’s Social Equity Goals? The Case of U.S. State Parks**”, my former mentor Beth Gazley, Indiana University doctoral student Chantalle LaFontant and I use multiple data sources from the California and Florida state parks systems to compare public parks with and without supporting “friends” groups. We find that wealthier Florida counties with greater income inequality are more likely to benefit from a charity supporting a nearby state park. However, there is no similar pattern in California. We further propose that the association between community wealth and park charity presence may depend on state characteristics such as the funding structure of each state park system, not just community wealth differences. In other words, policy and institutional designs matter as we delineate the equity implications of the nonprofit sector.

Built on the foundation of this *PAR* article, we connect the locations of park-supporting nonprofits to which racial-ethnic groups have better access to public park services. In our 2022 *Public Administration Review* article “**Nonprofit Density and Distributional Equity in Public Service Provision: Exploring Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Public Park Access across U.S. Cities**”, assistant professor at the George Washington University and Humphrey doctoral candidate Shuyi Deng and I made an important contribution to the literature by proposing three theoretical mechanisms through which communities with a larger nonprofit sector may create favorable conditions for public services to be distributed to certain racial-ethnic groups, namely substitution, resource lever, and patronage politics. Using a unique geospatial dataset of 2,392 U.S. city park systems, we empirically test this framework and find that communities with a higher density of park-supporting nonprofits generate better park access for all racial-ethnic groups. However, more benefits accrue to whites than to other racial-ethnic groups. These complicated realities require public managers to design better policies and institutional structures to ensure both equitable public service provision and active participation of non-governmental actors. This paper is part of *PAR*’s Race and Gender Symposium, a major effort in centering social equity in public and nonprofit management research.

Beyond the empirical context of parks and recreation services, I also use systematic literature review and meta-analysis techniques to gain a broader understanding of the nonprofit sector's social impact. In our paper in *VOLUNTAS* “**Dealing with Endogeneity to Understand the Societal Impact of the Third Sector: Why Should We Care and What Can We Do about It?**” Humphrey doctoral student Jung Ho Choi and I did a systemic literature review to understand how existing empirical studies address endogeneity when assessing sector impact. By endogeneity, we mean the omitted variables or uncaptured causes that both drive the changes of the outcome variable and the explanatory variable. This problem is very common yet challenging to deal with when assessing the impact of the nonprofit sector. By conducting this systematic review, we find that most quantitative studies of the nonprofit sector's societal impact are published in journals outside the main nonprofit journals. We then offer specific examples of how recent methodological advancements in addressing endogeneity help nonprofit researchers better solve this problem.

Built on this *VOLUNTAS* paper, I work with assistant professor at the University of Hawaii ChiaKo Hung to conduct a meta-analysis to further assess whether the nonprofit sector makes a positive impact on society across various policy domains (e.g., less crime, cleaner environment, better health outcomes or more active citizen participation) and how this impact is moderated by policy domains, geographical units of analysis, research design, and publication bias. Using 340 effects from 28 studies, we find a small but positive impact of the nonprofit sector on society, with a substantively larger positive effect in policy domains of citizen participation and the environment. We further propose a research agenda that fosters more cross-pollination between nonprofit studies and major social science disciplines on this important topic. This article titled “**Quantitatively Assessing the Impact of the Nonprofit Sector on Society: A Meta-Analysis**” is currently under review at *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

Future Research Directions

I maintain a robust research pipeline currently including three papers under revise & resubmit, one under review, and several work-in-progress. Looking beyond my existing research projects, I am exploring new directions to take my research. In particular, I am developing a research agenda in two directions: understanding the process of collaboration and system change, and exploring how digital platforms transform government-nonprofit relations and local governance. Both directions connect and expand my work in the changing roles of nonprofits in public service provision and their social impact. They also present exciting opportunities to collaborate with community partners and generate actionable policy impact. As we begin to have a better understanding of the causes and effects of these changing roles of nonprofits, it is critical to understand the process through which government and nonprofits can work together to improve the effectiveness and equity of the existing public service provision system. The emergence of new technologies such as digital platforms may also be a game-changer in how government interacts with citizens, nonprofits, and other stakeholders.

