

MPA Comprehensive Case Analysis and Assessment (2011-2012)

AY [2011-2012]

Report Date: September 28, 2012

School/College: School of Management

Department/Program: Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration, Master of Public Administration Program (MPA)

Person(s) completing the Report: Michael O’Neill and Gleb Nikitenko

1. Overview Statement: Briefly summarize the student learning assurance activities that were undertaken this academic year, indicating:

- a. which program learning outcomes were assessed this year.
- b. who in your department/program was involved in the evaluation of the above learning outcomes

MPA program faculty met regularly throughout 2011-2012 academic year to discuss, among other things, work on a continuous improvement plan of aligning NASPAA competencies, course offerings, learning outcomes, and aspects of curriculum assessment. Faculty deliberations were concerned about developing a sustainable feedback system with assessment playing an important role in analyzing program and course learning outcomes. Two key components were implemented. One was a systematic data collection on the course level (PA faculty were asked to fill out a standardized form in Spring 2012), and two was a revision of the capstone course, which is designed to evaluate students’ competencies at the program level. It should be noted that because of the cumulative nature of the MPA capstone course and the case exam, ALL program learning outcomes, except for those that were HSA –concentration-related, were assessed. The revision of the capstone course is discussed below. First, the data from the Summer-Fall 2011 capstone administration is reviewed, followed by an overview of the process used for reevaluation of the past practices with a list of action items the resulted from the review. Five (5) MPA FT and adjunct faculty (L. Brewster, S. Buller, R. Johnson III, G. Nikitenko, and T. Ward) reviewed and graded exams on the 1-5 scale (3.0- passing score) as part of the “blind” review panel (3 panelists for each of the administrations). This is followed by a description of work in progress for each of the action items.

2. Please Answers the Following Questions for Each of the Student Outcomes Assessed:

- a. What did you do? Describe clearly and concisely how you assessed the learning outcomes that were evaluated this year (e.g., measures, research methods, etc.). [please use bullet points to answer this question]

MPA Capstone Overview

In Summer and Fall of 2011, three cohorts (61 students; N=61) took the take-home comprehensive case analysis exam. The MPA program exit requirement housed in the PA 650 (Integrative Seminar) capstone course was administered over 11 days. Two different case studies were administered in both semesters in

the first administration. The following general qualitative assessment criteria were used for the case analysis exam (8 themes defined to evaluate the reviewers' qualitative responses):

1. Mastery of background information provided in the case.
2. Correctness and thoroughness of problem (or problems) identification and those of the main issues of the case study.
3. Quality and thoroughness of the environmental scan and stakeholders.
4. Application of organizational and behavioral theories and research.
5. Application of PA theory and research in specific areas.
6. Soundness of assumptions and logic.
7. Quality of analysis of basic principles called for in the exam questions.
8. Consistency and compatibility of analysis and recommendations.

b. What did the faculty in the department or program learn?

Summarize your findings and conclusions as a result of the student learning assurance indicating strengths and weaknesses in student learning demonstrated by this evaluation.

Of 61 MPA student responses received and analyzed, 57 (93.4%) passed the exam on the first attempt and 4 (6.6%) failed, thus requiring a re-take using a different case study. All four failures belonged to the same SF cohort completing the program in Summer 2011. Furthermore, 19 (31.1%) earned scores in the range of 3.0-3.9 (satisfactory), 35 (57.4%) earned scores in the range of 4.0-4.9 (good), and 3 (4.9%) earned the top score of 5.0 (excellent). **In all, 38 respondents scored "good" or "excellent" which represented 62.3% of the total;** the percentage was very close to a desirable target of 70% of all MPA graduates completing the program with the performance of "good" or better. The size of standard deviation in the SF cohort reflects its higher level of diversity in terms of academic and professional experiences of the students and their performance variability. The exam results are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for MPA 650 Comprehensive Case Exam (2011)

Cohorts	n	M	SD	% (≥4.0)	min	max
San Francisco	29	3.99	.72	65.5	2.20	5.00
Sacramento	16	4.19	.46	75	3.20	4.80
South Bay	16	3.89	.44	50	3.25	4.75
N (total)	61	4.02	.60	64	2.20	5.00

It is worth noting that evidence collected did not support a perceived notion among faculty and students that HSA students do not perform at the level of the non-HSA students in the case exam because the health services concentration students are not required to take PA 632 (Policy Analysis) and PA 644 (Strategic Planning) courses that non-HSA students take. There was no statistically significant difference found between both sub-groups in terms of the final scores achieved for the case exam.

c. What will be done differently as a result of what was learned?

