

# NASPAA Accreditation

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Eligibility Process

- **Who is eligible for NASPAA accreditation/are there any prerequisites for seeking NASPAA Accreditation?**
  - To be eligible for NASPAA accreditation, your program must be a master's degree in public affairs/policy/administration (or similar title denoting a professional master's degree preparing students for professional careers in public service). Your program must be a member in good standing of NASPAA and your home institution should be regionally or nationally accredited or be recognized by the equivalent quality assurance body in your country. Usually programs should be in operation for at least a four year period before seeking NASPAA accreditation in order to provide the sufficient data required to complete a review. Programs that have not been in operation for at least four years must provide a rationale as to the sufficiency of program data to support an evaluation. NASPAA accreditation is awarded at the master's program level only, not at the school or institutional level. Programs should also have a core faculty of at least 5 full-time faculty members, or their equivalent.
- **How does my program become a NASPAA member?**
  - To be eligible for NASPAA accreditation, your program must be a member in good standing of NASPAA. Details about NASPAA membership, including the membership application and due structure, may be found [here](#).
- **When do I have to notify NASPAA that my program wishes to seek accreditation?**
  - For NASPAA member programs, NASPAA has an Eligibility process that programs must go through prior to submitting their Self Study for an accreditation review. The eligibility application itself serves as the notice of intent to pursue NASPAA accreditation. The application must be submitted in its entirety, along with the eligibility fee. The application will not be considered without these items. Eligibility applications are accepted twice annually, August 1 and April 1. If the program receives a recommendation to proceed to accreditation review, the earliest it could submit a self-study would be the next upcoming August 15 deadline. Non-US applicants should submit applications by the earliest possible deadline before their desired self-study year to allow for additional administrative review time.
- **How do I complete the Eligibility application?**
  - The Eligibility Application, like the subsequent Self-Study Report, is completed using the [NASPAA Data Center](#), NASPAA's online database. Instructions can be found [here](#).

- **How do I gain access to the NASPAA Data Center?**
  - If you are a program representative at a NASPAA member school, please contact [drudy@naspaa.org](mailto:drudy@naspaa.org) or [gregory@naspaa.org](mailto:gregory@naspaa.org) to gain access.
- **What are public service values?**
  - Public service values are important and enduring beliefs, ideals, and principles shared by members of a community about what is good and desirable, and what is not. They include pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust; and demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with citizens and fellow public servants. NASPAA expects an accreditable program to define the boundaries of the public service values it emphasizes, be they procedural or substantive, as the basis for distinguishing itself from other professional degrees.
- **My program is only 32 hours — am I ineligible to apply for accreditation?**
  - The normal expectation for students studying for professional degrees in public affairs, administration, and policy is equivalent to 36 to 48 semester credit hours of study...Programs departing from campus-centered education by offering distance learning, international exchanges, or innovative delivery systems must demonstrate that the intentions of this precondition are being achieved and that such programs are under the supervision of fully qualified faculty. This determination may include, but is not limited to, evidence of faculty of record, and communications between faculty and students.
  - For programs based outside of the United States, the equivalency of the 36-48 credit hours is expected, given the context of higher education in that country.
- **Is it possible to waive the eligibility process?**
  - Yes, in special circumstances COPRA may choose to waive the eligibility application. Examples include a university with currently accredited programs seeking accreditation for an additional, closely related degree program.
- **If my program is seeking reaccreditation, do I need to fill out the eligibility application?**
  - No! The application is for first-time applicants only.

## Accreditation Process

- **How do I complete the Self-Study Report?**
  - The SSR is completed using the NASPAA [Data Center](#), NASPAA's online database. Instructions can be found [here](#). The Self-Study Instructions serve as the template for the Self-Study Report, including qualitative questions and data requirements, as well as rationale, bases of judgment and examples for each Standard. The Self-Study Instructions can be found [here](#).
- **How do I gain access to the NASPAA Data Center?**

