TO: Will Miller, Chair, Department of Public Administration  
Tih-Ten Ting, Chair Campus Senate  
FROM: Sharron LaFollette, Chair  
Graduate Council  
DATE: February 24, 2010  
RE: Graduate Council Response to MPA Program Review (Revised)  

The Department of Public Administration has submitted extensive documentation demonstrating its commitment to thorough review and reaccreditation. The clarity of the review and subsequent follow-up documents was helpful in the Graduate Council’s (GC) assessment of the program. GC found particularly strong the development of the program’s mission statement and assessment processes, which help maintain the MPA program’s focus and quality. GC was also impressed by the MPA program and faculty efforts to maintain the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) accreditation. This is no doubt critical for the program, its students, and the university as a whole.

GC noted that the department has worked diligently in the past eight years to attract and hire sufficient faculty to effectively staff and manage the MPA program at a level consistent with increasing enrollments. Although faculty retention has been an issue, the department currently has a full faculty cohort. The program has implemented a capstone closure instead of a thesis closure. This shift better reflects the goals of the program and the career needs of its students. The program’s new certificate, “Public Administration in a Global Context” is also an innovative way to respond to student needs and an increasingly globalized network of political economies.

The department’s continuing focus on increasing enrollments is commendable, and we encourage them to continue to explore innovative ways to combine online and on-campus course sections to maximize use of faculty resources and to allow for greater interaction between online and on-campus students. Such interaction is particularly relevant given that much of the growth in enrollment reflects students enrolling in the online degree.

Recommendations

- GC asks that during the next review period, the MPA program continues to maintain an open dialogue with faculty and administrators about faculty
retention, which has been at times difficult for the program. It appears faculty members, especially newer faculty members, find current course load demands difficult to balance with the scholarship demands common in their fields. We encourage the program to analyze and document the reasons for challenges in recruitment and retention at a teaching institution. There are a number of variables that may need to be considered in this dialogue: the type of faculty members recruited to a teaching institution, release time for scholarship, and market demand for doctoral degrees in this discipline (competition for new faculty). The new cohort-based, college-wide doctoral curriculum may help to address some of the challenges of retaining faculty.

- Because of a larger applicant pool, which allows for greater selectivity, online students meet higher entrance standards than on-ground students. Graduate Council recommends that the MPA program closely monitor and analyze the two groups of students to ensure quality education, comparable rigor, and workable faculty/student ratios.

- The shift from thesis to capstone course for closure demonstrates responsiveness to needs and goals of program and students. GC would like for the program to monitor whether this also increases student retention and degree completion.

- GC encourages the MPA Department to continue to work collaboratively with the Registrar’s Office to identify graduate students who are completing courses for MPA graduate certificates but have not officially declared their intention to seek a certificate so that the campus can more accurately track and document certificate enrollments.

- To speed review in the future and to ensure that all of the program objectives are clearly delineated and easily found, we ask that, in the future, the MPA program follow the Academic Program Review Guidelines instead of submitting the accreditation document as its program review document.

GC appreciates your thoughtful and thorough review. We encourage you to continue with your efforts at maintaining the quality of your program and responding to student needs.

Cc: Pinky Wassenberg, Dean, CPAA

Lynn Pardie, Associate Vice Chancellor for Graduate Education and Research