MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN AND PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT 2019-20

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN WITH REPORTED OUTCOMES

WILLIAM SCHRECKHISE, CHAIR
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
University of Arkansas

Master Public Administration and Nonprofit Management Program Goals and Learning Outcomes

In the fall 2019 semester, the total number of credit hours required to receive a Master Public Administration and Nonprofit Management (MPA) was changed to 39 semester hours for pre-career students and 36 hours for those currently in-career. To verify a student as having in-career status, it was established that a letter from the employer should include the student's start date, job title, and description of duties. The description of duties is to ascertain their relevance to both the MPA program and the student's goals for a graduate degree. Students are encouraged to seek out a focused area to complement their general coursework (community development, environmental policy and sustainability, health services administration, higher education administration, nonprofit management, public policy analysis, or recreation and tourism). The program uses a portfolio approach to encourage greater student ownership their own professional and academic development. The MPA offered 8 graduate classes in academic year 2019-2020, with most classes enrolling between 5 and 15 students. While the program is not NASPAA[1] accredited, the program offers the majority of the core classes typical for similar programs of its size (5 faculty members). To strengthen the professional preparation of students interested in nonprofit management careers, the MPA faculty reviewed the 15-hour Graduate Certificate in Cross-Sector Alliances. This certificate is offered through a collaboration between the MPA program and the MBA program in the Walton College of Business (see pp. 4-6 for more detail). The MPA program also offers a joint JD/MPA dual-degree program with the University of Arkansas School of Law.

By the end of their course of study students should be able to:

Outcome 1:   understand the link between political, policy and administrative issues facing contemporary public and nonprofit managers by applying learned knowledge to the analysis of "real world" political and policy issues;

Outcome 2:   write, analyze and communicate in a competent manner (suitable for various audiences);

Outcome 3:   understand and respond to the ethical dilemmas public and nonprofit managers might face;

Outcome 4:   grasp the role of institutions and organizations in the shaping of politics and policy both in the domestic as well and the international realms;

Outcome 5:   understand the impact of public-private collaborations—involving nonprofit organizations as well as private-for-profit organizations—on the work of the public manager.

---

[1] NASPAA is the national accrediting body for public administration and public affairs programs

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

These educational outcomes are evaluated by offering students assignments both in class and through service-learning projects, by designing meaningful tests, and by supporting students through internships and other professional opportunities. All students must demonstrate their academic and professional competencies through written and oral assignments, as well as through the ongoing development of their portfolios.

The following provide examples of processes used to determine student competency:

Outcome 1 may be evaluated in reflective essays and research papers after reading seminal texts in public administration or nonprofit management that examine the relations of politics and administration, by attending public meetings, or by shadowing a public or nonprofit manager. In a more experiential fashion, students are presented with decision-making cases to help them apply assigned readings to scenarios that simulate actual occurrences. In addition, all students are encouraged to participate in internships or similar professional development projects.

Outcome 2 is assessed by establishing clear expectations of the level of writing and analysis required for a specific class or assignment. Students may be required to repeat an assignment if the expected quality is not achieved. Many classes require that students give oral presentations or groups make presentations of their work.

Outcome 3 is most readily assessed when students participate in internships or other experiential assignments that bring them in contact with ethical dilemmas; in-class use of professional guest speakers; and the use of cases that directly confront students with the kinds of ethical issues that they might encounter in the workplace. These are designed to sensitize them to the intractability of some decision-making situations and help them think through the potential consequences of their choices. The Executive in Residence program has further strengthened this component.

Outcome 4 is assessed by encouraging students to participate in study abroad programs and reflecting on their experiences in a written paper. Another way some classes assess students' understanding is by offering simulations (e.g. of a legislative body) that requires students to apply their knowledge to that specific setting. Other students may conduct research that involves direct work with local officials, NGOs, or other entities.

Outcome 5 is assessed in several ways. As state and local governments search for new ways to deliver services, students must become thoroughly familiar with governmental roles in multi-actor and multi-sectoral decision-making arrangements. Issues such as accountability, transparency and communication are essential parts of these seminars. In addition students are encouraged to serve on local boards of nonprofits or undertake research projects that involve parties from different sectors.

Results of the Assessment of Level of Achievement of Program Learning Outcomes

As a result of the assessment by students during the pursuit of their degree we have identified the following three areas for continuous improvement:

1. Continued curricular integration
The program has moved toward a more outcomes-based method of assessment with the continued use of the Portfolio Examination process. This process allows for students to succinctly produce a final product that reflects their coursework and the relevance of various research methodologies. Students using this new portfolio approach continue to graduate in a timely manner. Completed portfolios are accessible in an archive with permission of the graduate.

The department also hired a new visiting assistant professor to help with the teaching of undergraduate and graduate public administration classes.