- If you are a program representative at a NASPAA member school, please contact [drudy@naspaa.org](mailto:drudy@naspaa.org) or [gregory@naspaa.org](mailto:gregory@naspaa.org) to gain access. You may also request access online at [naspaa.civcore.com](http://naspaa.civcore.com).
- **When is the Self-Study Report due?**
  - For programs that have gone through the Eligibility process and have decided to move forward with applying for accreditation self-study reports are due for submission to NASPAA on August 15, immediately following their self-study year. Programs may request a late submission (September 1) but will be required to pay a late submission fee (See [Schedule of Fees](#)).
- **How do I know my accreditation cohort? My self-study year?**
  - Your accreditation cohort is the year preceding your accreditation expiration date. The cohort year is reflected on the [Roster of Accredited Programs](#). Your self-study year, the year for which you will collect data, is the year directly preceding your cohort year. For instance, if your accreditation is through August 31, 2018, your accreditation cohort is 2017-18, your self-study year is AY 2016-2017, and your Self-Study is due August 15, 2017 (immediately after your self-study year).
- **How do I determine my self-study year?**
  - Your self-study year is the academic year (Fall-Spring-Summer) directly preceding the due date of your Self-Study Report. The self-study year is the academic year immediately preceding your cohort year, which is reflected on the [Roster of Accredited Programs](#). (For initial applicants, your cohort year begins with your August 15 submission). For instance, if your accreditation is through August 31, 2018, your accreditation cohort is 2017-18 (with your Self-Study due August 15, 2017), and your self-study year is AY 2016-2017.
- **What is SSY-1? SSY-5?**
  - These years represent data collection years in the Self-Study Instructions and NASPAA data collection forms (specifically, the annual maintenance report). SSY-1 is the year before your Self-Study Report (used for employment rates). SSY-5 is five years prior to your self-study year (used for graduation rates).
- **What are the (re)accreditation fees?**
  - The [Fees](#) page details the exact requirements. Generally, before program-specific add-ons, initial accreditation costs \$5,620 and septennial reaccreditation costs \$4,587. Accredited programs also pay a \$393 annual accreditation fee. Programs are also expected to reimburse the cost of their site visit. Accreditation fees are in addition to NASPAA membership dues.
- **How much does a typical site visit cost?**
  - While this can vary based on your location and travel costs particular to your region, a typical site visit (in the United States) costs between \$2000 and \$3000. Programs are encouraged to minimize costs by securing hotel rooms at university-based hotels. Please contact NASPAA staff for more information on hosting a site visit outside of the United States.
- **Who is my COPRA liaison?**

- Your COPRA liaison is your primary reviewer, and a resource throughout the accreditation cycle, available to answer any questions about your application and the process after the Self-Study Report. Your interim report will indicate who is serving as your COPRA liaison.
- **How long does my program's accreditation period last?**
  - This depends on your accreditation decision. For a program who has not delayed and is reaccredited, the standard period is 7 years. One-year reaccreditations and voluntary delays change this period, as noted in the final decision letter.
- **What are the accreditation deadlines?**
  - Member programs have the option of applying for eligibility each year on either April or August 1. The Self-Study Report is due August 15 of each year. Programs seeking initial accreditation may not both apply for eligibility and submit the Self-Study Report in the same calendar year. Site Visits take place during the spring of each cohort year, and COPRA decision letters are available by the end of July.
- **When will I receive my decision letter?**
  - Decision letters will be posted to The Data Center by the end of July. Hard copies are also mailed to the program and the university provost at this time.
- **How many NASPAA programs are accredited?**
  - As of September 2014, 184 programs are accredited, in 3 countries.
- **Can I delay my accreditation expiration?**
  - Programs are welcome to request a one-year delay. The Commission votes on all requests. While a program is granted a delay, it remains in the same cohort, and the maximum period of reaccreditation is for 6 years, instead of 7. Typical reasons for delay are periods of major restructuring, turnover in leadership, and natural disasters.
- **What is a roadmap of the process?**
  - Accreditation is essentially a strategic planning process. The mission and goals of a program, as articulated in Standard 1, guide how it approaches each of the six other standards. By engaging in strategic planning, programs can articulate how they approach governance, diversity, hiring, recruiting, student support, resources, communications, and most importantly student outcomes assessment and program evaluation, in the support of their mission.
  - More specifically, programs need to ensure that they are prepared to articulate conformance with each of the standards, and that they have been engaging in ongoing assessment. Programs should be able to provide an implemented logic model, assessment plan, and diversity plan.
- **What documents are available as resources?**
  - The NASPAA website includes the [Resources](#) section, intended to link programs with all necessary resources. Accreditation is guided by several official documents: NASPAA Standards, Self-Study Instructions, Policies and Procedures, and the Site Visit Manual. COPRA also publishes annual policy statements, which document the evolution of COPRA interpretations.

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- **If my program has gone through the Eligibility process and did not get a favorable recommendation can we still apply for NASPAA accreditation?**
  - Eligibility determinations by COPRA are advisory to the program seeking accreditation. The Eligibility process is intended to provide direction, directly from COPRA to programs interested in accreditation, on ways they may improve their prospects of receiving accreditation. The applicant program is given initial feedback on its application from the Commission and may decide to proceed to the self-study process, if the program chooses.
- **When will my Site Visit be after I have submitted a Self-Study Report?**
  - Programs that have submitted a Self-Study Report to COPRA for initial review at the August 15 deadline typically host their Site Visit in the Spring of that academic year. Site visits take place between January and April depending upon when the program, its administrators, and the Site Visit team can schedule a visit. COPRA provides program-specific recommendations, using the Interim Report, about whether a program should proceed to site visit. Initial applicants

with concerns in their interim reports often opt to delay the site visit for one year to better prepare.

