

Report

CAPPA Accreditation Review Committee

Master of Arts (Public Policy and Administration)

Ryerson University

August, 2008

SUMMARY OF REPORT

CAPPA Accreditation Review Committee for the Master of Arts
Public Policy and Administration Program, Ryerson University

Vic Pakalnis, Paul Pross, and Filippo Sabetti (chair)

RECOMMENDATION:

The Review Panel unanimously recommends that the Ryerson University Master of Arts, Public Policy and Administration be granted accreditation for the full term of seven years.

STRENGTHS

Ryerson has numerous strengths that accrue to it as a major institution in Canada's most diverse urban environment. We suggest that the University build on those advantages in order to give the Public Policy and Administration Program a unique standing amongst the programs that are available in Canada.

1. The Program draws on foundations going back to forty-five years of teaching experience in public administration in its undergraduate program.
2. The Program has laudable internal, periodical, appraisals of what it offers. It is sensitive to the need for self-correcting mechanisms.
3. We found a strong commitment and dedication on the part of Faculty to make the Program work and excel.
4. The issues canvassed within specific courses are in many respects admirably suited to the study of public administration in the urban environment of greater Toronto. The courses are well thought out and present the students with a rich literature and ample opportunities for exploring the field.
5. Several courses are explicitly comparative, drawing on experience in the developing world as well as in the industrialized democracies.
6. Faculty is well networked with the Provincial and Municipal Environments and with the immigration, housing and settlement sectors. Contacts with the federal government are growing in importance.
7. Faculty is generally youthful, energetic, and committed to scholarships. Faculty is well balanced with a number of former practitioners among their ranks.
8. There is a strong University support for the Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

We offer recommendations for improvement mindful of the fact that we want to leave as much leeway as possible for Ryerson to address the gaps in the Program in the fashion that they feel most appropriate to their mandate.

1. We recommend that students be given a stronger background knowledge of the way in which governments are formally organized, what authority is accorded to them through legislation and the processes of policy formation, decision-making, program implementation, program management and human resource management.
2. We suggest that faculty review the core courses with a long-term goal of creating more specialized courses on the structure and organization of government, human resource management and the use of quantitative methods in policy-making and management.
3. We recommend that the course on 'Ethical and Governance Challenges' become a core feature of the Program.
4. We recommend that a course in the field of administrative law and regulation be added to the Program.
5. The course on urban governance is an excellent introduction to the field. Much more could be done to expose students to issues in the organization of urban governance and human and financial resource management issues.
6. We suggest that more attention should be paid to national, federal, institutions and issues relating to Quebec's place in Canada, regionalism, and aboriginal affairs.
7. There is a distinct need for courses on Third Sector organizations, particularly courses on the management and organization of non-profit organizations, but also courses on the role special interest groups and voluntary organizations play in policy processes and how their policy capacity is developed and exploited.
8. While we found the social activist culture of the Program interesting and stimulating, we recommend providing students with greater exposure to the classic works in the politics of bureaucracy and democratic public administration and public policy.
9. The University should provide a single location to students, faculty and administration of the Program.

REPORT

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Master of Arts, Public Policy and Administration Program

Ryerson University

August 12, 2008

Vic Pakalnis, Paul Pross, Filippo Sabetti (chair)

Introduction

The Ryerson University Accreditation Review Panel (Panel) was established in February 2008, further to a resolution of the CAPPA Accreditation Board chaired by Dr. Leslie Pal. The Panel consisted of Vic Pakalnis, OPS Amethyst Fellow in Policy Studies, Queen's University, and Regional Director, Eastern Ontario, Ministry of Labour; Dr. Paul Pross, Professor Emeritus, School of Public Administration, Dalhousie University; and the Chair of the Panel, Dr. Filippo Sabetti, Professor, Department of Political Studies, McGill University.

Each member of the Accreditation Review Panel received three volumes of relevant materials from Ryerson University in April 2008. The materials consisted of Volume 1, The Program; Volume 2, Instructor CVs; and Volume 3, Appendices which included course outlines. The Table of Contents Volume 1 is attached as Exhibit A to this report.

