FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAMS

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

March 2018

Introduction

Public administration at Dalhousie University has a long history beginning in 1936 with the creation of the Institute of Public Affairs. A Master of Public Administration and a Graduate Diploma in Public Administration were created in 1969. The School of Public Administration (SPA) was formally established in 1975. It is the only English language school of public administration in Atlantic Canada and the largest east of Montreal. The School is part of the Faculty of Management, which also includes:

- Rowe School of Business
- School of Resource and Environmental Studies
- School of Information Management

The CAPPA Accreditation Review Committee undertook its site visit at Dalhousie University February 28, 2018 to March 1, 2018. The members of the Review Committee were:

- Susan Phillips, Professor, School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University, Ottawa
- Patrice Dutil, Professor, Department of Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, Toronto
- Howard Windsor, former Public Servant, Province of Nova Scotia

In preparation for the accreditation process, the School of Public Administration prepared the following self-assessment documents for consideration by the Review Committee.

- Section 1, OVERVIEW of the School's history, plans, programs, resources and students
- Section 2, COMPETENCIES and their application to programs
- Section 3, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT through the application of competencies

As well as reviewing these self-assessment documents, the Committee held discussions with several groups and individuals to determine how the School addresses CAPPA competencies and whether accreditation should be granted (see Appendix A).

It met separately with the Dean, Faculty of Management, Dr. Sylvain Charlebois. As well, there were several meetings with the Interim Director, Lori Turnbull. The Committee met with two groups of students: a Town Hall session was held with primarily first year students; additionally, there was a discussion with the student executive which consists of both first and second year students. The Committee also conducted a Town Hall session with Faculty and a separate session

with administrative support staff. Finally, the Committee met with graduate student faculty coordinators and the Director of the Centre for Advanced Management Education.

The School is in a period of transition. As of January 2018 an Interim Director was appointed and a process established to fill this position by 2019. The current Interim Director is a cross appointment between the School and the Department of Political Science. The previous Director was also a part-time appointment, although the new Director is expected to be allocated 100 percent to SPA.

The Committee is appreciative of the thoroughness of the documentation that it received from the School. Obviously, considerable work was required by all staff to create the self-assessment reports. As well, the Committee would like to thank everyone they met for sharing their thoughts and expertise.

Based on the Committee's review of the self-assessment documents and its site visit to the School, the Committee recommends that CAPPA grant accreditation to Dalhousie's graduate programs in Public Administration. The Committee also recommends several areas for enhancement in the School.

Distinctiveness of the Dalhousie School of Public Administration

The School of Public Administration has a clear vision of what it wants to accomplish. According to its self-report the School's mission is to "...develop public sector professionals with the integrity, knowledge and competence to promote innovative public policy, values-based management and good governance – all of which enhances the public interest...." Its vision is, "to be recognized regionally and nationally as a dynamic, innovative centre for public sector research, teaching and service. The School provides an environment which fosters the development of inspired public service professionals." In short, whether it is through teaching, research internships or other means, the School sees its primary role as developing public sector practitioners.

The School offers six graduate programs: 1) Master of Public Administration (MPA) which is taught in-class and aimed primarily at recent undergraduates who are aspiring public sector professionals; 2) Graduate Diploma in Public Administration (GDPA) using the same courses as the MPA; 3) Master of Public Administration Management (MPA-M) taught in a blended format of online courses and 2.5 day intensive sessions for experienced public sector professionals; 4) Graduate Diploma in Public Administration Management (GDPA-M) using the MPA-M courses; 5) combined Master of Public Administration/Juris Doctor (MPA-JD); and 6) combined Master of Public Administration Management (MPA-MLIS).

Our assessment is focused, as is the self-report, on the MPA (and the subsumed Graduate Diploma), and to a lesser extent on the MPA-M (and subsumed GDPA-M). The MPA-M/GDPA-M are managed by the Centre for Advanced Management Education (CFAME), a service unit of the Faculty of Management, rather than by SPA, and are delivered by a mix of academics, including

SPA faculty, and senior public servants. Little information was provided about the joint programs and the committee held no interviews specifically about them.

