

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Thomas Greitens  
MPA Program Director  
Central Michigan University

FROM: Laura Bloomberg  
Chair, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation  
Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

DATE: July 20, 2017

SUBJECT: NASPAA Accreditation Review

On behalf of the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that the Commission found your Master of Public Administration program to be in substantial conformity with NASPAA Standards, subject to the monitoring provisions outlined in the enclosed report. Your program is accredited for a period of 7 years – through August 31, 2024 – and will be included on the Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. An abbreviated letter announcing your accreditation has also been sent to your Provost, Michael A. Gealt, and I encourage you to further share this decision letter with your colleagues and program administrators.

Please accept the Commission's congratulations on the accreditation of your program. By pursuing and achieving accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education. You are part of the global community of over 190 accredited graduate programs in public service. The Commission wishes to commend the program for maintaining its unwavering commitment to students in the face of a rapidly changing environment and across multiple modalities.

Your program is in substantial conformance with the NASPAA Standards. However, the Commission concluded that questions remain about Standards 4.3, 6.1/7.1. Accordingly, COPRA plans to monitor your continued progress, annually, on these specific standards. The Commission asks that you report your progress on these particular standards each year in your annual accreditation maintenance report.

If you have any questions about this decision or NASPAA's accreditation process, I would be happy to answer them via email at [bloom004@umn.edu](mailto:bloom004@umn.edu). Questions about this year's annual report should be directed to Heather Hamilton, Accreditation Manager and Director of Assessment, at [Hamilton@naspaa.org](mailto:Hamilton@naspaa.org).

Warmly,



Laura Bloomberg  
Chair, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

**Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation  
Report on Monitoring Provisions**

**Master of Public Administration  
Central Michigan University**

**July 20, 2017**

**Item 1: Standard 4.3 – Support for Students**

Standard 4.3 states, “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 affairs, administration, and policy.”

In its Interim Report, the Commission noted that the program faced challenges when collecting employment data for its alumni and requested that “the program elaborate on its specific strategies to collect data on this programmatic outcome.” In its response, the program stated that past attempts to collect employment data were hindered by low response rates to voluntary surveys.

The Site Visit Report further confirmed that,

With regard to tracking graduates and alumni, the Site Visit Team learned the department was using all of the familiar methods (e.g., Facebook, twitter, Instagram) for engaging students and alumni so that it could continue to collect data from program alumni over time. The team was pleased to learn of a growing partnership with the University Alumni office that will ultimately result in greater information sharing across entities.

The Commission appreciates that the recently established relationship with the university’s alumni office presents new opportunities to elicit employment data from alumni. The Commission requests that the program provide additional information about the new strategies it is leveraging to remain connected to its alumni and that it collect complete employment placement data.

**Item 2: Standard 6.1 – Resource Adequacy/Standard 7.1 – Communications**

Standard 6.1 states, “The program will have sufficient funds, physical facilities, and resources in addition to its faculty to pursue its mission, objectives, and continuous improvement.”

Standard 7.1 states, “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.”

In its Interim Report, the Commission sought clarification from the program regarding its ability to fulfill its mission given declining resources as a result of diminishing enrollment. The Commission also requested the site visit team engage university administration on the internal competition with the

Master of Science in Administration-Public Administration concentration (MSA), given that the program reported student confusion regarding the differences or similarities between the MPA and MSA.

The program responded that it was pursuing measures to address declining enrollments that had exhibited early signs of success, such as the addition of an undergraduate degree in “public & nonprofit administration” and curricular revisions. The program also stated,

Our program continues to believe that our enrollment declines can primarily be attributed to: the university’s closure of off-campus locations where our program historically offered the MPA program, a shifting focus among today’s students wanting the flexibility of online education rather than face-to-face interactions at off-campus locations, and internal competition from CMU’s MSA-PA program which is online and has more substantial marketing efforts behind it.

