

Assessing Performance in NASPAA Graduate Programs

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ABSTRACT

Performance in graduate programs seeking accreditation through the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration may be assessed through a variety of indicators. This paper focuses on the second NASPAA standard, program mission, which requires demonstrated performance, and it addresses multiple program outcomes rather than a single performance measurement tool. The performance measurement efforts at the University of Delaware are discussed as an example of one program's approach to meeting the program mission standard.

This paper addresses the issue of assessing performance in graduate programs seeking accreditation through the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). Rather than describing a single tool, as did Roberts (2001) in the use of stakeholder surveys and Durant (2002) in the use of the capstone course, this article addresses multiple program outcomes through a variety of performance indicators to meet the NASPAA requirements and lead to educational improvements as recommended by Jennings (1989).

According to NASPAA, "the purpose of these standards for professional master's degree programs in public affairs/policy/administration is to promote and maintain educational quality" (NASPAA, 2005). The association has established

nine standards with the following headings: Eligibility for Peer Review and Accreditation, Program Mission, Program Jurisdiction, Curriculum, The Faculty, Admission of Students, Student Services, Support Services and Facilities, and Off-Campus and Distance Education. Programs are required to address each standard in a self-study. The self-study is followed by an onsite evaluation from a site visit team appointed by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA).

This paper focuses on the second standard, program mission, which requires the demonstration of performance. As NASPAA states, "the program shall use information about its performance in directing and revising program objectives, strategies, and operations." This standard also requires that the self-study include ways to measure program outcomes and the results of such efforts. This paper will specifically discuss one program's approach to meeting this requirement.

NASPAA joins others in the trend toward advocating accountability by demonstrating mission-driven results. For example, for Drucker, the mission statement is the instrument of accountability for public organizations. Successful organizations have learned to "define clearly what changes outside the organization constitute results and to focus on them" (Drucker, 1989, 89). In 1990, Congress passed the Chief Financial Officers Act, requiring the timely reporting of performance information. In 1991, the National Academy of Public Administration adopted a resolution endorsing and encouraging the development and use of performance monitoring at all levels of government. Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act in 1993, requiring all agencies to develop strategic plans, set goals and objectives, and measure progress toward these goals (for more description on trends, see Bavon, 1995; Aristigueta, 1999). The adoption of the outcome approach to assessment in higher education is discussed below and is followed by assessment in public affairs/policy/administration.

To clarify, a mission statement is the program's fundamental purpose, while goals are the directives that will help us achieve the mission. The goals in this case study also provide the framework for the performance indicators. In addition, it is important to differentiate between outputs and outcomes. Outputs are the products or services delivered; outcomes are "the events, occurrences, or changes in conditions, behavior, or attitudes that indicate progress toward achievement of the mission and objective of the program"¹ (Hatry, 1999, 15). It is not unusual for final outcomes to take a long time to materialize, so intermediate outcomes, although not an end in themselves, are also used to measure progress. These terms are included in the outcome chart found later in this paper.

Ideally, the self-study will be more than just a vehicle for reaccreditation purposes; the format for the self-study serves as a framework to study program performance. Ewell (1994, 29) states

[B]adly needed... is a set of agreements on what self-regulation in higher education ought to be fundamentally about.... One is the

community's own assurance of academic quality. This means first and foremost a predominant focus on the assessment of outcomes and results.... Focusing on outcomes as the centerpiece of recognition also forces us to address (and eventually develop a satisfactory answer to) legitimate questions about the common meaning of academic awards given in common."

This leads to the topic for this paper and the research questions: How do public affairs, public policy, or public administration program administrators know if they are accomplishing their mission? How is performance measured? And most importantly, how do we know if students are learning?

ASSESSMENT IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS/POLICY/ADMINISTRATION

Concerns about assessment in public affairs, public policy, and public administration are not new. The beginning of assessment of public service programs was the 1941 study in Graham's *Education for Public Administration*, according to Cleary (1990). Jennings (1989, 439) writes of a report issued by NASPAA in 1987 that "the Task Force on the Future of NASPAA recommended that NASPAA include in its strategic plans a study to review present master's degree standards and the curricula of NASPAA institutions in order to determine whether the present and future needs of the public service are being well served." Jennings promotes the use of outcome assessments focusing on the knowledge, values, and skills acquired by public affairs, public policy, and public administration graduates and the effectiveness of those graduates in the workplace, and he warns against an assessment process that serves only as a mechanism for accountability. In order to have an impact on program operations, Jennings says, one "must involve faculty, students, alumni, and public service employers in a process of renewal to lead to educational improvements" (443). Helpful information is found in previous studies referenced in this manuscript. Table 1 on the following page summarizes recent articles useful to assessing performance in NASPAA-accredited programs and referenced in this manuscript.

