ASSESSMENT REPORT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE FOR THE MASTERS DEGREE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (MPA)

AY 20015-2016

MASTERS DEGREE PROGRAM

This report is organized around the six questions asked in the Department/Program Annual Report Guidelines. This report contains an appendix of assessment instruments used to analyze student learning outcomes.

**Question #1: What learning outcome(s) did you assess this year?**

The MPA program currently has 14 student learning outcomes contained in our SOAP. We assessed three of them this academic year. They are as follows: (1) Evaluate alternative approaches to how policies are defined, designed, implemented, and evaluated; (2) Formulate and utilize regimes of ethical behavior and decision making in public and nonprofit organizations; and (3) Formulate alternatives to existing policy based on the combination of theoretical frameworks and original policy research.

**Question #2: What instruments did you use to assess them?**

All of the student learning outcomes was assessed using a combination of the MPA program’s student paper evaluation form (see appendix) and embedded question instrument (see appendix). The paper evaluation form allows faculty members to examine selected assignments with a uniform set of criteria. The embedded question instrument requires faculty to select a particular question or assignment closely linked to the student learning outcome being assessed.

For each of the eight criteria listed on the student paper evaluation form, all students are expected to score four out of five. This will constitute meeting the program’s expectations with respect to each of the assessed learning outcomes. The following discussion in Question #3 will show the link between the assignments, criteria on the student paper evaluation form, and assessed learning outcomes. Scores reported in response to Question #3 are average student scores across each of the stated criteria on the student paper evaluation form for each embedded question analyzed.

There is a variation between the outcomes assessed in this report and the MPA program’s SOAP. In previous academic years, the MPA program had assessed close to half of its student learning outcomes. We are revising this number to three per academic year. The MPA program will submit a revised timeline as part of an updated SOAP.

**Question #3: What did you discover from these data?**

(1) SLO #5 – Evaluate alternative approaches to how policies are defined, designed, implemented, and evaluated.

(A) Specific issue or question addressed: MPA 260 – Critical Essay #1: 6 to 8 page essay addressing the following points:

Discuss Stone’s polis (political community) model of society.

What are the implications of the polis (political community) model of society for the following: policy goals; problem definition; and the development of policy solutions?

What are the implications of the polis (political community) model for the role of public administrators in a democratic society? (\*You will need to use authors discussed previously in the course to address this item.)

(B) How the embedded question measures the stated student learning outcome:

Discussing Deborah Stone’s model of society and policymaking requires students to examine this approach in light of the more rational, value-neutral approach to policymaking, which is the focus of more traditional treatments of public policy. These two approaches are compared and contrasted in the first part of the critical essay. In parts two and three of the essay, the implications of Stone’s approach are explored further with respect to how policy is defined and designed by both public officials and the citizenry at large. The third part of the essay examines the role of public administrators in implementing and evaluating these policies. In parts two and three of the critical essay, students may couch their arguments in terms of Stone’s value-based approach versus a more traditional, value-neutral approach. This allows them to utilize alternative theoretical approaches to the examination of policy and the policy process.

(C) Assessment of overall class performance on issue or question:

Critical essays were examined using a combination of the MPA program’s student paper evaluation form (see Appendix) and embedded question (see Appendix) instrument. Students scored below standards in the areas of course-specific information (3.8 out of 5), understanding of pertinent issues in the literature (3.8 out of 5), quality of theoretical argument (3.8 out of 5), and original thought in theoretical argument (3.75 out of 5). The students’ performance was close to the standard in the overall assessment (3.95 out of 5). Organization (4.15 out of 5), quality of writing (4.05 out of 5), and proper citation (4.5 out of 5) were above the program’s standard of 4.0 out of 5.

(2) SLO #9 – Formulate and utilize regimes of ethical behavior and decision making in public and nonprofit organizations.

(A) Specific issue or question addressed: MPA 200 – Case Analysis #4: 8 to 10 page essay addressing the following points:

Develop a framework of ethical decision making.

Use this framework to analyze Donald Rumsfeld’s decisions concerning the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, as well as his treatment of various stakeholders in the development of policy surrounding the issue of interrogation techniques.

Provide recommendations to guide future decision makers in this area.

(B) How the embedded question measures the stated student learning outcome:

In order to develop a framework of ethical behavior and decision making for public officials, students must grapple with the following concerns: Is administrative ethics possible? Teleological (results-driven) vs. Deontological (duty/principle) approaches to individual-based ethical regimes; Individual-based ethics vs. public ethics; and the ethics of bureaucratic dissent in a democratic setting. Then the students apply this framework to the case of Donald Rumsfeld’s decisions with respect to prisoner treatment at Abu Ghraib. The student’s analysis of Donald Rumsfeld’s approach informs their recommendations for ethical decision making going forward. This assignment allows students to both formulate a regime of ethical behavior and apply it to decision making in public organizations.

