

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Public Administration, B.A. & Public Administration, M.P.A

The 2024-2025 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for the Public Administration BA and MPA programs in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) concluded with a culmination meeting on March 6, 2026. The MPA program is accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) and submitted accreditation materials in lieu of PPR documents.

The following people attended the meeting: Amir Dabirian (Provost), Jessica Stern (Dean), Gabriela Nunez (Associate Dean), Phillip Kopp (Chair), David Adams (Program Coordinator), Sean Walker (Deputy Provost), Greg Childers (Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Studies and General Education, AVPUSGE), Aimee Nelson (Executive Director for Graduate Studies, EDGS), and Su Swarat (Senior AVP for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, SAVPIEP).

The Provost congratulated the programs for successfully completing the PPR and the accreditation process. The Chair commended the Program Coordinator leading these efforts. The following specific accomplishments were highlighted during the PPR process:

For the BA program:

- The program's mission aligns with the university's mission; The program provides students with opportunities to engage and develop skills needed for careers in both public and nonprofit sectors, with a strong emphasis on public service.
- The faculty are highly dedicated and engaged in both scholarly activities and their classroom pedagogical practices, as evidenced by their involvement in research, including collaborations with students on publications and the ongoing development of teaching and curriculum.
- Students feel well-supported and engaged in the program, resulting in positive experiences and strong graduation rates. One highlight is the DC Scholars program, which is not only a signature program for the department but also the university.
- The program and its faculty maintain a relevant curriculum, ensuring that interdisciplinary approaches and diversity, equity, and inclusive values are integrated throughout the coursework. Other notable changes include updates to the public policy minor and the planned addition of courses in public finance and organizational theory.
- The program has a strong assessment practice with evidence of student learning; faculty engage in continuous improvement as seen in updates to pedagogical practices, such as the development of a comprehensive style guide.

For the MPA program:

- The program offers a comprehensive approach to public administration education that combines research with professional practice, providing students with opportunities to engage with public service concepts and techniques in preparation for their careers.
- The program embraces critical public service values that serve as guiding principles for students as they prepare for careers in public service, including democratic ideals, accountability and transparency, social equity and justice, and diversity.
- Faculty and students continually contribute to and engage in the field of public service, as evidenced by their publications in leading academic journals and their involvement in impactful community projects.

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- The program is dedicated to the continuous improvement of the curriculum, ensuring the inclusion of emerging trends in public service and equipping students with relevant, contemporary knowledge.
- The program utilizes both direct and indirect assessment, gathering information from students, faculty, alumni, and employers to gauge the program's impact and students' learning.

Major recommendations and issues raised through the PPR process were discussed as follows:

For the BA program:

1. Program identity:

- The external reviewers recommended the BA program to further define the program's identity, distinguish from the graduate program, and identify a "faculty champion" to lead this effort (i.e., coordinating initiatives that maintain the BA identity).
- The Program Coordinator reported that this effort is going well. The program now has an undergraduate coordinator that leads the development of the BA program identity. The student organization is organizing events connecting students with alumni. The advisory board also added undergraduate and graduate student members to help guide the efforts of fostering a collective sense of belonging yet maintaining distinctive identities for the two programs.

2. Curriculum improvement:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to consider both curricular and administrative program changes, such as adopting a PA-focused catalog prefix, creating a capstone course, or developing certificate programs.
- The Chair stated that after careful consideration, the department determined that a PA prefix could be detrimental to the department at this point.
- The Program Coordinator reported that the new undergraduate course for PA students on budgeting helps contribute to their sense of belonging. Additional curricular changes are also being planned, including a new organizational development course, which will enhance the curriculum. The program is also exploring the potential of transforming the internship course into a capstone experience.

3. Student advising:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to consider ways to strengthen program advising, such as identifying a dedicated faculty advisor and collaborating with generalist advisors to ensure that students receive relevant advising and reduce the number of general questions for staff.
- The Chair stated that the program has a tandem advisor and the undergraduate coordinator also takes on advising responsibilities; The combination of both seems to be working well.

