

MEMORANDUM

TO: Carissa Slotterback
Dean
University of Pittsburgh

CC: Ann E. Cudd
Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor
University of Pittsburgh

FROM: Domonic Bearfield, Chair
Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

DATE: July 27, 2022

SUBJECT: NASPAA Accreditation Review

On behalf of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that the Commission found your Master of Public Administration program to be in substantial conformity with NASPAA Standards, subject to the monitoring provisions outlined in the enclosed report. Your program is accredited through August 31, 2029 and will be included on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs.

Please accept the Commission's congratulations on the accreditation of your program. By pursuing and achieving accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education. You are part of the global community of over 200 accredited graduate programs in public service.

The Commission commends the Program on its diversity, equity and inclusion plan. Specifically, the Commission applauds GSPIA's operationalization of the plan in the various ways noted by the Site Visit Team as "emergent best practices." The Commission also commends the Program for its broad stakeholder engagement with the idea of the local to global mission, its comprehensive internship system, and its active and engaged Board of Visitors.

Your program is in substantial conformance with the NASPAA Standards. However, the Commission concluded that questions remain about the following Standards:

- Standards 1.2/1.3
- Standard 5.1

Accordingly, COPRA plans to monitor your continued progress annually on these specific standards. The Commission asks that you report your progress on these particular standards each year in your annual accreditation maintenance report. We look forward to receiving your 2021-2022 annual accreditation maintenance report by **November 1, 2022**.

If you have any questions about this decision or NASPAA's accreditation process, I would be happy to answer any questions you have about this decision via email at dbearfield@gwu.edu. Questions about this year's annual report should be directed to copra@naspaa.org.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Domonic Bearfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Domonic Bearfield, Chair
Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

**Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
Report on Monitoring Provisions**

**Master of Public Administration
University of Pittsburgh
July 27, 2022**

Item 1: Standard 1.2 – Performance Expectations / Standard 1.3 – Program Evaluation

Standard 1.2 states, “The program will establish observable program goals, objectives and outcomes, including expectations for student learning, consistent with its mission.”

Standard 1.3 states, “The program will collect, apply and report information about its performance and its operations to guide the evolution of the program’s mission and the program’s design and continuous improvement with respect to standards two through seven.”

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested additional information on the program goals for the MPA. COPRA requested that the Site Visit Team should explore how program goals and objectives are linked to the program’s mission and public service values. Additionally, the Commission requested that the program provide clarification on whether there were any program evaluative measures specific for the MPA program. COPRA stated, “The Site Visit Team should explore with the program how the defined performance goals, measures of outcomes, and programmatic improvements align with its mission and allow for systematic program self-evaluation and strategic management of resources.”

In its Interim Report Response, the program indicated that although there are some differences in how GSPIA evaluates each of its degree programs, it is accurate to say that most of GSPIA’s goals for its students are universal and do not vary by program. The program stated,

Following from the SSR and the logic model, suffice to say (in brief), GSPIA’s goals include, among other things:

- Meaningful employment of its students post-graduation, as measured by employment surveys.
- Collaborative student-faculty research, as measured by participation in student-faculty working groups and research projects.
- Engagement with the community, as measured by the diversity of its student body, public attendance at conferences/special events, faculty media appearances, the number of nonprofit organizations participating in GSPIA’s nonprofit clinic, etc.

Regarding evaluation criteria, the program reported, “GSPIA uses multiple tools to self-evaluate its programs. These include: student and alumni surveys conducted annually at regular intervals, internship supervisor evaluations and student self-evaluations, annual assessment reports of the Student Learning Outcomes committee, and many other tools highlighted in detail in the SSR (see Standards 1 and 5). Many of these assessment tools are used in common across all three degree programs. ... That said, there are situations in which GSPIA does use different evaluative criteria for the individual degrees. This takes place most notably in the context of Student Learning Outcome (SLO) Assessment.”

The Site Visit Team stated in its report,

The SVT reviewed governing documents and interviewed faculty, staff, and stakeholders. Evidence suggests that the substantive values and operational values outlined in the SSR supplemental narrative drive the overall performance expectations for the GSPIA. Governing documents suggest that these performance expectations help contribute to programmatic performance school-wide and help to facilitate programmatic performance among and between programs, but are not necessarily differentiated by program. However, the SVT was unable to verify any MPA-specific program goals outside of the MPA's program's defined section 5.1 student learning objectives (SLOs).

The Site Visit Team further stated, "After conversations with GSPIA leadership, the SVT has confidence that the GSPIA is examining ways to differentiate its MPA degree (either through mission or through specific mission-related goals and objectives) through its current strategic planning and mission review efforts."

In relation to program evaluation, the Site Visit Report indicated, "The SVT was unable to verify MPA program-specific evaluation criteria beyond the four MPA-specific student learning objectives."

In upcoming annual maintenance reports, the Commission requests that the Program further clarify its mission-related goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria specific to the MPA program, which should include, but not be limited to, competencies and/or student learning outcomes. The Commission seeks evidence that the program has developed clear goals and objectives that are linked to its mission and public service values and have measurable outcomes. The program must provide evidence of the development and implementation of program goals that extend beyond student learning and reflect the program's commitment to alumni, staff, faculty, employers, community leaders and partner organizations consistent with the program's mission.

