NASPAA Site Visitor Training
Workbook and Case Illustration

October 2017

Session 4C Site Visit Workshop

Session 5C Site Visit Workshop, Continued (Case Study)

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SITE VISITOR FOUNDATIONS

1. Goals for Site Visit Preparation Session
    a. Become Familiar with Accreditation Process and NASPAA Standards
    b. Preparation requirements for service as a Site Visitor

2. NASPAA Mission and Role of Accreditation
    a. Excellence in Education & Training for Public Service
    b. Peer Review – Formative & Evaluative Processes

3. Assessment Tenants
    a. Mission Based; Outcomes Oriented; Public Service Oriented

4. Accreditation Process and Steps
    a. Self-Study Report (August); COPRA Interim Report; Program Response; Site Visit (Spring); Site Visit Report; Program Clarification; Program Final Response; COPRA Decisions (July)

5. Roles and responsibilities of site visitors
    a. 'Eyes and Ears' of COPRA
    b. Report on Standards without Judgment - Evidence
    c. Confidentiality

6. Site Visit Team
    a. Chair, Academic, Practitioner
    b. Review and managing multiple reports
    c. Work effectively as a team, and
        i. Responsibilities of individual members and the team before, during and after a site visit.
        ii. Responsibilities of site visitors to prepare in advance and to, wherever possible, notify the program of additional data/documentation needs in advance.
        iii. What to Avoid

7. Value of Site Visit
    a. Feedback, Sharing New Practices, Network

SERVICE AS A SITE VISITOR – CHECKLIST

- **Pre Visit Preparation** (http://accreditation.naspaa.org/resources/official-standards-policies/)

  - Review NASPAA Standards and corresponding videos: http://accreditation.naspaa.org/for-site-visitors/site-visitor-training/
  - Review Self-Study Instructions
  - Review Site Visit Manual
  - Review current COPRA Policies (Policy Statements)
  - Perform conflict of interest check when matched to program

- **Pre Visit Preparation, Program-specific in NASPAA Data Center** (naspaa.civicore.com)
  - Review Self-Study Report and appendices
  - Review Interim Report and program response
  - Connect with Chair on Responsibilities
    - Draft Preparatory Questions
    - Consider needed meetings, documents to review
  - Coordinate travel with team (and program)
    - Chair tasked with setting on-the-ground schedule

- **The Site Visit** (2.5 days on-the-ground)
  - Connect with team re: strategy, conduct
  - Faciliatate formative and collegial discussions with all stakeholders
  - Confirm and clarify, inquire; Do not judge or evaluate
  - Review evidence (source documents) related to program evaluatation, student learning assessment, mission, etc.: confirm processes, progress
  - Focus on public service values
  - Draft report findings
    - Document evidence and conversations related to Interim Report concerns

- **Site Visit Report**
  - Coordinate Report through the Site Visit Chair
  - Indicate concerns/no concerns, as supported by evidence
    - Make no final judgments
  - Respnd to COPRA concerns
    - Focus on evidence, what was observed, not pre-judgment
  - Review (all) accreditation standards
  - Report through NASPAA Data Center

- **Chair Responsibilities**
  - Contact COPRA Liaison
    - Understand goals of visit
  - Work with Program Representative to arrange schedule and secure stakeholder meetings and documents
    - Communicate goals and role of visit
  - Assign the workload for the visit appropriately with the team
  - Direct the onsite meetings, including the exit interview, making sure attention is given to COPRA priorities
    - Introduce team and purpose for the visit and each meeting
  - Coordinate site visit report
    - Notify program of draft and finalize report post-program review

SITE VISIT REFERENCE MATERIALS

https://accreditation.naspaa.org/for-site-visitors/

- **Preparation Materials – Prior to Visit**
  - NASPAA Standards
  - Preparation Videos
  - Self-Study Instructions
  - Site Visit Manual

- **Program Documents – Prior to Visit**
  - Program Self Study Report
  - Interim Report from COPRA
  - Program Response to COPRA Interim Report

- **Site Visit Activities**
  - Drafting Preparatory Questions (and Lead Roles)
  - Review Program Documents
  - Meeting with Stakeholders with Questions
  - Developing a SV Report

- **Developing the Response for the Report**
  - Making Connections
    - Standard(s)
    - SSR
    - Interim
    - Program Response
    - Observations
    - Findings
    - Recommendations
  - Language in the Findings

CASE QUESTIONS

Using the Example Interim Report below, review the Program's Mission Statement and Items 1, 2, and 3. After you have reviewed each item, **divide the items at the table** and consider the following questions. Once you have completed, discuss the items as a group and share your responses.

1. What are the strengths of the mission statement provided in relation to the Standards? What are the weaknesses?

2. During the Site Visit, who would you want to meet with to address COPRA's Interim Report concerns? What questions might you ask them?