Discuss how courses and/or curricula will be changed to improve student learning as a result of the evaluation. Include a discussion of how the faculty will help students overcome their weaknesses and improve their strengths.

On the basis of the MPA 650 case exam's assessment consequently reviewed by nucleus and other full-time faculty, the following conclusions were drawn:

- There is evidence of an increasingly strong performance both in terms of breadth and depth of the students' application of leadership, ethical, and organizational theories to practical scenarios.
- Students should be encouraged to continue spending more time analyzing scenarios and case studies to focus on developing sound, evidence-based recommendations.
- A new "master" grading rubric for the comprehensive exam should be developed; the current version of the qualitative method may not be sustainable.
- Possible need to continue enhancing the coverage of quantitative analytical competencies and related skill-sets in PA 670 (Quantitative Methods), PA 633 (Public Budgeting), PA 632 (Policy Analysis), PA 623 (Economics and Finance), and PA 680 (Program and Policy Evaluation).
- Possible need to continue enhancing the coverage of quantitative analytical competencies and related skill-sets in PA 670 (Quantitative Methods), PA 633 (Public Budgeting), PA 632 (Policy Analysis), PA 623 (Economics and Finance), and PA 680 (Program and Policy Evaluation).
- The assessment revealed a great deal of variability in depth and quality of the stakeholders' and environmental analyses (including policy issues) in student responses regardless of the concentration. Unless the stakeholders' analysis is covered extensively in one of the core courses, there may be a need to re-institute PA 632 (Policy Analysis) as a PA core course.
- Topics related to managerial and policy implications of issues of gender, diversity, affirmative action should be expanded beyond the existing coverage in PA 611 (introductory level), 613, 636, 644, and 650 (capstone) and included or expanded as appropriate in PA 620, 670, 638, 632, 617, 660, and even 623.
- The MPA 638 (Emerging Technologies) current course format and a rapidly changing nature of the field may be warranting the course curriculum revision and re-evaluation of its current place in the program curriculum.

The actions taken on these items described in more details below.

- There is evidence of an increasingly strong performance both in terms of breadth and depth of the students' application of leadership, ethical, and organizational theories to practical scenarios.

d. What student learning improvement initiatives did you implement as a result of what was learned from this Year's student learning assurance report?

Discuss how courses and/or curricula were changed to improve student learning as a result of the Year's student learning assurance. Include a discussion of how the faculty has helped students overcome their learning weaknesses and improve their strengths.

The MPA 650 Capstone Committee (two FT faculty and a program staff involved in program management) was established in March of 2012 and convened several times in April-May of 2012 prior to the most recent round of the MPA 650 Integrative Seminar (capstone) course to review the outcomes of the 2011 capstone assessment (see the summary below) and make specific changes to the MPA exit requirement and the course curriculum in general. The new capstone design, which emerged from the

committee's deliberations, reflected the new approach to the case-study analysis, which now presents students with four scenarios (as recommended following the analytical assessment of the MPA 650 case exams from Summer and Fall of 2011) constructed on the basis of current policy and organizational (two levels of analysis) developments in the field.

For example, the Summer 2012 Capstone Analysis included the following topical scenarios offered to graduating students for a comprehensive analysis: 1) implementation challenges of the Affordable Care Act faced by governments and constituents, and specifically the local governments (county and city-level) -- selected for Health Services Administration (HSA)- concentration students; 2) ethical, organizational, and managerial challenges faced by GSA in the wake of the misappropriation and other scandals afflicting GSA in recent years (non-HAS students); 3) redevelopment policies and developments following the Legislature and Governor-sanctioned closure of local redevelopment agencies in the State of California; and finally 4) organizational and financial challenges and changes undertaken by local public and nonprofit hospitals (one particular case of organizational restructuring was provided as an example and a possible focus of research and analysis—Oakland Children Hospital).

The conclusions drawn on the basis of the 2011 MPA Case Exam administration listed below received faculty (and specifically the MPA 650 committee's) attention and led to certain programmatic and curricular changes shown in bold:

- There is evidence of an increasingly strong performance both in terms of breadth and depth of the students' application of leadership, ethical, and organizational theories to practical scenarios.

In the summer 2012 capstone analysis paper's administration, students were encouraged once again to select and apply organizational and PA theories that they had studied in the program, including those that were studied as part of the final capstone course, to one of the four scenarios pre-selected for analysis in the final analysis project. Students were rather consistent applying a variety of theories pertaining to leadership, ethical, and organizational issues to the aspects of the case scenarios, partially reflected in the final capstone rubric developed for these purposes (see the Final Rubric and the Guidelines for the Use of Scenarios for the Capstone Final Analysis attached below).

