

Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration

GENERAL INFORMATION AND STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL MASTERS DEGREE PROGRAMS

January 2008 Edition

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NASPAA

COMMISSION ON PEER REVIEW AND ACCREDITATION

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

I. Why and how does NASPAA provide peer review and accreditation?

In 1977, member institutions of NASPAA voted to adopt a program of voluntary peer review evaluation of master's degrees or degree programs in public affairs and administration. That same year, the Association adopted Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy and Administration. Peer review was

initiated by the member institutions to facilitate the continuing development and quality of public service education.

In 1983, the members of the Association voted to apply to the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), (now disbanded) to become recognized as a specialized accrediting agency to accredit masters degrees in public affairs and administration. On October 3, 1986, the Board granted NASPAA recognition as a specialized accreditation agency. In 1993, COPA was replaced by the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA), and in 1996, CORPA disbanded and has been replaced by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). NASPAA was granted re-recognition in 1991 and 1996, and will be reviewed again in 2003.

The NASPAA standards and the COPRA review process recognize that programs will have differing missions and approaches to achieving excellence in public affairs education. Variations from the standards must be justified in light of a program's mission and success in fulfilling its mission. In arriving at an overall judgement of accreditation, COPRA balances consideration of conformity with the standards and its assessment of overall program quality and unique mission.

The program mission is a key element in the review and accreditation process. Each program is asked to state clearly its educational philosophy and mission and to have an orderly process for developing appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources and constituencies. To assess student performance and accomplishment of objectives, each program reports on the assessment procedures and measures which are used to determine how well it carries out its mission. To guide performance, programs are asked to show how they use information in directing and revising program objectives, strategies and operations.

The review/accreditation process combines program self-study, review by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation and a two to three day campus visit by a COPRA appointed site visit team. The review/accreditation cycle begins each year on August 15, with the submission of a Self-Study Report. In June, the Commission meets for a final review session and determines if a program is in conformity with the standards. At that time, an Annual Roster of Accredited Programs is published by the Commission. Programs that have relatively minor problems can remain in the process for one or two years and can submit an abbreviated Self-Study Report identifying program modifications and changes.

NASPAA's membership consists of 250 member institutions which offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in public affairs and administration. Of the total number of programs eligible (to participate in peer review, 139 have been accredited. The sizable number of programs which have voluntarily participated in peer review and accreditation reflects their genuine and deep interest and concern in the quality of public service education.

The Standards for Professional Masters Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy and

Administration are proposed by the NASPAA Standards Committee and adopted by the Association. The Policies and Procedures for Peer Review and Accreditation are developed by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) and adopted by the Executive Council. All other documents relating to the review/accreditation process, i.e., the Self-Study Instructions, Site Visit Manual and scheduling of Site Visit Training Workshops are the responsibility of the Commission.

II. Overview of the Peer Review/Accreditation Process

A. Steps in the Process

1. Preparation and submission of Self-Study Report (SSR) by August 15.
2. Technical review by the Commission staff and chair.
3. Initial review and preparation of Interim Reports by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation during the NASPAA Annual Conference in the Fall. Each program under review is assigned a liaison. The liaison is a member of the Commission assigned to a program(s) and acts as a link between the Commission, program and Site Visit Team. The liaison has the responsibility of being thoroughly familiar with the program's SSR.
4. Options after initial review:
 - a) Commission recommends site visit;
 - b) Commission recommends program delay the site visit;
 - c) Program may withdraw at any time during the cycle.

Program may proceed to site visit regardless of Commission's recommendation.

