

# **Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration**

## **PEER REVIEW AND ACCREDITATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

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

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

1.3 The Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation as a specialized accrediting agency to accredit Master's degree programs in public and nonprofit policy, affairs, and administration globally.

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.

### **2.0 Purpose and Characteristics of Review**

2.1 The purpose of NASPAA accreditation for professional Master's degree programs in public and nonprofit affairs, policy, and administration is to promote and maintain educational quality. The approach is based on the NASPAA Accreditation Guiding Principles of November 2008 and can be characterized as driven by program mission and based on public service values, emphasizing the assessment of programs through student learning outcomes.

2.2 The accreditation review combines a program self-study, review by COPRA and a site visit. Programs in conformity with the Professional Master's Degree Standards are listed on an

Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. NASPAA assumes no liability or obligation arising out of the use of the roster by individuals or organizations.

2.3 In assessing each program for accreditation, the Commission shall base its conclusion on the overall quality of the program, its performance of its mission, consideration of substantial conformance with the standards, and its assessment of overall program quality given the unique mission of that program. Variations from the standards must be justified in light of a program's mission and success in fulfilling its mission. In arriving at an overall judgment on accreditation, COPRA shall balance consideration of substantial conformance with the standards and its assessment of overall program quality given the unique mission of that program.

2.4 All versions of the degree program seeking accreditation or re-accreditation are covered by the NASPAA Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public and Nonprofit Affairs, Policy, and Administration. NASPAA accredits degree programs, not schools. The normal expectation is that each degree program submits an application separately for review. Occasionally, multiple programs at a single institution can proceed as a single application, however, this is the exception, not the rule, and the burden is on the program to make the case for a single process.

2.5 The documents governing peer review/accreditation are:

1. Policies and Procedures for Peer Review and Accreditation
2. Standards for Professional Master's Degree Program in Public and Nonprofit Affairs, Policy, and Administration
3. Self-Study Report Instructions
4. Site Visit Manual

### **3.0 Conduct of Accreditation**

3.1 All parties participating in the accreditation process shall exhibit integrity and professionalism in their actions.

3.2 Conflict of Interest Policy: It is COPRA's policy to avoid any conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest arising because a person involved in the accreditation process has an associational interest in the program under review. Persons should not serve as site visitors nor participate in deliberations of programs if there is real, possible, or perceived conflict of interest. Possible conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to a site team member or COPRA member who:

- Has been an appointee of, employee of, or been a paid consultant to the reviewed institution within the past ten years;
- Has a relative who is employed by or affiliated with the institution;
- Has graduated from the reviewed institution;

- Has engaged in a relationship with the reviewed institution that creates the appearance of a conflict of interest; or
- Is employed within the competitive proximity of the institution.

3.3 Members of the Commission may not serve as independent consultants to any program during their terms on the Commission.

3.3.1 Individuals engaged in the review of an individual program, including site visit team members and/or former Commissioners, may not serve as independent consultants to said program prior to a final accreditation action.

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

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

#### **4.0 Accreditation Requirements**

4.1 Deadlines for each step in the review/accreditation process must be met by the program in order for the program to continue in the process and thereby assure consideration for inclusion on the appropriate Annual Roster of Accredited Programs.

4.2 Application for peer review and accreditation is open to NASPAA institutional members in good standing, including payment of the Association's annual membership dues, as well as payment of specified accreditation fees and site visit team expenses. The Schedule of Fees will be listed on the NASPAA website.

4.2.1 If an accredited program voluntarily terminates its membership in NASPAA, all membership rights are forfeited, including its accreditation status. The Commission would remove the program from the Roster of Accredited programs.

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

4.3.1 Payment of the NASPAA annual membership dues and the annual accreditation fee;

4.3.2 Submission of an annual accreditation maintenance report to the Commission. This report must provide information on substantive changes at the program as well as data to support ongoing conformance.

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

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

## **5.0 Accreditation Governance and Responsibilities**

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.

5.3 The Commission will articulate its budget priorities and make a budget request to the Executive Council of NASPAA on an annual basis.

