

# Accreditation Policies

## PEER REVIEW AND ACCREDITATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) is a professional education Association dedicated to the advancement of education, training and research in public affairs/policy/administration. NASPAA established the peer review process and accreditation to facilitate the continuing development and quality of public service education.

1.2 In 1977, NASPAA approved professional master's degree standards and initiated a voluntary Peer Review Process for master's programs in public affairs and administration. In 1986, the process was converted to accreditation when the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (now known as the Council on Higher Education Accreditation) granted recognition to NASPAA as a specialized accrediting agency for masters degree programs in public affairs and administration. Programs currently rostered through NASPAA's peer review process between 1980 and 1986 were automatically granted accreditation status.

All versions of the degree program seeking accreditation or re-accreditation are covered by the Standards for Professional Masters Degree Programs in Public Affairs/Policy/Administration.

This review is conducted by the NASPAA Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA). It combines a program self-study, review by the Commission and a site visit. Programs in conformity with the Professional Master's Degree Standards are listed on an Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. NASPAA assumes no liability or obligation arising out of the use of the roster by individuals or organizations.

1.3 Deadlines for each step in the review/accreditation process, including payment of NASPAA current membership dues and the specified fees, must be met by the program in order for the program to continue in the process and thereby assure consideration for inclusion on the appropriate Annual Roster of Accredited Programs.

1.4 Members of the Commission exclude themselves on all actions in the review process concerned with their own program and in any other instance representing a potential conflict of interest.

1.5 To maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the review/accreditation process, members of the Commission, Site Visit Team, staff and others involved in the process shall make no disclosure about individual program evaluations.

1.6 The documents governing peer review/accreditation are:

1. Policies and Procedures for Peer Review and Accreditation
2. Standards for Professional Master's Degree Program in Public Affairs/Policy/ Administration
3. Self-Study Report Instructions
4. Site Visit Manual
5. Public Service Internship Guidelines
6. Guidelines for Developing a Master's Degree Specialization in Public Works Administration Within the MPA Degree
7. Diversity Guidelines

1.7 Programs seeking initial accreditation or reaccreditation must provide complete and detailed information in order for COPRA to determine conformity with the standards and the burden of proving that the standards are met rests with the program.

1.8 In assessing each program for accreditation, the Commission shall base its conclusion on the overall quality of the program, its performance of its mission, consideration of substantial conformance with the standards, and its assessment of overall program quality given the unique mission of that program. Deviations 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 given the unique mission of that program.

## **2.0 Eligibility Requirements**

2.1 Application for peer review and accreditation is open to NASPAA institutional members who meet the following criteria:

- 2.11 The program must be a member of NASPAA for one (1) year.
- 2.12 The masters degree program must be in operation for four (4) years.
- 2.13 Payment of the Association's annual membership dues.
- 2.14 Payment of specified accreditation fees and site visit team expenses.

2.2 For a program to maintain its accredited status and remain listed on the Roster of Accredited Programs, the following criteria must be met:

- 2.21 Payment of the annual membership dues
- 2.22 Submit an annual report to the Commission no later than April 15 (or as determined by the Commission). This report must provide information about the program's resources, faculty, administration and curriculum. (See Section 11.0)

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

3.1 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation shall consist of twelve members appointed for three-year overlapping terms.

3.2 Members of the Commission shall be nominated by the Vice President of NASPAA prior to the Fall business meeting of the Commission and approved by the NASPAA Executive Council.

3.3 In the event a member of the Commission is unable to complete a three-year appointment, the President of NASPAA shall appoint another member to fill the vacancy subject to approval by the Council.

3.4 One member of the Commission shall be a "public member" to represent the interest of the public. Commission members shall represent both academic and practitioner experience.

3.5 One member of the Commission appointed each year shall be a member of the NASPAA Executive Council.

3.6 The Chairperson of the Commission shall be nominated by the Vice President of NASPAA and approved by the Executive Council.

3.7 The public member of the Commission shall be reimbursed for airfare and per diem costs to attend the Commission's meetings.

3.8 The eleven members of the Commission from NASPAA member programs shall be reimbursed for reasonable airfare costs to attend the Commission's Summer meeting.

3.9 Members of the Commission may not serve as independent consultants to any program that will be reviewed during their terms on the Commission.

#### **4.0 Fees**

4.1 The review/accreditation fee is set by the NASPAA Executive Council and subject to periodic review. The fee is due upon submission of the program's application and self study, no later than September 15 of that year. This fee is not refundable.

4.2 The program is responsible for payment of allowable expenses of the Site Visit Team. NASPAA reimburses individual team members and bills the program directly for costs of the Site Visit.