The School prides itself on being student-centered and has developed several distinctive components of the MPA to enhance this experience and develop future, professional public servants. This is evident in the two year Professional Development (PD) program that all MPA students are required to participate in. The purpose of the program is to provide students with professional skills that will help them to develop and manage their public sector careers. These skills can include everything from enhancing their communications skills to time management. Other examples of the School's emphasis on student development are the individualized coaching for first year students by designated faculty and the mentorship program that pairs second year students with public sector practitioners.

Recognizing that much of the work in the public sector requires working across departments and a multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving, the School has established a 'Management Without Borders' course requiring students to work on joint projects with students in other schools of the Faculty of Management.

As part of their degree, students in the MPA are required to organize the annual conference on the *Future of Public Administration in Canada*. The conference is organized with the Université de Moncton and is the largest of its kind in Atlantic Canada. The 2018 conference theme was *Stronger Together: Indigenous Reconciliation and Sustainable Growth in Atlantic Canada*.

Finally, the School has developed a paid internship program for all MPA students including faculty-led preparation of skills development for it. Students compete for internship positions and gain practical work experience in a department or agency of a level of government. Students told the Committee that internships were a highlight of their education as they provided practical work experience that strengthened their understanding of public sector management.

The internship program and the mentorship program demonstrate the close ties between the School and governments. The School has a strong working relationship with all three levels of government. The province of Nova Scotia has funded public servants to enroll in the MPA-M program. Several past and present senior provincial public servants are graduates of the School. Over the years, current and former public servants have taught at the School bringing practical experience to the students.

As previously stated, public administration has a long history in the University and the community. The School has been able to attract and retain award winning academics. Several students told the Committee that the reputation of the School and its location in Halifax were significant factors in their decision to attend Dalhousie.

Although the School has a strong presence in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada, it attracts students from other parts of Canada and international students. In 2017-18 the incoming class, not including the MPA-M students, was comprised of 16 percent of students from outside of Atlantic Canada and 16 percent from outside of Canada.

The CAPPA Competencies: The MPA

CAPPA adopted a list of five competencies by which to evaluate graduate programs in public administration: Critical Thinking; Leadership; Values and Ethics; Engagement; and Communications. The Dalhousie program reflected on these and offered a slight modification (with CAPPA's permission) to the Critical Thinking competency, adding "strategic" to this qualification.

'Critical thinking' is an inherent part of the academic approach to knowledge and understanding phenomena. The element of 'strategic' adds a new dimension to thinking without undermining the original intent. Public administration undoubtedly requires 'strategic' thinking in order to advance the public good as well as 'critical' thinking to discern misleading understandings. This refinement is useful and we think that it should be considered by CAPPA accreditation board.

As part of our discussions with students, staff and faculty, we tested whether the five competencies are appropriate and sufficiently comprehensive in the MPA. The reaction was that they are, although fruitful discussions considered whether 'awareness of diversity' should also be a competency for today's public servants. Again, we consider that this refinement is useful and we think that it should be considered by CAPPA accreditation board.

In our review of the Dalhousie SPA submissions as well as during our on-site visit to the Dalhousie campus, we tested how the competencies are attained through three primary vehicles: courses and curriculum as a whole; pedagogy; and supplemental activities. The committee is satisfied that Dalhousie's graduate programs (the MPA and the MPA-M as well as the associated Diplomas) meet CAPPA's standards. In fact, they do so well, and in a manner that cements this program as a leader in the field.

The SPA curriculum delivers on opportunities to enhance competencies through standard credit courses, which combine required and elective courses. The required courses cover the essential knowledge any public servant must have, while the electives offer a good range of topics. Students also have the opportunity to pursue their personal and professional interests by taking courses outside the School. Courses in Political Science, Health Management and Information Sciences seem popular in this regard, although students noted that they often have difficulty accessing desired courses due to prerequisites.

The CAPPA competencies are honed through pedagogy: for example, by assigning projects that test individual abilities as well as projects that involve teamwork, and by engaging with guest speakers drawn from the public sector. A mix of courses taught by Adjuncts with public sector experience as well as by full-time academics provides a variety of pedagogical and experiential approaches.

