

Submission date: 10 February 2020

Program/s in this review: Public Administration MPA

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): _____

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage

Members of the program review committee:

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1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role

The Department of Public Administration administers the Master of Public Administration (MPA). The MPA Program has a long history at UAA, which shows it to be an integral part of the tradition and identity of the university. It originated in 1976, and was offered by the division of economics, business and public administration with the Senior College at UAA. In the period between 1977-1985, the MPA was further developed; the degree requirement was raised to 36 credits, and various areas of emphases were added. In the period between 1985-1992, the MPA program became affiliated with the School of Business and Public Affairs, but then became part of the newly constituted School of Public Affairs. In 1997, under a reorganization plan, the School of Business and the School of Public Affairs merged to form the College of Business and Public Policy.

The public and non-profit orientation of the Department of Public Administration makes it an essential element of the College of Business and Public Policy Mission: The College of Business and Public Policy (CBPP) serves Alaska and global communities by training and educating the work force; promoting excellence in public, private and non-profit management and related business disciplines; providing professional assistance to public, private and nonprofit organizations; and conducting basic, applied and pedagogical research. The Department of Public Administration's mission is also congruent with UAA's mission to "discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement, and creative expression" and to serve "the higher education needs of the state, its communities, and its diverse peoples."

Research into local government demands indicate that pending retirements and professionalization of city management indicate a strong demand for qualified administrators. When combined with the needs of state agencies, federal offices, military personnel, and tribal governance, Alaska has a substantial demand for the MPA program. Previous studies by CBPP and MPA faculty suggest that program enrollment has not successfully penetrated the potential market for degree seekers (MPA Program Extended Review, 2013). Updated labor demand projections for Alaska do not show a strong increase in state and local government jobs, but given flat enrollment in the MPA since 2000, the program enrollment has not kept pace with increases since circa 2008 (there remains strong growth in healthcare administration through 2026) (Source: State of Alaska Industry Employment Projections, 2016-2026). Specific skill sets identified by the program and lacking elsewhere in Alaska include policy data analytics, energy and transport policy, and Alaska Native administration (e.g. ANCs).

Most MPA students are working professionals in federal, state or municipal agencies; or village or tribal native non-profits or corporations; or local or statewide businesses or non-profits. MPA students come from diverse ethnic and social background backgrounds. They range in age from 22 to 65. A majority of the students come from Anchorage; although the program attracts students from communities across the State as well as throughout the United States and the world. The UAA MPA program offers a blend of both academic and professional perspectives that provides the student with a practical orientation in the theories, values, and analytical and managerial skills important to success in public life. It is specifically designed to address the educational needs of active students who work full-time and are seeking to develop the leadership and analytical tools needed to attain higher leadership positions within their organizations. The curriculum teaches tools, techniques, and provides insights that build strong administrative and public policy development capacity. It offers opportunities for applied learning with a focus that is particularly relevant to Alaskan public policy and

administration. The six core classes in the MPA curriculum are typically full and each semester brings a new cohort group of graduates. There is also continued interest on the part of the students and faculty in expanding the program emphasis areas to include Community Planning and Development, and Tribal and Nonprofit Management.

2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend)

The MPA program has not shown significant change in the years 2013-2019 in terms of enrollment and instruction. As a small department, the MPA was supported by two full-time faculty, one of which left in 2019. Some teaching responsibilities were directed to research faculty from ISER, two of which in AY2019-20 taught one course each for the program. The MPA program was identified within the Strategic Pathways report to support and develop a new masters of public policy (MPP), including hiring of a new MPA/MPP director. The director was hired in summer 2019, at the same time that the department lost a member of term faculty. There is therefore to be expected a transition period where the new program (if and when approved by the BOR) introduces new courses, aligns with the MPA, and in the meantime is supported by only one full-time faculty, with additional courses offered by the director, ISER faculty, and when necessary adjuncts.

