

Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2016-17

Department: Political Science

Program(s): Master of Public Administration (MPA)

Assessment reports are to be submitted annually to report assessment activities and results by program. The reports are due every summer with a deadline of September 15th each year.

The use of this template is entirely optional.

Note: These reports have been required by MSU policy since 2004.

1. What Was Done

Based on our assessment plan, we evaluated learning outcomes #3 and #5 this year.

- 3) Analyze, synthesize and think critically in order to solve problems and make decisions.
- 5) Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

2. What Data Were Collected

Per our Assessment Plan, Outcomes #3 and #5 were evaluated by using students' professional papers.

Eleven MPA students completed professional papers during the academic year, three in the Fall and eight Spring semesters. Evaluation of the professional papers focused primarily on sections dealing with problem statements/definitions, research design and analysis approaches, and implementation plans and/or recommendations.

3. What Was Learned

Objective #3 - Analyze, synthesize and think critically in order to solve problems and make decisions: An examination of all students' papers showed evidence of the ability to:

- Identify and define/operationalize problems,
- Perform systematic collection of relevant information,
- Conduct an appropriately rigorous analysis of that information, and
- Utilize the results generated to craft technically applicable strategies likely to mitigate the original problem.

All students' papers used material from and/or extending beyond the coursework in which they developed and practiced critical thinking and analysis skills. Lastly, all eleven papers showed evidence of the ability to use relevant approaches in a technically appropriate way, and to do so in ways that demonstrates a degree of *strategic and normative* awareness as well.

Objective #5 - Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry: All eleven students' papers included indications of a substantive understanding of current research, and corresponding "best practices" for interacting and communicating with stakeholders. Students' papers also included communications, engagement, outreach or other action plan elements, the content of which indicate an

understanding of the diversity of their specific audiences of stakeholders, including citizens, and the needs of those stakeholders.

4. How We Responded

The new MPA curriculum, now in its second year of use, places additional emphasis on developing experiences and evaluative tools that encourage students to build their proficiency with and capacity to synthesize critical thinking, analytical and communications concepts into concrete competencies and practices relevant to their current and/or future professional positions. Underlying these concrete competencies is a program-wide emphasis on recognizing the normative attributes of common administrative approaches, and the reflective adoption or adaptation of approaches based on that recognition. Preliminary data from students' capstone, professional paper projects, as well as earlier course-based service-learning and other evaluative projects suggest that this approach is contributing to students' competencies related to the Program's stated learning outcomes.

While the results of this year's assessment indicate that we have met our performance goals for the two objectives examined this year, we will continue to examine our approach to course and curriculum development to further enhance the ability of students to not only understand the approaches to critical thinking, analysis and communications, but to be effective in using those tools as practitioners within public-serving organizations.