NASPAA
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The Commission on Peer
Review & Accreditation

NASPAA TASK FORCE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2014

NASPAA

The Global Standard in Public Service Education

Date: 10 October 2014

To: President Ethel Williams and the NASPAA Executive Council

From: Value of Accreditation Task Force (David Birdsell, Jo Ann Ewalt, Barbara Liggett, Greg Lindsey, Jack Meek, Michelle Piskulich)

Re: Task Force Findings and Recommendations

CC: Laurel McFarland, Crystal Calarusse, Heather Gregory

In May of 2014, President Williams established our task force to assess the burden, value, and pace of accreditation under the 2009 standards. We were charged with making recommendations relative to the:

1.   Burdens of the accreditation process;
2.   Role of NASPAA's Standards Committee; and
3.   Pace and tone of the accreditation process.

In the files attached to this memo, we present each of these charges, our findings, our recommendations, and considerations in implementation. Although we present findings and recommendations separately by charge, we want emphasize that the recommendations are inter-related, are mutually-reinforcing, and will be best viewed as a package. We excerpt our recommendations in this memo and refer you to supporting documents for elaboration.

While our Task Force was convened to address concerns voiced by NASPAA members about issues in accreditation, we want to affirm the efforts made by COPRA to implement the 2009 standards, the work of NASPAA's Standards Committee to address policy issues, and the efforts of NASPAA member programs and schools that have participated in accreditation. Consistent with mission-based accreditation that recognizes variation across programs, the 2009 standards replaced historic emphases on inputs with an appropriate focus on learning outcomes and acquisition of competencies. This change has required significant effort, and COPRA and member institutions have worked hard to implement the standards. Our recommendations are designed to further the evolution of the standards by addressing issues members have raised about the value and burdens of accreditation.

We think our recommendations will address member concerns, but we recognize that implementation of these recommendations will require significant effort by NASPAA and the Standards Committee, COPRA, and member institutions (particularly our recommendations for mission-based, strategic reviews for programs in good standing; streamlined accreditation of multiple programs; accreditation of schools; and new approaches to review of specializations). The cliché, "the devil is in the details," certainly is relevant here: many details remain to be addressed. We believe, however, implementation of these recommendations will, over time, strengthen the accreditation process and our member institutions.

We look forward to discussing our recommendations with you. It has been our pleasure to serve.

Value of Accreditation Task Force Recommendations

10 October 2014

Burdens of the Accreditation Process

To address real and perceived burdens of accreditation and to enhance the value of accreditation to schools and programs, the Task Force recommends continued effort to minimize data requirements and other inputs; new steps to maximize clarity of decision criteria used by COPRA; and a pilot program with new accreditation options for programs and schools in good standing that facilitate greater emphases on issues of strategic importance. Specific recommendations are:

1. **Continued Review of Data Requirements**. The Data Committee and the Standards Committee continue efforts to reduce data elements required by reviewing COPRA decisions, determining whether data submitted has direct links to decisions, and recommending discontinuation of data not used consistently in accreditation decisions (if any).

2. **Greater Transparency in Program Review**. COPRA take additional steps to clarify criteria used in program review, data and evidence used to determine conformance with standards, and internal COPRA decision-making processes during accreditation reviews.

3. **Mission-based, Strategic Review for Programs in Good Standing**. NASPAA and COPRA initiate a pilot program to provide a small number of programs or schools in good standing (e.g., successive accreditation and re-accreditation under the 2009 standards) the option for a "mission-based, strategic accreditation review" focusing on issues deemed critical by the program director and/or dean.

4. **Streamlined Accreditation for Multiple Degree Programs**. NASPAA and COPRA should continue the new pilot program to take a holistic approach to outcomes-based accreditation of multiple programs within a single School simultaneously. If this pilot is successful, procedures for holistic multiple program accreditation should be implemented.

5. **School Accreditation**. NASPAA and COPRA phase in a pilot program to provide a small number of institutions in good standing (e.g., successive accreditation and re-accreditation under the 2009 standards) the option for School-level accreditation.

Role of NASPAA's Standards Committee

To ensure that implementation of the standards is consistent with the expectations of the NASPAA Executive Council and NASPAA members, the Task Force recommends:

1. The Standards Committee work with staff to include assessment of COPRA accreditation procedures and instructions as part of its annual review of standards; and

2. The Standards Committee complete its initial review and assessment in the summer of 2015.

Pace and Tone of the Accreditation Process.

With respect to the pace of implementation of the 2009 standards, the Task Force recommends:

1. The NASPAA Executive Council and the Standards Committee affirm commitment to implementation of Standards 5 and 7, including time frames for implementation of assessment and communication of learning

outcomes relevant to the universal standards.

2. The NASPAA Executive Council and the Standards Committee establish a different, more flexible approach for assessment of specializations and that Standard 5 be revised to provide programs the option of one of three approaches to assessment of specializations:

A. Single Specialization Review. Complete assessment for a single specialization of primary importance to the program following the current standards and guidelines for assessment of the five universal standards and affirm that approaches used to deliver other specializations are similar.

B. Mission-based Specialization Review.

Complete a more general review of all specializations that includes presentation of evidence of:

> i. How each specialization fulfills the program's mission, is related to strategic objectives, and serves the populations of students each is intended to serve;
> ii. The availability of faculty, courses, and other co-curricular learning opportunities deemed necessary for delivery of the specializations;
> iii. Methods used by the program to evaluate the effectiveness of specializations, including a general description for at least one specialization of evidence of student acquisition of competencies.

C. Market-based Specialization Review. Complete a market-based review that focuses on career outcomes such internships and job-placement and other evidence that students are prepared to work professionally in the area of their specializations.

3. The NASPAA Executive Council and Standards Committee clarify expectations under Standard 7 for posting information about student success relative to learning outcomes.

With respect to the tone of implementation, the Task Force recommends that:

1. NASPAA's Executive Council and Standards Committee work with COPRA to manage expectations related to communications that occur during the accreditation process by:

A. advising program directors about the number and purpose of specific communications that occur;
B. publicizing COPRA's new policy of differentiating communications to program directors and university administrators (i.e., in 2013-2014, COPRA began differentiating letters to provosts, deans, and program directors, with provosts only being notified of accreditation status and details like monitoring communicated to program directors);
C. providing program directors templates for letters used;
D. continuing to include positive findings as well as findings of non-conformance in assessments, as is appropriate for specific accreditation actions;
E. reviewing COPRA's approach to including monitoring in decision letters and subsequently removing monitoring from annual reporting;
F. working with site visitors to ensure they focus on fact-finding and do not offer opinions about the likelihood of findings of conformance or accreditation outcomes.

Value of Accreditation Task Force
Charge #1: Burdens of the Accreditation Process
Charge, Findings, Recommendations, and Considerations in Implementation
10 October 2014

This document addresses issues related to alleviation of perceived and actual burdens of the accreditation process. After summarizing the charge to the Task Force from President Williams, the perspectives of members of the Task Force are summarized and consolidated, and illustrative or possible strategies for addressing issues raised by Task Force members are presented. The illustrative strategies are NOT recommendations – they are examples, or "straw men" developed to foster conversation, debate and recommendation.

Charge to the Committee Concerning Burden

NASPAA President Williams charged the Task Force with:

> **1) Making recommendations regarding how to reduce the burden of the accreditation process.**
> *In addition to reviewing the work already contributed by the Birdsell/Meek and Piskulich/Ewalt working groups, I am asking you to consider "burden" in its most comprehensive sense: not just the burden imposed by the standards per se, but also that burden imposed by the instructions, data requirements, and standard of evidence required for demonstrating conformance to each standard. I ask you to review the last 3 years of accreditation experience to determine what contributes to the burden of demonstrating conformity (e.g. amount of time and resources spent on the mechanics) across a variety of program size and complexity. Contributing issues include, but are not limited to:*
>
> *i. "Basic Burden": Should the existing standards be streamlined? Can the data collection associated with demonstrating conformance to the standards be reduced without sacrificing understanding or rigor? Are the*
> *revised instructions and the language in Standards 5 (and 1) requiring an appropriate standard of evidence to demonstrate [minimum] conformance? If not, what would make it clearer and/or set the appropriate bar?*
> *ii. The burden of multiple degree programs, dual degree programs at comprehensive schools: How can we make it easier for schools to bring all their degrees through accreditation without an exponential increase in burden? How could we make it easier for dual degree or joint degree programs to be accredited?*
> *iii. The burden of mismatched standards: Comprehensive schools have objected to the proportion of the workload of accreditation that seems to be connected to demonstrating that a school meets minimum thresholds in the current accreditation process. What could be done to demonstrate the value added of NASPAA accreditation to high performing programs? How can NASPAA and the accreditation process work better for these schools? Could waivers, triggers, and other means of tailoring accreditation to a wider variety of schools encourage participation by those schools not currently in accreditation?*
> *iv. The burden of American requirements/idiosyncrasies/definitions to International Programs seeking accreditation: How can we eliminate, or at least signal flexibility, in some distinctively American aspects remaining in the standards? How can we communicate more powerfully the VALUE of accreditation to non-US programs?*
> *v. The burden of standards for unique/innovative programs (esp. as referenced in the Standard 1 Revision Principles).*

Approach to Charge

The Task Force addressed Charge 1 by reviewing the history of accreditation; recent meetings and correspondence related to implementation of the new standards and universal competencies; recent accreditation decisions related to these standards; and other documents, including approaches to accreditation taken by other accrediting bodies. Task Force members engaged in reflection on their experience with accreditation and the experience of colleagues, brainstorming, review of staff reports, and deliberation of alternatives.

