



# UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

## Master of Arts in Urban and Public Affairs

AY 2022-2023  
Assessment Report  
MA in Urban and Public Affairs

### Program Details

#### A. Program and Contact Information

This report concerns the graduate program MA in Urban and Public Affairs. The report is coordinated by Patrick Murphy, Faculty Director of UPA (murphyp@usfca.edu)

#### B. Mission Statement

The Master of Arts in Urban & Public Affairs prepares students for employment in various policy-related fields by educating them in fundamental concepts of public policy, urban history and planning, community organizing and advocacy, and community-engaged research, while developing a policy specialization through an independent capstone project. The program serves the broader Bay Area community by engaging students with community in multiple ways, in service of the common good.

***(No changes were made to this statement.)***

#### C. PLOs

At the end of the program, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a theoretical, practical, and ethical understanding of community change, through practices including public policy advocacy, campaigns, and/or political/community organizing;
2. Critically analyze problems in urban and regional policy and politics using a variety of research methods;
3. Demonstrate the capacity for effective oral and written communication;

4. Evaluate and develop urban and regional policy, while learning to situate models of social change within historical and regional contexts;
5. Contribute to informed public discourse around contemporary political and urban policy issues through addressing issues in public policy, advocacy, community organizing, politics, and public service.

***(No changes were made to these PLOs.)***

#### **D. Curricular Map**

The curricular map is attached at the end of this document. No changes have been made. It reflects the most accurate and up-to-date map of our current course offerings.

## 2022-2023 Assessment

### Methodology

The UPA program is in the midst of a new approach to assessment. Pre-pandemic, a single assignment from one class was used to assess all five PLOs. Beginning with the 2020-21 year, the program began a more detailed assessment of each PLO, one at a time. To date, the following PLOs have been examined:

- 2020-21: PLO 5
- 2021-22: PLO 3

Last year's assessment plan proposed to focus on PLO 1 for the 2022-23 year, however, that plan has been altered. This year, the assessment focus is on PLO 4: ***Evaluate and develop urban and regional policy, while learning to situate models of social change within historical and regional contexts.***

The decision to switch was driven by changes that have taken place in the current administration of the program as well as with broader issues that have arisen with the provision of public service-related graduate study at USF. In June 2023, the UPA Program Director and Faculty Director were given responsibility for overseeing both UPA and the Masters in Public Administration Program in the School of Management. Given that PLO 4, in many ways, lies at the heart of the "value added" that UPA seeks to provide to students, combined with past adjustments the program had made to improve success in the capstone process, we moved it forward in our assessment plans.

In order to assess progress toward PLO 4, we created a single rubric, that included each of the elements of the learning outcome.

***PLO 4: Evaluate and develop urban and regional policy, while learning to situate models of social change within historical and regional contexts***

<b>PLO elements</b>	1 Insufficient	2 Introductory	3 Developing	4 Mastery	5 Exceptional
<b>Student defines and bounds a relevant policy problem.</b>	<p>A policy problem definition is absent or left to the audience/reader to discern.</p> <p>No case is made for the relevance of the problem and/or does it appear to be of immediate concern.</p> <p>The problem definition is absent any indication of impact area or population.</p>	<p>The problem definition is relatively amorphous and has no structural elements.</p> <p>A case is made that the problem may have been relevant at some time.</p> <p>The definition includes only references to groups or areas possibly affected are identified as examples.</p>	<p>The problem definition is stated with connections made to the harms caused.</p> <p>The case is asserted for current problem relevance.</p> <p>The definition includes discernable boundaries of the problem in terms of who and/or what is affected.</p>	<p>The policy problem is well structured with a clear sense of the harm caused or need for improvement.</p> <p>The temporal relevance of problem is established.</p> <p>The definition outlines the boundaries in terms of either the population affected, geographic area.</p>	<p>The policy problem is well articulated with a clear sense of the scale and scope of the harm caused.</p> <p>The temporal relevance of problem is both established and evident.</p> <p>The definition establishes the boundaries of the problem both in terms of what is, and isn't to be examined.</p>

