

UA Little Rock School of Public Affairs Master of Public Administration Program

# Leadership, Interpersonal and Oral Communication Assessment of MPA Capstone Projects

Fall 2015 – Spring 2017

Michael Crow  
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## **Purposes**

The leadership and oral communication assessment seeks to provide data to inform the UA Little Rock Master of Public Administration program's faculty about the extent to which we are successful in meeting our program's academic objectives, including NASPAA's universal competencies. In turn, this data informs our process for reviewing and updating the program's curriculum, teaching approaches and methods, academic advising and other student support services.

In particular, this assessment provides data on aggregate student learning in these UA Little Rock MPA program learning goals:

- Knowledge of public service principles (Learning outcome cluster 1A)
- Application of public service principles (Learning outcome cluster 1B)
- Leadership, organizational and management skills to lead and manage people in complex and changing environments (Goal 3)
- Written communication skills (Learning outcome cluster 4A)
- Oral communication skills (Learning outcome cluster 4B)
- Productive interaction with diverse workforce and citizenry (Learning outcome cluster 4C)

In the capstone course, students work together as consultants to develop a group project that addresses a policy or public administration problem that a public client requests help with resolving. Consequently, students must synthesize what they have learned across the curriculum about public administration concepts and values; research methods; leadership, management and organization on a complex project; and teamwork, interpersonal relationships and effective oral and written communications. Hence, it is an ideal opportunity to evaluate student learning across the curriculum in these areas, as well as provide students with applied, practical experience with a project from inception to completion.

## **Assessment method**

We carried out three types of assessment for each capstone project: an assessment of the oral presentation (aimed at assessing oral presentation skills); an assessment of the capstone paper (aimed at assessing knowledge and application of public service principles and written communication skills); and an assessment of the process by which the students completed the capstone, as revealed by the peer evaluations and the reflection rubrics students complete at the end of the project (aimed at assessing leadership and teamwork skills and interaction in a diverse context). Each MPA faculty member evaluated each of these components using a rubric. In some cases, adjunct faculty or other parties assisted in conducting evaluations of the oral presentations. This assessment covers available materials from fall 2015 through spring 2017.

## Oral communications assessment

The oral communications assessment is based on analysis of rubric-guided evaluations of the capstone oral presentations. Evaluation rubrics were completed by MPA tenure stream and adjunct faculty, School of Public Affairs staff, and clients present at these presentations at the time they were made. All tenure-stream faculty were encouraged to attend each presentation.

The oral presentation assessment rubric includes the following six items:

- Presentation had a clear sense of purpose and organization to achieve that purpose
- Demonstrated command of project problem, methods and recommendations
- Demonstrated effective use of PowerPoint and other visual aids
- Clear presentation, demonstrating appropriate language and public speaking skills
- Responded effectively to audience questions
- Overall, presentation effectively addressed the needs and expectations of the client

Each evaluator indicated whether competence on each item was not applicable (NA), not evident (0), somewhat evident (1), mostly evident (2), or clearly evident (3).<sup>1</sup> To analyze the data, we report the median and mean for each item across all evaluators for each capstone project.

Our goal with this assessment is to identify oral presentation learning outcomes in which students seem to systematically underperform as judged by the capstone oral presentations. To accomplish this, we rate MPA program performance on each learning outcome according to the following criteria:

**NA** --- Insufficient data to assess

**Deficient** --- Two or more raters rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for all three capstone presentations

**Of concern** --- Two or more raters rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for two of the capstone presentations.

**Satisfactory** --- Two or more raters rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for not more than one capstone presentations.