5.4 As per NASPAA's Bylaws, the NASPAA Standards Committee "shall develop and maintain appropriate standards for master's 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.

5.5 Any changes made to Self-Study Instructions, the Site Visit Manual, and Peer Review and Accreditation Policies and Procedures will be announced publicly.

5.6 The Commission is committed to seeking feedback on interpretation of accreditation standards from accredited programs, practitioners, students, and the public at large.

5.7 The Commission is committed to cooperation with other specialized and professional accreditors. The Commission abides by the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors Code of Good Practice.

5.8 The Commission is committed to demonstrating the high quality of NASPAA accreditation and maintains recognition by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). NASPAA-COPRA is recognized by CHEA to accredit Master's degree programs in public and nonprofit policy, affairs, and administration globally (2020).

5.9 The Commission is committed to international cooperation and information flows.

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

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

6.2 Members of the Commission shall be nominated by the Vice President of NASPAA prior to the Fall business meeting of the Commission. The Vice President solicits nominations to the Commission from current Commission members.

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

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

6.5 One member of the Commission appointed each year should be a member of the NASPAA Executive Council.

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

6.7 The public member of the Commission shall be reimbursed for all allowable costs to attend the Commission's meetings.

6.8 The thirteen members of the Commission from NASPAA member programs shall be reimbursed for reasonable costs, based on NASPAA-COPRA reimbursement policies, to attend the Commission's meetings when their programs are unable to support these costs.

6.9 Each member of the Commission shall be responsible for reading and reviewing Self Study Reports, Site Visit Reports, Annual Reports, and various supplemental responses. Each COPRA member shall produce draft Interim Reports to programs, accreditation recommendations on individual programs, evaluations of program annual reports, and decision letters on conformance. Each COPRA member should participate by attending Fall and Summer meetings, responding to queries from programs under review in a timely manner, contacting and responding to the site visit chair for their assigned programs, informing NASPAA Staff if they will be unavailable to perform duties over an extended period of time so that an interim liaison may be assigned, and engaging in COPRA policy committees and initiatives as their time allows.

6.10 The Eligibility "Committee" will be a COPRA subcommittee of three members, appointed to overlapping terms. Two immediate past COPRA members, or other qualified representatives not currently members of COPRA will be appointed to the subcommittee by the COPRA chair, based on their experience and knowledge of the standards and accreditation process. The other member will be appointed by the chair of COPRA from among the full COPRA membership.

6.10.1 The Eligibility Committee will run the eligibility process and will make a recommendation to COPRA, who will release the decision and be the final arbiter. The Committee works closely with the Commission and stays abreast of COPRA policies in order to give appropriate guidance to programs.

6.10.2 The Eligibility Committee serves a support role and its members do not have the same decision-making authority as the official members of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation.

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

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

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

7.3 An application must be accompanied by submission of the Self Study Report and any supplemental materials.

7.4 The Self Study Report and any related supplemental materials should be submitted in the official online data submission system. Access to the system can be obtained by contacting NASPAA staff.

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

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

7.6 Upon submission of the Report, NASPAA staff screen the Self-Study Report for general technical completeness. Programs will be given an opportunity to supply necessary information omitted from the Report.

Currently accredited programs seeking re-accreditation are required to submit a Self-Study Report and schedule a site visit. The rigor of the review for programs seeking re-accreditation will be congruent with that for initial applications.

7.7 If the Commission determines that a currently accredited program has valid reasons for requesting a delay in its scheduled review, the Commission may accredit for one year and require it to enter the next cycle. Delay requests must be received by June 1 of the year the Self Study is due. Late delay requests will be assessed a fee of \$336.

## **8.0 Eligibility Process for First Time Applicants**

8.1 All programs applying for NASPAA accreditation for the first time should participate in the Eligibility Process prior to the submission of their first Self-Study Report.

8.2 A program may commence the Eligibility process prior to the twice-annual deadlines of August 15 and April 15, with the submission of the Eligibility Application, a letter of intent signed by the Chief Academic Officer of the institution, and the Eligibility Fee.

