

## **Masters of Public Administration**

### **2.2 Assessment**

#### **Assessment Procedures:**

**Linking Assessment Directly to Mission:** We have a formal mechanism to link assessment to the mission. The first step in the development of the UWG MPA Program mission-assessment process was the dissection of the formal mission statement into 10 mission element statements. The mission elements were used as the springboard for the collection of assessment data. Assessment mechanisms (surveys, content analysis, interviews, etc.) are linked to each program element. Mission elements and NASPAA standards are used to construct specific survey instruments. For example, the exit survey, alumni survey, and employer survey drew directly from the mission elements to construct at least some of the questionnaire items. The 10 mission element statements and their connection to assessment mechanisms are summarized in Table 2.

1. Assessment activities discussed in subsequent sections are linked to the mission through the unique number assigned each mission element.

**Table 2.1**

#### **Linking Mission to Assessment** **Mission Element Assessment Methods**

**The MPA Program serves the region by:**

1. Improving the knowledge and skills of in-service managers and preparing pre-service students for management roles or further study.

1. Alumni survey
2. Review of student files
3. Student survey
4. Exit survey
5. Employer Contact

**Knowledge and skills are provided by:**

2. Promoting the understanding of public service values, ethics, democracy and constitutional principles.

1. Student survey
2. Oral defense of exit paper
3. Exit survey
4. Course evaluations
5. Annual faculty evaluations

6. Focus group

3. Teaching generalist public management knowledge and skills.

Alumni survey

- Oral defense of exit paper
- Exit survey
- Course evaluations
- Employer contact
- Annual faculty review
- Focus group

4. Developing the student's ability to integrate theory and practice.

Review of internship evaluations

- Oral defense of exit paper
- Exit survey
- Assessment of exit paper by committee members
  
- Alumni survey
- Employer contact

**The MPA program engages in activities that promote the public service through:**

5. Interaction with the public through service activities for governmental, non-profit, and community organizations.

Employer contact

- Formal departmental faculty review policy (promotion & tenure)
- Annual faculty review (post tenure review)

6. Forums and presentations on community needs.

Formal departmental faculty review policy (promotion & tenure)

- Annual faculty review (post tenure review)
- Alumni survey

7. Student involvement in service activities.

Alumni survey

- Exit survey
- Focus group

## **Conducting research that contributes to knowledge about public activities through:**

### **8. Scholarly research.**

Formal departmental faculty review policy (promotion & tenure)

- Annual faculty review (post tenure review)

### **9. Technical writing and reports.**

Formal departmental faculty review policy (promotion & tenure)

- Annual faculty review (post tenure review)

### **10. Student involvement in research activities.**

Alumni survey

- Exit survey
- Focus group

Appendix G summarizes the links between the mission statement and the assessment evidence that is provided throughout this document. Table G.1 provides clear evidence that the UWG MPA Program is mission driven and that it is achieving its mission.

## **Assessment Using the Literature on Master's Education**

The UWG MPA Program faculty assesses the program using the literature on master's education. In *Silent Success: Master's Education in the United States*, Clifton Conrad, Jennifer Haworth and Susan Miller identified 14 characteristics of "high-quality" masters programs. (Conrad, C., Haworth, J. and Miller, S. *Silent Success: Master's Education in the United States*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). They are:

### **Culture:**

Unity of purpose among program participants with a supportive learning environment

### **Planned Learning Experience:**

Core course work immersion doing centered learning with individualization  
tangible product out-of-class activities

### **Resources:**

Institutional support and Departmental support

### **Leadership and the Human Dimension:**

Faculty involvement:

Faculty with university and workplace experience with committed students with diverse backgrounds and experiences to create program leadership.  
We believe and assessment evidence supports that the UWG MPA program has all of the characteristics of high quality master's experiences.

Table 2.2 outlines the connection between the UWG MPA program and evidence showing how we adhere to the characteristics of high quality master's experiences.

## **Table 2.2**

### **The UWG MPA Program and the Characteristics of a Quality Masters Experience** **Characteristics of High Quality Master's Experience**

#### **Evidence** **Culture**

##### *1. Unity of purpose among program participants*

The program has a mission statement that was developed and modified by program participants. The volume of assessment data supports this claim.

##### *2. Supportive Learning Environment*

MPA Exit and Alumni survey results support that faculty are accessible. Exit interviews confirm that students feel the learning environment is supportive. Our program philosophy supports this claim. *“Our goal is an accessible faculty who promote an educational community with a generous spirit where people learn from each other both in and out of the classroom.”*

#### **Planned Learning Experience**

##### *3. Core courses*

We have a 21 hour core.

##### *4. Immersion*

The exit paper and other directed research allows students to be immersed in the topic.

##### *5. Doing centered learning*

Class assignments in many courses stress “doing centered learning.” This is particularly true of the exit paper. Students are encouraged to collect empirical data and are thus engaged in doing centered learning.

##### *6. Individualization*

The exit paper is an individualized experience. There is significant one-on-one time with the professor.

##### *Tangible product*

The exit paper.

##### *7. Out-of-class activities*

We hold a Pi Alpha Alpha awards ceremony. Students give papers at the Georgia ASPA Academic Conferences. We conduct a Student Orientation and hold Regular Advisory Board meetings that include students.

## **Resources**

### *8 Institutional support*

The institution's support is high. There is a willingness at the institution's top leadership levels to support the program.

