

Master of Public Administration (MPA)
The University of Alaska Southeast, School of Art and Science
AY 2019-2020 Annual Report on Program Level Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

Prepared by the MPA Faculty Team:

Dr. Ljubomir “LJ” Medenica, Program Coordinator, and Assistant Professor

Dr. Kathleen DiLorenzo, Associate Professor

Dr. James Powell, Adjunct Faculty; **Cathy LeCompte**, Adjunct Faculty; **Peggy Weaver**, Adjunct Faculty

1. Program Overview

Introduction. The Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) began in 1972. Since then, the program development went through several distinctive phases. The major program redesign was implemented in AY 2017-2018, with some adjustments in AY 2019-2020, related to the curriculum, a six-year sequence, and improved courses’ content and delivery methods.

Mission. The MPA degree program combines the relationships and structure of the traditional classroom with the accessibility of a distance delivered program to create a stable, supportive, and high-quality education. The MPA program is committed to practitioner-oriented instruction, flexible and convenient e-Learning, and offering courses relevant to students in the State of Alaska and the Yukon Territory.

Program Goals: Developing Workplace Competencies. UAS MPA program learning goals are based on the program mission, our public service values, and competencies required by professional standards (NASPAA – Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration). The MPA curriculum is developed to include required competencies in five domains, including the ability to:

1. Lead and manage in public governance.
2. Participate in and contribute to the policy process.
3. Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions.
4. Articulate and apply a public service perspective.
5. Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

Graduate Competencies. Program goals and learning outcomes are also aligned to the Graduate Competencies officially adopted by UAS Graduate Committee for graduate programs and course assessments.

1. Communication
2. Professional Behavior
3. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Program Design. The MPA degree prepares students for leadership at all levels of government and in non-profit organizations. It is designed for working professionals who seek to increase knowledge, competences, workplace skills, and credentials in public administration. The MPA program creates a community of leaders who network across the State of Alaska and the Yukon Territory to address the organizational and managerial issues in the public and non-profit sectors through the practical application of innovative problem-solving strategies.

The program helps to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for public administration leaders to address current local, state, and national issues and to help citizens shape the future of governance in Northern communities.

Activity Focus in AY 2019-2020. The MPA team was focused on strategic and operational activities aimed to (a) increase the admission in the program, (b) course enrollments, and (3) the retention and graduation rate. The examples of such actions are (i) developed strong marketing presence through comprehensive and user-friendly information at UAS website, (ii) improved communication with prospective students based on Salesforce system information about students interested or starting the admission process, (iii) engaged advising, including developed MPA Graduate Student Handbook with comprehensive information about the program, all courses, policies, and pathways towards graduation.

Cooperation. The UAS MPA program continued and further developed cooperation with other programs and organizations within and outside the UA system.

- We finalized the Memorandum of Understanding with UAF's Master of Business Administration (MBA) and UAF Master of Security and Disaster Management (MSDM) online programs. The goal of this agreement is to make it easier for students in the UAS MPA, UAF MSDN, and UAF MBA programs to take coursework that is offered in any one of these programs as electives and count it toward their respective degree requirements.
- We continued the cooperation with the UAF Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development (DANSRD), sharing courses in the MPA Rural Development concentration.
- We have a regular cooperation with the UAA MPA program, accepting their students in our courses that they needed to graduate and/or UAA did not offer those courses at time.
- In cooperation with UAA MPA, and our students from Juneau, Anchorage and Yukon, we prepared a joint presentation in virtual NASPAA 2020 annual conference.
- We continued cooperation with Yukon University, having Canadian students in our program.

Covid-10 Pandemic. Technically, the pandemic did not affect the way we are delivering our courses – using the Internet based technology for online synchronous classes. However, the entire MPA team proactively addressed the students increased needs for the advising, and overall flexibility regarding the assignments' schedules, accommodating late posts, and helping with other coursework aspects. The pandemic affected our search for the new MPA faculty. The candidate to whom we offered the position, decided to withdraw due to the covid-19 situation. We stopped the search until better time.

2. MPA Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Program Level Student Learning Outcomes: Upon graduating from the UAS MPA program, students will be able to learn, value and demonstrate the following:

1. Identify and analyze a current issue in public policy or public administration topic through the integration of relevant theory and practice.
2. Integrate knowledge across public administration areas and select and apply appropriate frameworks to identify and address public administration problems and or opportunities.
3. Examine specific topics in public administration through the lens of core MPA program areas, especially addressing the interconnected nature of public organizations.

4. Integrate findings on democracy, including the political environment and civic engagement, using multiple perspectives and praxis as a framework to analyze a public program or organization.
5. Demonstrate professional writing skills, effective communication, and the ability to present, using best practices in public administration.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) for specific courses are aligned with the PLOs.

PLOs assessment has three dimensions:

1. Direct measures (observations) evaluating the capstone course, where PLOs are the framework for the grading rubrics and evaluation criteria.
2. Direct measures (observation) of major assignments (tests, case studies, reflection papers, final projects, presentations) in specific courses, supporting PLOs.
3. Indirect measures (perception), of how students, employers, and alumni feel about the learning experience and quality in the MPA program, through anonymous student ratings, various surveys, focus group, time to degree, job placement and career advancement data.

