

ASSESSMENT REPORT: 2014–15 AND 2015-16 ACADEMIC YEARS

Notre Dame de Namur University School of Business and Management
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MASTERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (MPA) PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

This report summarizes our assessment activities in the School of Business and Management’s Masters of Public Administration (MPA) graduate program for academic years 2014-15 and 2015-16. The report is based on assessment data gathered during the fall and spring semesters of both academic years.

Please note that we have recently modified our assessment processes in all graduate programs in order to make them more rigorous and comprehensive and to optimize the statistical accuracy and representativeness of the findings that emerge from analysis of the assessment data. Furthermore, we have begun assessing Concentration Learning Outcomes which has necessitated a streamlining of our entire data collection and analysis process. 2014-16 represents our third assessment cycle of using the new evaluation methodology.

The process we used for the academic years 2011-12, 2010-11 and 2009-10 consisted of evaluating capstone projects assigned within the MPA Capstone courses for achievement of all six Program Learning Outcomes. The process we have switched to as of 2012-13, and have refined in 2014-15, and which we plan to continue using for the next year consists of assessing the relevant Program Learning Outcomes in the “core” Common Professional Component (CPC) classes as well as the relevant Concentration Learning Outcomes in the MPA concentrations (Human Resources Management and Public Affairs Administration). We feel this approach is superior to the capstone-only method used previously since it provides a greater number of data points using a more diverse set of assessment methods and faculty evaluators as a gauge of our progress toward achieving the PLOs and allows us to collect and analyze data for the concentration outcomes (which the capstone-only method does not).

It should be noted that due to staffing transitions, PLO data was not collected under the new multi-course method in the year 2012-13. 2013-14 is the first year in which such data have been collected. Thus, we are unable to include 2012-13 data in our MPA trend analysis.

GENERAL PROCESS

The process described below was followed in order to assess our achievement of the Program Learning Outcomes in the MPA program:

1. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for each of the graduate programs were created and vetted with faculty and administration within the School of Business and Management. Our PLOs were most recently revamped and renewed in 2010.

2. Instructors teaching core (CPC) courses or concentration elective courses in the MPA program are asked to identify the set of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Concentration Learning Outcomes (ConLOs) relevant to their course(s).
3. Instructors identify provisional methods to assess each of the relevant learning outcomes identified in 2.
4. The provisional methods are vetted with the School of Business and Management's Director of Graduate Programs for appropriateness and feasibility. In some cases, instructors are asked to revise their initial assessment methods to align more closely with the PLO or ConLO, to ensure a more feasible data collection and assessment process, or to provide a greater degree of concrete evidence of outcome achievement. Instructors may also be advised to focus on different PLOs or ConLOs in order to arrive at the aforementioned beneficial outcomes.
5. Once approved, instructors are asked to assess student work according to their approved assessment plans.
6. The Director of Graduate Programs obtains data from each of the assessing instructors, and then compiles and analyzes the data, noting trends and issues (reported here). See "Program Assessment Rubric" for a description of our assessment benchmarks.
7. The Director of Graduate Programs shares the findings with SBM and NDNU faculty, staff and administration. The group jointly brainstorms action steps for "closing the loop" on outcome achievement deficiencies. Suitable ideas emerging from the discussions are then implemented as early as possible in the academic year.
8. The next review cycle's results are examined to see if improvement has occurred in the areas of deficiency.

DATA SOURCES

As mentioned above, our PLO assessment data comes from assessments made in the "core" (Common Professional Component or "CPC") courses in the MPA program. ConLO assessment data comes from assessments made in the elective courses pertaining to the concentration outcomes being assessed (Human Resources Management or Public Affairs Administration). We have created a system that optimizes the simultaneous collection of data for both program and concentration outcomes given our limited faculty resources. New faculty members teaching core courses may initially be exempt from providing assessment data since they are less familiar with the pedagogy used in the courses they are teaching. Furthermore, assessments are typically provided by full-time faculty and not by part-time adjunct faculty, though there are exceptions. We compensate for these data deficiencies by collecting more data in courses staffed by veteran faculty.