5. Commission sends the program an Interim Report listing specific standards which need further clarification beyond the SSR in order to assess the program's conformance. These items will be examined especially by the SVT. Program responds to interim report. First contact with liaison generally occurs after receipt of interim report and may be initiated by the liaison or program.
6. Preparation for site visit - a set of names is submitted to program head. Program may eliminate one name. Site Visit Team (SVT) is appointed by the Commission.
7. Site visit occurs between January 1 to March 31. SVT prepares a draft report. Program responds and final SVT report is sent to Commission by May.
8. Commission meets in June to review and make recommendations which are sent to the program. These recommendations are for:

Initial Applicant Program:

- accredit for seven (7) years
- delay accreditation decision for one (1) or two (2) years until specific changes occur and program enters a future cycle
- deny accreditation

Program Seeking Re-accreditation:

- accredit for seven (7) years
- accredit for one (1) year
- deny accreditation

9. Appeals. The procedures for filing an appeal are outlined in Section 12.0 of the Policies and Procedures for Peer Review and Accreditation.

III. Standards

A. The purpose of NASPAA's MPA Standards is to promote and maintain educational quality and to provide professional education in public policy and administration. In addition, these standards are designed to meet the diverse educational needs of full-time and part-time students, students who are changing careers and students with interests in different career specialties in public policy and administration.

These nine standards deal with:

1. Program Eligibility for Peer Review
2. Program Mission
3. Program Jurisdiction
4. Curriculum: Common Core and Specializations
5. Faculty
6. Admission of Students
7. Student Services
8. Support Services and Facilities
9. Off-Campus and Distance Education Programs

B. Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report prepared by the program contains descriptive information about the degree program being reviewed. Each section of the Report is keyed to the MPA Standards.

I. Volume I contains:

Sections I - IX - descriptive information on standards

2. Volume II contains:

Faculty data sheets (or curriculum vitae)

Course abstracts (or course syllabi)

3. If program has implemented significant changes in requirements after preparation of the self-study report and prior to the site visit, then such information should be given in writing to the team before they arrive. Plans for change are not sufficient for conformity.

4. How is the Self-Study Year defined? As a general rule, the program provides the latest actual operating data/policies/procedures for the academic year immediately prior to the submission of application for peer review/accreditation.

5. Why does the Report Form request so much data/information? The approval process

will rely a great deal on the judgment of peers, not on a large number of quantitative standards.

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation and the Site Visit Team need considerable data to make judgments that are consistent and equitable across programs. The field stands to learn a lot about itself from the information collected.

6. Programs previously accredited are held to the same standards with the same rigorous interpretation as are programs being newly considered. Questions about compliance must be resolved before accreditation will be granted.

IV. Role of Site Visit Team

The role of the site visit team is to verify and clarify the description presented by the program in the SSR. The team acts as an extension of the Commission and assesses the goals as stated by the program against the NASPAA standards. It is particularly important that the SVT provide information on queries raised by the Commission. The SVT, however, does not participate in the determination of whether the program's compliance with the standards is sufficient for accreditation. This is the role of the Commission. The site visit provides an opportunity for the exchange of information among colleagues and is part of the larger peer review/accreditation process in an attempt to discover and share the continuing development of quality and excellence in public affairs and administration programs.

A. Pre-Visit Preparation

1. Attend a Site Visit Training Workshop
2. Thorough knowledge of peer review/accreditation process
3. Knowledge of standards and interpretations
4. Familiarity with the applicant Self-Study Report
5. Thorough understanding of the Commission's concerns

B. Site Visit Schedule

1. Two and one-half to three and one-half days in length
2. Multi-campus site visits may require extra days
3. Interviews with university and program administrators, faculty, alumni and students
4. Review program records

C. Site Visit Team Report

1. Preparation of a draft report. Usually the Chair assigns team members to prepare parts of the report. The team is urged to prepare a preliminary SVT Report before leaving the campus. Chair then assembles the draft and sends copy to program for review and comment.