4.3 NASPAA institutional dues and review/accreditation fees must be paid for a program to be listed on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs.

#### **5.0 Application for Accreditation or Reaccreditation and Self-Study Report**

5.1 Materials on the review/accreditation process are available from the COPRA office and on the NASPAA website ([www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)). General questions regarding the process are answered by NASPAA's Academic Director or by the Chairperson of the Commission.

5.2 An application for accreditation or reaccreditation must be sent to the Academic Director of NASPAA no later than August 15 of the academic year in which the site visit will be initiated. This application must be signed by the President, Provost, Academic Vice President, or Chief Academic Officer of the institution and by the NASPAA Principal Representative. Late submissions will be accepted until September 1 with a \$300 late fee. After September 1, no applications will be accepted.

5.3 Programs seeking initial accreditation must notify NASPAA's Academic Director or the Chair of the Commission of their intent in writing at least one year prior to the submission of the Self-Study Report.

5.4 Applications are accepted only from NASPAA members in good standing with current dues paid. Programs must be in good standing for one (1) year before being eligible to apply for accreditation.

5.5 An application must be accompanied by 8 bound copies of Volume I of the program's Self-Study Report, five copies of program catalogues and brochures, and the accreditation fee. All programs are asked to email a PDF (Adobe Acrobat) version of volume 1 to NASPAA. Volume II (syllabi and cv's) must be submitted electronically in PDF format.

5.6 The Self-Study Report must be prepared according to the Self-Study Report Form and must contain data for the academic year immediately prior to the Program's submission of an Application for Peer Review. For example, Self-Study Reports submitted by August 15 must contain data for the academic year immediately prior to the submission of the application and must describe procedures and policies in place at the time of the self-study year.

If the procedures and policies described in the Self - Study Report were not in place at the time of the Self-Study, but are planned to be in place beginning the academic year of the site visit, describe these in Section II of the Self-Study Report with supporting documents substantiating the changes. Evaluations are based on the program in place at the beginning of the site visit academic year and confirmed by the site visit.

5.7 Upon receipt of the Report, the Managing Director of the Commission screens the Self-Study Report for technical completeness. Programs will be given an opportunity to supply necessary information omitted from the Report.

5.8 An initial applicant program may voluntarily withdraw from the review/accreditation cycle at anytime. If a re-accredited program chooses not to enter its regularly scheduled review cycle, the Commission will withdraw its accreditation status.

## **6.0 Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation Review of Self Study**

6.1 At the time of the NASPAA Annual Conference, the Commission completes a preliminary analysis and prepares an interim report for the program. This initial examination is concerned with the substantive adequacy of the Report and the Program's apparent degree of conformity with NASPAA Standards. For purposes of the evaluation, a program is deemed to be in conformity with NASPAA standards when the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation determines that its purpose, organization and governance, curriculum, faculty, and admissions processes conform to the standards, including the provision of adequate support services for a program of quality.

6.2 Without prejudging the final outcome of the accreditation or reaccreditation process, the Commission advises the program of its interim findings and specifies points to be reviewed by the site visit team.

6.3 Alternatively, the Commission may advise a program seeking initial accreditation to delay the site visit and take the necessary steps to remedy specified weaknesses and non-conformities with the standards. Delay of the site visit allows a program to correct deficiencies and to re-enter the next available cycle without additional application cost. An updated Self-Study Report that clearly identifies program changes is required to re-enter the cycle.

## **7.0 The Site Visit Team Roster**

7.1 The Principal Representative at NASPAA member programs offering professional master's degrees in public affairs/policy/administration is requested to nominate highly qualified members of their faculty for the Site Visit Team Roster. Associate members are urged to nominate qualified practitioners who are familiar with public administration curricula. Nominations should be accompanied by a one-page resume according to a format specified by the Commission. NASPAA Principal Representatives are automatically eligible and are requested to submit a one-page resume. (The NASPAA President and Vice President and current members of the Commission are ineligible to serve on site visit teams.)

7.2 For inclusion on a site visit team, a nominee must have attended a site visit workshop, been trained with the NASPAA CD-Rom "Site Visit Training and Accreditation" or have served on the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation or have served as a member of a site visit team within the past five years.

7.3.1 Site visit training workshop(s) will be held at the NASPAA Annual Conference or as specified by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation.

## **8.0 Site Visits**

8.1 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, in consultation with the program, appoints a site visit team consisting of a chairperson and two qualified individuals. A larger team may be appointed to review complex programs. In selecting the team, consideration is given to the nature of the program, its geographic location, diversity, and the expertise of the team members (including practitioner experience).

