

The Evergreen State College
Graduate Program in Public Administration

Program Review

July 2003

Program Title: Graduate Program in Public Administration
Degree: Masters in public Administration.

Prior Reviews: HEC Board Reviews: 1993, 1999.

Documentation of the continuing need for the program.

This is the only MPA program offered in the south Puget Sound and state capitol region. There are other options available to prospective students of public administration in this area, including the new Executive MPA program at the University of Washington’s Evans School, and Seattle University’s MPA program. However, these are geographically inconvenient and offer a different philosophical and pedagogical approach to the subject. Student demand for the program appears to be increasing. Applications for the Fall 2002 and Fall 2003 cohorts were strong. This year we could not accept all qualified applicants, and the cohort for the 2003-2004 academic year is now full.

In our discussions with current and former students, the reasons they most frequently cited for applying to this particular MPA program were practical in nature: convenience and affordability. Some viewed the attainment of an MPA degree as a way to help them to advance in their career. Others wanted to expand their knowledge about the particulars of government and public service. Others were also attracted by the broad scope of the course work, diversity of TESC culture, and the teaching style of the school.

Most of the students are between the ages of 30—50, work full-time, and are employed in the public sector, with 75% working for state government. The male-female ratio varies by year, but overall tends to be a 50-50 split. Our racial and ethnic profile is consistent with the Thurston County community. The college is in the process of obtaining data from the Washington Employment Security Department that will in the future help us generate a much more detailed analysis of our graduates, but the analysis of those data are not yet complete.

Table 1. Enrollment, faculty and degree data. (Note: Faculty data reflect only full-time faculty assigned to the program and includes director at .5 FTE; degrees awarded in 2002-2003 are pending).

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
Average FTE enrollment	59	57	47	52	71
Degrees granted	26	39	30	24	33
Faculty	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	5.5
FTE Graduate Assistants	0	0	0	0.5	0.5

Program Overview:

Our stated mission is to provide high-quality professional education to students pursuing careers within government agencies, tribal governments and non-profit organizations. We are committed to preparing students to seek democratic, equitable, and practical solutions to public problems by embedding issues of social justice, social change, and democratic governance throughout our program. We seek to develop leaders who think analytically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively as they strive to make a difference in public service.

The cornerstones of an Evergreen education are critical reasoning, experiential and collaborative learning, and self-discovery. We believe that a multicultural perspective expands our understanding of complex public issues. Historical, political, social, cultural and economic context frame our exploration of public service and its relationship with the larger society. Students apply theory to practice through hands-on projects and discussions with practitioners. They have many opportunities to enhance their writing, public speaking, presentation, interpersonal, and analytical skills.

Prior to the 2002-2003 academic year, the program followed the same basic curricular and administrative model for about 15 years. Students began as a cohort in fall quarter and completed two consecutive years of fall/winter/spring 8-credit core courses, totaling 48 credits. The last requirement in the sequence was an applications project (thesis), generally completed in small groups. Students completed 12 credits (generally three 4-credit electives) to round out the 60 credits required for the degree. Students were allowed to enroll only on a full-time basis (8 credits) except in summers or after they had completed the required core courses. A program Director with a minimal teaching load managed the program, with administrative assistance provided by an assistant director shared with the Master of Environmental Studies program.

The MPA program engaged in a self-study in the winter and spring 2002. The 1st year students did this research as part of their research methods course in Winter 2002 as well as a group contract in Spring 2002. A convenience sample of alumni were interviewed via telephone, a small sample of employers of MPA graduates were interviewed, the then current students were surveyed, and the second year students participated in focus groups. The results identified strengths and weaknesses of the program and avenues for improvement. Based largely on these data, the faculty proposed changes in the curriculum and structure of the program that were accepted by TESC leadership. We implemented a redesigned program beginning in Fall 2002 as a two-year pilot project. The program design continues to evolve in light of new information based on feedback from current students.

Table 1. Summary of survey data for MPA self study.

	CURRENT STUDENTS	ALUMNI WINTER 2002	ALUMNI SPRING 2002	EMPLOYERS WINTER 2002	EMPLOYERS SPRING 2002
Survey Participants	24	26	21		14
Focus Group Participants			16		14
Interviews				23	

What the Students, Alumni and Employers Told Us

Generally, the alumni and current students participating in the study were positive in describing their experiences in the MPA program, and most (over 75%) would recommend the program to others.

