

NASPAA COMPETENCIES TASK FORCE

ANALYSIS OF STANDARD 5 IN 2011 SELF-STUDIES FOR ACCREDITATION

MATCHING OPERATIONS WITH THE MISSION: STUDENT LEARNING

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In 2011, approximately 28 programs provided self-studies to COPRA for consideration for (re)accreditation. An analysis was conducted of the information presented in the self-studies under Standard 5 Matching Operations with the Mission: Student Learning. The analysis was undertaken to prepare materials for training and workshops to be presented by NASPAA. Members of the Competencies Task Force commented on the analysis and made recommendations that are included at the end of this report.

Standard 5 asks programs to, for at least one of the universal required competencies:

- 1) identify and define the competency, in light of the program's mission;
- 2) describe the evidence of student learning that was gathered;
- 3) explain how evidence of student learning was analyzed; and
- 4) describe how the evidence was used for program change(s) or the basis for determining that no change was needed.

This report provides a summary of the analysis of the information provided in the self-studies under each of the four steps listed above. This analysis is the first one to take advantage of the new Civicore data base. The basis for this analysis was provided by NASPAA staff in the form of excel spreadsheets containing the program name and mission statement as well as the information provided in the self-study under the four points listed above from the Civicore data base. We did not have access to other parts of the self-study, so some of our analysis may be limited or taken out of the context provided by the other parts of the self-studies. We welcome comments about how to improve our analysis as well as how to take advantage of more of the opportunities for analysis of the new data base.

1. IDENTIFY AND DEFINE THE COMPETENCY

In general, the intent that programs define the competency in accordance with their mission has been embraced by most programs. For example, one program made reference to its organizational location within a College of Business, while others referred to their missions to serve grassroots or international communities.

Programs adopted a wide variety of definitions of the universal required competencies. A list of the themes encountered for each competency is attached (Appendix A). Most programs listed not only what students were expected to know but also what students were expected to be able to do with that knowledge (application skills) in their definition of the competency. However, one program stated that “instead of developing a broad definition of [the competency], we chose to develop skills that reflect...the domain of each competency.”

Some programs provided fairly lengthy and detailed definitions of competencies, whereas the information furnished by other programs was almost too brief. Some programs made reference to internal accountability systems (WEAVE Goal 3; section 1.682/685) that must have been explained in other sections of the self-study. One or two programs seemed to write in circles, for example, defining the competency “to lead and manage in public governance” as consisting of “the necessary managerial knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead and manage effectively and efficiently...”

There seemed to be greater convergence in definitions of Competency 2, participate in and contribute to the policy process and Competency 3, to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions. The greatest variety of definitions appeared under Competency 1, to lead and manage in public governance. The self-studies provided thoughtful definitions of Competency 4, to articulate and apply a public service perspective and Competency 5, to communicate and interact with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry. To this extent the field appears to be differentiating itself from other graduate professional degree programs in its dedication to the public service.

2. DESCRIBE THE EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING THAT WAS GATHERED

As illustrated in Appendix 2, the 28 programs generated 30 discrete categories of evidence. The modal category of evidence generated was course based in nature (50% of programs). This course based evidence primarily took the form of homework assignments and projects. Another seven programs (25%) relied on course based examinations to generate evidence of student learning. All of these assignments were conducted within the parameters of individual courses and represented direct methods of assessing student learning.

A majority of programs (75%) collected program level evidence. These 21 programs utilized a variety of direct program level measures such as capstone course projects and case studies,

comprehensive examinations (both written and oral), and portfolio reviews. These program level categories of evidence also reflected a direct assessment of student learning.

Several programs also engaged in the collection of indirect evidence. Multiple programs used the following categories of indirect evidence:

- Alumni Surveys (32%)
- Internship Evaluations and Surveys (28.5%)
- Student Surveys and Focus Groups (17.8%)
- Employer Surveys and Focus Groups (14.3%)
- Exit Interviews (7%)

When the categories of evidence were compared to the competency measured, it appeared that slightly more programs measured students’ ability to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions (competency #3) with direct measures than programs that chose to measure students’ ability to lead and manage in public governance (competency #1). A majority of the evidence used to measure competency #3 (69.8%) and competency #1 (57.7%) was direct in nature. Programs were far more likely to rely on course based assignments and homework to measure competency #3 (13 programs) as compared to competency #1. No programs utilized this type of evidence to measure competency #1.