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<sup>1</sup> A different scale is used in fall 2015, in which competence on each item was rated as not applicable (NA), not evident (0), partly evident (1), or clearly evident (2)

1) Presentation had a clear sense of purpose and organization to achieve that purpose  
(**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 2015 <sup>2</sup> :	2	2
Spring 2016:	2.5	2.5
Fall 2016:	3	3
Spring 2017:	3	3

2) Demonstrated command of project problem, methods and recommendations (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 2015 <sup>2</sup> :	2	1.8
Spring 2016:	3	2.5
Fall 2016:	3	2.75
Spring 2017:	3	3

3) Demonstrated effective use of PowerPoint and other visual aids (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 2015 <sup>2</sup> :	2	1.8
Spring 2016:	3	2.5
Fall 2016:	3	3
Spring 2017:	3	2.7

4) Clear presentation, demonstrating appropriate language and public speaking skills  
(**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 2015 <sup>2</sup> :	2	2
Spring 2016:	3	2.5
Fall 2016:	3	3
Spring 2017:	3	3

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<sup>2</sup> Based on a scale of 0 (not evident) – 2 (clearly evident)

5) Responded effectively to audience questions (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 2015 <sup>2</sup> :	2	1.8
Spring 2016:	3	3
Fall 2016:	3	3
Spring 2017:	3	3

6) Overall, presentation effectively addressed the needs and expectations of the client (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 2015 <sup>2</sup> :	2	2
Spring 2016:	3	2.75
Fall 2016:	3	3
Spring 2017:	3	3

<i>Table 1</i> <i>Summary Table of Capstone Oral Presentation Assessment</i>			
<b>Learning outcome</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>2015-17 Rating</b>	<b>2014-15 Rating</b>
4.6	Presentation had a clear sense of purpose and organization to achieve that purpose	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.7	Demonstrated command of project problem, methods and recommendations	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.8	Demonstrated effective use of PowerPoint and other visual aids	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.9	Clear presentation, demonstrating appropriate language and public speaking skills	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.9	Responded effectively to audience questions	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.6	Overall, presentation effectively addressed the needs and expectations of the client	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Generally, these results indicate that students in our program are largely successful in mastering our learning goals with respect to oral presentation. While there is variation in the median on individual items from capstone to capstone, we do not see evidence of a systematic pattern in students falling short in one particular aspect of oral presentation. Moreover, it is notable that no evaluator scored a capstone team's performance on any item as 0 across the four

capstones being evaluated. In addition, these results are consistent with the results of the spring 2014-spring 2015 assessment of oral presentations. The results indicate that students are coming into the capstone with sufficient oral presentation experience to create a professional oral presentation. This may reflect our efforts to incorporate oral presentation throughout the curriculum.

### **Capstone paper assessment**

The capstone paper assessment is based on analysis of rubric-guided evaluations of the capstone reports each team produces for its client. Evaluation rubrics were completed by all MPA tenure stream faculty for the fall 2015 through spring 2017 projects.

The capstone paper assessment rubric includes the following 20 items covering three MPA program learning outcome clusters:

#### *Writing and analysis*

- Paper identifies a clear purpose and is organized appropriately to fulfill that purpose
- Paper is free of mechanical problems (i.e. grammatical and spelling errors)
- Paper's writing style (word choice, paragraph and sentence construction) effectively communicates its argument and analysis to the client
- Paper's executive summary communicates the paper's goals, methods, and conclusions concisely and effectively to the client
- Uses appropriate quantitative and qualitative evidence to support arguments and analysis
- Conclusions and recommendations logically follow from arguments and evidence
- Overall, arguments and analysis generalize from the evidence and literature to generate original ideas, conclusions or recommendations

#### *Application of public administration knowledge*

- Analysis and recommendations are consistent with principles and best practices in organization theory
- Analysis and recommendations are consistent with principles and best practices in public financial management
- Analysis and recommendations are consistent with principles and best practices in human resource management
- Uses relevant public administration and public policy literature to support arguments and analysis
- Overall, describes and recommends managerial practices that will effectively address the client's needs

#### *Application of public service values*

- Included client and other stakeholders at appropriate points in the research process to determine needs and expectations for the end product
- Fairly considers the interests and values of stakeholders other than the client
- Distinguishes between public and private interests in developing recommendations

- Demonstrates understanding of relationship between political process and administrative process
- Describes and recommends practices consistent with principles of accountability and transparency
- Uses values rooted in public interest (efficiency, equity, effectiveness, accountability, transparency, etc.) to develop recommendations
- Demonstrates adherence to ethical principles of public administration practice
- Overall, develops an effective product that meets the needs and expectations of the client and the public

Each evaluator indicated whether competence on each item was not applicable (NA), not evident (0), somewhat evident (1), mostly evident (2), or clearly evident (3). To analyze the data, we report the median and mean for each item across all evaluators for each capstone project.

