NASPAA ACCREDITED
The Commission on Peer
Review & Accreditation

NASPAA—The Global Standard in Public Service Education

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Kari Knutson Miller
        Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
        California State University, Fullerton

FROM: Jeffery L. Osgood, Jr.
        Chair, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
        Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

DATE: July 30, 2018

SUBJECT: NASPAA Accreditation Review

On behalf of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration and the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA), I am pleased to inform you that the Commission found the Master of Public Administration program at California State University, Fullerton to be in substantial conformity with NASPAA Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy and Administration. The program is accredited for a period of 6 years -- September 1, 2018 - August 31, 2024 -- and will be included on NASPAA's Annual Roster of Accredited Programs. A letter detailing the specifics of the accreditation decision has also been sent to David Adams.

Please accept the Commission's congratulations on the accreditation of this program. By pursuing and achieving accreditation through a rigorous review, the program has demonstrated a commitment to quality public service education.

NASPAA now accredits over 200 graduate programs worldwide and is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). NASPAA's accreditation process is mission-based and driven by public service values. The NASPAA Standards are the quality benchmark used by graduate public service programs around the world. Accredited programs contribute to the knowledge, research, and practice of public service, establish observable goals and outcomes, and use information about their performance to guide program improvement. They practice truth in advertising and ensure their students achieve learning objectives in five domains essential to public service.

If you have any questions about this decision or NASPAA's accreditation process, I would be happy to answer them via email at JOsgood@wcupa.edu.

Warmly,

Jeffery L. Osgood, Jr.
Chair, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

MEMORANDUM

TO: Shelly Arsneault
              MPA Coordinator
              California State University, Fullerton

CC: Anil K. Puri
              Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
              California State University, Fullerton

FROM: Laura Bloomberg
              Chair, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
              Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration

DATE: July 20, 2017

SUBJECT: NASPAA Accreditation Review

The Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) has completed its review of the Master of Public Administration program at California State University, Fullerton and has voted to reaccredit your program for one year. On behalf of COPRA, I want to express our appreciation for your participation and commitment throughout the accreditation cycle. We recognize your efforts in reviewing your program mission and accomplishments and participating in the peer review process. By pursuing accreditation through a rigorous peer review, your program has demonstrated a substantial commitment to quality public service education.

The Commission has determined that your program may have specific non-conformities with the 2009 NASPAA Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy, and Administration due to lack of conclusive evidence available at the time of review (Section 10.3 of NASPAA's Accreditation Policies and Procedures). In the Commission's judgment, these concerns, detailed in the enclosed report, could be clarified and resolved within one academic year.

The Commission works to ensure a fair and consistent review for all programs who apply for accreditation. The review process is holistic, considering many factors when evaluating each Self-Study Report, Interim Report response, Site Visit Report, and Site Visit Report response. I urge you to speak to your COPRA liaison, Thomas Longoria (tl28@txstate.edu), about the Commission's review, decision, and your next steps. I would also be happy to answer any questions you have about this decision via email at bloom004@umn.edu.

We look forward to your clarifications and hope to seek resolution over the upcoming year.

Warmly,

Laura Bloomberg

Laura Bloomberg
Chair, Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation

Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation
One-Year Reaccreditation Report

Master of Public Administration
California State University, Fullerton

July 20, 2017

Item 1: Standard 1.3 – Program Evaluation

Standard 1.3 states, "The program will collect, apply, and report information about its performance and its operations to guide the evolution of the program's mission and the program's design and continuous improvement with respect to standards two through seven."

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested the program elaborate on how it has systematized its program evaluation, specifically trends in student enrollments and the involvement of the advisory board.