### PLO 4 Rubric (cont.)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Student effectively situates the policy within an appropriate historical/social context.</b></p>	<p>No research context is provided.</p> <p>The paper offers little to no discussion of the history or broader social setting.</p>	<p>A research context is provided, but only marginally aligned to the problem as defined.</p> <p>The paper offers a cursory or incomplete review of the specific history or social setting.</p>	<p>An appropriate research context is provided, but is incomplete.</p> <p>The paper provides a review of the relevant social and historical setting.</p>	<p>An appropriate research context is provided, including the most relevant scholars.</p> <p>The paper provides a review of the relevant social and historical setting.</p>	<p>An appropriate research context is provided, including the relevant scholars, and melds the discussion to meet the specific problem.</p> <p>The paper provides strong evidence to establish the relevant social and historical setting laying the foundation for the analysis to follow.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Student develops appropriate policy recommendations</b></p>	<p>No policy recommendations are provided.</p>	<p>Policy recommendations are included with little or no connection to the paper's analysis.</p>	<p>Policy recommendations are included but may not be realistic given the context or nature of the problem.</p>	<p>Viable policy recommendations are included and they reflect the general discussion of the paper.</p>	<p>Policy recommendations are appropriate and represent a clear and logical extension of the evidence and analysis presented.</p>

The assessment approach is to apply the rubric to all (14) of the capstone projects completed by the 2023 graduating class. There is good reason to focus on student capstones, as the PLO 4 does represent the integration of the program content into a coherent whole while the capstone asks students to perform precisely that task. For completion of the capstone, UPA students must submit both the written document and present their findings in a public forum.

## Findings

Each capstone project is reviewed and evaluated by two faculty members. In addition to the substantive review of the capstone, a letter grade is assigned. The student must achieve a grade of a B or higher to pass. Some students may pass, but with requested revisions.

### Summary of application of the PLO 4 rubric to May 2023 Capstone projects

<i>Capstone number*</i>	Student defines and bounds a relevant policy problem.	Student effectively situates the policy within an appropriate historical/social context.	Student develops appropriate policy recommendations	Pass/Fail	Avg.
1	5	2	3	Pass	3.3
2	4	4	4	Pass	4.0
3	4	3	4	Pass	3.7
4	4	5	5	Pass	4.7
5	4	4	3	Pass	3.7
6	5	3	5	Pass	4.3
7	4	4	3	Pass	3.7
8	4	4	4	Pass	4.0
9	5	3	4	Pass	4.0
10	4	4	4	Pass	4.0
11	4	2	4	Pass	3.3
12	5	5	5	Pass	5.0
13	4	4	4	Pass	4.0
14	4	4	5	Pass	4.3
Avg.	4.3	3.6	4.1		
Stdev.	0.45	0.89	0.70		

**\*For the purposes of the assessment, we are not identifying individual students, with each individual capstone represented by a number.**

We encourage students to archive their capstone projects with the [Gleeson Library](#). We also recorded the oral presentations of the capstones over the two days, and those videos can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

## Discussion of Findings

A review of this small but significant sample of work products yielded the following observations.

- Overall, using the UPA capstone assignment to assess PLO 4 suggests that the objective is being met. In particular, it is worth noting that all 14 of the second-year students passed the capstone in May 2023 without requiring major revisions.<sup>1</sup> In the memory of faculty associated with the program, the 100 percent pass rate, with at most minor revisions, is unprecedented.
- The most consistent element of the PLO being met is how the capstones define the problem to be addressed (4.3 average; 0.45 stdev).
- The PLO element that proved the most challenging with the greatest variation (3.6 average; 0.89 stdev) was placing the problem in the appropriate historical and social context.
- Students demonstrated success in developing policy recommendations (avg. 4.1; stdev .70).

### Reflecting on the 2022-23 assessment

As faculty director of the UPA program, I suspect I would have been surprised and disappointed had we not been meeting this outcome at a minimal level. PLO 4 represents what I consider to be central to what the degree is intended to convey: the ability to articulate policy problems and develop an alternative to the status quo.

The findings also suggest that prior programmatic efforts are paying off. It is worth noting that the UPA program has made a significant investment in preparing students to complete the capstone project. In particular, the instructor for UPA 651, Rhetoric for the Common Good, has concentrated the coursework such that students produce a viable prospectus for their capstone upon completion. Based upon the above, the effort appears to be providing students with a solid foundation heading into the final semester.

Perhaps related to the preparation provided by UPA 651, is success demonstrated in defining a policy problem for the capstones. This important first step is critical to students' understanding of the public policy process overall. In addition, the relative level of success students demonstrated with regard to the third element of PLO 4, developing policy recommendations, may be the most satisfying from a programmatic perspective. In the end, UPA's goal is to enable its graduates to become problem solvers. Their ability to generate viable recommendations to address relevant problems society faces suggests we are on the right track.

One area for improvement going forward might be the relative difficulty students demonstrating in placing their problem in the relevant historical and social context. That this hurdle proved to be the most arduous of the elements, perhaps, comes as no surprise. For any research, identifying the relevant research literature as well as outlining a substantive context for an issue is often challenging. That difficulty stems from trying to answer the questions of: Where should the researcher begin? What constitutes a sufficient degree of discussion? Etc. Being able to answer those questions often comes with experience. For nearly all of the students in our program, however, this is their first foray into a research

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<sup>1</sup> A capstone requiring major revisions is treated the same way as an incomplete, given the student the opportunity to make the changes and resubmit. While the student may "walk" with the May graduates, their degree will not be conferred until the revisions are made to the satisfaction of the committee.

project of this scale. It probably should not be surprising, then, that their capacity to provide that context was uneven.

