

Northern Arizona University MPA Program Diversity Plan

Diversity at Northern Arizona University-Overview

The NAU Masters of Public Administration (MPA) is committed to the public service values of equity and diversity. These values are enumerated in the program's mission statement. Furthermore, the Department of Politics and International Affairs includes diversity as one of its departmental foci. These program and department level commitments are also supported by the strategic goals of Northern Arizona University, which include general commitments to global engagement and diversity, civic engagement and community building, as well as a specific commitment to serving Native Americans.ⁱ NAU has also been designated an Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution by Excelencia in Education. The University has submitted paperwork for the Hispanic Serving Institution designation and will hear officially about the status during Fall 2021.

An Arizona state law enacted in 2010 forbids the use of preferential treatment in hiring or admissions. Even with these constraints, however, there is a great deal that the university does to enhance diversity, by creating an environment that is attractive to, and supportive of, diverse populations. NAU has a detailed Affirmative Action plan ⁱⁱ, and follows strict hiring policies as part of that plan. These policies are meant to ensure diversity and fairness at every stage of the hiring process in accordance with state and federal law. NAU also has a detailed Safe Working and Learning Environment Policy to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment. In the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, processes were put in place in 2018 to further strengthen protocols related to diversity in hiring, including having interdisciplinary hiring committees and training with the Associate Dean on implicit biases.

In fall of 2016, NAU created a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) position; however the CDO left the position the following year. The President's Office now has a new initiative - [Diversity Fellows Program](#) lead by a Chief Diversity Fellow, Dr. Gabe Montaña. The 2021 Inaugural Class of Diversity Fellows will provide vision to NAU for diversity and inclusion activities. One of the MPA core faculty, Eric Otenyo, is a part of this inaugural class. Related diversity and inclusions offices are the Office of Inclusion: Multicultural and LGBTQIA+ Student Services (IMQ), a Disability Resources Office on campus and the Equity and Access Office (EAO). The Native American Cultural Center, Departments of Applied Indigenous Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Latin American Studies, and Ethnic Studies also provide insights and support for diversity related topics.

Another responsibility of the CDO was the creation of a diversity plan for the university. This plan has gone through several drafts and received the President's approval. Implementation has been delayed until after fall 2021 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. NAU also commissioned an extensive campus climate survey in 2015 and a student campus climate survey in 2019. The university-wide diversity plan provides a framework for the development of the NAU MPA plan, and also mandates all academic units on campus to create similar plans, thus reinforcing and lending institutional support to NASPAA's mandate for accredited programs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Defining Diversity

These university-level policies, programs, resources and strategic goals demonstrate that the NAU MPA program is situated within an environment supportive of diversity. At the program level, moreover, the MPA program pursues specific diversity-related goals related to its mission of training public servants and furthering public service values in a process of continual assessment and improvement.

These goals have been formulated both with an understanding of the geographic, historical and cultural environment in which we are situated, and the clear need for public servants to be able to navigate a social world characterized by diversity and change.

The MPA Program defines diversity in terms of legally-defined protected groups, including women and ethnic minorities, as well as the disabled and the LGBTQIA+ communities. We are also concerned with obstacles created by income insecurity and poverty. Additionally, we see diversity in terms of catering to both in-service and pre-service students. This diversity in age and experience can be very useful in providing students, and faculty, with different perspectives allowing for a richer educational experience and range of insights.

As our degree is housed in a Department of Politics and International Affairs (PIA), we also attract, and have substantial resources to serve, international students and other students interested in the global dimension of politics and public administration. For example, our MPA students can take courses in subjects like international political economy and international environmental policy, depending on their interests and goals. Our development of the AIEI cohort links to this global commitment.

Diversity is valued in our degree program for several reasons. In the first place, public administrators in the United States deal with diverse populations and must be able to work with the different perspectives and needs these diverse populations bring with them. Secondly, diverse perspectives are important for promoting critical reflection and analysis, which are key learning outcomes for this degree program. Finally, diversity is simply a moral good-in-itself – one to which our faculty is strongly committed.