The Panel corresponded by email, and met by teleconference to review the principles of mission-based accreditation and to discuss and evaluate the information provided. The basis of assessment is the program criteria proposed by the school itself, and the Panel discussed how best to report on how well the program meets these criteria and how to propose improvements, if any. It was decided that a site visit was essential for the Panel to complete its mandate. Through a series of email exchanges and teleconferences, the Accreditation Review Panel narrowed in on a number of areas what the team felt would be addressed through a site visit to Ryerson University. The visit took place on May 20, 2008. Keeping in mind the need to conduct the accreditation process in as an economical a manner as possible, only Filippo Sabetti and Vic Pakalnis undertook that visit. The other member of the Panel, Professor Pross, agreed with this arrangement.

Dr. Janet Lum and Dr. John Shields, Graduate Co-Directors of the Public Policy and Administration Program at Ryerson organized a full day with meetings with the Dean of Arts, Dean of Graduate Studies, Department Head, faculty members and 20 students.

The Panel was unanimous on its recommendations and suggestions.

Program 1

Ryerson University offers a Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration through the Department of Political Science and Administration. The Program was launched in September 2005. It includes three options: a thesis option; a Major Research Project option; and a course-only option. The Program accepts students on a full time and part time basis. The Program is relatively new but, as the Panel was reminded by Faculty during the site visit, it also draws on foundations going back to forty-five years of teaching experience in public administration in its undergraduate program. They are also developing a PhD program in public policy and administration to be launched in 2009.

The Program's stated mission is:

To provide a high quality, professionally-relevant educational program that recognizes the unique character of the public service and its role in democratic governance to full time students considering careers in the public, para-public and third sectors and to part-time learners already in the public-service interested in furthering their education. (vol. 1, p. 3)

It also seeks to integrate fields of public policy and public administration to reflect the theoretical and practical realities of political development, implementation and analysis.

The Program has had laudable internal ongoing self-examinations of what it offers. This self-examination involves forums and surveys. The Panel was also given evidence of periodical appraisals of the program areas since 2004 (vol. 1, pp. 6-14). An important review was conducted by the Ontario Graduate Council on Graduate Studies in 2004 prior to the Council's approval of the MA Program in Public Policy and Administration. It identified the following issues:

1. Appropriateness of the research component of the Program regarding the Research Methods course and the research component for those students in the course-only option.
2. The relationship between the political context and structures of policy formulation versus program management and delivery in student expectations and the Program evolved- e.g. re: economics .

¹ The three volumes of the Ryerson submission are available at the CAPPA Accreditation Board website.

3. Student funding (e.g. the distinction between "full-time research option of the program " and other students)
4. Results of the Program 's exercise of "strict academic judgement" regarding transfer credits for non-academic or in-service courses.
5. Need for enhanced presence for the ethics component in the curriculum.

All five issues were addressed in the brief submitted to the CAPP Accreditation Review Panel . The Panel determined that the specific points raised by the 2004 review have been addressed adequately save issue #2 which addresses the specific example raised (economics), while we believe more should be done at the policy formulation - policy implementation interface generally. This is addressed in the Review Panel's 'Recommendations for Improvement'.

In addition to taking account of both internal and Council review, we felt that in view of the newness of the Program, it would be more appropriate to offer suggestions for further development, rather than to insist on a strict adherence to a pre-conceived checklist of features that we might expect to find in a long-established program.

We found a strong commitment on the part of Faculty to make the Program work and excel. There is no doubt that the specific objectives of the MA in Public Policy and Administration are being met. The Review Team is satisfied that both areas of public policy and public administration are addressed. Courses respecting policy analysis and policy development provide an appropriate introduction to the field. But this is not to say that things are perfect. We offer suggestions for improvements at the margin of a fine Program.

In the *Appraisal Brief* (Volume I of three volumes submitted) the Program is described as follows:

For both full-time and part-time students, the requirement for the MA in Public Policy and Administration is the successful completion of 10 courses (4 required courses and 6 elective courses) or equivalent for students in the course option. Aside from the course option, students may select the Major Research Project option (2 course equivalents), or the Master's Thesis option (4 course equivalents). Students may complete the Program in 12-24 months depending on the learning path selected by the student (Figure 11). The flexibility of the Program is designed to allow students to customize their studies depending on their educational goals, personal circumstances and work contexts. The full program selected by the student must be completed within 5 years of enrolment. (Vol. I, p. 51. See pp. 51-54 for a more complete description of the Program.)

