

**Program Performance Review 2025**

**Public Administration Undergraduate Program**

**California State University, Fullerton**

**External Review Report**

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*Reviewers*

**Cecilia Ayón, MSW PhD**

Professor, School of Public Policy  
Director of Undergraduate Studies, School of Public Policy  
University of California, Riverside

**Mark Drayse, PhD**

Professor, Department of Geography & the Environment  
California State University, Fullerton

**Charles C. Turner, PhD**

Professor, Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice  
MPA Coordinator  
California State University, Chico

## **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as external reviewers for this program assessment. This report evaluates the performance of the Cal State Fullerton Public Administration Undergraduate Program. During our site visit on 3 March 2025, we had the pleasure of meeting with the Program Coordinator, faculty and staff members, students, and division chair. Additionally, we engaged in discussions with the Dean and Associate Dean for Student Affairs in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The program self-study provided a thoughtful and thorough assessment of the program, highlighting both areas of strength and opportunities for growth. Overall, the process was engaging and informative.

The B.A. in Public Administration (BAPA) is a well-regarded, mid-sized program that offers students coursework designed to provide practical experience for careers in public service. The program is supported by a dedicated group of faculty, lecturers, and staff.

Our report is divided into three sections. First, we highlight the strengths of the program, including its alignment with CSUF's strategic plan, high-quality faculty, students committed to the Public Administration major, a relevant curriculum that addresses student needs, and a clear and innovative assessment plan. Second, we discuss challenges facing the program, including the need to develop a clear identity, the lack of a dedicated faculty 'champion', and the need for more faculty and staff resources. We conclude with several recommendations in the spirit of strengthening the B.A. in Public Administration, which provides a valuable service to its students.

## **Strengths**

### ***Mission and Goals Aligned with CSUF's Strategic Plan***

The BAPA program's mission and goals are closely aligned with the University's broader mission and strategic plan. The mission of the Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) is to prepare students for impactful and ethical careers in the public and nonprofit sectors, with a strong emphasis on public service values. The program's learning objectives are designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of public administration by exploring key concepts and theories, examining the roles of personnel administration, budgeting, and finance, and analyzing the administrative functions within political systems. Additionally, the program prioritizes the development of skills in applying quantitative research methods, evaluating public organization data, and demonstrating effective written communication. BAPA fosters critical inquiry and promotes social justice, equipping students with the tools to advocate for equity and inclusion in their

professional careers. The program places particular emphasis on local government and engages students in high-impact practices, such as internships and the Cal State DC program, to ensure they make a meaningful contribution to their local communities.

### ***Faculty***

The BAPA program benefits from a highly dedicated core faculty and lectures. Students consistently commend the faculty's engaging and effective pedagogical approaches within the classroom environment. A review of faculty CVs reveals a high level of productivity in scholarly activities, including publications, grants, fellowships, and professional presentations. Notably, faculty are actively collaborating with students on publications, which is a significant achievement. Furthermore, the faculty demonstrate a strong commitment to service, contributing significantly to the program, division, and campus community, as well as to the ongoing development of teaching and curriculum. While one limitation of the program is the absence of a faculty member exclusively dedicated to the BAPA program, the faculty's overall dedication to the program's mission and its evolving needs is nonetheless impressive.

### ***Students' Commitment to the PA Major and Student Success***

We met with five students from the PA program, who were an engaged and insightful group. They shared positive experiences and expressed that the PA major aligned well with their career aspirations in the public sector. They were overwhelmingly supportive of maintaining the program as a major for students with similar goals.

The students highlighted the distinct learning environment in PA courses compared to other courses, noting that the PA courses were "more engaging, interactive," and conducive to "creative thinking," "hands-on and discussion-based," and reflective of "fast-changing environments" while remaining "tied to current events."

Regarding faculty, students described them as "passionate," "dedicated to student learning," and able to "bring real-world experience" into the classroom. Students also spoke highly of the impact that lecturers had on their learning. Two students shared specific examples, including one course instructed by a city mayor, which provided invaluable insights from the field.

The program has produced excellent outcomes for its students. First-time freshmen (FTF) have a strong graduation rate, with 100% graduating within six years. Transfer students have a four-year graduation rate of approximately 70%. Given these positive outcomes and student feedback, the program is well-positioned to cultivate a strong and active PA alumni network. Additionally, the program is well-equipped to guide students into the MPA program.

