

MEMORANDUM

TO: MPA Program Faculty
CC: Mark Rosentraub, Dean
Dennis Keating, Associate Dean

FROM: Vera Vogelsang-Coombs
Associate Professor & Director

DATE: May 29, 2005

RE: MPA Program Capstone Assessment Results - CY 2003 & 2004

This report summarizes the MPA Program's first assessment of student learning, based on the plan approved at the March 30, 2005 faculty meeting. This report focuses on the assessment of the capstone course (PAD 692, Capstone Seminar in Public Administration), using the MPA learning goals from the NASPAA reaccreditation process as a backdrop. Finally, this report contains a summary of how the MPA faculty used the feedback from this assessment to improve the program.

Specifically, this report provides data that measured MPA Program Learning Outcome #3. This outcome states that "Students will develop specialized skills in one of the Program's substantive areas: (1) public management (including general public (city) management and nonprofit management); (2) economic development, and (3) health care administration."

The assessments embedded in the MPA capstone experience measure the following MPA Program objective (#11), and it states:

"Students will demonstrate critical thinking by integrating theory and applying specialized knowledge in the analysis of a problem drawn from practice."

Objective 11 has two sub-objectives. Objective #11a measures student performance concerning their defense of their capstone project to a panel of reviewers; objective #11b measures student performance on their written presentations.

Student Assessment Process

PAD 692 requires students to prepare and defend of their capstone paper, using ideas drawn from the MPA curriculum and best practices encountered in the workplace. The capstone paper must be original, although it can build on the work that students have done in other MPA courses. Each student prepares a 15-minute presentation about their capstone project that they augment with presentation technology. Afterwards, the student fields questions from the

audience for five minutes. A panel consisting of Levin College faculty members and practicing public administrators grades the student's presentation. Students receive grades from individual members of the panel and can use the panel's feedback to improve their capstone papers. The topics of the capstone papers are open.

As part of the assessment plan, the MPA faculty developed rubrics for the assessment of the students' oral presentations and for the capstone paper. Eight MPA faculty members reviewed nine (9) randomly selected papers from CY 2003 and CY 2004. At least one paper came from each of the MPA Program's active specializations – public management (general public management/ nonprofit management), economic development, and health care administration. A total of 53 students completed the capstone course since its inception in Spring 2003. Seven capstone papers had three reviewers; one had two reviewers, and the other had four. The Graduate Programs Manager removed identifying information so that the faculty members received anonymous versions of the papers that were also ungraded. Seven faculty members read the papers at a special faculty meeting on April 26, 2005, where they used the capstone rubric associated with the MPA Program's learning goals. An eighth faculty member read the papers the day after this meeting.

Findings

The panel reviews of the oral presentations operationalized objective 11a of the MPA Program's assessment plan. As shown in Figure 1, the panelists found that two-thirds (66.6%) of the capstone presentations delivered on campus received grades of "high pass" (a cumulative score of 36 points or higher). (The instructor teaching the capstone course at YSU did not use this oral presentation rubric to assess the MPA students.) Therefore, concluding that the MPA students' oral presentations met objective 11a of the MPA Program's assessment is reasonable: "Students will defend their problem analysis, using presentation technology, before a panel of MPA faculty and practitioners."

**Figure 1 - Scoring Summary of the Panel Evaluations for
the Selected MPA Oral Presentation**

N=8 CY 2003-2004

	Q1 - written comm	Q2 - project ID	Q3 -MPA core ideas	Q4 -Info Gathering	Q5 - Analysis	Q6 -Project Recommen d	Q7 - Learnin g	Q8-Quality Oral Presentatio n	Q9 Respons e to Question s	Q11 Panelist's Total Rating
Average	4.79	4.73	4.30	4.60	4.69	4.39	4.52	4.57	4.69	40.20
Median	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	5.00	5.00	5.00	41.00
s.d.	0.417855	0.449776	0.749713	0.563242	0.69	0.737327	0.687682	0.5683208	0.470824	4.13897
Variance	0.174603	0.202299	0.562069	0.317241	0.48	0.543651	0.472906	0.3229885	0.221675	17.131

A closer examination of Figure 1 shows larger variations for students' performance on MPA Learning, and Project Recommendations (questions 7 and 6, respectively). The overall mean scores for these dimensions were 4.3 and 4.39 on a five-point scale (with 5 as the highest score); the corresponding standard deviations were .75 and .74, respectively. These data mean that one-third of the students' performance on these dimensions were minimally acceptable. These findings take on greater significance when combined with the results of the MPA faculty's assessments of those students' capstone papers.