Although the Professional Development certificate is a brilliant concept, our interviews with staff, faculty and students revealed some general discomfort with its delivery. Indeed, students indicated that a significant portion of the three hours they spend a week in PD is under-utilized. The view among many is that how the PD program is taught is too passive and requires more engaging pedagogy by which students can actively practice the competencies they are learning. In addition, the PD modules are not well integrated with preparation for the internship, coaching

and mentoring. Both the content and delivery and of the PD program need to be reworked and better coordinated with other PD-oriented components of the MPA.

Finally, we note that the top priority identified in the Faculty of Management's Strategic Plan for 2017-2022 is to "Advance Experiential Learning (EL) Teaching and Research." We consider experiential learning to be a vital part of the mission to develop competencies, and in SPA it is already embodied in the student experience of organizing the signature fall conference on public administration, the internship and the interdisciplinary, problem-based Management without Borders course.

The SPA considers that "the critical thinking and ethics competencies are fully met; leadership, communication and engagement are met to a lesser degree (but still satisfactory), but improvements could be made." The committee agrees.

Competency 1 – Critical and Strategic Thinking:

The program offered by the Dalhousie SPA provides ample opportunities for students to develop critical and strategic thinking.

The courses required in the first year provide exposure to a solid knowledge base and prompt students' to critically analyze conventional wisdom through assignments and evaluations. The program is slanted towards quantitative evaluations in three courses (PUAD 5130: Managerial Economics; PUAD5131: Public Economics; PUAD5250: Strategic Financial Management) as well as two courses in methods, PUAD 5131: Quantitative Methods and PUAD5180: Research Methods and Policy Analysis.

In our discussions with students and faculty, we detected some unease with the orientation of these courses. They indicated that the courses were heavily theoretical and not sufficiently 'critical' or 'strategic' in light of public sector applications. The content, teaching methods and assignments could provide more distinctive application to the public sector.

Recommendation:

Consideration might be given to offering one of the mandatory economics course in the second year so as to lighten the load in the first year (and perhaps create an opportunity for the student to select one elective). In addition or alternatively, one of the economics courses might be regularly taught online, given that these courses are already online in the MPA-M, and it be offered with a format and pedagogy that is attuned to the reality that many students struggle with the economics components of public administration programs.

Competency 2 – Leadership:

Students have opportunities to develop their leadership capacities, although of all the competencies this is the weakest.

The students pointed to the course MGMT5000: Management Without Borders as a good opportunity to assert their leadership skills. Many identified the organization of the annual public policy conference as another tangible opportunity to take initiative, create contacts, and delve into engaging public policy and administration topics. They also noted, however, that they would

like more possibilities through the coursework to develop leadership competencies, including facilitation, negotiation and conflict management skills, and to obtain feedback on their performance.

We note that there is no required leadership course in the MPA, although such a course is already offered as an elective in the MPA-M program (MGMT6735: 21st Century Public Service Leadership).

<u>Recommendation</u>: A leadership course, possibly a version of MGMT6735: 21st Century Public Service Leadership, become a requirement in the MPA (and MPA-M), offered either in the first or second year.

Competency 3 – Engagement:

This competency heralds a new era in public administration. Government can no longer unilaterally make decisions and implement programs exclusively. It must consult extensively and often find ways to deliver programs in partnership with the nonprofit and private sectors. This shared governance requires a new set of skills that, while provided to some extent through the MPA and MPA-M, could be expanded and enhanced. Two courses, in particular, broach this topic: PUAD 5100: Organizational Designs for Governance and Public Management and PUAD 5120: Organizational Design and Introduction to Public Policy. We note that PUAD 6505: Interest Groups: Function and Management (an elective course, which needs to be renamed) offers the student an opportunity to develop competencies in 'engagement' and that a new course on 'Indigenous Public Policy' is being developed and will be offered shortly as an elective.

The SPA convinced the accreditation committee that it gives its students sufficient opportunities to develop engagement capacities. However, we often heard that real skills in convening, networking, conflict management, meeting facilitation and dispute resolution are not taught.

Recommendation:

- a. The Professional Development Program be adapted so as to ensure that students have an opportunity to develop hands-on "engagement' competencies.
- b. The course MGMT6700: Managing People in Diverse Organizations be available as an elective to the MPA students.

Competency 4 – Values and Ethics:

The evaluation committee emerged convinced that students can develop their understanding of values and ethics in the Dalhousie MPA program and how they apply these in the exercise of public service.

