

Academic Program Assessment Data Report (2016)
Ph.D. degree program in Public Policy (PUBPPH)
Submitted by Brinck Kerr, Director
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Introduction

This report includes the presentation of (1) PUBP student learning outcomes; (2) how learning outcomes are assessed; (3) timelines for data collection and analysis; and (4) guidelines for use of results. Assessment data for calendar year 2016 are presented below each learning outcome or set of outcomes in the section “Assessment of Student Learning.” All data are in bold.

Student Learning Outcomes

(Student Learning Outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will know and be able to do as a result of completing a program. These student learning outcomes are directly linked to the accomplishment of the program goals.)

Students near the end of their coursework should be able to:

- (1) conduct research in a collaborative (or team) setting that will inform some aspect of policy making on a community issue;
- (2) apply policy recommendations to a real world problem or issue;
- (3) demonstrate that they have the requisite policy core, specialization, and methods skills necessary to progress to the dissertation stage;
- (4) demonstrate the ability to do independent research;
- (5) expand upon or “test” public policy and/or specialization area theories;
- (6) contribute to new scholarly/academic knowledge; and
- (7) contribute to policy relevant knowledge.

Assessment of Student Learning

(A process must be defined and documented to regularly assess student learning and achievement of student learning outcomes. The results of the assessment must be utilized as input for the improvement of the program.)

All educational/learning outcomes (i.e. outcomes 1 through 7 in section 2 above) are evaluated by program faculty.

Outcomes 1 and 2 are primarily evaluated in PUBP 6134, the Capstone Seminar. In their last semester of coursework, policy students participate as team members in a capstone service project. The service project is designed to (1) inform some aspect of policy making—usually

relating to a community issue—and (2) apply policy recommendations to a real world policy problem or issue. Students receive a grade for the seminar and they make a public presentation on their project [meeting program goals 2 and 3].

The spring 2016 capstone team conducted an analysis of the math preparation of students entering the University of Arkansas into STEM majors after graduating from relatively low-performing Arkansas high schools. The researchers in this study evaluated to what extent current support mechanisms are closing the achievement gap regardless of where students attended high school. This project compared University of Arkansas students who are graduates of the 30 schools performing worst in math end-of-course exams to all others, using quantitative and qualitative analyses. The researchers found that the University of Arkansas is not yet closing the achievement gap represented by students who are graduates of low-performing Arkansas high schools. The retention and graduation rates are lower and more problematic among those students in STEM majors. Literature and best practices indicate that retention-focused interventions and programmatic support can improve experiences and outcomes for typically underrepresented students.

Outcome 3 is primarily evaluated during the qualifying exam process. The exam process serves as an opportunity for discussion between the faculty and the student as the student integrates core/specialization classes and academic activities across subject areas and disciplinary approaches. The exam committee, under the leadership of the student's advising chair, writes four questions relevant to the student's class work, career goals, and dissertation agenda. Students are given guidance by the specialization and program faculty to help them prepare for these questions. One question addresses competencies in *research design and methods*. One question addresses the discipline of *public policy* and is written and graded in cooperation with the program faculty who teach the core policy courses. One question addresses *specialization* competencies. An additional question is written by the *specialization faculty and will cover another area* that the committee feels is important; this is often referred to as the wildcard question. If the quality of the written answers is acceptable, the advising chair will schedule the oral exam with the student's exam committee. Oral exams cover only material from the written exams. Students may be asked to expand on their written responses; however, they may not be asked to cover material that is not addressed in the written exam questions. If the quality of answers is unacceptable, the exam committee shall propose remedies. This may include retaking of portions of the qualifying exam, assigning another written paper, taking an additional course/independent study, or perhaps, assigning some other option. If the student completes the written and oral portions of the exam, s/he is admitted to Ph.D. candidacy [meeting program goal 3].

The following five PUBP students were admitted to candidacy during 2016:

**Roslina Ben Ali
Henry Brooks
Bryan Hill
Teresa Sparks
Leslie Yingling**

Outcomes 4 through 7 are evaluated during dissertation process. Upon admission to candidacy, the student selects a dissertation chair and at least two other committee members. The dissertation chair and committee will direct the student's research so that the project is consistent with the following goals: (1) demonstration of the ability to do independent research; (2) expand upon or "test" theory; (3) contribute to new scholarly/academic knowledge; and (4) contribute to policy relevant knowledge. These goals are also pursued by students through the writing and submission of manuscripts for conference presentation and publication [meeting program goals 1, 2, and 3].

The following seven PUBP students defended their dissertations during 2016:

**Britni Ayers
Nathan Kemper
Amanda Krotke-Crandall
Rodica Lisnic
Mona Ritchie
Elizabeth Smith
Katy Washington**

During 2016, PUBP students presented 20 papers at professional conferences.

During 2016, PUBP students published or had accepted for publication eight peer-reviewed journal articles and one coauthored book.

During 2016, PUBP graduates were placed in the following jobs:

**Assistant Professor, Political Science, Philander Smith College
Assistant Professor, Public Administration, University of Memphis
Implementation Coordinator, Quality Enhancement Research Initiative, U. S. Department
of Veterans Affairs, Little Rock, AR
Manager, Learning Outcomes Assessment, Babson College
Researcher, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences-Northwest Campus**

Timelines for Data Collection and Analysis

(Specific timeline for collection and analysis of assessment data.)

Data on capstone projects, admissions to candidacy, dissertation defenses, student conference presentations, student publications, and job placements will be collected for the calendar year. The data analysis will be presented in the PUBP's Annual Academic Assessment Report. The report will be transmitted to the GSIE Dean's Office by May 15 of the following year. Parts of the analysis will be presented/reproduced in the PUBP annual report, which is generally due in the GSIE Dean's Office on July 1.

Use of Results

Feedback from student performance is continuously reviewed by the program administration and is used both to assess individual student performance and to review the program requirements. The results are included in the annual report of the program, submitted to the Graduate School, and in the seven-year program review.