It also appears that programs also gravitated toward comprehensive examinations when measuring competency #1 but not when measuring competency #3. Six programs used comprehensive examinations to generate evidence for competency #1 while only one program did so for competency #3.

3. EXPLAIN HOW EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING WAS ANALYZED

The information provided by programs under this sub-section varied from no evidence or analysis presented or described (28.6%), to some generalized results (28.6%), to very specific analysis of evidence (42.8%) of student learning on one of the universal required competencies. Examples of each of these are presented in more detail below.

	No Results	General Results	Specific Results	Total
Number of Programs	8	8	12	28
Percent of Programs	28.6%	28.6%	42.8%	100%

Specific and detailed evidence of student learning on one or more competencies was provided by 12 programs. These 12 programs 1) defined the competency being assessed; 2) described the mechanism for assessing student learning; 3) detailed how the evidence of student learning was collected and analyzed; and 4) provided the results of the analysis.

Many of the programs used direct evidence of student learning such as oral or written comprehensive exams, capstone or major project papers, assignments evaluated with rubrics, or supervisory ratings of interns. Examples of results of analysis of direct evidence of student learning included:

- 75% of students passed the [written] comprehensive exams
- Student papers on globalization averaged 3.6 points on a 5-point scale
- 100% of students passed the oral exam [on this competency]
- Seven of eight student interns were rated as 4.0 or higher on a 5-point scale
- In a program evaluation assignment, 13% of students exceeded expectations, 80% met expectations; and 7% did not meet expectations
- In analysis skills, 10% of students were highly competent, 45% were competent, 31% were barely competent, and 14% were below competent

Other programs used indirect evidence of student learning, such as student satisfaction surveys or exit interviews, or alumni/employer surveys. Examples of results of analysis of indirect evidence of student learning included:

- 56% of alumni stated the program developed their statistics ability to an adequate or exceptional degree
- Surveys of alums and employers show our graduates score high in oral communication ability, averaging 1.0 or 2.0 on a 5-point scale (where 1 is the highest)
- A course on leadership was mentioned the fewest times in student portfolios (compared to all other required courses)

Some generalized evidence of student learning on one or more competencies was provided by 8 programs. These 8 programs provided fewer details about what was collected to show student learning, or about how what was collected was analyzed, or about what was learned from the analysis (if any). Examples of such statements included:

- Course grades indicate that students demonstrate knowledge of [this competency]
- An analysis showed that students are not mastering the range of abilities [associated with this competency]
- Most students could articulate a public service perspective
- Many students had problems with budgeting
- Most projects met expectations
- The results of the comprehensive exams were below expectations
- Students need more help to complete their final project papers

- A student survey indicated students enjoyed service learning

No details on student learning on one or more of the universal required competencies were reported by 8 programs. These 8 programs provided fewer details about what was collected to show student learning, or about how what was collected was analyzed, or about what was learned from the analysis (if any). In general, these programs has not yet progressed to the collection and analysis of evidence stage. Some programs were in the process of establishing benchmarks or expectations for student performance that would indicate competency. Other did collect evidence but either did not report how it was analyzed or did not provide any details, merely that the evidence was “discussed by faculty.”

4. DESCRIBE HOW THE EVIDENCE WAS USED FOR PROGRAM CHANGE

Programs initiated a variety of curricular and programmatic changes as part of their assessment processes. Appendix 3 illustrates the categories of changes organized by competency. The vast majority of programs (67.8%) initiated course based changes as part of the assessment process. There was great variation among these programs in terms of the nature of these changes. Many of the changes involved incorporating specific skills and foci into core and elective courses. The types of changes initiated included:

- Focus on the federal government
- Focus on nonprofits
- More lab time for statistical analysis
- Inclusion of a planning component
- Inclusion of case studies

Seven programs (25%) altered their core course offerings to better align with the competencies. Some programs added new courses to the core curriculum. These courses included financial management, writing, research methods, data analysis, planning, and program evaluation. It was not surprising to see programs that emphasized competency #3 include research methods, data analysis, and program evaluation courses into the core curriculum.