In terms of ethnicity, Coconino County is very diverse, with almost 45% of inhabitants identifying themselves as non-white. Unlike much of the United States, however, the largest ethnic minority – at 26.5% of the population – is American Indian. Hispanics make up the second largest group, at 13.5%. African-Americans and Asian-Americans, on the other hand, are under-represented in comparison to the U.S. as a whole, at 1.1% and 1.3%, respectively.^{iv}

NAU has made serving this Native American population a strategic goal, and the MPA program contributes to this goal. We have contributed by working with the Department of Applied Indigenous Studies (AIS) to make our degree programs complementary. Students are able to enroll in a certificate program through AIS, which articulates seamlessly with the MPA degree. This not only allows us to better serve the needs of Native American individuals and tribes, but to bring greater diversity to our students and faculty. We are happy to count the current Navajo Nation President, Jonathan Nez among our alums, and members of the Office of Native American Initiative students have also sat on our Advisory Board.

The first year of the AIS Certificate program was 2016/17. We have experienced an influx of Native American students and we have assessed how well we are serving all students, including this subgroup, with no disproportional results.

Another major initiative that the program has recently taken is making it possible to take the program online. In doing so, we have removed a major obstacle facing many students, allowing for greater diversity overall. We believe the online option to be attractive to Native American students who may be unable or unwilling to relocate. It is also attractive to working adults who require a flexible schedule to

keep up with work and family demands. Additionally, it allows us to expand our reach throughout the country, and even internationally, creating opportunities to recruit students outside of our region.

MPA Program Standards and Goals

The diversity plan for the NAU MPA addresses the following NASPAA diversity standards:

Standard 3.2 Faculty Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment and retention of faculty members;

Standard 4.4 Student Diversity: The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, admissions practices, and student support services; and

Standard 5.1 Universal Required Competencies: To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

The NAU MPA program has identified five diversity goals to pursue in the service of these standards

1. Improve diversity of faculty and staff
2. Continue to attract and retain a diverse student body
3. Emphasize and foster respect for diversity in the curriculum
4. Create an inclusive climate that is welcoming to diversity
5. Promote diversity through research and community service activities

Goal 1: Improve diversity of faculty and staff

Background:

All hires at NAU are governed by strict hiring practices overseen by the NAU Equity and Access Office (EAO). In order to be cleared by the EAO, faculty hiring committees must have minority representation approved by EAO and committee members must attend annual training on EAO rules and procedures. EAO also requires that, in order to achieve a diverse hiring pool, positions be advertised across multiple job search sites, including to minority caucuses within the discipline. Before any job offer can be made, EAO reviews every aspect of the search to make sure that all rules were followed and an adequate pool of applicants was found. If they find problems, they can cancel the search and require the faculty to begin again.

Because diversity is one of the PIA department's foci areas, we gladly comply with these rules and seek to go beyond them. In this regard, the department's MPA program recruits faculty with diverse experiences, skills and knowledge bases. We score applicants on a hiring matrix that assesses, among other criteria, their willingness to work with diverse populations and their ability to complement our focus areas; one of which is diversity. At present, our core MPA faculty is diverse with three women and four people from underserved groups. We continue to focus on diversity and inclusion within the program.

In addition to taking steps to increase and retain diversity among core faculty, however, we can also take steps to increase the diversity of faculty teaching the courses that our students take, through the use of adjuncts and other members of the more diverse PIA faculty.

Action Steps:

1. Continue to abide by State and University mandated Affirmative Action plan and discuss its importance in faculty hiring committees.
2. As a faculty, review annually the NAU Safe Working and Learning Environment Policy to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment.
3. Consider in hiring decisions the departmental desire for faculty to represent the communities of interest that the program serves, which are diverse in terms of economic status, ethnicity, race, gender, and age.
4. Advertise positions in media that reaches the broadest and most diverse applicant pool.
5. When setting hiring priorities, specially consider the research subfields that tend to attract researchers and students from diverse backgrounds (i.e. Indigenous Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Latin American Studies, and Ethnic Studies).
6. Use adjunct faculty and PIA faculty of diversity when possible to teach courses in the MPA program.
7. Continue to cross-list courses with the Department of Applied Indigenous Studies (AIS) in order to bring AIS faculty into the MPA classroom and to increase diverse perspectives in our classrooms.
8. Continue to have the Chair of the PIA Department meet at least once a year with faculty to discuss any needs or concerns they may have, including concerns related to diversity and inclusion.
9. We also included a CDO from Tempe on the advisory board.