Data Caveats

The data on student credit hours (SCH) understate the SCH generated by PADM, since one of the six MPA core classes is taught under the ECON course prefix. For example, Economics & Public Policy (ECON 625) is offered every fall semester and generates additional credit hours. Some related courses are also taught under the BA prefix when taken at the 400-level, particularly special topics courses when first offered in the curriculum (e.g. Alaska Policy Frontiers by Hensley and Arctic Security by Briggs).

The number of majors counts only those students who have been regularly admitted to the MPA graduate program. These data do not take into consideration the significant number of prospective MPA students who take advantage of University of Alaska policy which allows them to up to take three classes as non-degree seeking students. Analysis of enrollment data by the Department of Public Administration has found that in any semester, non-degree seeking students often account for over 20% of the students taking MPA classes.

The assumption underlying the calculation of FTES (that a full time graduate student will take an average of 24 course credits per year) does not reflect the reality of MPA graduate students. The MPA degree is an applied professional degree. The entire MPA curriculum is offered at night to accommodate the working student who doesn't have time to take 24 credits per year. Department of Public Administration data show that each semester about two-thirds of the students taking MPA courses are enrolled in only one class. And, approximately 30% are enrolled in just two classes.

Efficiency Challenges

One challenge for the MPA has been its use of degree concentrations. While most students elect to focus on policy studies, the existence of 5 concentrations means that certain courses are required for students to graduate, and therefore for the program to offer, yet may have few students demanding each course. Being such a small program, this creates inefficiencies in assigning courses, and the department will be proposing to remove and teach out the degree concentrations. With most students electing to take policy studies, the new MPP program should provide adequate elective choices for such MPA students.

-MPP/MPA joint courses

The institutional costs for the program will also be realigned with the new MPP. The MPP is designed with all MPA/MPP students taking core courses together in the first year, with specialized courses offered in the second year (assuming a full-time student). This means that core courses such as PADM601, 604, and 606 will cover two programs instead of just one,

and that the two programs, combined, offer better instructional efficiencies than should they exist on their own. All core courses are expected to increase enrollment significantly by fall 2020.

Enrollment for the 2013-2019 period was lower than suggested demand from the local region. This program experienced shifting leadership, lacked any coordinated recruitment strategy or social media presence (there are currently two separate Facebook pages for the program, and one outside website not controlled by the department), with enrolled students reporting that they had difficulty finding the program or confirming that it still existed. While this is a negative reflection on the program's past, it also indicates enrollments can be increased with renewed efforts. Enrollment during 2019-2020 has also been affected by instability in the UA system (or perceptions thereof), with prospective students reporting that they are waiting for guarantees of program stability.

3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success

The Master in Public Administration (MPA) curriculum is designed to provide students with specific skills needed for professional careers in public service and administration. Professional competencies are developed in six core courses which develop skills in: Management & Leadership; Economics; Policy design and delivery; Quantitative analysis; Politics & Administration. Mastery of the core coursework is assessed by the MPA Comprehensive Exam. Students are given a week to analyze a case study after which they are tested by the MPA faculty to determine how well they integrate and apply the tools and concepts learned in the core curriculum. After completing the MPA Comprehensive Exam, students take five courses which concentrate on one of the following emphasis areas: Management; Policy; Health Administration or Criminal Justice. The culmination of the MPA experience is the Public Administration Capstone course where students work with a real client organization to examine issues and suggest solutions to management and policy problems. Capstone projects have received consistently positive feedback from clients, which range from small non-profits to US government agencies.