## ***Curriculum***

Core faculty members in the BAPA program continuously monitor emerging trends in public administration, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant. This is reflected in the program's emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and the introduction of courses focused on nonprofit organizations. The inclusion of electives from related fields fosters an interdisciplinary approach, which is vital in public administration and public policy. This approach prepares students with a comprehensive skill set, enabling them to navigate the complex challenges and diverse sectors they will encounter in their careers.

To further strengthen the program, several curricular enhancements are planned. In the short term, these include the incorporation of a dedicated learning objective on DEI, the integration of DEI content throughout the coursework, and updates to the public policy minor to appeal to a wider range of students. Long-term plans include the addition of courses in public finance and organizational theory, along with the development of additional high-impact practices to enrich student learning and engagement. These changes will help align the program with national standards in public administration.

## ***Program Assessment***

The program assessment effectively integrates the learning objectives and clearly outlines how these objectives are assessed, providing evidence of outcomes. Innovative strategies have been incorporated to streamline the process, and rubrics are employed to ensure a standardized and consistent approach to evaluation.

Students have met several of the identified metrics. For example, they demonstrate a solid understanding of the role of personnel administration and public budgeting in public administration, exhibit knowledge of the administrative function in political systems, and show proficiency in using quantitative research methods in public administration and policy analysis. However, there are areas that require further attention, including students' ability to define fundamental concepts and theories of public administration, as well as their ability to demonstrate effective written communication skills.

In response to these findings, the faculty have implemented targeted improvements, such as the development of a comprehensive style guide, an increased emphasis on utilizing the writing center, and the collection of both direct and indirect data measures (e.g., such as an internship exit survey). Additional efforts are needed to collect data for other relevant metrics.

## Challenges

Though we find the B.A. in Public Administration to be in very good shape overall, every program faces challenges. We have identified a few challenges and have grouped them around faculty, staff, and students.

### *Faculty*

One of the central challenges for the program faculty lies in establishing a **clear identity** for the BA program. We note, for example, that the mission and goals may be quite similar to those of the MPA program. There may be value in considering how the goals of the BA and MPA may differ. Moreover, the current BA goals do not seem to address some potentially important topics, like oral communication, ethics, and social equity. Some of the faculty plans for curriculum changes may need further clarification. For example, it is not clear whether ensuring “that DEI is embedded throughout the curriculum” means that all courses need to address all elements of DEI or whether, for example, one course might have components that address diversity while another focuses on inclusion issues.

Perhaps the most significant challenge that multiple faculty identified was the **lack of a faculty “champion” for the program**. While every faculty member we spoke to was very supportive of the existence of the PA major, they all had commitments to other programs or activities (e.g., the MPA) that prevented them from giving their full attention to the BAPA. There is also a tension between maintaining a Political Science identity for some faculty members and pursuing a Public Administration identity for others. Additionally, the responsibility for coordinating both the MPA and BAPA programs, advising students, and managing admissions currently rests with a single individual. The current BA faculty lead (who, by all accounts, does an excellent job) is also responsible for the MPA program—a program that has extensive external demands. Given recent and impending retirements, it is unlikely that the program will be able to reach the admirable goals it has laid out for itself without additional hires. Moreover, at least one hire would need to have the BAPA as its primary focus, since no faculty lines currently have this focus.

Faculty also face a **tenure line challenge** in a manner that differs from many other programs on campus. Only half of BAPA courses are taught by tenure-line faculty. While this may not be an issue for programs with 0.8 and 1.0 lecturers, the lecturers in this program have a much smaller time-base on average. One result is that students receive less institutional support via their coursework. Another is that students are less likely to have opportunities to take multiple courses with the same faculty member. This can become an issue when students need letters of recommendation from faculty who know them well.

Finally, faculty face a **professional development challenge**. Funding for faculty travel and professional development is inadequate. It would likely be impossible for a faculty member to attend a professional conference in their discipline unless they were willing to cover over half the costs out of their own pocket, which is not a realistic expectation for many.

### *Staff*

**Tandem advising** likely creates some efficiencies. Unfortunately, it may also pass some of the advising burden on to program staff, who answer questions from students who call or email the division office. Generalist advisors are also less likely to be able to give students advice beyond the DPR—such as career interests or elective courses. A model that supports the service of advising from within the program could avoid some of these inadequacies.

**Space and training** challenges also affect program staff. Though it seems there is never enough space on campuses, storage, adequate room for lecturing faculty, and the need for student space are particular challenges for the BAPA. Outdated technology and lack of adequate technical training to keep up with all of the CSU's software gambits make the already difficult job of academic staff even more challenging.