Figure 2 displays the four-pronged rubric used to measure student performance on their written papers. The scoring of performance relied on a seven-point scale, from 0 to 6 (the highest), based on dimensions related to the MPA Program's Learning Goals. The faculty members who evaluated the capstone papers used the explanation grid developed jointly in March 2005. Figure 3 summarizes the MPA faculty's review of the written capstones. These data operationalize objective 11b of the MPA Program Assessment Plan. Specifically, objective 11b states that "students will demonstrate critical thinking by integrating theory and applying specialized knowledge in the analysis of a problem drawn from practice."

Figure 2 - The MPA Program Capstone Paper Assessment Rubric

Spring 05 Capstone Assessment Papers							N=9
Unsatisfactory Performance	Marginal Performance		Satisfactory Performance		Exemplary Performance		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

**Figure 3 - Scoring Summary of the
MPA Faculty Review of Selected Written Capstones
N=9 CY 2003-2004**

	Goal 1 Substantive Knowledge	Goal 2 Written Communic.	Goal 3 Critical Thinking	Goal 4 Breadth & Application	Goal 5 Society & Culture	Goal 6 PA Values & Ethics
Exemplary Performance (5 or 6)	19.23%	19.23%	7.69%	3.85%	4.35%	21.74%
Satisfactory Performance (3 or 4)	42.31%	38.46%	50.00%	57.69%	69.57%	43.48%
Marginal Performance (1 or 2)	34.62%	30.77%	30.77%	34.62%	21.74%	30.43%
Unsatisfactory Performance (Score of 0)	3.85%	11.54%	11.54%	3.85%	4.35%	4.35%
Mean	3.154	2.885	2.769	2.8461	3.1739	3.130

Figure 3 shows an overall mean score of satisfactory performance on three goals: substantive knowledge, society & culture, and public administration values. The faculty reviewers found that the highest (exemplary) performance was for goal 6, public administration values and ethics, at 21.74%. As discovered from the assessment of oral presentations, the students' performance on goal 3, critical thinking, showed the lowest overall mean score of 2.769. Similarly, the mean scores for goal 2 - written communication - and goal 4- breadth & application of MPA learning- translated into marginal performance. The evidence suggests that the MPA students' performance on their written capstone papers was mixed.

Analysis

After the assessments, the MPA faculty discussed the results and identified MPA Program improvements. A summary of the discussion is in Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Problem Identification & Program Improvement

Identified Problem	Program Improvement/Questions
The capstones were poorly written.	Faculty members in PAD 600, Introduction to Public Administration, will stress writing in their courses. Does the MPA Program need prerequisites or a writing workshop on how to organize a paper?
Some courses give feedback to students at the end and therefore students do not have an opportunity to submit multiple drafts of their written work.	The capstone course allows students to submit multiple drafts of their writing assignments.
The capstone papers were descriptive, not analytical. (This finding is similar to capstone courses in other MPA Programs.) Students had trouble stating an argument and applying the appropriate theories.	As of Spring 2005, the capstone course has a specific reading on critical thinking. Students apply this framework to analyze the seminar’s readings. Then, they use it to assess their own capstone outlines. We will see if the capstone papers are better after students have had exposure to this framework.
One student missed an economic point in understanding an issue concerning the shortage of nurses.	
Students need to learn a standardized format for writing papers at the beginning of the MPA Program.	The MPA Program will require the APA style. The faculty members teaching PAD 600, Introduction to Public Administration, will introduce the APA style in their classes and will require it for their papers. Action Item: Faculty members will submit the writing guidelines they use in their classes. The plan is to develop one set of instructions about what style they should use in writing papers for MPA classes.
The capstone projects were not standardized.	Should we limit the kind of projects for the capstone and then provide detailed instructions, e.g., a budget analysis, a policy analysis, etc.?

While the MPA Program is in the early stages of the assessment process, the faculty members found that the process elicited a valuable discussion and served as a unifying experience. After the April 2005 assessment meeting, the number of faculty members volunteering to serve as reviewers of the May 2005 oral presentations doubled, from two to four. At a minimum, this change, although small, signifies more faculty ownership of not only of the capstone course but of the assessments that underpin it. In effect, the formalization of MPA learning outcomes and assessment has been a positive experience for the MPA Program.

