

COPRA Interpretations

(The following information pertains to the pre-2009 NASPAA Standards)

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“Five Faculty Rule” Workshop

October 28, 2003

Accreditation Institute, NASPAA Pittsburgh Conference

Is the “Five Faculty Rule” (Standard 5.1) still appropriate in an age of outcome measures?

NASPAA's Standard 5.1, which includes the language requiring five nucleus faculty, was the topic of a special workshop session of the Accreditation Institute. The session had its origin in a discussion hosted on the NASPAA Small Programs listserve. The purpose of the Accreditation Institute session was to introduce some of the issues that have arisen around the topic of the Five Faculty rule, listen to different viewpoints on the topic ([Click here to provide your views for posting on this website via email to copra@naspaa.org](mailto:copra@naspaa.org)), and explore some possible future changes to the standard.

The accreditation institute session focused on two issues: confusion about the existing standard and the possibility of altering the existing standard.

Confusion about the Existing Standard 5.1 (Faculty Nucleus)

Standard 5.1 currently states that the “...regular faculty should consist of a sufficient number of full-time faculty significantly involved with the program to support the set of teaching, research, and service responsibilities appropriate to the size and structure of the program. In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full-time persons.”

The “Self Study Instructions” to Standard 5.1 tell self study writers to demonstrate that their program has achieved a critical mass of faculty by “discuss[ing] such factors such as the depth and breadth of professional interest represented by the faculty; the opportunities for professional interaction among the faculty; and the opportunities for students to be exposed to the appropriate range of faculty viewpoints and content areas within major programs of study.” It then asks the program to provide “a summary listing for the faculty members employed full-time by the institution who have primary responsibility for the masters program being reviewed. This regular faculty should consist of a minimum of five (5) persons who are full time faculty members at the university and are significantly involved in the teaching and operation of the masters program being reviewed.”

The vagueness of the definition of faculty nucleus has troubled many programs, especially small ones. They wonder whether a particular faculty member is “significantly involved” enough to warrant inclusion in the nucleus faculty. Particularly difficult are those cases where a faculty member is attached to another department, but teaches one or more courses in the MPA or MPP program, or a faculty member who has heavy undergraduate or PhD teaching responsibilities. Some programs have developed tests, based on their mission and program, to assess whether each faculty member is significantly involved in the MPA or MPP program to warrant nucleus status. For an example of this approach, here is an excerpt from the University of Delaware's self study:

Some programs have developed more deductive tests of core faculty: they identify the number of different PhDs needed to cover the core curriculum with an appropriately qualified PhD in each main area of the core, and then identify the entire set of tasks necessary to operate a well-functioning MPA/MPP program: student recruitment, admissions, advisement, internship coordination, career services, records policy, curriculum coordination, etc. Then they look at who is actually involved in each of those teaching areas, and administrative/advisement areas, and identify their core faculty through that approach.

In short, COPRA currently provides no cookie cutter approach to defining five nucleus faculty, which creates some uncertainty for schools, but which also gives significant scope for each school to make its case regarding five core faculty, based on its own unique mission and circumstances.

The Accreditation Institute portion of the website now provides some “case law” examples of past COPRA decisions regarding five nucleus faculty. These cases are meant to be illustrative only, and while indicative of COPRA’s general approach to interpretation of Standard 5.1, they do not necessarily indicate how the Commission will interpret Standard 5.1 in other individual cases. (The Commission reviews programs in a mission-based framework, and each case is therefore unique.)

The Future of the Five Faculty Standard (5.1)

COPRA and NASPAA are reviewing all of the accreditation standards for professional masters degree programs in an effort to place more emphasis on outcomes. This is reflecting both the rising tide of interest in outcomes in higher education in general, and the more specific expectation by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation that recognized accrediting bodies should move away from input standards and focus more on outcomes in their reviews.

Viewed in this light, the Five Faculty Rule appears rather anachronistic, looking back at a time when quality was assessed more in terms of inputs than outcomes and performance. And in its present stark form (“In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five full-time persons”), it also appears arbitrary: why Five? Why not the Three Faculty Rule, or Seven? And yet, at NASPAA, for many years, there has been a shared consensus among both COPRA and many schools that five was not just an arbitrary number, but rather the result of considered expert reflection on how many people it really takes to run a good professional program, that is inherently multidisciplinary and often in a highly academic graduate setting where professional programs must struggle for identity and to provide special services to prepare students as professionals in public service. For many, “reform” of the Five Faculty rule is less about setting aside the language of the standard, than about articulating the long-standing tacit rationale for the Five Faculty rule that has existed behind the standard. But for others, the task is truly one of re-examining the entire of issue of how NASPAA looks at faculty quality, and whether there might be better ways, more closely related to outcomes and performance, of achieving that goal.

