**GUIDELINES FOR**

**BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS/PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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NASPAA

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ABOUT NASPAA

NASPAA is a professional education association dedicated to the advancement of education, training, and research in public policy and administration. The Association's institutional membership consists of over 300 academic institutions, globally. NASPAA serves as an international center for information about programs and developments in this field, fosters goals and standards of educational excellence, and represents the concerns and interests of its membership in the formulation and support of national, state and local policies for education and research in public policy and administration.

For information concerning NASPAA institutional membership, publications, annual conferences, sections and committees, faculty fellowship programs go to [www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)

INTRODUCTION

Guidelines and Standards for Baccalaureate Degree Programs in Public Affairs/Public Administration were unanimously adopted by the delegates to the annual conference of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) held in Washington, D.C., in April, 1976. These original guidelines were amended as a result of a review undertaken by the NASPAA Undergraduate Committee beginning in 1993 and concluding at the NASPAA Annual Conference held in Denver in October, 1996. The guidelines were again revised by the Undergraduate Committee in October 2016. These revised guidelines are primarily for professionally-oriented undergraduate degree programs with majors (concentrations) in public affairs/public administration. For this purpose, these terms are defined to include: public affairs, public administration, public policy, public management, and related fields. Throughout this document, PA will be used to denote this definition.

The guidelines are not prescriptive in nature. They are intended to provide guidance to faculty who are developing and/or evaluating baccalaureate degree programs. The purpose is to foster high quality education for the public service while also encouraging flexibility and innovation in course offerings and educational format.

The guidelines will be distributed widely. NASPAA encourages students, educational institutions, and employers to use them to evaluate the relevance and substance of baccalaureate degree programs in PA. Technical assistance and advice are available from NASP AA to schools desiring to develop a new baccalaureate program or strengthen an existing one. N ASPAA has also adopted guidelines and standards for doctoral and master's programs in public affairs/public administration which are available from NASPAA.

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**GUIDELINES FOR**

**BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN**

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS/PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

**1.0 Some Assumptions Basic to the Guidelines**

1.1 These guidelines have been established to improve the quality of professionally-oriented undergraduate degree programs with majors or concentrations in PA. They do not constitute provisions for accreditation nor do they impose any specific institutional requirements. Their purpose is to provide criteria for fostering and aiding the development of undergraduate programs and institutional self-appraisal and improvement.

1.2 Undergraduate education in PA should be focused upon the process and substance of public policy and the knowledge and skills needed for effective implementation of public policy. This requires that programs be multi-disciplinary in nature, drawing upon the behavioral, social, quantitative and administrative/management sciences, and related liberal arts disciplines.

1.3 The need expressed by employers for graduates who have the necessary knowledge and skills for planning, implementing, and evaluating public programs, coupled with the demand by students for relevant, career education, indicates that PA programs should have a professional orientation. This means that programs should provide a strong component of analytical and management skills relevant to the field of public management, along with a broad background and understanding of the political, social, and economic environment in which public issues exist. Critical to student success will be the development of communication skills that are relevant across multiple platforms.

1.4 Flexibility and innovation are needed in curriculum design for programs at specific institutions in order to meet the varying educational needs and professional interests of their students:

• Full-time or part-time

• Pre-service

• In-service

• Mid-career

• Returning to the workforce

• Pursuing careers in the public, not-for-profit or private sectors

• Planning to enter the job market immediately

• Anticipating graduate school or law school

1.5 A very close relationship should exist between undergraduate and graduate programs in PA in order to provide effective career education for the public service. It is recognized that the MPA is the primary professional degree in PA. Accordingly, undergraduate guidelines should relate closely to the NASPAA Accreditation Standards for master’s degree programs.

The fundamental difference is that the undergraduate guidelines will typically emphasize entry-level competencies and an "arts and sciences" foundation. The undergraduate degree should also provide a strong foundation for pursuing graduate level education.

1.6 These guidelines are intended to apply to professionally oriented undergraduate programs in all schools, departments, programs, and other organizational units which have as their objective the education and training of persons for positions in the public service, with special emphasis on administrative and managerial functions. In addition to general PA programs, these guidelines are applicable to such programs as criminal justice administration, health administration, human services administration, urban affairs, and others which feature education for public management in particular contexts.

I.7 Although these guidelines are aimed primarily at the educational process for professionally-oriented undergraduate degrees, they are intended to serve several constituencies, namely:

• Pre-service and in-service students who wish to identify appropriate educational institutions and programs in which to enroll for professionally-oriented education.

• Educational institutions which are seeking to establish new professionally-oriented undergraduate degree programs or to improve the quality of existing programs in PA.

• Employers and jurisdictions that are trying to measure the competencies of graduates of undergraduate degree programs for the purpose of determining which programs best serve their employment needs.

