



## **Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation**

Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

### **ACCREDITATION STANDARDS For Master's degree programs**

**Adopted October 16, 2009 at the NASPAA Annual Business meeting in Arlington, VA**

**Amended November 6, 2014 at the NASPAA Annual Business meeting in Albuquerque, NM**

## **Preconditions for Accreditation Review**

Programs applying for accreditation review must demonstrate in their Self-Study Reports that they meet four preconditions. Because NASPAA wants to promote innovation and experimentation in education for public affairs, administration, and policy, programs that do not meet the preconditions in a strictly literal sense but which meet the spirit of these provisions may petition for special consideration. Such petitions and Self-Study Reports must provide evidence that the program meets the spirit of the preconditions.

### **1. Program Eligibility**

Because an accreditation review is a program evaluation, eligibility establishes that the program is qualified for and capable of being evaluated. The institution offering the program should be accredited (or similarly approved) by a recognized regional, national, or international agency. The primary objective of the program should be professional education. Finally, the program should have been operating and generating sufficient information about its operations and outcomes to support an evaluation.

### **2. Public Service Values**

The mission, governance, and curriculum of eligible programs shall demonstrably emphasize 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 degree programs.

### **3. Primary Focus**

The degree program's primary focus shall be that of preparing students to be leaders, managers, and analysts in the professions of public affairs, public administration, and public policy and only master's degree programs engaged in educating and training professionals for the aforementioned professions are eligible for accreditation. Variations in nomenclature regarding degree title are typical in the field of public service education. Related degrees in policy and management are eligible to apply, provided they can meet the accreditation standards, including advancing public service values and competencies. Specifically excluded are programs with a primary mission other than that of educating professionals in public affairs, administration, and policy (for example, programs in which public affairs, administration, and policy are majors or specializations available to students pursuing a degree in a related field).

#### 4 Course of Study

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. The intentions of this precondition are to ensure significant interaction with other students and with faculty, hands on collaborative work, socialization into the norms and aspirations of the profession, and observations by faculty of students' interpersonal and communication skills. 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.

**Special Condition: Fast-tracking** Programs that combine undergraduate education with a graduate degree in public affairs, administration, and policy in a total of less than six academic years or the equivalent are not precluded from accreditation so long as they meet the criteria of an accredited graduate degree.

**Special Condition: Dual Degrees** Programs may allow a degree in public affairs, administration, and policy to be earned simultaneously with a degree in another field in less time than required to earn each degree separately. All criteria of an accredited, professional, graduate degree in public affairs, administration, and policy must be met and the electives allowed to satisfy requirements for the other degree must be appropriate as electives for a degree in public affairs, administration, and policy.

**Special Condition: Executive Education** Programs may offer a degree in public affairs, administration, and policy designed especially for college graduates who have had at least five years of cumulative experience in public service, including at least three years at the middle-to- upper level. The degree program must demonstrate that its graduates have emerged with the universal competencies expected of a NASPAA-accredited program, as well as with the competencies distinctive to executive education.

## **Standard 1 Managing the Program Strategically**

- 1.1 Mission Statement: The program will have a statement of mission that guides performance expectations and their evaluation, including**
- **its purpose and public service values, given the program’s particular emphasis on public affairs, administration, and policy**
  - **the population of students, employers, and professionals the program intends to serve, and**
  - **the contributions it intends to produce to advance the knowledge, research, and practice of public affairs, administration, and policy.**
- 1.2 Performance Expectations: The program will establish observable program goals, objectives, and outcomes, including expectations for student learning, consistent with its mission.**
- 1.3 Program Evaluation: The program will collect, apply, and report information about its performance and its operations to guide the evolution of the program’s mission and the program’s design and continuous improvement with respect to standards two through seven.**