-Future Assessment

Assessment of the MPA program will become systematized and will expand beginning spring 2020, as part of the newly-proposed MPP program and prospects for future NASPAA accreditation. The MPP degree prospectus had laid out a comprehensive matrix for determining how well program goals aligned with student performance and instructional design. The MPA and MPP share most learning outcomes, as these are based upon NASPAA standards, and with MPA and MPP students sharing core courses, extending the proposed assessment structure to the MPA is relatively simple and does not impose additional faculty resource demands. The only significant design difference between the two programs is that the MPA retains a comprehensive exam, while the MPP replaces this exam with an additional term of capstone instruction. The MPA comprehensive exam will remain a key indicator of the assessment process. Given approval of the MPP degree for fall 2020 and related strengthening of the MPA/MPP core, both programs will work toward NASPAA accreditation within the 5-year timeline required by the accrediting agency. Each core learning objective will be focused upon each semester, with specific courses evaluated for student performance and assurance of learning change needs to the course content or design. This three-year rotating focus is common among NASPAA-accredited MPA programs, and specific courses are mapped for linked competencies.

Outside funding efforts

Previous outside funding has been limited to named scholarships, such as the Judith Caminer Award, and local foundations have indicated a reluctance to invest in programs during general instability in the UA system. However, Dr. Briggs has been in discussion with the Ted Stephens Foundation on cooperating with their internship program, in effect designing a pathway for students to progress from undergraduate studies and internships in Juneau, to federal internships/employment and graduate studies with the UAA MPA.

-Visiting scholars

AY20 Expedited Program Review Template
Updated 2-5-2020

The program in the spring of 2020 is sponsoring a series of public presentations and research workshops, including both UAA faculty and visiting scholars. The Tower Endowment has awarded the department with funds to bring a scholar from Ottawa, Canada to UAA, who will be visiting at the same time as experts from the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC and Virginia Tech University. The visiting scholars bring interest in cooperating with the MPA program on areas of environmental and climate policy, Arctic security, and disaster planning and management. In 2019 the Virginia Tech Disaster Resilience and Risk Management program offered to share courses with the UAA MPA program, with VT expressing an interest in having an Arctic partner for its Coastal Hazards program.

-National Science Foundation

Such cooperation would strengthen both course offerings and funding opportunities, and dovetail with UAA becoming a partner (via Briggs as co-PI) in a new NSF award (Navigating the New Arctic RCN) in cooperation with Georgetown University. As part of this NSF project, UAA becomes the lead Arctic partner for a global consortium of experts on climate change and forced migration, including participatory workshops at UAA starting spring 2021. The MPA program will include its students in both research and expert network coordination, beginning with the planned Tower Endowment-sponsored workshop in February, 2020 (which while part of the Chancellor's Working Group on Climate Change, is also a lead-in event for the NSF activities). The NSF grant pays for a portion of Briggs's 12-month contract, and will provide opportunities for MPA students and faculty to study and cooperate with numerous Arctic institutions, from Finland and Sweden to Canada and Norway.

-Special courses

New courses will also be available to MPA students beginning summer 2020. A course on Arctic Security will be available in the summer term (initially taught as BA 490A), designed to attract senior-level undergraduates from the lower 48 states as a feeder to the MPA program. With an emphasis on scenario planning and simulations, the course is both unique and appeals to military studies, policy planning, environmental and energy planning, and business administration. In the fall 2020 new courses will appear in the catalog for both Alaska and Arctic policy studies. These courses were introduced in coordination with the MPP degree proposal, and will be available for all MPA students, particularly those with policy studies concentrations. Collectively, this focus on Alaska and Arctic policy (energy, environment, climate change) and security/disaster planning aligns with UA system priorities, both those expressed in Strategic Pathways, and more recent discussions in Washington, DC. (<https://www.alaska.edu/news/system/president-johnsen-advocates-for-ua-in-washington-dc.php>)

-US Military

The MPA program will also be cooperating with the US Air Force Alaska Command's (ALCOM) Professionalizing Arctic Service Initiative. The program provides extensive orientation for airmen deployed to Alaska, and cooperates with UAF in providing short, intensive courses. The program officers met with Dr. Briggs and agreed that new courses can be designed under the UAA MPA and MPP as part of the USAF program, with the additional benefit of providing a pipeline for new masters degree candidates for junior officers based at JBER. Although funding issues have to be worked out, instruction could begin as early as fall 2020. The MPA program will coordinate with UAF, Arctic Domain Awareness Center (ADAC), and other service commands.

