TO: Tih-Fen Ting  
Chair, Campus Senate

FROM: Cecilia Stiles Cornell  
on behalf of Graduate Council  
(Sharron LaFollette, chair)

DATE: October 16, 2009

RE: Doctorate of Public Administration (DPA) Program Review

The DPA program review is clear and reflective. The program appears to have weathered a difficult period, thought carefully about the challenges it faced, designed specific approaches to address those challenges, and positioned itself for a period of stability and potential growth.

An Interdisciplinary/Practitioner-Oriented Degree Program

The heart of the newly re-energized DPA appears to be its renewed emphasis upon the interdisciplinary nature of the degree, and its return to the practitioner-oriented model. These emphases reflect the feedback that the program received from faculty, students, and an outside evaluator. The program appears to have been very receptive to that feedback, and has tried to address the key issues that were raised. The recent changes in the program appear to have been well-received by the College and the Dean.

The return to an interdisciplinary focus seems well-suited to student practitioners who face multi-faceted challenges at work. It seems in keeping with the traditions of UIS and befitting our location in the state capital. And it seems central to maintaining the collaborative efforts among the faculty of the college that are necessary for the successful delivery of the degree program.

Assessment

The program has differentiated carefully between the learning objectives for MPA and DPA students. It has tied the DPA learning objectives specifically to student performance on the comprehensive exams. It has established specific criteria for dissertations. It is in the process of developing and implementing additional assessment tools and examining ways to use collected data for program-wide assessment. These
efforts appear promising, and GC urges the program to continue to develop these processes and to document assessment efforts carefully over the next review period. We are particularly interested in how the DPA program uses the results of assessment in curricular decisions.

Retention/Time to Completion

Retention and time to completion of the degree are complex issues in any graduate program, and even more so in small, specialized programs. It is difficult to find retention data for comparable programs, and thus difficult to establish a norm. Given those challenges, the program currently is focusing its energy on the front end of the process, being very careful in its admissions decisions. We appreciate the program’s efforts to carefully match applicants’ interests with those of available faculty. GC urges the program to establish parameters for an appeals process at the departmental level for applicants who are denied admission. DPA faculty also have worked to strengthen the mentor/advisee relationship, and to provide substantive feedback to students at critical points in their studies. The program is still examining the issue of timely completion of the degree, and we encourage it to continue its discussions on how long a student may work on a dissertation, and what kinds of reviews of that work might be helpful along the way.

The creation of a strong cohort model seems well-designed to address issues of both student retention and the timely completion of the degree. The program reports that the cohort approach currently is working very well. DPA has made plans for accommodating students who may not be able to keep pace with the cohort. The program has included sufficient flexibility, for example, to accommodate those who are called into military service.

Marketing

The admissions committee for the program currently is developing plans for marketing the program, particularly within this region. We encourage the program to continue to look at creative ways to reach out to qualified practitioners, and we encourage the campus to provide the support needed for developing a systematic marketing plan.

Dissertation

DPA students currently are required to take a minimum of 12 hours of dissertation credit,
but current catalog copy indicates that some students will take more. Currently, once a student completes the 12 hours of dissertation credit, that student continues to take dissertation hours until the dissertation is defended. The program believes that this approach better reflects the degree of continued faculty investment in a doctoral dissertation in progress than would the one hour of continuing enrollment typically used at the master’s level. The GC is concerned about the inconsistencies that will arise when students in the same program receive different numbers of credit hours for their dissertations. We encourage the program to continue to discuss this issue during the next review period, particularly as it accumulates more data about length of time to degree completion. We suggest that the next program review specifically address this issue. In the meantime, we encourage the program to insure that all descriptions of the program are consistent in their definitions of when a student officially is admitted as a doctoral candidate.

**Faculty Continuity**

The DPA, like many other programs, faces the challenge of faculty turnover. We appreciate the level of commitment to the DPA expressed not only by the PA faculty, but by the faculty of the College of PA&A as a whole. We commend the program’s efforts to encourage faculty in the College to participate in the DPA program. This is one way to build essential faculty continuity. Emphasizing the intellectual and collegial benefits that can come from working with doctoral students who are engaged in the study of relevant public policy topics seems one important key to maintaining faculty interest, even in times of budget constraints.

**Conclusion**

We commend the DPA faculty for its flexibility in responding to challenges and its continued efforts to strengthen the program. We encourage the program to continue to monitor carefully the changes that recently have been instituted, to track the effectiveness of those changes, and to address early any concerns that may arise. We are hopeful that the changes instituted signal a new period of stability for the program.