



Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration  
Association Canadienne Des Programmes en Administration Publique  
**Accreditation Board / Conseil d'accréditation**

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CAPPAA ACCREDITATION BOARD TO THE  
CAPPAA EXECUTIVE & BOARD ON  
REVISIONS TO THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS  
February 7, 2020**

**I. BACKGROUND**

**i. Context**

Between 2014 and 2016 the CAPPAA accreditation process for programs in public administration/policy/management was reviewed with the revised process receiving CAPPAA Board approval in 2016. The new accreditation process was implemented in 2017. In 2018, two programs underwent review using the new process and procedures. In May 2018, the CAPPAA Executive and Board asked the CAPPAA Accreditation Board to review the new process and determine if improvements were needed. This review began in 2019, providing the opportunity to take account of the experience acquired in the two most recent accreditations.

**ii. Actions**

In order to ensure that its review and recommendations would benefit from a fresh perspective, in August 2019 the Accreditation Board created an independent Accreditation Process Review Committee (APRC) with members representing programs of different sizes, mandates, and regions:

Chair: Dr. Evert Lindquist, Professor, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Member: Dr. Geneviève Tellier, Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa

Member: Dr. M. Paul Brown, Professor Emeritus, School of Public Administration, Dalhousie University.

The APRC completed its work on time in December 2019 and its report was the main subject for the Accreditation Board's January 2020 meeting. The present Recommendations draw substantially on the work of the APRC and the Board would like to express its gratitude to the members of the APRC for their thorough and timely analysis.

The Board believes that if these Recommendations are accepted at the 2020 annual meeting of the CAPP Board they can take effect immediately and serve the CAPP community in the 2020-2021 academic year.

### **iii. CAPP Accreditation Review Process Committee Terms of Reference**

The Terms of Reference for the Accreditation Review Process Committee are attached to this report in Appendix A. The Terms were approved at the May 2019 CAPP Board Meeting. The Terms of Reference specified that the Review Committee should pay "particular attention" to:

- Initial steps in determining if a program should be submitted for review and preparing a program for review after it has signalled its intent,
- the criteria of evaluation including the possibility of two sets of expectations with one for programs in department-based programs, and one for programs in Schools or Departments of Public Administration/Policy/Management,
- the self-study template and making the provision of program material more user-friendly,
- whether the accreditation review teams should make a recommendation on accreditation or be confined to an assessment of how well the program meets the criteria,
- outlining a clear set of outcomes of the accreditation process in light of the CAPP commitment to the delivery of a high quality of public policy and administration education, and
- recommendations on improving the accreditation webpage.

The Terms of Reference specified that the Review Committee should meet with the Chair of the Accreditation Board and any other Board members, survey the Directors of CAPP member institutions, consult with Directors and especially the two programs reviewed, and report to the Board at the midterm and conclusion of the work as appropriate. The Terms stated a final reporting deadline of December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The Review committee conformed to the spirit of these Terms, adjusting them where necessary to accommodate the short timeline and needs of the community.

## **II. REPORT OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS REVIEW COMMITTEE (APRC)**

### **i. Report**

The APRC Report is attached in Appendix B. The Board was impressed by the thoroughness, usefulness and perceptive analysis of the Report of the APRC. It was evident that the Review Committee put considerable, time and effort into this work. We deeply thank them for this significant contribution to the work of CAPPa.

THE APRC Report is divided into five sections:

- Terms of Reference
- Committee Membership
- Committee Activities Pursuant to the Terms of Reference
- Key Findings, Observations, and Inferences
- Recommendations for the CAPPa Accreditation Board to Consider

## **ii. Board Treatment of Report**

Given that the Report is appended, the Board does not consider it necessary to summarize the findings, recommendations or rationales. Instead, what follows are our recommendations based on the report and divided according to the phases of accreditation and a general category. We provide a rationale where we deviate from the APRC Report recommendations. We begin by identifying the principles that animate the accreditation process.