(C) Assessment of overall class performance on issue or question:

Critical essays were examined using a combination of the MPA program’s student paper evaluation form (see Appendix) and embedded question (see Appendix) instrument. On this assignment, students scored below established standards in the following areas: course-specific information (3.83 out of 5), understanding of pertinent issues in the literature (3.83 out of 5), quality of theoretical argument (3.83 out of 5), original thought in theoretical argument (3.83 out of 5), organization (3.50 out of 5), and overall assessment (3.83 out of 5). Quality of writing (4.33 out of 5), and proper citation (4.5 out of 5) were above the program’s standard of 4.0 out of 5.

(3) SLO #10 – Formulate alternatives to existing policy based on the combination of theoretical frameworks and original policy research.

(A) Specific issue or question to be addressed: MPA 260 – Final research paper: 15 to 20 page paper addressing some aspect of a public policy, program, or organization. Students were given the following guidance for constructing their papers:

Introduction (Relevance of topic/policy; Thematic statement; Research questions; Brief outline of paper);

Description of topic/policy;

Theoretical/analytical framework (This could include a discussion of data and methodology if needed.);

Analysis of topic/policy;

Conclusions (Implications of findings/analysis).

(B) How the embedded question measures the stated student learning outcome:

Students select a public policy, program, or organization and develop a focused research question concerning their topic. They are also tasked with developing a theoretical framework they will use to analyze their selected topic. They conduct research on the topic and develop a more in-depth understanding. This provides the foundation for a more thorough treatment of their topic. Students are then prepared to answer their research question. As part of their conclusions, students formulate alternatives to or improvements in existing policy, programs, or organizations.

(C) Assessment of overall class performance on issue or question:

Critical essays were examined using a combination of the MPA program’s student paper evaluation form (see Appendix) and embedded question (see Appendix) instrument. Students scored below standards in the areas of course-specific information (3.85 out of 5), understanding of pertinent issues in the literature (3.75 out of 5), quality of theoretical argument (3.65 out of 5), and original thought in theoretical argument (3.55 out of 5). Organization (4.2 out of 5), quality of writing (4.35 out of 5), and proper citation (4.2 out of 5), and overall assessment (4.05 out of 5) were above the program’s standard of 4.0 out of 5.

**Question #4: What changes did you make as a result of the findings?**

(1) SLO #5 – Evaluate alternative approaches to how policies are defined, designed, implemented, and evaluated.

(A) Recommendation for actions to be taken:

The lower-than-standard scores in the areas of factual comprehension, theoretical understanding and application, and critical thinking need to be addressed. The structure of this seminar course will be redesigned in order to give students more focused discussion of the fundamental ideas and concepts of public policy, as well as more practice applying these to relevant policy case examples.

Specifically, class sessions will be redesigned in the following manner: (1) Directed small-group discussion – Students will break-up into small groups to discuss the assigned readings. Their discussions will be focused around a set of themes or concepts provided by the instructor; (2) Short presentations on each of the readings for the class sessions – This provides opportunities for students to present the main theme of a reading, as well as important supporting points and questions for further discussion; (3) Large group discussion – Following each individual reading, students will address the discussion question raised by the previous presenter. The course instructor will direct the discussion as needed. Both students and instructors will provide feedback on the main themes and arguments raised in the presentation; and (4) In-class exercise – There will be class sessions in which the instructor will utilize short case analyses, which allow students to apply the ideas and concepts in the particular class session. This will provide yet another opportunity for students to get direct feedback on the quality of their understanding of ideas and concepts, as well as honing their critical thinking skills.

(2) SLO #9 – Formulate and utilize regimes of ethical behavior and decision making in public and nonprofit organizations.

(A) Recommendation for actions to be taken:

The lower-than-standard scores in the areas of factual comprehension, theoretical understanding and application, organization, and critical thinking need to be addressed. The student problems with organization can be handled in one of two ways. The first is to provide more structured guidance on the essay prompt. However, this does not really challenge the student to think through how to organize their factual materials and theoretical framework. The key to building students’ organizational skills is to enhance their understanding of the overall factual and theoretical content of the course. This is better handled through a redesign of the course structure.

The structure of this seminar course will be redesigned in order to give students more focused discussion of the fundamental ideas and concepts of public administration, as well as more practice applying these to relevant policy case examples. Specifically, class sessions will be redesigned in the following manner: (1) Directed small-group discussion – Students will break-up into small groups to discuss the assigned readings. Their discussions will be focused around a set of themes or concepts provided by the instructor; (2) Short presentations on each of the readings for the class sessions – This provides opportunities for students to present the main theme of a reading, as well as important supporting points and questions for further discussion; (3) Large group discussion – Following each individual reading, students will address the discussion question raised by the previous presenter. The course instructor will direct the discussion as needed. Both students and instructors will provide feedback on the main themes and arguments raised in the presentation; and (4) In-class exercise – There will be class sessions in which the instructor will utilize short case analyses, which allow students to apply the ideas and concepts in the particular class session. This will provide yet another opportunity for students to get direct feedback on the quality of their understanding of ideas and concepts, as well as honing their critical thinking skills.

