

**Assessment Results, Interpretation, and Data-Based Program Changes**

Master of Public Administration Program

Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration

Marist College

**MARIST**

## Overview

This document provides additional discussion of the content in section 5.2 Part B of the self-study report, which defines our student learning outcome for the NASPAA universal required competency of leading and managing in the public interest. Data were collected in MPA 505 and in MPA 699 (the capstone) during the fall 2020 semester. Results, interpretation, and recommendations for data-based changes are included here.

### Outcomes Assessment Results: Goal 1 / SLO 1

**Goal 1:** Prepare innovative leaders for service in public and nonprofit organizations.

**SLO 1:** Analyze organization problems by applying public administration theory to formulate effective responses and solutions.

**NASPAA Universal Required Competency:** To lead and manage in the public interest.

**Course:** MPA 505 (Human Resource Management in Public Organizations)

**Semester:** Fall 2020

### Assignment Prompt

For your final assignment you will write a 10–12-page paper that mirrors the capstone project that you will write at the end the MPA Program. In this assignment, you will select a public, non-profit, or health care organization and identify a challenge that the organization is facing as it relates to human resources management. Example challenges include a need to:

- Introduce new skills or abilities to meet organizational needs
- Recruit to replace a rapidly retiring work force
- Develop strategic avenues for recruiting
- Respond to difficulty retaining employees
- Diversify their work force

The challenge you select will be the focus of the final paper and, like the capstone project the end of this program, you will propose an innovative and effective solution to the need that you've identified. In doing so, you are tasked with making clear connections between the theories and readings that relate to the challenge that the organization is facing. Your paper should include:

- Introduction
- Discussion of the course material (and related literature) that relates to your topic
- Review of stakeholders who have been impacted (internal and external) by the problem

- Suggestions on how to address this challenge (that is, address the problem)
- Conclusion

You will submit various components of the paper throughout the round. The breakdown of components are as follows:

**Problem Statement and Outline:** You will draft a brief and succinct *problem statement* that will serve as the focus on your paper, and a simple outline that addresses key paper content. The statement should be no longer than one paragraph (about 5–6 sentences), and you will find a document designed to help you think about and structuring your problem statement on iLearn listed with this assignment. The *outline* should include major, primary sections of the paper, and secondary level will reflect main arguments/points being made. Please note that outlines *should not* contain text or prose that we normally associate with a fully developed paper.

**Final Paper:** Your final paper will be the culmination of all of these elements in one document. Please note that higher quality problem statements and outlines end up resulting in better papers – and those papers are often easier to write as well. Please be sure to include in-text citations and a fully developed and properly formatted reference list.

For the final paper you are required to use a minimum of five (5) peer-reviewed journal articles as reference material. Popular media articles may be used for background, but do not count toward the minimum number of peer-reviewed journal articles.

## Results

**Table 1.** Rubric Scoring for Goal 1 / SLO 1 (%)

Dimension	Distinguished	Proficient	Developing	Needs Development
Defining Problems	78.1	21.9	0	0
Identifying Strategies	54.7	43.8	1.6	0
Proposing Solutions	43.8	51.6	4.7	0
Solution Sensitivity	39.1	46.9	10.9	3.1
Implementing Solutions	48.4	37.5	10.9	3.1

*Note:* n = 64

## Interpretation

The assignment in this course requires students to identify a specific organizational problem or challenge, and identify and propose innovative and effective solutions to that problem or challenge. Students completing this assignment met established benchmarks for performance (>82% in the combined “distinguished” and “proficient” categories) in both sections of the course during the fall 2020 semester.

Performance was generally stronger in the more basic categories of defining problems, with all students falling in the distinguished or proficient categories. Likewise, a majority of students scored in the same combined categories for both identifying strategies and proposing solutions (98.4% and 95.3%, respectively). Areas of relative weakness were found in those portions of the paper that tackled the sensitivity of solutions to environmental considerations (both theoretical and contextual) and the specifics of implementing those solutions (in both cases, just under 11% scored in the “developing” category while just over 3% fell in the “needs development” category). Of note, these scores in lower categories were the same students across both dimensions. However, for both dimensions, students still met established benchmarks for performance, with 86% scoring in the distinguished or proficient categories for both.

## **Recommendations**

Two logistical recommendations emerge from these results. The first recommended change is to provide clearer directions for students on the requirements of the paper, with a focus on the processes of proposing solutions, ensuring that students locate and discuss relevant theoretical and contextual factors, and provide sufficient detail on implementing those solutions. This will ensure that students are adequately primed to provide details on those components of formulating effective responses to solutions.

