Recognizing public administration as an enterprise of social progress enables us to better understand the problems of the past and possibilities for the future. This perspective has played a central role in my work as a university leader, particularly my efforts in redesigning Arizona State University (ASU) as a public institution that offers broad accessibility to academic excellence and seeks to advance public well-being.

As an enterprise of social advancement, public administration predates formal inquiry into important topics such as organization, authority, and control that characterize the field in recent decades. Consider the Athenian Oath, which outlines the virtues of civic responsibility and stands as evidence of a larger notion of public administration. Displayed in the foyer of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, the Athenian Oath is one of the first beacons of social enterprise I encountered as a young doctoral student some 30 years ago. A central tenet of the Athenian Oath is the idea of societal improvement and advancement.

Like public administration, our system of knowledge production can trace its origins to ancient Greece, specifically to Plato and his Academy, but it has not operated unchanged. Society’s commitment to scientific inquiry has waxed and waned through time and so, too, has the pace and nature of social progress.

About 400 years ago, the modality of scientific discovery shifted to embrace a reductionist approach with an overpowering desire to know all there is to know about how and why something works. This modality has interacted dynamically with public administration. In the most recent 70 years, particularly in the United States, we have been putting the entire weight of our democracy behind that modality with a set of institutions created at the end of World War II, largely as a result of the awe-inspiring achievements of physicists who carried out the scientific research that led to development of nuclear weapons. These scientists inadvertently became public administrators.

The role of science in the success of the war effort led Vannevar Bush to codify a new relationship between government and academia. Accordingly, his treatise, *Science, the Endless Frontier*, can be recognized as a work of public administration because it outlined a system for connecting scientific discovery to public benefit. Presidents Roosevelt and Truman put in place a set of scientific institutions based on this 400-year-old modality. The logic was to give scientists resources, and solutions to social problems would emerge.

That logic, however, has run its course. Examples such as cancer—where billions of dollars are invested annually to understand the disease but little progress is made in effectuating solutions—stand as evidence of the inadequacy of the model.

A new model is needed for connecting knowledge to social progress, and this is squarely an issue of public administration. At ASU, I lead a team of institutional designers in developing a new prototype for a knowledge-intensive social enterprise that we term the New American University.

Our academic community has approached this challenge from the perspective of design within a democracy. The vision empowering the institution is egalitarian. We decided that the university would be measured and deemed successful based on inclusion and the success of our students. We would transition from an input-driven to an output-driven logic. Second, our research would be measured not just for its academic value but also its public value and societal benefit. Third, we would take some responsibility for the outcome of our community. These principles are now included in ASU’s recently codified charter, and they drive the way we understand social problems and design solutions.
Consider the challenge of social mobility. Educational attainment is the single most important factor affecting social mobility. Today, if you are a student in the top 10 percent of your high school class but your family income is in the bottom quintile, your chances of getting a college degree are only 9 percent. If you are a high school student in the bottom quartile academically but your family income is in the upper quartile, your chance of getting a college degree is 80 percent. This is a problem.

We have an inequitable distribution of the benefits of higher education, even publicly financed higher education. Of the more than half a trillion dollars spent on Pell grants since 1980, less than half of the recipients graduated, according to some estimates. On top of that, we are in a modality of exclusion, where schools seek to encourage more and more applicants for undergraduate classes so that they can turn as many of them away as possible. As a function of exclusion, the perception of quality increases.

What this means then is that many leading universities, especially private institutions, have become mirror images of one another, all following Harvard. Public universities are isomorphic replicants of one another, all following Michigan or Berkeley. The result is inadequate organizational differentiation and commitment to direct social impact. Perhaps most importantly, our top schools have adopted a set of institutional practices that isolate social concerns from the production of knowledge and design of solutions.

Historically, ASU was only admitting about 8 percent of the student body from Pell-eligible families. For decades, it was a low-cost institution that offered meager financial aid, largely to middle-class white students. Today, about 40 percent of our more than 67,000 undergraduates are Pell-eligible, and the student body has become representative of the full socioeconomic diversity of the state. In other words, we have more than 26,500 Pell recipients.

Students from families with little income have no cost of attendance, a remarkable design feat for a university that receives no state-based financial aid and steadily decreasing levels of general state-based public support.

In 2013, ASU students were recipients of 26 Fulbrights. A third of these were students whose families have little income. Since 2002, our degree production has increased from 8,500 to more than 19,000 per year. Our research portfolio has increased from $100 million in research to more than $450 million. The outcomes provide evidence of progress not just in terms of access but also academic excellence and knowledge production. The redesign of ASU aspires to produce an enterprise of social progress, a task that is very much a process of public administration.