## Standard 1

- **How often should my program review its mission?**
  - There is no specific expectation for mission review. COPRA expects programs to engage in ongoing program evaluation, which will naturally allow programs to review and consider its mission and whether or not programs are meeting mission-based goals.
- **What if my mission hasn't been revised in many years?**
  - COPRA does not expect programs will change their missions from year to year, but instead looks for evidence that programs are routinely reviewing the mission's ongoing alignment with the program's goals and outcomes.
- **Should stakeholders be involved in the process?**
  - Yes! COPRA looks for evidence that programs have consulted with various stakeholder groups — both internal and external — when developing and reviewing its mission. By involving these stakeholders, programs ensure they are meeting the needs of their faculty, students, and employers.
- **How do you engage faculty? Stakeholders?**
  - Engaging stakeholders is a crucial aspect of the accreditation process. COPRA looks for evidence that programs are engaging not only their faculty and students, but their alumni, employers, and community. Faculty are often involved in most aspects of program governance: strategic planning and policy decisions, mission review and development, curriculum, hiring, student advising, teaching, etc. External stakeholders are intended to supplement internal efforts and provide an outside perspective on the program. Employers are valuable consumers of the program's "product" – its students – and can speak to the competencies the field expects of successful hires. Alumni are invested in the quality of the degree, and can identify areas where the program did and did not support them post-graduation. Bringing stakeholders together on a regular basis can facilitate a human capital investment in the future of the program.
- **What is the role of an advisory board?**
  - An advisory board can play whatever role best supports the program and its mission. As the name suggests, this is typically an advisory role — on mission, curriculum, student placement, competency definitions, etc. Programs are increasingly involving their advisory boards in assessment processes. An advisory board is not required by COPRA, but many programs have found them useful.
- **What is a logic model?**
  - A logic model is a visual representation of the program evaluation process. It helps programs articulate their thought processes about how the program

evaluates whether it is achieving its mission. It is a graphic display that illustrates the way that program resources flow into the activities of the program and produce a series of outcomes and impacts that feed into assessment process, all framed by the program mission.

- **Aren't Standards 1.3 and 5.1 the same?**
  - Standard 1.3 deals with *overall* program evaluation, depicted in the program's logic model, whereas Standard 5.1 deals with student learning outcome assessment, one piece of overall program evaluation.
- **Does COPRA require a strategic plan? What about a written program evaluation plan?**
  - Standard 1.2 requires that programs establish observable program goals, objectives, and outcomes, including expectations for student learning, consistent with its mission. Standard 1.3 requires programs to collect data on its performance relative to the mission. While COPRA does not require programs to provide strategic plans or program evaluation plans, many programs have found it useful to document the process whereby performance expectations are established and program performance is assessed.

## Standard 2

- **Can any of my five nucleus faculty be professionally qualified?**
  - Yes! Standard 2.2 requires that programs maintain a core faculty of 5 faculty members employed full-time by the institution. These faculty members can be either professionally or academically qualified. The Basis of Judgment for Standard 3.1, in the Self-Study Instructions, states, "one way to demonstrate that a program's faculty members meet this standard is if at least 75% of nucleus faculty are academically qualified to pursue the Program's mission."
- **Does a faculty nucleus member have to teach full-time in only my program?**
  - No! Standard 2.2 requires that programs maintain a core faculty of 5 faculty members employed full-time by the *institution*. Joint appointments are common, but programs should ensure that faculty nucleus members are exerting substantial determining influence over the program. Programs should define, in the Self-Study Report, what it means to be a nucleus faculty member with substantial determining influence (i.e. faculty responsibilities), in their context.
- **Does COPRA require a program director?**
  - The normal expectation is for the program to have an identifiable director who provides an appropriate focus of attention, direction, and accountability. COPRA looks for evidence that programs have leadership and administrative capacity to function and support their mission.

## Standard 3

- **In my executive education program, professionally qualified, non-nucleus faculty teach many courses — is that allowed?**
  - COPRA recognizes that different programs will have different strategies to meet their missions. In some situations, it may be appropriate for a program to articulate why the normal expectations of the Commission do not support the mission of the program. The program must demonstrate to COPRA how the faculty distribution supports its mission.
- **I have a diversity plan, but my faculty do not appear diverse — is this an issue?**
  - The program should demonstrate its overt efforts to promote diversity, cultural awareness, inclusiveness, etc., in the program, as well as how the program fosters and supports a climate of inclusiveness on an on-going basis in its operations and services. In addition to the required diversity plan, the Commission seeks substantial evidence regarding programmatic efforts to promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness, specifically demonstrable evidence of good practice, a framework for evaluating diversity efforts, and the connection to the program's mission and objectives.
- **Do academically qualified faculty have to hold a PhD?**
  - Not always. The definition of academically qualified requires that a professor hold a terminal degree related to his or her teaching responsibilities, and has remained current in the field. Typically this is translated as a PhD, but increasingly different disciplines are represented in NASPAA programs. For instance, if you have a JD teaching an administrative law class, the terminal degree would appear related to the teaching responsibility. As always, the program should articulate why policies, including operating criteria for academically qualified faculty, align with the mission of the program
  - For programs based outside of the United States, the context of what constitutes a terminal degree may be different and COPRA will expect the program to articulate how its policies regarding academically qualified faculty align with both its mission and higher education context in the country.
- **What makes a faculty member professionally qualified?**
  - Professionally qualified faculty members generally hold a related graduate degree and have relevant professional experience to his or her area of responsibility. Programs should define how they operationalize their policy for employing professionally (and academically) qualified faculty.
- **Can my program employ adjuncts?**
  - Of course! Professional programs can be strengthened by use of current practitioners, who augment the program's mission and are available to serve as adjuncts. For accreditation, programs should be able to articulate how the makeup of their faculty supports the mission, and ensure the distribution of courses meets COPRA's normal expectations for at least 50 percent of courses delivery required competencies being taught by qualified nucleus faculty, as well as 50 percent of all courses taught by full-time faculty.