Seven programs initiated changes to their capstone/exit requirements. These changes included:

- Revising the capstone experience
- Revising the portfolio requirement
- Creating a portfolio requirement
- Creating a capstone experience

The revisions to the capstone experience were done to incorporate a project management focus, include the Director and Advisory Board in the experience, or match the requirements of

the capstone experience to the research methods course. In one instance, a program replaced the comprehensive examination with a capstone experience and in another a program created a new portfolio requirement to replace the comprehensive examination process.

The internship experience was another area of change for programs as three programs revised the internship experience to better meet the needs of students and reflect the chosen competencies. The focus of these changes was to include the Director in the assignment of internships and to increase the expectations for student satisfaction with the internship experience.

Two programs created or changed their orientations to include a focus on competencies. One of these programs included a pre-test that measured student knowledge of these competencies upon entry into the program.

The final two changes that were initiated as part of the assessment process included the elimination of a public safety concentration that was not enrolling well (and did not reflect the competency of interest) and better course scheduling to meet the needs of students.

There was great variation in the curricular and programmatic changes that programs initiated as a result of their assessment processes. However, some similarities were evident. Changing the content of courses and/or adding courses to the core curriculum were the choices of almost every program in the cohort (92.8%). Therefore, most programs “closed the loop” by focusing on curricular elements. Nearly all of the programs that focused on competency #3 made course based changes (90.9%) while less than half (42.8%) of programs that focused on competency #1 made these changes. Programs that focused on competency #1 used a larger variety of changes than did their counterparts who focused on competency #3 and were also more likely to focus on changes to the internship and portfolio requirements than other programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It appears that the intention that programs practice continuous improvement is being carried out with respect to student learning, among most programs applying for (re)accreditation. In this section we provide some recommendations for consideration by COPRA as well as for workshops or training materials offered by NASPAA and for future instructions on preparation of self-studies.

Overall Recommendations

There is a need for resource materials and training for programs on how to define competencies, what is considered acceptable evidence of student learning, how to analyze and present evidence, and how to use evidence for program change. It is also important for programs to understand that they should have a plan for assessing all competencies over time, and that while assessment is a continuous and holistic process, it needs to be broken down into separate specific steps for the purposes of reporting. The appropriate information needs to be

entered into each section of the self study, to eliminate unnecessary duplication but to ensure that a complete picture of the program's assessment process emerges. A glossary of terms would be useful for programs.

One important question is whether or how much of what is reported in self-studies will become public knowledge, either with or without an institutional identifier. Workshops and other materials for programs wishing to pursue (re)accreditation should make clear the expectations for reporting on assessment of student learning as well as the understanding of how much of the results provided will be made public.

Evidence of Learning

Many programs are using direct evidence of student learning, and others are combining direct and indirect evidence.

A few programs collected multiple forms of evidence for one of the competencies. In some cases, the evidence all pointed in the same direction, i.e., that students were meeting expectations in terms of their learning. However, in a few cases, the findings from evidence collected from one source did not confirm the findings from evidence collected from a different source. For example, one program reported that 50% of students were rated as strongly, 42% as moderately, and 8% of students as weakly competent on leading and managing in public governance based on course papers, but 100% of students passed the comprehensive exam on this competency. Another program re-evaluated comprehensive exams where 100% of students passed under their old standards for establishing competency but only 57% would have passed under their new standards. These programs should be commended for their efforts at improvement and their honesty during the process.

A few programs reporting using quite methodologically complex types of collection, analysis, and reporting of evidence of student learning. Some of these efforts seemed quite labor intensive as well. Programs should be encouraged to use direct, readily evidence of student learning, e.g., from exams, papers, thesis, etc., that students already complete as part of their work towards the degree as often as possible. This can save programs valuable time and produce more lasting results in the end.

Another item of note is that qualitative analysis of evidence of student learning is as acceptable as quantitative analysis, provided the results of analysis are useful for program improvement. This may be a call for qualitatively oriented faculty to provide guidance for how to use qualitative methods to analyze evidence of student learning on universally required competencies.

Programs showing exemplary reporting in the self-study should be nominated for special recognition. They could be invited to contribute materials to the NASPAA web page under the competencies section and/or to participate in NASPAA meetings and workshops on assessing student competencies.

