

MEMORANDUM

TO: David Adams
Associate Professor
California State University, Fullerton

CC: Amir Dabirian
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
California State University, Fullerton

FROM: Gloria J. Billingsley, Chair
Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

DATE: July 12, 2024

SUBJECT: NASPAA Accreditation Review

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) has completed its review of the Master of Public Administration program at California State University, Fullerton and has voted to reaccredit your program for one year. On behalf of COPRA, I want to express our appreciation for your participation and commitment throughout the accreditation cycle. We recognize your efforts in reviewing your program mission and accomplishments and participating in the peer review process. By pursuing accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education.

The Commission has determined that your program may have specific non-conformities with the 2019 NASPAA [Standards](#) for Professional Master's Degree Programs due to lack of conclusive evidence available at the time of review (Section 12.7.2 of NASPAA's [Peer Review and Accreditation Policy and Procedures](#)). In the Commission's judgment, these concerns, detailed in the enclosed report, could be clarified and resolved within one academic year. As such, your program's accreditation is extended through August 31, 2025, contingent on continued participation in the review process. In order to maintain accreditation and extend the reaccreditation term beyond one year, the program must provide information to demonstrate substantial conformance with the standards detailed in the enclosed report.

The Commission works to ensure a fair and consistent review for all programs who apply for accreditation. The review process is holistic, considering many factors when evaluating each Self-Study Report, Interim Report response, Site Visit Report, Site Visit Report response, and Program Final Response. I urge you to speak to your COPRA liaison, Lori Brainard (brainard@email.gwu.edu), about the Commission's review, decision, and your next steps. I would also be happy to answer any questions you have about this decision via email at gloria.j.billingsley@jsums.edu.

We look forward to your clarifications and hope to seek resolution over the upcoming year.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gloria J. Billingsley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Warmly,".

Gloria J. Billingsley, Chair
Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

**Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
One-Year Reaccreditation Report**

**Master of Public Administration
California State University, Fullerton
July 12, 2024**

Item 1: Standard 1.1 – Mission Statement

Standard 1.1 states, “The program will have a statement of mission that guides performance expectations and their evaluation, including:

- its purpose and public service values, given the program’s particular emphasis on public service,
- the population of students, employers, and professionals the program intends to serve, and
- the contributions it intends to produce to advance the knowledge, research, and practice of public service.”

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested additional information regarding why the mission statement was not revised despite stakeholders proposing alterations and amendments. The Commission stated, “Why was the decision to keep the current version at sole discretion of the program’s faculty? The Site Visit Team should explore this item with the program.”

In its response to the Interim Report, the program stated,

“The decision to retain our current mission statement was not taken lightly. It was based on a consensus that, at the time, it sufficiently encapsulated our core values and goals, particularly our commitment to ethical leadership, social equity, and diversity in public service. We recognize, however, the importance of having a mission statement that dynamically reflects the evolving landscape of public administration education.

As part of our upcoming strategic planning activities, we are committed to a thorough and inclusive review of our current mission statement. This process will actively involve faculty, students, alumni, and employers, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered. Our objective is to critically assess whether our mission statement continues to effectively represent our core values and goals in the evolving field of public administration. Depending on the outcomes of this review, we may either reaffirm our commitment to the current mission statement or develop a revised version that more accurately reflects the current and future needs of our program and stakeholders.”

The Site Visit Team stated in its report, “In addition to reviewing the program's response to the Interim Report, the Site Visit Team (hereafter SVT) had interviews with divisional chair, program coordinator, MPA faculty, staff, alumni, and stakeholders. Our discussions indicated that all parties had a strong commitment to participate in the process of developing and refining the mission statement and that the mission statement review remains an ongoing process. Last year, the Advisory Board was invited to participate, yet the feedback was mainly on statement wording and format (wordsmithing) in lieu of content. In response to COPRA's request, faculty members have been engaged in discussions about the MPA's mission statement since last February and the process remains active. However, the Division of Politics, Administration, and Justice (of which the MPA program is a part) is currently undergoing

structural changes and with that change, efforts are expected to align the MPA program's mission statement with the eventual divisional statement. There is consensus that more efforts will be dedicated to examining the mission statement from both faculty members and the advisory board. The administrative leaders all showed support for such future efforts. Awareness has been developed and the program director expressed strong commitment to involving all stakeholders to further improve the mission statement.”