3. What supporting documentation might you need to see to explore the issues raised in the interim report and provide evidence back to COPRA?

EXAMPLE INTERIM REPORT

Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
Interim Report to the

Master of Public Administration Program
NASPAA University

November 23, 2016

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation has reviewed the Self Study Report (SSR) for the Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program at NASPAA University. The Commission commends the program for strengths evident in the Self-Study Report and requests further information on the following point for its review. If the program proceeds to a site visit, particular attention should be paid to the items listed below. Please relate any responses to the program's specific mission and goals.

Program Mission Statement (as reported in the SSR):

The MPA Program seeks to prepare students for significant professional and managerial positions in the public and nonprofit sectors. The curriculum is designed to equip students with the necessary skills of contemporary public management, provide a broad understanding of the role of administration in the policy process, and provide a sound foundation in ethics. Thus, our MPA program seeks to:

1. *Provide a cadre of highly trained individuals who are committed to the notion of public service in a variety of organizational settings;*
2. *Develop advanced educational opportunities for student of public administration in an urban environment;*
3. *Fill the need for high-level executive management in public agencies which exists, particularly as this need relates to minorities and women; and*
4. *To serve as a resource to the greater community.*

Item 1: Standard 1.1 – Mission Statement
Standard 1.1 states, "The program will have a statement of mission that guides performance expectations and their evaluation, including:

- its purpose and public service values, given the program's particular emphasis on public affairs, administration, and policy
- the population of students, employers, and professionals the program intends to serve, and
- the contributions it intends to produce to advance the knowledge, research, and practice of public affairs, administration, and policy."

The Self Study Report indicates that the Alumni, Advisory Board, Employers, and Faculty are involved in the development of the mission statement. However, it is not clear how these stakeholders are involved (or will continue to be involved in its review):

"In preparation for the self-study report, a committee of the faculty reviewed the current mission statement and suggested adjustments to better reflect the program into which we have grown. We engaged our alumni, advisory board, a group of potential employers, and the entire faculty to review the proposed new mission statement. The mission statement was ratified in March 2014."

The Commission requests additional information regarding the process that was used in the development and continued evaluation of the mission statement. The Commission requests that the Site Visit Team explore this issue with the program during the site visit, paying particular attention to the specific process that was used in developing the mission statement, its continued evaluation, and how stakeholders are involved in that process.

Item 2: Standard 1.3 – Program Evaluation

Standard 1.3 states, "The program will collect, apply, and report information about its performance and its operations to guide the evolution of the program's mission and the program's design and continuous improvement with respect to standards two through seven."

Section 1.3.2 of the Self-Study Report states, "…a significant percentage of our graduates (primarily pre-service students) do not find a job in either the public or non-profit sector immediately (about twenty to twenty-five percent in recent years). On the face of things, this is a troubling result vis-à-vis the intent of the program to train leaders in the public and non-profit sectors. However, this is mostly a geographical issue related to the lack of professionalization in our region and the unwillingness of many of our students (who are by and large first generation college students) to leave the immediate area to find a job...Many wind up in private sector management careers, especially in the area of healthcare. Our as-of-yet untested hypothesis is that, as our graduates slowly occupy ever more and ever more powerful roles in local and regional agencies, professionally trained managers will become the norm rather than the exception, thus transforming local governance and service provision."

The Commission requests the program elaborate on the issues discussed above. How does the fact that a quarter of students ultimately find employment in the private, healthcare management impact the program's mission? Is this an opportunity the program has or could explore? The Commission requests the Site Visit Team examine this nuance in the program's employment data, specifically discussing with the program how it can evaluate this issue as well as how the program can facilitate its "untested hypothesis" and support professionalizing regional agencies.

Item 3: Standard 4.3 – Support for Students

Standard 4.3 states, "The program will ensure the availability of support services, such as curriculum advising, internship placement and supervision, career counseling, and job placement assistance to enable students to progress in careers in public affairs, administration, and policy."

In Section 4.3.4 the Self-Study Report states, "All students without professional work experience (pre-service) are required to complete at least one internship during their course of study….in Spring 2015, 69% of graduating students had participated in an internship."

The Commission requests a fuller description of how the program defines professional work experience and clarification of the exemptions granted to the 31% of students who did not complete an internship. Were these students required to have work experience specific to the field of public policy or did any post-baccalaureate work suffice?

Item 4: Standard 5.1 – Universal Required Competencies
Standard 5.1 states, "As the basis for its curriculum, the program will adopt a set of required competencies related to its mission and to public service values. The required competencies will include five domains: the ability

- to lead and manage in public governance;
- to participate in and contribute to the public policy process
- to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
- to articulate and apply a public service perspective;
- to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry."