The literature of higher education also addresses assessment. Huba and Freed (2000, 8) define assessment as "the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning." Another definition comes from Black and Wiliam (1998), who believe that assessment broadly includes all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning.

Higher education regional accreditation agencies surfaced partly to curtail the direct involvement of state legislators, an effort that led specialized accrediting

Table 1. Studies for Assessing Program Performance in NASPAA Graduate Programs

	Methodology	History of Assessments	Common Curriculum Components	Outcomes	Assessment Techniques	Findings
Jennings (1989)	Literature review.	Thorough history of assessments.	Outlined in paper.	Advocates outcomes assessments of knowledge, skills, and values expected of MPA graduates.	Information on use of surveys, testing, and assessment centers.	Assessments as a learning process for educational improvements.
Clery (1990)	Survey.		Did not find much difference in accredited vs. nonaccredited programs.			Thorough study of what MPA programs look like with questions for further study.
Roberts (2001)	Survey and case study application.				Stakeholder surveys.	Surveys of stakeholders to provide feedback to program.
Boyle and Whitaker (2001)	Case study.		Core MPA curriculum focusing on knowledge, values, and skills. Courses taught and sample of texts used.			Focused on the changing public sector and whether curriculum was meeting needs as was the focus of our curriculum review.
Durant (2002)	Case study.		Mission-driven capstone course for learning-based program development			Capstone course as useful outcome measure.
Williams (2002)	Case study.	Requirements for assessments in other fields.		Development of mission statement, objectives, and strategies.	Tracking indicators and measures using surveys and portfolios.	Study emphasizes the tradeoffs necessary for measures.
Breaux, Lynch, and Morris (2003)	Content analysis.		Core curriculum of 135 NASPAA programs.			Study found that, in spite of flexibility provided by mission-based accreditation, content of core curricula does not differ substantially.
Aristigueta and Gomes	Case study	Summary review of history.	Comprehensive curriculum.	Outcomes assessment chart as framework for assessment.	Surveys, demographic and academic data, performance appraisals.	Aligning of goals to outcomes and assessment tools is imperative. Allow time to learn and make program changes from the process.

bodies to adopt an outcomes approach to program evaluation (Huba and Freed, 2000). Competition also helped to trigger the need for assessment as three other factors were occurring: higher education institutions were competing with each other for students; foreign countries were producing well-prepared students as the job market was becoming more competitive and specialized; and employers were requiring students to have skills and experience when entering the job market. In order to demonstrate outcomes and compete in the various markets, there was and continues to be a need for systematic evaluation that can produce clear and interpretable results.

Although it has been established that assessment in higher education is necessary, resistance continues. Angelo (1999, 5) believes that a major reason assessment has been unpersuasive has to do with the "concept of assessment itself." More often than not, assessment is viewed as a necessary evil, something that must be done and is usually added to already heavy workloads. An attitude of resistance develops when assessment is seen as a mechanical and technical burden. Yet assessment is often a routine check-up mandated by external sources such as accrediting bodies, funding sources, or higher levels of an institution within which a program is housed. As Angelo (1999, 5) notes, "in general, already existing assessment techniques and methods are more than sufficient to meet the challenges we face. It's the ends toward which, and the ways in which, we use those tools that are the problem."

METHODS USED TO GUIDE AND ASSESS PERFORMANCE AT DELAWARE AND IN OTHER NASPAA PROGRAMS

An attempt to take these issues into consideration is made by the University of Delaware, whose program will be used as a case study and as one way of approaching the accreditation requirements, albeit not the only way. Let us begin by examining the description of the Delaware Model found in Denhardt et al. (1997), updated and paraphrased below:

The University of Delaware School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy has developed a model of public administration education that seeks to build upon the student's total experience in such a way that theory and practice are fully integrated. This effort is based not only in the curriculum, which seeks to integrate theory and practice in many of the same ways that other progressive public administration programs do, but also in the design and operation of the college itself.