APPENDICES

MPA PROGRAM LEARNING GOALS ACHIEVED THROUGH PAD 692/691 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CAPSTONE SEMINAR

- Goal 1:** **Substantive Knowledge:** MPA students will gain knowledge of factual information about public and nonprofit administration that enables them to analyze a defined policy problem, challenge, or opportunity successfully in the capstone project
- Students will explore the relationship between theory and practice in their capstone project
 - Students' selection of the capstone project will reflect a social, political, policy challenge that is fundamental to the practice of public or nonprofit administration in the contemporary context
 - Students can identify salient features of public administration and constitutional values.
- Goal 2:** **Core Communication Skills:** MPA students will demonstrate competence in written and oral forms.
- Students will prepare a written capstone paper that integrates learning from the MPA core curriculum
 - Students will “defend” their capstone paper to a panel of faculty, alumni, and practitioners
- Goal 3:** **Critical Thinking Skills:** Students will develop critical acumen such that they can make defensible judgments about policies and administrative behaviors and not to take information as dogma
- Students' participation in class appropriately will apply a critical thinking framework that allows them to identify arguments and question the underlying assumptions of analytical research
 - Students' capstone project will show appropriate data gathering and information analysis techniques
 - Students can distinguish between good and bad evidence for claims about policies or administrative behavior
 - Students will show the capacity to disagree respectfully and to apply ideas without becoming argumentative or without personalizing an issue
 - Discussion in class will allow students to share, disagree, or apply new viewpoints to contemporary issues
 - Students apply methodological skills to analyze a defined administrative or policy issue in their capstone project

**MPA PROGRAM GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES THROUGH
PAD 692/691 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CAPSTONE (continued)**

Goal 4: Breadth and Application of Knowledge: Students will understand that public administration is a multi disciplinary field

- Students will have exposure to a range of disciplines during their core program and in the capstone readings and discussions
- Students will show that they can analyze a problem from a multi disciplinary perspective, e.g., political, legal, economic, social, psychological dimensions

Goal 5: Understanding Society and Culture:

- Students will place a “public administration problem” in a global context through the course readings and formal assignments
- Students will offer viewpoints in class, based on justification rather than advocacy, about contemporary issues
- Students’ capstone papers will focus on a contemporary issue
- Students’ capstone projects, both the written paper and the oral defense, must demonstrate that they understand public administration broadly and they do not base their conclusions on advocacy or personal opinions

Goal 6: Values and Ethics: Students will demonstrate how public administration’s (constitutional) values and ethics influence their analysis and their learning.

- Students will review ethical frameworks and social equity writings in the capstone
- Students will explore ethical dilemmas drawn from public administration practice
- Students will grapple with actual ethical dilemmas that public administrators face on the job and apply ethical frameworks and standards of social equity into their decision making in the capstone
- Classroom readings, discussion, and guest speakers will emphasize the importance of social/civic values and ethical responsibility

**MPA CAPSTONE PROJECT
ORAL PRESENTATION ASSESSMENT RUBRIC**

Evaluator _____ Student _____ Date _____
Title of Capstone _____

1. Clarity in communication (goals 2 and 3)– grammar, organization, syntax, and the use of language (circle one):

5= the slides are concise and consistent with standards of grammar, spelling, and punctuation; organization of ideas is logical

4=

3= slides are not concise but mostly consistent with standards of grammar, spelling, and punctuation; the organization of ideas is logical

2=

1= slides are unclear and inconsistent with standards of grammar, spelling, and punctuation

2. Capstone project identification (goals 1 and 4):

5=oral explanation of the situation, policy problem, or community challenge/opportunity and its importance is clear, complete, and expressed in multi disciplinary public administration terms

4=

3= oral explanation of . . . and its importance is understandable but not expressed in public administration terms

2=

1= oral explanation of . . . and its importance is unclear and confusing.

3. Coverage of core ideas (goals 1, 4, 5, 6) – does the oral presentation draw on concepts, theories, and ethical models from the MPA core curriculum and/or area of specialization (circle one)?

5=discussion of concepts, theories, models, and ethical approaches is complete, accurate and thorough

4=

3= discussion of . . . is basically accurate and directly applicable to the capstone project

2=

1=discussion of . . . is incomplete, inaccurate, and not applicable to the project

4. Information gathering (goals 3 and 4):

5=information was gathered as required for the purpose of the capstone project

4=

3=

2= portions of the required data gathering are incomplete or weak

1=data gathering and information are incomplete or insufficient for the purpose

5. Analytical focus (goals 1,2, and 3)– Does the oral presentation provide analysis rather than advocacy?

5= analysis of information is specific and clear; analysis was consistent with analytical purpose; findings are not overstated

4=

3= description of analysis is generally clear; findings approach advocacy

2=

1= analysis is incomplete, vague, or unclear; findings reflect personal opinions

6. Project recommendations (Goals, 2, 3, and 6)

5=discussion of recommendations reflects thorough analysis; evidence to support recommendations are more than sufficient

4=

3=discussion of recommendations reflects thorough analysis; evidence to support recommendations is sufficient

2=

1=discussion of recommendations reflects little or no analysis; evidence to support recommendations is insufficient or missing.