2. Program responds to this draft and Chair of SVT completes the final report and sends this to the Commission.

The documents governing NASPAA's peer review are:

- Policy and Procedures for Peer Review and Accreditation (Amended April 1993)
- Standards for Professional Masters Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy and Administration (Amended October 1978, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1992, 1997, 2002)
- Self-Study Report Instructions (updated June 1994; 2001, 2002)
- Site Visit Manual (updated April 1993, January 2002)
- Public Service Internship Guidelines (Amended March 1991)
- Guidelines for Developing a Master's Degree Specialization in Public Works Administration within the MPA Degree (Amended April 1993)
- Diversity Guidelines (Amended October, 1997)

Prepared by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation October 19, 1988
 Amended March 23, 1991
 Amended October 24, 1992
 Amended June 17, 1994
 Edited and updated January 24, 2001; January 15, 2002

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL MASTERS DEGREE PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, POLICY, ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

Purpose. The purpose of these standards for professional masters degree programs in public affairs, policy, administration is to promote and maintain educational quality. These standards are used in NASPAA's peer review and accreditation process conducted by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation. NASPAA is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as a specialized accrediting agency to accredit masters degree programs in public affairs, policy, administration.

Applicability. These standards apply to individual masters degree programs whose purpose is to provide professional education for leadership in public affairs, policy, administration. All versions of the degree program seeking accreditation or re-accreditation are covered by these standards. These standards apply to individual masters degree programs whose purpose is to provide professional education for leadership in public affairs, policy, administration. All versions, of the degree program seeking accreditation or re-accreditation are covered by these standards. When off-campus and

distance education programs serve different missions, student populations, or utilize different educational technology or learning methods, these differences shall be described fully in order to demonstrate:

- the extent to which educational offerings are consistent with and contribute to the mission;
- the extent to which assessment and guidance processes ensure the comparability of the education offered;
- the effects of these differences on students, faculty, administrators, systems, processes, and the allocation of program resources and, therefore;
- the effects of these differences on the education received by all students in the program seeking accreditation regardless of where they are located.

(See SSR Instructions, Standard 9, and NASPAA's Guidelines for Off-Campus and Distance Education, for details.)

Flexibility and Innovation. The primary concern of these standards is to achieve high quality professional education for persons entering public service. Flexibility and innovation in curriculum design and means of delivery are necessary in order to meet the diverse educational needs of full-time and part-time students, pre-entry and in-career students, students who are changing careers and students with interests in different career specialties in public affairs, policy, administration.

Overall Evaluation of Program. NASPAA recognizes that programs will have differing missions and approaches to achieving excellence in public affairs education. Variations from the standards must be justified in light of a program's mission and success in fulfilling its mission. In arriving at an overall judgment on accreditation, COPRA shall balance consideration of substantial conformance with the standards and its assessment of overall program quality and the unique mission of that program.

1.0 Eligibility for Peer Review and Accreditation

1.1 Eligibility. These standards assume a commitment to the use of peer review procedures to assess educational quality. Formal peer review and accreditation processes of NASPAA are open to programs which meet the following criteria;

1.2 Institutional Accreditation. The parent institution is accredited by its regional association;

1.3 Professional Education. The primary objective is professional education preparing persons for leadership and management roles in public affairs, policy, administration;

1.4 Program Length. The program must have been in operation at least four years to provide adequate data for evaluating program policies, procedures, and placement of graduates.

2.0 Program Mission

2.1 Mission Statement. The program shall state clearly its educational philosophy and mission and have an orderly process for developing appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources, and constituencies.

2.2 Assessment. The program shall assess its students' performance and the accomplishment of its objectives. Assessment procedures and measures may take any form appropriate to the program and its circumstances, but each program shall develop and use procedures for determining how well it carries out its mission.

2.3 Guiding Performance. The program shall use information about its performance in directing and revising program objectives, strategies, and operations.

3.0 Program Jurisdiction

3.1 Administrative Organization. Effective public policy and public administration programs may exist in several forms - sometimes as an autonomous department or school, sometimes as an accountable portion of some larger unit such as a school of administration or a department of political science. Within the framework of university organization, responsibility for the professional masters degree program in public affairs and administration should rest with an identifiable component of faculty and an administrative organization capable of conducting the program effectively. Recognizing wide variations in university structures, the intent is to achieve an appropriate focus of attention, direction, and accountability for the program without prescribing any particular form of organization.