The School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy is organized around three academic programs and five centers. The programs include a Master of Urban Affairs, a Master of Public Administration, and a Ph.D. in Urban Affairs and Public Policy. The centers include the

Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research, the Center for Community Research and Service, the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy, the Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering, and the Institute for Public Administration. The experience of working with faculty and staff on current public issues is an essential and invaluable part of graduate education in public administration at the University of Delaware. Pre-service MPA students are involved in research assistantships in the college's centers and directly with faculty, off-campus research assistantships or on-campus agency placements, and state legislative fellowships. In each case, an effort is made to involve students—with faculty and staff—in developing and executing projects of substantial benefit to state and local government in Delaware.

Although this is not the mission of the program (the mission may be found in Figure 1), it is directly reflected in the mission and hence drives the outcomes and methods for evaluation.

As in other public affairs, public policy, and public administration programs, multiple methods to guide and assess the program are used to assist in offsetting the deficiencies of a single performance indicator (see Roberts, 2001, and Williams, 2002, for example). Williams states that “truly sophisticated measures are very difficult to design for graduate programs” (46). Nonetheless, he sees utility in general indicators that provide data to suggest and inform decisions, even if they do not provide statistically defensive conclusions. (For further discussion on the tradeoff involved in the use of performance measures, see Williams, 2002).

In the last decade, the Delaware MPA faculty has participated in two strategic planning efforts and a comprehensive curriculum review beyond the NASPAA accreditation review, self-study, and site visit. The strategic planning resulted in a mission statement and the identification of goals. A year-long, comprehensive curriculum review in 1999, undertaken by a committee appointed by the program director, analyzed data from several sources including exit surveys, course enrollments, and results from a focus group of alumni. The committee also examined the curriculum of well-respected MPA programs throughout the nation. Guests such as Maureen Brown of the University of North Carolina, Paul Light of the Brookings Institution, and Michael Brintnall, then director of NASPAA, were invited to discuss with the faculty changes in the field and needed changes in the MPA curriculum. The question driving the curriculum review was, What should a new curriculum include in order to prepare students for the new public service? The goal was to identify conceptual knowledge as well as necessary skills. MPA faculty at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, held a similar discussion (see Boyle and Whitaker, 2001). The result of the necessary core knowledge, values, and skills were very similar for both programs. For a detailed

listing, please refer to Boyle and Whitaker (2001, 271). It is also interesting to note that, despite the flexibility that accompanies a mission-based accreditation, Breaux, Clynych, and Morris (2003) did not find much variation in the core curricula of the 135 MPA programs that they studied.

In addition to the strategic plans and curriculum reviews, the faculty discusses multiple reports containing informal and formal performance indicators annually:

- Faculty reviews progress of all students in the program.
- Faculty participation in student's analytical papers—the capstone experience in the University of Delaware's MPA program—provides MPA faculty with information beyond their classroom experience about the products of the program.

Figure 1. Program Mission and Goals—University of Delaware MPA

The mission of the University of Delaware's Master of Public Administration program is to provide diverse, talented graduate students with specific competencies for leadership and management, including the knowledge, skills, and values essential to accountable and effective practice. The MPA program contributes directly to solutions to public challenges of our times through research and public service projects that involve students in experiential learning. The program also seeks to develop relationships with practitioners, fostering a professional focus and approach to public administration and nonprofit management and furthering the values of the field.

The following eight goals accompany the mission:

1. Emphasize the values of the profession in coursework, publications, and professional activities.
2. Continue to enhance the excellence and diversity of our student body through recruiting efforts at colleges and universities in the region.
3. Maintain and continue to enhance a set of core courses that require students to master essential knowledge, skills, and values.
4. Maintain and continue to enhance a set of areas of specialization that include courses requiring students to master the essential knowledge, skills, and values of the field. Academic areas of specialization will be based upon active research, public services, and professional achievements of the faculty.
5. Provide students with experiential learning through the research and service centers of the college, especially as research assistants in the Institute for Public Administration, Center for Community Research and Service, Health Policy Research Group, and Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research.
6. Develop and maintain a nationally recognized internship program, integrated in and supported by the Institute for Public Administration.
7. Maintain and establish relationships with government and nonprofit organizations that contribute to the mission of the program
8. Encourage faculty and students to conduct applied research and public service, and to communicate the results of this research to both the practitioner and academic communities.