Our goal with this assessment is to identify learning outcomes in which students seem to systematically underperform as judged by the capstone paper. To accomplish this, we rate MPA program performance on each learning outcome according to the following criteria:

**NA** --- Insufficient data to assess

**Deficient** --- Two or more faculty rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for three or more of the capstone papers.

**Of concern** --- Two or more faculty rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for two of the capstone papers.

**Satisfactory** --- Two or more faculty rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for not more than one capstone paper.

### *Writing and analysis*

- Paper identifies a clear purpose and is organized appropriately to fulfill that purpose (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	3	2.7

- Paper is free of mechanical problems (i.e. grammatical and spelling errors) (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	3	2.7

- Paper's writing style (word choice, paragraph and sentence construction) effectively communicates its argument and analysis to the client (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	3	2.7
Spring 16:	3	3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	3	2.7

- Paper's executive summary communicates the paper's goals, methods, and conclusions concisely and effectively to the client (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2.3

- Uses appropriate quantitative and qualitative evidence to support arguments and analysis (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	1	1.7
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	1.7

- Conclusions and recommendations logically follow from arguments and evidence (**Of Concern**)



	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	1	1.7
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

- Overall, arguments and analysis generalize from the evidence and literature to generate original ideas, conclusions or recommendations (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

*Application of public administration knowledge*

- Applies principles and best practices in organization theory to analyze problems and develop recommendations to client (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	3	2.3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	3	2.3

- Applies principles and best practices in public financial management to analyze problems and develop recommendations to client (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	1.3

- Applies principles and best practices in human resource management to analyze problems and develop recommendations to client (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	3	3
Spring 16:	3	3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

- Uses relevant public administration and public policy literature to support arguments and analysis (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	2	2

- Overall, describes and/or recommends managerial practices that will effectively address the client's needs (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

#### *Application of public service values*

- Included client and stakeholders at appropriate points in the research process to determine needs and expectations for the end product (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	1	1.3
Spring 16:	3	3
Fall 16:	2	2.3
Spring 17:	2	1.7

- Fairly considers the interests and values of stakeholders other than the client (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	1.7
Spring 16:	3	3
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	2	1.7

- Distinguishes between public and private interests in developing recommendations (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	2	1.7

- Demonstrates understanding of relationship between political process and administrative process (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	1	1.7
Spring 16:	2	2
Fall 16:	2	2.3
Spring 17:	1	1.3

- Describes and recommends practices consistent with principles of accountability and transparency (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	1.7
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

- Uses values rooted in public interest (efficiency, equity, effectiveness, accountability, transparency, etc.) to develop recommendations (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2.3

- Overall, demonstrates adherence to ethical principles of public administration practice (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	3	2.7

- Overall, develops an effective product that meets the needs and expectations of the client and the public (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

<i>Table 2</i> <i>Summary Table of Capstone Paper Assessment</i>			
<b>Learning outcome</b>	<b>Rubric criterion</b>	<b>2015-17 Rating</b>	<b>2012-14 Rating</b>
	<i>Writing and analysis</i>		
4.1	Paper identifies a clear purpose and is organized appropriately to fulfill that purpose	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.2	Paper is free of mechanical problems (i.e. grammatical and spelling errors)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.2	Paper's writing style (word choice, paragraph and sentence construction) effectively communicates its argument and analysis to the client	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
4.3	Paper's executive summary communicates the paper's goals, methods, and conclusions concisely and effectively to the client	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory
2.9	Uses appropriate quantitative and qualitative evidence to support arguments and analysis	<b>Of concern</b>	Deficient
2.13	Conclusions and recommendations logically follow from arguments and evidence	<b>Of concern</b>	Of concern
2.14	Overall, arguments and analysis generalize from the evidence and literature to generate original ideas, conclusions or recommendations	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory
	<i>Application of public administration knowledge</i>		
1.2	Analysis and recommendations are consistent with principles and best practices in organization theory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
1.16	Analysis and recommendations are consistent with principles and best practices in public financial management	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory
1.15	Analysis and recommendations are consistent with principles and best practices in human resource management	Satisfactory	NA
2.9	Uses relevant public administration and public policy literature to support arguments and analysis	<b>Of concern</b>	Of concern
1.3, 1.12, and 1.13	Overall, describes and recommends managerial practices that will effectively address the client's needs	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
	<i>Application of public service values</i>		
1.17	Included client and other stakeholders at appropriate points in the research process to determine needs and expectations for the end product	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
1.6	Fairly considers the interests and values of stakeholders other than the client	<b>Of concern</b>	Deficient
1.7	Distinguishes between public and private interests in developing recommendations	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory
1.5	Demonstrates understanding of relationship between political process and administrative process	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory
1.12	Describes and recommends practices consistent with principles of accountability and transparency	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory
1.9	Uses values rooted in public interest (efficiency, equity, effectiveness, accountability, transparency, etc.) to develop recommendations	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
1.10 & 1.11	Demonstrates adherence to ethical principles of public administration practice	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
1.18	Overall, develops an effective product that meets the needs and expectations of the client and the public	<b>Of concern</b>	Satisfactory