The Program offers seventeen public administration lecture and seminar classes and a field placement (Volume III, p. 113). The range of subjects is topical and the issues

canvassed within specific courses are in many respects admirably suited to the study of public administration in the urban environment of greater Toronto. The courses are well thought out and present the students with a rich literature and ample opportunities for exploring the field.

Several courses are explicitly comparative, drawing on experience in the developing world as well as in the industrialized democracies. This feature is not unique in Canadian public administration programs but it is a little unusual and well worth encouraging. One might include in this group the course on ‘Citizen Oriented Government and Globalization’ (PA 8201). As currently structured, this stimulating course may appeal more to students interested in development studies than to those contemplating careers in Canadian public administration. But perhaps if the session on issues relating to public participation and consultation were expanded to treat the subject from a public sector management perspective it might serve very well to introduce the latter group to the topic. It is certainly a subject that many public servants would do well to study.

The courses in urban government and government and politics in Ontario are clearly appropriate to the immediate context of students’ experience and probable career paths, while those that deal with financial management, union-management relations, ethics and with gender and equity issues are essential for any student planning a career in the public sector.

We note that the course on ‘Ethical and Governance Challenges’ appears as PA 8211 ‘Selected Topics’. In view of the significance of ethical issues in public administration we hope that it will become a fixed part of the curriculum. The discussion of ‘Changing Boundaries’ in PA 8209 is a useful feature of the curriculum, one that tends to be ignored in many public administration programs.

On the management side the Program needs to be strengthened. There is a tendency to plunge the students into the most complex issues of governance and management - such as issues revolving around urban governance, gender and equity - without first having provided a strong background knowledge of the way in which governments are formally organized, the authority accorded to them through legislation and - with the exception of financial management - the processes of decision-making and human resource management. The core courses attempt to review some of these fields, but it is virtually impossible to do them justice in one semester courses that are already replete with significant and essential material.

One area that could be strengthened is policy implementation, particularly with a course in project management. A research study soon to be released by researchers at Dalhousie University indicate MPA graduates from across the country found that :
 “...three areas were often mentioned. These were:

- (1) greater emphasis on the more practical components of the MPA program;
- (2) the need for greater diversity among project and program management courses; and (3) assistance in the job market preparation process.

There is a need to review the core courses and to separate out from them additional course on the structure and organization of government, human resource management and the use of quantitative methods in policy-making and management.

Finally, we note that Ryerson, in common with many other Canadian programs in public administration, has no course in the field of administrative law and regulation.

Ryerson has numerous advantages that accrue to it as a major institution in a Canada's most diverse urban environment. We suggest that the University make a point of building on those advantages in order to give the Public Administration Program a unique standing amongst the programs that are available in this country. For example, the course on urban governance is an excellent introduction to the field, but much more could be done to expose students to issues in the organization of urban government and the human and financial resource management issues that arise for governments that rank as "junior" levels of government.

There is a strong - and understandable - orientation to issues that are relevant to the greater Toronto area. We wonder, though, whether more attention should be paid to national, federal, institutions and issues, particularly issues relating to Quebec's place in Canada, regionalism, aboriginal affairs, and the like. Perhaps these topics receive less attention at Ryerson because the student body may be less interested in them than in diversity, rights, urban government, etc. But does this orientation explain the fact that relatively few graduates seem to find work at the national level?

The Program statement of objectives indicates that it is designed to meet the needs of students 'considering careers in the public, para-public and third sectors'. It goes on to suggest that one of the goals of the curriculum is to enable students to gain an understanding of the relationships between the public, private and third (including the para-public, voluntary, and not-for-profit) sectors as they affect the world of public policy and administration. This is an excellent objective and deserves support and encouragement.