## **III. ACCREDITATION BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **i. Animating Principles**

Key animating principles and realities inform this work of the Accreditation Board.

First, CAPPa is an institution-based organization. Its primary service is to the departments/schools/programs of public administration/policy/management across Canada. It performs this service by encouraging excellence in research and teaching through three primary vehicles which are the accreditation of academic programs, the annual research conference and the annual student case competition. If CAPPa is going to continue to offer accreditation in future, then its commitment to accreditation needs to be clearly signalled to the community and appropriately resourced.

Second, the CAPPa accreditation process should reflect two fundamental characteristics of the public administration/policy/management community in Canada – its commitment to educational excellence and to a diverse array of programs within the community (APRC Recommendation 5). The first commitment to educational excellence can be achieved by articulating universal standards and by encouraging continuous improvement in programs. The second commitment to recognizing the diversity of programs entails that the accreditation process must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate program-specific needs and standards. A legitimate and fair accreditation process requires a balance between these two objectives of attaining universal excellence and recognizing program diversity.

Third, to serve the community needs, the accreditation process must be streamlined and cost-effective with clear benefits. A facilitative, not punitive, process that assists programs in reaching their goals serves the community best.

Finally, the Accreditation Board is committed to ensuring that Canadian public administration/policy/management programs contribute to excellence in the public sector.

## **ii. Recommendations with Rationale**

### **A. General**

We agreed with and added to four general recommendations and the rationales provided by the APRC about the accreditation process and materials (Recommendations 1, 6, 10, 11):

- The CAPP Accreditation process should be used by CAPP to raise its profile in the community and to enhance its value to its members. We agree strongly that the CAPP Board and Executive need to promote the value and importance of accreditation to the CAPP community and encourage programs to become accredited.
- Although we recognize that there is an additional cost with translation, we agree that all documentation for accreditation including the information and template posted on the CAPP website should be available in both official languages.
- We agree whole-heartedly with the statement of the APRC that “The Accreditation portion of the CAPP website should not be seen to be isolated from the mission of CAPP notwithstanding the independence of the CAPP Accreditation Board and its committees.” To this end, the CAPP website and the Accreditation webpages should be updated and improved:

#### **CAPP BOARD**

- The CAPP webpage should include a mission statement that identifies accreditation as one of its primary functions;
- The CAPP title webpage should have the CAPP Accreditation logo on it;
- The CAPP title webpage should emphasize the value of accreditation as part of CAPP’s mission and the need for a mutually supportive, learning community.

## CAPPA ACCREDITATION BOARD

- The CAPPA Accreditation webpages should contain the accreditation logo and a mission statement that flows from the CAPPA mission statement. The accreditation mission statement should highlight its commitment to high quality public administration education and continuous improvement in programs;
- The CAPPA Accreditation mission statement and documentation should affirm the importance of recognizing the diversity of programs and the application of its accreditation standards to all programs while respecting their mission-based differences;
- The CAPPA Accreditation webpages should be designed to encourage programs to come forward for accreditation by emphasizing the value and benefits of accreditation to the programs. This section should include “testimonials” from accredited programs and potential employers in written or video form;
- The CAPPA Accreditation Board should, if feasible, develop short videos similar to those used by NASPAA/COPRA, that departments could use to explain the accreditation process and market accreditation to their members;
- The CAPPA Accreditation webpage should include space to post any news about accreditation including possible panels at the CAPPA or other conferences.

