

Master of Arts in Public Leadership Program
College of Arts & Sciences, University of San Francisco
Assessment Report for Academic Year 2020-2021
Due Date: November 1, 2021

1. Identifying Information

Name of program and degree type: Master of Arts in Public Leadership (MAPL)

Type of Program: Graduate Degree

Submitters:

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- Administrative Director: [Seth Lynn](mailto:slynn@usfca.edu), slynn@usfca.edu
- Program Manager: Madeline Meininger, mameininger@usfca.edu

2. Mission Statement

The mission of the Master of Arts in Public Leadership program is to foster a learning community where service-oriented students from across the ideological spectrum, particularly veterans and military families, together with faculty, can build on their leadership and public service experience, engage in productive political dialogue, and emerge as ethical and strategic public leaders. The curriculum blends theory and practice and equips students for a Second Service in public office, legislative affairs, campaign management, advocacy, and civic leadership.

This mission statement has been updated since the last assessment cycle.

3. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

- 1. Demonstrate advanced skills in writing, research, statistics, analysis, and oral presentation suitable for political and policy professionals*
- 2. Comprehend theoretical models and concepts of democratic participation and accountability, as well as current policy challenges, and demonstrate the capacity to apply these lessons in real-world settings*
- 3. Apply knowledge gained in the classroom to various political settings in the community*
- 4. Understand the nature of political power, mechanisms for aggregating interests, and how to influence the process in an ethical manner*
- 5. Interact with politicians as well as professionals from fields including campaigns, advocacy, community organizing, strategic communications, public policy, and public service*

The PLOs have not changed since the last academic cycle.

4. Current Curricular Map

Since the last assessment, one proposed course was added. Current curricular maps have been submitted with this assessment, and can be viewed at the following links:

- [PLOxILO Curricular Map January 2021](#)
- [PLOxCourse Curricular Map January 2021](#)

5. Assessment Schedule

Academic Year 20-21 was our first year assessing MAPL PLOs in the usual manner - last year the assessment process was modified due to the pandemic and prior to that MAPL was a brand new program. Additionally, in the course of submitting a curriculum update proposal, we considered modifying our PLOs, although we ultimately decided against it. As such, our initial assessment gave equal weight to all five PLOs rather than limiting our focus on one specifically.

After beginning our assessment, it became apparent that we should give particular focus to PLO-1, *Demonstrate advanced skills in writing, research, statistics, analysis, and oral presentation suitable for political and policy professionals*. We therefore plan to continue assessing PLO-1 during the next academic year, when we will also assess PLO-4.

The following annual assessment schedule is flexible and may be modified based upon our findings, but in any case will enable us to comprehensively assess our PLOs prior to our first Academic Program Review (APR), which we expect to occur in 2025.

- 2021 - PLO-1
- 2022 - PLO-1, PLO-4
- 2023 - PLO-2
- 2024 - PLO-3, PLO-5

6. Description of Assessment Methodology

The Capstone course (MPL 609) and presentations serve as the culmination of students' work in the MA in Public Leadership program. As such, it is an opportunity for students to display how they have applied skills in writing, research, statistics, analysis, and oral presentation that they have learned in the program in their own leadership and service. We created an assessment to review the performance of each of our PLOs within each graduating student's Capstone project.

This assessment tool was developed in consultation with faculty and applied to the Capstone presentations in Spring and Summer 2021 and was filled out by Seth Lynn (Program Director), Kelly Bare (Capstone Instructor, Term Faculty member), and Madeline Meininger (Program Manager) who participated in every presentation. This assessment form was not shared with students or used to grade them. The Capstone assignment does not require or encourage students to use all of the tools or skills that are included in the PLOs.

The questions from the assessment form are enclosed below and the form that evaluators used is linked [here](#).

Assessor Name:

Student Name:

The student demonstrates advanced skills suitable for political and policy professionals in...

(Select one response per row)

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Writing			
Research			
Statistics			
Analysis			
Oral Presentation			

Has the student identified...