Quality Faculty

The MPA program benefits from a strong core faculty at CBPP and ISER. All required courses for the MPA are taught by PhDs, an uncommon distinction for a professional graduate program in any state. Most of the faculty maintain active and strong research agendas, which help to inform both course content and scholarly networks. Expertise in certain administrative and policy areas are unique to UAA, including energy policy, Alaska Native corporations, education policy, and environmental risk. These competencies cannot be replicated by students taking online courses elsewhere.

4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness

UAA offers a classroom presence for the MPA which caters to the nature of Anchorage as a population, administrative, and military center for the state of Alaska. Many students prefer classroom instruction, particularly in subjects requiring intensive methods, or teamwork exercises that are difficult to replicate online. A 50%+ classroom presence is also required for international students and many military students (such as from JBER). While the UAA MPA program is examining options for more online and hybrid format course delivery, UAA is distinctive for its physical presence not only in the classroom, but with research, public events, and student advising.

The UAA MPA program benefits from sharing resources with other departments and institutes in CBPP, such as Economics, ISER, and overlap with the MBA program and the Alaska Native Business minor. Cooperation and course sharing also exist with the College of Health (MPH) and in the future with the College of Engineering (Project Management). These strengths cannot be replicated with a stand-alone online program.

The UAA MPA program already cooperates with the UA MPA, and they have shared many common course prefixes since 2000. This allows UAA students to take online courses when needed, should the similar course not be offered at UAA in a given term. The UAA program also cooperates with UAF in serving its policy students, especially when certain expertise is unavailable at UAF (e.g. energy policy), and Dr. Briggs will be visiting UAF to further cement cooperation with IARC and similar programs in late February.

5. Summary Analysis

The MPA program at UAA has existed since the early 1970s, and while having had different academic homes during the past five decades, it has had the support of CBPP and ISER. While the program has had static development during the review period, the hiring of a new director in 2019 and rolling out of the new MPP program provide new energy for the MPA and visibility to its strengths. It remains not only a vital source of skills for public managers and policymakers in Alaska, but the face-to-face nature of the program is favored by many students, and legally required for both international and military students. The unique background of Alaska and the Arctic is highlighted in new recruitment strategies, such as bringing students from the Lower 48 who are interested in Arctic security, or providing instruction for local residents who need a degree that addresses local challenges and history (be these Native, military, local city planners, etc).

Moving forward, the program will focus on three areas:

- **Assessment:** Academic assessments will be conducted to ensure that all MPA learning objectives are met, by evaluating matching course content, comprehensive exams, capstone projects, and alumni success and observations. This is beginning in spring 2020, and in fall 2020 will be conducted in coordination with the MPP program and in conjunction with NASPAA accreditation standards. The CBPP dean's office will be kept apprised of progress and assurance of learning outcomes.
- **Recruitment:** The MPA program has lacked any coordinated outreach or recruitment strategy. The program is now establishing new social media accounts (not just Facebook, but Instagram, Twitter), and highlighting events that the program is sponsoring throughout the spring and summer. Alaska will remain the main focus of recruitment, but efforts (such as the summer Arctic security course) will cater to students from the Lower 48 and Hawaii, and international student recruitment will also be a priority.
- **Innovation:** While all NASPAA-aspiring or accredited programs have traditional bases for learning, a priority remains on civic engagement and action. Recognizing that civic engagement does not occur in the classroom, the MPA program will ensure that students in the MPA have innovative ways to both learn and engage with politics and administration. The existing capstone projects should be just that- capstones- for a program and formats where students feel engaged in the world around them (as many already are, professionally). Th NSF workshops, visiting scholars and practitioners, public seminar series, special summer courses, and new-format military instruction, these are examples just from spring 2020. The MPA promises to be much more in the future.