8.2 Site visits are scheduled between January 1 and March 31. They are conducted in accordance with the "Site Visit Manual" and are of two to three days duration. The program is responsible for expenses of the site visit team as outlined in the Site Visit Manual.

8.3 The Chairperson of the Site Visit Team is responsible for its report. The program is given an opportunity to respond to the Team's draft report. The team's final report, program response and other related material are reviewed by the Commission at its Summer meeting. Deadlines and format for the Site Visit Team Report are provided in the Site Visit Manual.

### **9.0 Commission Action on Programs Seeking Initial Accreditation**

9.1 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation determines and publishes an Annual Roster of Accredited Programs found to be in conformity with NASPAA's Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs and Administration.

9.2 The Principal Representative of each initial applicant program is notified in writing of the Commission's decision to accredit, deny accreditation or delay its decision for one or two calendar years while the program is making changes prior to publication of the Annual Roster.

9.3 The Principal Representative of each initial applicant program will receive a copy of the Interim Report, the Site Visit Team Report and the Commission's final decision to accredit for seven (7) years, delay its decision for one (1) year or to deny accreditation.

9.4 An initial applicant program found to be in conformity with NASPAA MPA Standards is included on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs for a period of seven (7) years. (Refer to Section 10.0, Annual Review of Accredited Programs, which describes the procedures for continued accreditation.)

9.5 If the Commission determines that an initial applicant program has specific non-conformities with the standards that can be resolved within one or two calendar years, but which preclude immediate inclusion on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs, the Commission may defer its final decision and allow the program to re-enter a future cycle after implementing any corrective measures recommended by the Commission. An updated Self-Study Report describing the changes will be required when the program re-enters the cycle.

9.6 The Commission will review this updated Self-Study Report and determine whether a site visit is necessary to clarify the facts described in the new Self-Study.

9.7 If a site visit is necessary, the Commission will determine the size of the team and its schedule. The program is responsible for allowable expenses of the site visit team as outlined in the Site Visit Manual.

9.8 A final decision on inclusion on the Annual Roster will be reached at the Commission's next Summer meeting.

### **10.0 Commission Action on Programs Seeking Re-Accreditation**

10.1 Currently accredited programs seeking re-accreditation are required to submit a Self-Study Report and schedule a site visit as designated in this document. Each re-accredited program will undergo a thorough review as if it were an initial applicant. The Commission's actions for re-accredited programs are as follows: 1) re-accredit for either seven (7) or one (1) year; or 2) withdraw accreditation and remove program from the Roster of Accredited Programs.

10.2 If the Commission determines that a currently accredited program has valid reasons for requesting a delay in its scheduled review, the Commission may accredit for one year and require it to enter the next

cycle. Delay requests must be received by June 1 of the year the Self Study is due. Late delay requests will be assessed a fee of \$300.

10.3 If the Commission determines that a currently accredited program under review is found to have specific non-conformities with the standards that can be resolved within one calendar year, the Commission may accredit for one year.

10.4 Those programs granted one year accreditation under 10.3 will be required to submit an updated Self-Study Report when the program re-enters the next cycle. The Commission will review this updated Self-Study Report to determine whether a site visit is necessary to clarify the information described in the new Self-Study. If a site visit is necessary, the Commission will determine the size of the team and its schedule. The program is responsible for allowable expenses of their site visit team as outlined in the Site Visit Manual.

10.5 A final decision on inclusion on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs will be reached at the Commission's next Summer meeting.

10.6 If the Commission rules to accredit a program that had previously been granted a one year accreditation, this re-accreditation shall be for a period of six years.

10.7 The Principal Representative and Chief Academic Officer of each currently accredited program under review will be notified in writing prior to the publication of the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. A complete copy of the Site Visit Team Report and the Commission's final decision to re-accredit for seven (7) years, re-accredit for one (1) year or deny re-accreditation will be sent to the Principal Representative and the university's chief academic officer.

### **11.0 Annual Review of Accredited Programs for Continued Accreditation Status**

11.1 Those programs accredited for a seven year period shall submit an annual report no later than April 15 or as specified by the Commission, identifying whether the program's resources, administration and curriculum have remained substantially the same or changed since the most recent accrediting decision. These annual reports will become part of the program's permanent accreditation file. Continued accreditation is contingent upon this annual report and continued payment of NASPAA dues. If an accredited program voluntarily terminates its membership in NASPAA, all membership rights are forfeited, including its accreditation status. The Commission would remove the program from the Roster.

11.2 If, in the judgment of the Commission, the program has undergone substantial changes in resources, administration or curriculum, additional information describing such changes may be required.