### *Students*

While the BAPA students we met had overwhelmingly positive things to say about their major and their faculty, they all pointed to a **lack of cohesion and clear identity** for the program. BAPA students do not currently have the opportunity to take any classes (beyond the internship course) where they comprise more than a small fraction of the students in the course. While this is a result of coursework that overlaps with the much larger political science and criminal justice majors, it has the effect of making it difficult for PA majors to identify each other. We were surprised that the students we met had never met each other. This lack of identity has a few potential impacts worth noting. First, the lack of lower division courses may prevent some students finding out about the major until they have already selected another major, thus hampering program growth. Second, many students have never heard of the major, which may indicate that advertising and recruitment are needed to boost the number of majors and minors.

The issue above likely bears a direct impact on the challenge of **program size**. Though the BAPA is by no means a small program when compared to some others on campus, it is relatively small compared to the other degree programs in its division. This size issue may lead to the program having its needs overlooked by administrators and its value missed by students. It may take some intentional efforts in terms of resources and strategy, but a program like BAPA,

which offers a broad and clear career path, has the capacity to grow and could benefit from additional majors, minors, and double majors.

Finally, we also note some challenges related to the **assessment** of student and program data. Related to program assessment, sample size for the assessment method is not provided, but authors indicate that the assessment is based on small samples. In addition, two objectives did not have data. Though we believe some of these challenges to be a product of having to assess a program that exists within a larger division, we encourage faculty to continue exploring creative ways to assess their program goals.

## **Recommendations**

Our review of the Self-Study and productive discussions with faculty and students reinforced the importance of (1) creating a distinct identity for the BAPA program, (2) increasing the numbers of BAPA majors and Public Policy minors, (3) updating the curriculum, including the addition of more high-impact practices, and (4) reinforcing alumni and community relations.

While the BAPA program could exist as a concentration within the Division of Politics, Administration, and Justice (PAJ), the students we spoke with see themselves as part of a distinct, career-oriented program providing them with practical experience for careers in public service. Faculty also stressed the importance of the BAPA having its own identity. We encourage the program to hold a *faculty retreat* to discuss our recommendations and think of ways to implement those that they agree with.

### ***Faculty and Lecturers***

BAPA faculty are also responsible for teaching and service activities in the MPA program and the PAJ division. In particular, the MPA requires a lot of their attention; the BAPA is “left to fend for itself”. The BAPA program would benefit from a faculty “champion” dedicated to serving the PA program. We recommend that one of the *new hires* anticipated by PAJ is a faculty member whose main teaching and service responsibilities are centered on the BAPA program.

All faculty in the College benefit from a *3-3 teaching load*, which provides more time for research and service activities. This helps faculty to balance teaching, research, and service activities, and is important for recruiting new faculty. The Division should work with the College to ensure that PA faculty are able to maintain a 3-3 teaching load. To this end, service responsibilities should be spread amongst the faculty.

While we did not meet with *lecturers*, students stressed how important they are to the program. Lecturers typically teach one or two courses per semester for the BAPA program. While this may be due to other professional and teaching commitments, students would benefit from a core group of lecturers teaching 3-5 courses each semester, or the addition of more tenure-line faculty to teach those courses.

### ***Curriculum and Program Structure***

We support the program's intent to review the BAPA curriculum and develop new courses. We encourage faculty to consider adopting a *PA-focused catalog prefix* (e.g., PADM) for courses in the program. While this would result in the triple-cross-listing of many of the division's courses (POSC/CRJU/PADM), we think that the benefits of promoting the BAPA program's identity would be worth it.

To make the program more attractive to students, *the nine-unit related fields requirement could be dropped*. This would create a 39-unit program instead of a 48-unit program. In lieu of the related fields requirement, BAPA students could be encouraged to enroll in minor or certificate programs.

We support creating a *capstone course*, as recommended in the Self-Study. A research-focused capstone course could complement the service-based learning of the internships that are required of BAPA majors. In addition, the program could consider creating at least one 300-level course for BAPA majors only that would help to build the student community.

The division should consider creating a *4+1 blended program* for Public Administration students. This would streamline a logical pathway for BAPA majors and could help to attract students interested in careers in public administration.

The program could also consider creating *certificate programs* that combine PA courses with courses from other departments. For example, 12-unit certificates could be created for environmental policy or health policy. This would promote the PA program and create partnerships with other departments.