- Course evaluation summaries.
- The internship coordinator's annual reports and summaries of student placements. He also has regularly reported on student outcomes with the Presidential Management Internship (now Fellows) program.
- Admissions data are reported each spring including the number of applicants accepted, qualifications of those accepted, and which students did not accept our offers and, when known, why.
- Annual program entry and exit surveys.
- Annual curriculum reviews.
- Alumni survey of career placements
- Continuous feedback from the Urban Affairs Alumni Association.

Once we were comfortable with our mission and goals, which were updated as result of our strategic planning effort and curriculum review, we sought ways in which to assess our performance. More specifically, we contacted the Center for Teaching Effectiveness at the university for assistance with two questions: How do we know that students are learning, and how can we effectively assess learning?

The center was established in 1975 as a part of the university's teaching infrastructure, with the purpose of promoting the enhancement of learning and teaching at the university. Its primary goals are to

- Support the instructional improvement efforts of all members of university's teaching community.
- Facilitate the implementation of programs and activities that enrich and improve teaching and learning.
- Promote active engagement and innovation in teaching and learning.
- Cultivate an institutional climate that values, rewards, sustains, and renews excellence in teaching and learning.
- Act as a source of information and research on teaching and learning in higher education. (Source: Center for Teaching Effectiveness)

The Center provided reading materials and advice for this project and a listing of characteristics for effective assessment. These characteristics, which included the following, were used to guide our assessment (adapted from Angelo and Cross, 1993, and found at www.udel.edu/cte):

- Focuses on the processes as well as on the products of instruction.
- Assesses what we teach—and what we expect students to learn.
- Actively involves both teachers and students.
- Uses multiple and varied measures.
- Provides information for improving learning.
- Is carried out at various key points.
- Provides useful, timely feedback to those being assessed and those most affected.

- Is an intrinsically educational activity—one that reinforces and furthers the teaching and learning goals on which it focuses.

USING AND ALIGNING GOALS, ACTIVITIES, AND OUTCOMES FOR ASSESSMENT

In addition to formal program reviews, the MPA program director, school director, and faculty receive regular input from alumni, employers, and public service clients as a result of the public service orientation of the school, faculty, and affiliated centers. The Delaware model of education calls for and supports students working in internships, as Legislative Fellows, and in off-campus assistantships and on-campus research assistantships with frequent client interaction. Thus, feedback on students and graduates tends to be immediate and direct, albeit qualitative and anecdotal.

We needed systematic data to attest to what we were hearing. The program used the following guiding questions to determine the types of assessments needed:

- What is the purpose of the assessment?
- What do you hope to learn from this assessment?
- What will be assessed?
- Who will be assessed?
- How will it be assessed? Time frame for assessment?
- In what setting will the assessment be conducted?
- How will the results be analyzed?
- How will the results be used? How will the results be helpful to you and your students?
- To whom will the results be communicated?
- How will the results be communicated?

(Source: Center for Teaching Effectiveness)

Alignment is another paramount concept in mission-driven performance management. Paul LaMarca (2001, 1) provides an example of how alignment

Figure 2. Process for Development of Outcome Chart

1. Develop draft outcome chart (develop additional surveys to address outcomes).
2. Share draft outcome chart with faculty and ask for faculty comments.
3. Review draft outcome chart and make appropriate changes.
4. Pre-test survey instrument (review by select group of stakeholders and make appropriate changes).
5. Administer surveys.
6. Analyze data and prepare summary.

Table 2. Outcome Assessment Chart

Goals	Activities	Assessment Type	Intermediate Outcome	Assessment Type	End Outcomes
1. Emphasize values of profession	Courses, internship: research assistantships	Student exit survey	Internship	Alumni/employer survey	Graduates demonstrate values of the profession
2. Recruit diverse, talented students	Comprehensive recruitment program	Demographic and academic data from Graduate Student Office	An enriched program with diverse and talented students	Demographic and academic data from Graduate Student Office. Faculty and intern supervisor comments about students.	A racially and culturally diverse program
3. Maintain core courses	Offering of, and annual review of, core courses	Student exit survey, course description update, course evaluations	General knowledge base for general public administration skills	Alumni/employer survey	Knowledge to be effective in work environment
4. Enhance areas of specialization	Offering of and annual review of specialization courses	Student exit survey, course description update, course evaluations	Specific knowledge base for skills in area of specialization	Alumni/employer survey	Knowledge to be effective in work environment
5. Involve students in faculty research	Research assistantships	Student exit survey	Gain practical knowledge, foster ownership of projects	Alumni/employer survey	Better grasp of career interests/qualifications for positions
6. Maintain nationally recognized internship program	Internship seminar: internships	Student exit survey	Professional-level work experience in the field, student recruitment	Alumni/employer survey	Placement in chosen field
7. Maintain and establish relationships with government and nonprofits	Site visits, projects, research assistantships	Faculty workload, internship placements	Government agency visits to campus, off-campus instructors	Alumni/employer survey	Regional recognition, placement for students
8. Conduct applied research	Faculty publications, analytical papers	Student exit survey, faculty reviews	Publications, technical reports, presentations at conferences	Performance appraisals	National recognition

