

Master of Public Administration (MPA)
The University of Alaska Southeast, School of Art and Science
AY 2021-2022 Annual Report on Program Level Learning Outcomes Assessment

Prepared by the MPA Faculty Team:

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1. Program Overview

Introduction. The Master of Public Administration (MPA) is a professional management degree for individuals interested in public service careers. The MPA deals with management under current political realities and public interest goals. The MPA is designed to assist students in developing the skills and techniques leaders and managers use to design, implement, and evaluate policies, projects, and programs that promote ethical, democratic governance while addressing organizational, human resource, and budgetary challenges.

Mission. The UAS Master of Public Administration program prepares students to be competent, ethical, and effective public and nonprofit administrators and leaders for a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry. The MPA program is committed to practitioner-oriented instruction, flexible and convenient online 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 align with the Graduate Competencies adopted by the UAS Graduate Committee for assessments of graduate programs.

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 nonprofit organizations. It is designed for working professionals who seek to increase knowledge, competencies, 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 nonprofit sectors through the practical application of innovative problem-solving strategies.

2. MPA Program Level Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

Program Level Learning Outcomes: PLOs describe what we want our students to know or have learned by the time they finish the program. Upon graduating from the UAS MPA program, students will be able to learn, value, and demonstrate the following:

1. Identify and analyze a current public policy or public administration issue by integrating 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.

We aligned the student learning outcomes (SLOs) for specific courses with the program-level SLOs.

3. How the data is collected on the PLOs

PLOs assessment has three dimensions:

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

4. An evaluation/analysis of the data collected

Assessment Method – Exam

In this report, we focus on the MPA program assessment related to the NASPA first competence and the MPA corresponding PLO:

- NASPAA competence "Lead and manage in public governance."
- PLO "Identify and analyze a current public policy or public administration issue by integrating relevant theory and practice."

Assessment Example: the course PADM S628 – Financial Management.

PADM S628 – Financial Management is a core course offered every spring and fall term. This is the only course in the MPA program with an exam. Exam results provide an objective, accurate assessment of learning outcomes.

Financial management is one of the most critical issues in governing and managing the public (government) and nonprofit organizations. Understanding and implementing concepts, tools, and best practices in financial planning, budgeting, and capital investments is essential to have effective and efficient financial management as a part of the overall decision-making process. Therefore, one of the core assignments in PADM S628 is the mid-term exam.

The exam tests students' understanding of financial planning and managerial accounting topics and their ability to implement lessons learned in financial decision-making related to real-life examples. Exam results provide an objective, accurate assessment of learning outcomes.

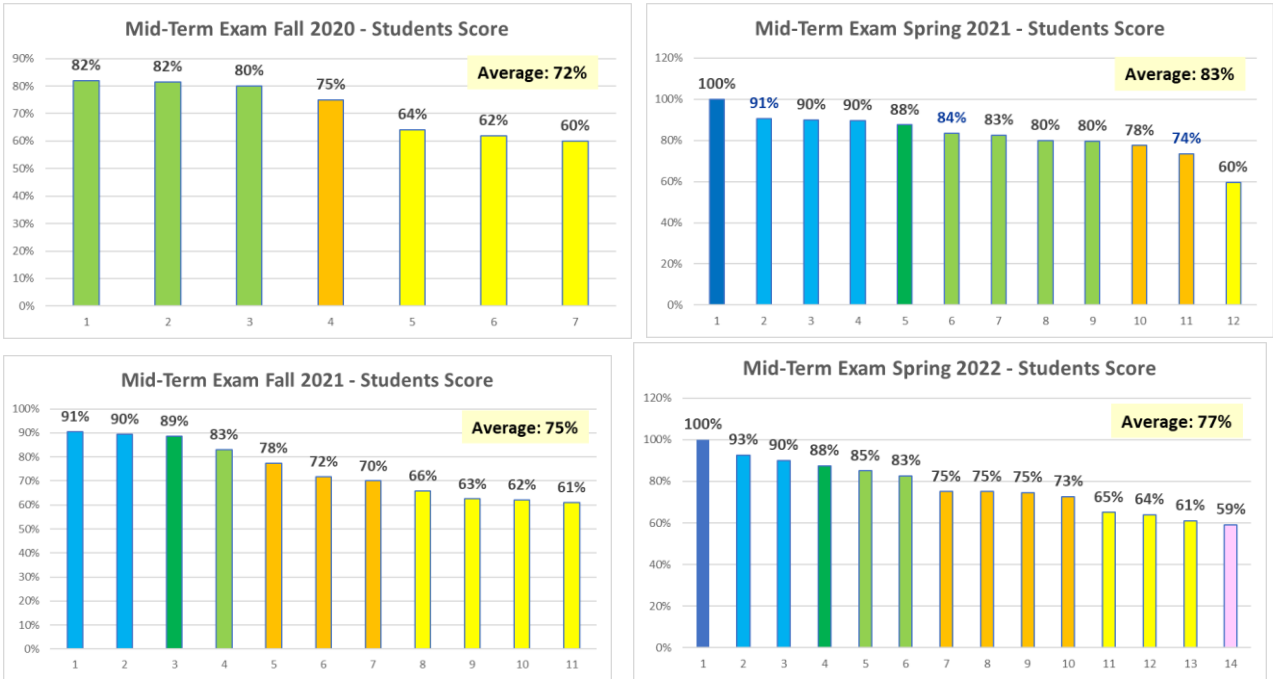
The exam questions address the essential financial management issues: budgeting concepts (accrual and cash accounting), budgeting process, developing specific budgets (operating and cash budgets, flexible budget, special program/event budgets), understanding various types of costs, and using cost analyses, break-even analysis, and variance analyses in the decision-making process, understanding the time of money concept (present and future value of money, depreciation, amortization), and their implementation in capital investment options analyses (net present cost, annualized costs, net present value).

The overwhelming majority of students do not have basic financial management knowledge. However, many students have roles in their work environment that requires at list a functional understanding of financial management, especially budgeting (board members, managers, supervisors). Therefore, the instructor designed this comprehensive and challenging exam as an experiential learning opportunity.

This is an open-book exam. Before the exam, the instructor provides numerous examples and live online exercises and demonstrations to prepare students for the exam. After the exam, the instructor provides a detailed explanation for each exam question, including the proper process of addressing the problem, a complete step-by-step calculation, and the result discussion/conclusion for the financial decision.

After a detailed evaluation of the exam's correct answers and typical mistakes, the instructor allows students with incorrect answers to redo their calculations. If done correctly, they will receive partial credit (a fraction of the total points) for those questions. In that way, the exam does not penalize students for their mistakes. Instead, the exam is an additional and effective experiential learning opportunity. Students highly value this approach, which their feedback and anonymous student ratings confirm.

Here are the exam results from terms in the AY 2021-2022 (before students have had a chance to redo incorrect answers and earn 20% of points for the related questions, improving their final score in the exam).



The exam counts for 20% of the total points in the course.

5. Conclusions and plans for program improvement

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

- **Curriculum, new courses, concentrations.**
 - To analyze the public sector needs, students' interests, 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 new courses and special topics.
 - To monitor the emphases (concentrations), enrolments, and performance metrics and consider program strategic orientation towards the general

curriculum with specialized elective courses.

- **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 improvement suggestions.
 - Complete an exit survey with graduate students (job placement, career advancements, job-related skills, and competencies).

6. Conclusions

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

- The exam results of the analyzed PADM course are an example of the program's success in achieving defined student learning outcomes at the program and course levels.
- The assessment report for the next AY will focus on the capstone course evaluation.

LJ

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