- **My state/country does not allow information on diversity to be collected – how does this impact my accreditation?**
  - COPRA is sensitive to the legal contexts in which programs operate. If a program cannot legally collect, and provide, certain data points, the program should articulate its context for the Commission. With the case of diversity, the program should demonstrate its overt efforts to promote diversity, cultural awareness, inclusiveness, etc., in the program, as well as how the program fosters and supports a climate of inclusiveness on an on-going basis in its operations and services. The Commission seeks substantial evidence regarding programmatic efforts to promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness, specifically demonstrable evidence of good practice, a framework for evaluating diversity efforts, and the connection to the program’s mission and objectives, regardless of its ability to track data.
- **I’m outside of the United States, how do the diversity standards apply to me?**
  - COPRA continues to evaluate diversity efforts against the context of the program itself, allowing programs based in different geographic locales and regions to be sensitive to local diversity issues and concerns. Programs are expected to provide program- and mission-specific diversity plans that detail strategies to promote faculty, student, and curricular diversity and foster an overall climate of inclusiveness.
- **Does my program have to have its own AQ/PQ policy or can it mirror NASPAA’s?**
  - COPRA articulates its threshold for expectations in Self-Study Instructions Glossary, and expects programs to operationalize their policies for academically and professionally qualified faculty members. The program should articulate a systematic approach to ensuring current faculty, and new hires, are qualified to teach within the program. For instance, what is considered current for an academically qualified professor? How does the program determine what constitutes relevant professional experience for professionally qualified faculty?

## Standard 4

- **I have a diversity plan, but my students do not appear diverse — is this an issue?**
  - The program should demonstrate its overt efforts to promote diversity, cultural awareness, inclusiveness, etc., in the program, as well as how the program fosters and supports a climate of inclusiveness on an on-going basis in its operations and services. The Commission seeks substantial evidence regarding programmatic efforts to promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness, specifically demonstrable evidence of good practice, a framework for evaluating diversity efforts, and the connection to the program’s mission and objectives.
- **My state/country does not allow information on diversity to be collected – how does this impact my accreditation?**

- As with Standard 3.2, COPRA is sensitive to the legal contexts in which programs operate. If a program cannot legally collect, and provide, certain data points, the program should articulate its context for the Commission. With the case of diversity, the program should describe for the program how it ensures a climate of inclusiveness, regardless of its ability to track data.
- **Does COPRA prescribe any admissions criteria?**
  - No. COPRA looks for evidence that a program’s admissions criteria are mission-based, are implemented consistently, and are designed to ensure a qualified and productive pool of students – who are prepared for the rigors of the curriculum – enrolling in the program.
- **Do we have to offer an internship?**
  - Not necessarily. Standard 5.4 requires programs to demonstrate how their students are exposed to, and learn, professional competencies. Most programs use an internship as a central part of their approach. However, depending on the mission of the program and its students, an internship may not be the best approach. For instance, many executive education programs (or tracks) do not require an internship, instead offering other supplemental experiences to their experience as students.
- **I’m outside of the United States, how do the diversity standards apply to me?**
  - COPRA continues to evaluate diversity efforts against the context of the program itself, allowing programs based in different geographic locales and regions to be sensitive to local diversity issues and concerns. Programs are expected to provide program- and mission-specific diversity plans that detail strategies to promote faculty, student, and curricular diversity and foster an overall climate of inclusiveness.
- **My program is small — is it okay that the majority of student support services are provided by the department/college/university?**
  - COPRA understands the varying needs and situations of programs depending on their institutional context. However, COPRA does expect to see that the program is meeting the needs of its students — whether advising or career-based. If it seems that students are not taking advantage of available services, or struggling to secure internships or graduate in a timely manner, COPRA may ask the program to address how it can better support the needs of its students.

## Standard 5

- **How do you combat faculty fatigue due to assessment?**
  - This is something with which all programs struggle. The best way to ensure faculty remain engaged in the process is to use the data. Data collection perceived as meaningful and to serve and improve the program is much less tiresome. Another way to lessen the burden on faculty members is to pull other groups into the assessment process. Think about how your program can take

advantage of capstone clients, an advisory board, internship advisors, etc., as stakeholders who could also be engaged in student assessment.