Regarding the first direction in understanding the process of collaboration and system change, I have drafted one manuscript on government's trust-building process with nonprofits serving BIPOC communities (Cheng & Sandfort, under review). I am now conducting research in two field settings where nonprofits play active and critical roles in changing the policy field: advancing park equity in North Minneapolis and supporting minority-owned businesses in

Minnesota. For the first project on park equity, I was recently nominated as a board member of the Minneapolis Parks Foundation and am deeply involved with its project of redesigning and reimagining the North Commons Park - a park located in one of Minneapolis' largest black and marginalized communities. I am particularly interested in how the CEO and senior staff of the park foundation build trust with its board and donors in this new strategic investment in North Minneapolis and how they manage their relationship with nonprofit partners and residents in North Minneapolis. For the second project on the evolution of a consortium of six Minnesota-based organizations that support minority entrepreneurs and their businesses, I was invited to join the research team by my Humphrey colleagues John Bryson, Barbara Crosby, and Humphrey doctoral alumni Danbi Seo. We are in the final year of our six-year data collection of monthly CEO interviews and meeting observations. It will offer important insights regarding how nonprofits strategize in their efforts of creating system change and how they balance it with their internal organizational capacity and needs.

The second direction of my future research centers on how digital platforms transform citizen participation and local governance. It starts with my COVID-19 research in which digital platforms played such a critical role in facilitating governmental and non-governmental actions (Cheng et al., 2020; Shen, Cheng & Yu, 2022; Wang & Cheng, 2021). As the effects of the pandemic continue, will these technical innovations that emerged in the crisis fade away or go on to transform existing public service provision and governance systems? How will they change how government interacts with citizens, nonprofits, and other key stakeholders? At what scale will they help the existing administrative reforms? I think the interplay of technological innovations and institutional reforms is a key topic for future public management research and I hope to be an important voice in this conversation.

In summary, I am committed to advancing public and nonprofit management scholarship in a diverse set of policy fields. My research trajectory demonstrates my ability to not only publish in the most prestigious venues of my academic discipline but also gain national and international attention in some of the most critical conversations in my field. As a scholar, I am driven by the goal of creating a better and more comprehensive understanding of the roles of nonprofits in public service provision and urban governance. I believe nonprofits play critical roles in our society beyond the tools of government and I hope my research sheds light on these important roles and their impact. As I move further along my career path, I aim to be a locally respected voice in key public policy issues, an internationally recognized scholar in public and nonprofit management, and a mentor and role model for future public affairs scholars and practitioners.

3.1 Narrative Summary of Teaching

“What we have ignored is what citizens can do and the importance of real involvement of the people involved - versus just having somebody in Washington to make a rule.”

— Elinor Ostrom

Teaching Philosophy

Why do I teach? One of the most transforming lessons I have learned through my research is that citizens should never stay there to wait for “somebody” to decide for them. They have to become responsible citizens and reflective leaders who can actively and effectively participate in public affairs. As a teacher, my goals are the same. I hope my class can become a platform for students to develop collaborative leadership, set up initiatives to improve their communities and appreciate the diversity and complexity of the real world. To achieve these goals, I have three overall teaching philosophies that guide all my teaching activities: teaching is about inspiration, learning by doing, and meeting students where they are. In the following sections, I describe how my teaching philosophy is reflected in my current course offerings and instruction strategies.

Teaching is about inspiration

I believe effective teaching emphasizes the why and how, instead of what. The world is changing fast and specific contents and information covered in classes are outdated faster than we realize. It is, therefore, critical to inspire and motivate students to be life-long learners and problem solvers. I achieve this goal in two ways. First, I design course modules that focus on the “heart” part of management and leadership: storytelling and value communication. This is particularly powerful for students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds as these exercises help them discover why they care and who they are. It is through our stories and choices in challenging times that we communicate our value proposition. In Management and Governance of Nonprofit Organizations (PA 5101), I devoted two weeks of the class to help students draft and practice the story of their leadership journey and why they are here. In Management of Organizations (PA 5011), I designed a new module on trust-building and used Andrew Yang’s speech at the DNC Summer Meeting to showcase how he creatively transforms his disadvantages into advantages and how he builds trust with audiences who hold bias against him. When I survey students about which modules are most impactful for their skill development, storytelling and trust-building always stand out.

Second, I leverage my background and winding roads in my journey to model vulnerability and relate to my students. This helps them see possibilities and hope. In the Integrative Doctoral Seminar in Public Affairs I (PA 8003) and Doctoral Research Seminar in Management, Leadership & Governance (PA 8106), I use my own experiences as an international scholar to connect to their struggles, so they understand that their challenges are not unique and there are strategies to turn their disadvantages to advantages. In particular, I emphasize the importance of finding role models, mentors, and peer support groups in academia. One student commented “The instructor shared his life journey, dilemmas, reflection, and learning as a Public Affairs researcher. He understood my location as an international student and responded according to my

strengths and possibilities.” I believe that true inspirations mean that students can see the path to where they aspire to be.