(3) SLO #10 – Formulate alternatives to existing policy based on the combination of theoretical frameworks and original policy research.

(A) Recommendation for actions to be taken:

The lower-than-standard scores in the areas of factual comprehension, theoretical understanding and application, and critical thinking need to be addressed in order to help students attain program standards in this learning outcome. To aid student development in these areas, a redesign of the course is recommended.

The structure of this seminar course will be redesigned in order to give students more focused discussion of the fundamental ideas and concepts of public policy, as well as more practice applying these to relevant policy case examples. Specifically, class sessions will be redesigned in the following manner: (1) Directed small-group discussion – Students will break-up into small groups to discuss the assigned readings. Their discussions will be focused around a set of themes or concepts provided by the instructor; (2) Short presentations on each of the readings for the class sessions – This provides opportunities for students to present the main theme of a reading, as well as important supporting points and questions for further discussion; (3) Large group discussion – Following each individual reading, students will address the discussion question raised by the previous presenter. The course instructor will direct the discussion as needed. Both students and instructors will provide feedback on the main themes and arguments raised in the presentation; and (4) In-class exercise – There will be class sessions in which the instructor will utilize short case analyses, which allow students to apply the ideas and concepts in the particular class session. This will provide yet another opportunity for students to get direct feedback on the quality of their understanding of ideas and concepts, as well as honing their critical thinking skills.

**Question #5: What assessment activities will you be conducting in the 2016-2017 academic year?**

The MPA program plans to assess the following student learning outcomes:

(1) SLO #1: Examine the impact of different social, economic, and political phenomena on public policy issues using analytical tools, including appropriate statistical concepts and techniques.

This student learning outcome will be assessed using the embedded question instrument.

(2) SLO #8: Formulate and utilize human resource systems that are effective in terms of both protecting individual employees and enhancing organizational performance.

This student learning outcome will be assessed using a combination of the student paper evaluation form and embedded question instrument.

(3) SLO # 13: Demonstrate an understanding of and apply basic public administration/nonprofit principles, theories, and research.

This student learning outcome will be assessed using a combination of the student paper evaluation form and embedded question instrument.

**Question #6: What progress have you made on items from your last program review action plan?**

MPA program materials are currently under review by the Graduate Committee. Our last program review action plan dates back to AY 2008-2009. The following is of the items and our progress on meeting them.

(1) Develop a more rigorous student outcome assessment plan (SOAP).

The MPA program revised its SOAP in the following academic years: 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015. We be revising the timeline of activities for our upcoming SOAP.

(2) Increase involvement of practitioners in the MPA program.

The MPA program now offers three one-unit practitioner seminars once every four semesters. These one-unit courses are part of the program’s regular rotation of courses and have been so for the past six years.

(3) Develop program options for MPA students.

The MPA program has created two different emphases for students in the program. The first is state and local public management. The second is nonprofit management and leadership. The MPA program partners with the Department of Sociology to provide courses in grant writing and evaluation as part of this emphasis.

(4) Develop a curriculum for nonprofit management and leadership.

The MPA program has developed two of its own courses in this area. The first is Nonprofit Management and Leadership (MPA 280T). The second course is Program Evaluation (MPA 280T). These courses are paired with two courses in the Department of Sociology: SOC 183S – Philanthropy and Grant Making and SOC 184S – Grant Writing and Evaluation.

(5) Offer weekend courses in the on-campus MPA program.

This has been proposed at various times in MPA program core faculty meetings. There has been no progress made on this item.

(6) Provide a closer link between the MPA program and career advising for students.

MPA program faculty provide guidance for students seeking further their education in other graduate-level programs (e.g., advising on programs and writing letters of recommendation). MPA program faculty provide job leads to both current students and alumnus. MPA program faculty also write letters of recommendation and function as references for job interviews. MPA program faculty also provide linkage to the university’s Career Development Center.

**Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program**

**Student Paper Evaluation Form**

**Date:**

**Student Name:**

**Course:**

**Faculty Name:**

Please evaluate the enclosed student paper/portfolio according to the following scale:

**1=Fail 2=Weak 3=Average 4=Good 5=Excellent**

**(1) Displays an understanding of factual, course-specific information**

**1 2 3 4 5**

(2) Displays an understanding of issues in the pertinent literature

1 2 3 4 5

**(3) Quality of theoretical argument**

**1 2 3 4 5**

(4) Clarity, original thought, and conciseness in the theoretical argument

1 2 3 4 5

**(5) Quality of organization**

**1 2 3 4 5**

(6) Quality of writing

1 2 3 4 5

**(7) Sources cited properly**

**1 2 3 4 5**

(8) Letter grade (overall assessment)

A B C D F

Comments: (optional)

**MPA Program Outcome Assessment**

**Term**

**Course # and Title**

**Embedded Question**

**(1) Specific Issue or Question Examined:**

**(2) Assessment of overall class performance on Issue or Question:**

**(3) Recommendation for actions to be taken:**