In its response, the program stated that it has been able to improve its record keeping moving forward after a series of files were lost in 2015, and that it now keeps records of students, including enrollments, exit surveys, and course evaluations. With regard to the Exit Survey, the program states:

> "The MPA program has also formalized evaluation via Exit Surveys administered during the final class session in POSC 521 (Seminar in Public Administration Theory). We discuss important findings and trends in Exit Survey results with our Advisory Board members and among faculty. The Exit Survey questions were designed with our program mission in mind, and ask specifically about student learning in public service values, the theories and foundations of public administration, and the importance of ethics, leadership, and diversity in management of our public organizations."

The site visit team further reviewed the program's overall approach to program evaluation, including its use of an exit survey, which has been "inconsistently reviewed by staff for trends due to staffing changes and available resources." "The Site Visit Team discussed the possibility of establishing a survey at the beginning or middle of their program, similarly course-embedded, to complement the Exit Surveys that have already been systematized within the curriculum. This would allow them to gather more information on students who do not complete the program." In its final response, the program clarified that it is committed to continuing to track student enrollment to help identify changes in student status, especially as related to student completion.

The Commission appreciates the program has encountered obstacles in ensuring consistent and useful programmatic data. Given the program has now systematized its record-keeping, the Commission requests the program provide additional information regarding how it has formalized its approach to program evaluation. For instance, what has the program learned from trends in exit survey results? Has the program or its advisory board identified opportunities to sharpen mission-related student learning or faculty engagement? How has student learning assessment (discussed below) been incorporated into the program's strategic program management? The Commission seeks evidence of a clear connection between the program's mission, goals, and its program evaluation and student learning assessment processes. The program should demonstrate how it uses programmatic evidence (including, the

enrollment trends or exit survey mentioned throughout the review) and student learning data to guide the evolution and improvement of the program.

Item 2: Standard 3.2 – Faculty Diversity/Standard 4.4 – Student Diversity

Standard 3.2 states, "The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment and retention of faculty members." Standard 4.4 states, "The program will promote diversity and a climate of inclusiveness through its recruitment, admissions practices, and student support services."

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested the program discuss with the site visit team strategies to promote a climate of inclusiveness and its success implementing its diversity plan, including the use of adjunct faculty and guest speakers to expose student to diverse experiences and viewpoints. The program provided a list of its guest speakers in recent semesters, noting that it would begin to review courses to understand how well issues of diversity and inclusion are represented in the curriculum and better link guest speakers to course topics. The program also provided data from the 2014 exit survey discussing the climate of the program.

The Site Visit Team reported that conversations on the ground discussed "social equity as an area where they felt the program could better reflect this stated value, and stated that as students, it was up to them in general to bring up questions of social justice in the context of the material discussed in the classroom." The Team found that the exit survey is structured so that some climate-based answers are open to only certain students (i.e. questions about women in the program were not open to men). Within the survey, the Team noted, "in reviewing Appendix C to the program's Response, observed that on a 5 point scale, where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 5 is "strongly agree," minority graduate students survey mean for the statement "As a minority student in the MPA program, I had adequate contact with minority faculty and minority public sector practitioners" was reported at 2.9, slightly lower than neutral." The program responded that it is planning to revamp the exit survey.

The Commission requests the program provide additional information regarding how operationalizes its diversity plan to intentionally promote a climate of inclusiveness across the program. While the diversity plan focuses on faculty hiring, it is largely silent on how the program emphasizes diversity and inclusion across the program, including in its student body and curriculum. The Commission requests the program provide additional information about its strategies to promote a climate of inclusiveness, including its efforts to refine the exit survey, incorporate guest speakers, and the results of its work reviewing diversity in the curriculum. The Commission seeks evidence that the program provides a supportive educational climate for students.

Item 3: Standard 4.3 – Support for Students

Standard 4.3 states, "The program will ensure the availability of support services, such as curriculum advising, internship placement and supervision, career counseling, and job placement assistance to enable students to progress in careers in public affairs, administration, and policy."

In the Interim Report, the Commission requested the program discuss its strategies related to student retention, given that only about 61 percent of students graduate within 6 years (no more than within 3 years). The program responded that MPA faculty and students have taken advantage of support

opportunities at the university level, and that for struggling students the program intervenes with a student-specific contract to indicate steps to improve academic performance.