Programs that report changes in student competency over time should also be recognized. For example, one program reported a significant improvement in student attainment of competency over a three-year period, based on the same evidence of student learning assessed in the same way.

However, programs should not feel that they need to a) conceal areas where students underperform or b) always be able to show improvement in all areas, since that is not statistically possible. Programs that report evidence of student learning that does not meet expectations and then take action to improve student learning in the future should be seen as just as worthwhile as programs from Lake Wobegone, where all students are “above average.”

Programs should be encouraged to move from not reporting any results of analysis of evidence of student learning, to reporting generalized results, to reporting specific results. NASPAA/COPRA may wish to consider whether to adopt some expectations for the number or percentage of programs that report no results, generalized results, or specific results of analysis of evidence of student learning in their self-studies. Another option would be to adopt some goals for the coming years to increase the percentage of self-studies that do report evidence of student learning at least on the universal required competencies.

Finally, it appears that at least one or two programs did not provide any discussion of evidence of student learning under the section of the self-study dedicated to Standard 5, but instead referred to a previous discussion under a different section (to which this analysis did not have access). This should be addressed by a revision of the self-study instructions for subsequent years.

Appendix 1: **2011 SELF STUDIES for COPRA**
THEMES IN PROGRAM DEFINITIONS OF THE UNIVERSAL REQUIRED COMPETENCIES

COMPETENCY 1: TO LEAD AND MANAGE IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

Constitutional framework

Democratic theory, democratic practices and principles

Governance Structures

Authority and accountability

Systems dynamics and networks

History of public service

Ecology, environment, and dynamics of the public sector

Administrative, legal, political, economic, social, and cultural aspects

Public, private, and non-profit sectors

Inter-governmental relations, stakeholders, developing consensus

International aspects

Organize, manage, and lead people, projects, and organizations

Knowledge base of organizational theory, organizational development and change

Public personnel, interpersonal relations, working in teams, managing conflict, motivation

Performance management, performance indicators

Strategic and tactical decision-making

Transactional and transformational leadership, flexible leadership styles

Ethical, efficient, and compassionate management practices

Policy and program planning, implementation, and evaluation

Managing information, technology, and ideas

Managing public resources

Making ethical judgments

Applying knowledge in the public sector

Applying public service vision and values in the public sector

COMPETENCY 2: TO PARTICIPATE IN AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS

Major theories of public policy

Public, private, and non-profit sector structures and environment of public policy

Public goods, externalities, market failures, opportunity costs

Legal context, statutes, and administrative procedures acts

Steps in the policy process

Public participation in the policy process, stakeholders

Policy making at the global, national, and local levels

Formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policy
Policy analysis, forecasting, estimation, cost-benefit analysis
Qualitative and quantitative policy analysis tools, data analysis
Program evaluation
Communication of policy analysis results appropriate to varied audiences

COMPETENCY 3: TO ANALYZE, SYNTHESIZE, THINK CRITICALLY, SOLVE PROBLEMS, AND MAKE DECISIONS

Critical Thinking

Critical analysis of assumptions and arguments, issue framing
Problem identification and structuring
Identifying needs for information, primary and secondary data, and sources
Critical analysis of data, information
Seek, gather, organize, critique, analyze, interpret, synthesize, and present information
Research methods, quantitative and qualitative techniques
Statistical and analytical tools, statistical software
Generate new knowledge, design research projects
Theories and models of decision-making
Ethical issues related to public sector decision-making
Problem solving within the context of today's public sector
Recognize limits of rationality, maintain skepticism, value creativity
Preparing, analyzing, and justifying budgets
Measuring and assessing public sector performance
Engage in strategic and tactical planning and decision making
Professional capacity in writing, speaking, numerical analysis, and information technology

COMPETENCY 4: TO ARTICULATE AND APPLY A PUBLIC SERVICE PERSPECTIVE

History of public service values such as merit, protection of rights, provision of services
US constitutional, statute, and common law and administrative rules
Democratic governance, deliberative democracy, representative government and bureaucracy
Civic responsibility, public interest, public welfare
Philosophical, ethical and normative systems and perspectives, moral reasoning
Citizen engagement, participation, dialogue, community outreach
Local, grassroots, democratic traditions
Compassion for marginalized communities, human rights, social justice, global and local