- **Do course syllabi for the same course, but taught by different faculty, need to match?**
  - No! Successful assessment for NASPAA focuses on student competencies instead of curricular specifics. However, if two faculty members teach the same course with different approaches, and students from these courses demonstrate different levels of competency, then COPRA would expect the program to use its assessment processes to identify opportunities for growth to ensure that all students are successfully gaining mission-based competencies.
- **Can my assessment be based on indirect measures?**
  - Strong assessment plans will incorporate multiple types of measures: both direct and indirect. COPRA expects programs to rely predominantly on direct measures of student learning to assess whether students have mastered the competencies, using indirect measures to supplement the direct evidence.
- **Can I use a capstone or portfolio to assess student competencies?**
  - Of course! Many programs have formed successful assessment processes incorporating assessment of a culminating student experience – a capstone or portfolio, for instance. Programs also use pre/post tests, comprehensive exams, embedded course experiences, experiential exercises, etc. – both written and oral, and many other combinations of direct measures. There is no one way that works for all programs!
- **Does COPRA require a full assessment cycle on each of the 5 universal competency domains?**
  - COPRA [Policy Statements](#) articulate the implementation expectations of the 2009 NASPAA Accreditation Standards, by cohort.
- **What is a direct measure?**
  - A direct measure is an explicit demonstration of student learning, often measured against a rubric. Examples include: capstones, exams, reports, case studies, simulations, white papers, etc.
- **My program has 5 concentrations — what does COPRA require me to do with them?**
  - COPRA's current approach to program specializations (Standard 5.3) is to ensure programs are practicing truth in advertising, with regard to concentrations, and other aspects of specialization quality (e.g. adequacy of course offerings, quality of faculty). ([COPRA Policy Statement](#), December 2013). COPRA does not expect programs to have fully-developed assessment systems in place for their concentrations at this time.
- **Does COPRA require a written student learning assessment plan?**
  - Yes, the program should provide its plan for assessing student mastery of the five Universal Required Competencies.
- **What are the components of a strong assessment plan?**
  - An assessment plan typically includes the strategies underlying the assessment of student learning outcomes, as well as the program's approach to programmatic improvement. A successful assessment plan typically details direct

(and indirect, as needed) measures, the use of rubrics for evaluation, faculty and stakeholder involvement, analysis procedures, and how analysis is used for overall program improvement.

- **How often should my program assess the universal competencies?**
  - The Basis of Judgment for Standard 5.1, Self-Study Instructions, states, “An accredited program need not assess all competencies every year or cohort, but rather at a frequency appropriate for its mission and goals. However, assessing each competency only once during a seven year accreditation cycle would not likely be sufficient for conformance in most programs.” The sustainability of an assessment schedule depends on the mission of the program, its structure, and capacity.
- **Does my program have to assess each student, or is a sample of students okay?**
  - Sampling is an effective tool for large programs to use when determining if students have mastered program competencies.

## Standard 6

- **How can accreditation help articulate resource needs?**
  - While the NASPAA Standards have few input requirements, the Standards do provide programs the opportunity to engage in strategic planning and articulate the resources needed to successfully meet their mission and goals. Further, NASPAA site visit teams typically meet with program stakeholders to discuss support for accomplishing goals. At the most basic level, the Standards require every program have at least 5 nucleus faculty members.
- **Why does COPRA care about my program’s budget?**
  - COPRA is interested in a program’s sustained ability to meet its mission and engage in ongoing development. For instance, if a program indicates that it is struggling to provide appropriate support services to students and faculty, COPRA will look to resource stability as a potential cause for any issues.

## Standard 7

- **What information must I share publicly?**
  - COPRA Policy Statements and the Self-Study Instructions provide a window into COPRA’s expectations in this regard. Apart from articulating standard program details (mission, faculty, admissions criteria, tuition, learning outcomes, etc.), the NASPAA Standards also require programs to showcase student achievement data, including graduation rates, employment rates, and recent internships.
- **Why does COPRA care what is on my program website?**
  - COPRA is committed to public accountability, and ensuring that stakeholders – specifically students – have the information needed to make informed decisions

about programs. The NASPAA School Search supports this effort as well, allowing students to compare NASPAA programs. On top of this, NASPAA-COPRA is a CHEA-recognized accreditor; CHEA expects all accreditors to require programs to share outcomes data publicly.

- **I don't have control over my program's website — what should I do?**
  - Many programs encounter structural obstacles when maintaining a current website. To be in conformance, however, programs must find ways to work with their IT departments. Thinking about the requirements of Standard 7, and establishing a consistent process for updating the website, is important. If your program has completed the NASPAA Annual Program Survey, an interim step to articulating conformance is to provide a link on the program's website to the [NASPAA Data website](#), which would include your program's student achievement data.

## Site Visitors

- **Who determines the detailed schedule of the onsite visit?**
  - The on-the-ground site visit schedule is determined by the program and the site visit chair. Typically, the site visit chair provides the program with a list of meetings and expectations, which the program proposes as a working schedule. The site visit chair has final approval of the schedule. The schedule is intended to (at least) reflect the priorities of COPRA, per the interim report. A sample site visit schedule is available in the [Site Visit Manual](#).
- **How are site visitors matched with programs?**
  - Trained site visitors are matched with programs based on several factors, including professional background and experience, geography, and knowledge directly relatable to the program or COPRA's concerns with the program. Efforts are made to ensure no conflicts of interest exist between the team and the program.
- **Does NASPAA reimburse alcohol?**
  - Minimally. You may submit for reimbursement for one glass of table wine or its equivalent with dinner.
- **Where do I submit my expense report to?**
  - Please scan and send your voucher *electronically* within 60 days of your visit to [togregory@naspaa.org](mailto:togregory@naspaa.org). Do **not** seek reimbursement directly from the program under review.
- **How long after the site visit do I have to send in my expenses?**
  - Site visitors should send in their expenses within one week of the end of the site visit to the NASPAA office. NASPAA will accept expense reports up to 60 days after the visit. After 60 days NASPAA will not honor the reimbursement request.