Teaching is about learning by doing

As an applied discipline, public affairs is ultimately about practice. Humphrey students often come to their programs with the ambition of changing the world. In my class, I bring students to the diversity and complexity of the real world through case analysis and management simulations. Management is a challenging subject to teach since there is no absolute line between right answers and wrong answers. The real world is very complex, and students need to understand and apply management concepts and techniques in real-world scenarios. In Management of Organizations (PA 5011), I design the class in a way that every major theory section is paired up with a case analysis or simulation. In Quantitative Research Methods and Analysis (PA 5056), students learn core statistical concepts and skills from the process of designing and implementing their quantitative research projects, instead of solving abstract problem sets or taking exams. When working with doctoral students in our program, I design a process through which students first learn the publication process in a project I am leading as collaborators and co-authors.

To integrate my research and provide locally relevant teaching materials, I also write teaching cases and simulations. With my teaching assistant Brooke Dirtzu, we wrote a role-play simulation designed to help students understand the challenges of creating a collaborative governance regime when actors involved have different understandings of the core issue. The simulation is situated in the context of advancing racial equity in the Minneapolis park system so students find great relevance to their own life and work. This teaching simulation won the 2020 E-PARCC Teaching Case and Simulation Competition organized by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. Many instructors inside and outside Humphrey have used this simulation and the case has also been translated into French. Dr. Jane Fountain at the University of Massachusetts Amherst commented that “When I used it last fall, students found it engaging, understood what they should do in their various groups and, I hope, began to see how performance measures and metrics, as well as budgeting could be used to reduce structural inequalities.” It is my goal to write a teaching case or simulation for each of my new research projects.

Teaching is about meeting students where they are

Public affairs is inherently interdisciplinary and diverse. This means that students often come to our MPP, MPA, and Ph.D. programs with varying levels of expertise and comfort in certain topics. To be an effective teacher in public affairs, it is critical to design teaching strategies that meet students where they are. I have two strategies to achieve this goal, one inside the classroom and the other often outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, students need to feel comfortable sharing their concerns and asking questions so the instructor and their peers can help address those concerns. They also need to understand that it is these varying levels of understanding that make peer learning possible and desirable. In my classes, I actively use small group discussions and creative idea-sharing mechanisms like the World Café to help students exchange ideas and ask questions in a smaller and safer environment. For more advanced students in my class, I design extra components in the assignment so they can continuously challenge themselves and

feel engaged with the course contents. For example, in my quantitative analysis class, students who are familiar with linear regression are encouraged to run an interaction model in their final assignment. I upload those lecture videos on the interaction model to Canvas so they can learn more advanced content at their own pace.

Meeting students where they are also means creating opportunities beyond the classroom to timely address their concerns and questions, so they feel confident and connected in the subject area. I firmly believe in the principle that “availability is the best ability”. I commit to responding to students’ emails on the same working day and creating sufficient team and individual office hours for my students. In my course evaluations, students consistently praise how responsive I am and how helpful I am in one-on-one settings. One student commented: "He was extremely generous with his time, offering both group office hours and individual appointment slots. He was also very responsive to emails and offered great feedback to assignments to inform the rest of the work in the class."

Course Developed and Taught

Since joining the faculty in 2018, I have developed and taught five different courses at Humphrey, all core courses in Master of Public Policy (PA 5011 Management of Organizations), Master of Public Affairs (PA 5056 Quantitative Research Methods and Analysis), Ph.D. in Public Affairs (PA 8003 Integrative Doctoral Seminar in Public Affairs I and PA 8106 Research Seminar in Management, Leadership & Governance), and Certificate in Nonprofit Management (PA 5101 Management and Governance of Nonprofit Organizations). Teaching these required classes was challenging as these courses are broad and students often have different levels of comfort and interest in those subject areas. However, they also serve as a gateway for me to interact with Humphrey students in different programs and introduce them to foundational management concepts, analytical skills, and academic research. I deeply appreciate the support and guidance from past instructors of these foundational courses at Humphrey.