## CAPPA ACCREDITATION DOCUMENTATION

- The CAPPA Accreditation Standards and Procedures documentation should more clearly specify the criteria being used to assess programs including:
    - the need for a mission statement,
    - clear delineation of a program’s approach, mandate, context,
    - links between program objectives, competencies and courses,
    - the importance and fit of experiential learning in programs,
    - and the indicators of program effectiveness.
  - The Self-Study template should include a description of a competency-based approach as well as the associated attributes;
  - If feasible, CAPPA should develop and post a form-fillable template to facilitate the self-study stage of accreditation; and,
  - Most importantly, the CAPPA Accreditation webpage should contain revised and up-to-date information on the accreditation process that is easily and quickly downloaded.
- Programs should be advised to consider applying for accreditation at the same time that they are undergoing other reviews to minimize the workload and reduce “review fatigue”. We recognize that reviews are time-consuming and require the production of much documentation. However, if the CAPPA process is undertaken at the same time as an internal university or a provincial or other program review, much of the same time may

be used by “cutting and pasting” it into the CAPP template and including other materials in the appendices to the CAPP accreditation self-study.

- The Board will develop and maintain a list of experienced advisors who it could recommend to programs requesting assistance in preparing for accreditation.
- The Board will develop a roster of potential program reviewers and will select appropriate reviewers for each program in consultation with the department concerned. The Board will develop a description of the reviewer roles and responsibilities to assist them in their duties.

**B. Streamlining the Accreditation Process: Phases and Off-Ramps (APRC Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9)**

The Board understood the APRC recommendations for an accreditation process with distinct phases and limited exit points (APRC recommendations 2, 3). However, we believed that there should be a clear distinction between the responsibilities of the CAPP Accreditation Board and the responsibilities of the programs. This can be achieved by a process that clearly outlines the phases of accreditation that require action by the programs and the parts of the process that require action by the Board. We believe that this distinction also makes the process seem more user-friendly and attractive to departments considering accreditation of their programs.

In this description of the accreditation process, we have departed from the APRC recommendations in an important way (Recommendation 3). While the APRC recommended that the last exit point for department programs be after the submission of the self-study and before the site visit, we recommend that departments be allowed to pause the process at any point that an emerging negative recommendation is evident. The reason for this difference is that the purpose of accreditation is not punitive but to encourage all programs to strive for excellence in education. We believe that allowing programs to submit additional information in response to an emerging negative decision or to pause the process while the identified problem is addressed is a better way of ensuring that programs engage in continuous improvement than denying accreditation. This iterative process maintains the high standards of accreditation while providing the departments with the flexibility to ensure that their programs provide an excellent educational experience while serving their specific needs.

**The Four Phases of Accreditation: Department Responsibilities**

Note we have used “department” for simplicity but this applies to schools and departments and other units.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
<b>Pre-Accreditation Preparation</b>	<b>Conducting the Self-Study</b>	<b>Preparing for Site Visit</b>	<b>Site Visit</b>
<b>Actions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department Agreement</li> <li>• Present CAPP A video on the value of accreditation to programs to dept.</li> <li>• Consultation with CAPP A Board/Advisor</li> <li>• File Intent to proceed or decide to postpone</li> <li>• Identify any reviewers with a conflict</li> </ul>	<b>Actions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present CAPP A information and video to dept.</li> <li>• Candidly assess readiness for accreditation</li> <li>• Make any necessary changes</li> <li>• Collect information and complete self-study template</li> <li>• Submit final self-study and signal readiness for site visit</li> </ul>	<b>Actions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Self-Study with CAPP A advisor &amp; dept.</li> <li>• Identify key messages for reviewers</li> </ul>	<b>Actions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule Site visit of 2 reviewers</li> <li>• Divide visit responsibilities among dept. members</li> <li>• Host visit and ensure strengths of program are known</li> <li>• Provide any further documentation</li> </ul>

**Phase 1: Pre-Accreditation Preparation**

In this phase of accreditation, the department reviews the importance of accreditation for their program(s). The CAPP A website documentation and video will be helpful. The Head or Director or designated lead on accreditation should outline the stages of accreditation. Ideally, the CAPP A Accreditation process should be conducted at the same time as another review to minimise workload to the department and to avoid “review fatigue.”