7. Learning (Goals 1, 5, and 6) - what was the impact of the MPA program?

5= explanations of learning to the student are thorough, insightful, and candid; strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged with reference to continuous improvement; the capstone project was a significant educational experience

4=

3=explanations . . . are somewhat thoughtful and candid; strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged, although continuous improvement is not referenced; the capstone project was a moderate educational experience

2=

1=explanations . . . are inadequate or missing altogether; no evidence that the capstone project was a growth and development experience.

8. Quality of the oral presentation (goals 1 and 2)- did the student make an effective presentation?

5= the presentation was very clear and very well organized; technology appropriately supported the presentation

4=

3=the presentation was clear and organized; technology supported the presentation

2=

1=the presentation was unclear and unfocused; technology was used inappropriately or not at all

9. Response to questions (goals 1, 2, and 3): Did the student respond effectively to questions?

5= the answers were very organized, very responsive, and very clear

4=

3=the answers were organized but not responsive

2=

1=the answers were disorganized, unresponsive, and unclear

10. What is your overall qualitative assessment of the student's oral presentation?

11. Grade: High pass= 36 points or higher/Pass = 27 points or higher/Fail=below 27 points

CAPSTONE PROJECT PAPER ASSESSMENT			
Outcome/Goals	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Goal 1 - Substantive Knowledge	Significant public administration problem explored the relationship between theory and the practice of public administration in an area of specialization; the explanation of the project was complete and specific	Significant problem identified; understandable problem statement but the relationship between theory and practice not explored; the explanation of the project was generally clear	Unclear or nonexistent problem statement; the explanation was unclear, confusing, or nonexistent
Goal 2 - Written Communication	Excellent writing and organization with few grammatical errors.	Good writing and organization with some grammatical errors.	Disorganized writing with many serious grammatical errors.
Goal 3 - Critical Thinking	Superior data gathering and excellent analytical skills were used; methods were consistent with the project's purpose; more than sufficient evidence to support recommendations; strengths & weaknesses of the analysis were acknowledged	Good data gathering skills and basic analytical skills were used; methods were consistent with the project's purpose; sufficient evidence to support recommendations; strengths but not weaknesses were acknowledged	Insufficient data gathering and weak or no analytical skills were used; methods were inconsistent or contradicted the project's purpose; insufficient or no evidence to support recommendations; no strengths or weaknesses were acknowledged
Goal 4 - Breadth & Application of Knowledge	Accurate evidence was drawn broadly from the scholarly literature; the analysis incorporated a multi-disciplinary framework	Evidence was accurate but drawn primarily from popular sources; the analysis was understandable but not expressed in terms of a multi-disciplinary framework	Evidence was inaccurate or not relevant
Goal 5 - Understanding Society and Culture	A contemporary problem placed in a broad context; findings were not overstated	A contemporary problem was placed in a broad context; findings were overstated and based on advocacy (or personal opinions)	A contemporary problem was not placed in a broad context; findings were based on advocacy (or personal opinions)
Goal 6 - Values & Ethics of Public Administration	Thorough & insightful application of the public administration concepts, theories, models, & ethical approaches learned in the MPA Program	Basic application of the public administration concepts, theories, models, and ethical approaches learned in the MPA Program	Less than satisfactory of public administration values, concepts, theories, models or ethical approaches drawn from the MPA Program

CAPSTONE PROJECT PAPER ASSESSMENT FORM

Faculty Evaluator _____ Capstone Paper Identification Number _____

Directions: The faculty evaluator should circle the number corresponding to his or her evaluation. The evaluator should provide any comment about the written capstone paper or the evaluation in the space provided (as well as the back of the form).

MPA Learning Goals	Evaluator's Comments	Unsatisfactory Performance	Marginal Performance	Satisfactory Performance	Exemplary Performance
Goal 1 Substantive Knowledge		0	1 2	3 4	5 6
Goal 2 Communication Skills		0	1 2	3 4	5 6
Goal 3 Critical Thinking Skills		0	1 2	3 4	5 6
Goal 4 Breadth & Application of Knowledge		0	1 2	3 4	5 6
Goal 5 Understanding Society & Culture		0	1 2	3 4	5 6
Goal 6 Values & Ethics of Public Administration		0	1 2	3 4	5 6