3.2 Identifiable Faculty. There is a public affairs and administration program with identifiable faculty membership, whose primary responsibility for the program is recognized at the next higher level of university organization.

3.3 Program Administration. Responsibility for program administration is assigned to a dean, chairperson, director, or other single administrator who is appointed after appropriate consultation with the program faculty.

3.4 Scope of Influence. Within the framework of organization and process peculiar to the institution, the public affairs and administration faculty and/or administrator exercises initiative, and substantial determining influence with respect to:

- general program policy and planning
- degree requirements
- new courses and curriculum changes
- admissions
- certification of degree candidates

- course scheduling and teaching assignment
- use of financial and other resources

- appointment, promotion, and tenuring of program faculty.

4.0 Curriculum

4.1 Purpose of Curriculum. The purpose of the curriculum shall be to prepare students for professional leadership in public service.

4.2 Curriculum Components and General Competencies. The common and additional curriculum components shall develop in students general competencies that are consistent with the program mission. The curriculum components are designed to produce professionals capable of intelligent, creative analysis and communication, and action in public service. Courses taken to fulfill the common curriculum components shall be primarily for graduate students. Both the common and the additional curriculum components need to be assessed as to their quality and consistency with the stated mission of the program.

4.21 Common Curriculum Components. The common curriculum components shall enhance the student's values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively:

In the Management of Public Service Organizations, the components of which include:

- Human resources
- Budgeting and financial processes
- Information management, technology applications, and policy.

In the Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis, the components of which include:

- Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation
- Decision-making and problem-solving

With an Understanding of the Public Policy and Organizational Environment, the components of which include:

- Political and legal institutions and processes
- Economic and social institutions and processes
- Organization and management concepts and behavior

Diversity Across the Curriculum. Program activities must prepare students to work in and contribute to diverse workplaces and communities. Consequently, courses, curriculum materials, and other program activities should expose students to differences relating to social identity categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, and veterans status.

These area requirements do not prescribe specific courses. Neither do they imply that equal time should be spent on each area or that courses must all be offered by the public affairs, public policy or public administration programs. Nor should they be interpreted in a manner that might impede the development of special strengths in each program.

4.22 Additional Curriculum Components. Each program shall clearly define its objectives for additional work and the rationale for the objectives, and shall explain how the curriculum is designed to achieve those objectives. The statement of objectives shall include any program specializations or concentrations and the main categories of students to be served (e.g., pre-service, in-service, full-time, part-time).

If a program advertises its ability to provide preparation for a specialization or concentration in its catalog, bulletin, brochures, and/or posters, evidence shall be given that key courses in the specialization or concentration are offered on a regular basis by qualified faculty. Specialization or concentration courses may be offered by units other than the public affairs or administration program. The specialization and concentration courses shall not be substitutes for the common curriculum components.

4.3 Minimum Degree Requirements. Students with little or no educational background or professional experience in the common and additional curriculum components are expected to devote the equivalent of two academic years of full-time study to complete the professional masters degree program. Where students have had strong undergraduate preparation in the common curriculum requirements or have been engaged in significant managerial activities, some of the subject matter requirements might be appropriately waived or reduced. Even in such cases, students ordinarily must spend the equivalent of a calendar year of full-time study in formal academic work, exclusive of an internship, to obtain the professional masters degree. A calendar year is defined as two semesters and a summer session at least eight weeks in duration or four quarters (exclusive of internship) of full-time academic work.

4.4 Internships. A carefully planned internship experience shall be made available by the program and students who lack a significant professional work background shall be strongly encouraged to take advantage of it. The program shall provide on-going academic supervision. Internship programs shall generally reflect NASPAA's internship guidelines.