PA 5011: Management of Organizations

This course is a required class for all of our Master of Public Policy students. It provides the gateway and foundation to other courses in the management and leadership area. The course draws upon various perspectives so students can analyze organizations from different lenses, including concepts from public administration, sociology, political science, organizational psychology, and management. The highlight of the course is the combinations of different approaches in instruction (class discussions, mini-lectures, simulations, case analyses, and group projects) and the focus on memo writing skills. Students often commented on the value of going through rigorous training in memo writing and case analysis. I actively integrate my research into teaching this course by writing original teaching simulations (e.g., the week on collaborative governance and the teaching simulation on advancing equity in the Minneapolis Park System) and developing applications based on my current research projects (e.g., the week on trust-building).

PA 5101: Management and Governance of Nonprofit Organizations

This course is a required class for our Certificate in Nonprofit Management students and a popular elective for students in the management and leadership concentration. It is built on the foundation of PA 5011 and provides a comprehensive overview of management and governance challenges facing nonprofit organizations. This course covers the definition, history, current size and impact on society, theoretical explanations for its existence in a market economy, and broad questions of leadership and accountability for the nonprofit sector. I am providing students with the opportunity to construct a “portfolio” of assignments, including a reflective essay on the role of nonprofits in society, a “Story of Self” recording on one’s origin story in serving in the nonprofit sector, a management memo on selected cases discussed in class, and a book review or Op-Ed.

PA 5790: Quantitative Research Methods and Analysis

This course is a required class for all Master of Public Affairs mid-career students and part of their cohort experiences. For many of our MPA students, this is their first quantitative analysis class in the last ten to twenty years and they enter the class with a high level of anxiety. Therefore, rather than focusing on mathematical proofs and problem sets, I take a project-based learning approach so students actively apply these concepts in the process of designing and implementing their quantitative research projects. Recorded videos on key concepts of statistical analysis are posted on Canvas to assist student learning. In this course, students choose a publicly available dataset to conduct statistical analysis and they need to go through the whole process of collecting, cleaning, and analyzing the data as well as interpreting the results and discussing limitations. By going through the whole life cycle of quantitative analysis, students gain a deep understanding of key statistical concepts and how a quantitative analysis project is designed and implemented.

PA 8003: Integrative Doctoral Seminar in Public Affairs I

This is the essential and foundational course for all Humphrey doctoral students. It requires a broad knowledge of the field so the instructor can draw connections and speak to students in various subfields. I add to the curriculum by not only covering foundational concepts and approaches in public affairs, but also key professional development topics for our doctoral students including the publication process, how to design their research career, and how to be an effective peer reviewer. Faculty members both within and beyond the Humphrey School are invited to the last hour of the weekly seminars so students can build connections with scholars from diverse backgrounds. My key objective in teaching PA 8003 is to model how to ask critical questions and stay curious and open to different approaches in public affairs. Students appreciate my background as an interdisciplinary and international scholar who is relatively new to my current academic position since I can directly relate and speak to their dilemmas and challenges as fresh public affairs scholars.

PA 8106: Research Seminar in Management, Leadership & Governance

This course is a required class for our Ph.D. in Public Affairs students in the management & governance subfield. It used to be a course collectively taught by all Humphrey management & leadership faculty members (each faculty member took a special topic for a few weeks). I completely redesigned this course in Spring 2020 and took the instructor role so students can get consistent feedback from one major instructor and have a foundational level of understanding of public and nonprofit management scholarship. We typically devote the first 90 minutes of the course to the discussion of the readings on selected public management topics. For the remaining one hour, I spend time covering career development and professional development topics such as strategic positioning in the public management job market, conference networking, how to write good article reviews, how to respond to reviewer comments, and data sources in public management.

Teaching Evaluation and Professional Development

I consistently receive excellent student evaluations. Students particularly appreciate my flexibility, responsiveness, and constructive feedback on their assignments. On average, students gave me 5.74/6 on my preparation for classes and 5.87/6 on my respect for students. A full summary of my quantitative teaching evaluations is provided in section 3.3 and the narrative reviews from students are provided in my dossier. In Spring 2020 and Fall 2020, I received formative reviews and in-class peer observations of teaching by four Humphrey faculty colleagues (all past recipients of the University of Minnesota's highest award for excellence in graduate education). They all commented that I engaged students and organized interactions in class very effectively. As we shifted to remote instruction in Spring 2020, I quickly adopted new class activities that took advantage of collaborative online tools like Google Docs, Zoom breakout rooms, and flipped classroom designs so synchronous class sessions can be oriented towards effective student engagement and interactions. Faculty peers observing my class reflected positively that were learning from the technological innovations I introduced.