2. Review of our curriculum
The enrollment trends of the MPA program are consistent with declining enrollment nationally. The faculty remains committed to addressing areas that would make the program more attractive to potential students. Recent work with the Communications Project Manager in the Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences to develop marketing materials and strategies as well as visits to upper division undergraduate political science classes by the department's chair and vice chair to promote our graduate programs exemplified efforts to increase enrollment.

3. Continue to strengthen career preparation
The MPA has prepared students well for careers in the public policy and nonprofit management fields by continuing to enhance student learning and professional opportunities. The faculty and graduate coordinator continue to identify high quality public and nonprofit sector internships and to provide multiple service-learning opportunities by expanding the number of our service learning classes.

Planned Improvements

1. Appointment of a Director of the MPA program
Although the Department of Political Science has an appointed graduate coordinator, this individual serves as the director of both the MPA program and the department's Master of Arts in Political Science program. Because of the unique needs of both programs, the department is considering the possibility of appointing a separate director for the MPA program.

2. Further address the internationalization
The MPA program faculty used sessions at recent NASPAA (Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration) meetings to share experiences with and draw lessons from other small programs across the country to better orient our program's components towards international issues.

3. Career Development: Skill Enhancement
Possessing high-level methodological and policy analytical skills is critical to increase the competitiveness of our students with those from larger programs. We hope to build an area of skill around political geography (GIS skills are in high demand across all public affairs areas). We will increase awareness of the Executive-in-Residence program by holding workshops specifically designed for graduate students and encourage students to take advantage of internships opportunities and to continue present their work at professional conferences.

Cross Sector Alliances - Graduate Certificate (CSAL_GC)

1. **Program description**:
Over the last decade, nonprofit, business, and governmental organizations have been increasingly working together to address a broad range of societal issues. The MBA (Walton College of Business) and the MPA (Fulbright College) programs at the University of Arkansas collaborate to furnish this 15-hr certificate. The Graduate School is officially responsible for tracking interdisciplinary graduate programs and certificates.

Students participating in the certificate must be admitted to either the MBA or the MPA program to participate in the certificate.
(http://catalog.uark.edu/graduatecatalog/programsofstudy/crosssectoralliancescsal/)

2. **Program Goals**:
Students participating in the part of their respective graduate programs will be in a superior position to transfer this knowledge to the diverse organizations and businesses that employ them. Moreover, they will be prepared for newly emerging careers that require intimate knowledge of the workings in the other sectors.

2.1.   Goal 1: Prepare students as future managers to understand the diversity of perspectives and purposes held by organizations in the three sectors. Develop their appreciation for the risks and challenges inherent in cross-sector collaborations, including how effectiveness of mission or goal accomplishment ("success") is defined, how power differences are managed, how trust is built in inter-organizational collaborations, how accountability to a complex set of stakeholders is assured and the extent to which communities are impacted ("Collective impact").

2.2.   Goal 2: Prepare students for professional careers that require knowledge of complex collaborations among public, for-profit and nonprofit sector organizations.

Typical careers might be the following:
- Middle and senior management positions in foundations or nonprofit organizations
- Board members of nonprofit organizations
- For profit funders and fund development professionals
- International careers as managers in NGOs, international organizations or organizations involved with social enterprises/innovations
- Governmental managers that develop and monitor complex policies involving cross-sector relationships and grants

3. **Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**:
Following Bloom's taxonomy of assessing student learning outcomes (see appendix), upon completion of the certificate students.

Goal 1:

1.1. Demonstrate a broad understanding of the challenges faced by public and private managers working at the intersection of public affairs, economic/business analysis, and associated theories.

1.2. Develop critical thinking as to the challenges facing managers working in intersectoral environments.

1.3. Develop of the ability to select appropriate quantitative and qualitative methodologies and technologies that can help explore relevant challenges.

1.4. Communicate effectively to different domestic and international audiences and purposes.

Goal 2:

2.1. Work with and for others in ways that translate broader community needs into actionable policy and program solutions, and to promote action awareness.

2.2. Develop an understanding of the complex ethical challenges when working in environments that promote different values and standards and learn to work through possible resulting conflicts.

2.3. Be able to conduct a purposeful inquiry exploring the problem/issue a client is experiencing (internships and professional development) and assist in finding viable solutions.

Bloom's Taxonomy

- Factual Knowledge

  - Knowledge of terminology

  - Knowledge of specific details and elements in materials offered

- Conceptual Knowledge

  - Knowledge of classifications and categories

  - Knowledge of principles and generalizations

  - Knowledge of theories, models, and structures

- Procedural Knowledge

  - Knowledge of subject-specific skills or algorithms

  - Knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods

  - Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures

- Metacognitive Knowledge

  - Strategic Knowledge

  - Knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge

  - Self-knowledge