8.3 The Eligibility Application should be submitted in the online web form specified by the Commission. Access to the form can be obtained through NASPAA staff.

8.4 The Eligibility process is not intended to pre-judge the final accreditation decision, but rather give programs early guidance in limited areas of potential concern. Eligibility determinations do not bind or preordain the outcome of the accreditation process.

8.5 Waivers of the Eligibility process may be granted by the Commission in exceptional circumstances. Programs seeking a waiver should apply well in advance of their proposed submission dates.

8.6 Eligibility applications are reviewed by the Eligibility Committee of COPRA, which makes a recommendation to the Commission. The Commission discusses the Eligibility recommendations at its next scheduled meeting and issues a guidance letter to the program. The Commission's guidance letter on Eligibility alerts the program to potential conformance concerns in limited areas, possible recommendations on designing the Self-Study report, and any potential administrative barriers to proceeding to Self Study Submission.

8.7 In general, a program may proceed to the Self-Study process at its discretion. In the case of a significant administrative barrier, the Commission could inform the program it may not proceed in the process until the administrative barrier has been resolved.

8.8 Programs submitting their Eligibility application by the August 15 deadline that decide to proceed with the accreditation process may submit Self-Study reports as early as the next available August 15 deadline and proceed with the general accreditation process.

8.8.1 Programs submitting their Eligibility application by the April 15 deadline that decide to proceed with the accreditation process may submit Self-Study reports and proceed with the general accreditation process may do so as early as August 15 of the year following the eligibility submission. Programs may not proceed to submission at the most immediate August 15 deadline.

8.9 Programs may voluntarily remain in the Eligibility process and delay the submission of the Self-Study report for up to three years. Programs must remain members of NASPAA in good standing during the interim period and pay an annual Eligibility maintenance fee. Programs remaining in the Eligibility Process beyond three years will be automatically withdrawn by the Commission.

8.10 The Commission will make volunteer eligibility counselors available to programs for limited consultation. COPRA will maintain a list of qualified individuals experienced with the

accreditation process and not currently participating in the program's review in an official capacity. The program may choose to engage with the eligibility counselor at their discretion. Any consultation beyond a limited engagement is at the discretion of the program. Any further arrangements for consulting must be pursued by the program independently of COPRA.

8.11 A representative from a program seeking NASPAA accreditation for the first time should attend an Accreditation Workshop (at the NASPAA conference, electronically, or at a regional venue) in the two year period prior to submitting their Self-Study Report. The representative should be an individual who will be involved in the program's preparation for accreditation, although it need not be the NASPAA Principal Representative.

8.12 In special cases, an administrative staff visit may be necessary to assess some of the very basic legal, logistical, cultural, and/or political barriers to a successful review or site visit. In cases where the paper record is insufficient to determine whether the program meets the administrative requirements to participate in review, staff may conduct a visit to clarify facts or resolve any potential administrative barriers. The program under review would be responsible for the direct costs of an administrative visit.

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

9.1 The initial examination of the Self Study Report is concerned with the substantive adequacy of the Report and the program's apparent degree of conformity with NASPAA Standards. For purposes of the evaluation, a program is deemed to be in conformity with NASPAA standards when the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation determines that its purpose, strategies, governance, operations and communications conform to the standards.

9.2 Prior to the Fall COPRA meeting, the Commission meets in Review Groups, of three to four commissioners, to discuss the preliminary analysis on the program's Self Study Report. At the time of the Fall COPRA meeting, the entire Commission completes this preliminary analysis and prepares an Interim Report for the program.

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

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

9.5 The Commission may also advise programs seeking accreditation to delay the site visit when the Commission is unable to interpret the data in the initial Self Study Report. In the case of unique models or structures, the Commission may instruct the program to clarify its data and evidence in order to support a review. Delay of the site visit allows a program to improve the

report and to re-enter the next available cycle without an additional application fee. A clarified and updated Self Study Report is required to re-enter the cycle.

9.5.1 Non-accredited programs receiving a recommendation to delay the site visit after the review of the first submitted self-study report may not move forward to site visit prior to the submission of a second self-study report.

