

Review of School of Public Administration, University of New Mexico

Team Members:

Meredith Newman, Florida International University, Team Chair

Mitchell Rice, Texas A&M University

Ric Richardson, School of Architecture and Planning, University of New Mexico
(internal member)

William L. Waugh, Georgia State University

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The Academic Review Team mission is to examine the academic program of the School of Public Administration (SPA) at the University of New Mexico. The team met with SPA faculty, students, alumni, staff and University administrators over a two and a half day period from September 28 to September 30, 2009. The academic review team was charged by the Office of the Provost to provide its insight and recommendations addressing the following five questions:

1. What short and long term strategies should SPA pursue to raise its visibility and ranking in the public administration academic and practitioner community, both regionally and nationally?
2. What additional programmatic initiatives, besides Health Administration and Policy, and Native American Governance and Policy should SPA undertake over the next five years?
3. How should SPA balance the increasing student enrollment and the demand for the program in the state with limited faculty, staff, and student support resources?
4. What are some effective strategies to reduce time to degree and increase graduation rates?
5. What short and long term strategies should SPA pursue to achieve a more balanced faculty?

The Academic Program Review report follows this format. After a brief introductory section, each of the five questions is answered in turn. The report concludes with recommendations.

Introduction

The School of Public Administration (SPA) has a rich 40-year history, and is well-known for its leadership in comparative and international public administration. However, with the retirement of Dr. Ferrell Heady and the extended leave of Dr. Bruce Perlman, SPA appears to have lost its earlier and somewhat unique focus in comparative and international public administration. In 2006, the School's MPA program was

reaccredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). NASPAA's Committee on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) expressed concerns related to program administration, the role of the advisory board, program jurisdiction, the need to recruit a program director, the need to address the needs of government units in the state (including Native American governments), and the potential to create a policy institute to bring together resources within the university. In the three years since the MPA program was reaccredited, a new program director, Dr. Uday Desai, was recruited and COPRA's concerns relative to program administration have been or are being addressed. The School's mission statement now includes foci on state and pueblo/tribal governments and efforts are underway to make those goals a reality. Efforts are also underway to create a policy institute as a vehicle for professional training and sponsored research. SPA's Advisory Board has a very impressive membership drawn from public agencies in the city and the state and its role is evolving to include marketing of the MPA program and the School. Parenthetically, it is noted that COPRA's concerns about program jurisdiction have yet to be resolved.

Clearly, most of the problems identified by COPRA have been resolved, but the Academic Review Team believes that there are still issues that should be addressed in order for SPA to reach its potential. These issues are expressed in the team's response to the Provost's five questions.

Question One: What short and long-term strategies should SPA pursue to raise its visibility and ranking in the public administration academic and practitioner community, both regionally and nationally?

The faculty and leadership recognize that SPA is at a tipping point in terms of increasing its visibility and recognition of the School regionally and nationally. The key is developing a community of scholars dedicated to a common vision and mission for the School. Building upon the School's long-standing reputation in the areas of comparative and international administration appears to be the best strategy for increasing its visibility nationally and internationally. Rebuilding its links to state government and establishing new links to tribal/pueblo governments are critical to the school's visibility and reputation in the state and the region.

Focusing on the development of a strategic presence in Santa Fe, and strong Native American and health administration and policy programs should be the short-term strategies of the School. These goals are clearly expressed in the self-study report and were repeated frequently in meetings with the review team. However, the SPA faculty is relatively small and pursuing these goals may be all that can reasonably be done over the next several years. The long-term strategy should involve securing an internationally or nationally recognized name for the school, a PhD program, an executive MPA program in Santa Fe, and a 3-2 program of undergraduate and graduate education in public administration, perhaps in collaboration with the Department of Political Science or another social science department. For example, a Bill Richardson School or Ferrell Heady School of Public Affairs would give the school national name recognition. Adding the Bureau of Business and Economic Research and other research centers would

further enhance the School and provide a clear focus on policy research. In this regard SPA's Advisory Board should be expanded to include members from the corporate sector and not-for profit sectors in New Mexico. This would coincide with the Business and Economic Research Institute focus.

The major challenges are to develop programs that will lend themselves to more faculty cooperation and collaboration. The continuing growth of student enrollment will require additional resources and, for the short term, those resources might be best found within the university and its related programs.

Question Two: What additional programmatic initiatives, besides Health Administration and Policy, and Native American Governance and Policy should SPA undertake over the next five years?

A public administration program in a state flagship university needs to address the needs of state and local government. The School of Public Administration needs to find a way to develop and enhance public administration and governance offerings for state and local governments and the state's tribes and pueblos. Given UNM's locus, there is arguably an ethical obligation to do so. Responding to the needs of constituents within the state should be the first priority.

