



Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS
For Master's degree programs

Adopted October 16, 2009 at the NASPAA Annual Business Meeting in Arlington, VA
Amended November 6, 2014 at the NASPAA Annual Business Meeting in Albuquerque, NM
Amended October 18, 2019 at the NASPAA Annual Business Meeting in Los Angeles, CA
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Preconditions for Accreditation Review

A program applying for accreditation review must demonstrate in its Self-Study Report that it meets four preconditions. Because NASPAA wants to promote innovation and experimentation in education for public service, a program that does not meet the preconditions in a strictly literal sense, but which meets the spirit of these provisions, may petition for special consideration. Such petitions and Self-Study Reports must provide evidence that the program meets the spirit of the preconditions.

1. Program Eligibility

Because an accreditation review is a program evaluation, eligibility establishes that the program is qualified for and capable of being evaluated. The institution offering the program should be accredited (or similarly approved) by a recognized regional, national, or international agency. The primary objective of the program should be professional education. Finally, the program should have been operating and generating sufficient information about its operations and outcomes to support an evaluation.

2. Public Service Values

The mission, governance, and curriculum of an eligible program shall demonstrably emphasize public service values. Values are important and enduring beliefs, ideals and principles shared by members of a community about what is good and desirable and what is not. Public service values consist of the values that should guide public and nonprofit professionals. NASPAA's public service values are consistent with globally recognized sustainable development goals to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. NASPAA's public service values include, but are not limited to: pursuing the public interest with accountability and transparency; serving professionally with competence, efficiency, and objectivity; acting ethically so as to uphold the public trust; cultivating global, regional, and local awareness; and promoting participation and inclusiveness by demonstrating respect, equity, and fairness in dealings with members of society, stakeholders, and fellow public servants. NASPAA expects an accreditable program to define the boundaries of the public service values it emphasizes, be they procedural or substantive, as the basis for distinguishing itself from other professional degree programs.

3. Primary Focus

The degree program's primary focus shall be that of preparing students to be leaders, managers, and analysts in public service, specifically the professions of public and nonprofit affairs, public administration, and public policy and only master's degree programs engaged in educating and training professionals for the aforementioned professions are eligible for accreditation. Variations

in nomenclature regarding degree title are typical in the field of public service education. Related degrees in policy and management are eligible to apply, provided they can meet the accreditation standards, including advancing public service values and competencies. Specifically excluded are programs with a primary mission other than that of educating professionals in public and nonprofit affairs, administration, and policy (for example, programs in which public and nonprofit affairs, administration, and policy are majors or specializations available to students pursuing a degree in a related field).

4 Course of Study

Students should interact and collaborate extensively with faculty and each other, engage in hands on collaborative work, be socialized into the public service values of the profession, and be able to develop their interpersonal and communication skills through ample faculty observation and feedback. The normal expectation is that professional degrees in public service require at least 36 semester credit hours of study, or the equivalent. Programs departing from campus- centered education by offering distance learning, international exchanges, or innovative delivery systems must demonstrate that the intentions of this precondition are being achieved and that such programs are under the supervision of fully qualified faculty. This determination may include, but is not limited to, evidence of faculty of record, and communications between faculty and students.

Special Condition: Fast-tracking Programs that combine undergraduate education with a graduate degree in public service in a total of less than six academic years or the equivalent are not precluded from accreditation so long as they meet the criteria of an accredited graduate degree.

Special Condition: Dual Degrees Programs may allow a degree in public service to be earned simultaneously with a degree in another field in less time than required to earn each degree separately. All criteria of an accredited, professional, graduate degree in public service must be met and the electives allowed to satisfy requirements for the other degree must be appropriate as electives for a degree in public service.

Special Condition: Executive Education Programs may offer a degree in public service designed especially for college graduates who have had at least five years of cumulative experience in public service, including at least three years at the middle-to- upper level. The degree program must demonstrate that its graduates have emerged with the universal competencies expected of a NASPAA-accredited program, as well as with the competencies distinctive to executive education.

Standard 1 Managing the Program Strategically

- 1.1 Mission Statement: 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.**
- 1.2 Performance Expectations: The program will establish observable program goals, objectives, and outcomes, consistent with its mission and of which students learning is one, but not the only component.**
- 1.3 Program Evaluation: 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.**

Rationale

The accreditation standards reflect NASPAA’s commitment to support programs for professional education that: 1. commit to the values of globally recognized sustainable development goals and global public service, specifically public and nonprofit affairs, policy, and administration, and model them in their operations; 2. invest their resources toward mission-based outcomes that promote the values of public service; and 3. continuously improve, which includes responding to and impacting their communities through ongoing program evaluation. The commitment to public service values distinguishes a NASPAA-accredited program from other degree programs. NASPAA expects an accredited program to be explicit about the public service values to which it gives priority; to clarify the ways in which it embeds these values in its internal governance and operations; and to demonstrate that its students learn the tools and competencies to apply and take these values into consideration in their professional activities.