Assessment:

1. Yearly assessment of faculty and staff diversity and discussion of how to improve diversity over time.
2. Analysis of how faculty diversity does or does not reflect the diversity of the student body.

Goal 2: Continue to attract and retain a diverse student body**Background:**

Our student body at present is quite diverse. In particular, we have a high percentage of female and Native American students. We are also diverse in terms of having a mix of pre-service and in-service students. Finally, we accommodate both part-time and full-time students and always have a mix of both.

We have taken several steps recently to increase the diversity of our student body. First, we have worked with the Department of Applied Indigenous Studies (AIS) to cross-list and articulate classes in their certificate program with our MPA degree. Second, we have made it possible to take the MPA completely online, making it more accessible to students from outside of the Flagstaff area, or who would otherwise find taking classes in a traditional classroom hard to manage. This option may be especially attractive to in-service students who are trying to balance pursuit of an advanced degree with career and family obligations. Third, in 2018, we applied for and were awarded WICHE status as part of the Western Regional Graduate Program exchange for our MPA program. This allowed students from throughout the western United States, including tribal students from surrounding states, entry into our program without paying out-of-state tuition. Note, the move to designate the MPA as online has eliminated this need as the online tuition is flat for all students. Finally, we expanded cohort programs into the City of Tempe, which has a diverse workforce and to AIEI-China to expand international diversity.

We have designed our admissions policies to be as accommodating as possible to students from diverse backgrounds. Any student expressing a passion for public service is welcome in our program, so long as their application provides evidence that they have a good chance to succeed. We do not require the GRE because we feel it may impose an unnecessary barrier for some students. Instead, we look carefully at the student's letter of interest to gauge their commitment to public service, and their writing sample to get a sense of their writing and research abilities. While we strictly enforce a minimum 3.0 GPA for admission to the MPA program, students who otherwise seem qualified and express an interest in public service are encouraged to apply for our graduate certificate program or to take two classes in the program as non-degree students. Applicants that demonstrate their ability to complete this work successfully are then admitted to the program and can use those courses to fulfill their degree requirements.

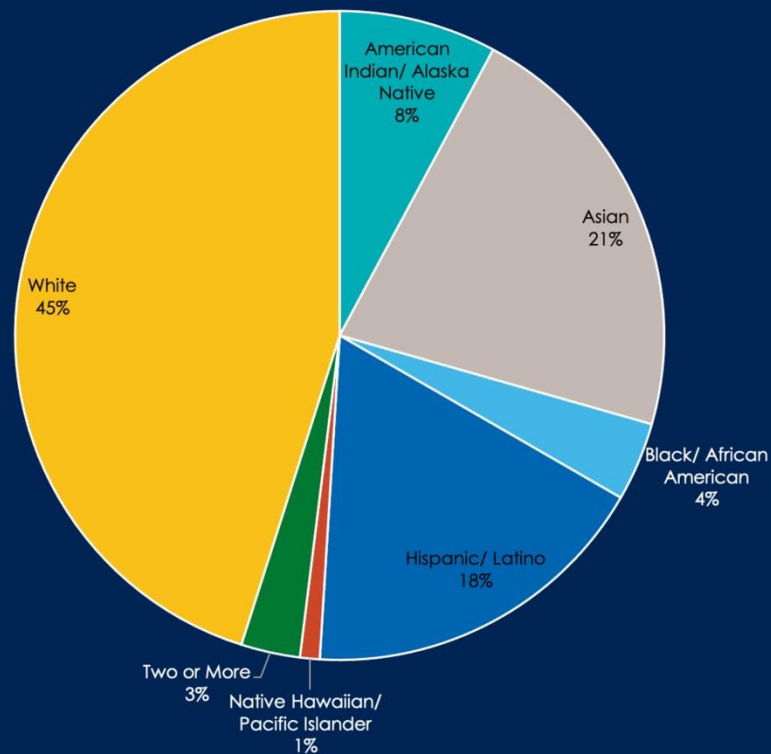
To increase access, we also allow students to apply and be admitted throughout the year – fall, spring and summer.