### *9. Departmental support*

The Political Science Department has shown consistent support for the program. Dr. Schaefer, Chair of the Political Science Department serves on the MPA Advisory Board. The Department has supported promotion and tenure of PA Professors.

## **Leadership and the Human Dimension**

### *10. Faculty involvement*

Faculty involvement is affirmed in exit surveys and alumni surveys. It is also affirmed by faculty attendance at awards banquets and student orientation sessions.

### *11. Faculty with non-university workplace experiences*

Many of our faculties bring non-university workplace experiences to the program.

### *12. Committed students with diverse backgrounds and experiences*

As the self-study will show we have wide diversity in our student body. Students show their commitment by their willingness to take part in Advisory Board meetings, and as alumni when they serve as Board members.

### *13. Program leadership*

Examples of program leadership include the mission process, the engaged Advisory Board Georgia ASPA presence. (Dr. Sanders and Dr. Caress serve on the Georgia ASPA Executive Council.)

## **Assessment Procedures: Sources of Assessment Information**

**The Exit Paper:** The Exit Paper is the UWG MPA program's capstone project. The exit paper is a cumulating experience and demonstrates in a concrete and summative way the analytic, policy, organization, and writing skills of the student. The successful exit paper process follows specific guidelines, thus creating a multidimensional assessment mechanism. First, there is a transparency to the process that allows for broad assessment and program feedback. The exit papers are orally defended before a three-member committee. The Political Science Department catalogues all exit papers.

Students can perform program assessment activities as part of their exit paper. For example, there is an employer assessment of the MPA program, an alumni survey, and several studies assessing the quality of the exit paper. The result is a multidimensional assessment. Student performance (both written and oral) is assessed.

**Teacher/Course Evaluations:** Toward the end of each semester, course evaluations are distributed to students in all classes. The evaluations, along with a summary statement, are returned to the faculty member each semester. Teaching evaluations are discussed with the Chair during the Annual Faculty Review. Faculty are encouraged to adjust course content and format if evaluations suggest that such modifications are needed.

**Alumni Survey:** In October of 2008 the MPA Director distributed an alumni survey to all graduates of the program from the past 5 years. The mission elements along with NASPAA standards were used to develop the survey instrument. The results indicate that the Program is doing a good job meeting its mission (See Appendix C for selected Alumni Survey results).

**Annual Faculty Review:** Each year faculty members prepare a document that highlights their accomplishments for the current year. Service, teaching, and scholarship are the categories used for the assessment. Upon completion, faculty meet with the Chair of the Political Science Department. The discussion during the meeting amounts to an informal formative assessment. At that time, teaching evaluations are discussed. The process is taken seriously by all. If a faculty member's performance is consistently below standards administrative action is a possibility.

**Interview at Oral Defense of Exit Paper:** At the conclusion of the oral defense of the exit paper, students are asked to give their honest impression of the program. At present, the committee asks the student to identify the program's strengths and ways that it could be improved. The Director uses this information to help modify the program if necessary.

**MPA Program Exit Survey:** After the oral defense, the students are asked to complete an exit survey. The survey includes specific questions about the curriculum and how the MPA Program contributed to students' knowledge and skills. In addition several questions are specifically tied to the mission elements. (See Appendix D)

**Employer Survey:** Employers were surveyed during a Needs Assessment in 2007-08 to determine whether the MPA Program curriculum and graduates met employer expectations and

if a new health track should be added to the program. The MPA Director conducted the survey. (See Appendix D for selected Employer Survey results.)

**Focus Group – Current MPA Students:** A focus group of current MPA students was convened in early 2009. Students were asked to provide input on the strengths and weaknesses of the program, curriculum, mentoring, and course delivery mechanisms. The focus group was led by the MPA Director.

**MPA Advisory Board:** The MPA Advisory Board can meet yearly. The Board is composed of practitioners, faculty, alumni, and students. Many of the professional members are alumni. Faculty also can attend the meetings. The Advisory Board provides both formal and informal feedback to the faculty. The Board helped to revise the mission statement, consider admission policy, and adopt curriculum change.

**Faculty Meetings:** Faculty members make program policy decisions such as curriculum or mission changes, taking into account Advisory Board opinions and assessment data during faculty meetings. While sometimes debate is spirited, decisions are generally reached by consensus. Individual faculty members are also encouraged to bring any concern to faculty meetings for consideration.



## 2.3 Guiding Performance

**A. Guiding Performance:** Using the assessment procedures discussed in Standard 2.2, the program engages in continuous collection of mission driven assessment data as well as deliberative, open, procedures that enable analysis and interpretation of the data. Program changes emerge from these processes.

### B. Program Changes as a Result of Assessment

#### Curriculum Changes

- In response to faculty curriculum review and Advisory Board feedback, an expanded elective Public Health Track was proposed. Additionally, a course in Comparative Public Administration is now being offered every fifth semester as an elective.
- In response to a previous assessment of the exit paper first draft deadlines and completion dates are established and posted every semester. Exit paper guidelines were modified in order to improve the quality of the exit paper. Specific guidelines were generated for developing exit papers on policy analysis, program evaluation, and administrative analysis.
- In response to a previous assessment of the Internship, new guidelines were generated. All information about the internship including expectations, forms, logs, and evaluations are included.

#### Student Services

- In response to student comments for a need to have better communication a student orientation presentation was developed and is conducted every fall. The MPA list serve was also improved and expanded.
- In response to trends in society, the program has greatly expanded its web presence (see <http://www.westga.edu/~polisci/mpa>).