Mastering the art, values, ideals, and principles of public service
Professional codes of ethics, NAPA Resolution on Ethical Education
Administrative responsibility and accountability, institutions and processes of oversight
Prudent administration of resources, avoiding high risk, effectiveness and efficiency
Personal commitment to be truthful, keep confidences, admit mistakes, fairness, diversity

To be principled, accountable, ethical, and responsible, meet fiscal and budgetary obligations
To act with honor and integrity, transparency, and sensitivity
To articulate core values of service, vision, integrity, competence and responsibility
To affirm the worth and dignity of all persons
Lifelong commitment to personal growth

Balancing competing values such as equity and efficiency, responsiveness and professionalism
Building cross-sector collaborative networks to facilitate interaction and solve problems
Use innovation and creativity, multi-disciplinary and diverse perspectives

COMPETENCY 5: TO COMMUNICATE AND INTERACT PRODUCTIVELY WITH A DIVERSE AND CHANGING
WORKFORCE AND CITIZENRY

Flexibility and adaptation to change
Knowledge of personal and leadership styles and their impacts
Soliciting the views of others, sensitivity to differences in people
Negotiation skills, consensus building
Fostering productive and collaborative interaction to attain practical solutions
Demonstrating professionalism
Exhibit good citizenship, as well as social, civic, and political responsibility
Working comfortably in international, inter-cultural, and diverse socio-economic environments

History and patterns of discrimination in the US, legal frameworks
Knowledge of effective equal opportunity practices and development of diverse work forces
Commitment to values of representative democracy and bureaucracy
Conducting a diversity audit with appreciation for concerns for equity
Appreciation of rights and responsibilities of public sector personnel and workforce diversity

Communicate effectively in writing, speech, and through technology with different audiences
Role of media, public relations, and technology in the practice of public administration

APPENDIX 2: TYPES OF EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING

ASSESSMENT METHOD	COMP 1: LEAD & MANAGE	COMP 2: POLICY	COMP 3: CRITICAL THINKING	COMP 4: PUB SERVICE PERSP	COMP 5: COMM & DIVERSE	TOTAL
Course Based Assignments/Homework		1	13			14
Alumni Survey/Meetings	4		4	1		9
Course Based Exams/Final Exams	2		5			7
Comprehensive Exam	5		1			6
Capstone Course Performance/Projects	1		5			6
Course Based Student Grades	5					5
Internship Evaluation	5					5
Focus Groups/Surveys of Students	3		2			5
Case Studies	2		2			4
Portfolio Review	4					4
Employer Survey/Focus Groups	2		2			4
Internship Survey			3			3
Exit Survey/Interviews with Students	1		1			2
Faculty/Student Meetings	1			1		2
Student Conference Presentation	2					2
Experiential Learning Project	2					2
Faculty Meetings			1	1		2
Thesis			1			1
Oral Exam	1					1
Practitioner Review of Research Projects			1			1
Course Based Pre and Post Observations		1				1
Pre-Observation in Orientation	1					1
Grant Application			1			1
Course Based Student Participation	1					1
Overall Communication Score developed for each student					1	1
Uniform Assessment Tool				1		1
Student Awards	1					1
Student Peer Reviewed Publications	1					1
Review of Syllabi	1					1
Job Placement Review			1			1

APPENDIX 3: PROGRAM/CURRICULAR CHANGES

ASSESSMENT METHOD	COMP 1: LEAD & MANAGE	COMP 2: POLICY	COMP 3: CRITICAL THINKING	COMP 4: PUB SERVICE PERSP	COMP 5: COMM & DIVERSE	TOTAL
Course Based Changes	6	2	10		1	19
No Changes	2		1		1	4
Created Portfolio Requirement	1					1
Improved Course Offerings and Scheduling	1					1
Revised Internship	3					3
Revised Capstone	2		2			4
Revised Portfolio	1					1
Added Courses to the Core	2		4	1		7
Created Competency Based Orientation	1		1			2
Created Capstone/Eliminate Comprehensive Exam				1		1
Eliminated a Concentration	1					1