



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Master of Arts in Urban and Public Affairs

AY 2021-2022
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.

2020-2021 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 2019-20 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
- 2019-20: PLO 1

This year, the focus is on PLO 3: ***Demonstrate the capacity for effective oral and written communication.***

In order to assess progress toward this outcome, we created two rubrics, separating out both oral and written communication skills:

Oral Communication Rubric

PLO	1 Insufficient	2 Introductory	3 Developing	4 Mastery	5 Exceptional
<p>Students will demonstrate the capacity for effective oral communication.</p>	<p>The presentation has no structural elements and does not put forward a clear thesis.</p> <p>Student provides little to no evidence for claims.</p> <p>The delivery of the speech (volume, tone, speed, use of visual aids) is inappropriate and makes it difficult for audience to engage the speech.</p>	<p>The presentation has a road map, but no discernible thesis and no transitions throughout the speech.</p> <p>Student provides very little evidence for the thesis and no explanation.</p> <p>The delivery of the speech (volume, tone, speed, use of visual aids) is inappropriate for the message and audience.</p>	<p>The presentation has a road map, but no thesis, and provides weak transitions throughout the speech.</p> <p>Student provides evidence for the thesis, but no explanation.</p> <p>The delivery of the speech (volume, tone, speed, use of visual aids) does not match the message and audience being articulated.</p>	<p>The presentation has a thesis, a clear road map, but need works on transitions.</p> <p>Student provides evidence to support the thesis, but needs to explain the evidence in more depth.</p> <p>The delivery of the speech (volume, tone, speed, use of visual aids) varies, but needs to better match the message and audience being articulated.</p>	<p>The presentation structure is clear with a strong argument, clear road map, and strong transitions.</p> <p>Student provides and explains the evidence supporting the thesis.</p> <p>The delivery of the speech (volume, tone, speed, use of visual aids) responds well to a particular audience and is appropriate for the message.</p>

Written Communication Rubric

PLO	1 Insufficient	2 Introductory	3 Developing	4 Mastery	5 Exceptional
Students will demonstrate the capacity for effective written communication.	<p>There is no discernible thesis.</p> <p>The paper offers little to no evidence that is appropriate.</p> <p>There are no discernible organizational structure or transitions.</p> <p>The paper begins with the thesis, rather than with an introduction.</p>	<p>Thesis is vague and does not answer the question.</p> <p>The paper offers evidence, but there is no explanation or discussion of the evidence.</p> <p>The organizational structure is unclear and transitions are missing.</p> <p>The introduction is not clearly linked to the issue addressed in the paper.</p>	<p>Thesis states how the research question will be answered, but does not answer the question directly.</p> <p>The paper offers appropriate evidence, but there is little explanation of the evidence.</p> <p>The organizational structure is clear in spots, but not in others. Transitions are weak.</p> <p>The introduction is either too large or too small in scope.</p>	<p>Thesis addresses the research question directly and offers an answer to the question.</p> <p>The paper offers good evidence and is explained adequately.</p> <p>There is a clear organizational structure, but transitions need to be more developed.</p> <p>The introduction is appropriate in scope, but needs stronger logical leaps between the problem and question.</p>	<p>Thesis directly addresses the research question and offers a nuanced answer in clear terms.</p> <p>The paper offers strong evidence and is explained so as to advance and support the thesis.</p> <p>There is a clear organizational structure that logically develops the argument.</p> <p>The introduction is appropriate in its scope and offers us a clear sense of the problem and question.</p>

The assessment plan was to evaluate materials against the rubric from a sample of students from different points in the program.

Courses scheduled to be assessed for written communication in AY 2021-2022

<i>Course</i>	<i>Professor</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Students on Roster from whom to Collect Assignments</i>
UPA 630: Urban Power Seminar	Brahinsky	Analytical Brief	1, 6, 11
UPA 650: Community-engaged Public Policy Research	Brahinsky	TBD	3, 8, 13
UPA 651: Rhetoric for the Common Good	Burgess	Final Prospectus	4, 9, 14
UPA 652: Masters Capstone Project	Burgess & Redmond	Capstone	Burgess: 2, 5, 7 Redmond: 3, 4, 8

Videos planned for inclusion for oral communication in AY 2021-2022

<i>Course</i>	<i>Professor</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Students on Roster from whom to Collect Assignments</i>
UPA 651: Rhetoric for the Common Good	Burgess	Prospectus Presentations	1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 15
UPA 652: Capstone Seminar	Burgess & Redmond	Capstone Presentations	Same students as above

The work product from the above sources was assembled into two portfolios – one for [written samples](#) and one for [oral presentations](#). In addition, the capstone presentations can be found [here](#). The exception was for the UPA 650 course, where collection did not happen.

Findings

The work product portfolios were reviewed by a faculty member who was not teaching in those courses nor involved in the capstone projects. The work was compared relative to the above rubrics.