### Rationale:

Accreditation standards reflect NASPAA’s commitment to support programs for professional education that 1) commit to the values of public affairs, administration, and policy and model them in their operations; 2) direct their resources toward quantitative and qualitative outcomes; and 3) continuously improve, which includes responding to and impacting their communities through ongoing program evaluation. The commitment to public service values distinguishes NASPAA-accredited programs from other degree programs. NASPAA expects an accredited program to be explicit about the public service values to which it gives priority; to clarify the ways in which it embeds these values in its internal governance; and to demonstrate that its students learn the tools and competencies to apply and take these values into consideration in their professional activities. The expectation that the program will 1) define and pursue a mission and 2) continuously improve its performance to benefit its community in observable ways through education and disseminating knowledge about public affairs, administration and policy reflects NASPAA’s commitment to public service values. In this way, NASPAA’s accreditation process promotes these values as the heart of the profession.

These standards verify that the program focuses its resources and efforts toward a defined mission. Its mission statement should assist the program’s decision-makers, students, and other constituents to understand the program and its operations. Decision-makers should be able to demonstrate that they use the mission statement to help them set priorities and align resources with their goals.

So long as their activities are consistent with their mission, programs have latitude to define their performance goals, measures of outcomes, and improvements. Whatever the program's goals and measures, they must be stated in terms that are sufficiently clear and concrete for the program to use in assessing itself and for outside parties, such as COPRA, to use in assuring that the program manages itself strategically. The mission statement brings coherence to the program's activities.

## **Standard 2 Matching Governance with the Mission**

- 2.1 Administrative Capacity: The program will have an administrative infrastructure appropriate for its mission, goals, and objectives in all delivery modalities employed.**
- 2.2 Faculty Governance: An adequate faculty nucleus—at least five (5) full-time faculty members or their equivalent—will exercise substantial determining influence for the governance and implementation of the program.**

### Rationale:

To pursue its mission an accredited program should have a transparent, identifiable, and effective governance system. Governance includes, but is not limited to: program policy and planning; establishing degree requirements; making and implementing recommendations regarding admission of students; advising students; specifying curriculum and learning outcomes; evaluating student performance and awarding degrees; appointing, promoting, and tenuring faculty; and participating in defining and assuring faculty performance, collectively and individually, both full- and part-time. The governance arrangement, including administrative leadership, should ensure the integrity of the program. Because program faculty members have deep knowledge of their program and a commitment to participatory processes, they should play a significant role in the governance and execution of the program. A program faculty member is defined as one whose participation in the governance and delivery of the program is functionally equivalent to that of a full-time faculty member in the program, commensurate with the rank of his or her appointment.

## **Standard 3 Matching Operations with the Mission: Faculty Performance**

- 3.1 Faculty Qualifications: The program's faculty members will be academically or professionally qualified to pursue the program's mission.**
- 3.2 Faculty Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment and retention of faculty members.**
- 3.3 Research, Scholarship and Service: Program faculty members will produce scholarship and engage in professional and community service activities outside of the university appropriate to the program's mission, stage of their careers, and**

**the expectations of their university.**

Rationale:

Students should have the opportunity to receive instruction from properly qualified faculty. The program's faculty, as a group, should include a variety of perspectives and experiences (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, disabilities) to invigorate discourse with each other and with students and to prepare students for the professional workplace. Faculty members should form a self-sustaining community of scholars who pursue intellectual, professional, and community service agendas consistent with the program's mission. Program faculty should engage in the scholarship of public affairs, administration, and policy because it leads to teaching and mentoring of students in cutting-edge methods and applications, it advances the profession, and it impacts the community. They should engage in community and professional service related to public affairs, administration, and policy because it promotes their personal accountability and commitment to the values they are expected to model, and it provides opportunities for them to connect theory and practice and to recruit students and place graduates.