Data for the assessments are collected in the fall and spring semesters of each academic year. We typically do not collect assessment data for summer courses given the diminished number of courses taught in summer semester. It should be noted that the most current review cycle is based on two years (i.e. four semesters) of aggregated data, as opposed to one year (i.e. two semesters) of aggregated data as we have done in the past. Limited faculty resources coupled with the additional demand of assessing concentration learning outcomes has necessitated that we collect data over a longer longitudinal

timeframe (i.e. two years instead of one). The amount of data we were able collect for each individual year (either 2014-15 or 2015-16) would have been inadequate for properly analyzing the outcomes. Combining the data for both years enables us to perform more robust analyses.

The “core” CPC courses for the MPA program that provide data for our PLO assessments are:

MPA Core Courses
Organization Management & Theory
Introduction to Public Administration
Human Resources Management
Government Budget & Finance
Leadership Concepts
Spatial Analysis
Community Based Research
Public Policy (MPA Capstone)

The MPA concentration elective courses that provide data for our ConLO assessments are:

Human Resources Management Concentration	Public Affairs Administration Concentration
Conflict Management	Administrative Law
Global Mgmt of Virtual Teams	Contemporary Issues in Public Administration
Labor Mgmt Relations	Managing Diversity
Managing Diversity	Public Relations
Recruitment, Training and Development	

It should be noted that we include assessments of Online MPA courses in our data, though we do not break achievement in Online MPA courses out as a separate component of analysis in the current report. Given the ongoing scarcity and volatility of courses offered online (versus the on-ground MPA program which has a more stable and substantial number of course offerings each semester) that results in a scarcity of online data available to evaluate achievement of the PLOs, we are unable to produce robust evaluations of the Online MPA as a separate and distinct component of our MPA program. Our new assessment process proposed for the graduate programs (see “Next Steps” section below) addresses this challenge.

MPA Program Learning Outcomes

The Program Learning Outcomes for the MPA are as follows: (key word in ***bold blue italics***)

1. Students will develop competencies for dealing with individual differences in skills and ***behavior*** and the basics of personality development as it relates to management and the behavior of people in community organizations.

2. Students will develop communication and information literacy (*info literacy*) skills necessary for gathering and analyzing data, writing reports, explaining issues and policies, persuasively presenting initiatives, and corresponding with colleagues and public contingents.
3. Students gain experiential knowledge about the challenges and model practices of contemporary public sector administration needed to effectively assess *public sector* organizations, community partners, and delivery of services.
4. Students will be able to *quantitatively* assess public policy programs from program formulation through evaluation.
5. Students will develop knowledge of political and legal institutions and processes as well as economic and social institutions and processes to *problem solve*.
6. Students apply the NDNU mission and *hallmarks* (community engagement and social justice) to course curriculum.

The Concentration Learning Outcomes for the MPA are as follows: (key word in *bold blue italics*)

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

1. Understand and apply human resources *best practices*, leadership and risk management principles that foster the development of productive work environments that treat employees equitably.
2. Apply *evidence-based management* techniques and research findings to optimize the quality of employee, group and firm level managerial decision-making within public organizations.
3. Gain an understanding of how to develop and analyze the *efficacy* of performance management programs within public organizations.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

1. Develop the skills needed to analyze, create and improve *policies* that promote public welfare and social well-being.
2. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the functional, social, economic and political aspects of the various *stakeholders* (i.e. government administrators, politicians, fundraisers and the press) that interact with public organizations in order to better serve the organization's constituents.
3. Develop the legal, financial, managerial and *advocacy* skills needed to successfully lobby a public organization's position, fund operations and develop partnerships with key public sector groups in order to effectively and efficiently achieve the public organization's mission.