9.6 Programs seeking reaccreditation are expected to proceed to a site visit in the cycle in which they submit their Self Study Report unless they receive advice from the Commission to delay.

9.7 First-time applicants needing to resubmit their Self Study reports do not have to pay an additional submission fee, provided the submission is within three cycles of their original Self Study submission date, or two cycles from a notice of a deferral action.

9.8 First time applicants receiving two subsequent delays of site visit or accreditation deferrals will restart the review process, to include resigning the accreditation application, submitting the self-study report, and remitting review fees.

## **10.0 The Site Visit Team Roster**

10.1 Site Visit Team composition and selection are governed by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation and the official Site Visit Manual.

10.2 For inclusion on a site visit team, a nominee must have attended a site visit workshop, or have been trained in an alternate approved manner, or have served on the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, or other closely relevant accreditation task force.

10.2.1 Site visit training workshops will be held at the NASPAA Annual Conference and at other conferences, venues, and virtual opportunities as specified by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation.

10.3 The Principal Representative of NASPAA-accredited programs are requested to nominate highly qualified members of their faculty for the Site Visit Team training roster, as well as qualified practitioners who are familiar with public and nonprofit affairs, policy, and administration curricula. Nominations should be accompanied by a resume and contact information. NASPAA Principal Representatives of NASPAA-accredited programs are automatically eligible and are requested to submit a resume.

10.3.1 For inclusion on a site visit team, academic nominees should represent NASPAA-accredited programs. On a case-by-case basis, academic nominees from non-accredited programs will be considered by the Chair of the Commission. In making exceptions, previous academic employment, demonstrated knowledge of program evaluation and accreditation, and expertise specific to program trends will be considered.

10.4 The NASPAA President and Vice President and current members of the Commission are ineligible to serve on site visit teams during their terms.

10.5 Site Visitors are considered current if, within the past five years, they have served on site visit team, have participated in a training session or special update session, or served on a relevant accreditation committee. [Note that becoming current under the NASPAA 2009 Standards requires attendance at a training session or site visit with the new standards, in October 2010 and beyond, due to the considerable differences between the pre-2009 and the current standards.]

## **11.0 Site Visits**

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

11.2 COPRA begins by matching individuals who are a good fit for the program and can fill one of three roles on the visit: chair, academic, or practitioner. A chair is typically someone who has previously served on at least two visits and who has a strong understanding of the Standards and the site visit process. The academic member of the visit is usually an associate professor or above and has expertise in an area that fits with the program or its mission. The practitioner is usually someone who has 7+ years of experience in the field of public service, whose area of expertise fits with the program's mission, and who has an MPA, MPP or similar graduate degree.

11.2.1 Programs will review site visit teams for conflicts of interest, as defined by Section 3.2 above. Concerns outside of the scope of the policy should be brought to the attention of COPRA. Final site visit teams are named at the discretion of the Commission.

11.3 Site visits are scheduled between January 22 and April 8, and may not be scheduled at a time when program stakeholders are unavailable. They are conducted in accordance with the official Site Visit Manual and are of two and one half to three days duration. The program is responsible for expenses of the site visit team as outlined in the Site Visit Manual.

11.3.1 For programs with academic calendars that preclude the spring site visit timeframe, COPRA will consider alternative site visit schedules. Requests for an alternate site visit schedule should be submitted with the self-study report on August 15.

11.3.2 Documents intended to be reviewed by the site visit team in preparation for the site visit, to include interim report responses, should be available in the NASPAA Data Center at least 30 days prior to the site visit.

11.3.3 In the case that a program has not scheduled its site visit by January 15 of the spring of its review year, the program may be administratively delayed into the subsequent cohort. An updated Self-Study Report is required to re-enter the cycle; the accreditation review fee does

not apply at this time. In the case of an administrative delay, the re-accreditation shall be for a period of six years, less any years used for voluntary delays.

11.4 At its discretion only, the Commission may recommend the site visit team virtually visit a program under review to navigate legal, logistical, safety, and/or political challenges to a productive on-the-ground site visit. In some cases, COPRA may recommend virtual site visits for follow-up site visits.

