

NASPAA Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Health Care Organizations, Management and Leadership

Background and Purposes

The NASPAA Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Health Care Organizations, Management, and Leadership ("Guidelines") respect the educational challenges presented by the breadth and diversity of the health care sector. A wide array of skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes is essential for success of health care leaders and managers. These guidelines are intended to stimulate exploration and innovation in curriculum design and content. They are not requirements for accreditation. Yet, these Guidelines are also based on the assumption that there are core "essential elements" that characterize health care organizations and their managers and differentiate them from most other organizations. Thus, any graduate professional education program for managers and/or leaders of health care organizations should reflect a fundamental body of knowledge.

"Graduate professional education" includes concentrations or tracks within graduate degree-granting programs (e.g., concentrations within Masters of Public Administration or Masters of Business Administration), and non-degree-granting certificate programs offered by academic departments or schools. For the purpose of improving education, without stifling creativity or innovation in the field of health care management education, the following Guidelines are presented:

Section 1: Mission, Program Objectives, and Structure

Graduate professional education programs in health care organizations, management, and leadership, serve different audiences and seek different ends. Thus, a program should have a clear written statement of its educational philosophy, mission, objectives and strategies to guide decisions about curriculum, faculty, degree requirements, and instruction. The statement should be included in all of the program's literature and referenced in advertisements.

The statement of mission, objectives, and strategy should identify:

- the general types of positions for which the program attempts to prepare its graduates (for example, leaders or managers of health plans, hospital systems, and health care agencies of federal, state, and local governments);
- the population from which students are drawn (for example, pre-service, in-service, local, national);
- the relative educational emphasis on, for example, theory, practice, leadership, public policy, organizational management, quantitative analytical/policy skills.

The faculty and administration should have a clear understanding of the program's compatibility with the mission of the host department or school and the program's relationships with other graduate professional education programs in the host department or school (if any). The structure of health care management programs can take on a variety of forms within the university. A careful assessment of resource stability, ability to draw on interdisciplinary resources, and intellectual compatibility with a host department are factors that should be considered in determining the placement of a health care management program within the university structure.

Section 2: Program Offerings and Requirements

Clear and precise representation of specialized offerings is imperative. As evidenced in "Section 3: Program Elements," health care management encompasses a significant range of subject matter.

Therefore, a minimum level of educational offerings dedicated specifically to the health care sector is critical for a program to accurately represent that it is providing graduate professional education in health care organizations, management, and leadership. Elective courses should be used to enable students to move beyond generic health care course work and to specialize in substantive knowledge areas.

1. A Masters in Public Administration or Affairs (MPA) with a Concentration in Health Care Management should include a minimum of 36 semester hours with a minimum of 12 semester hours within a health care concentration (4 courses focusing primarily on the unique essential elements of the health care sector listed below).

2. A Graduate Certificate in Health Care Management should have a minimum of 12 semester hours. Non-degree granting certificate programs must be sensitive to the foundational knowledge acquired in a degree program. Certificate programs can address the need for foundational knowledge through several mechanisms, including admissions requirements, courses, and assignments

Section 3: Program Elements

A. Format

For the purpose of these guidelines, separate courses do not need to be established for each element. Rather, within the curriculum, the elements may be addressed through any format appropriate to match the needs and resources of the offering institution. These guidelines are intended to allow flexibility and encourage creative delivery of this subject matter. It is acceptable to assemble a health care management curriculum by drawing upon courses originating in different disciplines such as anthropology, communications, health sciences, management, marketing, psychology, public administration, social work, and sociology, even though many functional discipline content areas are not "specific" to any one sector but can be related to any one of the sectors with examples and exercises.

B. Content

Although it is suggested above that a health care concentration should include a minimum of 12 semester or equivalent focusing primarily on the elements and skills unique to the health care sector, it is advised that the core MPA courses also include subject matter related to the health care sector. Because of the increased blurring of the sectors, it is equally important for professionals employed by government and the private sector to understand the health care sector itself. The changing relationship between the sectors should be included in the lecture materials, case exercises, assigned readings, and research topics throughout the curriculum.

C. Internship

If an MPA program requires an internship, students who choose the health care concentration should be placed in an agency or organization that will give them the most knowledge and experience in working with the health care sector.

D. Essential Elements

The following elements are divided into two groups. First, there are elements considered peculiar or unique to health care organizations. These elements should be addressed in the curricula of all programs that claim to provide graduate professional education in health care organizations, leadership, and/or management. Specific prescriptive approaches and requirements within these essential elements, however, are purposely avoided in order to foster innovation in the field and to preserve flexibility to pursue different educational program missions. Second, there are elements that are not unique or peculiar to the health care sector but are still important for effective management of health care organizations. Both sections are intended to communicate the nature of what students should learn. The following elements are unique to the health care sector.