During the June 2014 meeting of the Task Force, members shared concerns and perspectives on perceived and actual burdens of accreditation. These issues included 14 items:

1. How to accredit specializations, concentrations …
2. Time needed to respond to standards, reviews … is greater flexibility needed …
3. How can the accreditation process be structured to address strategic issues and priorities for programs being accredited …
4. Can information requirements for accreditation be minimized … the reduction from 300 to 175 information requirements is "small comfort" to faculty responsible for self-study and accreditation …
5. How can focus on benefits of accreditation be increased …
6. Emphases on "mission-based" focus of accreditation seems to have been lost … how can this be re-emphasized
7. The links between Standard 1 and Standard 5 need to be clarified …
8. Research on the benefits of accreditation is needed to address concerns of schools contemplating whether costs warrant it …
9. Results from Standard 5 are "concerning" … how can conformance be strengthened …
10. Should NASPAA accredit Schools in addition to programs?
11. Data committee has made progress in harmonizing data requests … but this is still moving target, and benefits of recent innovations (e.g., automated population of data fields) remains to be experienced …
12. Standard 5 is heart of accreditation … but COPRA reviews are silent if no apparent concerns … which means reviews focus on other factors …
13. Anxiety among programs is increasing because of new requirements – this may be related to perception of "churn" – of continuing changes in standards, policies, and requirements …
14. Need to retain elements of accreditation that require programs to stretch.

In addition to these 14 items, Task Force members also made several additional observations about the challenges of assessing the burden of accreditation. These observations included:

- The fact that many schools are addressing assessment of learning outcomes for the first time is a challenge.
- NASPAA needs to build confidence among both current and prospective members that accreditation has value and is worth the burdens and costs associated with it.
- Some schools would prefer accreditation involve a minimalist "threshold" approach to assessment of required programmatic elements.
- Larger, comprehensive schools expect a strategic academic approach designed to add value to the school as well as curriculum.

Several of these issues and observations are overlapping; some address substantive matters, while others concern the benefits and burdens of the accreditation overall. A theme that comes through is that the challenges of accreditation vary by type of institution (e.g., comprehensive schools vs. smaller institutions with a single public affairs program). One approach to summarizing these issues and reducing them to a more manageable number is to separate substantive issues from issues related to benefits and costs and to recognize that different types of institutions perceive issues differently. For example:

Task Force members identified two substantive issues:

1. **Specializations:** implementation of standards has been delayed, and clarification of expectations is needed (see item 1 in list); and
2. **Learning Outcomes:** many institutions have not implemented and are struggling with assessment of outcomes related to learning objectives for the five universal standards and for mission-specific standards (see items 1, 5, 9, 12, 13 in list).

In addition, Task Force members identified three categories of concern about process and benefits and costs:

3. How best to implement flexible, strategic options for mission-based accreditation of different types of schools that are responsive to their different needs (see items 2, 3, 6, and 10 in the list);
4. How best to minimize data requirements and other inputs to achieve the greatest efficiency or maximize benefits of the accreditation process (see items 4, 5, 8, and 11 in the list); and
5. How best to continue to challenge schools and programs to "stretch" to improve quality (see item 14 in list).

As noted, the perceptions of different types of institutions diverge. Some comprehensive schools view the current approach as non-responsive to their principal needs, with excessive focus on input and threshold level requirements and little emphases on strategic issues related to improving school and program quality. Some smaller programs view the process as mysterious and opaque, with lack of clarity about thresholds required to earn accreditation. Because real and perceived burdens of institutions differ, no single recommendation or approach can address all concerns.   The implication is that, to address the issue of burden, the process must become both more clear and explicit and more flexible and strategic. The challenge is how to achieve this while maintaining consistency and fairness across institutions.

Issues 1 and 2 (i.e., specializations and learning outcomes) also are covered in President Williams third charge to the Task Force concerning pace and tone. The Task Force addresses these two issues in the statement and findings in response to Charge 3; they will not be addressed here further. We focus here on strategies and recommendations to relieve burden by differentiating further the accreditation process based on mission-related priorities of the schools and programs.

Findings

The Task Force finds:

1. Accreditation of public affairs schools provides benefits to schools, programs, and students by helping to ensure programs deliver and students acquire, competencies essential to effective public service.
2. Many member schools and programs face burdens associated with the requirements of accreditation and increasingly question the value of accreditation.
3. Some highly respected public affairs schools are not members of NASPAA or accredited because they perceive the burdens or costs to outweigh the benefits.
4. Perceptions of the benefits and burdens of accreditation vary across schools and programs, with some larger, comprehensive schools frustrated by the lack of strategic focus and emphases on threshold requirements, and smaller programs frustrated by lack of clarity related to key thresholds and extensive data demands.
5. NASPAA's Data Committee and the Standards Committee recently have completed significant efforts to harmonize data reporting requirements and automate some data-related aspects of reporting, although data requirements remain substantial.
6. Additional clarification of requirements to meet key thresholds would address perceptions of burden held by some programs, especially those at smaller institutions facing greater resource constraints.
7. Options are needed within the accreditation process to address concerns of larger, comprehensive schools that the accreditation process focus less on inputs and be more flexible and strategic.

Recommendations

To address real and perceived burdens of accreditation and to enhance the value of accreditation to schools and programs, the Task Force recommends continued effort to minimize data requirements and other inputs; new steps to maximize clarity of decision criteria used by COPRA; and a pilot program with new accreditation options for programs and schools in good standing that facilitate greater emphases on issues of strategic importance. Specific recommendations are:

1. **Continued Review of Data Requirements.** The Data Committee and the Standards Committee continue efforts to reduce data elements required by reviewing COPRA decisions, determining whether data submitted has direct links to decisions, and recommending discontinuation of data not used consistently in accreditation decisions (if any).

The objective here is to minimize costs of seeking accreditation by reducing the costs of data collection and management.

2. **Greater Transparency in Program Review.** COPRA take additional steps to clarify criteria used in program review, data and evidence used to determine conformance with standards, and internal COPRA decision-making processes during accreditation reviews. These additional steps might include consolidation of ad hoc policy materials used as inputs or guides by each team of three COPRA members who review programs, publication of training materials used by COPRA, and encouragement of programs pre paring for review to attend site visitor training. These types of steps should not diminish the commitment COPRA has made to sharing and encouraging implementation of best practices in outcomes assessment.

The objective here is to address concerns, especially those voiced by smaller institutions struggling for resources for faculty and other program costs, for clarity of what's needed to "pass the bar." An additional objective is to help address concerns about consistency across reviews that inevitably occur when different COPRA members and different site review teams have responsibility for different reviews. While greater clarification of criteria and evidence used in decision-making is warranted, too much attention could lead to excessive focus on inputs if emphases on student learning outcomes are not retained.

3. **Mission-based, Strategic Review for Programs in Good Standing**. NASPAA and COPRA initiate a pilot program to provide a small number of programs or schools in good standing (e.g., successive accreditation and re-accreditation under the 2009 standards) the option for a "mission-based, strategic accreditation review" focusing on issues deemed critical by the program director and/or dean.

The objective here is to help programs focus on those issues deemed by program leaders and faculty to be of critical importance to the future success of the program. The idea is that giving programs greater control over the substantive focus of the accreditation review will maximize benefits and reduce perceptions of burden.

4. **Streamlined Accreditation for Multiple Degree Programs**. NASPAA and COPRA should continue the new pilot program to take a holistic approach to outcomes-based accreditation of multiple programs within a single School simultaneously. If this pilot is successful, procedures for holistic multiple program accreditation should be implemented.

5. **School Accreditation**. NASPAA and COPRA phase in a pilot program to provide a small number of institutions in good standing (e.g., successive accreditation and re-accreditation under the 2009 standards) the option for School-level accreditation.