To begin the discussion of possible changes to Standard 5.1, a list of options discussed at the October 2003 Accreditation Institute has been posted on the NASPAA website.

Please email NASPAA at copra@naspaa.org if you would like to identify additional options or comment on already posted ones. **NASPAA and COPRA encourage programs and individuals of all viewpoints to participate in this important and ongoing discussion.**

Five Faculty Options for clarifying and/or changing Standard 5.1

(NB: This page is based on an Accreditation Institute session at the NASPAA Conference, October 2003, and is a discussion document only. It does not necessarily reflect the policies of COPRA or the NASPAA Standards Committee.)

1. No change. In essence, each school would then retain considerable scope to make its case regarding five core faculty, based on its own unique mission and circumstances. This would be at the cost of continued uncertainty about whether a program is likely to be able to prove it conforms to the standard.

2. Keep the “5” in the Faculty Nucleus Standard 5.1, but sharpen definition of faculty member in the Self Study Instructions to remove ambiguity about who counts, perhaps by COPRA supplying clearer “tests” for determining whether a faculty member is nucleus or not. For an example of a school that already does this, see <http://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/institute/rule/uofdelaware.asp> for document containing U Del approach). This approach would reduce uncertainty, but would not address the “arbitrariness” or the input nature of the current standard language.

3. Modify the 5 faculty minimum in Standard 5.1 with clear definitions for mission-based or performance-based exceptions. This would probably allow more small programs to come forward for accreditation, but might chip away at the principle that 5 is the minimum critical mass.

4. Toughen the existing 5 Faculty Nucleus Standard by supplementing the 5 with additional language concerning expectations of faculty performance/quality.

5. Remove the number “5” from Standard 5.1’s faculty nucleus language and replace with alternate mission, functional, performance-oriented, and/or outcomes-oriented language. For example, the standards language could address faculty nucleus in terms of functional adequacy (ability to recruit, admit, instruct, advise, and place students in a professional program, for example), and disciplinary breadth necessary to cover the core curriculum, might be a less input-oriented approach. It could take a more mission or performance basis: “sufficient number of faculty to fulfill its mission” or “faculty nucleus of sufficient size to develop in students the full set of competencies necessary to perform as professionals in the public and non-profit sectors.” The language could also be explicitly performance-based: “to achieve excellence in coverage of the core curriculum and specializations.”

“CASE LAW” on Standard 5.1

The following section presents two cases of recent programs that were identified as having conformance issues with the Standard 5.1 (the “five faculty rule”). Each case presents excerpts from the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation’s Interim Report, the Site Visit Team report, and the final COPRA decision letter. The reader will note that the faculty nucleus concern is first identified in the interim report letter to the program that COPRA issues following its October review meeting. The site visit team then examines the issue as part of its early Spring visit and submits its observations to COPRA in the site visit report. Finally, the COPRA communicates its decision about the program’s conformance to Standard 5.1, along with all other standards, in its final accreditation letter. It is important to remember that the faculty nucleus issue should not be taken out of context of the overall review process: it is seldomly the only issue identified in the interim report, and is generally not the only non-conformity that gives rise to a non-

accreditation decision. It is often embedded in a set of conformity issues regarding the program's coherence and sufficient resources to achieve its mission.

CASE NO. 1:

This program did not receive accreditation, in part because of lack of conformance with Standard 5.1:

Excerpt from COPRA's Interim Report:

Item 4: Standard 5.1 Faculty Nucleus

Standard 5.1 requires that "there must be a faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. . . In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full-time persons." The Self Study Report shows that there are four full-time faculty members. Moreover, the information on p. X regarding teaching assignments indicates that two faculty carry the primary teaching responsibilities with at least one faculty member, -----, teaching very little in the MPA program. These data suggest that there is not a sufficient faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. The Commission requests additional information demonstrating that the program has achieved a critical mass of faculty.

Excerpt from the Site Visit Report:

Item 4. Standard 5.1 Faculty Nucleus

Standard 5.1 requires that "there must be a faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. . . In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full-time persons." In the Self Study Report, the MPA program indicates that there are four full-time faculty; two of these members carry the program's primary teaching responsibilities and one teaches very little in the program. COPRA's Interim Report suggests "that there is not a sufficient faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program." And, the Commission requested additional information to demonstrate that the MPA program has the minimum nucleus of five faculty members.

In its response to COPRA's Interim Report, the MPA program provided descriptions of how four faculty members (Professors D, E, F, and G) contribute to the program through thesis advising, involvement in the self-study report, supervising students in the capstone course, etc.

