

FSU trains tomorrow's government managers

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The late Mallory Horne used to tell a story about two campaign volunteers who came to see him, looking for state jobs, soon after his first election to the Florida House in the early 1950s.

A legendary Tallahassee legislator who was the last member to serve terms as both House speaker and Senate president, Horne told the men he'd heard the Highway Department was always hiring and promptly forgot about it. A couple weeks later, Horne said, the grateful new employees showed up in his office again to slip him a couple of \$5 bills. Genuinely shocked, and thinking it must be some kind of sting operation, he told the men he hadn't done anything to help them get hired and he certainly didn't expect any payday kickbacks. The puzzled men, who meant no harm, explained that they thought that's how it worked in state government. You got your job by knowing somebody important, and you kept it by helping that person stay in a position to hand out patronage. When your political benefactor lost, or if you backed the wrong candidate in a race, you could expect to lose your job.

Or, as a Georgia governor of the same bygone era once said of his state's "merit system" for state personnel, "My friends have the merit, and I've got the system."

As he moved up the power pyramid of the old Porkchop Gang days, Horne worked to bring about a standard civil service system for Florida, a forerunner of the Career Service methods currently used. It wasn't only for state employees, he used to say. Big Bend merchants couldn't sell a car or a house or a refrigerator, if customers couldn't get financing because their jobs were in jeopardy every two or four years.

The "spoils system" may have gotten its name in the Andrew Jackson administration (in Washington, not when he was territorial governor here), but it probably goes back to the pharaohs. There will always be political favoritism in management of government, as long as we elect politicians to appoint the managers.

But there is a program designed to add some professionalism and leadership skills to the grooming of government administrators. It's called the Certified Public Manager program at Florida State's Askew School of Public Administration and Policy, and it will graduate 110 new certified managers in the next few weeks.

Ben Green, director of the Florida Center for Public Management at FSU, laughed when asked if we'd ever see all department heads, division directors and bureau chiefs appointed strictly on the basis of their leadership and management skills. But you have to try, and hope to build a widening strata of professional managers in state and local agencies.

"There are some things that are obviously different in state government, rather than profit motives and product development and things like that," Green said. "In government, you're serving the public trust. There are plenty of state employees doing thankless tasks that the private sector isn't interested in doing, which need to be done."

And, as much as candidates like to say they'll run government like a business, a big corporation doesn't have its top executives and board of directors elected in competitive races, financed by outside interests. But Green said government administration has "a lot of similarities" to running any other business.

"It's still working with people, trying to get the best out of them, while managing limited resources," he added.

Green said his program is one of the oldest in the country, operating since 1979. It has produced more than 4,300 graduates statewide. He said it involves 31 days of training on a wide span of topics, over a year and a half to two years, with employees studying leadership techniques, motivation, delegation

and project management.

It culminates in a three-day leadership conference like the two graduation events CPM is holding this summer — July 23-25 at FSU's Turnbull Center and Aug. 20-22 in Pinellas Park.

Green said many agencies plan ahead for managers, knowing how many are in the DROP program or are otherwise likely to leave over the next few years. Some state, county and city agencies have a rigorous competition to get into the CPM program, while some require applicants to write essays about their career goals and how they think the training can help their agencies.

"This is not academia, it's not pie in the sky, it's very practical," he said. "The homework is not regurgitating some theoretical book, it's going back to your agency and making process improvements. It's really aimed at working managers and helping them improve what they're doing, as opposed to a grad student at FSU who reads a bunch of books and learns the basics."

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