(Select one response per row)

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Key stakeholders and decision makers as it pertains to the subject at hand?			
Entities with a shared interest and opportunities for coalition building?			
Ethical approaches to wielding influence?			

In regards to democratic participation and accountability, the student...

(Select one response per row)

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Displayed comprehension of theoretical models			
Applied lessons in real-world settings			

How has the student applied their understanding of democratic participation and accountability in real world contexts? (Open Text Field)

In regards to current policy challenges, the student...
(Select one response per row)

	Yes	Somewhat	No
Displayed comprehension of theoretical models			
Applied lessons in real-world settings			

How has the student applied their understanding of current policy challenges in real world contexts?
(Open Text Field)

Has the student used other skills or knowledge gained in the classroom within their community?
Yes Somewhat No

Which community? (Open Text Field)

Which course lessons? (Open Text Field)

Has the student interacted with professionals in any of the following industries?
(Select one response per row)

	Yes, they work in this field	Yes, they have had meaningful interaction	Yes, they have had superficial interaction	No, they had no interaction
Politics				
Campaigns				
Advocacy				
Community Organizing				
Strategic Comms.				
Public Policy				
Public Service				

7. Discussion of Assessment Results

In evaluating MAPL students' mastery of PLO-1 via their capstone projects, we found that students consistently demonstrated advanced skills in research, analysis, writing, and oral presentation, weaving each into their final presentations. What stood out, however, was that few students integrated statistics (or any type of quantitative analysis) into their capstone projects. While it bears repeating that students are not required to integrate quantitative analysis into their capstone projects, its absence was nevertheless striking.

We considered three logical possibilities:

1. MAPL students are not learning advanced skills in statistics,
2. MAPL students are learning advanced skills in statistics but are unable to usefully integrate such skills into their capstone projects,
3. MAPL students are learning advanced skills in statistics but are choosing not to integrate such skills into their capstone projects.
4. The compressed time frame of a half-semester does not support the time needed to develop a data set and complete quantitative data analysis specific to their area of interest.

MAPL students are required to complete two “quant-heavy” courses: MPL 603 Quantitative Methods in Public Policy (3 units) as well as MPL 624 Survey Research Practicum (1 unit). The former has proven particularly challenging, even to students with significant quantitative analysis experience (e.g. MDs from Michigan, MBAs from Harvard, and a nuclear engineer from MIT). MPL 603 requires students to complete a final project, which we used as an additional method of assessment, finding that students are clearly learning advanced statistical skills and showcasing their ability to use them in a practical context (in this case a media buying strategy).

As such, we ruled out possibility number one, and determined that although students are gaining skills in statistical analysis, they are either unable to apply, or do not have an available data set, or choosing not to utilize these skills practically in their capstone projects.

During informal conversations with students, we gleaned that the skills learned in MPL 603 were useful to those who planned to work as campaign managers and consultants, but not as relevant to other areas of public leadership. In other words, students clearly are learning quantitative skills, but not in a way that all students find to be relevant to their goals.

8. Integrating Assessment Results into the Curriculum

In response to our findings, we decided to update MPL 603 Quantitative Methods in Public Policy to provide students with greater facility with using quantitative analysis in a wider array of public leadership practical applications. Fortuitously, this coincided with the hire of a new MPL 603 instructor, Doug Usher, who was already planning to modify the course. Doug Usher has a PhD from Cornell in Political Science and Government, but has worked as a political practitioner for over two decades. As such, he is well positioned to enhance MAPL students'

experience by emphasizing practical applications of quantitative methods, equipping students with quantitative skills they can use throughout their public leadership careers. At the suggestion of the Associate Dean, both Seth Lynn and Rich Callahan have met with Doug Usher as part of the on-boarding process for adjunct faculty and to discuss specifics on the course, as well as to get feedback from Dr. Usher on the course design and to invite his on-going feedback.

We plan to continue assessing PLO-1, particularly the statistical aspect, during the next academic year, so we can observe how frequently students are integrating quantitative analysis into their capstone presentations, and evaluate their proficiency in doing so.

9. Feedback from Last Year's Assessment

We have not received feedback regarding our Assessment Report for Academic Year 2019-2020.