The department member in charge of the process, should consult the CAPP A Accreditation Board Chair and/or a CAPP A accreditation advisor to discuss the eligibility of the program for accreditation. At this stage, it may be useful to provide a short (5-10) page document outlining the key characteristics of the program(s) being considered for accreditation. If they decide that the program is not ready for accreditation, then they should identify what the department needs to do to begin the process and the appropriate timing for accreditation. If the program appears ready for accreditation and department chooses to go ahead, then it will send a formal request to the CAPP A Board Chair identifying which program(s) it would like accredited.

NOTE: In this stage, it is critical for departments to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program(s) being considered for accreditation and to discuss them candidly with the CAPP Accreditation Board Chair or advisor. CAPP recognizes that programs may have weaknesses that may be due to factors beyond the department control to address in the short term but will be interested in understanding how the departments plan to address any such weaknesses.

### ***Phase 2: Conducting the Self-Study***

In this phase, the department should discuss the self-study template and prepare the relevant documentation. Departments may wish to have a meeting dedicated to accreditation where they identify the core strengths of the program and areas for improvement, keeping in mind the department mission statement since it will be critical to the program review. If the department does not have a mission statement, then developing one should be the first step in the self-study. The mission statement will state the goals of the department and thus provide the rationale for the programs it offers.

If the department is undergoing another review, much of the information prepared for that review may just require a summary document that can be inserted into the CAPP Accreditation Self-Study template. The referenced material may then be included in an appendix using the format of either review.

The self-study should not exceed 40-50 pages excluding appendices. During the preparation of the self-study, the department may wish to consult the CAPP accreditation advisor regarding any questions or uncertainties. If the department identifies critical omissions in its program during the discussion with the CAPP advisor, it may elect to pause the accreditation process until changes can be made. The Department should inform the CAPP Accreditation Board Chair of this decision. The process will recommence when the department signifies its intention to resume the process to the Chair.

Once the self-study is completed to the satisfaction of the department, then the department head or designate submits it to the CAPP Accreditation Board Chair and indicates readiness for a site visit.

### ***Phase 3: Preparing for site visit***

In Phase 3, the department head or designate should meet by phone with the CAPP Accreditation Board Chair to advise the Chair of any concerns and any special conditions with the self-study. The CAPP Accreditation Chair will advise the department of the two reviewers for the program(s), taking into account any possible conflicts of interest.

The department should review any key messaging for the reviewers and the responsibilities of the department members during the visit. The site visit should be scheduled with a clear itinerary



for the reviewers including a block of time towards the conclusion of the visit for the reviewers to meet to discuss their report.

#### ***Phase 4: Site Visit***

The department will host the reviewers and supply any additional information that the reviewers deem necessary. As the reviewers write the report, they will advise the department if an emerging negative assessment is likely and the nature of their concern(s). The department will be given an opportunity to respond and provide any relevant documentation before the report is submitted by the reviewers. If the reviewers still believe an emerging negative assessment is forthcoming, then they should advise the CAPP A Accreditation Board Chair of the nature of the concern. After consulting with the Accreditation Board, the Chair will discuss with the department representative how to proceed. The department may elect to pause the process to address the concern or file additional information for the review pertaining to the concern raised.

#### ***The Reviewer Report and Aftermath***

After the site visit and after any additional information has been received, the reviewers will compose and submit their report to the CAPP A Board. The Reviewer Report should be submitted to the Accreditation Board as a two-part document. The main document should be prepared as the Report that is posted on the CAPP A website and should include the recommendation of the reviewers and their review of the program noting areas for improvement in a positive manner. Appendix A should contain the strategic memorandum that outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and provides advice to the leadership of the department/school on matters that are especially important to ensure continued success and improvement in the future. Appendix A will not be a public document. We believe that a strategic memo of this nature should be confidential to the Board and department to avoid embarrassment or discomfort to departments but should be submitted as part of the report to promote continuous improvement in programs and potentially provide the program leadership with leverage to make necessary changes or to obtain required resources for their programs.

The Board will review the report and any additional information supplied by the department. Based on the Board deliberations and decision, the Board Chair will inform the department of the accreditation decision. Again, if there is an emerging negative decision, then the department will be advised and will be given the opportunity to reply and provide any additional information to answer the concern before the Accreditation Board takes its final decision.