- **Do I need to provide any verification for mileage on my personal automobile for the visit?**
  - Site Visitors seeking reimbursement for mileage on their personal vehicle should include a Google Map, MapQuest, or other such print out verifying the mileage. NASPAA reimburses at the IRS mileage rate for that year. For those driving to the site visit, the request for mileage should not exceed the comparable rate of common carrier.
- **If my Site Visit coincides with additional travel I am doing how will NASPAA reimburse me?**
  - If a site visitor is traveling to/from another destination in conjunction with their visit, NASPAA will only reimburse for the portion of the expense that pertains to the visit. For example, if a site visitor purchases airline tickets to a visit in DC and is traveling to New York for a conference then flying from New York back to their home, NASPAA is happy to reimburse the portion of the trip that pertains directly to the visit.
- **Are there any restrictions on what is an allowable expense?**
  - Site Visitors will not be reimbursed for alcoholic beverages other than table wine or its equivalent. NASPAA will also not reimburse for expenses such as childcare or pet-boarding while you participate in the visit.
- **How do I become a site visitor?**
  - Come to a training! COPRA hosts in-person and online trainings throughout the year. If you're interested, email [gregory@naspaa.org](mailto:gregory@naspaa.org).
- **Do site visitors receive an honorarium?**
  - No, the peer review is completely volunteer-based. NASPAA is lucky to have so many willing expert volunteers!
- **What does site visitor training entail?**
  - Every site visitor must go through the NASPAA site visitor training, either in-person or online. The training has several video prerequisites, and is followed by a training session led by an approved trainer. The training emphasizes the norms of being a NASPAA site visitor (logistics, role of the site visit, expectations), as well as education on the NASPAA Accreditation Standards. Site Visitor Training takes place throughout the year at several conferences.
- **How are site visitors matched with programs?**
  - Site visitors are matched with programs based on several factors, including professional background and experience, geography, and knowledge directly relatable to the program or COPRA's concerns with the program. Efforts are taken to ensure no conflicts of interest between the site visit team and program.
- **Who is eligible to be a site visitor?**
  - Each team consists of three: a chair, an academic, and a practitioner. Academic site visitors are expected to be at least associate-level professors, and practitioners are expected to hold graduate degrees as well as have 7+ years of public service work experience (typically explicitly hiring our graduates).
- **When will my site visit take place?**

- Site visits occur between late January and late March of each year. If COPRA recommends your program proceed to a site visit, it will take place in the Spring of your cohort year. After NASPAA has matched a team, you will coordinate directly with the team to identify dates and the on-the-ground schedule.
- **How long is a site visit?**
  - The typical site visit lasts 2.5 days. If the institution is hosting a site visit for multiple programs or satellite campuses, the visit may be extended. Further, if the program is hosting a follow-up visit, after a one-year reaccreditation, the visit is typically only one day.
- **What is the site visit report?**
  - Upon completing the site visit, the site visit team has 30 days to draft a report addressing the concerns of COPRA as well as providing evidence from the visit. Programs then have the opportunity to review the draft for errors of fact, before it is locked by the team for COPRA review.
- **How do I complete the site visit report?**
  - The site visit report is completed in the NASPAA [Data Center](#). Instructions can be found [here](#).
- **How are expenses handled?**
  - Site Visitors are responsible for arranging the logistics of the visit with the program. After the visit, site visitors should send all receipts and the expense voucher directly to NASPAA. NASPAA then invoices the program in the aggregate. At no time should money exchange hands between the program and the team. Site visitors should be reasonably sensitive to costs.

## Hosting Site Visits: For Programs

- **Who determines the detailed schedule of the onsite visit?**
  - The on-the-ground site visit schedule is determined by the program and the site visit chair. Typically, the site visit chair provides the program with a list of meetings and expectations, which the program proposes as a working schedule. The site visit chair has final approval of the schedule. The schedule is intended to (at least) reflect the priorities of COPRA, per the interim report. A sample site visit schedule is available in the Site Visit Manual.
- **Why does the team want to meet with my university provost?**
  - Site Visit Teams want to meet with everyone that has a stake in the program: faculty, students, alumni, and even university administration. The provost, in particular, can provide the site visit team with a window into the institutional context the program operates within. The team can also offer insight to the provost on the strengths of the program.
- **How do I prepare for a site visit? What documents should be made available?**
  - The best way to prepare for your site visit is to consult with your site visit chair. The chair is responsible for helping translate the interim report and COPRA's

questions into a workable schedule. The chair has final approval of the schedule. Your chair should be able to help you grasp who the team will want to meet with, as well as what it will want to review (this is also available in the Site Visit Manual). In general, the team will want to meet with faculty, students, alumni, related student support staff, and university administration. The team will also want to review all documentation related to your program evaluation and student assessment processes, often including faculty meeting minutes, sample capstones/portfolios/assignments, admissions files, etc. Your COPRA liaison is also a good resource, helping to articulate the evidence COPRA wants the site visit team to document.

