

NASPAA Universal Required Competencies

(Excerpt from work done by Michelle Saint Germain, Competency Task Force)

Assessing Competencies in 5 Steps:

Step 1. Program Mission and Improvement

NASPAA expects an accredited program to 1) define and pursue a mission and 2) continuously improve its performance to benefit its community in observable ways. NASPAA expects an accredited program to be explicit about the public service values to which it gives priority and to demonstrate that its students learn the tools and competencies to apply and take these values into consideration in their professional activities.

The mission statement brings coherence to the program's activities.

Step 2. Defining Each Competency

Graduate competencies equip the student with knowledge and understanding that provides a basis for originality in developing and applying ideas. Students should be able to apply their knowledge, understanding and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader or multidisciplinary contexts related to public affairs, administration, and policy. Students should have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity. Competencies should be defined using active verbs, such as: analyze, make decisions, communicate, consider, identify, demonstrate, etc. So long as their activities are consistent with their mission, programs have latitude in defining their student learning outcomes (competencies). 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, so that they can be observed by program faculty and/or other relevant stakeholders such as employers, internship supervisors, community partners, or COPRA.

Step 3. Selecting Evidence of Learning on Each Competency

Evidence of student learning on the required competencies can take two major forms: direct evidence and indirect evidence. Direct evidence is an artifact produced by the student, such as a research paper, test, presentation, journal, portfolio of work, professional report, memo, case study, comprehensive examination, formal thesis, and so forth. Direct evidence is often referred to as embedded evidence, that is, the student does the work as part of a normal course of study. Direct evidence could also come from ratings of student work by faculty, student peers, experts, internship supervisors, etc. Indirect evidence is a self-assessment by the student on his or her work, for example, through a current student survey, student exit survey, alumni survey, etc. Indirect evidence can also be obtained by reputation surveys, third-party reports (newspapers, magazines), etc.

Step 4. Analyze the Evidence

Depending on the type of evidence gathered, various modes of analysis are possible. Specific examples are provided in the exercises that follow.

Step 5. Use the analysis to consider program change(s)

Depending on the results of the analysis of evidence, the program may consider making changes ranging from curriculum revision to adjusting admission criteria, adding or deleting tracks, appointing

required course coordinators, adopting various teaching and learning strategies, and so forth. The specific decision chosen by each program will depend on the results of analysis of evidence of student learning in light of the program's stated expectations for student outcomes.

Exercise 1

Exercise 1 walks you through the five steps in the process for the first one of the universal required competencies enumerated under the NASPAA Standards.

Step 1: Defining the Mission Statement

These two program mission statements (below) will be used as the basis for the self-guided exercises that follow. At any point you may substitute your own mission statement for one of those below and continue on with the exercises.

Program 1 Mission Statement

Our mission for the Masters in Public Administration (MPA) Program at X University is to prepare students to assume positions in state and local government through community service, research, and a program of study, which facilitates intellectual development, promotes scholarship, and integrates the theory and practice of public administration. The MPA Program promotes excellence by preparing in-service individuals for management in public administration. We emphasize ethics and values that encourage those in the public sector to meet the highest possible standards and foster an institutional culture that advances democratic administration and governance.

Program 2 Mission Statement

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) program provides high quality graduate education for current and prospective practitioners in public and nonprofit organizations. Within an evolving metropolitan environment, the program is designed to develop and enhance leadership and management skills essential to public and nonprofit organizations. The curriculum administers ethical principles, critical functions, and professional skills to help students contribute to the policy process and become leaders and managers in public and nonprofit organizations.

Commentary: What are the salient features of each Mission Statement above? Where are their commonalities, and where do they differ? The Mission Statement should describe the basic orientation of the program to the education of graduate students for service in the public sector. All of the subsequent definitions of competencies and their assessment will flow from the Mission Statement.

Are these Mission Statements specific enough to provide guidance for defining the specific required competencies?

Step 2: Defining Each Competency

There are five Universal Required Competencies that graduates of each program will demonstrate (there may be additional mission-specific competencies unique to the program). For each of these, the program will define the competency in specific, observable terms. The specific definition of each competency should be consistent with the program's Mission Statement.