Once the department has been informed of the Board decision and the department has had an opportunity to respond to the decision, the Board Letter with the Accreditation decision, the Reviewer Report and the Department response will be posted on the CAPP A website.

#### **IV. STEPS FORWARD**

1. CAPPAs Executive and Board accept this report.
2. CAPPAs Accreditation Board develops the accreditation mission statement and revised accreditation process for approval by the CAPPAs Board and AGM.
3. CAPPAs Accreditation Board revises the documentation and website as detailed above and especially:
  - a. The revised and more detailed accreditation process with videos on the importance of accreditation and how to complete the self-study
  - b. The mission statement
  - c. The Self-Study Template and guide for accreditation
  - d. Training modules for accreditation program reviewers.
4. The revision process should be completed by September 1, 2020.
5. In early September, a letter should be sent to all Directors/Heads of the CAPPAs member institutions to advise them of the revised process, the benefits of accreditation and the process to apply for accreditation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Brock, Chair  
Ian Clark, Member  
Nancy Olewiler, Member  
Luc Bernier, Member  
David Siegel, Member

APPENDIX A

REPORT OF THE CAPPA

ACCREDITATION PROCESS REVIEW COMMITTEE

DECEMBER 13, 2019

2020

# REPORT OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS REVIEW COMMITTEE

*Prepared by*

M. Paul Brown, Genevieve Tellier, Evert Lindquist

Submitted to the CAPP Accreditation Board  
on 13 December 2019

## **1. Terms of Reference: CAPP Accreditation Process Review Committee**

In August 2019, Dr. Kathy Brock, Chair of the CAPP Accreditation Board invited three colleagues from across Canada to serve on the CAPP Accreditation Process Review Committee during the Fall 2019 semester in light of recent experiences with accreditation reviews of two graduate programs of CAPP members, which had proceeded under revised procedures emphasizing a competency-based approach. The Accreditation Board's objectives were to have an independent review of these recent experiences, to canvass CAPP directors of programs and schools on their views, and to provide recommendations for the Board to consider, particularly on making the process as 'user-friendly' as possible to CAPP member institutions. The detailed Terms of Reference can be found in Annex 1 (p. 12).

The Terms of Reference suggested that we could supply a written report, if needed, and if so, provide a short report. Though we strove to be cogent, we found that we had to exceed the recommended report of two or three pages. Accreditation standards and processes are always complicated matters, particularly in smaller and very diverse countries like Canada, and, as a committee, we received diverse insights from individuals we interviewed and surveyed, and had our own observations, interpretations, and suggestions to add.

What follows has four parts. Section 2 reviews the composition and experience of the members of our committee. Section 3 provides an overview of the process we followed in order to inform this report and lead to our recommendations. Section 4 sets out our 'findings' based on multiple lines of evidence -- we felt it important to share with the Accreditation Board our findings and interpretations based on what we learned before setting out our recommendations. Section 5 itemizes our recommendations, many of which may go beyond what was initially envisioned by the Terms of Reference, but certainly consistent with its spirit. We did not have the time nor sufficient evidence to provide detailed recommendations and implementation plans; rather, we sought to provide considered recommendations that might stimulate the thinking of the CAPP Accreditation Board and encourage more schools and programs to move through the process.

## **2. Committee Membership**

Although no one of us had a hand in shaping the composition of our committee, we quickly saw the logic in the choices made by the CAPP Accreditation Board, given our respective programs and experience with accreditation. We have very much enjoyed working with each other.