5.0 The Faculty

5.1 Faculty Nucleus. There must be a faculty nucleus that accepts primary responsibility for the professional graduate program. This regular faculty should consist of a sufficient number of full-time faculty significantly involved with the program to support the set of teaching, research and service responsibilities appropriate to the size and structure of the

program. In no case should this faculty nucleus be fewer than five (5) full-time persons. The institution should specify how each regular faculty member is involved in the teaching and related research and service aspects of the program. At least 50 percent of the courses offered in the curriculum as well as at least 50 percent of the courses covering the common curriculum components shall be taught by full-time faculty of the institution.

5.2 Professional Qualifications. At least 75 percent of the professional graduate program's full-time faculty should hold an earned doctorate or other equivalent terminal professional degree in their field. Any full-time faculty member lacking the terminal degree must have a record or outstanding professional or academic experience directly relevant to the faculty member's assigned responsibilities. Full-time faculty actively pursuing appropriate terminal degree are to be included in the 25 percent not holding a terminal degree.

5.3 Practitioner Involvement. The involvement of practitioners is integral to the activities of a professional masters degree program. The institution shall specify how it involves practitioners in its program.

Where practitioners teach courses, there shall be satisfactory evidence of the quality of their academic qualifications, professional experience, and teaching ability.

5.4 Faculty Quality. In addition to the above, the qualitative adequacy of faculty members shall be demonstrated by their previous and current:

5.41 **Instruction.** Efforts to improve the instructional program, including student advisement, teaching methods, course content, and innovative curricula development;

5.42 **Research.** Research, writing, and publications;

5.43 **Experience and Service.** Professional experience and public service with government, industry, non-profit agencies, or consulting assignments.

5.5 Faculty Diversity. There should be evidence that specific plans are being implemented to assure the diversity of the composition of the faculty with respect to the representation of minorities, women, and persons with disabilities. Programs and plan to insure faculty diversity shall generally reflect NASPAA's Diversity Guidelines.

6.0 Admission of Students

6.1 Admission Goals and Standards. Admission goals, policy and standards, including academic prerequisites, should be clearly and publicly stated, specifying any differences for pre-service, in-service or other categories of students, and reflecting specific concern for the representation of minorities, women, and persons with disabilities. Programs and plans designed to insure student diversity shall generally reflect NASPAA's Diversity Guidelines.

6.2 Baccalaureate Requirement. Admission shall normally be limited to applicants with a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution and appropriately evaluated applicants from non-U.S. universities.

6.3 Admission Factors. Admission shall be limited to applicants showing good potential for success in professional graduate study and public service. Admission standards shall include several of the following factors about each applicant: (a) performance on the aptitude part of the Graduate Record Exam or the Graduate Management Admissions Test, or equivalent tests; (b) undergraduate grade point average and trend of grades; (c) rank in graduating class; and (d) biographical and career interest data and essays; and (e) evaluation of the quality of professional experience. These admissions standards should recognize the need for different measures to establish the criteria of excellence between pre-service and in-service students. Final judgment on admission shall be based on a combination of several of the above indicators rather than on a single criterion in order to increase the quality of professional personnel entering the public service.

7.0 Student Services

7.1 Advisement and Appraisal. Strong and continuous program advisement, career guidance, and progress appraisal shall be available for all students from the point of admission through graduation.

7.2 Placement Service. The program and/or the institution shall provide an adequate placement service oriented to public affairs and administration.

8.0 Supportive Services and Facilities

8.1 Budget. The program shall have financial resources sufficient to support its stated objectives.

8.2 Library Services. All students and faculty shall have reasonable access to library facilities and services that are recognized as adequate for master's level study in public affairs and administration. This would normally include texts, monographs, periodicals, serials, pamphlets, and research reports. The program faculty should have a major role in selecting library acquisitions for its program.

8.3 Supportive Personnel. Adequate secretarial and clerical personnel should be available to enable the program to meet its educational objectives.