10. Indirect Assessment

To better inform us of the student experience, we supplemented our primary assessment with indirect assessment methods to examine students' overall experience in the program. We used two tools for this examination.

Program Feedback Survey

We sent feedback surveys to students and alumni in Spring 2021. The surveys were sent to a total of 64 students and alumni and we received a total of 17 responses for a 26% response rate. Of the 17 respondents, 12 were current students and 5 were alumni. Students on the accelerated track (1-year) were over-represented, making up 7 of the total respondents. Six of the respondents were women, 11 were white non-hispanic, and 16 had a military affiliation, including veteran, active reserve/national guard, or military spouse.

The surveys that were sent are available below.

[MAPL Program Feedback Survey - Alumni](#)

[MAPL Program Feedback Survey - Students](#)

Overwhelmingly, students found their relationships with their peers, faculty, staff, and guest speakers to be the most satisfying or fulfilling part of the program. The MAPL program design to facilitate development of professional networks is recognized as a significant program outcome. The content of the curriculum was also valued by students. Meanwhile, student and alumni concerns were more varied. They included applicability of course content to real-world situations, consistency between courses and professor expectations, and not seeing enough diversity of thought or identity in classes.

Most students' goals do not change while they are in the program, however the curriculum helps them refine, clarify, and move closer to those goals as well as giving them the confidence to do so sooner than they would have otherwise.

Overwhelmingly, respondents would recommend this program for others, particularly veterans, progressives/liberals, and people who already have some experience.

This feedback has informed our programmatic and personal goals for the coming year. We have redoubled our efforts to build cohorts and curriculum that are diverse in experience, ideology, and identity. We continue to seek opportunities for students to network, bond, and learn from each other. We are working to create more cohesion and uniformity between classes by clarifying standards for professors and students while hosting more frequent meetings for our part-time faculty.

Professional Reflections Session

This second tool was similar to a focus group but doubled as a professional development opportunity for students. This guided reflection was held on Sunday, October 17th and facilitated by MAPL Interim Academic Director Prof. Rich Callahan. The 6 respondents included 5 students and one alumni, amongst the students 3 were in their first semester, 1 was in their third semester, and one was in their fourth semester. Within this group, 3 live in the DC area, 4 were veterans, 2 were women, and 2 were white non-hispanic. These students and alum had self-selected to participate in the session based on their interest in the topic and availability to join the session in-person in Washington, DC.

The session focused on three key questions:

1. What is success for you in this program?
2. What has surprised you about the MAPL program?
3. What did you unlearn? What did you think was true that you no longer think is true?

What is success for you in this program?

The answer to the first question reinforced a theme from the student and alumni surveys. Students generally prioritize building relationships, but they also value the opportunity to strengthen critical thinking and increase their capacity and skills for public service.

What has surprised you about the MAPL program?

Once again, students' responses centered on their peers. Students were surprised by the diversity of their classmates, by their ideology, their caliber and humility, their inclusivity, warmth, and generosity. They were surprised by just how nice people were! We also heard that students were surprised by the breadth and depth of the program and how personal the experience was.

What did you unlearn? What did you think was true that you no longer think is true?

Students are re-learning how to learn, especially since many are returning to school under new conditions, with families, full-time jobs, and pandemic conditions. They spoke of breaking old habits to form new ones and seeking new ways of learning, from experience and feeling as well as research and analysis.

To reflect upon this listening session, we asked ourselves the same three questions.

What is success for you in this session?

Getting honest feedback from students about their experience in the program. The in-depth professional reflections and willingness to share was a significant successful outcome, coupled with building the capacity to apply professional reflections in other professional settings.

What surprised you about the student responses?

Students made it clear that they felt a level of warmth and care from the program and our community. This was hugely gratifying and has been a concern for us, especially since we haven't been able to meet in person. For students to feel this closeness was a welcome surprise.

What did you unlearn? What did you think was true that you no longer think is true?

While there are outliers, our students are receiving a generally uniform experience, even though they come from diverse backgrounds and live in different states.