We come from programs across the country, and with different experiences dealing with accreditation and university and/or provincial reviews for public policy and public administration programs:

- *Dr. Geneviève Tellier* is Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, a former Director of its Public Administration Graduate Programs, and has been involved in review processes as the leader of a program and as an external assessor.
- *Dr. M. Paul Brown* is Professor Emeritus, School of Public Administration, Dalhousie University, a winner of the Pierre de Celles Award for Teaching Excellent, and was Chair of the Dalhousie School of Public Administration Accreditation Committee which handled the last CAPP Accreditation and Dalhousie University Review process for its MPA and MPM programs.
- *Dr. Evert Lindquist*, Professor, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria, and former Director of the School (1998-2015) which did not go through the accreditation process, contributed an early report on accreditation by CAPP with three colleagues,<sup>1</sup> and serves as Editor, *Canadian Public Administration*.

We did not have strong views or strong priors on the issues we were informed about nor the directions the CAPP Accreditation Board should go.

### **3. Committee Activities Pursuant to the Terms of Reference**

After receiving our invitations from Dr. Kathy Brock, Chair of the CAPP Accreditation Board, the committee began its work on September 6th, 2019. We started by inviting Dr. Brock to provide some background at this first meeting. Following that discussion the committee considered how to proceed with our remit. We agreed to schedule weekly hour-long Skype conference calls on subsequent Fridays until early December 2019, which we would use unless otherwise cancelled.

We reviewed the Terms of Reference and the materials on accreditation on the CAPP Accreditation portion of the CAPP web site, and formed some initial views on where some improvements could be made. As suggested in the Terms of Reference, we arranged conference calls with two of the Directors of school and programs which had recently been through CAPP accreditation process, and which had very different experiences. Early on we determined that it would be better to survey school and program directors for two reasons:

- 1) the CAPP Board of Directors and meeting of Directors had yet to be scheduled; and
- 2) a short confidential survey would provide Directors with an opportunity to provide direct input about their views and experiences with accreditation.

The Chair of our committee provided a brief oral report on the committee's progress and plans on to a meeting of the Accreditation Board. We also agreed that, as requested in the Terms of Reference, we would keep our report as short as possible, not providing detailed suggestions and options, but rather, pointing in directions we felt would be useful for the Accreditation Board to take up.

In what follows we first outline key findings, observations, and inferences from our review of the CAPP Accreditation web pages and the broader CAPP web site, our interviews, the survey responses, and the committee's deliberations. These form the basis for our recommendations for the Accreditation Board to consider, which can be found in Section 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Gattinger, M., Lindquist, E., Phillips, S., and Rouillard, L. 2005. *Accrediting Public Administration Programs in Canada: Report of the CAPP Working Group on Accreditation Implementation*. Submitted to Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration (CAPP)/Association canadienne de programmes en administration publique (ACPAP).

#### 4. Key Findings, Observations, and Inferences

Rather than simply offer recommendations for the CAPPAs Accreditation Board to consider, we thought it would be useful to share some of the findings we arrived at from multiple lines of evidence, even if we could not launch a detailed, systematic study (i.e. interviewing all directors, reviewing all accreditation reports, or having a very high response-rate to our survey). These findings, along with our experiences with reviews and accreditation, informed our deliberations and led to inferences and recommendations.

##### 1. *User-Friendliness of the CAPPAs Accreditation Information and Guidelines*

Information about CAPPAs accreditation process is found on CAPPAs web site. Two main documents are provided to help program prepare their accreditation request: The statement of Standards and Procedures and the Self Study. The Standards and Procedures express CAPPAs expectation that the graduate public administration education offered by programs will be continuously high quality and develop the competencies demanded by modern public service; the self-study gives programs a comprehensive opportunity to demonstrate that they meet this bar. It is thus essential that the two documents be clearly and mutually supportive.

Interviews and responses to the survey of directors did not reveal any significant concerns with either the standards and procedures or the self-study. Still, the recent experience of programs seeking accreditation as revealed in interviews, and the Committee’s own reflections, identified a number of areas of possible improvement to make both documents, but particularly the statement of standards and procedures more user friendly. Some concerns were also expressed about expectations concerning whether and how to articulate stated competencies to indicators of progress and/or performance.