In its Program Final Response, the program outlined the following plans, “The program will begin a strategic planning process in the fall of 2024 that involves faculty, staff, students, alumni, and our advisory board in various ways. The program will also engage in a review of the mission statement as part of this process, aligning its strategic planning process with the recently adopted university strategic plan and the college’s developing strategic plan. Much of this work will place the program well ahead of universal academic program alignment with the university’s strategic plan. The program will have a faculty retreat in the fall of 2024 to discuss the strategic planning process and the program’s mission and goals, as well as engage in a program performance review process of the undergraduate Public Administration program.”

Based on a review of the documentation, the program is in the process of undergoing a full mission review. The Commission understands that this will be carried out in the strategic planning process that is set to commence in Fall 2024.

Prior to the final accreditation decision in Summer 2025, the Commission expects the program to provide adequate evidence to support that it has engaged in and completed a comprehensive mission review process as part of the program’s upcoming strategic planning activities. Since the program intends to undertake a more extensive mission review process, it is important that the program update COPRA of its progress. COPRA will seek an update on specific strategies, goals, and plans related to strategic planning and mission statement revision. The Commission will also expect the inclusion of all stakeholders and on the decision-making about the mission statement. In addition, the Commission will seek updates on the Division's ongoing structural changes and how that process is impacting the programs efforts.

Item 2: Standard 3.2 – Faculty Diversity

Standard 3.2 states, “The program will promote equity, diversity, and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, retention, and support of faculty members.”

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested additional information on evidence of a DEI plan and DEI-related measures regarding faculty, as well as progress related to these measures. The Commission further stated, “The Site Visit Team will be responsible for reviewing the program’s evidence related to the DEI plan. COPRA expects a diversity, equity and inclusion plan that links mission-based goals to measurable outcomes. The program should provide evidence regarding programmatic efforts to promote diversity, equity and a climate of inclusiveness, specifically demonstrable evidence of good practice, a framework for evaluating DEI efforts, and the connection to the program’s mission and objectives.”

In its response to the Interim Report, the program outlined its DEI committee initiatives, alignment with the university's strategic goals, and future plans of developing a formal DEI plan. Attached to the response the program also provided a proposal for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives.

The Site Visit Team stated in its report, "The Site Visit Team met with administrators and faculty and verified the program response above. The program does have connections to minority serving institutions, has a recruitment plan which is required by the university, and they put together a very extensive list that resulted in a very diverse pool. Nevertheless, although all the final candidates were strong, they hired a white male because they felt that the characteristics that he brought to the table were more competitive than the others. They noted that it was a very close call because the top three candidates were all excellent. The candidates that were not selected were Asian females. The program does not have a current functioning diversity plan either for faculty or students of for the program. They do, however, have a proposed plan that they share with us and COPRA and are working to implement it this fall semester. The SVT feels that despite not hiring a minority candidate this time, that the program does have a good solid foundation on DEI type issues, has a good Diversity plan, and they expect to make a minority hire in the near future."

The Site Visit Team further noted,

"The SVT found that there was not a climate of inclusiveness for women in the program. We spoke with both women faculty, independently of the full faculty, and corroborated this finding. ... The Program coordinator is aware of the situation and finds it a stumbling block for the program. He said: 'The program can't grow unless the problem is address.' There appears to be an unconscious bias toward women in PA and political science. ... The Site Visit team is very concerned with the program and department environmental culture with respect to women, gender equity, and a climate of inclusiveness. Unfortunately, this situation is also affecting student advising."