is conceived in the academic environment: “alignment refers to the degree of match between test content and the subject area content identified through state academic standards.” For purposes of this paper, it can be said that alignment refers to the degree of match between the program goals and assessment tools in measuring outcomes and ultimately the mission of the MPA program as required by NASPAA.

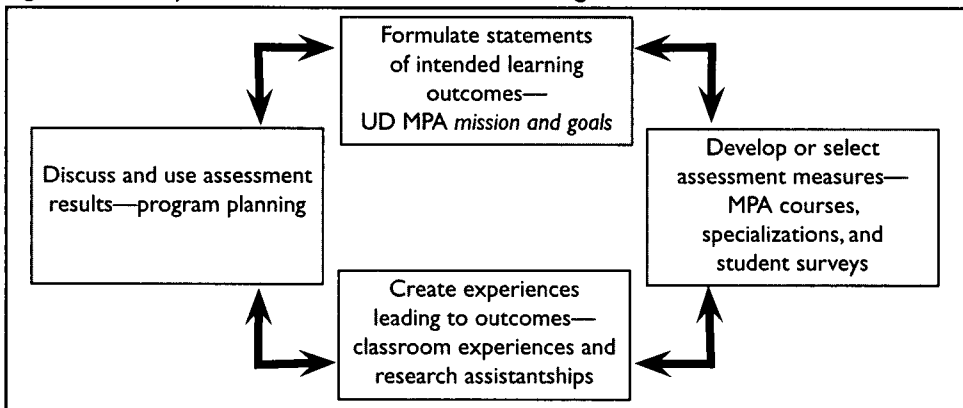
LaMarca (2001, 4) believes that “alignment is not only a methodological requirement but also an ethical requirement. It would be a disservice to students and schools to judge achievement of academic expectation based on a poorly aligned system of assessment.” In other words, it would be a disservice to students for the MPA program to not provide proper assessment techniques aligned with the mission and goals. Therefore, throughout the course of a program’s self-study, the theme of alignment should remain prevalent and should be defined as the degree of match between the program goals and assessment tools that lead toward measuring outcomes in accomplishing goals.

One of the first accomplishments in the self-study was an outcome assessment chart. The chart was developed as a way to visually display the alignment of the mission to the eight goals, to program activities, assessment type to measure the activities, intermediate outcomes expected from the activities, assessment type to measure the intermediate outcome, and expected end outcomes. The mission is not found in this chart because of its length, but may be found in Figure 1. Figure 2 describes the process that was undertaken to develop the chart. Table 2 displays the outcome assessment chart.²

OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

Huba and Freed’s assessment process (www.udel.edu/cte) is of an iterative nature. The process is circular to show balance in activity without giving impor-

Figure 3. Theory Becomes Practice for UD MPA Program



Source: Adapted from Huba and Freed (2000) as found in Bauer and Bauer (2002). A General Education Institute Session, July, University of Delaware, PowerPoint presentation. Retrieved 10-6-2003 from <http://www.udel.edu/cte>.

Figure 4. Benefits and Characteristics of Intended Learning Outcomes

- Intended learning outcomes for the basis of assessment at the course, program, and institutional levels.
- Intended learning outcomes provide direction for all instructional activity.
- Intended learning outcomes inform students about the intentions of the faculty.
- Intended learning outcomes focus on the learning resulting from an activity rather than on the activity itself.
- Intended learning outcomes reflect the institution's vision and the values it represents.
- Intended learning outcomes are in alignment at the course, academic program, and institutional levels.
- Intended learning outcomes focus on important, nontrivial aspects of learning that are credible to the public.
- Intended learning outcomes focus on skills and abilities central to the discipline and based on professional standards of excellence.
- Intended learning outcomes are general enough to capture important learning but clear and specific enough to be measurable.
- Intended learning outcomes focus on aspects of learning that will develop and endure but that can be assessed in some form now.