During the site visit, the Team paid careful attention to this question. The SVT Team asked members of the faculty exactly how they were involved in the MPA program, and it looked carefully at program records to determine faculty participation in program development, course instruction, student advisement, internship/job placements, etc. In addition, the Team also discussed this issue in individual discussions with Professors A & B. Thus, after a careful and comprehensive review of this particular question, the SVT must concur with the assessment contained in COPRA's Interim Report: There is not a sufficient faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. The SVT believes that Professors A & B do clearly qualify as part of the faculty nucleus: In fact, these two faculty members are intimately involved in almost all aspects of the program— from program admissions, through course delivery, to alumni relations. A third faculty member, Professor C, is also an active member of the program's nucleus. However, the other faculty members identified in the SSR are not as involved in the teaching, research, and service aspects of the program. Although these four faculty members are on program committees (related to admissions, the development of the self-study report, etc.), their activities and in some cases their statements to the SVT Team, indicated that they do not "accept primary responsibility for the professional graduate program." Two of the faculty are housed in

other departments and they do not have much (if any) regular contact with current MPA students or program graduates. A third member (Professor E) did provide extensive, invaluable support for the MPA program in the past; but he retired from the university some time ago. Although Professor E continues to provide valuable advise and guidance, he does not qualify as a regular, full-time faculty member. Indeed, the SVT believes that there are currently two faculty members who are carrying the "lion's share" of almost all of the program's activities. Since, one of these faculty members (Professor B) is retiring from the university this summer, that means that the program's faculty nucleus will be even smaller. The SVT believes that the MPA program needs to provide the necessary faculty support to develop and sustain a quality program.

Final Decision letter from COPRA (non-accreditation):

"The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) has determined that your Masters of Public Administration degree program has specific non-conformities with NASPAA Standards. Attached is a report of the specific non-conformities on which the Commission's decision is based.

Standard 3.3 requires the 'faculty and/or administrator exercises initiative, and substantial determining influence' over the program. The Commission has found that the Director and/or the core faculty do not exercise substantial determining influence over the program.....Additionally, the SVT reports that major decisions and polices are made by a group called the Core Faculty of which only two are clearly public administration/policy faculty.

Standard 5.1 requires that 'there must be a faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full-time persons.' The Commission has found that there is not a sufficient faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the MPA program. The SVT reports that only two faculty members clearly qualify as part of the faculty nucleus.

Standard 5.3 states that 'the involvement of practitioners is integral to the activities of a professional masters degree program.' The SVT reports that the program utilizes some practitioners as guest speakers but there is very little evidence that practitioners actually teach in the program or participate more directly in program activities.....

Standard 8.1 requires that 'the Program shall have financial resources sufficient to support its stated objectives.' The Commission has found that the program does not have sufficient financial resources to support its mission...."

CASE NO. 2:

This program was of initial concern to COPRA regarding the number of faculty in the nucleus, but the school's response and site visit report response satisfied the Commission, and it was reaccredited.

Excerpt from COPRA's Interim Report:

"Standard 5.1 states, 'There must be a faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. This regular faculty should consist of a sufficient number of full time

faculty significantly involved with the program to support the set of teaching, research and service responsibilities appropriate to the size and structure of the program. In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full time persons.'

The Self Study Report notes that the number of students has been increasing over time, although it is not clear whether this is due to the addition of the Online program or not. The Self Study Report also notes that one faculty will be retiring, and one new full-time, tenure-track faculty position will be added in 2002-2003. The Commission requests an explanation of what the resulting number of faculty involved with the program will be, and how that number is sufficient to support the teaching, research, and service responsibilities of both the current and anticipated future increases in program size.

This is especially important in light of the increasing proportion of graduate courses containing 30 or more students, and undergraduate courses taken for graduate credit containing 40 or more students. For example, the percentage of all courses with 30-39 students increased from 15% in 1998-99 to 40% in 2000-01.

Excerpt from the Site Visit Report :

Item 4: Standard 5.1 (Faculty Nucleus)

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation noted that Standard 5.1 states, 'There must be a faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. This regular faculty should consist of enough full-time faculty significantly involved with the program to support the set of teaching, research and service responsibilities appropriate to the size and structure of the program. In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full-time persons....' The Self Study Report also notes that one faculty will be retiring, and one new full-time, tenure-track faculty position will be added in 2002-2003. The Commission requested an explanation of what the resulting number of faculty involved with the program will be, and how that number is sufficient to support the teaching, research, and service missions of the program. For example, the percentage of graduate-only courses with 30-39 students increased from 15 percent in 1998-99 to 40 percent in 2000-01."

...The MPA program replied that the number of faculty in the program remains the same as reported in the self-study -- eight core faculty members, one of whom is a fulltime faculty member on half-time retirement (Dr. A) and one of whom is serving in a campus administrative position but is scheduled to return to the department full time in Fall 2004 (Dr. B). In addition, the department is currently recruiting for a full-time faculty member to begin an assignment in Fall 2003 and has been authorized to recruit for another full-time faculty member next year to begin an assignment in Fall 2004. It is anticipated that both of these additional positions will be filled before any of the current fulltime core faculty retire.