The principal objective for recommendations 4 and 5 is to address concerns, especially those of larger, comprehensive schools, that the accreditation process needs to add greater value and to focus more on longer-term strategic issues central to achievement of the mission. An additional objective is to engage schools not presently accredited by NASPAA and COPRA, including schools of public affairs, administration, and policy outside the United States. The notion is that experience with simultaneous accreditation of multiple programs will lead to insights and expertise essential for School accreditation.

Considerations in Implementation

1. Continued Review of Data Requirements

This recommendation is an endorsement of the successful work completed by the NASPAA Data Committee, the Standards Committee, COPRA, and NASPAA and COPRA staff to harmonize data and automate data reporting. While these efforts have been productive, additional work to reduce data requirements is warranted During the 2014-15 academic year, these committees and staff should continue review, focusing on alignment between data requirements and use in decisions related to accreditation. Data requirements include those for context and those related to specific standards; some data may not be related to specific decisions about con formance with standards. Data now required that is not used in determining conformance or essential for interpretation on context should not be collected.

The Task Force notes that in response to Charge 2 concerning the role of the Standards Committee, it is recommended that the Standards Committee also review instructions and procedures used in accreditation. The Task Force anticipates that this expanded role for the Standards Committee, if approved, will support efforts to reduce the burdens of data collection and management.

2. Greater Transparency in Program Review

This recommendation is designed to address the concerns of member programs, especially those smaller programs, about what's required to "pass the bar". COPRA presently has not codified in written form guidelines and decision-making criteria used internally by review teams to frame and guide decisions. These materials should be developed and made available to programs and schools. These efforts might include review and updating of the Basis for Judgment to ensure consistency. It may be that further elaboration of requirements for "eligibility" for accreditation also would address concerns about thresholds for accreditations and reduce focus on inputs during reviews.

The Task Force notes that in response to Charge 2 concerning the role of the Standards Committee, it is
 recommended that the Standards Committee also review instructions and procedures used in accreditation. The Task Force anticipates that this expanded role for the Standards Committee, if approved, also will support efforts to increase transparency in program review.

3. Mission-based, Strategic Review for Programs in Good Standing

Regional accrediting organizations such as North Central have provided universities in good standing with options for strategic emphases within accreditation reviews. The notion behind mission-based, strategic accreditation reviews is to move from a summative emphasis to a developmental focus on issues administrators and faculty deem critical to the long-term success of the institutions. In many cases institutions have a high probability of re-accreditation: the idea is to aid institutions in addressing issues they believe most important. In a 2006 review, for example, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) made civic engagement the strategic focus on its North Central accreditation review. Oakland University now is undertaking its North Central accreditation review around the area of student success. The Task Force believes this type of approach holds great promise for addressing concerns of member schools and programs that accreditation is burdensome because it focused on threshold or minimum standards that are not really at issue instead of critical, strategic issues.

The Task Force has identified several fundamental considerations for implementation of a mission-based, strategic accreditation review. The program would be limited to those that have been accredited under the 2009 Standards. Programs in good standing would be required to submit evidence that material conditions of the program have not changed and certification by program or school representatives that institutional quality-assurance and improvement procedures, including emphases on student learning outcomes, remain in place. Identification of strategic issues would be addressed through a self-study and through peer review by a team of site visitors critical to the program's continued development and improvement. The idea is that, barring extenuating circumstances, the probability of re-accreditation would be acknowledged, and the process would be customized to address strategic program priorities in a developmental rather than summative way.

Implementation of this option would require changes in COPRA procedures and likely require greater up-front communication as the focus of the mission-based review is determined. Another potential change is greater engagement of schools in selection of experts engaged in peer review. Staff has identified additional considerations to be addressed (see Appendix 1).

4. Streamlined Accreditation for Multiple Degree Programs

During the 2014-2015 academic year, COPRA will pilot a program for holistic, simultaneous accreditation of multiple degree programs. This initiative will address concerns of academic leaders that individual program ac creditation is burdensome, inefficient, and potentially misleading because programs within schools are integrated, share faculty and budgets, and fulfill distinct but related elements of the School mission. Simultaneous accreditation review inevitably will be associated with broader assessment of conformance with standards, including a focus on consistency across degree programs. Successful implementation of this pilot program will inform decisions about when to pursue accreditation of Schools.

5. School Accreditation

Independent, comprehensive schools are a key constituency of NASPAA. Many of these schools offer several degrees, but only one or two may be accredited. During accreditation reviews, issues such as whether the school mission is appropriate for the program are raised, which leads to debate over whether separate school and program missions are needed to be accredited. Some school and program leaders do not find these types of issues to be central to their concerns about program quality. Similarly, part of the burden of accrediting a single program in a comprehensive school is academic and financial data management systems are not designed t provide separate accounting for individual programs, which leads to difficulty in complying with accreditation data requirements or formats. The Task Force believes that school accreditation – instead of or in addition to - program accreditation can address these types of issues and increase the potential of adding strategic value to schools that opt for it.

A school-level accreditation review would be available by choice to separate schools of public affairs. Details would need to be elaborated, but schools would be expected to submit basic data related to their public service missions, document school resources and institutional procedures for quality-assurance and improvement, including emphases on student learning outcomes; and identify strategic issues to be addressed through a self-study and peer review by a team of site visitors.

School accreditation will require development review of existing COPRA policies, development of new instructions and procedures, and place additional demands on COPRA. It also will raise new issues. The Task Force anticipates that school accreditation would be conducted at a more general level of review, and not require as much detailed information for individual degree programs. For example, for a school with degrees in public administration, public policy, and environmental policy, rather than demonstrating conformance with the five universal standards for each program, the school might instead provide evidence that it has procedures in place for each public service program for assessing acquisition of competencies. This is just one example of the many details to be addressed if this recommendation is adopted.

To address these types of details, it will be important to consider the experience of peer accrediting institutions. For example, AACSB primarily accredits business schools, but also accredits programs. CEPH (i.e., public health) accredits both schools and programs. Consultation with other institutions will be useful in pursuing this recommendation.

Given the needs to gain experience with simultaneous accreditation of multiple programs and to develop new procedures, it is expected that this recommendation will be phased in over the next several years. Phasing-in of this program will provide NASPAA and COPRA time to address issues of resources required for implementation.

More generally, the approach of providing options for programs in good standing with opportunities for focused, mission-based strategic reviews or for school accreditation would provide opportunities for balancing benefit and burden. The reason a pilot program would be considered is because it is more operationally practical, given limited staff and given the number of details to address. A potential benefit to the more flexible approach includes attracting institutions now not accredited by NASPAA (including prestigious U.S. institutions and international institutions).

Appendices

- Calarusse memo, 9-22-14: memo on strategic, focused mission review.
- Calarusse memo, 9-22-14; memo on accreditation of schools.
- Matrix on accreditation of schools, October 2013.

Appendix 1

Accreditation Pathway Choice for High Performing Programs

September 23, 2014

MEMO for the Value of Accreditation Task Force

In the current NASPAA accreditation process, all programs must proceed through the same review. As programs implement the 2009 standards and begin to differentiate their market niches and understand better their strengths, would it make sense to consider accreditation processes that mirror those developments?
For example, instead of a full review, could programs that have proved high performance through multiple accreditation cycles opt for a focused review on an area of the accreditation standards where they have the potential to be best practice? Some regional accreditors have begun to adopt this model, and there is some merit to discussing it in the NASPAA context, in order to increase value.

How would it work? Instead of proceeding through a full review, programs opting for a custom pathway could choose a mission area to focus on (like stakeholder engagement, community impact, student learning, research output, diversity, or some special component of the mission) . A program could choose one or more topics to frame the process. The tradeoff is that they would spend less time on other threshold issues, like basic resources or perhaps other more general strategic discussions. Imagine it like a consent agenda for a meeting—unless there are red flags and a specific standard discussion is triggered, the conversation would center on the chosen topics. The program would continue to submit their data annually and traditional annual quantitative indicators could be packaged as a summary to support the review.

Who could participate? There would need to be some criteria to determine the programs that would be eligible (no small task). Perhaps having accreditation for two cycles is a minimum requirement, as well as no red flags in annual reports. There might be some minimum resource requirements—perhaps a program with 5 faculty would not be a good candidate to skip the resource review? This is tricky in the NASPAA context as the majority of programs have between 5-10 faculty members. Could we come up with a reasonable set of criteria that ensures that all high-quality programs have the opportunity to participate?

What are the early thought challenges?
- How would COPRA deal with substantive change in this model? Regional accreditors using this model have serious substantive change policies that require institutions to ask approval before major changes (adding a branch campus, going online, forming a school, etc.). In contrast, NASPAA seeks information after the fact. Given the high rate of change at NASPAA programs from cycle to cycle, this review would need to be accommodated in the process somewhere. A custom pathway may not solve the problem of perceived busy work burden if program burden is offset by more convoluted substantive change policies. And not allowing program with special innovations to proceed through the special pathway could work to squelch innovation.