Source: Huba and Freed, 2000, 95-117.

Figure 5. Example of Alignment of Goals to Questions in Student Exit Survey

Goal 4: Maintain and continue to enhance a set of areas of specialization that include courses requiring students to master the essential knowledge, skills and values of the field. Academic areas of specialization will be based upon active research, public services, and professional achievements of the faculty.

Students are asked to rate "your satisfaction with the role of the specialization courses in helping you master essential knowledge, skills, and values in your specialization area using a 5-point scale from 5=very satisfied to 1=very dissatisfied (z=cannot rate)."

22. Availability of area of specialization you wanted to pursue.
23. Specialization courses in the area of specialization you chose.
24. Knowledge gained from specialization courses.
25. Applicability of specialization courses' subject matter to your projected career.
26. Mini-courses (1-credit courses) appropriate for area of specialization.

Note: Questions 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26 were all related to this goal and may be aggregated to measure performance.

Source: University of Delaware, School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, MPA Program.

tance to one step over another. Figure 3 shows the Huba and Freed assessment process as applied by the University of Delaware's MPA program.

Alignment requires the following fundamental ingredients: First is mission and goals, or according to the Huba and Freed model, statements of intended learning outcomes (see Figure 4). Second, there has to be a way to assess the goals, or according to Huba and Freed, a process of developing or selecting assessment measures. Recognizing that final results will take time to achieve, the MPA faculty have identified and agreed upon intermediate as well as end outcomes to measure the goals. The third ingredient would be a way to test the assessment tools, or to measure outcomes. For the purpose of the self-study, surveys were used (and expanded below) in addition to the curriculum review, and a focus group of alumni was created to discuss the perceived impact of the MPA curriculum on their careers.

SURVEYS AND ALIGNMENT TO MISSION AND GOALS

We used two primary instruments and will begin by discussing the student exit survey, which is given to students upon completion of the program. The data reveal overall student satisfaction with the program. Alignment began with the program's eight goals as the starting point and all survey questions were aligned with a program goal. For an example, refer to Figure 5, which demonstrates the alignment of goal 4 with survey questions.

Inservice, external stakeholder surveys are distributed to alumni, employers, and internship supervisors who are working in the field of public administration. The surveys are used to examine the level of importance of skills and coursework from the perspective of the practitioner. Second, the data are used to determine the effectiveness of the program goals based on the level of importance. As may be expected, we experienced a lower response rate from the in-service respondents than from the students. The data were aggregated among the three groups to allow for a more realistic picture of how the external stakeholders view the MPA program.

The final step in beginning alignment is linking all survey questions to the eight goals, or, in Huba and Freed's terms, using assessment results to improve learning. The same method of relating questions to mission and goal alignment that is used for the student exit surveys is also used for the external, in-service stakeholder surveys. The student exit survey had been reconstructed to correlate with the eight mission goals. The external stakeholder survey instrument was borrowed from Dr. Chris Grant of Georgia College and State University. Because of time constraints, it was not adapted to correlate with the MPA's eight goals; plans are underway to modify the survey.

PROGRAM CHANGES RESULTING FROM ASSESSMENTS

The most significant changes in the MPA program with a basis in program mission, goals, assessment, and the processes for guiding performance have been the following:

1. Changes in the required courses:
 - The statistics requirement changed from course to a course requirement to encouraging students to meet the requirement prior to matriculation, demonstrating competency by testing out of the requirement, or by taking advanced courses. This change came from student feedback provided through surveys and focus groups.
 - Nonprofit content was added to courses and the word nonprofit was added to several course titles to reflect students' desire for increased emphasis on nonprofits and to reflect our mission.
 - An information technology requirement of 3 credits was added with the scheduling of several mini-courses (1-credit courses) for students to select from to meet the requirement. These included Introduction to Information Technology, Virtual Government, Basics of Information Management, GIS and Public Policy, and Data Mining. This addition resulted from the curriculum review. Conversations with faculty, review of curricula at other schools, and discussions with Michael Brintnall and Maureen Brown particularly led to identifying the need to increase students' knowledge for managing information technology.
 - Organizational Theory and Administration changed to Organizations and Management to reflect the addition of organizational behavior and applications to this course. This change came from student feedback through student course evaluations.
2. Changes in areas of specializations:
 - Dropping the areas of international administration and environmental administration because of a dearth of research assistantships and, to some extent, a lack of MPA faculty in these areas.
 - Dropping personnel and labor relations and adding organizational leadership to better build upon current faculty and to center strengths such as in conflict resolution and leadership to better reflect changes in the field of personnel administration.
3. Identifying the need for additional assessment:
 - Tools to evaluate comprehensive learning (as opposed to perception, measured through surveys or course learning, measured through required exams and papers) were needed by the program faculty. A committee was assigned the responsibility of designing a tool to assess learning using the final requirement in the MPA program—the analytical paper—as the activity. The analytical paper assessment asked that, in addition to providing a grade for the academic paper, the committee