3. How the data is collected on the Program SLOs

We are collecting the following group of empirical and statistical data:

- 1 Graduation data
- 2 Admissions data, as a reflection of the MPA program’s market value.
- 3 Enrollment data
- 4 Capstone grades and the Program’s SLOs assessment
- 5 Student rating results
- 6 Tuition revenue and the MPA Program financial self-sufficiency as one of the KPI

4. The data collected on the Program SLOs during the previous academic year

4.1. Graduation Data

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>
AY 2018-2019	28
AY 2019-2020	25

4.2. Admission Data in AY 2019-2020 (*)

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>New Students</i>
AY 2018-2019	27
AY 2019-2020	31

(*) In AY 2019-2020, 57 students started the admission process, and 31 students were admitted to the MPA program. The conversion rate is 54%. Students claimed that they did not complete the admission process due to the job issues, concerns about the UA/UAS stability, and COVID-19 issues.

Comparison AY20 vs. AY19: 115% (15% growth in the number of admitted students)

4.3. Enrollment Data in AY 2019-2020

<i>Element</i>	<i>Students Headcount</i>	<i>Student Credit Hours (SCH)</i>
Summer 2019	70	210
Fall 2019	142	426
Spring 2020	135	405
Total AY 2019-2020	347	1,041

Comparisons with AY 2018-2019: Total enrollment: 350. Total SCH: 1050. AY20 vs. AY19: 99.1%

4.4. Capstone Average Grade (1 to 4) and Average Student Ratings (from 1 to 5, 5 – Highest)

<i>Element</i>	<i>Average Grade</i>	<i>Average Student Ratings</i>
Summer 2019	A- (3.7)	4.5
Fall 2019	A- (3.7)	5
Spring 2020	A (4.0)	5
Weighted Average	3.84	4.88

(*) In AY 2019-2020, 24 students finished the Capstone course (PADM S690)

4.5. Student Rating Results (Rating from 1 to 5, 5 – Highest)

<i>Element</i>	<i>Average Rating</i>
Summer 2018	4.82
Fall 2018	4.84
Spring 2019	4.74
Courses / Weighted Average	4.80

(*) In AY 2018-2019 the weighted average rating was 4.65.

4.6. Tuition Revenue in AY 2019-2020

- Total number of active students enrolled in the MPA Program: 148
- **Total revenue from the course enrollments' fees** in the AY 2019-2020:
1041 SCH x \$513 per graduate credit = \$534,033
- **The MPA program is financially self-sufficient** covering all expenses from the tuition revenue, and not using the UA General Fund.

5. An evaluation of data collected on the Program SLOs during the AY 2019-2020

Public Administration Capstone. The most comprehensive and direct evaluation of PLOs is based on the capstone grades, student rating, and qualitative comments. **The average capstone grade is 3.84** (in the previous AY was 3.73), which is above our high target level of 3.5. **The average capstone student rating is 4.88**, which is excellent.

Student Ratings. In the AY 2019-2020, **the average student rating for all courses is 4.80** (in the previous year was 4.65), which is an exceedingly **high level (96.03%)**.

During the advising process with students, we are collecting students' perceptions about the program content, structure, and delivery. Along with anonymous comments in students' ratings, this provides quality information about ways to improve and develop the program.

The MPA program's outputs (data), and outcomes (anecdotal information collected through the interviews and surveys about job-placements, career advancements, professional networking, and employers' satisfaction), provide an analytical foundation to support the finding that the MPA as a remarkably successful, and sustainable program.

6. Plans to improve student learning

We have identified the following improvements that we believe will benefit our students:

- **Curriculum, new courses, concentrations.**
 - To analyze the public sector needs, students' interest, and national trends in course offerings in Master of Public Administration programs.
 - To use research data, surveys, and the MPA Advisory Committee suggestions to consider the curriculum enrichments, adding a new courses and special topics.
 - To monitor the emphases (concentrations) enrolments, performance metrics), and consider program strategic orientation towards the general curriculum with specialty elective courses.
- **Cooperation and collaboration with other UA master programs.** To use the MOA with the UAF and relation with UAA as a platform to offer students more electives that fit their interest. Adding to the MPA program degree general requirements (core courses), students can complete a concentration offered by other graduate programs within the UA system.
- **Best practices in instruction and advising.**
 - To share among the MPA faculty students' major comments and suggestions, expressed through student ratings, during the advising process, directly to the program coordinator, and collected through our anonymous surveys.
 - To share best practices in developing courses' content, structure, and delivery.
 - To use NASPAA standards and best practices as guidelines.
- **Surveys.**
 - Complete an annual anonymous survey among all MPA students, using open questions and seeking comments about the MPA program, courses, instructions, and suggestions for improvements.
 - Complete an exit survey with graduate students (job placement, career advancements, job-related skills, and competencies).

7. Conclusion

The Master of Public Administration program's assessment data and evaluations confirm and validate the assessment report's summary statement:

- The MPA program is going strong, increasing its UA, UAS, and market visibility.
- Effective admission, advising, and marketing activities resulted in increasing the number of new students admitted in the program and the course enrollments.
- The results of PADM courses outcomes evaluation confirms the program continuing to be remarkably successful in achieving defined student learning outcomes at the program and course levels.