The Site Visit Report confirmed, that the MSA-PA program appeared to enjoy significantly greater fiscal appropriations and market exposure. The Report elaborated,

Historically, the MSA program has controlled all its own administrative functions such as marketing, admissions, and enrollment services as well as academic program concentrations. This resulted in confusion between not only the MSA-PA program and the MPA, but also with other academic programs across campus. The transition to a "one campus" model has centralized a number of administrative support services that have traditionally been under the direct control of the MSA program.

In the final response of the program to COPRA, it identifies a number of initiatives that the program intends to help to distinguish itself from the MSA-PA program, including the formal adoption of the CNP credential, a new joint degree offering with the Criminal Justice Program, and the Provost’s formal approval of a general version of its MPA degree fully online. In its discussion of the expanded marketing opportunities presented by the addition of the online version of the program, the program states,

In our marketing meetings, we have continually emphasized the practitioner (i.e. ‘working professional’) dimension of our program. We feel that such actions help to address the [Site Visit Team’s] concern about messaging regarding our MPA program and how that messaging could be refined to better emphasize the practitioner dimension to our program.

Also in the final response, the program elaborated on its new online course offerings for the MPA-General Concentration and noted,

By going online, we’ve also been able to increase resources earmarked for the program. For instance, the University allocated \$25,000 for a Spring marketing campaign that advertised our MPA-General Concentration degree being offered online starting in the Fall of 2017. Additionally, our program has now been included in the online programs’ marketing budget for the fiscal year 2017-2018. Consequently, our program will most likely have an even greater marketing budget in the upcoming year...In addition, by going online we’ve been able to secure a resource commitment from our College Dean to pay for 50% of CNP dues and we’ve also been able to have multi-year contracts for our non-tenure track, full time public administration faculty...renewed.

The Commission appreciates the MPA program's efforts to be responsive to its students and community while pursuing innovative strategies to grow its program. While the campus is transitioning to a one campus model that centralizes administrative support that was previously unevenly distributed or controlled by particular programs/groups, there are still concerns about the extent to which the program will continue to have adequate resources in terms of marketing funds and support of upper administration to match both resources and communications to its mission. With the entry of the accredited MPA into the online market and focus on both pre- and in-service students, the Commission seeks evidence the program continues to ensure available information for prospective and current students to make informed decisions and appropriately distinguish the accredited MPA from the MSA. Finally, given the identified issues related to marketing resources and the need to ensure that communications are "sufficient to inform decisions by its stakeholders such as prospective students", the Commission requests the program provide additional information regarding its strategies to ensure it has the support necessary to pursue its mission.

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Over time, the Commission expects that programs will continue to develop their approach to strategic program management, including student learning assessment, and that this maturation will be evident in the program's annual accreditation maintenance reports. As the public service field continues to advance and evolve, COPRA seeks to support programs as they strategically pursue their missions, graduate leaders in public service, and achieve excellence in education.

Please note that the Commission will review each of your annual accreditation maintenance reports to determine ongoing conformity with NASPAA Standards, including progress in the areas noted above. Your annual reports and COPRA's actions in response to your reports will become a permanent part of your record for your next accreditation review. COPRA's acceptance of the Program's annual reports is contingent on receiving satisfactory responses on the issues noted. If the program does not submit the information requested regarding the monitored standards in annual reports, the Commission may require the program to re-enter the accreditation cycle with an updated Self Study Report. Monitoring provisions remain in effect and must be addressed each year until the program is notified by COPRA that the monitoring has been removed.

The Commission also wishes to reemphasize its commitment to the transparency and accountability central to Standard 7.1 – Communications. Accredited programs are expected to consistently, accurately, and publicly provide their stakeholders with relevant information about the program and its student learning outcomes, to include graduation rates and employment placement. Programs found out of conformance at the annual report review each fall will be expected to resolve any nonconformities immediately upon notification, at the risk of COPRA alerting the university provost and pulling the program into an early reaccreditation review.

We look forward to receiving your annual report by **October 1, 2017**. Questions about this year's annual report should be directed to Heather Hamilton at [Hamilton@naspaa.org](mailto:Hamilton@naspaa.org).