- **Skills Gained and Importance for Work:**

A majority of the alumni identified personal improvements through the program, including: group process and collaboration, written communication and presentation skills, creative thinking, problem solving and understanding the political context of public administration. A majority of the alumni surveyed also ranked these skills as important in their work. Less than 25% of the alumni surveyed reported that their skills in management, ethics, or specific technical skills (such as computer, budget and finance, data analysis or research methods) improved through the program. This could reflect that they had these skills already or that the program needed to be strengthened in these areas.

Employers surveyed also identified group process and collaboration, written communication and presentation skills, creative thinking, and problem solving as important in the work setting. In addition, the employers also believed that leadership, strategic planning, policy analysis, interpersonal skills, and specific skills such as human resources and budget were important in the workplace. While the ability to make sense of data and information is important, less than half of the employers rated research methods as important.

- **Faculty Performance:**

More than 60% of students and alumni rated the faculty as very good and excellent in terms of being: knowledgeable about their subject, providing timely feedback, high level of preparedness, and access outside the classroom. Areas needing improvement were striking a better balance between theory and practice, flexibility and clearly communicating expectations. Participants had mixed views about faculty teams, with 29% reporting the faculty were excellent role models for teamwork and cooperative learning, while 24% rated them as poor to fair.

- **About the program coursework:**

The views on the content of the program coursework varied. For example, the highest proportion of 2nd year students rated fiscal policy as useful (68%) and the lowest proportion rated understanding public organizations as useful (57%) (see Appendix, Table 2). The alumni telephone survey found that 73% of the respondents believed the political and economic context course was taught well or very well, while only 32% believed the budgeting (and fiscal policy) course was taught well or very well (see Appendix, Table 4). The alumni suggested that the experiences in the courses were highly dependent upon the faculty teaching them. Some noted that faculty did not necessarily teach subject matter consistent with the title of the programs or meet student expectations for practical skills. The commitment and knowledge of the faculty were important elements in the more valued courses. In addition, students benefited from instructors and guest speakers who were “in the field.” Alumni also mentioned that many of the courses were very theoretical, and they would have liked a more practical approach that focused on state government. Some alumni asserted that managerial concerns were not given a lot of focus and that a critique of administrators was often emphasized in seminar. There were also concerns about the lack of choice in the program, since 48 credits of the 60-credit program consisted of required coursework.

The Legislative Process elective received high praise, with some alumni reporting that they had delayed their graduation date so that they could take this elective. Alumni also found Public Law, International Administration, and Conflict Resolution beneficial.

- **Desired Improvements**

The students and alumni offered some suggestions to improve the program. These were wide ranging but can be grouped into internal and external activities. In their view, the program could be improved internally with a wider selection of electives. A second theme was the desire for more practical skills and knowledge, including subjects like personnel, bargaining, data analysis and applied management. A third theme centered on improving the consistency of the material in the courses. One alum noted the problem with faculty rotations and stated: “You’re never sure that you’re going to cover the whole range of topics in a given course, because the topics vary depending on the faculty [member’s] interest in the subject and depending on who is teaching that particular year.” Another concern was the gap between theory and practice: some felt that theory tended to be over-emphasized. One alum felt that s/he “gained no skills in dealing with very difficult situations that I continue to deal with in state work.” There was specific feedback about the quality of the orientation and communication between the program and students. Lastly, there was a desire for more balance in political views and a greater appreciation for the new directions in the field.

Alumni also had suggestions for improving external relationships. These tended to center on the need for better marketing of the MPA program in the community, building tighter connections with alumni of the program, and better organization of program operations and delivery. They would have liked a more structured relationship between the MPA internship program and the actual internship placement organization. Other alumni provided ideas for connecting with MPA alumni, accessing local resources within state and local government, providing alternative

learning options such as distance learning and continuing education, and more assistance with post-MPA options.

