

# Seeking the Holy Grail: Assessing Outcomes of MPA Programs

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## ABSTRACT

NASPAA accreditation standards, university assessment processes, and program management have put an increased emphasis on outcome and performance measurement in MPA and related programs. Simple yet comprehensive measures are not easily found or are very difficult and expensive to create. Based on the trade-offs, this article proposes information that may be collected as a byproduct of MPA program operation and from supplemental processes. Use of these multiple measures can serve well in assessing MPA programs and in guiding their performance. Examples are given from a specific MPA program.

Many public administration and public affairs programs are caught between the pressure to develop and utilize outcome and performance measures and the lack of knowledge about or nonexistence of clear and accepted measures. We have searched extensively for the Holy Grail of outcome measures, but this search has often been followed by feelings of disappointment in what has been found. Still, the academic faith trudges forward, believing that social scientists should certainly be able to develop that elusive evaluative gauge.

Many panels have addressed the topic of outcome measures at meetings of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). Numerous workshops over the years have explored the accreditation standard requiring "[that] the program shall assess its students' performance and the accomplishment of its objectives," including a statement of mission, "an orderly process for developing appropriate strategies and objectives," "assessment procedures and measures," and use of "information about its performance in directing and revising program objectives, strategies and operations" (NASPAA, 2000). NASPAA has had a Committee on Outcomes Assessment and it has published a *Symposium on Outcomes Assessment* (1992). Useful ideas have resulted from these efforts over the years, but there still seems to be a search for that Holy Grail of outcome assessment that captures the essence, gives insight to much, is on target, and has no flaws. This article reviews some of these efforts, proposes the use of simpler and more practical measures, and presents a well-developed system that uses multiple measures.

## DON'T LET THE PERFECT DRIVE OUT THE GOOD

NASPAA accreditation standards, university assessment processes, and program management have put an increased emphasis on outcome and performance measurement. At the same time, there has been an expansive but developing body of literature about the difficulty of developing good measures that will withstand the scrutiny of validation and statistical analysis. But it is very hard to develop perfect measures that encapsulate the complexity of MPA programs, and the search for the perfect measure may

be accompanied by a danger of driving out a good measure. Rather than search for the Grail—the perfect measure—perhaps public affairs and administration programs should adjust their expectations and be largely content with practical measures that will serve well enough.

In the following sections, this article will report on the approach and experience with various measures in the master of public administration program at West Virginia University. However, this will not be a set of perfect measures with high validity and reliability or highly sophisticated methodology. I cannot offer those perfect outcome or performance measures for which many have been searching but which many have not found.

The simple reason for using less than perfect measures is either that perfect ones do not exist or that they are so difficult, expensive, and time consuming as not to be workable. It is important to realize that tradeoffs are necessary. To be useful and workable, an approach does not have to be perfect. Something, I argue, is better than nothing.

To set the conceptual basis for the approach that will be presented, the key tradeoffs need to be recognized and discussed. These points are based in experience. The tradeoffs are summarized in Table 1.

Truly sophisticated specific measures are very difficult to design for graduate programs. However, general indicators may be used; these are data that suggest and inform but do not provide statistically defensible conclusions. The analytical methods of

the disciplines represented in public affairs and administration may not be as useful as methods based in the operation of the various programs.

The issues of cost, time, and effort can be critical in outcome measurement. It would be very expensive and time consuming to develop the kind of new data and information that would be required for high-quality measures. The opportunity costs would be less and the evaluative insights almost as good if existing information and data were used. Most programs already create and report extensive information that can be used for this additional purpose.

Another tradeoff is between high quantitative measurement validity and workability. Selected but lower-quality quantitative data combined with informed qualitative judgments may actually result in higher measurement validity. These data are not suitable for statistical manipulation and measurement. Judgmental evaluation based in experience may capture better the meaning of the data for the program.