11.4.1 At its discretion only, the Commission may recommend a program's site visit be postponed to adapt to legal, logistical, safety, and/or political challenges to a productive on-the-ground site visit as originally scheduled.

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

## **12.0 Commission Action on Programs Seeking Accreditation**

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

12.2 The Principal Representative, or other program-designated representative, and the Chief Academic Officer of each applicant program is notified in writing of the Commission's final accreditation decision prior to the publication of the Annual Roster and Action Statement.

12.3 The Principal Representative, or other program-designated representative, of each applicant program will receive a copy of the Interim Report, the Site Visit Team Report and the Commission's final decision.

12.4 At its Summer Meeting, the Commission will make a final conformance decision on the programs in the current cycle. New applicants may be accredited for a full term, denied accreditation, or the Commission may defer the decision. Reaccreditation applicants may be accredited for a full term, denied accreditation, or granted a one-year accreditation.

12.4.1 Prior to the Summer COPRA meeting, the Commission meets in Review Groups, of three to four commissioners, to discuss the preliminary recommendation of the program's accreditation decision. At the time of the Summer COPRA meeting, the entire Commission determines the final action and prepares the accreditation decision for the program.

12.5 An initial applicant program found to be in conformity with NASPAA Accreditation Standards for Master's Degree Programs is included on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs for a period of seven (7) years.

12.6 A reaccreditation applicant found to be in conformity with NASPAA Accreditation Standards for Master's Degree Programs is included on the Annual Roster of Accredited

Programs for a period of seven (7) years, unless that program is operating under delays or one-year reaccreditations that would reduce the length of the accreditation term.

#### 12.7 Deferrals and One Year Accreditations

12.7.1 If the Commission determines that an initial applicant program has specific non-conformities with the standards that can be resolved within one or two calendar years, but which preclude immediate inclusion on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs, the Commission may defer its final decision and allow the program to re-enter a future cycle after implementing any corrective measures recommended by the Commission. At the Commission's discretion, a new self-study report or a response to the decision letter addressing the nonconformities will be required when the program re-enters the cycle. Programs that do not submit these requirements within three years will be automatically withdrawn by the Commission.

12.7.2 If the Commission determines that a currently accredited program under review is found to have specific non-conformities with the standards that can be resolved within one calendar year, the Commission may accredit for one year. Those programs granted one year accreditation will be required to submit a response to the decision letter addressing the nonconformities when the program re-enters the next cycle.

12.7.3 The Commission will review submissions from programs that have received a deferral or one-year reaccreditation, and will determine whether an additional site visit is necessary to clarify the information described in the new Self-Study. If a site visit is necessary, the Commission will determine the size of the team and its schedule. The program is responsible for allowable expenses of their site visit team as outlined in the Site Visit Manual.

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

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

12.7.6 If the Commission rules to accredit an initial applicant program that had previously been deferred, that program is still eligible for a full seven (7) year accreditation term.

12.8 Programs found in conformity with the NASPAA Accreditation Standards and achieving accreditation may be subject to monitoring provisions in their required annual report. These provisions are noted in the Commission's Summer decision letter to programs in the accreditation cycle.

12.8.1 A program may be monitored on a specific standard(s) when the Commission deems that the program is in overall conformance, yet needs improvement in a specific conformance area, or the Commission wishes to follow the implementation of a new practice.

12.8.2 The program is expected to respond to monitoring provisions each year in its Annual Report, until the program is notified that those provisions have been eliminated by COPRA.

### **13.0 Withdrawals and Denials**

13.1 An initial applicant program may voluntarily withdraw from the review/accreditation cycle at any time. This notification should be submitted in writing, and signed by the Principal Representative of the program and the Chief Academic Officer of the institution.

13.2 If an accredited program chooses not to enter its regularly scheduled review cycle, the Commission will withdraw its accreditation status, effective either at the expiration of its regular term or at the due date for its next annual review, whichever is sooner.

13.3 Students graduating from a program subsequent to the effective date of a denial or withdrawal are not considered graduates of an accredited program. Accreditation status at the time of a student's graduation determines whether he or she may be considered a graduate of an accredited program.