Program Changes

Based on the feedback from the students, alumni, faculty input, and an informal analysis of the characteristics of other successful MPA programs, the MPA program was completely revamped for the 2002-2003 class. The Evergreen MPA still consists of 60-credit hours, with courses offered in the evenings and weekends to accommodate students who work full-time. There is now a part-time option for students who prefer to take only one 4-credit course per quarter. Students begin their studies in Fall quarter with the first year required core program and are expected to take the first and second year core programs (4 credits per quarter, 12 per year, 24 credits total) as a cohort. The first year core program provides a foundation of public administration (12 credits), while the second year covers analytic tools including research methods, policy analysis, budget analysis, and an introduction to the context of policy and budgeting (12 credits). These programs are developed in collaboration with the MPA faculty as a whole, thus ensuring greater consistency in the material covered.

A major change in the program was the creation of concentrations. Students now choose one of three areas of study: Public and Non-Profit Administration (a generalist program that can be tailored to cover a specific area of student interest), Public Policy, or Tribal Governance. Students generally complete 32 credits of concentration coursework. The 8-credit application project has been replaced with a required 4-credit capstone program. Students still, however, have the option of completing a thesis project to meet the capstone requirement.

We implemented the Tribal Governance concentration as a two-year pilot program using a combination of funds donated by tribes, in addition to regular state funding. Students attend the courses as a cohort and will complete the program in two years. They will complete core and capstone courses, 20 credit hours in Tribal Governance, and 12 credits of other elective coursework. Each quarter students in this concentration complete one core and one concentration course per quarter. They meet on 4 intensive weekends (Friday afternoon, and all day on Saturday and Sunday) each quarter. During this cycle there are 15 students enrolled in the tribal cohort (about 13 FTE).

We have just completed the first year of the restructured MPA pilot program. We have increased the number of matriculated students in the non-tribal cohort from 40 to 45 in each new cohort, although many (around one-third of the students) are attending part-time. (This figure does not include the 15 students in the tribal cohort, and full time enrollment is considered 8 credits per quarter). Our core programs are limited to matriculated students, but students with a bachelor's degree can take the other MPA courses on a space available basis.

A survey of first year students conducted in Spring 2003 found that most rated their experience with the restructured program as positive and that their expectations of the program were met. Over 90% would recommend the program to others. Overall, most would maintain the current teaching approaches, except for the use of case studies and lectures. Just over half would like to see more cases and just under half would like to see more lectures. Faculty are also pleased with

the results of the work this year. The increase in faculty workload implemented with the new model (from a 24 to a 28 credit yearly course load, plus a significant increase in the teaching load of the Coordinator) did challenge each MPA faculty member at one time or another during the year.

A few other program changes are worthy of note. We reorganized the governance of the program by empowering the MPA faculty as a self-managed workteam, led by a Coordinator. The position of MPA Director was eliminated. Our goal is to have faculty and staff participate in important decisions about the program and to allocate the program work and governance more evenly. We revised and improved our orientation in Fall 2002 (adding an introductory speech by the Washington Attorney General, Christine Gregoire, as well as team building exercises and time for scheduling faculty advising sessions with students). Finally, improving communications between the program and students is one of our areas of emphasis; our goal is to reply to any program inquiry (from current or prospective students) within 24 hours.

We have also begun a substantial community outreach effort. This includes forming an advisory board (a list of members is included in the Appendix), creating an alumni group, and performing community service. Our most notable project in this area during the year was the assistance we provided the United Way of Thurston County and a local Community Partnership Group on a community assessment for Thurston County. MPA students were heavily involved in the collection and analysis of data for the project, and two program faculty wrote the final report and a summary that appeared in *The Olympian* newspaper (the documents are available at <http://www.unitedway-thurston.org/>).

Our primary goal for the 2003-2004 academic year is to improve the program's relationships with state government agencies and our marketing and recruitment efforts. We recently hired a new Associate Coordinator with substantial marketing and recruitment experience to assist with this effort. We are establishing improved relationships with the South Puget Sound Community College Certificate in Public Management Program. We will also lay the groundwork for an MPA certificate program, which we hope to implement in the 2004-2005 academic year. Assessment of the revised program and the tribal concentration will continue during the second year of the pilot and beyond, through the use of surveys of alumni and current students and focus groups.