For most of the program's existence, we have been focused on serving students and agencies from Northern Arizona. Our online presence, WICHE status and involvement with tribal administration have expanded our reach. Furthermore, the strong programs in International Relations and Comparative Politics in the PIA Department make us an attractive choice to international students. Because of these factors, we expect our diversity to increase in the coming years along with our enrollments. We are already seeing some evidence of this, as discussed elsewhere in the self-study.

A second aspect of student diversity is retention and timely graduation of the students we do admit. In this regard, we have recently made important changes and have discussed how to do even more. Several years ago, the program was not doing particularly well in this regard, as the MPA program did not have a designated director and MPA students were being advised by faculty throughout the department. While during the SSY, our program was directed by an associate dean with split duties, we do have a primary advisor for all MPA students. The advisor maintains a close relationship with all students, meeting with them annually, reviewing their programs of study, and aiding them in securing internships for the capstone course. There are clear policies in the student handbook regarding the maintenance of satisfactory progress to graduation. Because many of our students are part-time and in-service, we also maintain a degree of flexibility with regard to time to graduation. Our emphasis is on working with each student to meet their individual educational and professional goals. The below chart details the demographic makeup of our students as of July 2021. You can see that Native American and Asian students are slightly overrepresented vis a vis the general US population and African American students are slightly underrepresented vis a vis the overall US population. The overrepresentation of Asian students is due to our AIEI cohort. In all, we have a diverse student body which matches the mission of our program.



MPA STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



ETHNIC
BACKGROUND
IS BASED ON 2021
STUDENT DATA.

Action Steps:

Recruitment:

1. The department's graduate program coordinator will continue to work with the University Graduate School in outreach efforts that target Native Americans (especially Hopi and Navajo communities), international students, mid-career public officials, townships in Arizona, first generation students just graduating from undergraduate programs and experienced graduate students seeking to join the teaching profession.

2. Continue to use word-of-mouth, online presence, and brochures, various influencers, alumni efforts, as well as our sophisticated marketing efforts to aggressively recruit students from a variety of cultures, religions, races, gender, national origins, sexual orientations and ages.

3. Continue efforts by the MPA Advisory Committee to continuously network and build relationships with various public and non-profit agencies that serve as a feeder for underrepresented talent across all segments of the public administration profession.
4. Continue internal informal outreach meetings, to interest undergraduate seniors from NAU and the other local universities.
5. Work with our Community Outreach officer on development of additional cohorts with municipal and state government agencies in Arizona.

Retention:

1. Continue to hold mandatory orientation meetings with new students to publicize the policies in the student handbook relating to safe learning environments, programs of study, advising, and so on, and to make them aware of student support resources available at the university.
2. Continue to have the MPA advisors meet with each student annually (at least) to insure that students are able to navigate the curriculum successfully as they move towards fulfilling their individual educational and professional goals
3. Continue early interventions for any student found to be struggling in the program.
4. Increase awareness among the faculty regarding the need to be sensitive to the differing needs and values of the diverse population of MPA students, including racial and ethnic, gender, LGBTQIA, disabilities, international, in-service, pre-service, part-time and full-time.
5. Continue to closely monitor the progress of our Native American students with an understanding of the additional obstacles to success in higher education such students have historically faced, including cultural differences, family and religious obligations, and feelings of isolation or alienation.

Assessment:

1. Monitor diversity of students coming into the program.
2. Analyze data about student struggles (poor grades, probation, dropping or failing out of the program) in terms of diversity criteria in order to detect any possible patterns.