At the moment there seems to be no course dedicated to these para-public, voluntary, and not-for-profit sectors although some relevant topics do appear in the public policy and 'changing boundaries' courses. These sessions, however, focus almost exclusively on the privatization issue, and while that is significant, it is no by means the sole aspect of Third Sector management that should be canvassed by students looking for a career in interest groups/voluntary organizations. Very little attention has been paid to this part of the field of public administration in Canada, and Ryerson could establish an important niche for its program if it were able to expand its offerings in the field.

Several core faculty members have experience in the Third Sector, but, except for

a few readings (and presumably discussions) in several classes, they do not appear to capitalize on their experience in distinct course offerings. For example, there is a distinct need for courses in the management of organizations in the sector. Amongst other issues are problems related to human resource management: how do relatively small organizations provide employees with career ladders, appropriate benefits and working environments likely to entice very talented people? Organization and structure are also significant: NPOs such as hospitals or large international aid agencies have structural and organizational concerns quite different from those of government, but also different from those of small voluntary organizations. Then there are issues that revolve around the relationships between staff and volunteers.

Finally, any student interested in a Third Sector career should be familiar with the role interest groups play in policy processes and how the policy capacity of such is developed and exploited. Courses built around these topics would be attractive to individuals already working in the third sector, as well as to students contemplating entering that field.

Faculty

In order to appreciate the emerging strength of Faculty, it may be worth recalling that Ryerson University only began offering graduate programming in the late 1990s. Before the start of the MA Program in Public Policy and Administration in Fall 2005, most faculty members associated with the degree had little opportunity to gain graduate supervision experience. Data of completed and current number of MRP and Thesis Supervisions by faculty members (Tables 3A and 3B, vol. 1, pp. 25-29) reveal very positive developments in the pattern of growth. Core Program faculty have considerably broadened and deepened their supervisory involvement.

In the site visit, the Panel met with twelve faculty members. They reviewed their area of specialization and their current research interests. While much of this is documented in Appendix B of the Ryerson submission, the discussions and current updates that took place in the face-to-face meeting were valuable. Faculty were generally youthful and energetic, and committed to scholarship. Their publication list relevant to teaching public policy and administration is good.

The Panel had wondered about how seasoned and how cohesive faculty could be since the program is only on its 3rd year. As noted earlier, Faculty reminded the Panel that Ryerson University has forty-five years of experience in public administration in its undergraduate program; they are also developing a PhD program in public policy and administration to be launched in 2009. Our strong impression is faculty in the Program is responsive to the Program's needs and that we can expect this involvement to expand among faculty in the future.

We found Faculty well networked with the Provincial and Municipal Environments and with the immigration, housing and settlement sectors. Contacts with the federal government are growing in importance.

Our impression is that Faculty is cohesive, mutually supportive and well balanced with a number of former practitioners among their ranks. Dr. Patrice Dutil summarized their work as a balance between “Craft and Scholarship”. The Panel agrees.

Students

The Panel was initially concerned that the minimum entry level for the program was a B average. As we discovered in the site visit, this is not quite correct. Given the competitive nature of entry into the program, the entry level is, in fact, a B+. Faculty indicated that other schools such as Harvard University list a minimum of B average to accommodate unusual circumstances that might otherwise exclude exceptional candidates. The B minimum, particularly for the part-time students, gives the program flexibility in considering background, publications, references and experience.

Another aspect of the student body that did not jump out of the written submission was the unique mix of part-timers and full-timers. Classes are scheduled in late afternoon (2-5 p.m.) and evenings (6-9 p.m.) to accommodate part-timers. Of the 33 students in a class, 22 are full-time students (1 year term) and 11 are part-time (2-3 year terms). This 2:1 ratio seems to be an optimum number. The presence of the part-time students seems to enrich the class considerably for the full-time students. This presence also provides a network that is useful for job placements after graduation. Unless we misunderstood, a class of 33 students is too big.

We consider the Program’s retention and completion rates to be well within the normal range of programs in this field. In the three years that the Program has been offered five full-time and two part-time students have withdrawn. All 22 of the full-time students entering in 2005 graduated within six terms; 26 of the 32 entering in 2006 completed within six terms; three were continuing and three had withdrawn. Data was not provided for the term ending in the Spring of the current year. Of the 27 part-timers entering in these two years, five had completed, two had withdrawn and the remainder were still in the Program in the 2007-2008 year. (See Vol. 1, pp. 55-57.)