Competency: TO LEAD AND MANAGE IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

PROGRAM 1	PROGRAM 2
<p>Sense of urgency—demonstrated by turning in assignments on time; engaging in applied work as expected; respect for deadlines; produce and convey clear and accurate information in a timely manner</p> <p>Mobilize resources—demonstrated by being able to motivate and engage others; sees assets where others only see scarcity; consensus builder; ability to garner support necessary in organization</p> <p>Attention to detail—demonstrated by evidence of what they know and how they know it; critical thinking; broadening perspective; going from the general to the specific; differentiating between symptoms and problems; being able to account for resources</p> <p>Professionalism in dealing with public—Identifying those who need to participate in the process; transparency; good interpersonal skills; emotional intelligence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to identify organizations and publics involved• Ability to understand and apply different leadership theories to different settings• Appreciation for diversity of organizations and settings• Building multiple perspectives into groups• Demonstrate listening, cooperation, integration of perspective, communication• Organizational development skills—group facilitation, negotiation, and conflict resolution• Skills in collaboration, team building, networking and relationship building• Understand different influence practices

Commentary: Are the competencies defined by each program above consistent with the program's Mission Statement? Has each program identified specific, observable behaviors in its definition? What types of behaviors/skills would a student with this competency exhibit? What about a student without this competency? How many behaviors/skills should be defined for each competency? Here the program should provide definitions of each competency only, not examples of its assessment.

Program 1 does not seem to have linked its focus on state and local government to its definition of student learning on this competency. It is not necessary to specifically link each element of the mission to the definition of each competency but taken as a whole the definitions of all the required competencies should reflect the entirety of elements of the program's mission.

Step 3. Selecting Evidence of Learning on Each Competency

<p>Program 1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Surveys of alumni</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Class projects</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Portfolios</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Capstone</p>	<p>Program 2</p> <p>Develop a Rubric—meets expectation, does not meet expectations</p> <p>(a) How many organizations identified</p> <p>(b) Classify organization in IGR system</p> <p>(c) Does analysis identify/ discuss multiple perspectives</p>
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Commentary: It is not possible from the brief descriptions provided here to make an evaluation of whether the program has selected the necessary and sufficient evidence of student learning on this competency. Each program would have to provide more details, such as the following.

	Mission Element	Competency Definition	Evidence of Student Learning
Program 1	community service	motivate and engage others; consensus builder;	Student performance in community service placement
		ability to garner support necessary in organization	Student performance in role-playing exercise in course on organizations
	management in public administration	critical thinking;	Student work on a capstone course project
		being able to account for resources;	Student performance on an objective test in a budgeting course
		sees assets where others only see scarcity;	Student written analysis of case study dealing with scarcity

	Mission Element	Competency Definition	Evidence of Student Learning
Program 2	evolving metropolitan environment	identify organizations and publics involved; appreciation for diversity of organizations and settings	Student analysis of a management problem involving multiple levels of government organizations with multiple perspectives
	leadership and management skills	Organizational development skills; group facilitation; negotiation; conflict resolution; Skills in collaboration, team building, networking and relationship building	Student performance in a community service placement; OR Student performance in a role-playing simulation in a negotiating course; OR Student team video project of a project to enhance networking;

Step 4. Analyze the Evidence

Each program should have a comprehensive plan for gathering and analyzing evidence of student learning on all competencies. However, not every competency has to be analyzed every year; nor does every possible instance of evidence of student learning have to be gathered for every competency; and not every student's learning has to necessarily be gathered and analyzed every year. Rather, a judicious, representative selection of the most important evidence of student learning on each competency can be gathered and analyzed on a rotating basis by a faculty group. For example, if there are five universal competencies, the faculty group could plan to gather and analyze multiple types of evidence of student learning on one competency per year over a five year period.