I am committed to continually refining my teaching skills and more effectively integrating my research into teaching activities. I have taken advantage of many opportunities to develop my skills as a teacher. I completed the year-long Early Career Teaching and Learning Program organized by the Center for Educational Innovation in 2018-2019 so I have a deeper understanding of student learning and a portfolio of diverse teaching strategies. I actively seek mid-course feedback from students in all of my classes and have made numerous adjustments to my teaching practice as a result of student feedback. In Fall 2018 and Spring 2019, I worked with the Center for Educational Innovation to complete a course observation and feedback session in my Management of Organizations and Management and Governance of Nonprofit Organizations classes. I recently joined the MPA teaching team so I can regularly bounce ideas with other instructors and bring my expertise to our innovative cohort-based MPA program.

Mentoring and Advising

I am very active in advising students and research assistants at the Humphrey School. I was the primary advisor for one doctoral student from 2019 to 2021 and serve as a committee member for another two doctoral students at Humphrey. I also advised one international visiting student

and two Humphrey International Fellows. During my time at Humphrey, I have advised and supervised four teaching assistants, eight research assistants, and sixteen MPP students. I attended the Current Research in Public Affairs doctoral seminar regularly so I can support Humphrey doctoral students beyond those formal mentorship roles. I take great pride in my students' achievements. My students have won the University Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, U Penn Doctoral Summer Fellowship, and ARNOVA Doctoral Fellowship.

Leveraging my students' strengths and engaging them in all stages of the research progress are my top priorities as an advisor. Given we have a very small doctoral program at Humphrey, I actively reach out and involve doctoral students in my research so they can be competitive in the job market. With Humphrey doctoral students Jung Ho Choi, Shuyi Deng, and Ahmad Banamah, we have co-authored papers that have been published in top public and nonprofit management journals and edited books, including *Public Administration Review*, *VOLUNTAS*, and *The Encyclopedia of Nonprofit Management, Leadership and Governance*. My mentoring strategy for my doctoral students is that they work with me as coauthors and collaborators for projects I am leading first so they can learn and experience the publication process. I then actively encourage and advise them to become the first or single author on projects they expect to lead. My ultimate goal is that my students can become independent scholars who have their distinct intellectual agendas.

To close, I consider teaching and advising a critical part of my job. I am privileged to be part of my students' intellectual development and I aspire to be a role model they can look up to and relate to. It is so rewarding to see my students embrace who they are and grow as responsive and reflective citizens, leaders, and scholars. This motivates me to become a better teacher and scholar every day.

4.1 Narrative Summary of Service Activities

Service is an integrative and critical part of my job at the Humphrey School. I regard service as learning opportunities to know how our school, university, community, and profession work. More importantly, doing service is the best way to pay back the support and kindness I have received from my institution and profession. Therefore, I never waited for or run away from service activities. Instead, I actively seek service opportunities that are aligned with my values and priorities in supporting student development, creating a more inclusive academy, and bridging academia and practice. My public and professional service activities are integrated with my research and teaching activities. Here I expand on a few examples of my service to the School, the University, my profession, and the public community.

Service to the Humphrey School and University of Minnesota

I am a faculty member and advisor in the Public and Nonprofit Management & Leadership area of the Humphrey School. I am involved in the Master of Public Policy, Master of Public Affairs, Doctor of Philosophy in Public Affairs, and Certificate in Nonprofit Management programs at Humphrey. Since 2020, I have served as the Director of Graduate Studies for the Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management. I redesigned the curriculum of the certificate program so the processes of course selection and degree completion are more streamlined and easier to navigate through. The certificate program used to be a five-school collaboration and the courses were all over the place and outdated. The revised curriculum highlights the ownership of the Humphrey School and makes it more flexible for students to complete the certificate program.

Another highlight of my service at the Humphrey School and the University is the Humphrey School Dean Search Committee. As the only junior faculty member serving on the committee, I deeply valued this opportunity of representing the public and nonprofit management and leadership area and building a diverse pool of candidates who provide future leadership for the Humphrey School. On the committee, I was not hesitant to voice my opinions and I participated in all of the twelve semi-finalist interviews. The result was a diverse and exciting pool of finalists. I truly enjoy this service with my colleagues in different areas of the Humphrey School.