• New processes would need to be established to determine if a program is eligible for a special pathway. This puts increased pressure on the quality of the submission and review of the annual maintenance reports. And do programs need to have their proposed areas approved before proceeding?

• Expertise—Site visitors should have some expertise in the areas that programs have chosen for maximizing value. Some areas might be easier as all site visitors should have expertise in strategic planning and performance management, but others may be more challenging. In all, it means more attention should be paid to the recruitment and preparation of site visitors, a volunteer resource implication.

• How would this project mesh with the accreditation of schools proposal on the table? Is it realistic to implement them at the same time or to phase in? It may be risky to proceed through that much change at one time.

Appendix 2

Accrediting Schools: What would it mean for NASPAA?
Memo to Value of Accreditation Task Force
9.22.2014

Attached is the 10.2013 memo describing some of the pros and cons of NASPAA accrediting schools in addition to degree programs. The analysis is still relevant and is included. This new memo will not spend time on those issues and instead focuses on how we might consider moving forward, should the relevant policy-makers believe it is prudent to do so. If a decision is made to proceed with school-based accreditation, this is a broad outline of how we might think about proceeding.

Preliminary Steps

1.   Determine demand
         a. To date, there has been no serious analysis to determine if our missing prospective accreditation targets would actually apply if offered this option. Is school-based accreditation desirable to currently accredited programs as well? We will need to conduct this analysis at some level.
2.   Make serious policy decisions
         a. School-based accreditation typically includes baccalaureate and doctoral degrees. Will these be a part of NASPAA's accreditation? Or will NASPAA choose something less comprehensive—accreditation of a school for master's degrees only? Could you exclude these and still have a realistic school-based accreditation?
         b. Does the early analysis confirm that school-based accreditation is the right solution for the concerns at han For example, it may be more work than the current model for schools seeking accreditation, and it may offer them less freedom to exclude experimental programs. However, the option may be a better fit and more valuable overall.

Implementation Steps

3.   Find relevant models and examples
         a. A few accreditors accredit both schools and programs. NASPAA should host a summit or meet with others to gather data on the benefits and challenges. (CEPH-public health, ACBSP-business, AACSB-business accounting, ACEN, AVMA)
4.   Design new processes/standards
         a. Determining which degrees are in/out of school-based accreditation is the most complicated aspect of school-based accreditation, as reported by other accreditors. Ultimately, the accreditation has to rest at the level of the degree, even in school-based accreditation. NASPAA should not attempt to accredit programs that have their own accrediting processes (planning, social work, etc.), but other degrees on the edges may be more complicated. New policies and instructions (if not standards) would need to be created to facilitate this process. This process also has substantial resource and possible timeline implications.
         b. The Standards Committee would need to determine what changes to the standards need to happen to facilitate school-based accreditation. Do we need a separate, but similar, set of Standards? Or could the instructions be folded in to the current slate?
5.   Pricing
         a. Given that the school-based accreditation is more resource-intensive than the current model, how might NASPAA consider pricing accreditation to cover those costs?
6.   Determine if a scope change is necessary with CHEA
         a. NASPAA's current scope with CHEA is to accredit programs only. Would a scope change be necessary? (Note that AACSB's scope with CHEA also only refers to programs. Even if NASPAA is accrediting schools, perhaps it is still technically only accrediting a collection of degree programs?)

7.   Additional process enhancements
        a. The site visitor core would need to be enhanced with academics from large comprehensive schools. The core is particularly weak in this area.
        b. COPRA would need to design a process for reviewing and deliberating on schools and programs in a way that brings fairness to all applicants.
        c. The NASPAA online data portal would need revisions to accommodate new models.

Appendix 3

Staff Supplement to the Standards Committee Report
Analysis of Accrediting Schools in Addition to Programs
October 2013

Background: In its recent strategic planning discussions, the Executive Council expressed concern regarding programs that have the capacity to be accredited and have not yet chosen to pursue accreditation, specifically some of the leading schools in public policy and administration. One concern noted by at least one of these programs is the lack of accreditation at the school level, leading them to explain to stakeholders why some degrees are accredited by NASPAA and others are not. Additionally, some currently-accredited programs express frustration at having to create artificial distinctions when attempting to accredit multiple degrees at a single school.

The Council charged the Standards Committee to look more deeply into the issue and they, in turn, requested staff analysis. The Standards Committee is asking the Council to view this chart and indicate a preferred direction for the committee to explore over the course of the next year.

The options in the chart are: to maintain the status quo of accrediting programs only, to accredit degrees only but find ways to make it easier for schools with multiple degrees to articulate their identity in the process and reduce redundancy in reporting, or to accredit both programs and degrees. Accrediting schools only was not considered as an option, given that at least 65% of currently accredited programs are not in a public service/administration/policy related school and it is doubtful such a proposal would pass a vote of accredited programs, even if deemed desirable.

Options	Accredit Programs Only	Streamlined Process for Multiple Degrees at a PA School	Streamlined Process for Multiple Degrees at a PA School Accredit Both PA Schools and Programs
Description	The current NASPAA process. Each degree applies for accreditation separately and must stand on its own in the quality review. Some sharing of information is acceptable, like a single site visit, and there is some overlap in reporting.	Create a new tiered form for the Self Study report, framing the assessment process and resources at a school level, but still requiring each program to stand on its own for accreditation. No material changes to the accreditation standards, but requires changes to COPRA policies.	Amending the accreditation standards to allow for accreditation of both schools and programs. Most likely resources, inputs, and strategic planning assessed at the school level. Most likely student learning, employment outcomes, and graduation rates assessed at program level.
Quality Implications	Different degree programs have different goals and outcomes. Maintaining accreditation at the level of the degree program allows for a more focused review.	Maintains degree-based accreditation, but eliminates redundancy in reporting across degrees. Would need to waive some requirements at the degree level to make the "streamlining" work. Recognizes the governance role of the school.	If the program remains the unit of analysis, the review can remain focused, even within the larger context of the school. Looking at the school alone, in terms of competency attainment, could dilute the focus of the current review considerably.
Burden of accreditation	Schools report that accrediting multiple degree programs separately is burdensome and causes them to artificially assign resource data.	Streamlining standards for the second and the third degree could significantly reduce the burden of accreditation. There would need to be some trust that certain data collected at the level of the school are satisfactory for the accreditation of the degrees within the school.	It is unclear whether school-based accreditation would reduce the reporting burden to schools with multiple degrees. Even in school-based accreditation, the degree unit is an important component of articulating quality measures. It may actually increase the reporting burden as a greater number of units may be involved.
Complexity of accreditation	Accreditation at the degree level simplifies the review. However, it sometimes imposes artificial distinctions between multiple degrees at the same institution.	Could present a more coherent story for multiple degrees.	Accrediting schools would require COPRA to make decisions regarding which degree programs are excluded from school accreditation and which are not. Based on experiences of other accreditors, this will make the process MUCH more complicated.

Options	Accredit Programs Only	Streamlined Process for Multiple Degrees at a PA School	Streamlined Process for Multiple Degrees at a PA School Accredit Both PA Schools and Programs
Demand for NASPAA accreditation	Some schools report choosing not to go through the current process because only one or two degrees would be accredited.	An easier process likely encourages schools with multiple degrees to submit more programs for accreditation.	Unaccredited schools might decide to participate in accreditation. Some programs (not in PA schools) might resent the accreditation of schools, as it could be perceived as a two-tier system. Other programs not in PA schools might enjoy increased association with reputable schools.
School / Program Marketing	Accreditation is marketed with respect to the degree.	Accreditation is marketed with respect to the degree.	Schools could market themselves as accredited.
Promoting Innovation	Allows schools to experiment and explore in non-accredited degrees that are not part of the review.	Allows schools to experiment and explore in non-accredited degrees that are not part of the review.	All PA degrees in a school would need to be part of the review. All new degrees, etc,. would be subject to accreditation standards.
Resource/Cost Implications at NASPAA	No changes.	A mixed bag. Would encourage more degrees to apply. Multiple degree reviews often require specialized expertise on the SVT, leading to larger teams. Review of multiple degrees would likely be more coherent for reviewers than the current model. A fair bit of IT programming would be required.	Two levels of review will require increasing capacity. School-based accreditation poses some unique challenges for accreditors and may require more robust eligibility processes to determine which degrees are in or out.
Revenues	Lost revenue from schools that don't apply.	Potential for additional, related degrees to apply. Likely increased revenues.	NASPAA could charge substantially more for school-based accreditation. Unclear impact from programs not in schools, depending on demand implications.