- **How much does a typical site visit cost?**
  - While this can vary based on your location and travel costs particular to your region, a typical site visit hosted in the United States costs between \$2000 and \$3000. Programs are encouraged to minimize costs by securing hotel rooms at university-based hotels. Please contact NASPAA staff for information about hosting a site visit outside of the United States.
- **How are site visitors matched with programs?**
  - Site visitors are matched with programs based on several factors, including professional background and experience, geography, and knowledge directly relatable to the program or COPRA's concerns with the program. Efforts are taken to ensure no conflicts of interest exist between the team and program.
- **When will my site visit take place?**
  - Site visits occur between late January and late March of each year. If COPRA recommends your program proceed to a site visit, it will take place in the Spring of your cohort year. After NASPAA has matched a team, you will coordinate directly with the team to identify dates.
- **How long is a site visit?**
  - The typical site visit lasts 2.5 days. If your institution is hosting a site visit for multiple programs or satellite campuses, the visit may be extended. Further, if you are a one-year reaccredited program hosting a follow-up visit, the visit is typically only one day.
- **Who visits my program?**
  - Each team consists of two academics, including the chair. The third team member is a practitioner. Academics are expected to be at least associate-level professors, and practitioners are expected to hold graduate degrees as well as have 7+ years of public service work experience (typically explicitly hiring our graduates).
- **What if I have concerns about the composition of the proposed site visit team?**
  - NASPAA staff work to avoid any conflicts of interest and match your program with a team appropriate to your context. There is a limited pool of volunteers, but COPRA and NASPAA staff coordinate with the programs to ensure a productive site visit. Ultimately, the site visit helps COPRA clarify and confirm



evidence presented in the Self-Study Report, and COPRA has final approval on site visit teams.

- **If I have two or more programs being (re)accredited – can they share a site visit?**
  - Yes! COPRA is interested in making the process as effective and efficient as possible. If you have multiple programs in the same accreditation cohort, typically within the same governance unit, a site visit team will be matched to review all programs in one visit. Depending on the scale, your team and visit length may be adjusted to ensure a thorough review.
- **What is the site visit report?**
  - The site visit report is the team’s communication with COPRA. Upon completing the site visit, the site visit team has 30 days to draft a report addressing the concerns of COPRA, as well as providing evidence from the visit. Programs then have the opportunity to review the draft for errors of fact, before it is locked by the team for COPRA review.
- **What are my response opportunities?**
  - A program’s initial response opportunity is to address the points in the interim report, prior to the site visit. Upon completing the site visit, the site visit team has 30 days to draft a report addressing the concerns of COPRA, as well as providing evidence from the visit. Programs then have the opportunity to review the draft for errors of fact, before it is locked by the team for COPRA review. The program then has the opportunity to respond directly to COPRA, ahead of its summer decision meeting, using the final response to respond to items in the site visit report, elaborate on changes the program has made or plans to make, or provide final supplementary information requested by the Commission.
- **How are expenses handled?**
  - Site Visitors are responsible for arranging the logistics of the visit with the program. After the visit, site visitors send all receipts and the expense voucher directly to NASPAA. NASPAA then invoices the program in the aggregate. At no time should money exchange hands between the program and the team. Site visitors should be reasonably sensitive to costs.
- **Can my program pay for anything on the visit?**
  - Yes! We encourage programs to arrange the hotel for the teams, and when they are able, programs can directly pay for lodging costs. Further, the program will likely pay directly for meals any on-campus meals during the visit (site visit teams often have at least one “working lunch”). Some programs have university requirements for travel arrangements, and are able to book flights through a travel agent. At no time should money exchange hands between the program and the team. If you have questions about specific expenses, please email [gregory@naspaa.org](mailto:gregory@naspaa.org).
- **Does NASPAA reimburse alcohol?**
  - Minimally. Site Visitors may submit for reimbursement for one glass of table wine or its equivalent with dinner.
- **Are there any restrictions on what is an allowable expense?**

- Site Visitors will not be reimbursed for alcoholic beverages other than table wine or its equivalent. NASPAA will also not reimburse for expenses such as childcare or pet-boarding while you participate in the visit.
- **Do site visitors receive an honorarium?**
  - No, site visitors are completely volunteer-based. NASPAA is lucky to have so many willing, expert volunteers!