The expectation that the program will define and pursue a mission that benefits its community through education and the dissemination of knowledge about public service reflect NASPAA’s commitment to public service values, for example civic virtue, participatory processes, and social equity; direct resources toward observable and measurable outcomes reflects NASPAA’s commitment to the public service values of transparency and accountability; and evolve and improve reflects NASPAA’s commitment to the public service values of responsiveness and sustainability. In this way, NASPAA’s accreditation process promotes public service values as the

heart of the discipline.

Conformance with these standards ensures that the program invests its resources and efforts in a specific and well-defined public service mission. Strategic program management enables a program to develop and pursue a mission that articulates a program's purpose and public service values, and guides program performance, decision making, and continuous improvement with regard to governance, operations, faculty and student support, diversity and inclusion, student learning, resources, and communications. The purpose of strategic management is distinctive value creation. Strategic management is fundamental to investing increasingly scarce resources to achieve desirable, differentiated, and measurable outcomes. Formulation of a program's purpose, public service values, and implementation strategy and tactics should explicitly consider the program's unique goals and objectives as reflected in its faculty, curriculum, pedagogy, student support, climate of inclusiveness, and the student and employer populations whom the program serves. The resultant mission statement is the program's succinct promise to its stakeholders and should state or imply metrics by which program success can be objectively and routinely evaluated. Routine evaluation of program performance should inform both current and future operating priorities as well as suggest strategic imperatives necessary to deliver on this promise.

So long as their activities are consistent with their mission, programs have latitude to define their performance goals, measures of outcomes, and improvements. Whatever the program's goals and measures, they must be stated in terms that are sufficiently clear and concrete for the program to use in assessing itself and for outside parties, such as COPRA, to use in assuring that the program manages itself strategically. The mission statement brings coherence to the program's activities.

Standard 2 Matching Governance with the Mission

- 2.1 Administrative Capacity: The program will have an administrative infrastructure appropriate for its mission, goals, and objectives in all delivery modalities employed.**
- 2.2 Faculty Governance: An adequate faculty nucleus—at least five (5) full-time faculty members or their equivalent—will exercise substantial determining influence for the governance and implementation of the program.**

Rationale

To pursue its mission, an accredited program should have a transparent, identifiable, and effective governance system. Governance includes, but is not limited to program and policy planning including allocation of resources; establishing degree requirements; making and implementing recommendations regarding admission, advising and evaluations of students; advising students; specifying curriculum and learning outcomes; evaluating student performance and awarding degrees; appointing, promoting, and tenuring faculty; and participating in defining and assuring faculty performance, collectively and individually, both full- and part-time.

An appropriate administrative infrastructure that matches program delivery is essential for the proper governance of the program. Programs may have multiple forms of delivery and a clearly defined program infrastructure should be identified that matches program delivery form. Given the choices made regarding program delivery, the program needs to demonstrate adequate administrative and faculty governance. The governance arrangement, including administrative leadership, should ensure the ongoing integrity of the program. Because program nucleus faculty members have deep knowledge of their program and a commitment to participatory processes, they also should play a significant role in the governance and execution of the program. A program nucleus faculty member, is one whose participation in the governance and delivery of the program is functionally equivalent to that of a full-time, tenured faculty member in the program, commensurate with the level of his or her appointment.

Standard 3 Matching Operations with the Mission: Faculty Performance

- 3.1 Faculty Qualifications: The program's faculty members will be academically or professionally qualified to pursue the program's mission.**
- 3.2 Faculty Diversity: The program will promote equity, diversity, and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, retention, and support of faculty members.**
- 3.3 Research, Scholarship and Service: Program faculty members will produce scholarship and engage in professional and community service activities outside of the university appropriate to the program's mission, stage of their careers, and the expectations of their university.**

Rationale

An accredited program must demonstrate that the faculty engaged in instruction possess credentials and expertise consistent with the curricular outcomes for which they are responsible and sufficient to support the program mission. Students should have the opportunity to receive instruction from properly qualified faculty. The program's faculty, as a group, will include a variety of identities, perspectives and experiences to invigorate discourse with each other, and with students, and to prepare students for the professional workplace. The program should demonstrate efforts that strengthen diversity, equity, and a climate of inclusiveness through recruitment and retention initiatives, faculty support, and professional development. The program should implement inclusive practices to eliminate barriers and reduce bias that fully engage faculty in its mission. The program with a public service orientation should demonstrate its commitment, to the extent it is possible *within its legal and institutional framework*, to public service values in the processes used to recruit, retain, and support faculty and in the ways they assure students are exposed to people with diverse views and backgrounds. Faculty members in an accredited program form a self-sustaining community of scholars who pursue intellectual, professional, and community service agendas consistent with the program's mission. Program faculty should engage in the

scholarship of public and nonprofit affairs, administration, and policy because it leads to teaching and mentoring of students in cutting-edge methods and applications, it advances the profession and it impacts the community. They should engage in community and professional service related to public service because it promotes their personal accountability and commitment to the values they are expected to model and provides opportunities for them to connect theory and practice, to recruit students, and to place graduates. In short, the program is expected to be able to articulate how it is making a difference for its students, in its community, and in the profession.