Options	Accredit Programs Only	Streamlined Process for Multiple Degrees at a PA School	Streamlined Process for Multiple Degrees at a PA School Accredit Both PA Schools and Programs
Reputational Implications	Accreditation fosters branding of PA degrees.	Accreditation fosters branding of PA and related degrees.	Accreditation fosters branding of PA schools.
Scope	No scope change.	Requires some consideration of scope as affiliated degrees apply for accreditation.	Requires a scope change to look at schools versus degrees. Also, PhDs and undergraduate degrees would likely be a component of the review.
Staff Bottom Line	The default option. There is merit to the current approach, but it doesn't seem to adequately address the growth in PA schools and the proliferation of related degrees.	This option appears to be win-win, for both the program and COPRA. This could be a good interim step in the exploration of whether a school-focused approach is feasible or desirable. The downside is that it would require programming costs, etc. and there isn't much of a revenue stream associated with it. Also, there is no special marketing incentive for schools.	Interesting option but it is unclear if it NASPAA has the critical mass to support it. Would be more resource intensive than the current model and there is some political risk from programs not in schools. We have been warned by other accreditors how complicated this will be. On the other hand, it would be a tremendous marketing opportunity for PA schools. A very interesting option, but not one entered in to lightly.

The market for school-based accreditation

Within NASPAA's current ranks: NASPAA currently accredits programs at 58 schools of public service/policy/administration or similar. The remaining programs are housed in 110 units that are not public service schools (e.g. business schools, departments, or other units). Of the 58 schools currently supporting a NASPAA-accredited program, approximately 22 have 100% public service related degrees at the school, assuming inclusion of PhDs and undergraduate degrees. Less than 1/3 of the degrees at 22 others are public service related. Note, however, that this analysis is blunt as this number only describes counts of degrees offered and not the relative importance of the degrees to the school. For example, a social work or planning degree may be an important component of the school's management process and identity; other smaller degrees may not be.

Among non-accredited programs: Approximately 23 of NASPAA's unaccredited members are structured as schools of public service/policy/administration or similar. This is a potential market for accreditation. Staff analysis last year showed that there is a positive correlation between being in a school of public service and being NASPAA-accredited. Caveat--many of these schools also have a focus on the MPP, traditionally underrepresented at NASPAA. It's possible that promoting NASPAA's new broad approach to competency-based education may be just as much an incentive to accreditation participation.

Staff recommendation

Move forward on the exploration of streamlining processes for program's with multiple degrees. Approach the potential market for school-based accreditation to get a sense of demand before investing heavily in process design.

Value of Accreditation Task Force
Charge #2: Role of the Standards Committee
Summary: Charge, Findings, Recommendation, and Considerations in Implementation

10 October 2014

Charge Concerning the Role of the Standards Committee

NASPAA President Ethel Williams charged the Task Force to:

> 2)   … consider the potential role of the Standards Committee in reviewing not just Standards language, but also reviewing the Instructions and other materials on an ongoing basis to advise whether a) the minimum standard of evidence, b) data required (including data reliability aspects), and c) the required procedures for schools with multiple degrees/unusual missions/non-US institutional features, are at an appropriate level (and that the minimally acceptable, "threshold" level of conformance is clear in the instructions). That is, I ask that you assess whether the standing charge and responsibilities of the Standards Committee should be broadened to include assessment of procedures for the accreditation process.

Approach to Charge

The Task Force addressed this charge by reviewing NASPAA and COPRA policies governing the role of the Standards Committee, the relationships among NASPAA, the Standards Committee, and COPRA, consulting the Standards Committee, and deliberating the merits of "broadening" the charge to the Standards Committee to include assessment of instructions and procedures for accreditation.

Findings

The Task Force finds:

1.   Review of accreditation instructions and procedures has the potential to enhance the accreditation process.

2.   Current policies governing the NASPAA Standards Committee and its relationship with COPRA provide authority to NASPAA and the Standards Committee to engage in periodic, systematic review and assessment of accreditation instructions and procedures as well as the standards themselves; and

3.   The Standards Committee concurs that review of instructions and procedures would be in the interest of NASPAA member institutions and would enhance the accreditation process.

4.   The Standards Committee is prepared to undertake an expanded review and prepare an annual report summarizing its assessment of standards, including COPRA instructions and procedures.

5.   Timely collaboration between the Standards Committee and COPRA will be essential for effective implementation of this broader review.

Recommendation

The Task Force recommends that:

1.   The Standards Committee work with staff to include assessment of COPRA accreditation procedures and instructions as part of its annual review of standards; and

2.   The Standards Committee complete its initial review and assessment in the summer of 2015.

Considerations in Implementation of Recommendation

Members of the Task Force, the Standards Committee, and COPRA agree that timing will be a key factor in successful implementation of this recommendation. The Standards Committee review will be most useful if completed for consideration by COPRA prior to issuance of new policy statements.

COPRA presently completes accreditation reviews during June and July of each year. Following these programmatic decisions, COPRA then works with staff to identify and address broader policy issues that emerged during the accreditation process. Depending on the issues that have emerged, COPRA then may issue a policy statement for the coming year that provides programs entering the accreditation cycle new guidance. COPRA and staff work to complete these policy statements by early September when the roster of programs entering accreditation review is released.

The Standards Committee review of COPRA's instructions, procedures, and interpretations of standards will be most useful if provided to COPRA prior to issuance of policy statements in September of each year. To accomplish this objective, the Chair of the Standards Committee will need to cooperate with COPRA to obtain relevant information from the accreditation decisions in June, convene the Standards Committee, and provide feedback to COPRA by September so that COPRA members can consider the feedback prior to issuance of policy statements for the coming accreditation year. This schedule will require changes in the operations of the Standards Committee, which historically has convened in October and met by teleconference if necessary during the academic year. The implication of this recommendation is that members of the Standards Committee must agree to meet by teleconference during July of each year to fulfill their obligations for review. Planning ahead and reservation of time will be essential for successful implementation of this recommendation.

In addition to changes in schedule, implementation of this recommendation will require the Standards Committee to work with staff to develop procedures for incorporating review of instructions and procedures as well as standards. These procedures possibly could include the use of new rubrics. Work to develop this approach can occur during the 2014-15 academic year to support the initial review in the summer of 2015. If this recommendation is adopted, then the Standards Committee could begin development of a plan for implementation, including criteria or rubrics for review of instructions and procedures, at the fall NASPAA meeting.

Basis for Findings and Recommendation

Broadening the Role of the Standards Committee to Include Review of Instructions and Procedures Can Enhance the Accreditation Process

The question of whether the role of the Standards Committee should be broadened depends on whether periodic review of procedures used in accreditation would enhance the quality and value of the process. To some extent, this depends on whether procedures followed by COPRA result in outcomes that could be constructed as affecting policy or the standards themselves and whether additional review could lead to changes in procedures. To address these issues, NASPAA and COPRA staff identified procedural and other decisions made by COPRA that potentially could be interpreted as affecting interpretation of policy or the standards and could be addressed in instructions. Examples of these decisions include:

- Adjusting/clarifying faculty qualifications ratios and definitions in the SSI;
- Calibrating the phase-in period on how many competencies a program should show evidence of bringing through a full-cycle;
- Calibrating the phase-in period for full assessment of specializations;
- Ultimately deciding where the minimum threshold for assessment exists in a given year;
- Enhancing the diversity standard by requiring a diversity planning document;
- Requiring a logic model;

- Requiring an assessment plan to show the direction of new practices;
- Expectations of best (or at least good) practices in strategic management and performance (stakeholder engagement, validity, reliability, rubrics);
- Amending requirements for public information (employment outcomes on program websites)
- Elimination of half of the data requests in the SSI;
- Requiring programs with multiple modalities to more explicitly break down their faculty and outcomes data to assess comparability of offerings;
- Programs can maintain an Executive MPA track within the MPA, assuming the competencies and mission are congruent (Previously, there was a trend towards separate degrees under old standards.);
- Programs in China may be accredited.

These examples make it clear that topics and issues addressed in instructions and procedures link to policy and that benefits to the accreditation process could result from an expanded role for the Standards Committee.

Current Policies Governing the NASPAA-Standards Committee-COPRA Relationships Provide Authority for a Broader Role for the Standards Committee

The NASPAA Bylaws establish the broad charge for the Standards Committee. The President of NASPAA has authority to and periodically supplements this charge with additional specific requests and tasks. The responsibilities of the Standards Committee in the Bylaws are:

"Standards Committee. The Standards Committee shall develop and maintain appropriate standards for masters programs in public affairs and administration. At the direction of the Executive Council, the Committee shall also develop proposed standards for education for public affairs and administration at other levels."