The search for single or summary indices that measure much is particularly elusive. A number that encapsulates the critical outcome or reports full performance is an example of the Grail sought but never found. Multiple but poorer measures often help to offset mutual limitations. And finally, some measures are wickedly hard to do and intractable to complete; other measures—tame but still very helpful—are easier and more manageable. The terms “wicked” and “tame” are adapted from Rittel and Webber (1973), who apply the words to public poli-

**Table 1 Outcome and Performance Measure Tradeoffs**

Specific, sophisticated measures	vs.	General indicators
Analytically based	vs.	Operationally based
Development of new data and information	vs.	Use of existing data and information
High measurement validity	vs.	Workable
Largely quantitative	vs.	Qualitative based on selected quantitative
Statistically manipulable	vs.	Judgmental evaluation
Summary indices or measures	vs.	Multiple measurements
Wicked (very hard, intractable measures)	vs.	Tame (relatively easy, manageable measures)

cy problems. Tame policy problems, such as paving roads, lend themselves well to solutions arising from common sense and professional expertise. Wicked policy problems, however, evidence no ready solutions and are typically characterized by temporary and imperfect resolutions. Wicked problems usually enjoy no definitive formulation and no commonly accepted evaluative criteria. In the same way, high-quality outcome measures are wicked, with no ready solution, no definitive formulation, and no accepted criteria.

Noting parallel developments in the decision-making literature can also make this point. Because most in public administration will be familiar with decision making theories and arguments, the concepts there may be used to illuminate the discussion on outcome measures. In many ways, the outcome measures that are sought are similar to the rational or synoptic model in the decision-making literature. The same kind of limitations apply: not all data can be collected, there is bounded rationality, it is not clear how the data should be analyzed and ranked, there are inherent assumptions, and so forth. In the decision-making literature, the limitations of the rational model encouraged the development of alternative approaches and concepts such as Simon's satisficing, Lindblom's incremental model, Etzioni's mixed scanning, and March and Olsen's garbage can model (Gortner, 1997; Simon, 1945; Lindblom, 1959, 1979; Etzioni, 1967, 1986; March and Olsen, 1979). The argument of this paper is that many approaches to outcome measures in public administration programs have the same limitations as the rational model of decision making. The more productive and effective approaches in outcome measures may be those that adjust to the context, information, and usefulness inherent in graduate education in public affairs and administration.

Prior to presenting a system that responds to these points, it will be helpful to link into other efforts to develop outcome measures—other efforts to find the Grail.

#### THE TRAIL TO THE GRAIL

Outcome measures for public administration and public affairs programs are but one application in a

wide variety of efforts centered on outcome and performance measurement.

Professors and practitioners of public administration will be familiar with the large and developing literature on performance measurement in budgeting. The provisions of the federal Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 require agencies to define missions and desired outcomes and to measure performance at each organizational level. As part of this system, agencies are to collect sufficiently complete and accurate data and to use performance information. The National Performance Review (NPR) includes similar efforts although in a less comprehensive form. Many of the NPR efforts are related to total quality management (TQM) concepts, tools, and techniques, many of which also are data- and performance-based and which have an International Accreditation Forum for the certification and registration of quality systems ([www.ibpinetsp.com.br/iaac/ia](http://www.ibpinetsp.com.br/iaac/ia)).

Another concurrent stream in the search for and use of outcome measures is the assessment system—and the office to conduct such—in many universities. The Commission on Colleges (and the five regional accrediting associations such as the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and the Southern Association of College and Schools) expects each institution and program to adopt an assessment plan responsive to its mission and needs. In so doing, they urge the assessment of outcomes (North Central, 1997). Most universities have assessment systems in various stages of development and have individuals responsible for assessment. For example, Oregon State University and the University of South Dakota have Web sites that provide extensive information on their assessment activities ([www.orst.edu/aa/accreditation/handbook/standards/std022.html](http://www.orst.edu/aa/accreditation/handbook/standards/std022.html) and [www.usd.edu/admin/vppa/assessment](http://www.usd.edu/admin/vppa/assessment)).

One reason that the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) in NASPAA has focused on outcome measures lies in its own accreditation. Just as public affairs and administration master's programs have standards that must be met for accreditation, so COPRA has to meet the policy and procedures of the body that approves general and special-

ized accrediting organizations—and, yes, COPRA has had to write a self-study on itself. The body that recognizes accrediting organizations is the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2000). CHEA requires that the accrediting organization encourage institutions to relate quality indicators to planning, assessment, and improvement strategies. Persons interested in assessment and accreditation in higher education would be well advised to review CHEA's bibliography on these topics ([www.chea.org/Commentary/biblio.cfm](http://www.chea.org/Commentary/biblio.cfm)).