## Students

- **Why Should I Choose a NASPAA Accredited Program?**
  - NASPAA Accreditation indicates that the program has undergone a rigorous peer review process and has been judged to be a quality program by its peers. Programs seeking accreditation must be in substantial compliance with the Standards of education for the field. The accreditation process is designed to foster continuous assessment and improvement even after accreditation has been achieved.
  - The benefits of graduating from an accredited program when seeking employment are that your prospective employer is assured that your degree has come from a program that is recognized as meeting a standard of quality and that you have been adequately prepared for the profession. This is particularly useful if the prospective employer is not familiar with the institution from which you receive your degree. Additionally, in some cases the employer may require that your degree come from an accredited program to be eligible for tuition reimbursements.
- **What Does it Mean if a Program is Not Accredited?**
  - Unaccredited programs are not necessarily poor quality programs. There are a number of reasons why a program may choose to not seek NASPAA accreditation. If you are considering a program that is not accredited you should find out as much information about the program as possible before enrolling. Questions to consider: is the institution itself accredited by a regional or national accreditor, where are the graduates of the program finding jobs, what do the alumni of the program think of its rigor and quality?
  - One type of unaccredited program to be explicitly aware of is a “diploma mill” or “degree mill”. These types of programs detract from educational quality by allowing students to purchase or obtain a degree with little to no work. More information about how to avoid a degree mill can be found here.
- **What is the difference between having NASPAA membership and being accredited by NASPAA?**
  - NASPAA is a membership organization that programs in the field of public administration, public policy, and public affairs may apply to join. NASPAA members have all agreed to a code of good practice. However, not all NASPAA members are accredited by NASPAA. In order for a program to be accredited, it

must submit to a peer review process and be judged to be in compliance with NASPAA Standards. All NASPAA accredited programs are NASPAA Members, but not all NASPAA members are accredited programs. When using the NASPAA School search, select “accredited” to only view only accredited programs.

- **What is the difference between institutional accreditation and NASPAA accreditation?**
  - NASPAA Accreditation focuses solely on Master’s Degree programs in the fields of public administration, public policy, and public affairs. Its purpose is to ensure that these programs are in compliance with the Standards set by the field. Institutional accreditation granted by regional and national accreditors focuses on the Institution as a whole and ensures that the University is meeting a level of quality set forth by their accreditor.
  - Whether an institution is accredited by a regional or national accreditor is particularly important in the United States due to the fact that students are only able to obtain federal financial assistance if the institution they are attending has achieved accreditation from an accreditation organization recognized by the US Department of Education. NASPAA Accreditation requires that the institution be accredited by a regional or national accreditor, or the appropriate recognition body for programs based outside of the United States.
  - As with degree mills, it is also important to be alert to programs holding accreditation from “accreditation mills”. These accreditors operate similarly to diploma mills by allowing universities and programs to purchase or easily obtain accreditation without rigor and transparency. More information about how to ensure the program you are interested is legitimately accredited can be found here.
- **If I attended a program that was recently awarded accreditation can I say I attended an accredited program?**
  - NASPAA Accreditation is effective September 1 of the year accreditation is awarded. If you graduate from the program after September 1 of that year you are considered to have graduated from an accredited program. Accreditation is not retroactive.
- **If I am attending a program that has recently lost its accreditation, what does this mean for me?**
  - If a program has been denied reaccreditation it will be removed from the Accreditation Roster effective September 1 of that year. If you graduate before September 1 you are considered to have graduated from an accredited program, if you do not graduate by that date you are not considered to have graduated from an accredited program.
- **What Process Does a Program go Through to be Accredited?**
  - Programs that seek NASPAA accreditation go through a rigorous peer review process. Programs begin by conducting a year-long Self Study Report with regards to NASPAA Standards. They submit their report at the conclusion of the Self Study year to the Commission on Peer Review Accreditation (COPRA). COPRA is made up of 13 of their peers and a practitioner public member. The Commission reviews the program’s Self Study Report and provides initial

feedback asking for clarification on issues of concern. The program then hosts a three member Site Visit Team of trained volunteers that consists of two academic members and a practitioner. The team reviews the program's Self Study Report as well as the initial feedback from COPRA. They act as the Commissions "eyes and ears", meeting with program faculty, students and alumni, as well as key administrators at the institution over a three day period. The Site Visit team then writes a report to COPRA. Throughout the process the program has an opportunity to respond to concerns and provide additional information. The Commission reviews all of the information they have on the program and makes a decision regarding accreditation. Programs can be accredited for a maximum of seven years at the end of which they may apply for reaccreditation.

- **If a program's accreditation expires soon, what does that mean for the program I want to apply to?**
  - The academic year listed with each program on the accredited roster indicates not only the expiration date, but also the program's expected reaccreditation cohort. If a program's accreditation expires on August 31, 2018, then the program will most likely enter the reaccreditation cycle in August of 2017, to ensure continuity in its accreditation (the roster would read 2017-2018). Because NASPAA Accreditation is voluntary, a program may choose to not seek reaccreditation, at which point its accreditation status would lapse.
- **What do I do if I have a complaint against an accredited program?**
  - If you have a complaint against an accredited program please contact NASPAA staff at [copra@naspaa.org](mailto:copra@naspaa.org). The complaint must relate to the NASPAA Standards; COPRA is an accrediting body, not a regulator or an appellate tribunal for student or faculty grievances. For more information on complaints please see our Policies and Procedures.