13.4 Programs that have been denied accreditation or have voluntarily withdrawn may reenter the next applicable accreditation cycle, with the regular required submissions and fees.

13.5 Denials of accreditation and voluntary withdrawals will be announced publicly and listed on the NASPAA website in COPRA's annual statement of actions. For all denials of accreditation, COPRA will provide specific reasons for the decision accompanied by a response from the denied program (if submitted).

13.6 First-time applicants that voluntarily withdraw from the accreditation or eligibility processes at any point prior to a final decision will not be announced publicly in the Commission's Statement of Actions; however, NASPAA staff and Commission members will respond to on-demand queries regarding the status of these programs only.

### **14.0 Annual Reporting of Continuous Improvement and Substantive Change**

14.1 Those programs accredited for a full term shall submit an annual report no later than November 1 or as specified by the Commission. These annual reports will become part of the program's permanent accreditation file. Continued accreditation is contingent upon acceptance of this annual report.

14.2 In the annual report, the program will identify whether the program's mission, strategies, resources, administration and curriculum or offerings have remained substantially the same or changed since the most recent accrediting decision. Programs will also submit data related to their operation and educational outcomes as specified by the Commission. As a demonstration of accountability, some annual report data may be made public.

14.3 Programs being monitored on specific accreditation standards, as per their most recent accreditation decision letter, must respond to these concerns in the annual report.

14.3.1 Programs being monitored on specific accreditation standards will have the monitoring provisions removed after the third completed annual report, unless the Commission

determines the program has not yet addressed the concerns outlined in the program's most recent decision letter.

14.4 At its Winter meeting, the Commission will review the program's annual report and decide whether or not to accept it. If the annual report is not accepted, the Commission may request further information.

14.4.1 If the program's responses do not provide adequate evidence of conformance to the NASPAA Standards, the Commission could require the program to re-enter an upcoming accreditation cycle for a more intensive review.

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

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

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

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

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

### **15.0 Appeals**

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

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

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

- COPRA's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which the Commission took action, or

- the procedures used to reach the decision were contrary to published COPRA Policies and Procedures, or other established practices, and the procedural error prejudiced the Commission's consideration of the program application.

15.4 The program has the burden of proof with regard to its appeal.

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

15.6 Within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the institution's Grounds for Appeal, the COPRA Chair (or designee) shall provide the institution with a complete list of the members of the Accreditation Appeal Board and identify the three Accreditation Appeal Board member representatives on that list who are willing and qualified to serve on an Appeal Panel and possessing knowledge of the accreditation standards and processes applicable to the respective programs which is the subject of the appeal. Within seven (7) calendar days of receipt of those names, the institution will remove two names from the list and notify the COPRA chair (or designee) of its decision.

15.7 Concurrent with its notification of the two names it has removed, the program shall provide COPRA with three names of Accreditation Appeal Board member representatives willing and qualified to serve on the Appeal Panel and possessing knowledge of the accreditation standards and processes applicable to the respective program which is the subject of the appeal. Within seven (7) calendar days of receipt of those three names, COPRA shall notify the institution of the two names it has removed.

15.8 Within twenty-one (21) calendar days of confirmation of their joint appointment, the two members thus chosen shall select a third member of the Accreditation Appeal Board willing and qualified to serve on the Appeal Panel and possessing knowledge of the accreditation standards and processes applicable to the respective programs which is the subject of the appeal.

15.9 The Accreditation Appeal Board shall be comprised of qualified site visitors, former COPRA members, program directors of NASPAA-accredited programs, and members of NASPAA's Standing Committees as defined in NASPAA by-laws, excluding current COPRA and Executive Council members.

15.10 The Appeal Panel members may not be current commission members or have participated in any way in the accreditation process for the program that is appealing the adverse decision.

15.11 The Appeal Panel shall select one of its members to serve as Chair. The Chair of the Appeal Panel shall determine the date of the hearing and shall notify all parties at least thirty (30) calendar days in advance of the hearing. The hearing shall occur within nine (9) months

of the negative decision and be held at the NASPAA offices or at such other location as COPRA and the institution may agree.