**2.0 General Guidelines Applicable to All**

**Undergraduate Degree Programs in PA**

**2.1 Admissions**

2.11 Admission policies should be clearly stated for students entering from high school, transferring from 2-year or other 4-year schools or returning to college. Admission and retention standards should not be lower than those of the college or university as a whole.

2.12 Many students take their first two years of college at a community or junior college. It is important that transfer policies be developed in cooperation with and be fully understood by the community and junior colleges from which the majority of transfers will occur. With reference to the transfer of PA courses from associate to baccalaureate programs, the PA baccalaureate degree granting unit should provide at least the majority of required professionally-oriented courses in a student's program. All courses transferred from the associate level for credit toward the baccalaureate degree should involve logical and analytical thinking processes designed to develop the reasoning capacity of the individual. Courses not generally regarded as transferable are those which are essentially procedural or routinized "how-to-do-it" courses.

2.13 A special effort should be made to encourage a broad diversity of students to enter undergraduate programs for the public service and to foster their success.

**2.2 Educational Format**

2.21 Undergraduate programs in PA are characterized by a high degree of diversity and by a multiplicity of objectives. As a result, the knowledge and skills set forth in these guidelines may be delivered in a variety of ways, including conventional and non-conventional modes for term length, course length, and classroom activity. Any educational format should relate to the nature and goals of the program, the composition of the student body, and the resources available in order to produce the most effective learning experience. A professionally-oriented undergraduate program should recognize the potential of non-traditional educational approaches which can enrich career education for the public service. However, it is imperative that the quality of instruction should be maintained at a high level regardless of the delivery system used. In essence, a viable program format should enhance the ability of a program to achieve its educational goals in the preparation of individuals for careers in public service, for the further development of those already in professional and para-professional levels of career activity and for success in graduate or law school.

2.22 One format a school may adopt is an accelerated program (4+1, 3+2) which allow students to complete a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in a shorter time frame than completing them separately (typically five calendar years instead of six or seven). Qualified students may accelerate their careers by beginning graduate level courses in their third or fourth year of undergraduate study. While programs may vary, in a typical accelerated program a set number of credits will be shared with the student’s bachelor’s and the master’s degree. Once the students complete the credits required for the baccalaureate degree, students continue their graduate coursework full time, in order to finish their undergraduate and graduate degrees in five calendar years. Students must meet the individual program’s admission requirements. Many programs allow students to take the graduate courses at the undergraduate tuition rate.

Programs offering 4+1 or 3+2 as feeders into their master's program(s) should be aware of the following guidance from COPRA's policy and accreditation documents:

* *Special Condition: Fast-tracking Programs that combine undergraduate education with a graduate degree in public affairs, administration, and policy 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.*
* *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.*
* *A baccalaureate degree, or equivalent, from an accredited institution is required of all students entering any accredited Masters Program in Public Administration, Policy, or Affairs. Where a program has a combined Bachelors/Masters degree, it must specify requirements appropriate for the success of Bachelors students engaging in graduate work.*

**2.3 Student Career Guidance and Placement Services**

2.31 Strong and continuous career counseling is important in assuring that students seek appropriate academic preparation for both advanced study and future managerial roles in the public service. Students should be made aware that professional public service roles will increasingly be found in the not-for-profit and private sectors. Although counseling responsibilities may be centered in one individual or office within the program, all members of the faculty should be available to advise students about appropriate curriculum choices and career possibilities within their various specialized fields. Adequate information should be

available about advanced study opportunities for students interested in continuing their formal education.

It is especially important that PA students be encouraged to develop a perspective about career opportunities available to them. Formal workshops, special orientation sessions or a portion of the educational experience should provide students with an opportunity to investigate careers and to gain experience in searching for information, preparing resumes, and interviewing for future jobs. A diverse portfolio of these career enhancing opportunities should be provided throughout the students’ matriculation through their degree programs.

2.32 PA programs are encouraged to provide placement services, either as a separate endeavor by the PA unit or in conjunction with a university-wide office. Ideally, the individual responsible for placement services would have a broad knowledge of professional employment trends and maintain a wide range of contacts and relationships with public service employers. The placement services should be available to both current students and alumni of the program. These services offer a means of maintaining closer contact and communication with graduates who become practitioners.

**2.4 Program Configuration and Administrative Jurisdiction**

2.41 Undergraduate programs in PA may operate under a variety of program configurations and

administrative jurisdictions. Regardless of the program configuration or administrative jurisdictional arrangement under which the PA programs operate, it should be offered by a degree granting unit which has the same autonomy as other professional and academic units in its institution.

2.42 Within overall college and university policies and procedures, the administrative unit which offers the undergraduate PA program should:

• Have a dean, director, chair or head chosen in consultation with the PA faculty

• Determine the criteria for admission of students to the program.

• Determine its own curriculum and degree requirements.

• Have control over the allocation of resources within its budget.

• Participate in the selection, hiring, and promotion of full-time and part-time faculty members for the PA program.

