

DATE: 7 November 2017

TO: Gina Torres, Director, Teaching and Learning Center

FROM: Judy-Lynne Peters

Subject: Report on the Status of the Program Improvement Grant

The Department of Public Management received a Program Improvement Grant in the spring 2017 semester. Our objective in seeking the grant was to strengthen the capacity of the Department of Public Management faculty to conduct a full assessment of the undergraduate curriculum. Our hope was to improve learning outcomes of the major, assess whether courses are properly aligned with program goals, ensure appropriate skills were being built into each course; and determine whether the proper prerequisites were in place. A second objective in seeking the grant was to help us to have a panoramic view of our undergraduate program. The primary concern was that our students might not be receiving the quality education they deserve. Conducting an assessment and incorporating the results into ongoing supervision and mentoring of adjuncts was be important to improving the quality of our offerings.

Original Context of the Project

Although the Department of Public Management has taken steps toward improving the public administration major, our efforts have been hampered by the fact that the majority of courses in the program have been taught by adjuncts for several years. Our assessments show that some courses have not realized expected outcomes due to the fact that adjuncts are often unaware the purpose of course learning objectives.

The need for adjuncts to cover undergraduate courses is the result of a requirement by the National Association of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (the organization that accredits our MPA programs) that a minimum of 50% of all our graduate courses be taught by full time members of the faculty. In recent years, only 14% of our undergraduate courses have been taught by full time faculty members. We are committed to increasing the number of full time faculty teaching undergraduate course (with our recent new hires that figure has improved to over 20%), but until we can do so, we have relied on adjuncts to teach the majority of our foundation courses.

Full time members of the faculty have taken lead roles in developing and overseeing a number of courses, however, it has been well over a decade since most of them have taught at the undergraduate level or been involved directly in the curriculum of an undergraduate course. Our heavy reliance on adjunct faculty means that our course development and review must be robust and our ongoing assessment rigorous. Another consequence of not having full time faculty teaching in the public administration major is a growing disconnect between the undergraduate program and the Master of Public Administration programs offered by the department. We would like to see to it that the undergraduate program articulates well with the foundation courses of the MPA programs.

Finally, the Five-Year Assessment Plan for the Bachelor of Science in Public Administration Major (AY 2016-17 through 2020-21) calls for the assessment of the major's four learning outcomes (recently revised and expanded to six), using exams and/or papers from specific courses. This exercise would afford the Public Administration faculty an excellent opportunity to re-engage with the undergraduate curriculum.

For all of these reasons, the curriculum committee of the Department of Public Management (consisting of David Shapiro, Elizabeth Nisbet, Denise Thompson, Vijay Sampath and Judy-Lynne Peters) proposed to undertake a full review of the undergraduate curriculum, consistent with the short-term program goals of the public administration major outlined in our five-year assessment plan, including:

- Revising the Curriculum Map
- Ensuring that new goals and objectives are integrated into course syllabi
- Ensure proper alignment of all courses
- Developing scoring matrices to examine new goals and objectives for all courses
- Reviewing learning outcomes

Scope of Project Revised

After the Department secured the grant, it was determined in consultation with Gina Torres, that the focus of the grant should be on the introductory course in the major—PAD 140 (to be renumbered in fall of 2018 to PAD 101). Aside from being a more realistic objective for the grant, focusing on PAD 140 would lay a foundation for future assessments of the major as well as enable the department to devise a strategy for assessment of the major moving forward.

With this narrowed project scope in mind, Marie Springer, an adjunct in the Department and a student in the Criminal Justice Ph.D. program, was hired to assist in the project. Because she was on the verge of defending her dissertation, the start of the project was pushed back till the end of May. The initial round of activities were carried out over the course of the summer, and the curriculum committee will follow up and continue the project through the remainder of the academic year.

Activities

Springer collected the syllabus of every spring 2017 section of PAD 140 (five syllabi). Two 2015 syllabi were also included in her review. She did a review of each syllabus and a comparison of the syllabus to the Public Administration program Learning Outcomes.

Preliminary Findings

- Each class uses a standardized syllabus that include the learning outcomes, however, assignments are not standardized, so that the syllabi do not include a consistent set of assessable assignments.

- Although: all syllabi have required learning outcomes, the assignments do not relate closely enough to them. This is an issue that arose when an assessment was done of PAD 343 (Budgeting) during the spring semester.
- The syllabi do not meet standards established in the college-wide Writing Across the Curriculum initiative.

Next Steps

Previously scheduled assessment: PAD140 is one of three courses scheduled to be assessed this year. The assessment coordinator, Denise Thompson, sent out an email to the lead faculty members of the three courses, in which she related the following information. (Nota bene: this was decided in a faculty meeting that I did not attend.

A. Learning goals to be assessed:

#1: Demonstrate knowledge of some of the core mechanisms of public administration

#2: : Understand how different organizational environments impact the practice of public policy and administration

B. The final exam or major writing assignment currently in place will be used to do the assessment.

After it was found that there were no assessable assignments that related to the learning outcomes in PAD 343, there was some discussion correcting that problem prior to the assessment. The curriculum committee will be meeting shortly to discuss the upcoming assessment where we will discuss these preliminary findings.

Course analysis. One of the recommendations made by Gina Torres was that we conduct an analysis of student success. That was not done over the summer, however, it is something we plan to pursue, although there is not a significant difference among syllabi of the five sections. We do hope to identify best practices that may be replicated for the other sections.

Course revisions. This is tentative, because it must be discussed with the lead faculty for the course. As a result of the assessment and our continued analysis of the course, we hope to see the course curriculum updated to include more assessable assignments, more low stakes activities and more scaffolding in the course.

Workshops for PAD 140 faculty. A very high priority for the curriculum committee is to hold workshops in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Center to raise awareness about assessment and to teach faculty members to design activities that are assessable. While these workshops will be primarily directed at adjuncts teaching PAD 140 and other foundation courses in the undergraduate program, we hope to encourage as many faculty members as possible to participate.

Budgetary Expenditures

The grant provided the department with a budget of \$1,419.60 to cover the expense of hiring an adjunct for 25 hours of administrative work, in addition to the cost of providing refreshments for three workshop sessions with the Teaching and Learning Center.

Personal Services:

Non-adjunct teaching hours for $\$42.32/\text{hour} \times 30 \text{ hours} = \$1,269.60$

Other Than Personal Services:

Refreshments for three workshops (\$50 each) = \$150

Total Budget: \$1,419.60

To date, the project has spent the monies allocated for personal services to Dr. Springer.