In its Program Final Response, the program stated, "Since the site visit, the program and Division have engaged in a Division-wide effort to make hiring committees more diverse and inclusive. The program will follow the steps outlined in its diversity initiative for upcoming hires." The program further stated, "There is a Division-wide effort to address inclusivity and climate issues. Since the site visit, the Chair has appointed a senior female-identifying faculty member to the position of Vice Chair. The program has welcomed a female-identifying full-time faculty member after retreating from an administrative position."

Based on a review of the documentation, the program has not yet provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that a formal DEI plan is currently in place. However, the Commission acknowledges that the program has a preliminary plan and timeline. As the program works on the development and implementation of its formal plan the Commission encourages the program to think of the following questions: What are the specific goals for the planning process? What efforts is the program undertaking to meet these goals? Is the program meeting those goals? As outlined in the 2019 Self-Study Instructions, the Commission requests a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan, as defined in page 37: A written planning document which provides 1) substantial evidence regarding programmatic efforts to promote diversity, equity and a climate of inclusiveness, 2) specifically demonstrable evidence of good practice, 3) a framework for evaluating DEI efforts, and 4) the connection to the program's mission and objectives. A diversity, equity and inclusion plan should link mission-based goals to measurable outcomes.

Secondly, the Site Visit Team raised an additional concern about the climate of inclusiveness for women faculty. The Commission recognizes that the program has increased *representation* of women identifying faculty, but the program's most recent communication does not address the climate issue. In the program's future reports to COPRA it should share information on the specific strategies, goals and techniques used in addressing the climate issue as well as the actual climate as those strategies take place. This is of importance to the Commission because inclusion (or lack thereof) has the potential to affect faculty members' mental well-being, promotion and tenure efforts and outcomes, and the student experience.

Prior to the final accreditation decision in Summer 2025, the Commission expects to see evidence of 1) significant progress towards the finalization and implementation of the program's DEI plan and 2) specific efforts toward promoting an inclusive environment for all faculty members, with a particular emphasis on women faculty. COPRA will expect an update on the program's efforts and progress against the plan, and in addressing the faculty climate in the program's next report to the Commission.

Item 3: Standard 4.3 – Support for Students

Standard 4.3 states, "The program will ensure the availability of support services, such as curriculum advising, internship placement and supervision, career counseling, and job placement assistance to enable students to progress in careers in public service."

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested additional information on support for students to ensure the persisting to graduation gap does not continue. The Commission further stated, "Additionally, the Commission recognizes that the program has difficulty gaining access to employment information for graduates and program alumni. COPRA seeks additional information regarding the program's plan to close the gap in program alumni employment data in the future. The Site Visit Team should discuss these items with the program."

In its response to the Interim Report, the program stated, "In response to COPRA's concerns regarding Standard 4.3, our program has undertaken significant measures to enhance student support services, streamline administrative processes, and improve alumni tracking and engagement." The program then went on to outline: enhancements in information accessibility and curricular changes, improvements in advising and registration, orientation and continuous engagement alumni tracking, and future commitment.

The Site Visit Team stated in its report,

"The Site Visit Team met with students and was extremely impressed with the quality of students the program admits and mentors through the program. The SVT did ask about the program's response to the Interim report, and we were able to see that programmatic changes have been made to ensure students are receiving the supports they need. The program might need to make some changes for the program to continue to grow. Nevertheless, in the short term it is somewhat of a concern. For instance, some of the student comments were:

- The Alumni Network is lacking, should build it as asset for the program to build connections and highlight of the program.
- Need to have more alumni mixers where students can reach 2nd year students and alumni.
- MPA class rotation was just updated yet students did not receive the email informing them of the change. Some students had to pay for an extra class to graduate.
- Advising - faculty do not respond to emails Dr. Adams does, however.
- Advising - experience was cold and intimidating.
- The program could have a stronger local government focus including counties.
- Not all instructors notify the bookstore of required texts for their course.”

In its Program Final Response, the program outlined plans on how to address the areas for improvement in developing an alumni network and academic advising. The program also indicated that since the site visit: 1) The role of faculty advisor has cycled to a different full-time faculty member. 2) With the guidance of the dean’s office, the program will develop guidelines for faculty advising and support for students, including attending advising orientation and retreats offered through Graduate Studies.