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

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

15.13 The institution and COPRA shall have the right to appear before the Appeal Panel, to be represented by counsel, and to present opening statements, all within the limitations prescribed by the Chair of the Appeal Panel. The hearing, which customarily will not take more than two (2) hours to complete, shall proceed in the following manner:

15.13.1 The Chair of the Appeal Panel shall describe the standard of review the Appeal Panel will utilize in the conduct of the appeal and the procedures that will be followed. The program shall then offer an opening statement summarizing the program's grounds for the appeal. The program shall have not less than 30 minutes for this presentation. COPRA shall then offer an opening statement summarizing COPRA's position on the issues presented in the original negative action.

15.13.2 After the opening statements, the Appeal Panel may ask questions directed to the program, COPRA or both related to the record on appeal or any of the issues raised by the institution or COPRA. COPRA and the institution may not address each other, call witnesses, or introduce new evidence.

15.13.3 The program may then, but shall not be required to, offer a closing statement, following which the hearing will adjourn and the Appeal Panel will retire to executive session.

15.13.4 Any changes in the schedule must be approved by the Appeal Panel.

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

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

15.16 If the appeal panel upholds the decision of COPRA, that decision becomes final as of the date of the letter stating the panel's disposition of the appeal. If the appeal panel remands the

matter to COPRA, the Commission shall consider the action of the Appeal Panel and the determinations of the Panel on which the remand was based at the Commission's next meeting. COPRA's decision is final and not subject to further appeal.

15.17 The Statement of Actions will indicate the program's decision to appeal. The program status shall remain unchanged until the appeal or any remand to the Commission has been finally resolved.

15.17.1 COPRA will inform the Executive Director of NASPAA and the Executive Committee of the NASPAA Executive Council upon receipt of notification of the intent to appeal, at the release of the decision from the Appeal Panel, and after the Commission's final decision, in the case of remand.

## **16.0 Global Accreditation**

16.1 NASPAA accreditation is open to programs serving students in any geographic location.

16.2 All review documents, including the Eligibility Application, Self-Study Report and appendices, program responses, and the Site Visit Report, should be submitted in English. The site visit will be conducted in English. If a translator is required for the visit, the program shall be responsible for those expenses.

16.2.1 At the Commission's discretion, site visits may be conducted in the program's language of instruction.

16.2.2 Ancillary documents, such as CVs, samples of student work, archived meeting minutes, university-wide policies, and website pages, may not be required to be translated into English. The Commission and/or Site Visit Team may request non-English language documents pertinent to the review be translated.

16.3 The burden of articulating conformance to the NASPAA Standards rests with the program in instances where the program's culture or environment create apparent incompatibilities with NASPAA accreditation standards.

16.4 The program is expected to actively participate in the securing of travel documents and making any special or necessary arrangements for international site visitors. When NASPAA incurs additional costs to facilitate international travel arrangements, these costs will be passed on to the program.

## **17.0 Accountability and Distribution of Information on Accreditation Activities by COPRA**

17.1 The Commission is committed to demonstrating transparency and accountability to the public through its disclosure policies.

17.2 Each year, The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation will publish the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs, which will be posted on the NASPAA website ([www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)) and distributed to NASPAA members and the accreditation community.

17.2.1 The Roster of Accredited Programs may be updated at the discretion of the Commission to reflect changes to program status.

17.3 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation will file an annual Statement of Actions listing accreditation actions, the reasons for those actions, the length of any accreditation term granted, as well as the names of accredited programs that voluntarily withdrew. Accreditation actions include the following decisions: accreditation, accreditation with monitoring, one-year reaccreditation, deferral, and denial.

17.3.1 The Statement of Actions will be posted on the NASPAA website ([www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)) and distributed to NASPAA members and the accreditation community no later than 20 days after the release of final decision letters to programs receiving accreditation actions.

17.4 The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation will report annually to the Association on the status of the peer review/accreditation process, identifying substantive trends and developments regarding education for the public service and/or guidance and clarifications on the interpretations of standards.