Appendix

Graduate Program in Public Administration Advisory Board

Honorary Members:

Hon. Dan Evans
Hon. Christine Gregoire
Ron Allen, Chair, Jamestown S'kallam Tribe

Working Members:

Meagan Eliot
Special Projects Coordinator
Association of Washington Cities
TESC MPA Alum

Stephen H. Buxbaum
Managing Director, Community Development Programs
Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development
TESC MPA Alum

Dick Cushing, Former City Manager
The City of Olympia

Russ Lehman, Managing Director
First American Education Project

Wolfgang Opitz
Assistant Director
Washington State Office of Financial Management

Joe Dear
Executive Director
Washington State Investment Board

Marcee Stillner
Executive Director
South Sound Mental Health Services

Randy Scott
Owner, ACCESS

Pam Toal
Executive Director
United Way of Thurston County

Mary Anne Lindeblad
Director of Division Support
Medical Assistance Administration

Kim Washington
Coordinator, Bridge Program
Tacoma Community College
MPA Alum

Victor Moore
Coordinator, House Appropriations Committee
Washington State House of Representatives

Table 1: 2nd Year Student Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction with MPA Program Elements.
Source: Survey of 2nd year Students, Winter 2002.

MPA PROGRAM ELEMENTS	PERCENT DISSATISFIED (1 OR 2)	PERCENT NEITHER (3)	PERCENT SATISFIED (4 OR 5)
Graduate Administrative office	37	59	5
Management of Program	35	48	17
Graduate Student Association	50	41	9
Orientation	52	29	5
Instruction in Core Programs	22	26	52
Instruction in Electives	22	17	61
Seminar Experience	4	30	64
Accessibility of Instructors	4	9	87
MPA communication with students	28	46	28
Overall satisfaction with program	17	30	52

Table 2. 2nd Year Views about the Usefulness of MPA Core Programs. Source: Survey of 2nd year MPA students, Winter 2002. Scale: 1=Of little or no use; 5=Very Useful

a. Political & Economic Context of PA	1 (4%)	2 (13%)	3 (26%)	4 (35%)	5 (22%)
b. Research Methods for Public Sector	1 (0%)	2 (17%)	3 (17%)	4 (39%)	5 (26%)
c. Understanding Public Organizations	1 (0%)	2 (17%)	3 (26%)	4 (30%)	5 (26%)
d. Fiscal Policy	1 (5%)	2 (14%)	3 (14%)	4 (50%)	5 (18%)
e. Public Policy and Admin Implications	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	3 (26%)	4 (30%)	5 (30%)

Table 3. Alumni Rating of Skills Important to Professional Career. Source: Alumni Surveys, Winter and Spring 2002.

Skills	Alumni Survey Winter 2002 Mean	Alumni Survey Spring 2002 Mean	Alumni Survey Spring 2002—Skills improved through MPA (Mean)
Oral communication skills	4.73	4.67	3.52
Writing skills	4.62	4.81	3.52
Problem solving skills	4.54	4.67	3.38
Creative thinking skills	4.50	4.52	3.67
Ability to manage change	4.19	4.14	3.05
Group process skills	4.15	4.62	4.05
Policy analysis skills	4.15	4.48	3.24
Understanding ethics	4.08	4.10	2.62
Understanding pol. context		4.10	3.67
Computer skills	4.00	4.19	1.81
Budget and finance skills	3.85	4.95	2.05
Presentation skills	3.85	4.43	3.76
Integration of theory/ practice	3.73	3.52	3.05
Networking skills	3.73	4.24	3.10
Program evaluation skills	3.73	3.57	3.00
Management skills	3.69	4.19	2.62
Data Analysis skills	3.69	4.14	2.48
Research skills	3.62	3.71	2.90

Table 4. Alumni Views on Programs. Proportion responding that programs were taught “well” or “very well.” Source: Alumni Survey, Winter 2002.

Subject	% Responding "Well" or "Very Well"
The political, economic, & social forces in government	73
Designing a well-focused group research paper	69
Organizational theory & behavior	62
Policy implementation	62
History of public administration	60
Research methods	54
Creating positive organizational change	42
Budgetary process	32
Collection & allocation of resources	22

Table 5: Alumni: Skills improved and importance of skills to their present career.
Source: Alumni survey, Spring 2002

