



**WORKING DRAFT**

**The Uniqueness of NASPAA-Accredited Programs: The Role of Public Service in Accreditation**

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\*This paper was written to support the NASPAA Standards 2009 standards revision process by Jeff Raffel, who is chair of the NASPAA 2009 Standards Steering Committee. Comments are welcomed at [raffel@udel.edu](mailto:raffel@udel.edu). The paper, which is a working draft, does not necessarily reflect the position of the committee, and is not to be cited without permission of the author. The author thanks Laurel McFarland for her cogent comments and advice on this paper and Crystal Calarusse for her thoughts and help.

As the Standards 2009 Steering Committee discussed the revision of the standard(s) for student competencies, one question reverberated in our minds—How do these competencies differ from what would be required for MBA students? We recognized that this question is part of a more basic question: More generally, what makes NASPAA-accredited programs distinctive? This is a question we need to address for our field to survive and prosper in a competitive market. Now that the boundaries of the public sector have been blurred, with much of governmental services contracted out to profit-making and non-profit organizations, why should students consider our programs over our competitors?

While there are several answers to this question of distinctiveness, the most significant is a focus on public service. This response is now detailed in the philosophical underpinnings statement from Raffel, Maser, and McFarland resulting from the Standards 2009 process. In essence this statement argues that NASPAA accreditation should now be public service values driven, mission-based in order to emphasize the unique contributions of NASPAA schools in meeting the demands of the day. This standards revision rationale should be manifest in several aspects of the revised accreditation standards—required student competencies, the accreditation process, and most significantly, the mission of our programs and the measurement of mission achievement. The Committee therefore recommends that each program seeking accreditation demonstrate its commitment to public service and how it has furthered public service. This addition is vital to strengthening our programs and the profession. This paper discusses the proposed public service mission NASPAA accreditation principle in more depth.

### The Role of Public Service in NASPAA

As noted on the NASPAA website ([http://naspaa.org/about\\_naspaa/about/overview.asp](http://naspaa.org/about_naspaa/about/overview.asp) accessed on July 30, 2007):

The **National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration** is an institutional membership organization which exists to promote excellence in public service education.

The NASPAA member Code of Good Practice second requirement also emphasizes the public service role of members:

Continuously operationalizes the commitment to public service among students, faculty, alumni, and other constituencies, and holds the profession of public service in the highest esteem.

While the current NASPAA accreditation standards do not repeat this explicit mention of public service, the introduction to the standards does state (<http://naspaa.org/accreditation/seeking/reference/standards.asp> as accessed on July 30, 2007):

These standards apply to individual masters degree programs whose purpose is to provide professional education for leadership in public affairs, policy, administration.

Indeed, a majority of NASPAA accredited programs specifically include public service in their stated mission. For example, the first two mission statement posted on the NASPAA Accreditation Institute web site explicitly mention public service goals in the first sentence of their missions (<http://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/institute/compendium.asp> as accessed on July 30, 2007):

#### **East Carolina University**

*The MPA program's mission is:*

- 1) to prepare professional public managers to meet the needs and challenges of public service;
- 2) to advance the study of Public Administration through scholarly and applied research and related activities; and
- 3) to serve government, the profession, and the university through the extension of Public Administration expertise to relevant organizations that could benefit from such expertise.

#### **The George Washington University**

*Mission:* The Department of Public Administration at The George Washington University is committed to maintaining the highest quality of graduate education, research, and public service. Our department is grounded in a strong image of the public interest and a deep commitment to the integration of theory and practice. The Master of Public Administration program at The George Washington University provides an opportunity to study management and policy issues in an intergovernmental context. The program focuses on developing critical intellectual capacities, sound analytical skills, and sensitivity to the ethical and value concerns that are central to the traditions of our field.

Programs which do not explicitly use the words “public service”, which were difficult to locate on the NASPAA web site, also share the goal of enhancing and improving public service. For example,

#### **University of Maine**

*Mission:* First, to prepare students for productive, fulfilling careers in public and nonprofit administration – particularly in the dynamics of state and local government. Second, to promote an understanding and appreciation of the functions and value of government in society. Third, to contribute to the improvement of governance and social institutions.