Overall, the capstone paper assessment suggests that the MPA program is successful at achieving learning goals on written communication and knowledge and application of public administration knowledge and values. Consistent with the writing and methods assessment last year (i.e. the policy analysis paper assessment), the capstone papers are generally characterized by well-organized and mechanically-correct writing. In addition, our evaluation of the capstone papers suggests that our students can apply principles from some core courses (i.e. organization theory, human resources) to project management and have internalized core ethical principles in their work. That is, they can “articulate and apply a public service perspective.”

At the same time, the capstone paper assessment also points to several ways in which our students are falling short in our expectations. First, the results suggest that some of the capstone papers fall short in depth of analysis. This is, some of the projects do not go far enough in supporting arguments with appropriate evidence and logical argumentation and/or they fail to generate original ideas and recommendations. This particularly seems to have been a problem in the fall 2015 (the Little Rock Parking Study) and spring 2017 (the Port Authority Sustainability Strategy) capstone projects.

Second, students are not going far enough in using managerial best practices to inform their capstone analysis, particularly when it comes to public finance. This may suggest that students are not fully able to translate principles in the classroom into practice. That is, students may not readily make the connection between principles from their core courses and the capstone.

Third, some of the capstone projects could have gone further in demonstrating application of core public administration values. Two results are of particular concern. For one, the capstone projects have fallen short in incorporating the views and interests of all the relevant stakeholders into the project. This may suggest that our students are not giving sufficient thought as to who may be affected by a particular policy problem or proposal that is under consideration, beyond the client. It may also indicate that our students are not coming into the capstone aware of or comfortable with reconciling the interests and desires of a client with those of the broader community. In short, our students may be too quick to internalize the interests and values of a particular client, leading them to neglect the possibly conflicting interests of other stakeholders. Moreover, the capstone projects have fallen short in developing recommendations that are clearly rooted in universalistic values. This, too, could suggest that students in the capstone too quickly adopt the goals of the client as their own, without giving sufficient consideration to more general public interest.

Comparing outcomes on learning goals to our last capstone paper assessment for fall 2012-fall 2014 shows that deficiencies noted in that report have not yet been fully addressed. Moreover, it suggests that some new deficiencies have emerged. Notably, originality of ideas and recommendations, description and recommendation of managerial best practices, and meeting client expectations have each become new concerns since the 2012-2014 report.

Based on these results, we should consider the following adaptations to our curriculum:

- 1) Incorporate principles and examples of project management in core courses (e.g. Professions, human resources management, organization theory) and electives (e.g. Strategic Management; Managing Public Disputes).
- 2) Incorporate examples of best practices in project management in core public management courses (organization theory, human resources and public finance).
- 3) Prompt students to identify more non-client stakeholders as part of the capstone project. Encourage them to contact or interview these stakeholders as appropriate to identify their interests and obtain input.
- 4) Incorporate a unit on universal values, normative analysis and evaluative criteria in the policy analysis course.