In 1988, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges issued a statement of principles on student outcome assessment. The seven principles stated that assessment should focus primarily on effectiveness of academic programs and the improvement of student learning and performance, be based in incentives rather than regulations, have faculty collaboration, be appropriate to the institution, use multiple methods, not impose costly programs, and be linked to strategic planning and program review processes with the institution ([www.asee.org/pubs/html/assessment.htm](http://www.asee.org/pubs/html/assessment.htm)).

Other fields and disciplines are undergoing the same developmental efforts for outcome measures. They are also confronting the same sorts of issues and concerns. The American Society for Engineering Education, for example, has issued an *Assessment White Paper* addressing these matters. A Joint Task Force on Engineering Education Assessment was formed to review the current status of higher education assessment activities and propose a comprehensive process that would lead to improvements in assessment. The matrices that they developed for engineering education assessment measures are available at [www.asee.org/pubs/html/assessment/htm](http://www.asee.org/pubs/html/assessment/htm). Another example is the outcomes assessment process in the accreditation of master's programs in library and information studies ([sils.pratt.edu/ala/outcomes](http://sils.pratt.edu/ala/outcomes)).

Although some professional associations, institutions, and programs have designed specific systems and have specified measures, there is still much development and flux in the concepts and their application. The search for the Grail continues.

The programs affiliated with NASPAA are facing the same kind of movement toward outcome measures and assessment as other fields. Specifically, how do NASPAA schools do on outcome measures? Based on limited experience, I have developed some impressions. My assessment is not based on a scientific review or even a survey, but rather my participation in reviews of about 60 programs during my tenure on COPRA and my involvement in about a dozen site visit teams to various universities. The systems and approaches that I have seen have varied widely, with varying degrees of success in identifying mission, assessing performance, and guiding programs. While there are some good approaches, most programs are still in search of the Grail.

#### MISSION, OBJECTIVES, AND ACCREDITATION

Given the trade-offs in MPA assessment systems and the developments in related areas, I will now present the assessment and measurement system used by the MPA program at West Virginia University (WVU). It is a system that works well, is comprehensive, has longitudinal data, provides evaluative data, and enables the guiding of program performance. It is also a system in which a multiplicity of measures helps to compensate for the limitation of individual measures. None of these elements will be the perfect measure, but in combination they constitute an effective system. The WVU program has undergone accreditation twice using this mission-based assessment system and has more than 10 years of data on the measures used.

The public administration program at WVU anticipated the developing need to have more effective measures for program evaluation and for accreditation. The mission approach to accreditation was under consideration in NASPAA at the time and the WVU program reaccreditation was in sight. We took the accreditation process seriously and began to develop a better mission statement and some performance measures. We could also see the trends for other required assessments and thought that a mission performance measurement system would be useful for the Board of Trustees review, the Graduate Council evaluation, and the regular College assessments.

Because the MPA program wanted to use the system for accreditation review and wanted it to be clear that it had met the required accreditation elements, it purposely used the terminology and items from the NASPAA accreditation guidelines. The accreditation guidelines require a mission statement, assessment, and guiding performance. They also require continuous processes to assess and guide performance.

Developing a mission statement was the place to start. It was initially thought that this could be done in a faculty meeting or two. As the process unfolded, it took about a year and a half to develop the mission statement, the objectives, the tracking indicators, and other aspects of the system. The full faculty was involved. The faculty started by brainstorming all the goals and objectives that they thought should be considered. About forty items were initially listed, but as they were explored and developed, the elements were combined and language was improved.

The mission statement that resulted from this process appears to be simple and straightforward. As may be noted in Table 2, it covers the fairly standard categories of teaching, research, and service. However, it honestly reflects the faculty's wrestling with what the program wanted to be. In some ways, it reaffirmed what the program was doing.

**Table 2 Mission Statement**

<p>The mission of the Division of Public Administration at West Virginia University is to—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prepare professional public managers who seek to meet change and challenges in public service</li> <li>2. Serve the State of West Virginia, profession and community through extending Public Administration expertise and intellectual resources, applying knowledge and engaging in professional activity</li> <li>3. Advance the state of knowledge in the field of Public Administration through scholarly productivity, publication and applied research</li> </ol>
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Once a general mission statement had been developed, objectives and strategies that would elaborate on and achieve the mission had to be determined. These objectives (Table 3) provided priorities and focus within the more general mission statement.

#### ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS AND MEASURES

The West Virginia University MPA mission evaluation approach provides for two major processes or systems for assessment. In addition to these two processes, our faculty evaluations, course evaluations, annual reports, budget reviews, and other assessment systems continue to contribute to an overview of general program performance and feed into aspects of the two systems.

The two major mission assessment processes are, first, an *annual system* that tracks major indicators of mission objectives. This wide range of information is tied directly to missions, objectives, and strategies. The tracking indicators are reviewed annually by the Division Advisory Committee in discussions with the Chair, all faculty, and staff. These discussions are used to assess and direct Division objectives, strategies, and operations.

Second, the *periodic system* of accreditation self-study, site review, and program evaluation provides in-depth analysis and evaluation every seven years. This evaluation usually includes major surveys, such as those of MPA alumni, current students, internship supervisors, and employers that were conducted in spring 2000.

The annual assessment procedures and selected measures for each area of the mission statement are specified in the following material. In most cases, the summary indicators are derived from current operations to provide regular monitoring and continuous improvement. The Division recognizes the weaknesses and limitations in the data. Because there were no obvious perfect outcome measures, it was decided that we would use a wide variety of indicators and qualitative judgments.

#### TRACKING INDICATORS AND MEASURES

As noted in the previous section, we have developed an annual system to track mission elements

**Table 3 Mission and Objectives**

**Mission 1**

Prepare professional public managers who seek to meet change and challenges in public service.

*Objectives:* In preparing master's students for the public service, particular emphasis will be given to:

- A. Develop and apply generalist public management and leadership knowledge, skills and abilities
- B. Foster an understanding of values and ethics embracing human diversity, democracy and constitutional principles
- C. Create a climate which is collegial and student centered and which emphasizes adult learning and diversity to promote personal and career development of students
- D. Develop a specialization in healthcare administration and cooperative relationships with other academic programs and public organizations.

**Mission 2**

Serve the State of West Virginia, profession and community through extending Public Administration expertise and intellectual resources, applying knowledge and engaging in professional activity.

*Objectives:* Public service in the mission of the Division of Public Administration will particularly emphasize:

- A. Interaction with various publics, particularly in outreach, consulting, reports and training
- B. Instruction and presentation, particularly when delivered off-campus and on-campus when focused on the needs of the state
- C. Research, particularly when applied and presented to the state and community
- D. Student involvement, particularly in internships, organized projects, external involvement and class focus on service and application

**Mission 3**

Advance the state of knowledge in the field of Public Administration through scholarly productivity, publication and applied research

*Objectives:* Scholarly productivity, publication and applied research are discussed more completely in the Faculty Evaluation Guidelines. Particular emphasis is directed to:

- A. Research activities and the publication of the outcomes of research in peer-reviewed journals, books, conference papers and professional presentations
- B. Performance of applied research and technical assistance projects resulting in a research product (e.g. monograph or technical report) which benefits governments or other agencies and contributes to the common body of knowledge about public administration
- C. Participation of students in research activities as a part of course requirements and in collaboration with faculty research agendas

**Table 4 Tracking Indicators and Measures**

<i>Mission 1 Prepare professional public managers who seek to meet change and challenges in public service.</i>		
1.1	Public management and leadership knowledge, skills and abilities	Student report in exit questionnaire
1.2	Understanding of values, ethics, democracy and constitutional principles	Student report in exit questionnaire
1.3	Application of items in 1.1 and 1.2 as evidenced in capstone seminar analysis and presentation	Average grade in capstone seminar
1.4	Application of items in 1.1 and 1.2 as evidenced by use in internship	Average evaluation given by supervisor
1.5	Climate which is collegial, student centered, diverse and based on adult learning	Student report in exit questionnaire
1.6	Personal and career support and development	Student report in exit questionnaire
1.7	Student enrollment in healthcare administration courses	Number of student credit hours
1.8	Students in joint and cooperative programs	Number of students in joint programs
1.9	Quality of teaching in all PA courses	Average course evaluation
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<i>Mission 2 Serve the State of West Virginia, profession and community through extending public administration expertise and intellectual resources, applying knowledge and engaging in professional activity</i>		
2.1	Faculty service efforts	Faculty evaluation committee report of service ratings for faculty
2.2	Service and outreach to the State of West Virginia	Total reported in annual faculty reports
2.3	Student involvement in public service	Student report in exit questionnaire
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<i>Mission 3 Advance the state of knowledge in the field of Public Administration through scholarly productivity, publication and applied research</i>		
3.1	Faculty Research Efforts	Faculty evaluation committee research ratings for faculty
3.2	Number of applied research activities, publications and products	Total number listed in annual faculty reports
3.3	Student research activities and products	Student report in exit questionnaire
3.4	Student demonstration of research skills in applied research	Average grade in applied research

