



## MA in Urban & Public Affairs

ASSESSMENT REPORT  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2017 – 2018  
REPORT DUE DATE: 10/26/2018

### I. LOGISTICS & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Please indicate the name and email of the program contact person to whom feedback should be sent (usually Chair, Program Director, or Faculty Assessment Coordinator).

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2. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? Kindly state “Yes” or “No.” Please provide the current mission statement below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current mission statements of both the major and the minor program.

No changes.

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.

3. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? Kindly state “Yes” or “No.” Please provide the current PLOs below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current PLOs for both the major and the minor programs.

No revisions were made to PLOs.

Current PLOs:

- 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

**4. Which particular Program Learning Outcome(s) did you assess for the academic year 2017-2018?**

For 2017-18, we built on the assessment from last year. First, to continue to assess student engagement and progress with capstone projects, we used PLO #4: *Evaluate and develop urban and regional policy, while learning to situate models of social change within historical and regional contexts*. This is the same PLO we utilized to assess capstone presentations for the 2017 Annual Assessment Report, utilizing the spring capstone oral presentations for both UPA and MoPA as the anchor of analysis.

Additionally, we decided to assess student progress regarding PLO #2: *critically analyze problems in urban and regional policy and politics using a variety of research methods*. For this PLO assessment we used an assignment for the Fall prospectus research methods courses for both UPA and MoPA, which we will be able to assess again in future years to chart progress or change.

Also, please note that our assessment report will refer to the MA in Urban & Public Affairs (UPA) and the MA in Public Affairs (MoPA), two separate programs that were merged over the last few years, but which we have assessed collectively as part of the merger process. In 2017-18 we ran our final MoPA classes, and, moving forward all classes will be labeled UPA.

## **I. METHODOLOGY**

**5. Describe the methodology that you used to assess the PLO(s).**

The program assessed two key assignments that reflect the PLOs noted below. The rubric was created by a committee of two faculty and data was entered into our rubric by professors without student names or any identifying information. A faculty member who did not teach the course then evaluated rubric.

First, using direct methods, we assessed student outcomes regarding the following PLO#4, *Evaluate and develop urban and regional policy, while learning to situate models of social change within historical and regional contexts*. The assignment through which we have chosen to evaluate this PLO is the spring public oral presentations for student capstone projects. We created a rubric for evaluating student performance on this final assignment to analyze student performance and draw data-based conclusions on the assignment, student progress, and to develop insights for building on this analysis in coming years. We compare this data with the same data for the prior year.

Also using direct methods, we assessed student outcomes for PLO#2, *Critically analyze problems in urban and regional policy and politics using a variety of research methods*. We used a Fall Semester research prospectus assignment to evaluate this PLO. In the assignment, students develop a revised research question for their capstone thesis projects. The assignment asks students to move from three initial broad questions developed earlier to a more focused and researchable question that relates to issues in urban affairs and public policy. Both the UPA 641 class and the MOPA 690 classes in the Fall of 2017 carried out the same assignment – and these two courses have been merged into our current curriculum, so this assignment can be tracked going forward for students at the same stage. We created a rubric for evaluating student performance on this assignment in order to analyze student performance and draw data-based conclusions on the assignment, student progress, and to develop insights for building on this analysis in coming years.

## II. RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

### 6. What are the major takeaways from your assessment exercise?

#### **PLO #4:**

We evaluated student presentations as outstanding, satisfactory (student meets all major course competencies) or incomplete (for those students who were unable to finalize their capstone project within the normative timeline, and whose presentations reflected this incomplete status). Of the thirteen-member cohort, two students did not finish their capstones, and their lack of preparation was evident in the presentations that we analyze here (this explains the Incompletes).

Analysis of the rubric results shows that all but one student who completed their projects scored outstanding in their ability to identify an urban or public affairs issue and design a capstone research project. More than half of the students scored outstanding in their ability to select appropriate methods and for their comprehension of key theories and concepts in the fields of urban and public affairs.

