

March 18, 2004

Dear NASPAA Principal Representative,

Standard 5.5, Faculty Diversity, has been the focus of much attention in NASPAA's accreditation process. The standard reads as follows:

There should be evidence that specific plans are being implemented to assure the diversity of the composition of the faculty with respect to the representation of minorities, women, and persons with disabilities. Programs and plans to insure faculty diversity shall generally reflect NASPAA's Diversity Guidelines.

Since this standard is one that has impeded accreditation or reaccreditation for several programs, led to confusion, and generated much discussion within the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), the Commission thought it would be helpful to inform all programs of recent "case law" concerning COPRA's implementation of Standard 5.5. We also want to affirm our recognition and support for this standard.

Some programs have interpreted standard 5.5 to be irrelevant if they have had not hired any tenure-line faculty for several years. Other programs have indicated that they have met this standard through their university's or college's affirmative action or diversity plan. COPRA, however, has viewed this standard as referring to a specific faculty diversity plan for the program. (It is important to remember that COPRA accredits programs and not academic units.) COPRA also recognizes that faculty diversity has a context. The implementation of diversity could well be affected by the setting of the program (New York City versus a rural area), the mission of the program (e.g., assisting urban governments versus preparing mid-career international students for leadership positions in their home countries), and the nature of the student body.

COPRA maintains a broad view of faculty diversity. We are all painfully aware of the dearth of minority PhDs in our field. However, programs committed to diversity and excellence have utilized a variety of means to ensure that students experience a diverse array of instructors through their tenure track hiring processes as well as their instructors, adjuncts, and guest speakers in the program.

COPRA has recently responded to self-studies as follows:

"The Commission requests a specific, program-level diversity plan for all individuals involved in delivering program instruction including but not limited to full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, lecturers, and instructors. This plan may include elements of the general university and department plan, but should also be focused on the unique needs, challenges and opportunities for recruiting MPA faculty."

Generally, we also expect that the plan will be presented to the Commission as a formal, written document contained in the self study.

I hope that you find this information useful. The Commission will continue to review its interpretation and implementation of Standard 5.5 and it welcomes input from all NASPAA member programs.

Sincerely yours,

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Chair, Commission on Peer Review and
Accreditation