

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2018-19

Department: Political Science

Program(s): Master of Public Administration (MPA)

Assessment reports are to be submitted annually to report assessment activities and results by program. The reports are due every summer with a deadline of September 15th each year.

The use of this template is entirely optional.

Note: These reports have been required by MSU policy since 2004.

1. What Was Done

Based on our assessment plan, we evaluated learning outcomes #4 and #6 this year.

4) Articulate and apply a public service perspective.

6) Recognize relevant theoretical and normative orientations and their practical consequences for public policy and administration.

2. What Data Were Collected

Per our Assessment Plan, Outcomes #4 and #6 were evaluated by using students' comprehensive exams.

Ten MPA students completed comprehensive exams during the 2018-19 academic year, seven in the Fall and three in the Spring semester. Evaluation of the comprehensive exams focused primarily on Foundations of PA and Leadership and Ethics questions, as well as student responses that indicated a grounded understanding of a public service perspective, the normative attributes of governance and their impacts on practice.

3. What Was Learned

Objective #4 – Articulate and apply a public service perspective.

An examination of all students' exams showed evidence of the ability to:

- Identify distinguishing factors of public and governance organizations, and
- Apply that knowledge into critical or institutional operations.

All students' exams used material from and/or extended beyond the coursework to articulate a unique and reflective public service perspective. Specifically, this took the form of mid and late-twentieth century literature that discusses the context and necessary competencies in the two sectors, and/or more recent literature grounded in the major theoretical orientations to the field. All ten exams also showed evidence of the ability to operationalize relevant approaches in a technically and contextually appropriate way in leadership, organizational and/or policy domains.

Objective #6 – Recognize theoretical and normative orientations and their impacts on practice.

An examination of all students' exams showed evidence of the ability to:

- Demonstrate their understanding of core theoretical and normative orientations of governance, and
- Understand the implications of various normative and theoretical orientations, AND demonstrated ability to operate within and/or across those orientations in applied domains (e.g. management and public policy).

All ten students' exams included indications of a substantive understanding of the major theoretical orientations within the field of public administration as indicated by their description and use of theory covered in their coursework in response to the exam's cases. Students also showed substantive synthesis of those ideas into relevant to specific sub-fields including organization theory and public policy. Their exam responses also reveal the capacity to recognize the normative or value-oriented consequences of those theories. Most importantly, students' exams also demonstrate the capacity to integrate concepts within and across sub-fields and the ability to operationalize and apply those theories into accepted managerial and other techniques in contextually appropriate ways.

4. How We Responded

We have now completed the transition to our new MPA curriculum, and for the first time all of the students whose materials were part of this year's review, completed all of their coursework under the new curriculum. Now in its third year of use, the new curriculum places additional emphasis on developing experiences and evaluative tools that encourage students to build their proficiency with and capacity to synthesize critical thinking, analytical and communications concepts into concrete competencies and practices relevant to their current and/or future professional positions. Underlying these concrete competencies is a program-wide emphasis on recognizing the normative attributes of common administrative approaches, and the reflective adoption or adaptation of approaches based on that recognition. Preliminary data from students' comprehensive exams, as well as their capstone, professional paper projects, and their earlier course-based service-learning and other evaluative projects, all suggest that this approach is contributing to students' competencies related to the Program's stated learning outcomes.

While the results of this year's assessment indicate that we have met our learning outcome objectives for the two areas examined this year, we will continue to examine our approach to course and curriculum development to further enhance the ability of students to not only understand the approaches to critical thinking, analysis and communications, but to be effective in using those tools as practitioners within public-serving organizations. This can be seen, for example, in ongoing changes to course syllabi and to the calendar of course delivery (e.g. reversing the schedule of courses such that PSCI 558 is delivered before PSCI 520).