**Standard 4 Matching Operations with the Mission: Serving Students**

- 4.1 Student Recruitment: The program will have student recruitment practices appropriate for its mission.**
- 4.2 Student Admissions: The program will have and apply well-defined admission criteria appropriate for its mission.**
- 4.3 Support for Students: The program will ensure the availability of support services, such as curriculum advising, internship placement and supervision, career counseling, and job placement assistance to enable students to progress in careers in public affairs, administration, and policy.**
- 4.4 Student Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, admissions practices, and student support services.**

Rationale:

The outcomes of student recruiting, admissions, and student services should be consistent with the program's mission. Admitted students should show good potential for success in professional graduate study in public affairs, administration, and policy. The recruitment and service processes should be transparent, accountable, ethical, equitable, diverse, and participatory. A program should encourage diversity in its student body to help prepare students for the workplace of the 21st Century.

## **Standard 5 Matching Operations with the Mission: Student Learning**

- 5.1 Universal Required Competencies:** As the basis for its curriculum, the program will adopt a set of required competencies related to its mission and public service values. The required competencies will include five domains: the ability
- to lead and manage in public governance;
  - to participate in and contribute to the policy process;
  - to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
  - to articulate and apply a public service perspective;
  - to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.
- 5.2 Mission-specific Required Competencies:** The program will identify core competencies in other domains that are necessary and appropriate to implement its mission.
- 5.3 Mission-specific Elective Competencies:** The program will define its objectives and competencies for optional concentrations and specializations.
- 5.4 Professional Competencies:** The program will ensure that students learn to apply their education, such as through experiential exercises and interactions with practitioners across the broad range of public affairs, administration, and policy professions and sectors.

### Rationale:

An accredited program should implement and be accountable for delivering its distinctive, public service mission through the course of study and learning outcomes it expects its graduates to attain. The curriculum should demonstrate consistency and coherence in meeting the program's mission. While an accredited degree program must meet basic minimal performance criteria, NASPAA recognizes that programs may have different profiles with varying emphases. The program being reviewed should demonstrate how its curricular content matches the profile emphasized in its overall mission. Whatever competencies the program designs, the learning outcomes should reflect public service values. Programs should strive to assure that their students can apply to real world problems the concepts, tools, and knowledge they have learned.

Graduate competencies equip the student to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that is founded upon, extends and enhances that typically associated with the Bachelor's level, and provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and applying ideas. Students should be able to apply their knowledge, understanding and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader or multidisciplinary contexts related to public

affairs, administration, and policy. They have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity. For example, they can formulate judgments with incomplete information, including reflection upon social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments.

### **Standard 6 Matching Resources with the Mission**

#### **6.1 Resource Adequacy: The program will have sufficient funds, physical facilities, and resources in addition to its faculty to pursue its mission, objectives, and continuous improvement.**

Rationale: An accredited program should have the resources required to pursue its mission and to continue to improve. Resources can include, but are not limited to: budget, information technology, library services, supporting personnel, instructional equipment, offices, classrooms, and meeting areas.

### **Standard 7 Matching Communications with the Mission**

#### **7.1 Communications: The program will provide appropriate and current information about its mission, policies, practices, and accomplishments—including student learning outcomes--sufficient to inform decisions by its stakeholders such as prospective and current students; faculty; employers of current students and graduates; university administrators; alumni; and accrediting agencies.**

Rationale:

When communicating with its stakeholders, the program should be transparent, accountable, and truthful. NASPAA expects accredited programs to meet the expectations of the profession in terms of accountability in public affairs, administration, and policy. The program should understand and provide the information required to inform its stakeholders about decisions they are making with respect to the program, for example:

- Students: decisions about whether to apply and enroll
- Staff and Faculty: decisions about whether to accept and continue employment
- Employers: decisions about whether to sponsor internships or hire a graduate
- Administrators: decisions about whether to approve faculty lines and provide funding for the program
- Alumni: decisions about whether and how to interact with the program following graduation

Information about the program's capacity and performance should not be kept confidential absent a compelling reason, such as student and faculty privacy laws and regulations.