

**University of New Mexico**  
**School of Public Administration**  
**Academic Program Review**

**Review Panel Report**  
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**Report Prepared by Professors**

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## Introduction

This report is prepared based on the review of the Fall 2018 departmental self-study report site visit by the review panel: Professors Patria de Lancer Julnes (external reviewer), Raymond W. Cox III (external reviewer), Phillip Gonzales (internal reviewer). This report follows the same format provided by the office of the Academic Affairs for the onsite report with few modifications. According to the instructions by the office of academic affairs, this report only points to the areas of strengths and weaknesses without providing suggestions for remedies and or improvements to the program. The report is organized according to the following sections:

- Summary of Findings
- Student Learning Goals and Outcomes
- Teaching and Learning Curriculum
- Teaching and Learning Continuous Improvement
- Students
- Faculty
- Resources and Planning
- Facilities
- Peer Comparisons

## Summary of Findings

The overall findings are here summarized:

### Strengths

- Faculty excellence in research, teaching, and grants acquisition
- Effective public administration and health administration curricula
- Student satisfaction
- Dedicated and efficient staff
- Administrative (director) leadership
- Distance education
- Committed Advisory Board
- Alumni accomplishments
- Reputation of the School in the community
- Improved ranking by 30 places and into top 100 schools of public administration

### Areas Requiring Improvement

- Keeping faculty abreast of administrative developments
- Settling of the School's institutional status within UNM
- The School's reputation on campus
- Knowledge on campus of SPA as a discipline

## **Student Learning Goals and Outcomes**

### Strengths

The School of Public Administration (SPA) has a long history of student engagement and a commitment to offering a curriculum to meet the expectations of accrediting organizations, and which addresses the academic and professional practice needs of students. In part because of the rigor and discipline imposed by accreditation for the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (MPA), the program has well-articulated and carefully assessed learning outcomes and mission goals. The program would not have been successful acquiring renewal for accreditation if it did not provide clear student learning goals and measurable outcomes for the MPA.

Of particular note is the long history of links to state and local government via internships and by the active involvement of faculty in public service endeavors. Faculty members are well known and respected in the community. In a program in which most students are working professionals seeking a graduate degree part-time, the need for faculty members who appreciate and have worked in the public environment is critical. The efforts of past and present faculty exemplify what the MPA accrediting body expects in outreach and community engagement. Those interactions are a part of the reason that the established student learning goals and outcomes are relevant, current, and sufficient in meeting the academic and professional aspirations of students.

The faculty members in the MHA program are following the same pathways pioneered by the MPA faculty in community engagement and efforts to make the curriculum as current as possible.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

As members of the review committee we found no areas of concern under this review category.

## **Teaching and Learning: Curriculum**

### Strengths

In part because of the expectations of the MPA accrediting body, the curriculum developed by the SPA is not only consistent with the student learning goals and outcomes, but also offers the breadth of courses and blend of required and elective offerings to satisfy the needs of students. The SPA has experimented with a range of delivery modes for its courses including synchronous online (multi-site settings using ZOOM to link to faculty instructors) and weekend courses to complement and supplement the courses offered in more traditional formats.

Working professionals are not “traditional” students in the common academic parlance. Two significant barriers to academic success are resources to pay tuition and matching the demands of work with an academic schedule. Greater use of technology and experimenting with other scheduling arrangements has been a positive step for the MPA and MHA. Encouraging and offering resources to support such experimentation is and will continue to be critical.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

The SPA is at a crossroads with regard to its curriculum. The addition of the MHA has stretched resources. While the health administration faculty are able to teach public administration courses and some of the Public Administration faculty can teach health administration the balance is delicate. To the extent that keeping the curriculum consistent with student learning goals and outcomes will require new or revised curriculum means that faculty expertise and competencies must adjust.

## **Teaching and Learning: Continuous Improvement**

### Strengths

As stated earlier, because of the requirements of accreditation for the larger of the two degrees in the School (the MPA), not only are the student learning goals and outcomes clearly established and reflective of the skills, knowledge, and discipline that students are expected to demonstrate at the completion of the degrees, but there is an established assessment methodology to measure curriculum effectiveness and student learning. The SPA has demonstrated efforts to improve, evolve, and maintain an assessment structure to maximize and sustain student learning. Also, it uses assessment results to evaluate student learning and inform program improvements. These efforts operate in support of assessment methods to inform and support quality teaching. The SPA has monitored short- and long-term impacts of its changes and improvements, though organizational and leadership changes has limited the ability to be more proactive and to develop a long-term improvement plan.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

As members of the review committee we found no areas of concern under this review category.