4. Student outreach and recruitment:

- The PPR process raised the need to strengthen outreach efforts to increase enrollment of both undergraduate majors and Public Policy minors.

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- The Dean stated that this is a major focus for the college, which provides every department with potential student list and outreach message templates to support their outreach efforts.
- The Program Coordinator acknowledged the need and expressed the desire to possibly reduce the required units for the minor (to 12-15 units) as a way to encourage enrollment.
- The Chair reported that recruitment is now included in the responsibilities of all roles receiving assigned time.

5. Faculty and staff hiring:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to work with the Dean's Office to resolve tenure-line challenges (i.e., retiring faculty) and ensure students receive the necessary opportunities to take multiple courses with the same faculty member.
 - o The Dean reported that a new hire is taking place.
 - o The Chair stated that the program will need a tenure-line faculty member in the area of finance in the near future.
 - o The Provost suggested resolving the issue of staffing multiple courses with the same faculty member through scheduling.
 - The Program Coordinator stated that the challenge is that many courses cover specialized topics that require different faculty.
 - The Chair suggested the program to look into having a tenure/tenure-track faculty member teach one of the introductory foundational courses, which will create opportunities for students to have this faculty member again since they will teach another major course later.
- The external reviewers also recommended the program to receive additional staff resources to support increasing administrative demands.
 - o The Dean reported that an additional staff member was hired for the department, and further mentoring and professional development is needed to help grow the staff's role.

6. Faculty professional development:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to work with the Dean's Office to identify support for faculty professional development activities, such as conferences and a faculty retreat.
- The Dean acknowledged the need and reported that the program now receives more funding than the normal allotment to support attendance to two NASPAA conferences.

For the MPA program:

1. Program mission and value alignment:

- NASPAA recommended the program to continue to review its mission, values, and strategic plan to ensure alignment with program components, discipline values, and NASPAA accreditation standards.
- The Program Coordinator acknowledged the need and reported that he is working on it. Specifically, the MPA program now has new mission and values; The next step is to develop and integrate new student learning outcomes to align with them.

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2. DEI integration:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to continue implementing the program's DEI plan and goals, such as establishing more inclusive hiring committees, developing support systems for underrepresented groups, and assessing the impact of DEI efforts.
- The Program Coordinator reported that this effort is underway. Progress includes a diverse hiring committee and rich applicant pool, the hiring focus on diverse human resources, and the integration of DEI into the program's strategic plan. The DEI committee will assess the impact this spring and make adjustment in the fall.

3. Timely graduation:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to continue to enhance student support services to decrease time to graduation by offering tailored advising support, monitoring and addressing student needs, developing guidelines for faculty when advising students, and offering a student orientation.
- The Program Coordinator concurred and reported that several strategies are in place to address this issue – completed course rotation until 2030 to help students plan their path to graduation; in-person orientation to engage not only the students but also their family and alumni; and mid-semester check-in to ensure students are on track.
- The Chair stated that students are advised by both their faculty advisor and the Program Coordinator. The program is working to improve notetaking for these advising sessions.

4. Alumni engagement:

- The external reviewers recommended the program to consider expanding alumni engagement efforts through monthly communications, additional networking events, and the development of an alumni mentorship program.
- The Program Coordinator reported that the program sends a newsletter every semester to the alumni, which has received positive feedback and generated interest in alumni mentoring.
- The Program Coordinator expressed the concern that sustaining an alumni mentoring program requires more logistical support. The Dean recommended the program to collaborate with the college's Passage to the Future program for support.

5. Student space:

- The PPR process raised the need for a graduate student lounge for the MPA students to build community.
- The Chair offered the idea of "hoteling" lecturer offices, which would open up spaces for a MPA student lounge. The Dean welcomed the idea and encouraged the program to work with the college on it.
- The Program Coordinator stated that competition among MPA programs is fierce. Having a community space could be helpful with student recruitment, especially given the program's strength – recognized both by the population it serves and by NASPAA – is that it is an in-person program.

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The Provost concluded the meeting by thanking the department and program leadership. The Dean expressed gratitude to the Chair and the Program Coordinator for their hard work in changing the curriculum and the department culture.