provide ratings to support the students' demonstrated skills. The skills included communication; planning, problem solving, and analytical ability; initiative and leadership; and quality of content. The form was pretested last year, and it is being used on a voluntarily by faculty to measure student learning.

The mission and goals of the program played a significant role in these deliberations. For example, the areas of specialization that were eliminated did not have the resources required by the Delaware model—for example, research assistantships—and therefore the MPA faculty agreed that the program should no longer offer them. The focus group and exit surveys provided support for keeping much of the required core of the program but did identify issues that had to be addressed in statistics and a need for courses on managing information technology. This led to changes in requirements in these areas as previously discussed.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following statements are intended to facilitate the process of assessing program performance in NASPAA graduate programs.

- Start the accreditation or assessment process early to allow for more time-consuming activities such as curriculum reviews and strategic planning.
- Make sure surveys are compatible with stated goals so that results provide performance information.
- Collect entry and exit surveys over long periods of time to track trends and allow for program improvements.
- Create and maintain an alumni tracking program in the department or school.
- Create and maintain a faculty tracking system for publications
- Use a variety of methods for assessment—i.e., surveys, focus groups, observations, and discussions.
- Use methods with greater probability of increased response rates to surveys. Options include telephone calls, surveys posted on the Web, mail surveys, and the option to fax survey responses.
- Encourage colleagues to make provisions for measurable outcomes.
- Use direct measures for student performance, such as research assistant ratings, course papers/exams, a final analytical paper requirement, presentations in the field, case studies, and internship supervisor evaluations.
- Use indirect measures for student performance, such as student, alumni, and employer surveys, a database containing statistics on admitted students, information from graduates, and information from internship supervisors and employers.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study finds themes echoing existing literature and it supports practices advocated earlier. For example, it concurs with Jennings' 1989 findings of assessments as a learning tool for educational improvements. Cleary in 1990 did not find much difference between accredited and nonaccredited programs. Although this study did not look at nonaccredited programs, it experienced consistency in core curriculum much as described by Breaux, Clynch, and Morris in 2003. Methods used for program assessment were similar to those used by Roberts (2001), Williams (2002), and Durant (2002), with the exception that the University of Delaware's MPA uses a final analytical paper rather than a capstone course. How this study differs is that it tries to demonstrate to the reader in a comprehensive manner the steps that one program took to meet the NASPAA reaccreditation requirements and to improve program performance by focusing on student learning.

More specifically, the research question is how to assess graduate program performance by demonstrating mission-driven results. One way in which the University of Delaware MPA program did this was through the creation of an outcome assessment chart that was meant to align mission and goals to assessment tools and outcomes. While it was shown to be effective in terms of determining mission and goal accomplishments, recommendations are made through the lessons we learned to encourage our colleagues to make provisions for measurable outcomes.

Student learning focuses on what students will learn. Learner-centered assessment thrives on the concept of student learning and has been developed to assess accordingly. The concept of student learning asks not, "What will I teach?" but rather, "What will my students learn?" Assessment that parallels this concept is meant to promote and diagnose learning and provide tools for program improvement. Student learning is assessed through coursework, research assistantships, internships, and the analytical paper (capstone assignment). In addition, the faculty meets once a year to discuss student progress.

In closing, encouragement is provided for examining MPA programs prior to reaccreditation. Much work can be done ahead of time. By allowing more time, the self-study may be used as an assessment tool for program improvements in addition to a tool for attaining reaccreditation.

NOTES

- 1 The terms objective and goal are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature. Some readers may prefer to use goals supported by measurable objectives.
2. The UD faculty chose the goals as the point of departure for the measures. Others may prefer to develop objectives and adhere to the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, and Time-related) format, stating outcomes and additional indicators in measurable terms. The assessment types in this chart are methods or instruments used to determine performance.

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