8.4 Instructional Equipment. Program faculty and students should have access to appropriate equipment for coursework and research, including computer facilities, visual aid devices, audio and video tapes and films.

8.5 Faculty Offices. The offices for faculty should provide adequate space and privacy for student counseling, course preparation, and other faculty responsibilities.

8.6 Classrooms. Appropriate classrooms should be available for the courses being offered. This would normally include rooms suitable for seminars, case discussions, simulation exercises, and lectures.

8.7 Meeting Area. An appropriate area should be available for students and faculty to meet informally and discuss class projects, internship experiences, and other program matters.

9.0 Off-Campus and Distance Education

9.1 Definition and Scope

Off-campus and distance education programs are programs in which (a) students are located in facilities or at sites other than the main [parent] campus of the program, and/or (b) the students do not engage regularly in face-to-face interaction with an instructor who is in physical proximity. Off-campus and distance education programs can satisfy legitimate educational needs. When they serve different missions, student populations, or utilize different educational technology or learning methods from the parent campus, however, the burden is on the program to provide adequate information that demonstrates:

- the extent to which educational offerings are consistent with and contribute to the mission; the extent to which assessment and guidance processes ensure the comparability of the education offered;
- the effects of these differences on students, faculty, administrators, systems, processes, and the allocation of program resources and, therefore;
- the effects of these differences on the education received by all students in the program seeking accreditation regardless of where they are located.

9.2 Program Mission, Assessment, and Guidance

The program shall present a statement of rationale that specifically addresses off-campus and distance education courses, sites, and programs and that explains how this rationale emerges from and contributes to the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution's MPA program. The rationale for off-campus and distance education offerings shall be based on the distinctive aspects of the student population to be served and regional needs. The rationale also shall demonstrate its contributions to the mission, goals, objectives of the program on the main (parent) campus.

9.3 Program Jurisdiction

The program shall explain how and by whom educational, student services, and administrative policies and practices relate to off-campus and distance learning courses, programs, sites, and arrangements are formulated, administered, and assessed, including how comparability is assured.

9.4 Curriculum

The core curriculum shall be comparable to the curriculum in the main campus (parent) program. The program shall demonstrate the pertinence of the curriculum design and educational technologies to the program's mission, assessment, and guidance processes as well as with educational goals of specific offerings; comparability of offerings and requirements; compatibility of the educational technology with course goals and content; and the nature and availability of academic supports.

9.5 Faculty

The faculty shall be comparable to the faculty in the main campus (parent) program. The program shall demonstrate how: the main campus faculty maintains control over planning, design, delivery, and assessment of curriculum, courses, and instructions; off-campus and distance education offerings affect faculty workloads and assignments; instruction of off-campus and distance education courses is factored into the institution's retention, promotion, tenure, and merit review processes and decision criteria and; and policies and practices that promote faculty equity and diversity, and prohibit discrimination in off-campus and distance education, are comparable to those on the main campus.

9.6 Admission of Students

Admission standards, procedures and criteria shall be comparable to those used on the main campus.

9.7 Student Services

Students shall have access to academic and administrative support services that are comparable to student services available to students on the main campus.

9.8 Support Services and Facilities

Support services and facilities shall be comparable to those on the main campus. The program should identify contracts and arrangements that assure the on-going availability, access, and performance of services and facilities.

APPROVED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Colorado Springs, CO, 11/10/77.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA, 10/25/78.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Lexington, KY, 10/20/81.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Washington, DC, 11/3/84.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Seattle, WA, 10/24/87.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 10/22/88.

AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Baltimore, MD, 10/18/91.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Cleveland, OH, 10/23/92.
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Raleigh, NC 10/17/97
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Los Angeles, CA, 10/02
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Indianapolis, IN, 10/04
AMENDED: NASPAA Annual Business Meeting, Seattle, WA, 10/12/07.