This competency is met primarily through the capstone course PUAD 6000: Ethics, Public Service and Governance. In addition, topics related to the values and unique responsibilities of public servants are regularly raised in classroom discussions, particularly in the courses taught by current or former public servants.

Competency 5 – Communication:

Students are given multiple opportunities to develop their abilities to communicate and confidently improve their practices in this area as future public servants.

Like all graduate programs, students are distinguished by their ability to communicate their findings and by their ability to convince their colleagues through argument. In several courses, student write assignments as briefing notes and most require them to make oral presentations, and they evaluate students on a variety of communications tests.

However, many students and faculty believed that there is much more that could be done in this regard given that communication is a core competency and a versatile skill that gives graduates a competitive advantage in entering positions in public service, broadly defined. Students indicated they would welcome more assignments in the form of briefing notes, as well as case studies and simulations, among other formats. In addition, communication skills increasingly require use of social media: for instance, one student noted the importance of 'effective tweeting.'

Recommendation:

a. The Professional Development Program be adapted so as to ensure that students have an opportunity to develop hands-on communication competencies (e.g. effective presentations, imaging techniques, advanced Powerpoint, social media strategy, working with the media, FOI laws and practices).

CAPPA Competencies: The MPA-M

The blended format MPA-M was designed as a competency-oriented program from the outset, based on the leadership competencies developed by the Government of Canada. The self-report (Volume 2) provides a detailed explanation as to how these also satisfy the CAPPA competencies. As a distance-based program, the competencies need to be fully embedded into the MPA-M courses because students do not have access to the PD program, coaching or mentoring as do the MPA students. The learning obtained through peer-to-peer learning is the primary supplemental means of advancing competencies, and appears to be highly valued. As public sector professionals with at least five years of experience, however, the MPA-M students are already at a different level of personal development in these competencies than the less experienced MPA students. Although the committee did not have an opportunity to speak with MPA-M students, we are satisfied from the self-report and our meeting with the CFAME Director that the program satisfies the CAPPA competencies.

Critical thinking, communication and engagement are reportedly integrated into the online component and the following intensive sessions through postings to the discussion forum, individual and group presentations, simulations, case analyses, and other activities. Students develop collaboration and engagement skills by working in teams on group projects, consensus-building, being encouraged to value diverse perspectives, and reflecting on their professional experiences in the 'classroom.' The CFAME Director made a convincing case that the actual

delivery of these competencies in an online format is as engaging and satisfying as the self-report describes, and as we know to be possible with online methods of teaching.

Attention to values and ethics is woven throughout the curriculum, again with a variety of means of practicing this competency.

The elective course, 21st Century Public Service Leadership, is explicitly aimed at building leadership competencies and seems an important addition to the curriculum -- one that might be elevated to a required course in both the MPA-M and MPA.

Recommendations for Improvement and Sustainability

In the committee's judgement, Dalhousie's School of Public Administration satisfies achievement of all of the CAPPA competencies. There are a number of areas in which improvements could be made, however, to improve the delivery of these competencies and to ensure their sustainability going forward. We group our recommendations for improvement into three categories: 1) the overall leadership and strategic direction of the School; 2) measures related to delivery of the competencies that SPA should implement; and 3) measures that might be considered or given further examination.

Leadership and Strategic Direction

Dalhousie's School of Public Administration has been in a period of transition for several years. In addition, it can be anticipated that across the Faculty of Management (and university) as a whole, the coming years will bring increased interest in scholarship and research productivity, as noted in our conversation with the Dean. To put the School on a firm footing and be well prepared to adapt to a stronger emphasis on scholarship, while not diminishing the quality of the education experience for students, attention to its leadership and strategic planning is essential.

With its focus on the student experience, SPA undertakes a great many activities that serve students well, including the coaching program for first year students, mentoring by public servants for second year students, the internship and PD program. It does so with limited faculty resources: although SPA lists 11 full-time faculty (two of whom are Instructor positions), the actual availability for teaching and coaching is substantially fewer. The total count includes the Dean and an Associate Dean, a pending retirement in 2018, cross-appointments with split teaching responsibilities and those with buyouts for other university service. As a result, only three faculty carry a full teaching load of four courses, and faculty who teach in the MPA-M often do so on overload, reducing their time for research. The School makes effective use of current and former public servants in course delivery, and the committee heard very complimentary appraisals of the value most bring to the program in terms of providing the kinds of 'real world' knowledge and application desired by students. The ability to make a replacement hire for the retirement in 2018 will be important to SPA's capacity to sustain a complicated teaching program and enhance its scholarship. In addition, some reorganization of responsibilities might contribute to more effective use of existing resources.