At this point, there are no plans to make any program-level changes to the curriculum relative to PLO 4. I do plan to share this report with the UPA Program Manager and Faculty, noting that there are some opportunities for improvement in some areas, while in others, the faculty are to be congratulated for their contribution to the students' development. Similarly, I plan to flag the specific challenge of articulating the historical and social context for the capstone advisors in the spring.

## Future Plans for Assessment

For the AY 2023-2024, we will assess PLO 1: Demonstrate a theoretical, practical, and ethical understanding of community change, through practices including public policy advocacy, campaigns, and/or political/community organizing;

In Spring 2024, the program will develop a rubric for PLO 1 that attempts to capture the essence of the outcome. PLO 1 is particularly challenging in this regard; it focuses more on content knowledge as opposed to skill development.

In addition, the nature of a graduate program such as this one is structured around the idea that the core body of knowledge taught is relatively small and the student is encouraged to explore in greater depth issues that align more closely with their interests. In other words, it is not possible to simply administer a standardized comprehensive exam to test for competency in this area.

With that challenge acknowledged, our assessment will attempt to plumb the depths of our students understanding of basic tenets while at the same time looking for a demonstrated breadth and depth of understanding related to a single issue. To do that, we will collect work product primarily from at least two elective courses<sup>2</sup> and the completed capstones. In this instance, the capstone products will be reviewed relative to their mastery of the specific issue area. In both instances, the material will be examined relative to the demonstrated understanding of the drivers of community change in general as well as relative to specific topics.

### *Future Plans\**

AY 2023-2024: Assessment of PLO 1

AY 2024-2025: Assessment of PLO 2

AY 2025-2026: Year of Reflection

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<sup>2</sup> The courses selected will depend upon the availability of work product relevant to the PLO. For example, if the course deliverables consist of a series of short reaction papers, those may not be most appropriate to assess content mastery.

\*It isn't impossible that the assessment of PLO 1 and 2 get switched, or we possibly attempt to assess both. If there is a decision to re-imagine public service graduate study, it could be very helpful to have a deeper understanding of our progress on PLOs sooner, as opposed to later.

Master of Arts in Urban & Public Affairs// Curricular Map (Rev. Oct 2019). Program Learning Outcomes X Courses/ Requirements	PLO1: Demonstrate a theoretical, practical, and ethical understanding of community change, through practices including public policy advocacy, campaigns, and/ or political/ community organizing.	PLO2: Critically analyze problems in urban and regional policy and politics using a variety of research methods.	PLO3: Demonstrate the capacity for effective oral and written communication.	PLO4: Evaluate and develop urban and regional policy, while learning to situate models of social change within historical and regional contexts.	PLO5: Contribute to informed public discourse around contemporary political and urban policy issues through addressing issues in public policy, advocacy, community organizing, politics, and public service.
<b>Requirements</b>					
UPA 630 Urban Power Seminar	I	I	I	I	I
UPA 633 UPA Colloquium					
UPA 634 UPA Colloquium II					
UPA 650: Community-Engaged Public Policy Research		I	D	D	I
UPA Internship (no course number)	D	D	D	D	D
UPA 651: Rhetoric for the Common Good	D		M		
UPA 652: Masters Capstone Project	M	M	M	M	M
Practical Politics Workshops (no course number)					
<b>Electives</b>					
UPA 660: The Politics of Public Policy	D			D	
UPA 661: Urban & Regional Planning	D	D		D	
UPA 662: Non-Profits and Public Policy		D			D
UPA 663: Globalization, Social Justice & the City	D		D		
UPA 664: Cities, Law & Inequality		D		D	
UPA 665: Urban Racial Politics		D		D	
UPA 666: Applied Democratic Theory	D		D		
UPA 667: Housing, Community & Public Policy	D				D
668: The Economics of Social Justice	D				D
669: Urban Field Class		D	D		D
<b>UPA 670...: Policy Theme Seminars</b>					
UPA 671 Education Reform	D			D	
UPA 672 The Immigrant City	D	D			D
UPA 673 Urban Food Policy		D		D	
<b>UPA 680...: Practical Politics Theme Seminars</b>					
681 Labor & Community Organizing	D		D		D
682 Campaigns & Political Mobilization	D		D		D
683 Grassroots Movement-Building	D		D		D