OUTCOME ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

PLO and ConLO data is coded on a 2-5 scale, with the following point descriptors:

- 5 = Exemplary Achievement of Learning Outcome
- 4 = Satisfactory Achievement of Learning Outcome
- 3 = Questionable Achievement of Learning Outcome – Possible Deficiency
- 2 = Learning Outcome Not Achieved – Definite Deficiency

Data for the PLOs and ConLOs are reported as averages and standard deviations. We generally consider averages between 4 and 5 to be acceptable and averages between 2 and 3 to be unacceptable outcomes. Averages between 3 and 4 are considered on a case by case basis, but generally indicate a cause for concern, especially if the average is tending closer to the 3.0 mark. Standard deviations are used to evaluate the confidence level of the calculated averages (i.e. high SD means we are less confident in the data).

Our assessment goals for the program are to:

1. Maintain all yearly PLO / ConLO averages above 4.0.
2. Maintain all semesterly PLO / ConLO averages above 4.0.
3. Reverse and rectify any significant, sustained downward trends in PLO / ConLO averages, including those having central tendencies in the lower part of the 4-5 range.

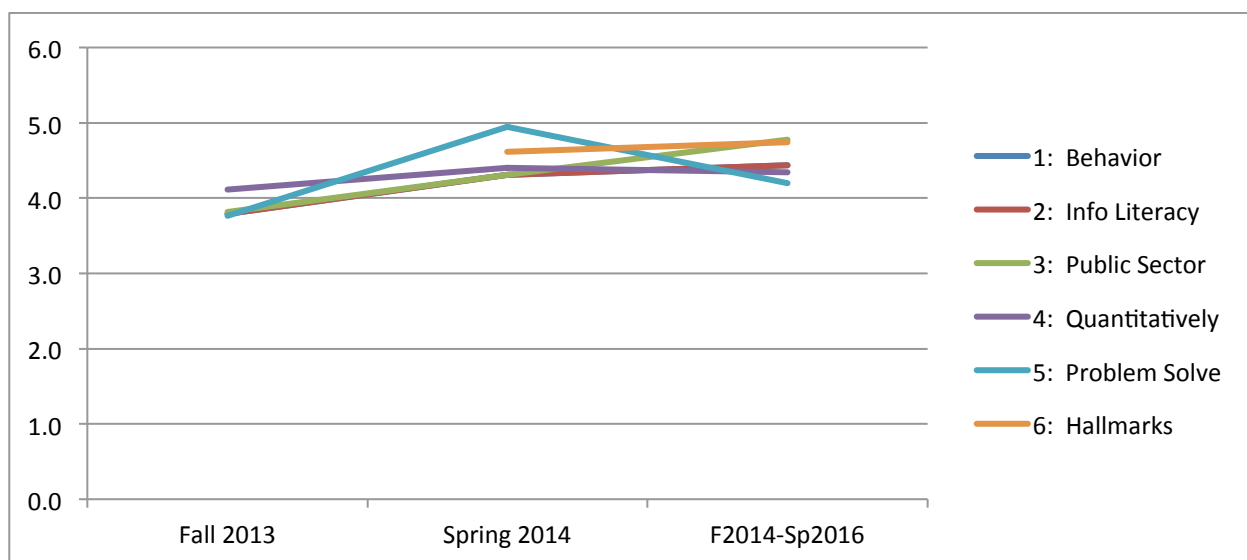
CURRENT ASSESSMENT DATA

Below we present data summaries for our Fall 2014 – Spring 2016 review cycle PLO and ConLO assessments.

Program Learning Outcomes							
MPA Program							
		<u>1: Behavior</u>	<u>2: Info Literacy</u>	<u>3: Public Sector</u>	<u>4: Quantitatively</u>	<u>5: Problem Solve</u>	<u>6: Hallmarks</u>
	2014-16 Average	4.4	4.4	4.8	4.3	4.2	4.7
	2014-16 St Dev	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.8	1.1	0.4
Concentration Learning Outcomes							
MPA Program							
Human Resources Management							
		<u>1: Best Practices</u>	<u>2: EBM</u>	<u>3: Efficacy</u>			
	2014-16 Average	3.7	4.6	-			
	2014-16 St Dev	1.3	1.1	-			
Public Affairs Administration							
		<u>1: Policies</u>	<u>2: Stakeholders</u>	<u>3: Advocacy</u>			
	2014-16 Average	4.4	4.7	4.7			
	2014-16 St Dev	0.8	0.7	0.7			

Below we present in tabular and graphical formats a trend analysis of PLO data for three consecutive analysis periods.