and objectives and to guide performance. That is, we have developed tracking indicators or measures for the elements in the mission statement and objectives. These summary indicators are derived from current operations and existing information. The program did not create new sophisticated measures or new information and reports. Of course, the program already had exit surveys and interviews, course evaluations, faculty reviews, annual reports, and other such information.

Multiple measures were used with the assumption that they would help offset the deficiencies in any single measure. These tracking indicators are not considered perfect measures; they are simply numbers that track various items and provide a basis for questions, discussion, and judgment. It is helpful to have data that cover many years, so that we can see trends and changes. In the accreditation self-study report submitted in September 2000, for example, longitudinal data for all these measures are presented for the last seven years.

The tracking indicators are also connected to each of the missions and objectives (listed in Table 2 and 3). In some cases, there are multiple measures for an objective. The tracking indicators are listed in Table 4.

The tracking indicators are fairly straightforward and relatively unsophisticated. For example, graduating students are asked to rate various matters in an exit questionnaire. Using a 10-point scale, they are asked directly about how they felt the MPA program

prepared them for public management; about the adequacy of their preparation in values, ethics, democracy, and constitutional principles; about how collegial, student centered, diverse, and adult oriented the instructional approach was; about the degree of personal and career support and development; and so forth. Other measures on the same topics were ratings by intern supervisors as part of their regular evaluation reports. The faculty evaluation process gives annual ratings to faculty on research and service; these are aggregated and included.

Table 5 shows how multiple quantitative tracking measures are used to qualitatively form the basis for discussion and judgment about the program mission and its specified objectives.

#### GUIDING PERFORMANCE

The faculty and the advisory committee review the assessment data and tracking indicators in an annual meeting. Prior to the meeting, staff compile a mission report using existing data. For comparative purposes, the data for the previous seven years are also listed. The various indicators and their trends form the basis for discussion, questions, comments, and suggestions. Review usually goes substantially beyond the indicators listed. The advisory committee and the faculty interact and discuss issues and concerns. They also make suggestions and recommendations. In addition, of course, the faculty deal with this and other sources of information in their regular meetings to make program changes and improve-

**Table 5 Matrix for Tracking Indicators and Mission Elements**

Mission 1				Mission 2				Mission 3		
Obj. A	Obj. B	Obj. C	Obj. D	Obj. A	Obj. B	Obj. C	Obj. D	Obj. A	Obj. B	Obj. C
1.1	1.2	1.5	1.7	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.3	3.1	3.1	3.3
1.3	1.3	1.6	1.8	2.2	2.2	2.2		3.2	3.2	3.4
1.4	1.4	1.9							3.3	
1.9	1.9									

Note: Mission and objectives are listed in Table 3; tracking indicators are listed in Table 4.



ments. These reviews are thus used to guide performance, identify needs for program change, reinforce matters working well, improve matters working less well, and note the developments in the field.

Some of the discussions and changes have related to cross-cutting skills and some have related to individual course content. For example, the coverage of communication skills has been addressed in Advisory Committee meetings. The integration of the curriculum in the capstone seminar has also had some focused discussion. These arose naturally out of discussion of the tracking indicators and trends.

The most significant change that has come out of the annual and faculty reviews has been the WVU portfolio system. There were concerns that, although there was an excellent curriculum, a good mission and assessment process, and a supportive climate, the MPA program was still not where it wanted to be. There seemed to be a need to respond beyond a sequence of courses in preparing public administration professionals. There seemed to be a need to integrate and relate courses, to learn outside and beyond courses, and to enable students to progress in different and better ways.

