

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME ASSESSMENT REPORT: 2013-14 ACADEMIC YEAR

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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 the academic year 2013-14. The report is based on assessment data gathered during the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters.

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. 2013-14 constitutes our second year 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 which we plan to continue using for the foreseeable future consists of assessing the appropriate and relevant Program Learning Outcomes in each of the "core" Common Professional Component (CPC) classes every time the core course is taught (with occasional exceptions). 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.

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 compare results from the current year to the prior year.

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 in the graduate programs are asked to identify the set of Program Learning Outcomes relevant to their course(s).
3. Instructors teaching core (CPC) courses are then asked to 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 so that they more closely align to a proper assessment of the relevant Program Learning Outcomes and/or allow for a more feasible and practical assessment and data collection process. In other cases, instructors are advised to modify their selection of Program Learning Outcomes to assess in order to arrive at the same beneficial outcomes mentioned above.
5. Once approved, instructors are asked to assess 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 at the beginning of the academic year. The group jointly brainstorms how to improve upon any problematic areas demonstrated by the findings and identifies action steps needed “close the loop” on program learning outcome achievement deficiencies. Suitable ideas emerging from the discussions are then implemented as early in the academic year as possible.
8. The next academic year’s results are examined to see if improvement has occurred in the areas of deficiency.

DATA SOURCES

As mentioned above, our assessment data comes from assessments made in the “core” (Common Professional Component or “CPC”) courses within each graduate program. Each time a “core” course is run during the fall or spring semesters, we ask instructors to provide assessment data for that course. New faculty members teaching core courses may initially be exempt from providing assessment data since they are less familiar with the course structures and pedagogy in the courses they are teaching. We compensate for such “CPC” deficiencies by simply collecting more data in other simultaneously running CPC courses.

Data for the assessments are collected in the fall and spring semesters of each academic year. We do not collect assessment data for summer courses given the diminished number and more “elective” nature of the courses taught in this timeframe.

The “core” CPC courses for the MPA program that provide data for our 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

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 scarcity of courses offered online (versus the on-ground MPA program which has a more substantial number of course offerings each semester) and the resulting scarcity of online data available to evaluate achievement of the PLOs, we believe the best strategy is to accumulate another year's worth of data in order to evaluate Online MPA as a separate and distinct component of our MPA program. Enrollments have been steadily rising in the Online MPA Program and we have been able to offer a greater number and variety of courses online which gives us the opportunity to obtain more meaningful samples that speak to the online students' achievement of program outcomes.

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

MPA Program Level Learning Outcomes

The Program Learning Outcomes for the MPA Program 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.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

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

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

Data for the PLOs are reported as averages and standard deviations. We generally consider PLO averages of 5 and 4 to be acceptable assessment outcomes and PLO averages of 3 and 2 to be unacceptable outcomes. 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 averages above 4.0.
2. Maintain all semesterly PLO averages above 4.0.
3. Reverse and rectify any significant, sustained downward trends in PLO averages, including those having central tendencies in the 4-5 range.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT DATA

Below are our PLO assessment data summaries for the academic year 2013-14.

MPA Course PLO Summary Data 2013-14 Academic Year				Program Learning Outcomes Assessments (scale is 2-5)					
Semester	Course	Instructor	Metric	1: Behavior	2: Info Literacy	3: Public Sector	4: Quantitatively	5: Problem Solve	6: Hallmarks
Fall 2013	Organization Management Theory (online)	Goodson	Average (Mean)	3.8	3.8	3.8			3.8
			Standard Deviation	0.9	0.9	0.9			0.9
Fall 2013	Organization Mgmt & Theory	Fogal	Average (Mean)	3.7	3.7				
			Standard Deviation	1.2	1.2				
Fall 2013	Government, Budget & Finance	Holtzman	Average (Mean)				4.1		3.7
			Standard Deviation				1.1		1.3
Fall 2013	FALL 2013 OVERALL	All Instructors	Average (Mean)	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.1		3.8
			Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.1	-	-		0.1
			Standard Deviation (all data)	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.1		1.1
Spring 2014	Public Policy (MPA Capstone)	Martin	Average (Mean)	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.5		5.0
			Standard Deviation	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.7		0.0
Spring 2014	Government, Budget & Finance (online)	Holtzman	Average (Mean)				4.3		4.9
			Standard Deviation				0.5		0.4
Spring 2014	SPRING 2014 OVERALL	All Instructors	Average (Mean)	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.4		5.0
			Standard Deviation (by class avg)	-	-	-	0.1		0.1
			Standard Deviation (all data)	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.6		0.2
OVERALL 2013-14 ACADEMIC YEAR	All Courses	All Instructors	Average (Mean)	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.3		4.2
			Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.2		0.7
			Standard Deviation (all data)	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.9		1.1