MPA - Trend Data by Semester						
	1: Behavior	2: Info Literacy	3: Public Sector	4: Quantitatively	5: Problem Solve	6: Hallmarks
Fall 2013	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.1	3.8	
Spring 2014	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.4	5.0	4.6
F2014-Sp2016	4.4	4.4	4.8	4.3	4.2	4.7
Trend	0.32	0.32	0.48	0.11	0.22	0.13



DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Program Learning Outcomes

The following observations can be made about the most recent and cumulative MPA PLO data:

1. Assessments for all PLOs (1-6) fell between the 'satisfactory' and 'exemplary' points of the evaluation scale. Thus we do not observe any deficiencies in the achievement of the MPA Program Learning Outcomes.
2. The highest scoring learning outcome was 'Public Sector' (4.8) and the lowest scoring outcome was 'Problem Solve' (4.2).
3. Though trend data should be viewed as highly tentative given the limit number of periods being observed and aggregate nature of the most recent period, we observed moderate to strong positive upward trends in all PLO assessments between the 2013-14 academic (baseline) year and the most recent Fall 2014 – Spring 2016 assessment period. The 'Behavior', 'Info Literacy', 'Public Sector' and 'Problem Solve' outcomes all showed strong upward trends ranging from .22 to .48 increases per period. The 'Quantitatively' and 'Hallmarks' outcomes showed more

moderate upward trends. Though again it should be noted that the 2014-16 data point counts four semesters as a single observation, thus semesterly increases in PLO results for these outcomes are likely to be substantially lower in magnitude.

Action Items: None needed

Concentration Learning Outcomes

The SBM Graduate Business Programs began collecting Concentration Learning Outcome (ConLO) data for all MPA concentrations in Fall 2014. Each concentration has three learning outcomes which were developed by faculty having the appropriate subject matter expertise and implemented in Fall 2014. For the 'Human Resources Management' concentration, we were able to collect data (and therefore assess) on two of three outcomes. For the Public Affairs Administration concentration, we were able to collect data (and therefore) assess on all three outcomes. However, given the paucity of data points collected for the assessed outcomes, we are hesitant to draw firm conclusions as to the level of achievement represented by the data. Thus, our conclusions are tentative and need to be reconsidered in light of data acquired in future assessment cycles.

Data collection for the ConLOs was complicated by the following factors: (1) The new implementation of a requirement to assess ConLO data and perform ConLO assessments, (2) the concurrent need to assess Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for graduate and undergraduate business programs which, along with the ConLO assessment requirement, placed an undue burden on faculty to assess and collect data.

The following observations can be made about the MPA ConLO data:

Human Resources Management

1. The 'Best Practices' outcome scored somewhat below the 'satisfactory' mark (3.7).
2. The 'Evidence Based Management' (EBM) outcome scored well above the 'satisfactory' mark.
3. We were unable to collect data (and therefore assess) on the 'Efficacy' outcome.
4. To date, insufficient data has been collected to make firm conclusions about any of the three HRM outcomes.

Public Affairs Administration

1. All three outcomes scored well above the satisfactory mark.
2. Two of three outcomes 'Stakeholders' and 'Advocacy' approached the exemplary mark (4.7).
3. To date, insufficient data has been collected to make firm conclusions about any of the three HRM outcomes.

Action Items:

1. **Reformulate MPA ConLO Data Collection Processes:** As part of our master plan to reformulate the assessment process, we will ensure that an adequate amount of data is collected each semester for each of the Concentration Learning Outcomes in each concentration. A greater extent of ConLO assessment and data collection will primarily result from a streamlined PLO data collection process which will allow most faculty to concentrate their efforts on solely collecting ConLO data.