The program elaborates on the universal required domain to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions, identifying three competencies, two of which were assessed using random student papers from two classes, using rubrics. The program stated, "The results of the assessment were shared with key stakeholders (MPA Advisory Board, which includes alumni and area professionals; and department head) over the summer and will be shared with the entire department faculty at the start of the fall semester. The department's PA Committee will consider potential programmatic changes in the fall when the academic year begins."

Based upon a review of the documentation, it does not appear that the program has completed one cycle of assessment for any of the universal competencies. Specifically, the Commission requests that the program provide updated information regarding its progress through the assessment cycle, including defining the competency, gathering evidence of student learning, analyzing the evidence, developing rubrics, and using the results for programmatic improvement. *The Commission requests the Site Visit Team examine and document evidence of progress on each of the universal required competencies, including one complete cycle of assessment of student learning. (Italics added)*

CASE QUESTION – Writing A Response

Using the same example Interim Report above, review Item 4 of the Interim Report from COPRA. Please also review the Program Response to COPRA on Item 4. After this review, with those at the table, develop a SVT Team Comment to this Item to be included in the SVT Report.

From the Program's Response to COPRA's Interim Report

To date, the program has completed one cycle of assessment. During 20XX-XX+1 and 20XX+1-20XX+2 academic years, we considered Competency #3—the ability to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions." We did this using a sample of papers students had written in our Course X (Analytical Techniques), as well as completed capstones. We supplemented **our analysis** with student self-reports of their learning. Our data show that students generally felt good about the skills they acquired in these courses, including in their ability to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions. We did see one item of concern—students reported that while they felt confident they could apply statistical techniques (e.g., chi-square or ANOVA), the felt less confident knowing which statistical techniques to use to use in various situations. Based on this, we have revised the way we teach our methods courses to incorporate more attention to this. Otherwise, we have been pleased with the way we teach research methods, and have made no other changes as a result of our analysis.

This year, we have formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Assessments, composed of Professors, X, Y, and Z, to assess Universal Requirement #1—"the ability to lead and manage in public governance." We will be using an exercise from the midterm examination in [our budget course] that is ideally suited for testing this competency. We will be developing a rubric for assessing their assignment during January and February, analyzing papers during March, and sharing the results with the PA Committee in April. The results will also be shared with the advisory board this spring in an effort to close the loop with potential changes in the program.

The Ad Hoc Committee is also working on Universal Requirement #2—"the ability to participate in and contribute to the public policy process." We will use two measures: completed capstones and the final paper required in (our policy analysis course). We will develop a rubric for these artifacts in November and December, analyzing papers during March, and sharing the results with the PA Committee in April. The results will also be shared with the advisory board in the spring in an effort to close the loop with potential changes based on these analyses.

NASPAA wishes to have programs test each competency twice in a seven-year period. Our schedule in subsequent years will be to test three of these competencies per year. This would get us on a schedule to test each of the seven competencies (the five universal ones, plus two tied to each of our concentrations) two times by the end of our accreditation cycle.

From the Site Visit Team Report:

Standard 5.1   Status Cited by COPRA
                      Have No Concerns   Have Concerns
Standard 5.1 Comments

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SCENARIOS FOR SITE VISIT TEAMS

On-the-Ground Conduct

1. At a meeting of students assembled at the team's request by the Program Administrator, the student comments are uniformly positive praising the program for its strengths.
2. The Interim Report indicates the Program submitted no diversity plan. The Program has a diverse student body.
3. Key members of the nucleus faculty are not available during the site visit.
4. At a meeting with students, another member of the Site Visit Team begins to lecture about public service values.
5. At a meeting with the program chair, a member of the Site Visit Team begins talking about the value of the Site Visit Team member's home program's approach to curriculum design. What do you do?
6. The program offers courses online, moving toward offering its entire degree online. How can the team review compliance?
7. Program faculty are resisting developing student learning assessment above and beyond grading students.
8. The Program is notably lacking in obvious student and faculty diversity. How can the team approach discussing the same topic with different programmatic stakeholders? For instance, if the program is struggling to articulate its climate of inclusiveness, how do you facilitate a conversation with students? Faculty? The provost?

Site Visit Report

1. The Team has found evidence that the program has not met the expectations with regard to assessing the universal required competencies, as appropriate for its accreditation cohort. How does the Team communicate this in the Report? To the program in person?
2. The students indicate that they are dissatisfied with the level of internship and career support provided by the program. The alumni echo this concern.
3. The Team believes the program is doing an excellent job with regard to student support. Likewise, the Team thinks there are large opportunities to improve faculty support. How does the Team communicate this in the Report? To the Program in person?
4. As a Site Visitor, what if you have a concern with conformance to a standard not raised by COPRA? What do you do?
5. As a Site Visitor, what if a concern from COPRA is not a concern for you? What do you do? How is it reported?