**2.5 The Faculty**

2.51 The PA faculty must be committed to the goal of educating persons for management and leadership positions in the public service. If the faculty's interest in public management education is subordinate to other educational goals, it is highly unlikely that an effective program can be developed and maintained.

2.52 A professionally competent faculty is vital to a professionally-oriented program. All faculty who teach for the PA program should have a realistic understanding of the education and training needed to develop managers and leaders for public service. To accomplish this, the appointment of full-time faculty who are academically qualified and also have relevant professional experience should be encouraged. The use of qualified practitioners as part-time instructors, guest lecturers, and curriculum advisors will also help to strengthen the professional orientation of the program.

2.53 All faculty teaching undergraduate PA courses should hold academic degrees appropriate to the level of the program. At the baccalaureate level all PA faculty should hold a relevant master's degree and at least 50% should hold a relevant doctorate. Exceptions may be made for persons with outstanding public service experience that is relevant to the courses being taught.

2.54 Faculty members should be encouraged to be active in advisory and consulting tasks. Opportunities for faculty to take full-time governmental assignments should also be supported through sabbaticals and leaves of absence. Continuing participation in the activities of professional organizations should be expected as a means of exchanging ideas between practitioners and academicians.

The professional competence of faculty members can be improved and sustained by these activities, which should be given serious consideration in appointment, tenure and promotion evaluations.

2.55 An appropriate composition and size for the undergraduate faculty is affected by the multi-disciplinary nature of educational programs for public management. A substantial number of courses may be taught by faculty from other college or university departments and qualified part-time faculty with appropriate professional experience. However, experience indicates that a core group of at least 4 or 5 full-time faculty who participate regularly in the PA program is necessary to teach undergraduate courses, administer the undergraduate program, and provide student advising. At least one-half of all courses offered in the PA major should be taught by the full-time PA faculty.

**3.0 Curriculum Guidelines**

**for Baccalaureate Degree Programs**

**3.1 Objectives of Baccalaureate Education in PA**

These guidelines and standards are intended to promote the objectives stated below.

3.11 To provide those elements of liberal education relevant to the preparation of qualified persons for public service in contemporary society.

3.12 To provide a professional orientation in PA in order to prepare students for careers in the public service.

3.13 To provide a program with sufficient flexibility to meet both the needs of students without fixed career objectives and the needs of persons already in the public service who wish to enhance their skills or prepare for different roles.

3.14 To provide a student with adequate preparation for entry into graduate study in related fields.

3.15 To provide adequate foundation work in subject areas that are fundamental to a liberal,

professionally-oriented education and preparation for career objectives including graduate work. They include:

• Understanding of economic, legal, political, and governmental institutions, systems, and processes.

• Development of analytical/quantitative abilities and skills for defining and solving problems.

• Development of communication abilities and skills-- written, oral and electronic

• Understanding of human behavior- individual, group, and organizational- and development of abilities and skills for analyzing and coping with behavioral situations.

• Understanding of administrative/management systems and processes.

• Navigating within and across differences

**3.2 Universal Competencies**

3.21 NASPAA has adopted a set of five universal competencies in its accreditation standards in which students graduating from a masters PA program should be proficient. Undergraduate PA programs should mirror these competencies at a level that is appropriate for undergraduate education (in many cases this means students have the “knowledge of” rather than the “ability to” we see at the graduate level). The five universal competencies are:

* + to lead and manage in public governance;
  + to participate in and contribute to the policy process;
  + to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
  + to articulate and apply a public service perspective;
  + to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing

workforce and citizenry.

3.22 The consideration of ethical behavior and issues is relevant to all major competency areas and should be integrated into the curriculum of all PA programs.

**3.3 Sample Curriculum**

See Google Spreadsheet[[1]](#footnote-1) for a compendium of example curriculum coverage for BA, BS, and BPA programs.

**3.4 Experiential Learning**

3.41 Experiential learning can be a valuable component of a public administration, public

policy or public affairs undergraduate degree program.

3.42 Experiential learning can take many forms, including internships, externships, volunteer service, practicums or client-based projects, and applied research experiences.

3.43 Experiential learning can be particularly rewarding when combined with other academic experiences. When assigning academic credit to experiential learning, it is important that such experiences include built-in processes for student reflection, application, and integration with the student’s academic curriculum, as well as opportunities for personal or professional development.

The National Society for Experiential Education (www.nsee.org) and the Council of the Advancement of Standards in High Education (www.cas.edu) provide guidance for institutions and programs in how to develop high-quality experiential learning opportunities.

**3.5 Student Achievement Assessment**

3.51 Undergraduate programs must link departmental and programmatic objectives for student

learning with institutional missions and goals.

1. (https://docs.google.com/a/naspaa.org/spreadsheets/d/1FkBSISXWxgetWVMSWUxR36xZ5x3G4M42HvkGdxGLEBI/edit?usp=sharing) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)