The site-visit team found that this is a serious issue. We found that all of the regular faculty members have extremely demanding teaching and service duties. The university system requires a 15-unit work load each semester, 12 units for teaching and 3 units for advising and service. Based on this, fulltime faculty members are responsible for a 4-course teaching load per semester (frequently reduced by "assigned time" allocations for administrative responsibilities and occasionally for research activities) and for service activities such as student advising and committee assignments. Despite their heavy teaching and advising responsibilities, the faculty performs these tasks with dedication – most class assignments and examinations require critical thinking and effective communication, which are carefully assessed by the faculty, who hold their students to very high standards. However, they are stretched very thin.

Both the dean of the school and the university's provost assured us that the MPA program shall be given two additional positions (one this year and one next year) and that retiring faculty shall be replaced. The dean expressed his belief that to sustain the program at a satisfactory level, the student-faculty ratio (full-time equivalent students divided by full-time equivalent regular faculty) of the on-campus MPA program

should be lowered from 23/1 to 19/1....”

Excerpt from COPRA’s Accreditation Decision Letter (7 year accreditation)

On behalf of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that your Master of Public Administration program has been found to be in conformity with NASPAA Standards. Your program will be reaccredited for seven years...

Please note that the Commission will review each of your annual reports to determine progress toward implementation, and they will become a permanent part of your folder for your next accreditation review.

Faculty Nucleus

University of Delaware

B. Faculty Nucleus

The MPA faculty appointment policy defines the nucleus faculty as those who regularly teach at least one course per year in the MPA program; participate in MPA student advisement and the supervision of MPA students on analytical papers, theses, or applied research and public service projects; and contribute to the effective operation of the program through participation in faculty meetings, area of specialization committees, and other program-building activities will be considered nucleus faculty for NASPAA accreditation purposes and as core faculty for program governance purposes. This designation refers to those individuals holding all types of faculty appointments including secondary faculty, public service faculty, tenure-line faculty, joint appointments within the School, and joint appointments with University of Delaware units outside of the School (such as faculty in the Department of Political Science and International Relations).

Of the 22 core faculty members, ten are tenure line and twelve are public service faculty. Included in those 22, one is the MPA Director (not an administrative designation), one is the IPA Director, and one is the School Director (see faculty nucleus table on next page). Previously, public service faculty members were classified as professional staff with secondary faculty appointments. However, as of September 1, 2001 the University recognized public service faculty as non-tenure faculty with a majority of their workload committed to public service and nine of the current core faculty converted to this new category at the time. (A definition of public service faculty is contained in the UD Handbook’s Personnel Policies for Faculty.) The chart on the next page contains the 22 members of the nucleus faculty.

Faculty Nucleus

Name	Rank & Title	Tenure Status	Administrative Unit	Degree & Field
M. Aristigueta	Associate Professor and MPA Director	Tenured	The School of UA & PP	DPA Public Administration
D. Auger	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Political Science

K. Curtis	Associate Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Anthropology
K. Denhardt	Associate Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Political Science and Public Administration
B. Dworsky	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	M.A. Political Science
J. Flynn	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ed.D. Educational Leadership
E. Freel	Instructor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	M.Ed College Counseling
E. Jacobson	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	MPA Financial Management
J. Johnson	Associate Professor	Tenured	Political Science	Ph.D. Political Science
W. Latham	Associate Professor	Tenured	Economics	Ph.D. Economics
P. Leland	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Urban Affairs & Public Policy
J. Lewis	Associate Professor and IPA Director	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Public Administration
A. Loessner	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Higher Education
M. Palley	Associate Professor	Tenured	Political Science	Ph.D. Political Science
J. Raffel	Messick Professor and School Director	Tenured	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Political Science
J. Rha	Assistant Professor	Tenure-track	Consumer Studies	Ph.D. Consumer & Textile Sciences, Organizational Leadership
P. Ross	Assistant Professor	Non-Tenure Track	The School of UA & PP	M.A. Public Administration
P. Solano	Associate Professor	Tenured	The School of UA & PP	Ph.D. Government & Politics
R. Sylves	Professor	Tenured	Political Science	Ph.D. Political Science
D. Tuttle	Instructor	Non-Tenure	The School of UA & PP	MPA Agency Management
L. Ware	Louis L. Redding Professor	Tenured	The School of UA & PP	J.D.
R. Wilson	Associate Professor	Tenured	MPA	Ph.D. Demography

Source: University of Delaware, NASPAA Self-Study report, 2003, pages 49-50.