There are several strategies for collecting evidence of student learning on the required competencies. For example, student learning may be demonstrated at the end of the program via a capstone course, comprehensive examination, or formal thesis, and then compared to a faculty standard or expectation. A before-and-after strategy may be used to collect a sample of student writing when they begin the program and again when they exit the program, and the results may be compared to estimate the value added by the program. Students may have the opportunity to prepare first drafts of assignments and then re-write a final draft to demonstrate learning on one competency over one course. Students may track their learning, for example on critical thinking, by collecting samples from each of their required courses into a portfolio over their life in the program; faculty may then examine the development of students' critical thinking skills by reviewing these portfolios.

Let's take an example from Program 1's evidence of student learning above. For the competency of being able to account for resources, the evidence was provided by student performance on an objective test in a budgeting course. Presumably on an objective test there are points awarded for each answer and so it would be relatively easy to tally up the number of points earned by each student on the portion of the test having to do with ability to account for resources. So each student receives a numerical score. Or the student work could be evaluated with a rubric that identifies the important dimensions of the competency and differing levels of performance, such as "pass/fail" or "below expectations," "meets expectations," "exceeds expectations".

Let's take another example from Program 2's evidence of student learning on the competency of negotiation and conflict resolution, which was gathered from student performance in a role-playing simulation in a negotiating course. The evidence could consist of observer evaluations of student performance; peer evaluations of student performance; and/or student journals or papers about the experience. The observer or peer evaluations could use a 3-point or 5-point rating scale or rubric for each student. Each student would then have a total score in points derived from the sum of all the rating sheets, or an average score could be calculated for each student. Scores could also be assigned to teams if that is the basis for the evaluation.

Another example from Program 2 concerns student ability to identify organizations and publics involved and to demonstrate an appreciation for diversity of organizations and settings. The evidence is provided by a written student analysis of a management problem involving multiple levels of government organizations with multiple perspectives. The analysis could be evaluated on many dimensions, for example, did the student identify all the relevant organizations? Did the student correctly classify each organization on an intergovernmental grid? Did the student demonstrate an appreciation for diversity? However these are defined,

the students' work can be evaluated on these dimensions and assigned a score or holistic assessment.

Step 5. Use the analysis to consider program change(s)

It is up to the program to establish expectations or benchmarks for student performance, and then to take steps for improvement when student performance does not meet expectations.

Continuing with the example from Program 1 in Step 4 of the objective test for the ability to account for resources, what should the faculty do with the results? For example, should all students score at least 75% of the total possible points on the portion of the test? (Note that this is not the same as the student grade on the entire test). Should all students' work on that portion of the test be judged as "competent" or "meets expectations" or "pass" by a committee of faculty who teach that subject? Or should at least 90% of students' work be expected to meet the faculty standard?

The same rationale can be applied to all analyses of evidence of student learning. The evidence is gathered; the evidence is analyzed; and the evidence is compared to faculty expectations. Are the evaluations of internship supervisors meeting program expectations for student performance? If not, what can be altered? For example, are student presentations meeting expectations in terms of organization, time, visual aids, communication ability, and so forth? Have expectations been clearly communicated to students in the form of a rubric or presentation guide? Do students need to make use of campus resources to help them improve? Should presentations be required in more courses? Should more presentations be done by individuals or teams?

If the judgment of the faculty is that student performance has met expectations, then presumably no further action is warranted at the present time. If student performance could be improved, then the faculty can decide what strategies to adopt. These could include curriculum revision, adoption of different teaching/learning pedagogies, changing textbooks or workbooks, adopting computer-aided tutorials, spending more classroom time on the subject, covering the subject in more than one course, professional development for adjunct or part-time faculty instructors, and so forth.

The important point with these exercises, and with these five steps in general, is that each program needs a Mission Statement to guide its operations, including its curricular offerings, expectations for student learning, assessment of student learning, and use of analysis for program improvement. Setting up a multi-year schedule for gathering and analyzing evidence of student learning on the program-defined competencies will make the process meaningful, manageable, and transparent. The results of this continuous improvement undertaking can be shared with program stakeholders, including the wider university community (for program review and regional accreditation), community partners, employers, prospective students, parents, and others.