The second recommended change is to ensure that students devote appropriate time and effort to those sections of the paper, as writing strategies may result in more effort going to earlier sections of papers while less effort goes to the concluding sections. This will ensure that students maintain a focus on paper components in a manner that supports a fuller understanding of the entirety of the process of proposing and implementing solutions.

A final recommended change relates to course content, and will situate added discussions of sensitivity to context and the details implementation in week 6 of the course. This specific week, which focuses on performance assessment and management, is naturally well suited to this type of content change given the linkages between problems, devising measuring performance in service of effective solutions, and implementing solutions. This added content will take the form of added text to the “weekly notes,” and added specific discussion during the synchronous “office hours” session for that week.

## Outcomes Assessment Results: Goal 1 / SLO 1

**Goal 1:** Prepare innovative leaders for service in public and nonprofit organizations.

**SLO 1:** Analyze organization problems by applying public administration theory to formulate effective responses and solutions.

**NASPAA Universal Required Competency:** To lead and manage in the public interest.

**Course:** MPA 699 (Innovation in Public Administration - Capstone)

**Semester:** Fall 2020

### Assignment Prompt

Students are required to analyze a program or process within a public or non-profit organization and develop an innovation that is strategic in nature and creates and/or enhances public value in the selected organization. Innovations chosen are expected to be fundamental, dramatic and bold. In writing capping papers, students are required to conduct a strategic analysis of their organization and develop a comprehensive plan for implementing the innovation.

### Results for Goal 1 / SLO 1

**Table 1.** Rubric Scoring for Goal 1 / SLO 1 (%)

Dimension	Distinguished	Proficient	Developing	Needs Development
Defining Problems	55.0	45.0	0	0
Identifying Strategies	45.0	50.0	5	0
Proposing Solutions	40.0	50.0	10.0	0
Solution Sensitivity	25.0	75.0	0	0
Implementing Solutions	25.0	55.0	20.0	0

*Note:* n = 20

### Interpretation

Scores for the *defining problems* dimension were the strongest, with more than half (55%) in the highest category of “distinguished”; the remainder were in the second highest category of

“proficient.” Similarly, scores for the *identifying strategies* dimension were strong, with most papers scoring in the distinguished or proficient categories (45% and 50%, respectively) and 5% in the “developing” category. Though scores were still also relatively strong for the *proposing solutions* dimension (with 90% in the distinguished and proficient categories), a higher proportion of papers (10%) scored in the developing category. And, though all papers in the solution sensitivity dimension were in the highest categories of distinguished and proficient, a somewhat large proportion of those scores (75%) were in the proficient category. Finally, the scores for papers along the implementing solutions dimension demonstrated relative weakness. Though 80% of papers were in the distinguished and proficient categories, 20% of papers scored in the developing category. Scores for all dimensions met the benchmarks set by the program (82% in the distinguished and proficient categories) with the exception of the last dimension of implementing solutions.

These results are supported through indirect measurement of student collected through the MPA exit survey for those students graduating in the fall of 2020 ( $n = 23$ ). Students leaving the program indicated that they had a strong understanding of the theories of public administration that undergird change (mean = 4.3; median = 4; scale: 1–5, strongly disagree to strongly agree) and organizational change and behavior concepts (mean = 4.5; median = 5).

## **Recommendations**

The fourth chapter of the capstone, which addresses the processes and challenges of implementing innovative solutions, has historically been a challenge for students to write. This specific chapter is often lacking in detail and may be somewhat vague on key components. Though there are a variety of reasons that this may occur (e.g., writing fatigue as they get close to the end of the capstone), it is more likely that student are missing direction and detail on contents. It is this foundational area that we focus our recommended changes.

To this end, we will revise the capstone guidance documents that focus on chapter four, with an emphasis on ensuring that students can translate problems into specific action plans and tactics for implementing their proposed solutions. We will provide clearer directions and content requirements for students as they consider the necessary specifics on aspects of implementation.

We will revise the documents related to chapter four, and we will include that document in our MPA 699 course shell so that it can be use by all faculty teaching MPA 699. These changes will be made during the summer of 2021, and will be incorporated into capstone guidance for the fall 2021 semester.

## **Additional Outcomes Assessment Results**

Additional student learning outcomes assessment reports are available upon request, including:

**Fall 2020:** SLO 3

**Spring 2021:** SLO 2

**Fall 2021:** SLO 4 and SLO 5