## **Students**

### Strengths

The SPA's analysis of enrollment trends is precise, informative, and realistic. The projections reflect an awareness of fiscal and social realities affecting graduate enrollments. The emphasis on staff support for advising seems to be a concern for some outside of the School, but the reality of assisting a large, diverse body of graduate students (currently about 260), requires professional dedicated staff. While MHA students navigate the curriculum as a cohort, MPA students take courses based on work schedules and personal finances. For these students, no straight-line pathway exists through the curriculum. Finding a pathway to graduation under such circumstances requires more attention to detail than is typical in advising. For a student to successfully navigate the curriculum requires an almost semester-by-semester reassessment of a path to timely graduation. The advising system devised by the School is exceptional, but we agree that it is also necessary.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

Organizational and institutional changes have limited the capacity of the School to implement strategic management initiatives to recruit students. Pathways that were available through the use of off-site multi-classroom synchronist teaching are no longer available. This has changed the

recruitment landscape and viable alternatives have not been identified.

## **Faculty**

### Strengths

This active and competent faculty fully attends to all three aspects of faculty responsibility: teaching, service, and research. Students we interviewed appeared emphatic in their acknowledgement of the faculty as mentors and in their engagement with students as adults and professionals. The student-faculty relationship is well developed and effectively communicative. The School has had a long history of well-known researchers. That history continues.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

While the composition, qualifications and credentials of the faculty are appropriate for the two degree offerings, there is considerable pressure on them given the size of the two graduate programs. This is partly the problem of longitudinal statistics. The number of credit hours generated has been increasing at a steady pace. However, the number of faculty has not altered, in fact it has seen recent reduction. Moreover, the distribution of the faculty is somewhat imbalanced. When the MHA was created a careful plan to find Public Administration faculty with competence in Health Administration permitted the School to address the current and near-term needs of the MHA. However, the number of faculty is now split between two programs. The number of faculty in the School is below what it was a few years ago, when there was only an MPA program. The MPA program has fewer faculty per student than in the past. Not only is it a struggle to meet student expectations in terms of appropriately varied elective offerings, but the slow but steady increase in enrollment and credit hours makes new course offerings and/or more cooperative endeavors with other degree programs problematic.

While every program expects faculty to achieve success in publishing peer reviewed works, the expectation is admittedly higher for faculty in graduate programs. As a School with only graduate students this expectation is immediate and persistent for both early career and senior faculty. Opportunities for interaction with colleagues across the country and internationally are critical to success as researchers, but current funding is minimal. This harms junior faculty even more than senior faculty.

The last decade has been one of turmoil and restructuring/reorganization for the School. After four decades reporting directly to the UNM Provost, the School has been variously attached to the Business School and the College of Arts and Sciences. Such shifting around has created issues of governance but has been particularly detrimental to strategic initiatives. Multiple proposals for settling on a governance model and a strategic path for the School have not been approved.

## **Resources and Planning**

### Strengths

The composition and effectiveness of the staff to support the two degree programs is sufficient. The School has completed an assessment of the sufficiency of the institutional support and potential for external resources.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

In part because the governance system is unclear, resource planning is a matter of guess work rather than strategic assessment.

## **Facilities**

### Strengths

As currently allocated the instructional, research and administrative space for the School is adequate. However, the adequacy of the space is only for the near term.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

Assuming the School continues on its current pace of enrollment growth, space considerations will be insufficient within a few years. If any of the proposals for new strategic partnerships, or new degrees, are approved, the space limitations will become the more apparent.

## **Peer Comparisons**

### Strengths

The School has maintained a solid reputation across the country and in countries to the south (particularly Mexico and Central American countries). Assessment of the program relative to the “comparison” schools affirms that reputation, even though the comparison group has no truly comparable programs. That the School can compete against schools and departments that in four of the five cases offer large and well-endowed doctoral programs is a testament to the quality of the program.

### Areas Requiring Improvement

The problem in the comparison group is not the relative quality of the graduates of the School. Rather, it begs the question of institutional support for the School. The School’s alumni are successful in their careers. On the other hand, recruitment beyond a relative limited geography arises as a problem. The comparison group can offer the enticement of transitioning from a Masters’ degree into a PhD (important for many international students who are funded by their governments). Also, there is no comparison when looking at funding for assistantships. For all intents and purposes, the School cannot offer much to those who are local and self-funded. While

this is not a problem unique to the School, it makes the relative success of the School in national rankings all the more surprising.