Out of these discussions and some pilot projects, we developed a portfolio system for our MPA students. This system is the result of assessment and guiding performance, but is also a way to apply the mission and assessment system to the graduate student level. This is a mission focus for individual students, an assessment process for personal application, and a plan to guide career development and program success for specific student needs. The portfolio system is very useful as part of the program mission and assessment system, but it is used mainly for student benefit and only indirectly for program evaluation. The way in which it is designed does not generate quantitative program assessment, but rather it provides insight into individual student program outcomes with individual advisors and the program director.

Because this is an integral part of the mission process, it applies program concerns to the student level, and it is an important outcome of our attempts to guide program performance, some of the key concepts in the portfolio system are presented in the

following section. More complete information on the portfolio program at WVU may be found in a previous *J-PAE* article (Williams, Plein, and Lilly, 1998).

#### MPA PORTFOLIO: OUTCOME MEASURES AT THE STUDENT LEVEL

Professional preparation and career development includes more than the completion of specific coursework. The concept of outcome measures can also be applied at the level of the individual student and is a part of the approach at WVU. In order to enhance personal assessment and growth, MPA students focus on six cross-cutting professional development abilities that are important to the public service. Some of these can be cultivated within regular courses; others may require effort in addition to coursework.

A professional portfolio consists of materials representative of one's work. It is a collection of exemplary accomplishments and a demonstration of abilities and skills. During their academic career, WVU MPA students prepare a portfolio that will show the development of abilities through accomplishments and activities in six areas important to professional preparation. In essence, they apply outcome measurements to their professional development.

The portfolio is planned and reviewed through two integrative seminars and through consultation between students and advisors. In the initial integrative seminar (Professional Skills Seminar, an orientation at the beginning of the program) and the continuing assistance of their advisor, students use the six areas and prepare an assessment of strengths and weaknesses and an individual plan for professional development. Working from this initial plan, MPA students develop a portfolio over their academic career. The portfolio and their progress are then reviewed in the capstone course.

The portfolio approach is a general model that students may adapt to their professional and career needs. It is seen as a foundation for continuing career development for the student, not just as a series of requirements for the MPA program. As a summary of professional capacities, the portfolio (or parts of it) is also useful in demonstrating important

abilities to potential employers, and graduates have often called back to report on their successful use of the portfolio.

The six areas of professional development are presented in Table 6. In each of the six professional preparation areas, students assess their own strengths and weaknesses, create a plan, and conduct various activities. Many of these activities can be accomplished within the required courses. Developmental activities can also take place in internships, through involvement in professional organizations, and in extracurricular experiences.

The MPA program is seen in the portfolio approach as a management practice field, a place to practice and develop the individual professional skills needed in the public service. Students assess their own abilities in each of the six areas and select activities and training that will develop those areas. The portfolio approach is a focus on outcomes at the individual student level, although the portfolio

can be used to assess general student outcomes and program performance.

#### ADJUSTING THE OUTCOME MEASURES MODEL

True to the tradeoffs identified earlier, the measures used in WVU's assessment system are all limited. However, the different types of data, the variety of sources, and the multiplicity of information combine to offset the limitations of individual measures and to provide adequate information for good assessment and program improvement.

The different types of data include surveys (students, intern supervisors, exit, etc.), operational information (e.g., service activities), qualitative judgments (e.g., faculty evaluation rankings), quantitative data (course evaluations, number of publications), and performance measures (grades, etc.). The annual sources of information include students, faculty, the advisory committee, internship supervisors, the faculty evaluation committee, course evaluations, and so

**Table 6 MPA Portfolio Professional Preparation Abilities**

*Academic Performance and Course Integration:* To strengthen academic abilities and skills in MPA course work, particularly in learning, studying, writing and presenting, to meet graduation requirements for the Master of Public Administration degree, and to develop the ability to integrate various courses and applications in the professional field.

*Leadership Skills:* To assess and develop leadership skills, to hone teamwork and group dynamic abilities, and to develop greater public management capacities.

*Application:* To enhance the ability to apply knowledge to the professional field, to experience the adaptations which must be made, and to develop the ability to deal with complex situations.