11.3 Based on a review of the new or additional information, the Commission may determine that the program has sufficient non-conformities and require the program to re-enter a future cycle. An updated Self-Study Report will be required when the program re-enters the cycle. The review/accreditation fee does not apply at this time.

11.4 The Commission will review this updated Self-Study Report and determine whether a site visit is necessary to clarify the facts described in the new Self-Study.

11.5 If a visit is necessary, the Commission will determine the size of the team and its schedule. The program is responsible for allowable expenses of their site visit team as outlined in the Site Visit Manual.

11.6 A final decision on inclusion on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs will be reached at the Commission's next Summer meeting.

## 12.0 Appeals

12.1 In the event that the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) denies accreditation to an applicant program, denies re-accreditation to an accredited program, or revokes accreditation, the program has the right to appeal the decision.

12.2 A program seeking to appeal a decision of COPRA shall submit a statement of intent, signed by the head of the institution, to NASPAA within 15 calendar days of receipt of the letter transmitting the Accreditation Report. The program shall then submit written grounds for appeal and a fee, established by NASPAA to defray the costs of the appeal, to NASPAA within 30 calendar days of the date of the letter of intent.

12.3 A master's degree program may appeal only on the grounds that:

- COPRA's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which the Commission took action, or
- the procedures used to reach the decision were contrary to published COPRA Policies and Procedures, or other established practices, and the procedural error prejudiced the Commission's consideration of the program application.

12.4 Only evidence properly submitted to COPRA prior to the decision that is the subject of the appeal may be considered in the appeal. No new evidence may be submitted on appeal. In the event of a failure to submit within the required time frame the statement of intent to appeal, the appeal fee, or the grounds for appeal, the appeal will be dismissed, and COPRA's decision will become final.

12.5 The executive director of NASPAA will refer the request for appeal to COPRA. The Commission appoints a five-person panel from the Appeal Board to consider the program appeal and establishes a date for a hearing on the appeal. COPRA shall inform the program of the composition of the appeal panel and the hearing date. Objections to the composition of the Panel, and/or other procedural matters regarding the manner in which the appeal is to be heard, shall be submitted by the program in writing to the executive director of NASPAA. The executive director will refer objections to COPRA, whose disposition of the matter shall be final.

Members of the appeal panel will be selected from the Appeal Board, which is composed of public affairs educators and practitioners who have experience with the accreditation process and other appropriately qualified individuals. Panel members may not be current commission members or have participated in any way in the accreditation process for the program that is appealing the adverse decision.

12.6 All members of the appeal panel shall receive the following at least 14 calendar days prior to the appeal hearing:

- the complete Interim Report, Site Visit Report, and Decision letter, or other written documents, rendering the findings of fact on which the appeal is based,
- the program statement of grounds for appeal,
- the site visit team chair's reply to the grounds for appeal, if the adverse decision resulted from a site visit to the program, or a response to the grounds for appeal from COPRA.

12.7 At the appeal hearing, representatives of the program shall be afforded the opportunity to make a presentation explaining the basis for the appeal. The program shall have not less than 30 minutes for this

presentation. The members of the appeal panel may also ask questions of the representative of the program about the basis for appeal.

The program may elect, at its expense, to have a transcription or audio recording of the hearing, and COPRA shall arrange for such transcription or recording. The program may elect to have legal counsel present at the hearing. The program may waive the opportunity for an appearance before the appeal panel and request that its appeal be considered on the basis of the record before COPRA and the program grounds for appeal.

12.8 At the conclusion of the hearing, the appeal panel will convene in executive session to review the evidence and determine its action on the program appeal. The appeal panel may uphold or remand the decision of COPRA. The program shall be informed in writing of the panel's action and the basis for the action within 30 calendar days of the hearing.

12.9 If the appeal panel upholds the decision of COPRA, that decision becomes final as of the date of the letter stating the panel's disposition of the appeal. If the appeal panel remands the matter to COPRA, the Commission shall consider the action of the Appeal Panel and the determinations of the Panel on which the remand was based at the Commission's next meeting.

12.10 The decision of COPRA and the program appeal shall be held in confidence and the program status shall remain unchanged until the appeal or any remand to the Commission has been finally resolved.

### **13.0 Dissemination of Information on Accreditation Activities**

13.1 Each year, The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation will publish the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs in the Journal of Public Affairs Education. In addition, the most recent edition will always be available on the NASPAA website ([www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)), and by mail upon request.