COPRA's Policies and Procedures document describes the respective responsibilities of COPRA, the Standards Committee, and NASPAA:

1.4 The accreditation review is conducted by the NASPAA Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA). COPRA has independent decision-making and policy autonomy for purposes of accreditation review.

5.1 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation shall be autonomous in matters of accreditation review and policy.

5.2 The Commission is responsible for maintaining and revising as necessary the governing documents for accreditation, specifically the Self Study Instructions, the Site Visit Manual, and the Policies and Procedures for Peer Review and Accreditation. The maintenance and revision of NASPAA Accreditation Standards are governed by NASPAA by-laws and are outside of COPRA's jurisdiction.

*5.4 As per NASPAA's Bylaws, the NASPAA Standards Committee "shall develop and maintain appropriate standards for masters programs in public affairs and administration." The Commission will inform the Standards Committee's work by submitting updated information on the interpretation of standards or areas of concern. After its Summer meeting, the Commission will report major changes to Self-Study Instructions or other interpretative materials to the Standards Committee for analysis. COPRA will consider advisory recommendations from the Standards Committee on adjustments to the Self Study Instructions or other accreditation documents in areas related to interpretation of Standards. Any recommendations from the Standards Committee will be discussed by the Commission at its next scheduled meeting, where the Commission will determine whether or not to reconsider any changes**. (underline = emphases added)***

These documents, particularly the language in 5.4, make it clear that, within existing policy, the Standards Committee has authority to extend its work to include periodic review of instructions and other procedures followed by COPRA in accreditation and to provide "advisory" reports to the Executive Council and COPRA concerning its reviews. Because

authority for assessment of procedures for the accreditation process already exists, the question of whether the Standards Committee "charge and responsibilities" should be broadened is primarily an issue of whether this broadening is warranted on its merits. No changes to bylaws or existing policy documents are needed to empower the Standards Committee to assume a broader role.

The Standards Committee is Prepared to Embrace a Broader Role

Jack Meek, Chair of the Standards Committee, convened the Standards Committee by teleconference on August 19 to discuss, among other issues:

> *2) … a possible expansion of scope for the Standards Committee to take on an annual, systematic role in reviewing accreditation INSTRUCTIONS as well as STANDARDS to provide independent feedback to COPRA about whether the instructions map appropriately to the standards in some important dimensions.*

Participants in the meeting in addition to members of the Standards Committee included Crystal Calarusse, Chief Accreditation Officer, and Greg Lindsey. Members of the Standards Committee discussed these issues and by acclamation agreed:

- An expanded role for the Standards Committee that includes review of instructions and procedures will enhance the value and quality of the accreditation process;
- Careful consideration needs to be given to collection and interpretation of evidence related to instructions and procedures;
- The results of the broader review should be summarized in an annual report prepared in the summer, beginning in 2015; and
- Collaboration with the Value of Accreditation Task Force in the design of the initial report will be useful.

Value of Accreditation Task Force

Charge #3: Pace and Tone of the Accreditation Process

Summary: Charge, Findings, Recommendations, and Considerations in Implementation

10 October 2014

Charge Concerning the Pace and Tone of the Accreditation Process

NASPAA President Ethel Williams charged the Task Force to:

3)   *… make recommendations regarding the appropriate Pace and Tone of the accreditation process.*

> ***Pace***
> *i. What is the right pace for Standard 5 implementation, given the lengthy amount of time it takes for schools to develop and assess competencies? Do the standards and other requirements contribute and/ or compound this?*
> *ii. What should be the pace of discussion of specialization competencies? Specifically, I charge this task force to review the options for specializations that have been developed to date, and make recommendations regarding the right level and pace for implementation.*
> *iii. How fast should our schools come into complete compliance with public information on their websites about their outcomes (standard 7)?*
>
> ***Tone***
> *i) Maintaining a consistent, collegial tone: Member schools should expect a consistent message about what constitutes conformity, and how to conduct their self-studies, and how to plan their site visit. We should also strive for consistency on site visits and in the assessment process. Does the current process achieve this objective?*
> *ii) Clarity: Member schools should be provided with a clear indication of where the minimum threshold is for demonstrating conformance to standards, with clear published examples of "sufficiency", and feedback available as they are working on their self-study.*

Approach to Charge

The Task Force addressed this charge by reviewing the history of implementation of the 2009 standards and universal competencies, including current guidance for implementation of Standards 5 and 7; recent accreditation decisions related to these standards; and COPRA communications through the accreditation process, including communications with programs seeking accreditation.

Findings

With respect to the pace of implementation of Standard 5 (assessment of learning outcomes for the five universal competencies), the Task Force finds:

> 1. Assessment of student learning outcomes and acquisition of competencies is at the heart of the accreditation process and is a superior approach to validation of the quality of educational programs than historic approaches, which focused primarily on measures of inputs to educational programs.

> 2. The current accreditation standards were adopted in 2009; NASPAA and COPRA have collaborated to phase in the standards gradually to provide institutions time to implement new procedures for assessment of learning

outcomes and competencies; and member institutions now seeking accreditation or re-accreditation have had several years to plan and implement these procedures.

3. Evidence indicates that programs that have sought accreditation and made good-faith efforts to complete the assessment cycle for the universal competencies, including use of direct measures to assess learning outcomes, are progressing through the accreditation process. Figure 1 summarizes completion of assessment of the universal standards by accreditation decisions for 2013 and 2014. As COPRA has increased expectations for assessment of the standards, most institutions have met the expectations. Site visit teams in some instances differ from programs under review in their assessment of whether evidence of assessment has been presented.

4. The perceptions of burden imposed by Standard 5 are intertwined with other perceived burdens associated with data collection and reporting for other purposes and that efforts by the Data Task Force to reduce data burden and streamline reporting will help to address concerns about implementation of Standard 5.

5. If implemented, the recommendations made by this Task Force related to Charge 1 (i.e., to increase clarity of threshold requirements for accreditation and to provide opportunities for accredited programs in good standing to opt for a strategic, focused accreditation review), will address concerns about the pace of implementation of Standard 5.

6. There are no compelling reasons to delay further implementation of Standard 5.

With respect to the pace of implementation of assessment of specializations, concentrations, or other focused areas of study, the Task Force finds:

1. The array of specializations offered by NASPAA accredited institutions vary widely and derive from School missions, faculty expertise, student interests, and changing market demands.

2. Assessment of specializations as part of accreditation is warranted to help ensure overall program quality and to confirm that programs can provide courses and other opportunities needed for students to acquire competencies particular to specializations.

3. Some programs reportedly have considered elimination of specializations because of the burden of assessment in the 2009 accreditation standards.

4. The specializations offered by NASPAA members vary widely in terms of substance, their role in curricula, and a "one-size-fits-all" approach to assessment of them is not well-founded.

5. The approach to assessment of learning outcomes and competencies established in Standard 5 to assess the universal competencies is not well suited for assessment of specializations.

6. A different approach to assessment of specializations is needed that matches the variation in specializations across curricula, takes into consideration their particular role in the curriculum, their value in the marketplace, provides greater flexibility to programs, and better balances the benefits and burdens of review.