*Ethics and Professional Standards:* To understand and apply professional standards and codes of ethics for public administration and the academic world (ASPA Professional Standards and Code of Ethics, WVU Code of Conduct, etc.) and to practice sensitivity to democratic values and constitutional principles in public service, and to understand human dignity and diversity.

*Public Service:* To value the goal of making a contribution to society, to develop and exemplify the core ethic of public sector management, and to understand better the larger community.

*Professional Growth and Continuing Education:* To develop the practice of professional growth by involvement in continuing education professional organizations, to become well-rounded as an individual particularly as it supports management effectiveness, and to learn to renew oneself mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally.

**Table 7 Measures Used in Accreditation Report**

Standard 2.0 Program Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission statement with the 3 parts, 11 objectives, and 16 tracking indicators listed above, with data for 7 years</li> <li>• MPA Portfolio process</li> </ul>
Standard 3.0 Program Jurisdiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPA student survey, particularly on organizational change and impact on students</li> </ul>
Standard 4.0 Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission statement, the 4 objectives and 9 tracking indicators listed above as related to curriculum</li> <li>• Survey of MPA alumni for last 7 years on adequacy of preparation and on each course</li> <li>• Survey of current MPA students on career preparation and courses and program</li> <li>• Survey of federal, county/local and healthcare employers on curriculum areas</li> <li>• Exit questionnaire on management abilities and on ethics and legal understanding</li> <li>• Intern supervisor ratings of knowledge, skills and abilities of MPA students</li> </ul>
Standard 5.0 Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission statement, objectives and tracking indicators related to research and service</li> <li>• Survey of MPA students on faculty size, quality of teaching, accessibility, program</li> <li>• Survey of MPA alumni from last 7 years on preparation for career, program assessment</li> <li>• Summary reports of evaluations for all courses</li> </ul>
Standard 6.0 Admission of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit questionnaire on preparation in public management and understanding of ethics, values, democracy and constitutional principles, diversity</li> <li>• Alumni survey on success in entering the career field, including sector of employment, salary compared to expectations, difficulty of finding employment in preferred field</li> <li>• Survey of current MPA students rating perceived rigor of admissions process, climate</li> <li>• Employer survey comparing MBA, MPA, MPH, MSW, JD and CPA preparations</li> </ul>
Standard 7.0 Student Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit questionnaire on personal and career support and development, program climate</li> <li>• Survey of current MPA students on advising, finances, placement assistance</li> <li>• Alumni survey on placement support and experience, job satisfaction</li> <li>• Survey of employers generally on MPAs and on the WVU MPA</li> <li>• Alumni data, employment, location, function from MPA data base</li> </ul>
Standard 8.0 Support Services and Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exit questionnaire on climate which is collegial and interactive, treated as adults</li> <li>• Survey of MPA students on facilities, computers, instructional equipment, faculty office hours and availability, time spent with faculty outside of class, seminar rooms, lounge</li> </ul>
<p>No external or additional measures are used for Standard 1 (Eligibility) or Standard 9 (Off-Campus)</p>	

forth. The periodic supplemental sources of information include alumni, students, and employers. All of these have limitations, but together they provide a rather comprehensive picture. Instead of perfect measures, these are taken as tracking indicators, as suggestions that lead to evaluation and discussion and then to improvement.

The information collected in the two processes (annual review of mission tracking indicators and periodic surveys) provides excellent data for use in the accreditation self-study report and in responding to the accreditation standards. Table 7 reports the measures used in the accreditation self-study report that are in addition to the specific data and information required in the report instructions. The table illustrates how the information relates to the accreditation standards.

#### SUMMARY

MPA programs look frequently for their Holy Grail, the perfect outcome measure that encapsulates great and sophisticated insight into a number or two. This article argues that such simple yet comprehensive measures are not easily found or they are very difficult and expensive to create. But there exists a great wealth of information that may be collected as a byproduct of MPA program operation and from other assessment processes, and the use of these multiple measures can serve well in assessing MPA programs and in guiding their performance.

A perfect outcome measurement approach would require the development of sophisticated measures, the creation of new data sources and collection mechanisms, and the support of competent staff to accomplish the process. Although elements of such an approach may be desired, there are severe limits and trade-offs to this approach as discussed above.

WVU's approach serves well in collecting and using existing information, providing the basis for discussion and qualitative judgment, and creating the basis for program guidance and improvement.

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