Masters of Public Administration (MPA) Course PLO Summary Data 2013-14 Academic Year		Program Learning Outcomes Assessments (scale is 2-5)					
Semester	Metric	1: Behavior	2: Info Literacy	3: Public Sector	4: Quantitatively	5: Problem Solve	6: Hallmarks
Fall 2013	Average (Mean)	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.1	3.8	-
	Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.1	-	-	0.1	-
	Standard Deviation (all data)	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.1	-
Spring 2014	Average (Mean)	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.4	5.0	4.6
	Standard Deviation (by class avg)	-	-	-	0.1	0.1	-
	Standard Deviation (all data)	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.2	0.5
OVERALL 2013-14	Average (Mean)	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.3	4.2	4.6
	Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.7	-
	Standard Deviation (all data)	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.5

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The current year PLO assessment data lead us to the following conclusions:

1. All Program Learning Outcomes within the MBA program appear to have been achieved satisfactorily in the academic year 2013-14 (an overall average of 4.2 out of 5 across all PLOs), though students performed better in some outcomes than others.
2. Our highest achievements for the year were in the “Quantitatively” and “Hallmarks” PLOs.
3. Our lower areas of achievement for the year were in the “Behavior”, “Info Literacy” and “Public Sector” PLOs. All three of these PLOs assessed at a 4.0 which is the bottom cusp of our threshold of satisfactory performance.
4. It should be noted that another full-year cycle of data collection and analysis will be beneficial in helping us affirm, revise or negate any conclusions reached within this report. The above conclusions are based on only one academic cycle worth of data using a system that was newly established only two years ago. It should also be noted that sample sizes of data were somewhat inadequate in two ways: (1) only four classes were sampled to produce data for the six outcomes, (2) a small number of student assessment instances were collected for two of the four classes sampled, and (3) standard deviations for PLOs #1-3 were among the highest of any PLO measurements taken across the six MPA PLOs and PLOs in the other graduate programs, indicating less confidence in these means.

ACTION STEPS FOR THE 2014-15 ACADEMIC YEAR

Given that PLO data for the MPA has only been collected for one academic cycle under the new system and that our confidence in the means showing the lowest achievement (Behavior, Info Literacy and Public Sector) is questionable, we believe the best course of action is to collect another academic cycle worth of data and re-assess the results at the end of the 2014-15 for areas demonstrating a need for improvement.

Extra care will be taken to ensure that sufficient data is collected during the 2014-15 cycle to produce a robust analysis and alleviate the aforementioned concerns pertaining to the analysis of the current year’s data.

NEXT STEPS – GENERAL ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

The following next steps will be implemented during our 2014-15 academic year:

1. 2013-14 assessment results will be discussed broadly with faculty as well as SBM and SBM administration. We will emphasize the need to collect a bigger data set consisting of a wider

array of courses and a greater number of student assessment instances in each of the courses chosen for assessment.

2. MBA faculty and the Graduate Business Program Director will jointly develop a detailed set of rubrics for each of the six Program Learning Outcomes for the MPA program. Our initial year of assessment using the multiple-course method purposely kept assessment at a more general level so that faculty could (1) best adapt to the new system, and (2) discover the important elements of assessing each of the learning outcomes which will feed into our development of the more detailed rubrics in 2014-15.
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 themselves.