Figure 1. Completion of Assessment of Universal Standards by Accreditation Action*
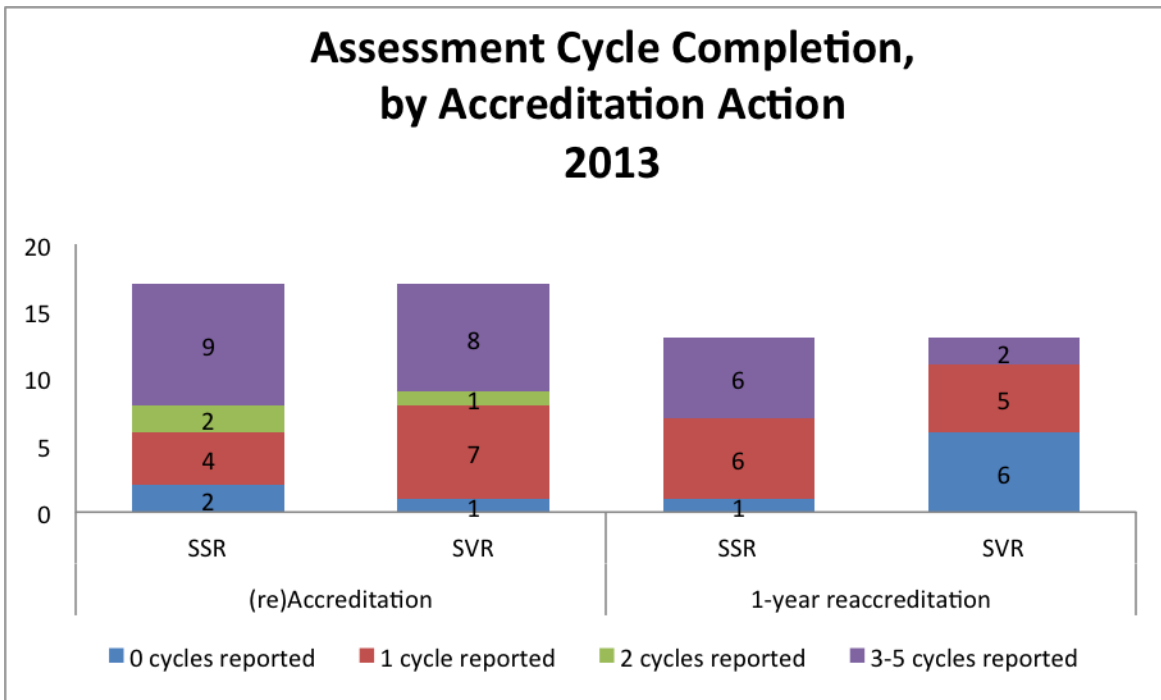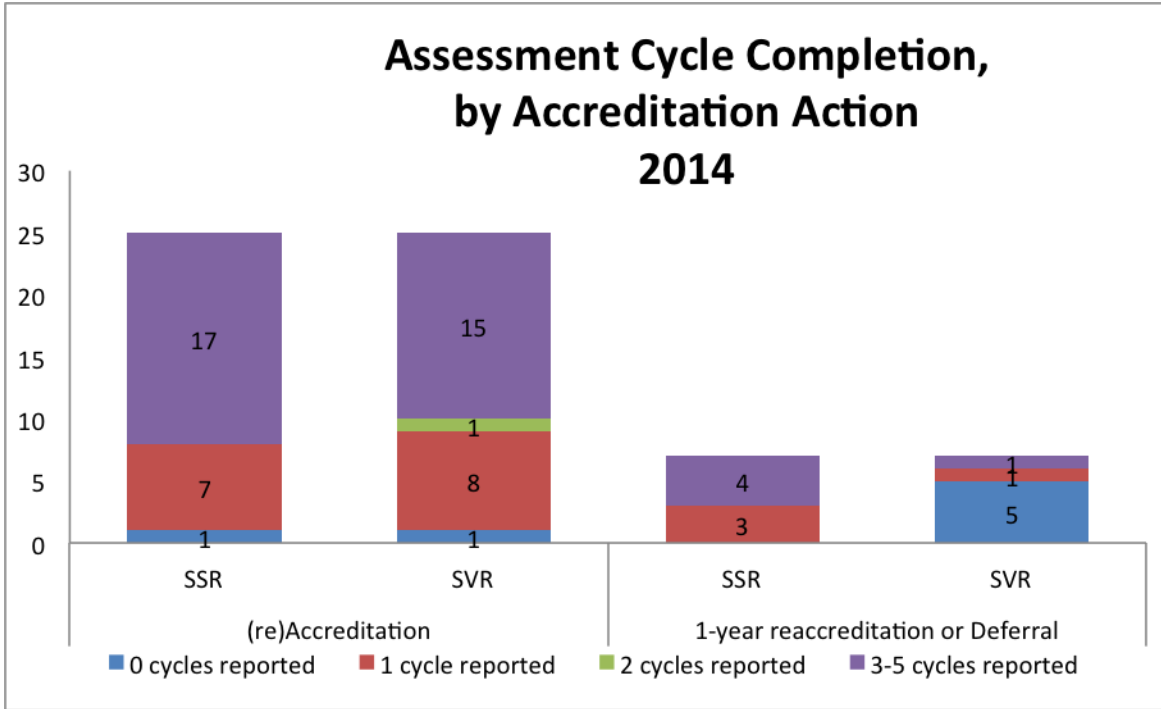
*2014: 32 programs hosted site visits; COPRA stated threshold was 3 completed competency cycles; 2013: 30 programs hosted site visits (under 2009 Standards); COPRA stated threshold was 1 completed competency cycle.

With respect to the pace of implementing the requirement in Standard 7 Communications to post information about employment and learning outcomes on program websites, the Task Force finds:

1. The requirement to post outcomes derives partially from requirements imposed by CHEA, the body that accredits COPRA and other accrediting organizations, that all accredited programs post outcomes.

2. The commitment to transparency in Standard 7 is important to ensure that different constituencies, particularly prospective and current students, have information to inform   decisions about their academic careers.

3. Standard 7 should not burden programs by establishing requirements for posting that mandate excessive detail or data that can be misinterpreted or misconstrued absent context essential to understanding.

4. Additional guidance on the types of summary measures or approaches to complying with Standard 7 with respect to learning outcomes is needed.

5. COPRA has pursued a measured approach to implementation of this requirement, focusing on graduation and employment outcomes that can be measured more consistently across programs and working with programs to address requirements about learning outcomes.

With respect to the tone of communications between COPRA and NASPAA member institutions seeking accreditation, the Task Force finds:

1. Members' concerns and frustrations associated with communications with COPRA stem from a variety of sources, including their lack of experience with accreditation under the 2009 standards; COPRA's commitment to communicate in a neutral, business-like manner to minimize potential for misinterpretation and maintain equity across institutions; COPRA's historic decisions to communicate mainly about its concerns and not to reiterate positive outcomes related to conformance with standards; misunderstandings or uncertainly about timing and recipients of communications; and members' not knowing what to expect in the content of communications.

2. Some frustration with communications from COPRA is likely due to the substance of decisions (e.g., findings of non-conformance or negative decisions) as much as the tone of communications and that changes in language may not eliminate concerns about tone when programs disagree with COPRA decisions.

3. COPRA listened to concerns about communications and, in 2014, changed its letters to programs
 going   through accreditation or re-accreditation to include new information about positive outcomes and the strengths of programs (see examples of previous and new templates for letters in Appendix).

4. Additional work by NASPAA and COPRA to manage expectations regarding the frequency and tone of communications is warranted.

Recommendations

With respect to the pace of implementation of the 2009 standards, the Task Force recommends that:

1. The NASPAA Executive Council and the Standards Committee affirm commitment to implementation of Standards 5 and 7, including time frames for implementation of assessment and communication of learning outcomes relevant to the universal standards.

2. The NASPAA Executive Council and the Standards Committee establish a different, more flexible approach for assessment of specializations that reflects their unique roles in program curricula and the variety of specializations offered by programs seeking accreditation. The rationale for each specialization should derive from the program or school mission. The principal goals of this new approach should be to ensure that students have opportunity to acquire competencies associated with specializations and that the specializations are assisting students in achievement of their career goals and objectives.

A key issue relative to accreditation of specializations concerns "truth-in-advertising": programs claiming particular specializations need to have faculty with the requisite expertise and offer courses in a timely way or guarantee the opportunities for study through other enduring arrangements (e.g., by having relationships with other departments or schools).

The Task Force recommends that Standard 5 be revised to provide programs the option of one of three approaches to assessment of specializations:

A. **Single Specialization Review.** Complete assessment for a single specialization of primary importance to the program following the current standards and guidelines for assessment of the five universal standards and affirm that approaches used to deliver other specializations are similar. This option would retain the basic approach of assessing acquisition of competencies but would reduce burden by eliminating the requirement to assess all specializations. This approach might be attractive, for example, for programs with specializations in areas such as budgeting and finance or emergency management where professional associations have established guidelines and comprehensive exams for assessing competencies are available

B. **Mission-based Specialization Review.** Complete a more general review of all specializations that includes presentation of evidence of:
i. How each specialization fulfills the program's mission, is related to strategic objectives, and serves the populations of students each is intended to serve;
ii. The availability of faculty, courses, and other co-curricular learning opportunities deemed necessary for delivery of the specializations;
iii. Methods used by the program to evaluate the effectiveness of specializations, including a general description for at least one specialization of evidence of student acquisition of competencies. This evidence might include successful student placements related to the specialization; outstanding capstone or internship projects related to the specialization; or a description of the program's analyses of assessment data of the specialization.

This approach would require discussion of evidence related to all specializations, but not require the level of documentation associated with the Single Specialization Review (e.g., logic models, course-related learning objectives, and examples of assessment of competencies).

C. **Market-based Specialization Review**. Complete a market-based review that focuses on career outcomes such internships and job-placement and other evidence that students are prepared to work professionally in the area of their specializations. Relevant evidence under this approach could include position placement data, results of alumni surveys, or feedback from employers. The notion here is that specializations are intended to equip students with skills required to pursue their career interests and if students are being placed into position, then they presumably have acquired basic competencies in the area of the specialization.

3. The NASPAA Executive Council and Standards Committee clarify expectations under Standard 7 for posting information about student success relative to learning outcomes. The clarification should include guidance with specific examples that meet expectations (e.g., posting a self-study that includes data related to assessment of learning outcomes for each universal competency; passage rates for schools that offer comprehensive exams). This guidance should be issued by the summer of 2015 so programs undergoing accreditation will understand expectations.

