YEAR THREE PROGRESS REPORT

ON PROGRAM REVIEW:

MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICES PROGRAM

Management of Public Services Program*

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Introduction

This report summarizes the Management of Public Services Program’s (MPS’s) progress in fulfilling the objectives identified in the Memorandum of Understanding dated June 1999. As the manuscript attempts to show, the program has taken notable steps in response to the issues
and actions agreed upon in the memorandum. Also, the unit has devoted time and energy to issues identified in the memorandum as needing further work and consideration. Although we are under no illusions that we have satisfied all the concerns outlined in the self-study report, we provide evidence demonstrating our recent progress.

Issues and actions agree upon

1. Create new concentrations to provide focus and direction to students’ curricular choices

Our program achieved its intended objective of establishing concentrations. In accordance with the plan described in the self-study report, we introduced eight areas of study during the past academic year that allow students to pursue specialized coursework in a variety of professional areas. Rather than summarizing the concentrations here, we provide descriptive materials as an attachment.

While recognizing that implementation challenges lie ahead, our early experience with concentrations has been favorable. Several dozen students have announced their intention to pursue a specialized area of study, and at least one has graduated with a completed concentration. To facilitate assessment, each faculty member is expected to monitor a particular concentration and periodically review its content. Nevertheless, the added complexity brought by concentrations is requiring faculty to sort through a variety of difficult administrative and curricular issues, such as the need for new courses and heightened attention to the timing of courses. Our ability to anticipate all of the problems and contingencies will likely not be fully evident until next year, when recently admitted students begin looking for specialized courses to fulfill particular concentration requirements.

During the fall quarter, we prepared and mailed a descriptive cover letter about concentrations and a “Frequently Asked Questions about Concentrations” flyer (see attachment) to all current students. These documents encouraged students to discuss the alternatives with their advisors; they generated several dozen one-on-one meetings between students and members of the faculty. At the Spring faculty retreat, the faculty agreed to give each faculty member the authority to substitute certain courses for others to help students overcome scheduling problems incumbent to particular concentrations.
2. Deliberately move toward the elimination of enhancement of ancillary programs

MPS took several important steps this year that will strengthen its ancillary programs. We approved major curricular changes to the joint program with International Studies that will eliminate some of the redundancy in coursework, especially in the area of economics. With our support, the International Studies Program conducted a focus group to provide insight into student perceptions about the joint program. Associate Professor Susan Bennett continues to serve as a liaison with International Studies and regularly attends planning meetings on the Lincoln Park campus. We have also established a more productive working relationship with the law school that should improve the learning experience among those enrolled in the Health Law program.

Our unit is also moving forward to develop new programs to serve constituencies with a pressing need for public service training. Most notably, Program Director Patrick Murphy’s effort to establish an MPS presence in Brazil (which has the formal support of the faculty as well as others throughout the university) is nearing the implementation phase, with classes tentatively set to begin in 2001. During late 1999, Professors Murphy and Woods Bowman planned and participated in a conference in Sao Paulo that greatly enhanced our visibility in the region.

Professor Maureen Scott received approval from the college’s curriculum committee to establish a program in conjunction with the University of Colorado. The program, espousing to provide leadership training to the rural poor in the vicinity of Colorado Springs, hopes to use an educational model revolving around the principles of field-based learning. Several MPS faculty members have agreed to travel to Colorado next year as an additional responsibility beyond their normal teaching load to assure the program’s success. We have also devoted considerable resources to establishing a presence on the Lake County Campus—an issue we discuss further later in this report.

3. Cultivate the growing number of alumni in ways meaningful to their professional and personal development

To build channels of communication with graduates of the program, MPS established the “Alum Professional Roundtables” series this year in direct response to the memorandum. After mailing invitations to all Chicago-area alums and successfully hosting two Roundtables, we consider this initiative worthy of continuation next year.

These events brought faculty and graduates together for lively discussions to share career-related insights. The first of these evening gatherings explored professional opportunities with small
urban nonprofit organizations; the second explored the often-delicate task of balancing personal priorities and professional goals in public service careers. Thirteen graduates attended at least one of the roundtables. A small but active group of Alums will take a leadership role in planning next year’s roundtables, which will include at least one event at the Naperville campus. We provide as an attachment a copy of the invitation sent to MPS graduates for the second event.

We are also developing a fund-raising plan with Brian Montgomery, Director of Development, to increase the support of alumni during the upcoming academic year, and have hired a part-time worker (one of our graduate students) to help facilitate this effort. We received a strong response from our graduates at our 30th Anniversary Celebration held at the Chicago Athletic Club in early May and continued the practice of featuring an alum in each of our departmental newsletters.

As MPS works more closely with its graduates, the unit is also increasingly calling upon these professionals to serve as part-time instructors. Three recent alums accepted our invitations to teach courses next year.

**Issues and actions on which there is agreement to do further work and continue conversations**

1. Explore alternatives to strengthening admissions criteria

After lengthy discussion about the merits of various alternatives, we are moving in a somewhat different direction in this area than our program review committee anticipated. Most notably, the faculty has decided to keep our minimum undergraduate grade-point average at 2.7. Recent experience, however, has made it clear that students admitted “conditionally” (perhaps due to lower-than-acceptable undergraduate GPA) often struggle in the classroom and continue to take courses after failing to satisfy the conditions set forth by the program director (such as the requirement that they receive a B- or better in their first two courses).