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

17.6 COPRA strives for consistency in its decision-making, both within and across accreditation cohorts. Decisions that arise from Fall and Summer meetings are subject to consistency analysis prior to the release of Interim Reports and Final Decision letters.

17.7 COPRA will systematically collect feedback from accredited programs on its conduct, processes, and the interpretation of standards.

17.8 COPRA will encourage scholarship on quality in public service education and will participate in scholarly leadership in this area whenever possible.

17.9 COPRA will release aggregate data gathered from accreditation activities to inform the public, programs and researchers about public service education.

17.10 COPRA will release certain program-identifiable data gathered from accreditation activities as an accountability measure to the public, as described in the Self Study Instructions.

17.11 The NASPAA Accreditation process is intended to be formative and lead to improvement in programs. The Commission is committed to projects and initiatives that assist programs in their pursuit of quality, and in their understanding of NASPAA accreditation processes and goals.

## **18.0 Public Disclosure of Information by Programs Listed on NASPAA's Annual Roster of Accredited Programs**

18.1 The Commission is committed to ensuring program accountability and transparency to program stakeholders through the disclosures expected of programs.

18.2 NASPAA supports the desire of member institutions to publicize inclusion of their master's degree programs on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs that are in conformity with the NASPAA standards for professional master's degree programs. A logo has been designed for this purpose and is available for download at the NASPAA website ([www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)).

18.3 NASPAA members wishing to cite their degree program's inclusion on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs on their website or other advertising materials should choose among the following phrases:

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

"(Name of master's degree) is a Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) accredited degree program."

"(Name of master's degree) appears on the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) Annual Roster of Accredited Programs in conformity with standards established for professional master's degrees in public service."

18.4 Programs seeking accreditation or re-accreditation shall communicate their NASPAA accreditation status clearly and truthfully and provide relevant context to their stakeholders in a timely manner. Programs are encouraged to share additional information related to the decision, as appropriate, including plans for ongoing improvement.

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

18.5 If the Commission is notified of a non-accredited member program using language to publicize its program in such a way that "accredited status" is implied but not directly stated, the Commission will notify the program to take appropriate steps to correct the misleading language. If the program does not correct the misleading information in a timely manner, the Commission will notify the Executive Director of NASPAA of a potential NASPAA Code of Conduct violation.

18.6 Programs that are not accredited by NASPAA should not imply an association with the NASPAA accreditation standards. The Commission will consider statements that imply that the program "shadows the NASPAA Standards" or is "designed according to the principles of the NASPAA curriculum/competency standards", or other similar language, to be misleading to the public.

18.7 Programs that are seeking accreditation for the first time may state that they have applied for or are seeking NASPAA accreditation, but may make no definitive public statement that implies a positive decision is imminent or forthcoming.

18.8 Unauthorized use of the NASPAA Accreditation logo is subject to legal action.

## **19.0 Complaints Against Accredited Institutions**

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

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

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

19.4 COPRA will not consider anonymous complaints.

### **19.5 Processing of Complaints**

Complaints received by COPRA staff will be provided to the COPRA Chair who will screen complaints to eliminate any that are frivolous or do not clearly and directly rest upon a serious allegation that the program fails to substantially comply with particular NASPAA standards. If the Chair concludes that a complaint should be forwarded to COPRA for consideration, staff will promptly provide a copy of the complaint and supporting material to the program with a request for a timely response. The COPRA Chair may appoint a subcommittee of the Commission to make further inquiries if such an investigation appears necessary to provide adequate information for COPRA to evaluate whether the program remains in conformity with the standard or standards in question.

19.6 Complaints forwarded by the Chair to COPRA will be evaluated at the next scheduled COPRA meeting, or in conjunction with annual program review for programs not currently involved in the reaccreditation process.

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

### **19.7 Action on Valid Complaints**

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

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

19.8 If, on receipt of the complaint, the Chair of COPRA believes the issue significantly jeopardizes the quality of students' educational experiences at an accredited institution, COPRA can proceed with an immediate evaluation, rather than awaiting the next scheduled annual review.

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This draft was approved by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation August 7, 2020.