

Regional

SIUE's Carr teaches tomorrow's public servants

In these times, there are many arguments floating around about the proper scope of government. Should it be large or small? How can it be made more efficient?

Should more power rest with states and localities or at the federal level? Politicians inevitably end up on the receiving end of these opinions — and complaints. Yet, most people do not realize that the majority of individuals who work for the government — at all levels — are not politicians but public servants.

Also little realized is the fact that many of those individuals are actually trained as professional administrators.

A local educator who trains those professionals is T.R. Carr. Born in Miller, Ark., a small rural community about 60 miles from Little Rock, Carr received his bachelor's degree from Minot State College in North Dakota and his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Oklahoma. He decided to pursue an academic career while in the U.S. Air Force, and today he is a professor in the department of public administration and policy analysis at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Given all the political controversies about government and politics, one wonders if there is a decreasing interest among college students to pursue careers in government.

"Some students are hesitant to get involved in the public sector because of fear of getting involved in politics," Carr said. "There is an increase in the number of people wanting to get into the non-profit organizations. We see international students really interested in getting in the non-governmental organizations."

One area of Carr's research involves how to improve the court system, and he has studied the issue of termination of parental rights by Illinois courts.

"People think that they can always get things resolved by going to court, but our court system is very slow because it is based on deliberation," explained Carr. "Most of the public really lacks an understanding about how the court system works."

Another field of Carr's research relates to how the court system deals with mental health issues. "Mental health is an area that

Aldemaro Romero Campus Talk

has not received sufficient funding to meet the needs of individuals with mental issues," Carr said. "So, how do we provide services to the population that has long-term, chronic conditions?"

"Elected officials do not seem willing to take on that task," he added. "There is no termination point for treatment, which runs contrary to the way our health system is designed to deal with when it comes to funding."

He cites the case of autism as an example. "The number of children with this condition is rising dramatically, and the need for those individuals is a life-long one," Carr said. "How are we going to pay for that?"

Another health area in which he has worked — one that is considered by some public health officials to be an epidemic in this country — is obesity among women and children.

"Many women are providers for their families, which increases their stress," Carr said. "We discovered the difficulty of many working women is a matter of lifestyle and family relationships."

For children, Carr said that a major contributor to childhood obesity is the high-fat diets in many school cafeterias.

Carr's knowledge in the area of public administration comes not only from academia but also from his 10-year experience as mayor of the city of Hazelwood, Mo., a city of about 26,000 people.

"Although on paper it was a part-time job with a city manager dealing with day-to-day issues, it is really time-consuming," Carr said. In most cities the size of Hazelwood, the mayors are not career politicians, but the mayor still has to deal with political relations. He encourages young people to get involved in local government.

"Local government affects our everyday lives, from garbage service, sanitation, police, and fire protection, to parks, recreation and streets. It really does everything that affects our quality of life," Carr said. Yet, he is clear



Photo by Susanna Lu

T.R. Carr, a former mayor, teaches one of his classes at SIUE about serving as public administrators.

about the important roles played by both the state and the federal governments.

"Without the federal government we would lose our banking system, national defense, trade, and monetary system, while state governments deal with infrastructure issues such as highways," he explained.

Carr said he is aware that the taxpayers are keen on seeing more efficiency in government.

"The public argues that they want a more efficient government. But there is also demand to access and services. And the two are not always compatible," Carr said.

He added that he does foresee changes in

the structure of government in America in the next two or three decades.

"We will probably see an increased level of concentration of authority in the feds, and, therefore, more conflicts between the states and the feds while the local governments take on more responsibilities," he said.

Despite all these discussions on the American system of government, the department of public administration and policy analysis at SIUE has many international students, particularly from developing countries. Most of them are interested in running not-for-profit organizations when they go back to their home countries, and that is

something they learn while at SIUE.

Carr cites numerous success stories of SIUE graduates. "We have examples of students developing programs that foster jobs in Ethiopia and successful fundraising initiatives within the international community," he said. "They are really promoting change."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.