Goal 3: Emphasize and foster respect for diversity in the curriculum

Background:

The MPA faculty support diversity in the curriculum throughout the program, and diversity is a core element of the University's teaching and research emphasis. The MPA program core competencies include two that regard diversity: 1. Define and discuss the importance of equity, transparency, participation, accountability and diversity in public management and organizations, and 2. Critically reflect upon the nature and consequences of diversity (e.g. race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, culture, nation), and develop an understanding of how this diversity both alters and is altered by the practices of public service. As indicated by the curriculum map, these competencies are introduced and reinforced across the curriculum, giving the faculty ample opportunity to assess the program's ability to emphasize diversity as a driving challenge and opportunity of public service. Diversity topics are covered

in POS 541 via HR, labor relations, social equity, and EEOC topics. Continuing DEI discussions are found in POS 543—via each chapter. POS642 includes the heaviest dosage of diversity in the curriculum from the use cases studies that directly speak to HR and diversity. Examples include cases on discrimination, sexual harassment, and data from EEOC.

Action Steps:

1. Continue to introduce, reinforce and assess the diversity-related core competencies in the curriculum, as discussed on the curriculum map and assessment plan.
2. Continue to make respect for diversity a central aspect of POS 527 Ethics of Administration and POS 642 Human Resource Administration.
4. Continue to cross list Applied Indigenous Studies with MPA courses and encourage students to explore issues of Native Nation governance.
5. Revisit core course syllabi and learning objectives each year to explore new opportunities to emphasize diversity in the curriculum.

Assessment:

1. Monitor our course syllabi and readings to make sure they reflect the range of diversity that our program values, assessing which categories of diversity are not adequately addressed.
2. Annually review course materials and cases to ensure they reflect emerging struggles for social justice and recognition in contemporary society.
3. Include on the agendas of the biannual MPA faculty and advisory board meetings time to reflect upon the curriculum and how to update courses to enliven discussions of diversity.

Goal 4: Create an inclusive climate that is welcoming to diversity

Background:

Our program works to develop a climate of inclusion first and foremost by addressing each student's values and goals individually through the advising and mentoring process. Beyond this, we also take steps to ensure a general atmosphere of inclusion and openness, where students understand that acceptance of diversity is the expectation and that any concerns they may have will be taken seriously by faculty and administration.

Action Steps:

1. Continue to follow the department mandate that all syllabi include a statement on safe working and learning environments.
2. Encourage faculty to develop and follow their own respect and inclusion policies.
3. Continue to encourage MPA students to participate in the PIA Graduate Association of Political Science (GAPS), which allows them to interact with their peers in a supportive and productive way, help organize conferences and speakers, have representation in PIA faculty meetings and act as student representatives on faculty search committees.
4. Continue to include an MPA GAPS student as a member of the MPA Community Advisory Board.
5. Continue to include student voices in discussions related to climate, curriculum and hiring, as a way of extending our efforts to be more inclusive and diverse.

Assessment:

1. Solicit student input regarding climate and inclusiveness in both formal advising meetings and other informal advising settings.
2. Individual annual meetings of faculty with the PIA chair should assess faculty satisfaction with climate

and inclusiveness in the department.

3. Add a climate/inclusiveness question to student exit survey.

Goal 5: Promote diversity through research and community service activities

Background:

The NAU Department of Politics and International Relations takes diversity as one of its departmental foci. We actively recruit faculty whose research and teaching interests touch on diversity issues.

1. Continue to maintain diversity as a departmental focus, including calls for diverse applicants in job descriptions, and other departmental communication to prospective faculty.
2. Continue to encourage faculty to address issues of diversity in their research and publications.
3. Continue to encourage faculty to bring a diversity perspective to community service activities.

Assessment:

1. Review faculty achievements in publishing and community service in terms of contributions to diversity.

Endnotes

i <http://nau.edu/Strategic-Planning/Goals-and-Strategies/>

ii <https://nau.edu/equity-and-access/plan/>

iii <http://www.nau.edu/ced/>, <http://nau.edu/Equity-and-Access/Forms-Policies/>
<http://nau.edu/Center-for-University-Access-and-Inclusion/Diversity-Commissions/>

iv <http://nation.maps.arcgis.com/apps/OnePane/splash/index.html?appid=c36ff619bc2a4b5e95b2a9314bd11391>