The Commission recognizes the program's efforts to create new systems to engage in developing an alumni network and enhancing advising support to students. Given that much of the program's response is future-oriented, COPRA would like to monitor the program's efforts on this standard. The Commission will expect to see evidence of engaging alumni, enhanced communication with students, and responsive advising. The Commission also requests that the program provide an update in its next report to COPRA regarding how the new full-time faculty member is fulfilling the faculty advisor role.

Prior to the final accreditation decision in Summer 2025, 1) the Commission expects evidence of implementation of the communication plan, including any improvement of available alumni employment data, and **2) the program is also expected to provide evidence of efforts to improve the areas of student support**, including students' need for an established alumni network, improved communication, and improved advising, which was expressed to the Site Visit Team.

In order to maintain accreditation and extend the reaccreditation term beyond one year, the program must provide information to demonstrate substantial conformance with the standards listed above. **Please submit updated information on the applicable standards to COPRA no later than September 19, 2024.** Should the program choose to not submit a response to the points above, the program’s accreditation will not be extended through August 31, 2025. The program will instead be removed from the Roster of Accredited Programs, effective September 1, 2024.

The program should submit the requested information in the [NASPAA Data Center](#) using the Accreditation Maintenance Report (within the Annual Data Report form). The program should respond to the concerns above and provide the annual data required of accredited programs (with respect to faculty, student admissions, graduation rates, and employment). If the program wishes, it may opt to also upload a full text response to the decision letter as an attachment at the end of the report form (question 18). At its Fall Meeting in October 2024, the Commission will make a final determination whether the program should move forward with a second site visit. In addition to the September response, COPRA requests that all final updates and responses related to accreditation be submitted by **May 18, 2025**, in a Program Final Response, ahead of the Commission’s 2025 Summer Decision Meeting.

COPRA looks forward to working with you in the coming year. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Gloria Billingsley via email at gloria.j.billingsley@jsums.edu. You may also direct questions to Fabiola Bachinelo, Interim Chief Accreditation Officer at bachinelo@naspaa.org.

November 13, 2024

David Adams
Associate Professor of Public Administration
California State University, Fullerton

Dear Professor Adams,

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) has completed its review of your program's one-year reaccreditation decision letter response. We appreciate your efforts in responding to questions outlined in the July 2024 decision letter, your efforts reviewing program mission and accomplishments, and hope that this review has been beneficial to your program.

Based on a review of your response, the Commission recommends that the program schedule a follow-up site visit. The program should also update the Commission on the concerns described in the Interim Report and provide evidence of progress made towards implementation before COPRA's June 2025 decision meeting. For each program in the 2024-2025 Cohort, the COPRA initial examination raises questions or concerns about the conformity of programs with the [NASPAA Accreditation Standards](#). The questions or concerns specific to your program are outlined in the attached Interim Report. Please read this report carefully so that you can respond to each of the points listed.

To facilitate the on-the-ground review, a Site Visit Team will be appointed. In visiting your program, the Site Visit Team will review your program mission and meet with program stakeholders, including faculty, students, alumni, and university administrators, as well as review pertinent program documents, including those related to program evaluation and student assessment. The team will be directed to address the items listed in the Interim Report and provide evidence to confirm and/or clarify information provided in the Self-Study Report. To prepare, please review the Site Visit Manual and other helpful resources on the [NASPAA website](#).

NASPAA Staff will contact your program shortly to begin the process of appointing your site visit team. Your site visit dates should be finalized no later than January 15, 2025.

A member of the Commission, Lori Brainard, has been designated to serve as liaison to your program. I urge you to contact your liaison via email at brainard@gwu.edu to discuss any questions and concerns raised in the Interim Report and to answer any questions you may have about the process. As Chair of COPRA, I would also be pleased to respond to your questions about this letter or the review process at angela.eikenberry@uconn.edu.