### **Capstone process assessment**

The capstone process assessment is based on analysis of rubric-guided evaluations of the peer evaluations and the reflection rubrics that each capstone student prepares at the end of the semester. Each student prepares an evaluation of each of his/her peers on his/her performance that includes comments on the scores they awarded each peer and why. These comments provide insight into team interpersonal dynamics and the effectiveness with which members of the team worked together. In addition, each student prepares a self-reflection rubric on the capstone experience. The prompts for this assignment generally encourage students to comment on leadership and teamwork during their capstone experience.

Each tenure-stream MPA faculty member reads all the peer evaluation comments and self-reflection essays that each capstone team member prepares and evaluates each capstone on a rubric that includes the following 14 items:

- Multiple students took responsibility for important elements of the project
- Tasks for developing the project were fairly distributed across members
- Tasks for developing the project were assigned according to strengths of team members
- Team members communicated expectations effectively with each other
- Team members succeeded in developing consensus on project goals, methods and recommendations
- Team effectively addressed issues of free-riding
- Team members followed through on individual commitments to the project
- Team members managed time well
- Team generated a work climate in which members felt free to express dissenting opinions
- Team effectively resolved conflict among members
- Team communicated effectively with clients
- Team developed a work climate inclusive in race, gender, and sexual orientation
- Overall, team members demonstrated effective leadership in the execution of the capstone project

- Overall, team members demonstrated effective teamwork in the execution of the capstone project

Each evaluator indicated whether competence on each item was not applicable (NA), not evident (0), somewhat evident (1), mostly evident (2), or clearly evident (3). To analyze the data, we report the median and mean for each item across all evaluators for each capstone project.

Our goal with this assessment is to identify learning outcomes in which students seem to systematically underperform as judged by the process the students used to carry out the process (reflected in their peer evaluations and reflection rubrics). To accomplish this, we rate MPA program performance on each learning outcome according to the following criteria:

**NA** --- Insufficient data to assess

**Deficient** --- Two or more faculty rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for three or more of the capstone projects.

**Of concern** --- Two or more faculty rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for two of the capstone projects.

**Satisfactory** --- Two or more faculty rated the competence on the outcome as “not evident”, “somewhat evident”, or “mostly evident” for not more than one capstone project.

- Multiple students took responsibility for important elements of project execution (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	2	2

- Tasks for developing the project were fairly distributed across members (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	1.7



- Tasks for developing the project were assigned according to strengths of team members **(Of Concern)**

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	3	2.3
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	1.7

- Team members communicated expectations effectively among each other **(Deficient)**

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	1	1.3

- Team members succeeded in developing consensus on project goals, methods and recommendations **(Of Concern)**

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	3	2.7
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	1	1.3

- Team effectively addressed issues of free-riding **(Deficient)**

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	1.7
Spring 16:	2	1.7
Fall 16:	2	2
Spring 17:	1	0.7

- Most team members followed through on individual commitments to the project **(Deficient)**

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	2	2.3
Spring 17:	1	1.3

- Team members managed time well (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	1	1.3
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	2	1.7

- Team generated a work climate in which members felt free to express dissenting opinions (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	2	2.3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	1	1.3

- Team effectively resolved conflict (**Deficient**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	1	1.3
Spring 16:	2	1.7
Fall 16:	2	2
Spring 17:	0	0.3

- Team communicated well with clients (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
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Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	3

Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

- Team developed a work climate inclusive of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other underrepresented group members (**Satisfactory**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	3	3
Spring 16:	3	3
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	3	2.7

- Overall, team members demonstrated effective leadership in the execution of the capstone project (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2.3
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	3
Spring 17:	2	2

- Overall, team members demonstrated effective teamwork in the execution of the capstone project (**Of Concern**)

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Fall 15:	2	2
Spring 16:	3	2.7
Fall 16:	3	2.7
Spring 17:	1	1.3