<i>Course</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Assessment relative to rubric</i>
UPA 630: Urban Power Seminar	Analytical Brief	1, 6, 11	A range from 2 (Introductory) to closer to 4 (Mastery)
UPA 651: Rhetoric for the Common Good	Final Prospectus	4, 9, 14	Solid 3 (Developing) and an example of 4 (Mastery)
UPA 652: Masters Capstone Project	Capstone	Burgess: 2, 5, 7	A mix of 3 (Developing) and 4 (Mastery)

Oral Communication Assessment

<i>Course</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Students on Roster from whom to Collect Assignments</i>	<i>Assessment relative to rubric</i>
UPA 651: Rhetoric for the Common Good	Prospectus Presentations	1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 15	A mix of 3 (Developing) and 4 (Mastery)
UPA 652: Capstone Seminar	Capstone Presentations	1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 15	Mix of 3 (Developing) and 4 (Mastery), though more 4's than 3's, with one 5 (exceptional)

Discussion of Findings

A review of this relatively small samples¹ of work products yielded the following observations.

- Overall, the assessment of the written communication examples varied in a relatively normal distribution. There were a relatively few examples in the tails of the distribution (2-Introductory and 5-Exceptional). Most of the observations fell in the 3-Developing to 4-Mastery levels.
- It is worth noting, however, that the samples that were assessed lower against the rubric came from coursework earlier in the curriculum (UPA 630, a core course required of all first-year students) while those samples that were assessed higher against the rubric emerged later in the course sequence (UPA 652 Capstone).
- Relative to the oral communication rubric, the assessment levels were on the whole, higher in the scale. A few student presentations would be assessed at the 3-Developing level. Most, however, would be at the 4-Mastery to 5-Exceptional level. Capstone presentations, in particular, were impressive in terms of the clarity of communication.

To complement this relatively small sample, a summary of the final capstone projects – as assessed by their first and second readers – was prepared. Like any assessment measure, it is not without its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, this summary has the advantage of representing the universe of students (16) who would seek to be awarded a graduate degree in Urban and Public Affairs. On the other hand, the assessment is completed primarily by individuals who have spent the prior 1-2 years working with the students. The results of this summary review do seem to reinforce the above observations.

- Of the 16 capstone projects submitted in May 2022, 11 passed after their oral presentations. Three more received a “pass with minor revisions.”
- Only 2 projects received a “needs major revisions” assessment. None failed.
- Of the 11 projects that passed as of May 2022, the mean letter grade assigned was 3.9 on 4.0 scale.

While the assessment of the capstone projects depends upon the content of the written thesis and oral presentation, the relatively high pass rate would indicate that at least in the eyes of those readers. There is consistency with the assessment of the other work products as well.

¹ To be fair, it is a small sample drawn from a program that is not large. During the 2021-22 academic year, the UPA program enrolled fewer than 30 students across the two years.

Reflecting on the 2021-22 assessment

Because of the nature of assessing learning outcomes, it is difficult to offer a definitive set of responses. The above observations suggest that the graduates of the program generally emerge with appropriately refined oral and written communication skills. One might argue that the proficiency in oral communication may be slightly ahead of the writing skills.

As faculty director of the program, I am somewhat at a loss as to how to interpret these observations. For example, given that at least a three-course (12-unit) sequence is devoted to the production of the capstone project, shouldn't every student exhibit mastery at the end of 2 years? However, I don't know what written communication skills were like for the students that entered the UPA program in the fall of 2020. If they were already at a reasonable level, perhaps the program did little to refine that skill set. If, however, most entered at an introductory level (which is quite possible), then the program deserves to be commended for sharpening these students' writing tools. Either direction is possible.

One takeaway that I feel more confident about is the confidence and competence that students exhibited in their oral presentations. Few students at any level relish public speaking. Even fewer emerge from an undergraduate program or even a work environment with a great deal of experience presenting the features of public policy to an audience. Therefore, I am willing to make the assumption that a small share of the UPA students entered the program with much depth discussing and leading a discussion of policy issues. If that assumption is correct, then UPA's small class size, systems of student support, and multiple opportunities to participate helped these students develop their oral communication skills. Given the circumstances that existed during these students' tenure at USF, that is particularly impressive.

At this point, there are no plans to make any changes to the curriculum relative to PLO 3 other than to share this report with the UPA Program Manager and Faculty, noting that there are some opportunities for improvement while in other areas they are to be congratulated for their contribution to the students' development.

Future Plans for Assessment

For the AY 2022-2023, 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 2023, 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 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 courses² 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 4

AY 2024-2025: Assessment of PLO 2

AY 2025-2026: Year of Reflection

² 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.

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.
Requirements					
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)					
Electives					
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
UPA 670...: Policy Theme Seminars					
UPA 671 Education Reform	D			D	
UPA 672 The Immigrant City	D	D			D
UPA 673 Urban Food Policy		D		D	
UPA 680...: Practical Politics Theme Seminars					
681 Labor & Community Organizing	D		D		D
682 Campaigns & Political Mobilization	D		D		D
683 Grassroots Movement-Building	D		D		D