Over the past five years, the School has had three Directors: the position is currently filled on an interim basis by a faculty member with only a 50 percent appointment in the School, and a search is currently underway with the aim of filling the position as of January 1, 2019. In order to provide the requisite strategic direction and to enhance collegiality within the School, it seems essential that this appointment be allocated 100 percent to the School.

As part of a new leadership regime, the sustainability of the current delivery model of the MPA needs to be assessed, particularly if there are new pressures on faculty for increased scholarly productivity. For example, the internship program, which is a vital component of the program, is administered by a faculty member who receives a course release, and it is clear that some faculty oversight is important. The operation of the internship program, which has many repeat employers and an experienced member of staff as support, was described to the committee as a 'well-oiled machine.' A substantial part of its logistics might be centralized within the Faculty of Management or managed with better application of technology, thus freeing a faculty member from what is essentially administration.

The coaching program for first year students is a valuable addition, but its sustainability likely requires a review of the distribution of assignments. The committee learned, for example, that one of the two Instructors, who is allocated only 60 percent to SPA, is coach to 23 students, a remarkable commitment but a fragile one given the instructor's other workload. In addition, the role of graduate coordinator seems ill-defined, including to students, and could be more clearly formulated and communicated in a policy document.

Another key task of the new Director will be to develop, in a manner in which the faculty have buy-in, a strategic plan for the future of the School. The current strategic plan, 2014-2020, identifies a wide range of opportunities for the School, but it does not provide adequate *strategic* direction in terms of establishing priorities with action plans. Although it anticipates the need to balance 'cutting edge' research with effective teaching, it primarily enumerates the existing research agendas of faculty but lacks a strategy for creating sufficient collaboration in selected research topics to create more substantial and sustainable research clusters.

The new MacEachen Institute of Public Policy and Governance presents a distinctive opportunity for SPA and its students. Established in 2016 with a substantial endowment, the Institute involves the Faculties of Management, Arts and Social Sciences, Law and Health, and is directed by a faculty member of SPA. With one aspect of its core mission identified as 'civic engagement,' the MacEachen Institute has already proven to be a prime venue for learning and experience and will be a valuable part in enhancing student knowledge of and competencies in engagement, for example, by serving as research assistants, participating in events, etc. Although the MacEachen Institute is a collaborative endeavour among four faculties, rather than an instrument of SPA, and is still struggling to find sustainable funding, an important task for the new Director will be to better define and capitalize upon the School's relationship with the Institute.

Given SPA's focus on public administration and management, its location in a Faculty of Management is itself a strategic advantage. The Management without Borders course which involves teams of students from the different units working together to address contemporary issues is a creative means of fostering engagement with other units. There is considerable scope

for other means of collaboration that is not being exploited, however. These include greater use of some of the central services of the Faculty (such as Career Services), closer linkages with Information Science, among many others.

Finally, the relationship of the MPA-M, which is managed by CFAME, to the School needs to be considered. The MPA-M seems to be competently managed and has a strong enrollment of working public sector professionals, but the School gains little reputational value from it. When asked if graduates of the MPA-M see themselves as alumni of SPA or CFAME, the committee was told their connection is to CFAME. We are not suggesting a fundamental restructuring of the management of the MPA-M, but there must be means of closer integration and linkages with the School that would benefit the visibility of both, and that might facilitate more integrated planning and delivery of courses while respecting that the MPA and MPA-M serve very different audiences and have differing cost structures.

Recommended Improvements to the Delivery of the CAPPA Competencies

The School is to be congratulated for the variety of vehicles designed to enhance professional skills that have been developed to supplement the core curriculum. The main shortcoming of these supplemental programs is that they are not well coordinated with each other. Students noted that they cover topics in the preparation for the internship that are also covered in the PD program. These components need to be coordinated and integrated, and the content timed to support the internship; indeed, it seemed to the committee that the preparation for the internship could be absorbed into the PD program. Such integration would also enhance the sustainability of these valuable opportunities.