The area that showed the greatest need for improvement relates to student “analysis and evaluation using multiple sources” With 2 students scoring an incomplete, 4 a satisfactory and 7 scoring outstanding. The categories that showed a greater number of satisfactory designations indicate the areas where we can improve our curriculum and practices: use and emphasis of appropriate methodologies across the curriculum, enforcement of the use of broader research sources to develop complex thinking, and better support for students in developing and expressing insights for solutions to urban and public affairs issues.

Finally, we noticed that those students who scored Incompletes in the last two rubric columns, also struggled in other categories, indicating a need to work more closely with said students at earlier phases of their research.

In comparing the two years, we can see shifts in the categories where students excelled and where they struggled. There is not clear pattern yet that we can see in terms of growth in one area or another, and we don’t think that one year’s change is enough to identify a trend, in any case. Please see “closing the loop” for more on this.

#### **PLO #2:**

We evaluated student research questions as outstanding, satisfactory (student meets all major course competencies) or incomplete (for those students who were unable to finalize the assignment). The assessment was taken from cognate MoPA and UPA courses, totaling a number of 13 students, all in their third semester in the program. For this assignment, nobody received an incomplete in any category.

Analysis of the rubric results shows that 61% of students who completed the assignment scored satisfactory in their ability to identify an urban or public affairs issue. The same percentage of satisfactory evaluations applies for questions 3 and 4 pertaining to their choice of relevant topic and the availability of pertinent research materials to successfully complete research on the selected research question. For questions 5 and 6 (manageable methods and contribution to field), 30% of students scored outstanding, while for question 2 (ability to move from broad to more specific area of inquiry), only 15% of the students scored outstanding. This area showed the greatest need for improvement, and in fact that outcome is indicative of the stage of inquiry for this assignment. We would expect students to struggle with this aspect of the assignment.

The categories that showed a greater number of satisfactory designations indicate the areas where

we can improve our curriculum and practices: construction of coherent research questions, consideration of existent scholarship and policy on a given topic, use and emphasis of appropriate methodologies across the curriculum, and better support for students in developing and expressing insights for solutions to urban and public affairs issues.

### III. CLOSING THE LOOP

7. **Based on your results, what changes/modifications are you planning in order to achieve the desired level of mastery in the assessed learning outcome? This section could also address more long-term planning that your department/program is considering and does not require that any changes need to be implemented in the next academic year itself.**

Over the past few years we have been working towards regularizing our research methods offerings under our new merged curriculum, and this data supports the insights that faculty have had as we developed the new curriculum. For example, we retained two full-semester courses focused on capstone development, rather than move to an independent study model (that would look more like a PhD process). The data here supports that decision. Looking ahead, by keeping those courses in the core curriculum and strengthening them, we will be able to focus on the outcomes discussed in this report, strengthening research-question development to the point where students can largely construct viable projects (as per PLO #2) and strengthening the material in the capstone writing course to the point where students can largely excel in their presentations, drawing on the skills and methods of the course (per PLO #4).

In keeping with the data here, we will look at ways to strengthen student comprehension of a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods to better prepare students to develop and analyze significant research outcomes. We will ask the instructor for the prospectus course (in which research questions are formulated) to work on support student capacity in sharpening their questions and keeping them relevant and researchable. We will ask the instructor for the capstone courses to be more explicit with students about the expectations outlined in the data above, specifically, for example, noting that we are looking for multiple sources and methods to come through in their research presentations. We can report in future years on the outcomes of this effort.

Next year we will have three years' data on capstone presentations and we think that at that stage we can begin to identify trends in the assessment for PLO#4. In the following year, we will do the same for PLO#2, which by then will also have three years' data.

Finally, in terms of the assessment report itself, as we complete this report we can see that it will be helpful to organize our data analysis in chart form so that we can look at the three-year data in a clear way. This will be a core part of next year's assessment and analysis cycle.