Certainly, “preparing students for productive, fulfilling careers in public and nonprofit administration” and “contribute to the improvement of governance and social institutions” fall under the notion of enhancing and supporting public service. Generally programs have indicated two ways of enhancing public service. First, they prepare students to participate in, become more competent, and lead in the public service, i.e., in positions that enhance the public’s well being primarily through government and nonprofit positions. In some instances programs provide explicit opportunities for

students to engage in public service activities through service learning, research assistantships, or other activities. Second, programs indicate that their faculty directly or through centers work with (usually public) organizations to enhance their capacity to serve the public. This work may involve technical assistance, program evaluation and other applied research projects, consulting, serving as a forum for public policy discussions, and a number of other activities. **What few NASPAA programs do, however, is take this symbolic commitment to public service to its logical conclusion, specifying public service goals which can be measured as outcomes. Nor do most NASPAA programs measure their students' competencies to perform public service.** Simply put, while most programs reference their public service mission, few take the commitment all the way to assessment and guiding performance or through the measurement of their students' competencies and learning. And our current accreditation process does not demand that programs assess the effectiveness of this important role.

The NASPAA 2009 Standards Steering Committee recognizes the extent to which graduates of accredited programs are now enhancing public service through positions outside of government in the nonprofit and even private sector, e.g., as consultants to governmental organizations or as governmental service providers. Many of our graduates, as Paul Light (1999) has noted, switch sectors during their careers. NASPAA-accredited programs thus positively and legitimately need to prepare students not for a given sector but for a career enhancing public options, policy, and services. Thus, we recognize and applaud a new definition of public service which transcends working in governmental bureaucracies to contributing to community governance, improving the public welfare, promoting justice and social equity, etc. in roles in the public, nonprofit, and even the private sectors.

The Committee is recommending the continuation of mission-based accreditation. Under this philosophy, programs need to not only explicitly specify their missions but also indicate how they assess to extent to which they are achieving their goals. Specifically the current NASPAA standards call for:

## **2.0 Program Mission**

2.1 Mission Statement. The program shall state clearly its educational philosophy and mission and have an orderly process for developing appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources, and constituencies.

2.2 Assessment. The program shall assess its students' performance and the accomplishment of its objectives. Assessment procedures and measures may take any form appropriate to the program and its circumstances, but each program shall develop and use procedures for determining how well it carries out its mission.

2.3 Guiding Performance. The program shall use information about its performance in directing and revising program objectives, strategies, and operations.

Thus, one way of viewing the Committee's public service recommendation is that we are recommending that all programs seeking accreditation or re-accreditation include an explicit statement about their public service role and, as they would for other goals,

note how they have assessed its achievement and how their assessments have impacted their program, i.e. guided performance.

There is a second rationale for emphasizing the achievement of an impact on public service. NASPAA, as an institution representing programs preparing students for leadership positions in public service, advocates for programs and institutions that also achieve this end. NASPAA would benefit from more specific information, data, and examples of how its member programs achieve public service goals. This information may be productively collected through the accreditation process. That is, there is a marketing purpose in requiring programs to note their public service contributions.

### **National Context**

This discussion also takes place in a national context that recently has placed more emphasis on engagement, public service, and the university as citizen. Several national organizations and educational leaders have called for universities to be engaged and better citizens in their communities. Probably the most well-known call for university engagement was from Ernest Boyer, former Commissioner of Education and SUNY chancellor, in his 1990 book *Scholarship Reconsidered* while he was President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Boyer called for moving beyond the teaching versus research debate and broadening the notion of scholarship to include not only the scholarship of discovery, integration, and teaching but also the scholarship of application. In the latter "...the scholar asks, 'How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems? How can it be helpful to individuals as well as institutions'" (21)? Boyer argued that "Graduate education should be more attentive to the scholarship of application" and that graduate study should not be a period of student withdrawal but rather of engagement.

Enhanced public service and university engagement have also received organizational support. The National Association of State and Land-Grant Colleges (NASLGC) has been at the forefront of the engagement movement. For example, in February 1999 NASLGC presidents issued a report, "Returning to our Roots: The Engaged Institution," calling for universities to better respond to the needs of students, enrich the experience of students in bringing research and engagement as well as practical opportunities into the curriculum, and bring university knowledge and expertise to bear on communities ([www.naslg.org/whatsnew/press\\_releases/better\\_public\\_service.htm](http://www.naslg.org/whatsnew/press_releases/better_public_service.htm)), accessed on July 31, 2007). The academic world has generated valuable examples and analyses of university engagement.<sup>1</sup>

The national call for university engagement is a clarion call for schools of public affairs, public administration, and public policy to lead their universities! Public engagement and service is a core value of NASPAA and its member organizations. Many NASPAA programs and schools are not only heeding the engagement charge, they are leading their universities. We should carefully show how we are more successful at engagement than other units of our universities.