While the School's mission statement includes reference to goals within the state and internationally, the priorities are unclear. The faculty needs to reach consensus on what it wants to be and the constituencies it wants to serve. The senior faculty is key to helping the director shape the School's values and direction. As a result, a balance needs to be reached on senior faculty leaves of absence and the need for the presence of senior faculty in helping to shape SPA's mission and programs.

SPA needs to sharpen its vision and align its mission with the well thought out mandates to address the needs of the Native American population, create a strong program in health administration and policy and build its state government programs with a strategic presence in Santa Fe. A focus in these three areas will raise SPA's visibility, ranking, and prestige in a short period of time. The curriculum should be refined in light of the new mission.

Consistent with this focus SPA must increase and diversify its faculty to include more women, Native Americans, Hispanics, and those with a strong public administration identity. SPA must find innovative ways to "grow the faculty."

Question Three: How should SPA balance the increasing student enrollment and the demand for the program in the state with limited faculty, staff, and student support resources?

In the short-term, the best strategy to grow the School faculty is to hire two associate professors with preference for Native American, Hispanic, and female applicants. The addition of a Native American "faculty-in-residence" or "practitioner in residence," perhaps a retired senior state official, would provide needed visibility for the Native

American program, as well as satisfying the need for practitioner participation in the program. In the long-term, the development of a Ph.D. program could serve to increase the number of Native American faculty nationally, representing a significant singular accomplishment

Question Four: What are some effective strategies to reduce time to degree and increase graduation rates?

As noted above, the School faculty is relatively small and faculty members are seemingly overwhelmed with administrative and academic demands. To immediately reduce the workload quickly, the program should eliminate the professional paper in favor of an internship, capstone course, exit or comprehensive examination, or some other culminating experience. Doing so will reinforce the vision as an applied professional program and reduce demands upon faculty. Papers are required in all or nearly all of the core courses and it is uncertain how the professional paper requirement expands student competencies.

Question Five: What short and long term strategies should SPA pursue to achieve a more balanced faculty?

The Academic Review Team is concerned about the number of senior faculty on leave and the small number of senior faculty fully engaged in the School's programs. To achieve a more balanced faculty in terms of rank, a solution is to hire at least two associate professors. The team recognizes this solution will be difficult to achieve in the current economic context. Involving additional affiliated faculty of intermediate rank in SPA's programs might help alleviate this situation and may provide needed mentoring and professional support for junior faculty, as well. The junior faculty members are a critical resource because they deliver the general public administration core courses. They also represent SPA's future. At present, they are committed to SPA and its programs and are very productive scholars who are already contributing to the school's national reputation. SPA faculty should be commended for their recruitment of four quality junior faculty, but retention may be a serious issue if conflicts within the faculty are not resolved collaboratively

Faculty and administrators alike expressed concerns about the organizational status of SPA within the university. SPA is functioning as a college and a department. This arrangement does not appear to be working for either the Provost or the director. The best alternatives seem to be giving SPA college status with the director becoming a dean or placing it within a college, perhaps, elevating the director to associate dean status to assure SPA's autonomy and viability. Choosing one of those options would seem to be the best short-term solution. Policy schools are often built around a few departments, research centers, and training programs, and this would seem to be consistent with SPA's long-term goals. Creation of a policy or public affairs school would also encourage pursuit of funded research projects, training programs, and other activities common to a public administration program. It would also provide opportunities for faculty to contribute in ways consistent with their professional interests and areas of expertise.

Recommendations:

1. SPA, as the public administration program at the state's flagship institution, should be comparing itself with peer institutions, such as Arizona State University and the University of Colorado at Denver.
2. Create and implement a transparent and fair SPA promotion and tenure policy process.
3. Include student representation in faculty and Advisory Board meetings.
4. Build the MPA concentration in health administration and policy immediately and use affiliated faculty especially at the intermediate level to provide mentoring and other professional assistance to the new junior faculty.
5. Create a research colloquium to encourage faculty and students to share their research. Such interaction contributes to building a "community of scholars."
6. Increase administrative support for the SPA Director.
7. As a long-term goal, create a Ph.D. program in collaboration with other related programs on campus. Institutional visibility and reputation are greatly enhanced by a quality doctoral program.
8. Increase the representation of the SPA Advisory Board to include members from the private and nonprofit sectors.
9. Explore the possibility of mounting the MPA program fully online. This could be achieved in cooperation with Distance Education Programs & Services.
10. Maximize the benefits of impressive and strategically placed SPA alumni. For example, as one advisory board member commented, "We have to link our alums to the 'pitch'" [promoting and generating foundation monies for SPA].
11. Re-evaluate the process and motivation for delivering a significant proportion of MPA courses via ITV.
12. Collaboratively establish written SPA policies and procedures that center on faculty governance (for example, policies and procedures as they relate to faculty annual review, recruitment and selection, and T&P as noted above).