The Site Visit Team:

> "explored with the program the number of students graduating within 200 percent of degree program length and whether there is any discernible trend related to the interventions described in the Response. The program's degree completion rate appears similar to schools offering the MPA degree to which the program compares itself in its geographical service area; for this reason, the number of students completing in three years or less is a limited concern for the program. As part of this exploration of time to completion, the program provided the SVT a table on attrition rates for the past eight years as well as seven years of graduation rates and time to graduation. These tables are inconclusive regarding the strategies adopted to boost graduation, but also indicate considerable variation (between 12% and 32%) in the number of students who do not return in the second year. The Site Visit Team also reviewed the Academic Success Self-Assessment document referenced in the Response. Nearly all questions on the self-assessment are related to student performance, so any possibility of incorrect expectations of the MPA program or fit to the institution cannot be gleaned from this material."

The program's final response stated:

> "The concerns that COPRA and the Site Visit Team have about program graduation rates are of some concern to us as well, however, as the Site Visit Team notes, "The program's degree completion rate appears similar to schools offering the MPA degree to which the program compares itself in its geographical service area." The program is more distressed by what appears to be a trend (begun in fall 2015) of attracting more pre-service, and therefore weaker, MPA applicants and students…Ill-prepared students tend to be the ones that quickly drop (or fail) out of the program due to its rigorous nature and/or student expectations not being in-line with the nature of the program. There are two recent developments that we hope will reduce the number of ill-prepared students applying for and/or joining the program; first, in fall 2016 we started offering in-person information sessions each semester. Our hope is that through these info sessions the program can better manage student expectations, thereby reducing the number of students who apply but are not yet willing to commit to the academic rigor of graduate school. Second, in the past 18 months, the university has begun requiring a financial down-payment from students who accept admission. Again, our hope is that this will encourage students to fully explore our program before accepting admission and dissuade students who are not well-prepared from joining a program that does not meet their needs and/or expectations."

The program notes that issues with retention and graduation may be addressed by more clearly communicating a preference for in-service students, most explicitly through information sessions. While it is true that some students struggling with the program may be "ill-prepared", the Commission requests the program consider additional causes which may be impacting program retention, and if there are additional program- and mission- specific strategies that may better help students achieve their educational objectives. For instance, if the program finds students are poorly prepared for the rigor

of the program, are the admissions requirements appropriate to gauge future student success in the program? Are there identifiable trends for those students who begin the program and ultimately succeed (or dropout)? Has waiting until a student is placed on academic probation proven to be a successful strategy for intervention? The Commission seeks evidence of support systems appropriate to support students to persist to graduation.

Item 4: Standard 5.1 – Universal Required Competencies

Standard 5.1 states, "As the basis for its curriculum, the program will adopt a set of required competencies related to its mission and public service values. The required competencies will include five domains: the ability

- to lead and manage in public governance;
- to participate in and contribute to the policy process;
- to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
- to articulate and apply a public service perspective;
- to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry."

In its Interim Report, the Commission requested the program provide additional detail about its assessment processes and its implementation, including its approach to ensuring consistency across rubrics and assessment tools. The program noted that it was in the process of improving the assessment process, including standardizing a rubric for each competency. In its interim report response, the program clarified:

> "The primary means of longitudinal assessment is the comprehensive exam. We have used the comprehensive exam for decades as a means of evaluating student learning as well as programmatic deficiencies…Each of the exams is evaluated by multiple faculty members who complete a grading rubric with written feedback about each exam. These results and scores are compiled in an excel sheet and distributed to the faculty for review. Each of the subfields also meets to review the exam scores and evaluate where changes should be made in the curriculum or in the exam itself. The results of the exams are always discussed at faculty meetings so that the faculty can make course corrections and programmatic changes in order to close the loop."