8. **What were the most important suggestions/feedback from the FDCD on your last assessment report (for academic year 2016-2017, submitted in October 2017)? How did you incorporate or address the suggestion(s) in this report?**

We were happy to receive very positive feedback last year, and note that the feedback did not contain major suggestions. We decided to expand our analysis to compare year-to-year and to add one more PLO for analysis, in any case.

**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

**ASSESSMENT DATA FOR PLO #4**

**Assignment:** Students are required to develop a 15-minute presentation on their capstone thesis topic. The presentation is open to the general public, is advertised widely and is attended by peers and faculty. Students are questioned by their faculty committee for a total of 15 minutes following the presentation. Students have prepared for the presentation in their capstone courses and the presentation is the culmination of the degree and of the school-year’s worth of work on the capstone project.

**Rubric Key: O—Outstanding; S—Satisfactory; I—Incomplete**

<b>Spring 2018. UPA 642-01  Assignment: Capstone presentation</b>	<b>Clearly identifies urban and public affairs issue</b>	<b>Designs a research question for capstone project</b>	<b>Employs appropriate research methodologies</b>	<b>Demonstrates comprehension of theories and concepts in urban and public affairs</b>	<b>Interprets, analyzes, and evaluates information from multiple sources</b>	<b>Offers insight or solutions for urban and public affairs problem analyzed</b>
<b>Student 1</b>	O	O	S	S	I	I
<b>Student 2</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 3</b>	O	O	O	O	S	S
<b>Student 4</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 5</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O

<b>Spring 2018. UPA 642-02  Assignment: Capstone presentation</b>	<b>Clearly identifies urban and public affairs issue</b>	<b>Designs a research question for capstone project</b>	<b>Employs appropriate research methodologies</b>	<b>Demonstrates comprehension of theories and concepts in urban and public affairs</b>	<b>Interprets, analyzes, and evaluates information from multiple sources</b>	<b>Offers insight or solutions for urban and public affairs problem analyzed</b>
<b>Student 1</b>	O	O	O	S	S	O
<b>Student 2</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 3</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 4</b>	S	S	S	S	I	I

<b>Student 5</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 6</b>	O	O	S	S	S	S
<b>Student 7</b>	O	O	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 8</b>	O	O	S	S	S	S

**ASSESSMENT DATA FOR PLO #2**

**Assignment:** Students must formulate a revised research question for their spring capstone projects. The assignment asks students to move from three initial broad questions selected the week prior, to a more focused question that relates to issues in urban affairs and public policy. Both the UA 641 class and the MOPA 690 class carried out the same assignment under the guidance of the same professor, so we have combined the data here in one chart.

**Rubric Key: O—Outstanding; S—Satisfactory; I—Incomplete**

<b>Fall 2017. UPA641 &amp; MOPA 690  Assignment: Research Question Revision</b>	<b>Clearly identifies urban and public affairs issue</b>	<b>Question moves from broad significance to specific area of inquiry</b>	<b>Identifies relevant case study for topic</b>	<b>Topic lends itself to research materials available</b>	<b>Methods implicated are manageable within timeframe</b>	<b>Demonstrates potential contribution to urban/public affairs field</b>
<b>Student 1</b>	S	S	O	S	O	S
<b>Student 2</b>	S	S	S	O	S	O
<b>Student 3</b>	O	S	O	O	O	O
<b>Student 4</b>	S	S	S	S	S	S
<b>Student 5</b>	O	O	S	O	O	S
<b>Student 6</b>	S	S	S	S	S	S
<b>Student 7</b>	O	S	S	S	S	O
<b>Student 8</b>	S	S	S	S	S	S
<b>Student 9</b>	S	S	S	S	S	S

<b>Student 10</b>	O	O	O	O	S	O
<b>Student 11</b>	S	S	S	S	S	S
<b>Student 12</b>	S	S	O	S	S	S
<b>Student 13</b>	O	S	O	O	O	S