Standard 4 Matching Operations with the Mission: Serving Students

- 4.1 Student Recruitment: The program will have student recruitment practices appropriate for its mission.**
- 4.2 Student Admission: The program will have and apply well-defined admission criteria appropriate for its mission.**
- 4.3 Support for Students: 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.**
- 4.4 Student Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, admissions practices, retention efforts, and student support services.**

Rationale

The outcomes of student recruiting, admissions, retention, and student services should be consistent with the program's mission. Admitted students should show good potential for success in professional graduate study in public service, in area(s) relevant to the program's mission. The recruitment and retention processes should be transparent, accountable, ethical, equitable, diverse, inclusive, and participatory. Student support services should exhibit the same characteristics, as well as be available to, and accessible by, all students in the program. A program should encourage diversity in its student body to help prepare students for a diverse and changing professional workplace.

Standard 5 Matching Operations with the Mission: Student Learning

- 5.1 Universal Required Competencies: 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.

5.2 Mission-specific Required Competencies: The program will identify core competencies in other domains necessary and appropriate to implement its mission.

5.3 Mission-specific Elective Competencies: The program will define its objectives and competencies for optional concentrations and specializations.

5.4 Professional Competencies: The program will ensure that students apply their education, such as through experiential learning and interactions with practitioners across the broad range of public service professions and sectors.

Rationale

Graduate level education should enable the student to demonstrate knowledge and understanding that is founded upon, extends, and enhances that typically associated with the bachelor's level, and provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and applying ideas. Graduate students should be able to apply their knowledge, understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments, and within multisectoral, multidisciplinary, and multicultural contexts related to public and nonprofit affairs, administration, and policy. They should have the ability to identify, collect, analyze and use qualitative and quantitative data to inform decision making that best serves the well-being of the public; to actively engage others to learn, understand, and respect different cultures and contexts; and to make decisions that address and adapt to the needs, interests, and norms of different cultural groups. Graduate students should be able to recognize, adapt to, and make decisions in changing and increasingly complex environments, for example, but not limited to, managing and leveraging emergent technologies, and dealing with incomplete information and conflicting demands. Graduate students should reflect upon the social and ethical responsibilities and the equity implications linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments. An accredited program should strive to assure that its students can apply the concepts, tools, and knowledge they have learned in pursuit of the public interest.

An accredited program should implement and be accountable to its students and stakeholders for delivering its distinctive mission through the course of study it offers and through the learning outcomes it expects its graduates to attain. While all accredited degree programs must meet these standards, NASPAA recognizes that programs may have different missions with varying emphases.

The curriculum should demonstrate consistency and coherence in meeting the program’s mission. The program being reviewed should demonstrate how its curricular content matches the emphasis of its overall mission and public service values.

Standard 6 Matching Resources with the Mission

6.1 Resource Adequacy: The program will have sufficient funds, physical facilities, and resources in addition to its faculty to pursue its mission, objectives, and continuous improvement.

Rationale

An accredited program should have the resources required to pursue its mission and to continue to improve. In keeping with NASPAA’s Guiding Principles, a program’s level and use of resources should reflect the program’s mission and a commitment to continuous improvement. Resources can include, but are not limited to: budget for salaries, travel, equipment, supplies and other expenses; personnel and support for administrative functions; sufficient numbers of faculty to maintain class sizes, faculty-student ratios and frequency of course offerings appropriate to the program mission; information technology to support teaching and research; adequate library services; instructional equipment, offices, classrooms, and meetings areas.

Standard 7 Matching Communications with the Mission

7.1 Communications: The program will provide appropriate and current information about its mission, policies, practices, and accomplishments—including student learning outcomes—sufficient to inform decisions by its stakeholders such as prospective and current students; faculty; employers of current students and graduates; university administrators; alumni; and accrediting agencies.

Rationale

When communicating with its stakeholders, the program should be transparent, accountable, and truthful. In establishing transparency, programs must provide data that are publicly available and clearly linked to the mission of the program. NASPAA expects an accredited program to meet the expectations of the profession in terms of accountability in public service. Transparency is a *public service value* exemplified in programmatic action and results. In order to demonstrate that the program results follow from the mission, the burden lies with the program to produce data acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the program mission.