1. History, Values, Ethics and Philosophies of Health Care Organizations: Health care management programs should place health care organizations in the context of our democratic society. The history,

values, ethics, and philosophies of health care organizations are necessary for understanding the role of health care organizations in civil society and democratic processes. It is also useful in understanding the challenges faced by health care leaders and managers. But, this essential element is especially important to the balance between theory and practice in the health care management field and in understanding relationships between organizations in the health care sector and in other sectors.

The curriculum should address the moral and ethical issues and dilemmas faced by health care organizations, their boards, and staff. Critical thinking skills are essential because of the complex regulatory and competitive environment in which leaders and managers of health care organizations operate. Operating in the public trust requires elevated standards of both the duty of loyalty to the health care organization's mission and a duty to care for the public's best interests in the execution of that mission.

2. Health Care Management: Programs should cover the management challenges unique to health care organizations, and provide students with the information and skills to manage in the complex health care environment. The distinct characteristics of health care organizations (public, nonprofit, and for-profit) and the wide range of settings (from large academic medical centers to small community hospitals, independent physician practices, and group health clinics) require students to develop a set of skills in which to navigate each aspect of the system and to interact with populations such as trustees, employees, providers and patients.

3. Health Care Law: Programs should include curriculum content that addresses the legal context within which health care organizations operate including a dynamic regulatory environment. An understanding of the responsibilities imposed by statute and the rationale for society's willingness to grant sanctions to health care organizations should be included in an academic program's basic curriculum. This element should address, for example, concepts of legal liability, government regulation of private insurance, and the organization of the health care enterprise (staff privileges, contract and employment, tax-exempt status, financial relationships, and antitrust).

4. Health Care Policy: Leaders and managers of health care organizations operate in a complex political and policy-making environment that conflates multiple stakeholders from the public and private sectors. Programs should incorporate theories and concepts from public administration, political science, and economics to explore the policy-making process. Attention should be given to America's mixed system of public and private finance and delivery; the implications of this configuration; and the various public and private initiatives to lower costs, improve quality, and expand access to care.

5. Health Care Economics: Health care organizations in the United States operate in a market economy. They are subject to market forces and must be alert to both macro and micro economic principles to maximize their effectiveness. Revenue generation has become increasingly important for health care organizations and the decisions faced by health cares in determining such things as product and service mix, pricing, market opportunities, and competition with for-profit firms will affect the organization's alignment with its mission.

6. Health Care Finance: Programs should provide coursework which focuses on the management of health care resources. Issues such as asset control, accounting practices, revenue collection, funding, and cost control are critical to effective leadership of health care organizations. Our unique financing and insurance system with active involvement from government, third party payers and employers requires students to understand the impact of such complexity on the mission and viability health care providers. Programs should aid students in the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will make them effective leaders and managers in the articulation of resource needs.

The following elements are not unique or peculiar to the health care sector but nevertheless should be included in courses in health care management concentrations/certificate programs, and also should be

integrated into mainstream courses in public administration, business administration and other professional graduate degree programs.

1. Human Resources Management: Nearly two-thirds of expenditures in most health care organizations comprise employee costs. This places a premium on employee recruitment, retention, planning, and budgeting. Employees of health care organizations often are highly educated and highly trained individuals. Successful managers require a skill-set that includes knowledge of professional relations, labor relations, and the elements of and barriers to effective communication.

2. Organization Theory and Behavior: Health care managers require a thorough grounding in organization theory and behavior. The organizational environment (comprising hospitals, managed care organizations, nursing homes, home health agencies, etc.) is highly complex. Government regulation and professional self-regulation are key determinants of organizational configuration and operational boundaries and practices. Managers must be able to respond to profound social, economic, and political changes in their internal and external environments.

3. Information Management and Technology: Health care managers and leaders should be able to integrate current information technology into the processes of planning, policy analysis, management and evaluation in health care organizations. Decisions about which information technology applications should be used, and strategies for keeping pace with technological change, are examples of appropriate elements in a health care curriculum.

4. Budgeting and Resource Management: Effective management of organizational resources is a critical responsibility of health care executives. Budgeting assists those involved with operations in setting and achieving cost and revenue expectations, and planning for capital improvements. The goals of resource management are ensuring that organizational assets are utilized with optimal effectiveness and efficiency.

5. Strategic Planning and Marketing: Strategic planning and marketing have become staples of successful management of health care organizations. Much of this is due to competition, government regulation, demographic change, technological innovation, and rising costs of health care. Managers must have a thorough grasp of the planning process, the planning environment, competitive strategies (vertical and horizontal integration, diversification, joint ventures and strategic alliances) and marketing concepts.

6. Quantitative Decision-Making: Health care managers need to understand how to apply quantitative models and methods to managerial and policy decisions. Topics should include the analysis and use of statistics in forecasting, simulation, and decision-making.