A second concern is the content and pedagogy of the PD program, as noted above. More creative methods of enabling students to apply and practice professional skills need to be included. In particular, it could more fully assist students in developing a range of communication and engagement competencies. As indicated in its self-report, the School is already planning to incorporate a competency-based framework and testing into the PD program.

The least developed of the competencies is leadership. The committee endorses the School's proposal in the self-report to introduce a comprehensive leadership course.

Dalhousie's School, like most in our field, could be more explicit in testing for the acquisition of competencies, including through exit assessments or interviews with graduating students. It might also track alumni over several years to determine how they progress in their professional careers and which competencies prove to be most valuable to them.

Additional Improvements that Might be Considered

The self-assessment for CAPPA accreditation seems to have been a useful, reflective exercise for members of the School, as evidenced by inclusion of a volume dedicated to continuous improvement. A second round, and periodic review (perhaps led by a Teaching Committee and

involving students) of the content and pedagogy of the core courses might provide useful guidance to instructors on enhancing teaching methods and application of the material. As in most public administration programs, the economics and statistics courses are ones in which students always seem to have recommendations for better public sector applications.

Consideration might be given to offering one of the mandatory economics course in the second year so as to lighten the load in the first year (and perhaps create an opportunity for the student to select one elective), or regularly offering one in an online format with careful attention to instructional design for students who struggle with such material.

Although students may take electives in other units, they indicated that they often have difficulty accessing these due to prerequisites or are unaware of interesting options. The School might better collaborate with other units to provide access to electives and better communicate with students the availability of other suitable electives. This needs to be balanced, however, against ensuring adequate enrolments in SPA's own offerings.

Students noted that they would welcome being able to obtain specialized sub-certifications, in collaboration with professional bodies, for instance in program management or SPSS. While the School might give consideration to collaborations that could provide such certifications, it also needs to be realistic as to how much it can commit to delivering with a relatively small faculty complement.

The idea of a research stream with a thesis is being considered by the School as part of the initiative of enhanced scholarship and to enable better funding of students. The committee is neutral on this idea, seeing merit but also appreciating that thesis supervision can take considerable resources and anticipating, based on experience in our own universities, that the student take-up of a thesis option is likely to be limited.

Conclusion

The committee concludes that Dalhousie's MPA and MPA-M, and associated Graduate Diplomas, satisfy the five competencies that serve as the basis for CAPPA accreditation, and recommends that accreditation be granted to them.

We also encourage the Dean of the Faculty of Management to assist the School in moving forward with new leadership, and we encourage the School to take up its own and the committee's recommendations for further improvements to the programs.

Appendix A: Agenda for the Site Visit

DAY 1 (Wednesday, February 28)

9:00 -10:00 am: Meeting with Lori Turnbull, Director, School of Public Administration

10:00-11:00 am: Meeting with Krista Cullymore, Administrator & Dolene Lapointe, Secretary/receptionist, SPA, Rowe 3033

11:30 am - 12:30 pm: Town Hall style meeting with students of SPA, Rowe 2068

12:45 - 1:45 pm: Lunch with Lori Turnbull and faculty members, University Club

2:00 - 2:30 pm: Meeting with Dr. Markus Sharaput, Graduate Coordinator, SPA, Rowe 3033

3:30 -4:30: Faculty Town Hall, Rowe 2068

4:30-5:15 pm: meeting with Professional Development team, Rowe 3033

DAY 2 (Thursday, March 1)

8:30-9:30 am: Breakfast with the Student Executive, Lord Nelson

10:00 - 10:30 am: Skype call with Dr. Sylvain Charlebois, Dean Faculty of Management

11:00 – 11:45 am: Meeting with Dr. Isabelle Caron, Internship Coordinator, Rowe 3033

12:00- 1:00 pm: Lunch at University Club

1:15-2:00 pm: Skype call with Michael Atkinson, Rowe 3033

2:00-2:45 pm: P. Dutil, S. Phillips, H. Windsor, Rowe 3033

3:00-3:45 pm: Meeting with Dr. Martine Durier-Copp, Director of CFAME, Rowe 3033

4:00 pm: head to airport