The Panel met with roughly 20 MAPP students, a mixture of full-time and part-time students. We reviewed the CAPP Accreditation process and then asked each in turn to comment on their observations and advice to us. Their comments were candid and insightful. The faculty were excused from the room.

The students commented on the balance between 2/3 part-time and 1/3 full-time. Other than one student (a full-timer), the rest found it provided a balance between theory and practice. The full timers had access to current knowledge of the literature and theories of political and social sciences and the part-timers gave the class a reality-check on what practices are in place today in the public services. The one student dissenting felt it slowed the class down; the student favoured a more homogeneous class of either all full-timers or all part-timers. If this is a tension, it is hard to know how unique or widespread it is.

Group work was seen as an essential component of the Program. This reflects the fact that so much activity within government takes places through committees. Most felt more courses and group work related to non-profits would be useful.

In general, the students we met found program administration very responsive, practical and supportive.

The question of streaming was discussed. Many MPA programs provide streaming or specializing in such areas as social policy, health care, economic policy, aboriginal options, etc. Ryerson does not. The students we met preferred the generalist approach given the short duration of the program and the broad based preparation received increases their options for employment.

Ryerson has a social activist culture that was certainly supported in the Program. The students expressed aspirations - "to make a difference" in whatever organization they end up in. One student characterized the practical orientation taken by the program. Graduates are "plug and play" – ready to contribute to Canada's public services.

All this is commendable and worthy of support. Still, there is the danger of a certain insularity that comes with social activism or any other such normative commitment. Bluntly put, reading Gramsci is fine but his work becomes all the more challenging when read alongside the rich literature on the experience of Socialist public policy and administration in Eastern Europe, Cuba and China, when read alongside classic works in democratic public administration and public policy like James Q. Wilson, Vincent Ostrom and Alexis de Tocqueville, or when read alongside works tracing the experience of prairie Socialism and capitalism in Canada. Perhaps students should be more exposed to the dilemmas created by a social activist culture for a public service career.

University Support for the Program

The Panel was interested in the University's support for the program. Given the newness of the program, the issues related to space and facilities mentioned in the student remarks in the written materials submitted, the Panel wanted to gauge the university's positioning of the program. Panel members met with Dean Carla Cassidy, Dean of Arts, and Dean Maurice Yeates, Dean of the School Graduate Students.

As Dean Yeates expressed it, "Support for the School is rock solid". He indicated that the program was a perfect fit for Ryerson's general career-orientation. Proximity to the large provincial public service (67,000), City of Toronto (43,000) and federal, non-profit organizations creates a large market in the Toronto casement area guaranteeing quality applicants. The competitors in the Toronto vicinity are the University of Toronto and York University that have about 250 students per year. Ryerson University is targeting 30 to 40 students per year that can very easily be absorbed in the local market and would of course be available nationally and internationally.

The Ryerson tuition is in line with U of T at \$7,500. About 24% of students at Ryerson are emigrants. The University brands itself as accessible and more career oriented than their competitors.

Both Deans interviewed have a connection with the Department of Politics and Public Administration. Dean Cassidy headed the undergraduate program in public administration and Dean Yeates was Dean of Graduate Studies at Queen's University when the School of Policy Studies was established. Small world!

Facilities

The Panel observed excellent facilities, classrooms, and offices. However, students are spread out and the synergy that comes from being co-located is diminished. Students and faculty and administration agreed that the program should be in one place – one building. Given Ryerson's unprecedented growth and urban location, it will be a constant challenge for the program to consolidate and establish a single location for faculty and students.

Conclusion

The Review Panel offers the following recommendation of the Review Panel to the CAPA Accreditation Board:

The Review Panel unanimously recommends that the Ryerson University Master of Arts, Public Policy and Administration be granted accreditation for the full term of seven years.

Respectfully submitted,

Vic Pakalnis, Paul Pross, Filippo Sabetti (chair)

August 12, 2008