13.2 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation will file an Annual Report with the NASPAA Executive Council listing those programs granted accreditation, the length of accreditation, and identify those programs which voluntarily withdrew or were denied re-accreditation. This Annual Report will be included in the minutes of the meeting and distributed to NASPAA members and available to the public upon request.

13.3 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation will submit an Annual Report to the Association on the status of the peer review/accreditation process identifying substantive trends and developments regarding education for the public service. This report will be sent to NASPAA members, practitioners and other interested parties.

13.4 In the interest of keeping member programs and the public informed of the status of the peer review/accreditation process, the Commission may conduct general overview sessions for this purpose.

### **14.0 Publicity Guidelines for Programs Listed on NASPAA's Annual Roster of Accredited Programs**

14.1 NASPAA's Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as a specialized accrediting agency to accredit masters degree programs in public affairs and administration. NASPAA supports the desire of member institutions to publicize inclusion of their masters degree programs on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs that are in conformity with the NASPAA standards for professional masters degrees in public affairs and administration.

NASPAA members wishing to cite their degree program's inclusion on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs in catalogs and brochures should choose among the following phrases:

"(Name of master degree) is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation and listed on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs in conformity with NASPAA standards."

"(Name of masters degree) is a National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) accredited degree program."

"(Name of masters degree) appears on the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) Annual Roster of Accredited Programs in conformity with standards established for professional masters degrees in public affairs and administration."

"The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) is recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation as a specialized accrediting agency and authorized to accredit masters degree programs in public affairs and administration. (Name of masters degree) is a NASPAA accredited degree program."

Those degree programs currently listed on the Annual Roster of programs found to be in conformity with NASPAA Standards for Professional Masters Degree Programs in Public Affairs and Administration may use appropriate accrediting language in their catalogs and brochures when referring to their degree program's accreditation status.

14.2 Any program found to be misrepresenting its accredited status through public statements or in documents will be notified by the Commission to undertake appropriate steps to correct these errors and to notify the Commission when public corrections have occurred.

14.3 If the Chair of the Commission or the Executive Director of NASPAA is notified of a non-accredited member program using language to publicize its program in such a way that "accredited status" is implied but not directly stated, the Executive Director of NASPAA will notify the program to take appropriate steps to correct the misleading language and notify the national office when public corrections have occurred.

## **15.0 Complaints Against Accredited Institutions**

15.1 While the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, like all organizations authorized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation to grant accreditation, is interested in assuring that accredited programs maintain their quality and continue to meet NASPAA standards, neither NASPAA nor its Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) is a "clearinghouse or mediator for consumer complaints against institutions or programs of study" (Council on Postsecondary Accreditation Handbook). COPRA is an accrediting body, not a regulator or an appellate tribunal for student or faculty grievances.

15.2 COPRA will accept and evaluate complaints against accredited programs in connection with annual review of program conformity or reaccreditation processes where there are serious allegations that a program may not be in conformity with NASPAA standards.

15.3 COPRA will not consider any dispute that is currently in any stage of litigation.

15.4 COPRA will not consider anonymous complaints.

15.5 Processing of Complaints

Complaints received by COPRA staff will be provided to the COPRA Chair who will screen complaints to eliminate any that are frivolous or do not clearly and directly rest upon a serious allegation that the program fails to substantially comply with particular NASPAA standards.

If the Chair concludes that a complaint should be forwarded to COPRA for consideration, staff will promptly provide a copy of the complaint and supporting material to the program with a request for a timely response. The COPRA Chair may appoint a subcommittee of the Commission to make further inquiries if such an investigation appears necessary to provide adequate information for COPRA to evaluate whether the program remains in conformity with the standard or standards in question.

15.6 Complaints forwarded by the Chair to COPRA will be evaluated at the Spring meeting in conjunction with annual program review for programs not currently involved in the reaccreditation process.

Complaints made regarding programs currently in the reaccreditation process will be evaluated at the Fall meeting in conjunction with the examination of self-studies and preparation of interim reports. If a complaint is received too late in the process to be evaluated in the Fall meeting, it may be carried over to the Spring meeting at the same time as the regular annual review process.

#### 15.7 Action on Valid Complaints

If the Commission determines that a complaint is valid and indicates non-conformity with one or more specific standards, the program shall be notified within two weeks.

The record and decision shall be placed on file for consideration along with other materials at the next review of annual reports or reaccreditation process, whichever occurs first. That information will be considered only as a part of the Commission's regular review of a program's accreditation status.

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The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (formerly known as the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation) as a specialized accrediting agency to accredit masters degree programs in public affairs and administration. Approved October, 1986, re-recognition granted April, 1991, March, 1996 and January, 2004. It will be reviewed again in the next 10 years.