University engagement has implications for the work of faculty, the role and values communicated to students, and the role of the university in higher education and society. A commitment to public service as described herein refers to the program's commitment to serving the public with the scholarly and professional expertise of its faculty, staff, and students, and inculcating this public service value into its student body while providing opportunities for students to engage in the process as well. It is not the role of NASPAA to decide HOW this is to be done but rather to insist that this public service role be part of the program's mission and that success be measured in operational terms. Students' commitment to the common good should be enhanced, understanding that there is not one type of organization or sector in which to fulfill this responsibility or provide experience to develop such values and experiences. We recognize that many students will enter "The Public Service," referring to government, but today's opportunity to be of service to the public extends well beyond working in government to significant positions in the non-profit and even private sector.

Thus, given the need to demonstrate the distinctiveness of NASPAA programs, the obligation for university engagement, and the historical role of NASPAA schools in enhancing the public service, the NASPAA Standards 2009 Steering Committee concluded it was appropriate and necessary to determine how each program seeking accreditation might seek to achieve the goal of enhancing public service and to measure the extent to which this has been achieved. Specifically, the Committee decided there should be a design principle that promotes the following in the new standards:

1. The new standards should explicitly refer to public service, especially in setting the parameters for acceptable program missions, and should reflect the evolving definition of public service, and allow room for it to continue to evolve.
2. The standards should ask programs to use outcome measures (or some more precise measurement language) to assess whether they are achieving their public service mission-- focused enough to demand discernible results (especially regarding community engagement, civic engagement, research contribution to public policy, etc.) , but flexible enough to accommodate different missions.
3. The evidence of impact of our public affairs schools and programs on public service should be made public.

### **Implementing the Public Service Principle**

Given the significance of public service and university engagement to NASPAA programs, and given the lack of explicit attention to the assessment of NASPAA programs' public service mission, the Committee thus recommends the following foundation principle to guide the revised standards.

#### **2. The mission of every program should include having a positive impact on public service in a way that is demonstrable to prospective students, peers, and external audiences.**

Rationale: NASPAA accredits master's degrees with an explicit orientation towards preparing capable professionals for the public service and improving the quality of public service education. The aggregate outcome of master's education is presumably to

improve the public service activities. Programs should be able to document the impacts of their efforts on their communities, at the scope appropriate to the program.

This principle is not a standard! NASPAA's standing Standards Committee, working with the NASPAA Standards 2009 Committee, will need to translate this principle into a standard or standards. At this point it is not clear if this will mean a new, explicit standard in this area or a revision of the current mission standard (Standard 2) as per above. Yet however the principle works its way into the standards, programs may well wonder how would they demonstrate that they were having a positive impact on public service.

The answer lies in part in the mission of the program. One would not expect the same evidence for a program working with mid-career local government managers on the Mexican border as a program preparing pre-service students for positions in the federal government. Nor would one seek the same information from an urban program in a land-grant institution working with non-profit, part-time students. The answer would be based on the program's role and activities. Those programs focusing on preparing students for public service could indicate the placement of their students in public service settings, the impact of their students in a subset of these roles, and recognition of their graduates by others, e.g. employers, formal leadership positions held. While programs would not necessarily need to specify the direct public service provision of their faculty, that would certainly be appropriate. Again, some programs would have faculty working with GAO and other federal agencies, some with local nonprofits, and others with a variety of local governments.

In measuring the impact of the program through students and/or faculty, the questions that should be addressed would include the number of individuals involved, the results or impact of their efforts, and the recognition received. More programmatic than individual activities would require similar information on the program rather than be individual-based.

One helpful source of potential measures of public service impact is available from NASLGC. NASLGC has a Council on Extension, Continuing Education, and Public Service "composed of university administrators and staff responsible for extension, continuing education and public-service functions" at member institutions and systems ([http://www.nasulgc.org/council\\_extension.htm](http://www.nasulgc.org/council_extension.htm) accessed on July 31, 2007). This council serves as a forum for discussion, professional development, networking, and assistance to member units. <sup>2</sup> Lynton's *Making the Case for Professional Service* (American Association for Higher Education, 1995) provides several helpful definitions in the public service context as well as proposing measures of public service accomplishment. <sup>3</sup>

Some NASPAA college, school, and program promotion and tenure documents have explicitly addressed the measurement of public service. The University of Delaware's School of Urban Affairs & Public Policy's Promotion & Tenure Policy and Procedures document includes the specific faculty public service expectations as well as examples of evidence indicating the fulfillment of these expectations. <sup>4</sup>

## **Transparency**

This principle also calls for information about the public service impact of programs being made available to the public, presumably on the program's website but perhaps in university publications or by other means. Hopefully no NASPAA program would be anything less than delighted at this requirement!