I have also been a member of the Equity & Inclusion Council since 2019 and a member of the search committee for the President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, which is oriented to diversifying academia. Since two postdoc fellows joined Humphrey, I have also served as their mentors to help them navigate the publishing process and teaching responsibilities. These services played important roles in making Humphrey a more inclusive and diverse place to work and study. Finally, I have served on the Lloyd B. Short Award Committee and Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship Review Committee. These committee services showcase my commitment to student development. I aim to be both a fair reviewer and a helpful consultant for students in those committee service opportunities.

Service to the Profession

My service to the profession demonstrates my strong reputation in public and nonprofit management research and my commitment to enhancing diversity and inclusion in academia. I

serve as the Managing Editor for *Public Administration Review* which is a top journal in public management. My central goal in this managing editorship role is to help *PAR* identify junior scholars from less represented backgrounds so their voices can be incorporated in the journal review process and they can build a scholarly reputation through review services. My international and interdisciplinary backgrounds also allow me to help *PAR* engage more international scholars from diverse disciplines and methodological backgrounds. As it is quite unconventional in my field for a junior scholar to serve such editorial positions, I hope my experiences can encourage more junior scholars to step up to provide key academic leadership for the development of public and nonprofit management research.

I currently serve on the Editorial Board of *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* and *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*. Over the last five years, I have reviewed for over twenty different journals and four academic conferences, many among the top journals and most highly respected conferences in public and nonprofit management research. I also helped organize the first international workshop on the coproduction of public services under comparative perspectives in Hangzhou, China, and served as the guest editor for that special issue in *Journal of Chinese Governance*. These experiences made me a respected voice in my field.

With my international background as an Asian scholar, I regard the globalization of public and nonprofit management as a key purpose of my service. This is critical as public and nonprofit management research is quite U.S. and Europe-centric and the field desperately needs more comparative research between the East and West. I have been nominated and selected as the conference program committee member for the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) Asia Conferences in 2019 and 2021. I helped started and coordinated the ARNOVA Common Interest Group in Chinese Nonprofit Research so scholars who are from China or interested in doing research related to the nonprofit sector in China can find an academic home and support each other.

I emphasize mentorship and the cultivation of the next generation of public affairs scholars in my service to the profession. Through my leadership at the ARNOVA Theory, Issues, and Boundaries Section (TIBS), I have also helped organize a professional development workshop on theory development which had a packed room during the 2021 ARNOVA Conference in Atlanta. Starting in 2022, I became the co-chair of the Professional Development Workshop Subcommittee of the ARNOVA Conference. I actively participate in the ARNOVA Research Roundtables which aim at helping doctoral students and junior scholars develop their papers. Over the years, I have been nominated to conduct some of the most important services for my profession, including serving on the committees of the RGK-ARNOVA President's Award, Felice Davidson Perlmutter Best Paper Award, and ARNOVA Distinguished Achievement in Leadership and Nonprofit and Voluntary Action Research Award. These experiences engage me with the top research in the field and build my reputation as a public and nonprofit management scholar.

Service to the Public Community

In recognition of my scholarship and reputation in government-nonprofit relations and urban greenspace, I have been invited to serve on several boards and committees. I am a board member of the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, assisting them with their project on the North Commons

Park and their involvement with the Reimagine the Civic Commons initiative. I have also served as a member of the Community Advisory Committee for the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board Parks for All Comprehensive Plan 2021-2036, and the organizing committee of the Nonprofit Leadership Conference hosted by the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. These service opportunities provide the gateway for me to do engaged scholarship and build deep connections with community-based organizations in Minnesota. As I have stated in my research statement, doing locally engaged scholarship is my current and future research priority.

I appreciate these opportunities of introducing my research to the practitioner community. Thus, in addition to my committee and board service, I have also been invited to speak by government and nonprofit agencies, including the Government Accountability Office, Mounds View City Council, and the Minnesota Chinese Association of Science and Technology. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, I have also done major outreach in my home country – China. My colleagues and I engaged in several research projects examining how the government worked with community-based organizations to coproduce pandemic responses. We emphasized policy advocacy as much as academic publishing. In particular, we wrote a popular press article in Chinese to reflect on grassroots and nonprofit activities during the pandemic, titled “One Year Anniversary of the Wuhan Lockdown: What Nonprofit Organizations Do We Need in a Risk Society?” We also wrote an English version article in *Nonprofit Quarterly* which is a respected venue for bridging research and practice. It is my goal to write public-facing articles along with my academic publications, as part of my ongoing commitment to integrate my research, teaching, and service activities.