NEXT STEPS

The following next steps will be implemented during our 2016-17 academic year:

1. 2014-16 assessment results will be discussed broadly with SBM graduate faculty and administration. The main focus of the discussion will be on assessment process reformulation in response to our sole action item of needing to collect more ConLO data.
2. Assessment process reformulation is currently underway and will continue throughout the 2016-17 academic year. See “New Assessment Processes” below for an outline of the reformulated process.

The rationale for the reformulation is:

- a. To simplify and standardize the generation, collection, analysis and reporting of assessment data for faculty and administration
- b. Our current assessment process is too complex and confusing which lowers the level of faculty participation and discretionary effort in assessment efforts. We want more faculty collecting a manageable amount of assessment data.
- c. To offset the added demands of Concentration Learning Outcome (ConLO) assessment.
- d. To standardize assessment methods between ground and online programs

The goal is to produce a set of learning outcomes that:

- a. Are easy and straightforward to assess
 - b. Reflect what MPA students should know / skills they should have
 - c. Address market needs and boost employment potential
 - d. Incorporate some aspect of dealing with complexity
 - e. Are aligned to the SBM Strategic Plan
 - f. Standardize assessment methods between ground and online programs
3. We will endeavor to reflect upon and assess our own assessment processes. Faculty will be asked to provide feedback about ease of conducting assessments, whether they believe assessments are helping to improve learning outcomes, whether our rubrics adequately address the PLOs and about the quality and usefulness of the PLOs and ConLOs themselves.

NEW ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

Final Implementation Target – Fall 2017

PLO Assessment Process:

- A new set of Program Learning Outcomes for the MPA Program meeting the requirements stated above will be developed and approved by SBM faculty and administration. We are going to use the NASPAA accreditation outcomes as our baseline for developing the new MPA PLOs. This is being done to facilitate our eventual application for NASPAA accreditation which requires assessment of NASPAA’s specific outcomes.
- Summative assessments of all (new) PLOs will be conducted exclusively in the MPA Capstone course using the capstone project as the signature assignment.
- The capstone project will co-developed by MPA faculty teaching the Community Based Research and MPA Capstone courses and the Program Director as a standardized assignment to be used in all MPA Capstone instances (ground, online and satellite programs). The assignment will be designed to yield assessment data on all MPA PLOs.
- A rubric will be developed to assess the MPA PLOs using the signature capstone project assignment. We expect to have 2-3 dimensions per PLO.
- Faculty teaching the MPA Capstone course and second readers will independently evaluate the capstone projects based on the newly designed rubric.
- The MPA Capstone instructor will coordinate the PLO assessment process in conjunction with the Program Director.
- Given our current course cycling, we expect to produce one full PLO assessment each year for the ground MPA and one full PLO assessment each year for the online MPA.

ConLO Assessment Process:

- The graduate faculty will revisit the current set of MPA concentration learning outcomes (ConLOs) and suggest any tweaks to be made. SBM faculty will then approve any minor revisions to the ConLOs. We expect, for the most part, to continue using the original ConLOs that were developed in 2014. Doing so lends the advantage of maintaining data continuity.
- We do not intend to create specific standardized rubrics for the ConLOs at this time. Instead, faculty will be asked to create an assessment map linking Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) to Concentration Learning Outcomes (ConLOs) using signature assignments. The maps will be approved by the Program Director. A template version of this map is shown below.

	ConLO #1	ConLO #2	ConLO #3
CLO #1		Signature Assignment #2 Evaluation Method for SA#2	
CLO #2	Signature Assignment #1 Evaluation Method for SA#1		

CLO #3			Signature Assignment #3 Evaluation Method for SA#3

- Faculty not assessing the capstone for PLOs will be asked to provide three ConLO assessments in one or more concentration elective courses, preferably covering all three concentration outcomes.
- Identical assessment methods (i.e. mappings, signature assignments and evaluation methods) will be used for all program modalities (ground, online, satellite) to ensure comparability across modalities.