## **Conclusion**

The NASPAA 2009 Standards Steering Committee, building upon the essence of NASPAA's mission and code of member organizations, is proposing a public service principle in the revised accreditation process to emphasize the distinctiveness of NASPAA graduate masters programs. The principle includes the meaning of public service as a profession and as a calling. Programs seeking accreditation will be asked to include public service goals in their mission and to indicate how they measure their achievement. The specifics of the accomplishment of this component of program mission will be "mission-based," i.e., related to the overall mission of the program.



## Notes

1. One helpful volume which exhorts the theme of engagement and the role that institutions of higher education are playing is *Colleges and Universities as Citizens* (Bringle, Games, and Malloy (1999). The volume provides examples of university engagement and considers the implications for higher education institutions if such roles were broadened. The editors propose, “Specifically, colleges and universities need to (1) develop an infrastructure of facilities, specialized staff, and resources to support collaborations that promote public dialogue, (2) generate information that is relevant to communities, and (3) promote work that serves the academy’s educational and civic function (10).”
2. One presentation on their web site has lists of measures used by universities to measure engagement (William R. Tysseling, “Benchmarking Engagement: Results of National Survey” [http://www.nasulgc.org/CECEPS/AM05%20Presentations/Tysseling\\_EngagementSurvey3.pdf](http://www.nasulgc.org/CECEPS/AM05%20Presentations/Tysseling_EngagementSurvey3.pdf) accessed on August 1, 2007). The study lists measures for inputs, outputs, and impacts. Under inputs, institutions may measure the time and funds devoted to public service. Under outputs, for example, colleges may measure the number of students involved in public service activities and the amount of faculty engagement research in terms of the number of projects and the revenue from such projects. Under impacts, the report focuses on measuring the impact on learners/clients/stakeholders, the university, and external communities. Impacts may be measured by the number of jobs created, the economic impact of the work, and the perceived reception by constituency groups.
3. Lynton focuses on “faculty professional service--that is, work by faculty members based on their scholarly expertise and contributing to the mission of the institution (1).” While various universities have defined this in a variety of ways, the 1993 University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign description seems apropos. Professional service “contributes to the public welfare or the common good, calls upon faculty members’ academic and /or professional expertise, and directly addresses or responds to real-world problems, issues, interest, or concerns (17).” As defined by Lynton, and building upon Boyer, professional service is a scholarly endeavor. Lynton’s report attempts to propose some measures of successful professional service activity and presents information from University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Illinois as examples of operating policies and definitions in this field. (Those seeking further references are urged to read the *Metropolitan Universities* journal and NASLGC publications.)
4. The University of Delaware’s School of Urban Affairs & Public Policy’s Promotion and Tenure document states:

Members of the faculty share with the professional staff of the School a responsibility for public service activities in fulfillment of a mandate from the University to serve the community. The public service programs of the School include: technical assistance to public and nonprofit administrators throughout the State; community organization, education, and technical assistance; and data collection, analysis, and publications. Faculty contributions to these and other public service programmatic efforts are encouraged and may be manifested in such things as: public policy forums, specific short-term projects for

research, program evaluation, professional consultation, assistance to community organization, organization of training workshops, or other technical assistance to public and nonprofit agencies.

## 2.0 Public Service.

2.1 Participation in technical assistance, research, and other forms of aid to governmental, community, and other bodies related to the public service mission of the School is expected of every member of the faculty. Reports and other written material that grow out of such activities may be considered a part of a person's service record.

2.2 Public presentation of research results or other materials within a person's area of expertise constitute another form of public service.

These may occur through a variety of media--in person, television, radio, film, or print--and a variety of formats--lecture, panel discussion, interview, or audience question-and-answer. Where possible, the text of these presentations should be included in the dossier. Whenever formal evaluations, such as the reviews or audience surveys, are available, they are helpful. Otherwise, the Promotion and Tenure Committee will rely on peer evaluation.

In addition, the service record should be more extensive in all areas and reflect sustained contributions. Moreover, there should be indicators of leadership in the service area evidenced by the initiation, organization, and direction of various public service projects, by recognized contributions through committee memberships and appointive positions in the School, College, University, and community, and by service to the profession at large. Specifically, candidates for full professor are expected:

1. To have initiated, organized, and directed public service projects or programs in the School.

## References

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