	Skills improved through MPA					Importance to career				
	Not Impv'd	A bit Impv'd	Somewhat Impv'd	Very Impv'd	Greatly Impv'd	Not Imp't	Somewhat Unimp't	Neither / Nor	Somewhat Imp't	Very Imp't
a) Writing skills	5%	43%	43%	10%				5%	10%	86%
b) Oral communication skills	5%		38%	52%	5%			5%	24%	71%
c) Creative thinking skills			43%	48%	10%			5%	38%	57%
d) Problem-solving skills	10%		38%	48%	5%				33%	67%
e) Group process and collaboration skills		5%	19%	43%	33%				38%	62%
f) Organizational mgt. and change skills	19%		38%	43%			5%	10%	52%	33%
g) Integration of theory and practice	19%	14%	14%	48%	5%	10%	5%	19%	57%	10%
h) Management skills	14%	33%	33%	14%	5%			19%	43%	38%
i) Data analysis skills	14%	38%	33%	14%				24%	38%	38%
j) Policy making and analysis skills	14%	14%	19%	38%	14%				53%	48%
k) Budget and finance skills	43%	14%	38%	5%		5%		19%	38%	38%
l) Computer skills	52%	29%	5%	14%			5%	9%	48%	38%
m) Research methods and skills	10%	19%	48%	19%	5%		10%	29%	43%	19%
n) Networking skills	10%	19%	24%	48%				14%	48%	38%
o) Program evaluation skills	5%	19%	48%	29%		5%	10%	29%	38%	19%
p) Understanding ethics	29%	10%	38%	19%	5%	5%		19%	33%	43%
q) Presentation skills		14%	19%	43%	24%			10%	38%	52%
r) Understanding the political context of public administration	5%	5%	29%	43%	19%			14%	62%	24%
s) Resource identification and utilization skills		20%	30%	45%	5%		5%	10%	65%	20%

Table 6: Alumni Perceptions of Faculty. Source: Alumni Survey, Spring 2002

Faculty	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
a) Overall, faculty seemed knowledgeable about subject			35%	40%	25%
b) Accessibility outside of the classroom		15%	25%	35%	25%
c) Provided clear feedback to student assignments		19%	48%	24%	10%
d) Provided timely feedback to student assignments		10%	24%	48%	19%
e) Clearly communicated their expectations	10%	19%	38%	29%	5%
f) Diversity of backgrounds	5%	14%	33%	24%	24%
g) Struck a balance between theory and practice	19%	14%	48%	14%	5%
h) Flexibility without compromise of standards	5%	25%	20%	30%	20%
i) Level of preparation for class sessions		10%	24%	53%	14%
j) Presentation of diverse points of view	10%	10%	33%	38%	10%
k) Quality of student evaluation process		20%	55%	25%	
l) Role models for teamwork and cooperative learning	5%	19%	29%	19%	29%

Table 7: Alumni Views on Skills Improved through the Program:

% Very Improved or Greatly Improved. Source: Alumni Survey, Spring 2002

- Group process and collaboration 76%
- Presentation skills 67%
- Understanding the political context 62%
- Creative thinking 57%
- Oral Communication 57%
- Written communication 10%
- Problem solving 52%
- Understanding ethics 24%
- Research methods 24%
- Computer skills 14%
- Management 19%
- Data analysis 14%
- Budget and finance skills 5%
- Program Evaluation skill 29%
- Resource identification and use 50%
- Organizational mgt. and change 43%
- Integration of theory and practice 53%
- Policy making and analysis 52%
- Networking 48%

Table 8: Employer Ranking of Importance of Skills. Source: Employer Survey Winter 2002, Employer survey Spring 2002.

Skills	Spring 2002	Winter 2002
Oral communication skills	4.70	4.5
Writing skills	4.5	4.8
Problem solving skills	4.71	4.5
Creative thinking skills	4.36	4.2
Ability to manage change		
Leadership		4.4
Understanding Political context	4.29	
Group process skills	4.14	4.7
Interpersonal skills		4.5
Resource identification	4.29	
Policy analysis skills		3.8
Policy making	3.43	
Organization/management change skills	4	
Understanding ethics	4.21	
Computer skills	3.57	
Strategic Planning		3.8
HR Management		3.4
Public Relations		3.9
Budget and finance skills	3.86	3.5
Presentation skills	4.14	
Public relations		3.9
Integration of theory and practice	3.71	
Networking skills	3.86	
Program evaluation skills	3.5	
Management skills	3.71	
Data Analysis skills	3.21	3.5
Research skills	3.14	