Please also submit your response to the specific points addressed in the enclosed Interim Report by uploading a single PDF file to the *Documents* tab in the NASPAA Data Center no later than either January 15, 2025, or 30 days before your confirmed site visit start date, whichever is earliest. NASPAA Staff will contact your program shortly to begin the process of appointing your Site Visit Team. Your site visit dates should be determined and confirmed to NASPAA Staff no later than January 15, 2025. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Fabiola Bachinelo, Chief Accreditation Officer, at bachinelo@naspaa.org.

COPRA reiterates the requirement of conformance with Standard 7.1– Communications. **Programs found out of conformance with Standard 7.1 will receive a citation in future reporting until conformance is reached.** More information on the requirements for Standard 7.1 [can be found here](#).

The program should pay particular attention to:

- Standard 7p) Distribution of Placement of Graduates Graduating from the Year Prior to the Data Year (number)
 - Meaning for students who graduated during the 2022-2023 academic year.
- Standard 7r) Completion Rate (percentage of class entering five years prior to data year that graduated within 2 years and 4 years)
 - Meaning for students who entered the program in the 2018-2019 academic year.

This information should be transparent and easily accessible, no more than a couple of clicks away from the program’s homepage.

If you have questions about how to demonstrate conformance with Standard 7.1, please contact Shaun Gabrielli, Accreditation Associate, at gabrielli@naspaa.org.

We look forward to working with you throughout the remainder of the accreditation cycle. Please do not hesitate to contact NASPAA Staff or me if you have any questions.

With warmest regards,



Angela M. Eikenberry, Chair
Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

COMMISSION ON PEER REVIEW AND ACCREDITATION

Accreditation Decision Response Interim Report to the

Master of Public Administration California State University, Fullerton

November 13, 2024

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation has reviewed the Accreditation Decision Response (ADR) to the July 2024 Decision Letter for the Master of Public Administration program at California State University, Fullerton. The Commission requests further information on the following points for its review. When the program proceeds to a site visit, particular attention should be paid to the items listed below. Please relate any responses to the program's specific mission and goals.

Program Mission Statement (as reported in the 2023 SSR):

To prepare our students for a career in public service by providing a core set of competencies anchored in the foundations of scholarly research and professional practice. Our students develop knowledge, skills, and public service values that equip them to be ethical and exceptional leaders in their communities who act with a commitment to public service, democratic values, accountability, social equity, and diversity.

Item 1: Standard 1.1 – Mission Statement

Standard 1.1 states that, "The program will have a statement of mission that guides performance expectations and their evaluation, including

- its purpose and public service values, given the program's particular emphasis on public service,
- the population of students, employers, and professionals the program intends to serve, and
- the contributions it intends to produce to advance the knowledge, research, and practice of public service."

In its response to the July 2024 Decision Letter, the program stated, "We have initiated a comprehensive mission review process aligned with our strategic planning efforts, which actively engages faculty, staff, students, alumni, and our advisory board. On September 20, 2024, we will hold an initial mission and vision planning meeting for faculty to begin drafting mission and vision statements and identifying core values for the program. A smaller group will refine these drafts for further review.

This process will extend to our advisory board, with at least two meetings planned, as well as to current students and alumni through focus groups and surveys. We aim to finalize the mission and vision statements by the end of the fall semester. Aligning program components with these statements will be a key focus throughout the academic year.

Additionally, we are conducting a program review for the Public Administration BA, involving a day-long retreat, self-study, site visit, and administrative review. This departmental review will complement the strategic planning for the MPA program.”

The Commission continues to seek a detailed update on the comprehensive mission review process’s progress, as the program’s initial mission and vision planning meeting (September 20, 2024) was not held until after the Accreditation Decision Response (ADR) was submitted. COPRA seeks an update on the current status of the mission and vision development, including the engagement and participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as the program’s anticipated completion date for the mission revision process.

The Commission noted that the program did not provide any information in its ADR on the ongoing structural changes within the Division of Politics, Administration, and Justice and how that process is impacting the program’s mission revision efforts. COPRA seeks an update on these changes, and how these changes align with the MPA program’s mission statement. The program should discuss these changes with the Site Visit Team.