In response, MPS is devoting more attention to monitoring the progress of students admitted conditionally. In particular, we have 1) instituted a practice of having the program director engage in the somewhat labor-intensive task of reviewing grade reports
at the end of each quarter to identify poor-performing students, which has allowed for greater student accountability, 2) established a rule that students need to have a minimum 2.7 grade point average before beginning the thesis-practicum sequence, and 3) explored the possibility of using PeopleSoft to help enhance monitoring of students subject to probationary restrictions. The faculty is especially hopeful that the new software will help us counsel students appropriately at an early stage in their graduate-education process.

2. Establish a more effective mechanism to identify earlier in the program those students needing special assistance.

Apart from the initiatives described above, our continuing discussions about this issue at faculty meetings have not yet resulted in any major actions or policy changes. One small change was adopting a policy of notifying the program director (via e-mail) of all students who earned grade of “C” or below at the end of the term to assure that appropriate intervention takes place if necessary. This item will remain on our departmental agenda during the upcoming year.

3. Enhance Opportunities to Facility Learning Experience of Strongest Students

Our program took several notable steps in this area. Most significantly, we established a new seminar-style course that will provide a new avenue for learning among the program’s most motivated students and draw upon the entire faculty’s research and public service activities. Students will need to receive the permission of the instructor and demonstrate their interest in advanced graduate study to register.

The faculty is enthusiastic about this new curricular offering. While the theme of the course will change from year to year, it will consistently require advanced reading on topics related to ethics, diversity, or public service. During the Spring Quarter, Assistant Professor Anna Waring received a Quality of Instruction Council grant to develop the first installment of this course, which will initially focus on diversity issues. She will jointly teach the course during the Winter quarter with Susan Bennett. We expect the course to be warmly received by students seeking opportunities to critically evaluate complex social phenomenon.

4. Critically assess student perceptions and other learning issues affecting the success of suburban weekend-oriented degree programs.
Discussions at faculty meetings suggest that this issue is becoming less serious as instructors better adapt to the expectations of students taking weekend courses at suburban campuses and as more students take class at multiple campus locations, thus fostering greater interaction between various student groups. At the same time, MPS (as well as the Chaddick Institute, an affiliated center that began awarding scholarships to Naperville students this year) is making a concerted effort to include students at suburban campuses in departmental and extracurricular activities. At the faculty’s suggestion, for example, a newly created student group, the MPS Student Council, has enlisted the support of two Naperville students as well as a Lake County student and plans to hold occasional meetings or social events at suburban campuses.

Separately, low enrollment at our Lake County campus continues to be a problem that will demand departmental attention. Extensive efforts by Assistant Professor Dean Eitel to stimulate interest in this campus through direct mailings and networking have thus far not generated sufficient enrollment. We intend to re-evaluate the viability of this suburban location during the Autumn quarter.

Areas of discussion in which further work is needed, as yet unspecified.

1. **Research/data on students**

   and

2. **Targeted marketing recruitment.**

This year, we began collecting information about the number of students pursuing particular concentrations as well as names or alums attending our Roundtable series and other special events. This summer, we met with David Kalsbeek, Vice President of Enrollment Management, to discuss trends in enrollment and received newly-available Illinois board of higher education data to be used for research. On the marketing side, we recently met with Jamie Nolan, our representative in Adult Admissions, to discuss opportunities to expand promotion of our degree offerings.
Under the leadership of Woods Bowman, we also conducted analysis assessing the problem of student “turnover” (the propensity for students to leave the program before finishing their degree). After discussing the turnover issue (which is a substantially higher than some of the faculty had previously believed) at our Spring planning retreat, the faculty established a three-member departmental committee to further investigate this program. More work on these agenda items, especially in the area of targeted recruiting, is still needed.

3. Assistance to students on writing skills.

Largely in response to concerns about student writing (as well as research skills), the faculty agreed in principle during the Spring planning meeting to make significant alterations to the thesis/practicum sequence (MPS 585 and 595). The goal of these changes will allow the instructor to more effectively channel the analytical skills acquired by students during the core curriculum and thus eliminate some of the ambiguity from the thesis-writing process. Many students, a majority of the faculty feel, will benefit substantially from a more structured process that requires them to evaluate information from a limited number of data sets identified by the instructor prior to the beginning of the course. The faculty will prepare a final implementation plan by the end of the fall quarter.

4. Foreign study options.

MPS took several major steps this year to promote foreign study options. Professors Murphy and Eitel are conducting a class in Ireland later this summer (MPS’s first course conducted overseas) exploring notable international aspects of public service management. As previously described, Murphy is also in the final stages of establishing a graduate presence for MPS in Brazil, and classes are slated to begin in 2001.
Our academic unit will need to continue to devote its attention to the above areas of concern, especially to achieve the goals outlined in the memorandum of improving student assessment and more effectively helping students in need of academic assistance. Nevertheless, the past year has been sufficiently productive to establish a solid foundation for meaningful program improvement.