### ***Outreach Plan***

We recommend that the program develop an outreach plan to attract BAPA majors. For example, BAPA students and faculty could make brief presentations to students in courses in PAJ regarding the benefits of a BAPA major or minor for students interested in public service. Students and faculty could reach out to other programs to promote the public policy minor for their students. E-mails/flyers could be sent to students admitted into PAJ each semester to inform

them about the PA program. Throughout our meetings, faculty stressed the need for resources to support outreach and recruitment efforts.

Related to outreach, the program could think about ways to re-brand “Public Administration”. Faculty might consider a brainstorming meeting to develop creative ideas for courses or even the major. “Public Service Administration” or “Applied Policy and Administration” might be names to consider, for example.

### ***Student Relations***

Creating a ***student organization*** is one of the most important ways to develop a distinct identity for the BAPA program. In most of their courses, BAPA students are a small minority amidst POSC and CRJU majors. A BAPA student organization would help to build a sense of community amongst BAPA majors. The student organization could help to plan and promote guest speakers, events, and meetings to connect them with professionals and career opportunities. The students we spoke with are strongly supportive of a PA student organization.

The program should implement a ***dedicated BAPA email address*** to distribute a newsletter with pertinent information for BAPA students, such as upcoming events, internship opportunities, HIP offerings, and contact details for key program personnel. If space could be found, it would be helpful for PAJ to create a ***student lounge*** for its students to help increase their interactions outside of class, build community, and provide a space for posting information about upcoming events and job opportunities.

### ***Advising***

The advising needs of the MPA program absorb much of the attention of PA faculty. As a result, BAPA students are advised by PAJ tandem advisors. Tandem advisors provide an important service for large programs like PAJ, taking care of student course selection, TDA reviews, and grad checks. However, students in a medium-sized program like BAPA would benefit from a ***dedicated faculty advisor*** to help students plan for careers in public administration and work with a BAPA student organization, in addition to assisting their progress to the BAPA degree.

### ***Assessment***

The program should prioritize data collection to enhance the assessment process and explore additional options that can support program evaluation. For example, consider implementing a graduation ***exit survey*** where students self-assess their achievement of learning objectives, while also providing feedback on their satisfaction with the learning experience. The

exit survey can help capture valuable data that will guide future innovations and improvements. It also allows for the integration of both subjective data (provided by students) and objective data (based on faculty review) in the assessment process. Additionally, the data collected would reflect the entire graduating class each year. The exit survey could include questions that reflect the identified “additional indicators” the program wants to track (as outlined on page 14 of the self-study), such as students' plans to apply to graduate school, acceptance into graduate programs, job placement status, and a request for students to provide a personal, non-CSU email to be added to the alumni listserv for follow-up (tracking job placement, program impact and relevance, fundraising, and other engagement efforts).

### ***Alumni Relations***

Since most BAPA students find jobs in Orange County and the greater Southern California region, the program has created a robust alumni network across local and county governments, agencies, and non-profit organizations. We recommend that the BAPA program ***expand and intensify its connections with their alumni***. This would build upon the ***high-impact practices*** that are one of its most distinctive features.

The students we met were attracted to the ‘career-focus’ of the program, service-learning opportunities, and the opportunities to meet professionals in the field. Reinforcing and building its alumni network is one of the best ways in which BAPA can promote its own identity and attract new students.

In addition to ongoing relationships with alumni that provide internships, guest speakers, and course lecturers, BAPA could:

- create and continually revise an ***alumni list*** with current employment and contact information (which includes collecting students’ non-CSUF e-mails prior to graduation),
- develop ***service-learning opportunities*** complementing student internships,
- create a ***newsletter*** sent to alumni once or twice each year that highlights the program’s students, faculty, and events,
- work with alumni to develop one-day ***career expos*** for BAPA students,
- reinstate the popular ***“Professor for a Day”*** program, and
- organize an ***annual symposium*** bringing together alumni, students, and faculty (like the annual All Points of the Compass symposium held by Geography & the Environment).

These activities require the time and resources that could be provided by dedicated BAPA faculty working with a BAPA student organization.

### *Administrative Staff Support and Resources*

The BAPA benefits from the services of the PAJ staff, one of whom is assigned to the program. We encourage the Division, College, and University to address the following challenges identified by the staff:

- the need for ongoing training and support regarding university software,
- more scheduling flexibility, such as two virtual workdays per week instead of one,
- more space for storage, and
- technology upgrades (like “better headsets”).