Item 2: Standard 3.2 – Faculty Diversity

Standard 3.2 states that, “The program will promote equity, diversity, and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, retention, and support of faculty members.”

In its response to the July 2024 Decision Letter, the program stated, “We have integrated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) planning into our strategic planning process to ensure DEI objectives align with the program’s mission and goals, fostering an inclusive climate for students and faculty. Addressing the Commission’s concern about gender inclusiveness among faculty, we have developed strategies to improve the climate in the upcoming academic year.

As outlined in our Proposal for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives, we are focusing on actionable steps such as:

- Enhancing recruitment efforts to attract a diverse pool of candidates, with an emphasis on gender diversity.
- Developing support systems for underrepresented groups, including mentorship programs and professional development opportunities.
- Establishing student and faculty feedback mechanisms to continually assess and improve the inclusiveness of our environment.

We will utilize the university’s resources and partnerships to advance DEI goals, including creating more inclusive hiring committees and supporting initiatives that prioritize diverse faculty recruitment.”

Given that the strategic planning processes began after the submission of the program’s ADR, the Commission requests a comprehensive update on the current status of its DEI plan development, including details on the program’s efforts and progress in this area. Furthermore, while the Commission acknowledges the program’s initiatives to enhance faculty representation and inclusion, COPRA requests specific details regarding these plans and the processes guiding their implementation. The Site Visit Team should review the DEI plan with the program.

Item 3: Standard 4.3 – Support for Students

Standard 4.3 states that, “The program will ensure the availability of support services, such as curriculum advising, internship placement and supervision, career counseling, and job placement assistance to enable students to progress in careers in public service.”

In its response to the July 2024 Decision Letter, the program stated, “In response to COPRA’s feedback, we are enhancing student support services, particularly advising and alumni engagement. We successfully conducted the fall orientation for incoming students, held in person for the first time since the pandemic. New students were invited to bring a family member or friend and engaged with faculty, current students, and alumni to discuss program details and support systems.

The program director and advisor is pursuing a Certificate in Supporting Graduate Students of Color through the Project upGRADS program and has and will continue to attend relevant training to improve advising for our diverse student body. We plan to survey students to assess their needs and preferences for advising and support services.

We are also considering several ideas as we expand our alumni engagement efforts, including:

- Distributing a semesterly newsletter.
- Hosting additional alumni networking events.
- Inviting alumni as guest speakers.
- Developing an alumni mentorship program.
- Continuing our annual Alumni of the Year Award.
- Featuring alumni spotlights on our website.

These initiatives aim to strengthen our community and provide enhanced support to our students.”

The program’s ADR does not provide evidence of implementation of its communication plan, much of which is still in the consideration process. As the ADR largely focuses on future-oriented ideas, the Commission requests specific updates on the implementation of the program’s communication plan, including evidence of engaging alumni, enhanced communication with students, and responsive advising.

As stated in the Decision Letter, prior to the final accreditation decision in Summer 2025, the Commission expects: 1) evidence of implementation of the communication plan, including any improvement of available alumni employment data, and 2) evidence of efforts to improve the areas of student support, including students’ need for an established alumni network, improved communication, and improved advising. The Site Visit Team should discuss these items with the program.

General reminders for all programs undergoing review:

The Site Visit Team will be responsible for reviewing the program’s evidence related to a written diversity equity and inclusion plan that links mission-based goals to measurable outcomes. The program should provide evidence regarding programmatic efforts to promote diversity, equity, and a climate of inclusiveness, specifically demonstrable evidence of good practice, a framework for evaluating DEI efforts, and the connection to the program’s mission and objectives.

The Site Visit Team will also be responsible for reviewing the program's evidence related to student learning assessment. For the 2024-2025 Cohort, COPRA expects evidence of program completion of one full cycle of assessment for student learning outcomes in at least three of the universal competency domains. A "full cycle of assessment" means defining a student learning outcome, gathering evidence of learning, analyzing the evidence, and using the analysis to make programmatic decisions ([COPRA Policy Statement, November 1, 2023](#)).