Item 2: Standard 5 – Universal Required Competencies

Standard 5.1 states, "As the basis for its curriculum, the program will adopt a set of required competencies determined by its mission and public service values. The required competencies will include five domains: the ability:

- to lead and manage in the public interest;
- to participate in, and contribute to, the policy process;
- to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make evidence-informed decisions in a complex and dynamic environment;
- to articulate, apply, and advance a public service perspective;
- to communicate and interact productively and in culturally responsive ways with a diverse and changing workforce and society at large."

In the Interim Report, the Commission stated,

After its review of the Self-Study, it remains unclear to the Commission how each of the Universal Required Competencies (URC) are planned to be measured. While the Assessment Plan lists School-wide universal competencies and degree-program specific competencies, it does not offer a crosswalk of how each evaluative measure relates to each competency domain. Although the program does embed some of the competencies in its discussion of evaluation work already done, the Commission is interested in understanding the program's analysis procedures. The Commission's review of the SSR also indicates different core courses for each of the programs seeking reaccreditation. The data on assessment implies different Student Learning Objectives (SLO) for each program too, but the individual SLOs are not laid out in relation to the URCs.

The Commission requests that the program lay out the connections between the URCs and program-specific competencies, and then connect how and where each is measured across the programs' curricula.

The Site Visit Team should discuss the assessment plan with the program. The Site Visit Team will be responsible for reviewing the program's evidence related to student learning assessment.

In its Interim Report Response, the program stated, "The URCs are embedded very explicitly in many of the evaluation tools that GSPIA uses. These include the alumni survey, internship supervisor evaluation, rubrics for assessing Student Learning Outcomes, and others discussed in the SSR. ... In 2017 and 2018, these evaluations were used as the principle data source for the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee's annual assessment reports." The program then provided four tables outlining how the URCs map to the evaluation criteria and outlining the program-specific learning competencies that were included in the Self Study Report.

The Site Visit Team noted in its report, "MPA assessment is conducted from artifacts produced in the MPA foundations course (PIA 2020: Introduction to Public Affairs). The SVT team were not provided with artifacts from this course and it appears the last time the four MPA program specific criteria were assessed was in 2015. It is unclear to what extent the results of the MPA assessment were used to 'close the loop' in either the MPA curriculum or program management. Additionally, MPA faculty were unsure of who oversaw assessment when asked by the SVT."

In its Program Final Response, the program indicated recognition that a more systematic and ongoing review of our curriculum that is closely linked to assessment of student learning objectives of the MPA program is an important step for the school to take. The program then stated, "As such, it is an important priority for the school. To that end, the reconstituted Curriculum Review and Evaluation group will work with the Associate Dean to develop a more regularized, institutionalized assessment framework during the summer and into the next academic year. Over the medium term (next 1-2 years), GSPIA plans to do a curriculum review that covers courses, content, and modes of delivery. In AY 2022-23, GSPIA plans to revise its bylaws."

In upcoming annual maintenance reports, the Commission requests updates on plans to "develop a more regularized, institutionalized assessment framework, as stated in the Program Final Response. Specifically, the Commission requests an assessment plan/framework that shows how each of the MPA Program competencies and student learning outcomes are being evaluated, by what measures, and the frequency of measurement. As noted in the Self-Study Instructions and reiterated by the Site Visit Team,

assessing each competency only once during a seven-year accreditation cycle would not likely be sufficient to demonstrate conformance for most programs. Secondly, the Commission requests evidence of completion of one full cycle of assessment linked to the Program competencies and student learning outcomes noted in the framework in at least three of the universal competency domains. The Commission seeks demonstrable evidence of how the program used performance data to make programmatic decisions (“closing of the assessment loop”).

Over time, the Commission expects that programs will continue to develop and implement their approach to strategic program management, including student learning assessment, and that this maturation will be evident in the program’s annual accreditation maintenance reports. As the public service field continues to advance and evolve, COPRA seeks to support programs as they strategically pursue their missions, graduate leaders in public service, and achieve excellence in education.

Please note that the Commission will review each of your annual accreditation maintenance reports to determine ongoing conformity with NASPAA Standards, including progress in the areas noted above. Your annual reports and COPRA’s actions in response to your reports will become a permanent part of your record for your next accreditation review. COPRA’s acceptance of the Program’s annual reports is contingent on receiving satisfactory responses on the issues noted. If the program does not submit the information requested regarding the monitored standards in annual reports, the Commission may require the program to re-enter the accreditation cycle with an updated Self Study Report. Monitoring provisions remain in effect and must be addressed each year until the program is notified by COPRA that the monitoring has been removed.

The Commission also wishes to reemphasize its commitment to the transparency and accountability central to Standard 7.1 – Communications. Accredited programs are expected to consistently, accurately, and publicly provide their stakeholders with relevant information about the program and its student learning outcomes, to include graduation rates and employment placement. Programs found out of conformance at the annual report review each fall will be expected to resolve any nonconformities immediately upon notification, at the risk of COPRA alerting the university provost and pulling the program into an early reaccreditation review.

We look forward to receiving your annual accreditation maintenance report by **November 1, 2022**. Questions about this year’s annual report should be directed to copra@naspaa.org.

Certificate of Accreditation

THE COMMISSION ON PEER REVIEW AND ACCREDITATION OF THE
NETWORK OF SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC POLICY, AFFAIRS, AND
ADMINISTRATION

accredits

Master of Public Administration
University of Pittsburgh



Domonic A. Bearfield
COPRA Chair

Through the date of

August 31, 2029



Martha Bohrt
Chief Accreditation Officer