- Students should be encouraged to continue spending more time analyzing scenarios and case studies to focus on developing sound, evidence-based recommendations.

Specifically, students were expected to conduct an independent research, collect data, analyze principal organizational and policy implications for a selected scenario and provide comprehensive, sound, and detailed recommendations on the basis of their analytical findings. The capstone analysis rubric was developed to emphasize this and other expectations (see attached).

- Grading rubrics associated with course-embedded case-study assignments may need to be re-designed and/or replicated across the curriculum.

Some courses underwent curricular redesign and improvement, including the case-study-based rubrics in the following courses: MPA 611 (both in-class and online), MPA 620 (currently ongoing in anticipation of the Fall 12 scheduled launch of the Online MPA (Kim Connor) and other sections), MPA 636 (Summer 2012; mostly adjunct faculty teams), MPA 638 (especially the online component and pertaining case studies; Summer 2012; mostly adjunct faculty teams), MPA 644 (Rich Callahan), MPA 660 (Elena Capella), MPA 617 (Francine Serafin-Dickson) and select aspects of case-study-based assignments for MPA 623 (Jim Shaw).

Other courses continued being offered using current curriculum, and the new MPA courses (680 and 685) had already established related rubrics prior to the site visit team's arrival.

- A new “master” grading rubric for the comprehensive exam should be developed; the current version of the qualitative method may not be sustainable.

Because the case exam was discontinued to address some of the concerns of the capstone course and program assessment outcomes, the new capstone design was launched in Summer of 2012 with a re-designed rubric to reflect the concerns that faculty, staff, and some site visitors had about the case analysis exam requirement. Please see the new capstone rubric developed and piloted in the Summer of 2012 attached below. The rubric's categories were established on the basis of the NASPAA competencies and are visibly connected between each other as evidenced in the attached document.

- Possible need to continue enhancing the coverage of quantitative analytical competencies and related skill-sets in PA 670 (Quantitative Methods), PA 633 (Public Budgeting), PA 632 (Policy Analysis), PA 623 (Economics and Finance), and PA 680 (Program and Policy Evaluation).

Except for the newly designed PA 680, which has not been offered yet, the only quantitative course, which has received some degree of curricular review and enhancement, was PA 670. The course was partially redesigned, focused better on its very specific outcomes, and piloted successfully in South Bay (Richard Waters) and Sacramento (Kimberly Garth-James) in Spring 12. The redesign included selection of additional reading, reconfiguration of the analytical (group and individual) projects, introduction of an alternative statistical software, etc.

- The assessment revealed a great deal of variability in depth and quality of the stakeholders' and environmental analyses (including policy issues) in student responses regardless of the concentration. Unless the stakeholders' analysis is covered extensively in one of the core courses, there may be a need to re-institute PA 632 (Policy Analysis) as a PA core course.

In addition to a more focused coverage of the stakeholder (policy and organizational actors) analysis and the environmental scan in PA 632 and 644 sections in Fall 11, the topics were revisited extensively in the PA 650 course and exam in Summer 12 on the basis of the committee's curricular work in Spring 12. The final analysis rubric (attached below) assesses student performance in this important area in one of the designated categories.

- It is recommended that faculty pay more attention to the students' citations and references, their completeness, relevance, consistency, and correctness in all principal course submissions.

The issue was raised repeatedly in the departmental meetings in Fall 2011- Spring 12 and was also reflected in more detail in the assessment of the 650 Final Analyses (see the rubric).

- Topics related to managerial and policy implications of issues of gender, diversity, affirmative action should be expanded beyond the existing coverage in PA 611 (introductory level), 613, 636, 644, and 650 (capstone) and included or expanded as appropriate in PA 620, 670, 638, 632, 617, 660, and even 623.

The curricular redesign and related inclusion of the above issues in the course content indeed occurred in all courses as planned, except for PA 638 and 623 due to ongoing time commitments by full-time and adjunct faculty. The two courses are planned to be enhanced in terms of the topical issues pertaining to economic and technology implications of diversity and inclusion in the 2012-2013 academic year.

- The MPA 638 (Emerging Technologies) current course format and a rapidly changing nature of the field may be warranting the course curriculum revision and re-evaluation of its current place in the program curriculum.

The recommendation was reviewed by faculty and program administration (department chair and the program services director on the basis of the FT and adjunct faculty feedback), but no decision was made beyond encouraging the 638 faculty team teaching this course (S. Morris, Peter Nanopoulos, and Scott Rosen) to revisit the course curriculum (completed in late Spring 2012) and pilot changes in Summer 2012.