With respect to the tone of implementation, the Task Force recommends that:

1)   NASPAA's Executive Council and Standards Committee work with COPRA to manage expectations related to communications that occur during the accreditation process by:

A. advising program directors about the number and purpose of specific communications that occur;
B. publicizing COPRA's new policy of differentiating communications to program directors and university administrators (i.e., in 2013-2014, COPRA began differentiating letters to provosts, deans, and program directors, with provosts only being notified of accreditation status and details like monitoring communicated to program directors);
C. providing program directors templates for letters used;
D. continuing to include positive findings as well as findings of non-conformance in assessments, as is appropriate for specific accreditation actions;
E. reviewing COPRA's approach to including monitoring in decision letters and subsequently removing monitoring from annual reporting;
F. working with site visitors to ensure they focus on fact-finding and do not offer opinions about the likelihood of findings of conformance or accreditation outcomes.

Considerations in Implementation of Recommendation

Implementation of this recommendation would require further elaboration of the options and work by COPRA to formalize changes to review and assessment of specializations. This revised approach to assessment of specializations could be implemented for programs undergoing accreditation during the 2016-2017 academic year. This would require issuance of new COPRA guidance by the summer of 2015.

Appendices

- •   Templates for COPRA decision letters

Appendix 1

Full Accreditation, No Monitoring Decision Letter Template: Program

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Program**

FROM: **COPRA Chair**

DATE:

SUBJECT: **NASPAA Accreditation Review**

On behalf of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that the Commission found your Master of Public Administration program to be in substantial conformity with the NASPAA Standards. Your program is accredited for a period of seven years and will be included on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. An abbreviated letter announcing your accreditation has also been sent to your Provost.

Please accept the Commission's congratulations on the accreditation of your program. By pursuing and achieving accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education. You are part of the global community of over 180 accredited graduate programs in public service.

Please note that as a requirement of accreditation, the Commission will review annual accreditation maintenance reports to determine ongoing conformity with NASPAA Standards, which will become a permanent part of your folder for your next accreditation review. We look forward to receiving your 2014 annual accreditation maintenance report by October 1, 2014.

If you have any questions about this decision or NASPAA's accreditation process, I would be happy to answer any questions you have about this decision via email at rmberryj@ncsu.edu. Questions about this year's annual report should be directed to Heather Gregory, Accreditation Associate, at gregory@naspaa.org.

Warmly,

Appendix 2

Full Accreditation, with Monitoring Decision Letter Template: Program

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Program**

FROM: **COPRA Chair**

DATE: **October 20, 2014**

SUBJECT: **NASPAA Accreditation Review**

On behalf of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that the Commission found your Master of Public Administration program to be in substantial conformity with NASPAA Standards, subject to the monitoring provisions outlined in the enclosed report. Your program is accredited for a period of seven years and will be included on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. An abbreviated letter announcing your accreditation has also been sent to your Provost.

Please accept the Commission's congratulations on the accreditation of your program. By pursuing and achieving accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education. You are part of the global community of over 180 accredited graduate programs in public service.

Your program is in substantial conformance with the NASPAA Standards. However, the Commission concluded that questions remain about the following standards: **. Accordingly, COPRA plans to monitor your continued progress, annually, on these specific standards. The Commission asks that you report your progress on these particular standard(s) each year in your annual accreditation maintenance report.

If you have any questions about this decision or NASPAA's accreditation process, I would be happy to answer them via email at rmberryj@ncsu.edu. Questions about this year's annual report should be directed to COPRA at copra@naspaa.org.

Warmly,

Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

Report on Monitoring Provisions

Date

Items: Standards

_____

Over time, the Commission expects that its understanding of the Standards and the expectations of what it means to be in compliance will advance and evolve, as programs (and COPRA) become more familiar with the competencies-based approach to accreditation. The Commission will expect accredited programs to continue to develop their competency measures and use of assessment tools, and that this maturation should be evident in the program's annual accreditation maintenance reports.

Please note that the Commission will review each of your annual accreditation maintenance reports to determine ongoing conformity with NASPAA Standards, including progress in the areas noted above. Your annual reports and COPRA's actions in response to your reports will become a permanent part of your record for your next accreditation review. COPRA's acceptance of the Program's annual reports is contingent on receiving satisfactory responses on the issues noted. If the program does not submit the information requested regarding the monitored standards in annual reports, the Commission may require the program to re-enter the accreditation cycle with an updated Self Study Report. Monitoring provisions remain in effect and must be addressed each year until the program is notified by COPRA that the monitoring has been removed. We look forward to receiving your annual report by October 1, 2014. Questions about this year's annual report should be directed to Heather Gregory at gregory@naspaa.org.

Appendix 3

Full Accreditation, with or without Monitoring Decision Letter Template: Provost

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Provost**

FROM: **COPRA Chair**

DATE:

SUBJECT: **NASPAA Accreditation Review**

On behalf of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration and the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that the Commission found the Master of Public Administration program at University to be in substantial conformity with NASPAA Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy and Administration. The program is accredited for a period of seven years and will be included on NASPAA's Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. A letter detailing the specifics of the accreditation decision has also been sent to the program MPA Director.

Please accept the Commission's congratulations on the accreditation of this program. By pursuing and achieving accreditation through a rigorous review, the program has demonstrated a commitment to quality public service education. Thank you for your cooperation and continued support of the program.

NASPAA accredits over 180 graduate programs worldwide and is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). NASPAA's accreditation process is mission-based and driven by public service values. The NASPAA Standards are the quality benchmark used by graduate public service programs around the world. Accredited programs contribute to the knowledge, research, and practice of public service, establish observable goals and outcomes, and use information about their performance to guide program improvement. They practice truth in advertising and ensure their students achieve learning objectives in five domains essential to public service.

If you have any questions about this decision or NASPAA's accreditation process, I would be happy to answer them via email at rmberryj@ncsu.edu.

Warmly,

Appendix 4

One-year Reaccreditation Decision Letter Template

TO: PROGRAM

CC: PROVOST

FROM: RaJade M. Berry-James, Chair
                 Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

DATE: October 20, 2014

SUBJECT: NASPAA Accreditation Review

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) has completed its review of the Master of Public Administration program at University and has voted to reaccredit your program for one year. On behalf of COPRA, I want to express our appreciation for your participation and commitment throughout the accreditation cycle. We recognize your efforts in reviewing your program mission and accomplishments and participating in the peer review process. By pursuing accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education.

The Commission has determined that your program may have specific non-conformities with the 2009 NASPAA Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy, and Administration due to lack of conclusive evidence available at the time of review (Section 10.3 of NASPAA's Accreditation Policies and Procedures). In the Commission's judgment, these concerns, detailed in the enclosed report, could be clarified and resolved within one academic year.

The Commission works to ensure a fair and consistent review for all programs who apply for accreditation. The review process is holistic, considering many factors when evaluating each Self-Study Report, Interim Report response, Site Visit Report, and Site Visit Report response. I urge you to speak to your COPRA liaison, X, about the Commission's review, decision, and your next steps. I would also be happy to answer any questions you have about this decision via email at rmberryj@ncsu.edu.

We look forward to your clarifications and hope to seek resolution over the upcoming year.

Warmly,

Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
One-Year Reaccreditation Report
Program
Institution
Date

Items: Standards

In order to extend reaccreditation beyond one year, the program must provide information to demonstrate complete compliance with the standards listed above. Please submit updated information on the applicable standards to COPRA no later than September 26, 2014. The program should submit the requested information using the Accreditation Maintenance Report form, within the Civicore system. The program may choose to complete the entire form, fully addressing the concerns above, or simply use the form to provide the annual data required of accredited programs (with respect to faculty, student admissions, graduation rates, and employment). If the program wishes, it may opt to upload the full text of its response to the decision letter as an attachment at the end of the report form. At its Fall Meeting in October 2014, the Commission will make a final determination whether a second site visit should move forward. COPRA requests that all final updates and responses related to accreditation be submitted by May 24, 2015, in time for the Commission's Summer Decision Meeting 2015.

Over time, the Commission expects that its understanding of the Standards and the expectations of what it means to be in compliance will advance and evolve, as programs (and COPRA) become more familiar with the competencies-based approach to accreditation. The Commission will expect accredited programs to continue to develop their competency measures and use of assessment tools, and that this maturation should be evident in the program's annual accreditation maintenance reports.

COPRA looks forward to working with you in the coming year. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email **rmberryj@ncsu.edu**. You may also direct questions toward **Crystal Calarusse**, **Chief Accreditation Officer**, at **copra@naspaa.org**.