Graduate Program in Public Administration
2004-2005 Assessment Report

The Public Administration Program has two graduate curricula: a Master’s in Public Administration (MPA) and a Certificate. This report refers primarily to the MPA, but as will be seen below the responses also are relevant to the 15-credit graduate certificate since the two programs share the Core Year. (See below for a description of the Core Year.)

Background information on the Public Administration Program

The MPA responds to the question: What do people in public service positions need to know to be effective in their work? The Program’s response to that question is answered through a carefully designed and highly integrated program of study that has four components. This careful design makes having an integrated method of assessment much easier.

The Program components are:
1. A 14-credit Core Year that is organized in modules of varying lengths. The modules cover a variety of conceptual and skill leanings intended to address the range of issues and performance requirements likely to face a person in public service. The modules that make up the Core Year are modified over time in response to changes in the field. The Core Year must be taken first by those admitted to the MPA program, and is a building block for the other three Program components. It also constitutes 14 of the 15 credits for the Certificate.

2. A 9-credit Individuated Concentration requires the MPA student, in consultation with an adviser, to define an area of study of particular professional significance. Also in consultation with an adviser, the student selects courses in the Program or elsewhere that represent the theme.

3. A 3-credit Practicum is a requirement for each MPA student without regard to her or his years of experience. It is also an option for those in the Certificate program. In consultation with an adviser the student defines learning goals that can be met through placement in an organization. The student and the adviser then seek an organization in Hawai‘i, elsewhere in the United States, or internationally where placement will permit the learning goals to be reached.

4. A 4-credit Capstone is a year-long endeavor that is designed to pull together what has been learned and apply it to a significant public issue in Hawai‘i or the Asia-Pacific Region. It consists of a 1-credit planning seminar and a 3-credit implementation seminar. It must be taken last, or at a time when it is clear all other requirements will be met when it is completed.

Responses to assessment questions.

1. List of Public Administration Program Student Learning Outcomes.
a. Be able to interpret and analyze complex public issues from a variety of perspectives (i.e., as an issue of communication, politics, economics, history, ethnicity, organization, information, etc.).
b. Be able to apply appropriate skills to problems. 
c. Be able to work effectively in teams.

2. Where are the SLOs published? These learning outcomes are referred to in our brochure and on our website. They are announced at our convocation in the fall, and reiterated throughout the Core Year. They also are found in detail in materials that describe the Capstone to those enrolling in it. In these documents students are informed that they will be graduated based on the degree to which they can (1) apply what they have learned to the public issue they have selected, (2) work effectively in teams and (3) do work through their project that will make a difference with respect to the issue they are addressing.

3. How are SLOs mapped onto the curriculum? Because the Program is based on an integrated design it is not difficult to emphasize and teach to our learning goals. Moreover, since there is a strong emphasis on the cohort, it is easier to infuse the learning outcomes into the Program’s sub-culture.

4. What population is covered by the assessment? The population is all students who are enrolled in either our MPA or our Certificate.

5. Assessment events and devices. We use a diverse array of tools to assess graduate student progress, as follows:
   A. Core Year Tools.
      By design, each module employs a different tool to assess what has been learned. The rationale for this variety is that they provide a more complete picture of a student’s capabilities. Moreover, since students perform better on some assessment tools than others, it is more valid to offer a variety to them. 
      Examples of the diversity of Core Year assessment tools:
      • Ideas, Writing and Time Module: A short paper on a topic of choice that focuses on writing style.
      • Communication Module: A paper on their personal communication style and its strengths and weaknesses.
      • Political and Economic Thinking Modules: Analytic work addressing the same social issue from political and economic perspectives, and then comparing the perspectives, in individual papers and group presentations.
      • Budget Module: A problem solving assignment based on a budget simulation using computer software.
      • Legislative Module: Oral and written testimony on recent bills,
delivered in a mock hearing to legislators.

- Hawaiian Perspectives Module: Compose a letter that would appear in the newspaper about the Akaka bill.
- Organization Module: PowerPoint presentation applying models of organization to their agency.
- Administrative Law Module: A research paper on the administrative rule making process in their agency or one with which they are familiar.
- Research Module: Small group presentation of research designs to faculty panel, followed by reworking of the design based on panel feedback and submission as research proposal.
- Ethics Module: Individual telephone simulation in which the student must describe an ethics case and then name and justify actions to “boss.”
- Futures module: Create a webpage identifying emerging issues and trends that will affect their agency, and how the agency can begin to prepare.

Core Year assessment is enriched by use of a narrative evaluation at the end of each semester. Each student receives, in addition to the letter grade, a statement from the participating faculty members that describes his or her strengths and weaknesses during that semester. The narrative statements are written collaboratively by two faculty members who have worked closely with the cohort group. Students are encouraged to discuss the narrative they have received with the faculty.

Also, students are required to turn in a written self-assessment at the end of each semester. In this assessment students describe what they see as their strengths and weaknesses, how they view their growth throughout each semester, their participation in class, and what they feel they need to improve on.

B. Practicum Tools.

The Practicum is a six to eight week placement in an organizational setting that meets the student’s learning goals. The experience is assessed based on the student’s success in completing the project on which the practicum is based, and on a reflection paper organized around a detailed list of journal questions.

C. Capstone.

Performance in the Capstone is based on the student’s ability to (1) work effectively in teams, (2) apply what has been learned in the Program to a significant public issue and (3) interact with individuals and organizations in the community to produce something that will have an impact on an important public issue. These goals are made known to students at the beginning of their degree program and detailed as they enter the capstone phase.
Success in meeting these learning goals is based on the faculty member’s appraisal of the quality of the capstone product, the ability of the team members to work together, and the likely impact of their work on the public issue being addressed. This appraisal is informed by a peer evaluation process in which each student rates him/her self and his/her teammates.

6. Contribution of students to academic area.

The Public Administration Program offers an applied education, one intended to be directly relevant to the professional responsibilities students now hold or will hold in the future. It is less appropriate that work produced in the Program appear in academic journals than that it find its way to relevant public service practitioners. Given this mission and program priority, the work that our students must produce in the final requirement, the capstone, is done in concert with relevant individuals and groups in the community. Moreover, when the project is finished the completed work, or an executive summary of it, is sent to all those with whom the capstone group worked. It also becomes part of our resource library and is posted on our website.

Since 1991 and the inception of the degree we have produced 54 capstones. Each of these has found its way into the hands of some combination of public officials, legislators, state and city/county agencies, non-profit organizations, community organizations and opinion leaders.

7. The Program maintains an active alumni directory. It is updated and re-issued every other year. A blanket request is sent to all alumni prior to issuance of the new directory to tell us of changes.

The Directory permits us to know what is happening with our graduates, but also enables the graduates to use one another as professional resources, something strongly encouraged in our cohort model.

The Program also has monitored post-graduate professional activities through two surveys. The surveys inquire about changes in professional position as well as the extent to which their experience in the Program has contributed to their successes, or lack thereof.

Additional note regarding the relevance of the Program’s recruitment and selection process for assessment.

Public Administration has two distinctive elements in its recruitment process. The first feature is that we interview a substantial portion of the applicants, either in-person or, if they are outside of Hawai‘i, by telephone. The interview consists of questions we wish to ask, and an opportunity for applicants to inquire about the Program.

The second distinctive feature is that we admit classes rather than individuals. Once the application deadline has closed we seek to construct a cohort group that is highly diverse with respect to age, professional and educational background, ethnicity and gender.
The significance of these features for recruitment is that (1) students enter the Program with a clearer idea of its norms and performance expectations and (2) they enter as part of richly diverse community of learners who are expected to help one another succeed.