The site visit team elaborated:

> "The inconsistency in rubrics cited by COPRA is perhaps best described as the alpha and beta tests of its first effort at assessment of the universal competencies (UCs). In fact, that is the only instance in which there are two data points for any Competency: all others have been applied once, across each of the five UCs. The sense of the SVT is that the extant measures in place now can be applied to track longitudinal trends in student learning going forward. It is ambiguous to the SVT how the comprehensive exam maps to competency assessment…Of the rubrics and scorecards examined, the SVT could not determine how the general rubric was interpreted by faculty in addition to or in lieu of the evaluation forms. The written comment sheet provides some validation but not direct connections to the rubric rating. The question of "inter-rater reliability" noted on page 7 of the [interim report] Response may therefore result from a mis-match between

the items on the rubric and the questions the evaluation score cards combined with a lack of category definitions on the general rubric."

In its final response, the program also discussed how it is working to implement its new assessment process, with revised rubrics. The program specifically highlights its work on competencies 2 and 4. Based on the appendices, Competency 2 assessment appears to revolve around one assignment, and while competency 4 does involve review of student comprehensive exams, it is unclear why the resulting suggested action items address issues raised in failing exam responses. Related to competency 3, which was discussed in the self-study report, it remains unclear how the program formally closed the loop. For instance, in a summary document, the program articulates that "the majority [of students] were at very basic levels of comprehension", and the self-study report points to some coursework changes and software training, however it is unclear the relationship between the data collected across POSC 523 and the explicit changes made to address gaps in student learning.

Based on a review of the documentation, the program has not yet provided adequate direct evidence or data to support that its students have achieved the competencies established by the program with respect to its mission. While the Commission acknowledges that programs are in transition to the 2009 NASPAA accreditation standards, the program has not demonstrated that it is far enough along in its assessment of student achievement to achieve full accreditation. Congruent with the September 2015 Policy Statement, the Commission expects accredited programs have completed one full cycle of assessment for each of three universal competencies.

The Commission requests the program elaborate on how its approach to assessment provides the program with evidence of student competency, with which to identify and implement steps for programmatic improvement. The Commission lacks the evidence to understand the program's approach to analysis, how or why decisions link to student competency, and implementation of identified opportunities for improvement. While course-embedded assessments can be an important basis for student learning assessment, the Commission seeks evidence that the assessment process is producing evidence that enables the program to focus improvement on program-wide student learning, not only insular to single courses, as well as progress toward programmatic goals. Prior to the final accreditation decision in Summer 2018, the Commission expects to see evidence of the completion of one full assessment cycle for at least one universal competency established by the program and substantial progress toward the completion of a complete assessment cycle for at least two additional competencies. The program should provide explicit evidence of the data analysis and implemented programmatic change.

The dedication represented by your review has been substantial and the Commission appreciates your ongoing commitment to strategic program management. In order to maintain accreditation and extend the reaccreditation term beyond one year, the program must provide information to demonstrate substantial conformance with the standards listed above. **Please submit updated information on the applicable standards to COPRA no later than September 22, 2017**. The program should submit the requested information in the NASPAA Data Center using the Annual Accreditation Maintenance Report (within the Annual Data Report form). The program may choose to complete the entire form, fully addressing the concerns above, or simply use the form to provide the annual data required of accredited programs (with respect to faculty, student admissions, graduation rates, and employment). If the

program wishes, it may opt to upload the full text of its response to the decision letter as an attachment at the end of the report form. At its Fall Meeting in October 2017, the Commission will review the September response and make a final determination regarding whether the program is recommended to move forward with a second site visit. In addition to the September response, COPRA requests that all final updates and responses related to accreditation be submitted by **May 25, 2018**, ahead of the Commission's 2018 Summer Decision Meeting.

COPRA looks forward to working with you in the coming year. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email bloom004@umn.edu. You may also direct questions toward Crystal Calarusse, Chief Accreditation Officer, at copra@naspaa.org.