*Table 3*  
*Summary of Capstone Process Assessment*

<b>Learning outcome</b>	<b>Rubric Criterion</b>	<b>2015-17 Rating</b>	<b>2013-14 Rating</b>
3.1	Multiple students took responsibility for important elements of the project	<b>Of Concern</b>	Satisfactory
3.2	Tasks for developing the project were fairly distributed across members	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
3.2	Tasks for developing the project were assigned according to strengths of team members	<b>Of Concern</b>	Satisfactory
3.2	Team members communicated expectations effectively with each other	<b>Deficient</b>	Of concern
4.15	Team members succeeded in developing consensus on project goals, methods and recommendations	<b>Of Concern</b>	Satisfactory
3.2	Team effectively addressed issues of free-riding	<b>Deficient</b>	Of concern
4.16	Team members followed through on individual commitments to the project	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
3.2	Team members managed time well	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
4.18	Team generated a work climate in which members felt free to express dissenting opinions	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
4.17	Team effectively resolved conflict among members	<b>Deficient</b>	Satisfactory
3.1	Team communicated effectively with clients	<b>Of Concern</b>	Satisfactory
4.18	Team developed a work climate inclusive in race, gender, and sexual orientation	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
3.1	Overall, team members demonstrated effective leadership in the execution of the capstone project	<b>Of Concern</b>	Satisfactory
3.2	Overall, team members demonstrated effective teamwork in the execution of the capstone project	<b>Of Concern</b>	Satisfactory

Overall, the results indicate that students are not consistently demonstrating leadership and teamwork that meet our expectations. The peer evaluations and the self-reflection essays suggest that on a number of project teams, students fell short in effective communication, equitable division of labor, follow-through on individual commitments, conflict resolution, and curbing free-riding behavior. Though our students do seem to succeed at creating work environments that are inclusive with respect to race, gender and sexual orientation, they fall short in every other area of effective leadership and teamwork.

These results also stand out in sharp contrast to the findings of the 2013-14 study of capstone process. That study generally found that capstone teams met our expectations for leadership, teamwork and interpersonal communication, with the exception of evidence for free-riding behavior on some teams. One factor that may have contributed to the different results this time is the fact that each of the teams was a rather large team: The smallest of the four teams in this study was nine members. Consequently, problems with leadership and team dynamics that were not apparent in the small teams of the 2013-14 study are now more apparent in this study.

To some degree, leadership, teamwork and interpersonal communication consist of soft skills that are perhaps best developed through practice rather than in classroom instruction. Our curriculum reflects this by incorporating groupwork, such as team projects, throughout the core curriculum. But given these results, we may want to consider changes to our curriculum to

develop skills and techniques students can use in their professional lives to develop more effective teams and interpersonal communication and to resolve conflict. This may include:

- 1) Developing a unit on group facilitation as part of the professions or human resource management courses.
- 2) Incorporating a unit on leadership and/or project management within one of the core courses (e.g. organization theory or human resource management).
- 3) Integrating interpersonal communication skills development across the curriculum (for instance, as part of group-work or team-based projects).

## Conclusions

The capstone assessment provides an opportunity to assess our program's learning goals in knowledge and application of public service concepts and values, leadership and management skills, and oral communication skills. In addition, it serves to supplement the assessment of student writing and methodological skills carried out in the policy analysis paper assessment. In sum, we find that:

- 1) Program goals in oral and written communication are being met satisfactorily;
- 2) Some program goals in knowledge and application of public service concepts and values are being met satisfactorily, particularly with respect to best practices established in our core courses and with respect to professional ethical expectations;
- 3) At the same time, students may be falling short of our expectations in some important ways
  - i) Application of best practices in management and team leadership, particularly on team-oriented projects.
  - ii) Application of core public administration values for transparency and accountability.
  - iii) Analytic depth of written work
  - iv) Effective application of best practices in leadership, teamwork and interpersonal communication

To address these shortfalls, we recommend that the MPA program:

- 1) Incorporate principles and examples of project management in core courses (e.g. Professions, human resources management, organization theory) and electives (e.g. Strategic Management; Managing Public Disputes).

- 2) Incorporate examples of best practices in project management in core public management courses (organization theory, human resources and public finance).
- 3) Prompt students to identify more non-client stakeholders as part of the capstone project. Encourage them to contact or interview these stakeholders as appropriate to identify their interests and obtain input.
- 4) Incorporate a unit on universal values, normative analysis and evaluative criteria in the policy analysis course.
- 5) Develop a unit on group facilitation as part of the professions or human resource management courses.
- 6) Integrating interpersonal communication skills development across the curriculum (for instance, as part of group-work or team-based projects).