Furthermore, the Committee believes that the current website can only be seen as a missed opportunity with respect to communicating CAPPAs commitment to the delivery of high-quality public policy and public administration education, to identifying the need for continuous improvement, and linking those to the accreditation process.

##### 2. *Recognizing the Diversity of Programs and Institutional Contexts*

Public administrations programs are delivered in a wide variety of formats. We found that the classic distinctions made between ‘free-standing’ programs (usually defined by having a separate School of Public Policy or Public Administration) and MPP and MPA programs delivered by a disciplinary department (i.e. Political Science, Economics, or Business or Management which might deliver other MA programs, among others) might not withstand close scrutiny. Some programs might be joint programs, or faculty level programs, and they might vary considerably with respect to their focus (on different kinds of policy or management questions, different target audiences, different value orientations, different competency or critical skills mixes, etc.).

Not all programs have access to similar resources and support to undertake accreditation. Some programs received unquestioned support from their institution, especially from their Dean and Faculty (one program was allowed to submit a CAPPAs accreditation report in lieu of the normal university evaluation process), while others must face skepticism (even within their own program) or at best indifference toward CAPPAs accreditation program. Furthermore, some programs have more direct access and control over resources that they can be used for accreditation (for instance, one program was able to hire an external professional to write its report), while others stated that accreditation simply require a lot of resources that their programs do not have.

One concern that was raised by some was about the minimal required size for program to be qualified for accreditation. Size is difficult to measure. For instance, faculty positions, which can be one measure, are not always attached to one single program.

There were also some confusion over whether the CAPPa competency framework ought to predominate and how it might relate to the competency framework developed by programs and larger departments, schools, and faculties -- indeed, some programs might be less focused on competencies per se, and more on theoretical and analytic perspectives.

Some concerns were also raised about the choice of evaluators. It was felt that evaluation team should have a background in traditional public policy and administration principles, and recognize the diversity of the field of public administration as well as with the diversity of institutional settings of programs. They should also familiarize themselves with the program to be evaluated before their on-site visit.

### *3. Support for Programs Considering or Undertaking Accreditation*

CAPPa currently offers a variety of supports to programs seeking accreditation, most notably detailed in the appendix to the standards and procedures document (see "Setting the Stage for Accreditation"). Support is offered at each of the four stages in the process: (1) advice and encouragement leading up to formal application; (2) advice from the Chair of the Accreditation Board on how to ensure eligibility for accreditation; (3) a self-study template and a mentor (if needed) to assist with drafting; and (4) recommendations for continuous improvement assuming a successful application.

Interviews with heads of recently accredited programs and the survey of directors indicate considerable satisfaction with the level of support in all four phases. But opportunities to add additional value also became apparent, in terms of further refinements in support documents and the role of the mentor. Indeed, mentoring emerged as a distinct positive, to the point where it should be seen to be integral to all phases of the accreditation process.

### *4. Considerations in Choosing Whether to pursue Accreditation*

Those we interviewed and surveyed reminded us that preparing for faculty, university or provincial reviews, as well as CAPPa accreditation, involves a lot of data-collection, engagement with many internal and external stakeholders, considerable administrative effort, and strong report-writing capabilities. It is not surprising, then, that directors indicated that whether to pursue CAPPa accreditation was often considered in relation to whether a university or provincial review is in the offing. Indeed, a critical question asked even within schools and programs which proceeded with CAPPa accreditation, was what its 'value-added' would be given that these reviews had recently occurred or were slated to proceed.

We also heard that, given these questions, worries about allocating resources, and the fact that many faculty members in programs and schools of public policy and public administration have diverse disciplinary and professional backgrounds, and do not work actively in the field of public administration, it would be important to receive initial advice from a CAPPa mentor about the rationale for, expectations of and prior experiences with the CAPPa accreditation process. Directors and their colleagues need advice on strategies for efficiently and effectively navigating reviews and accreditation, including better appreciating that accreditation could proceed in tandem with university or provincial reviews, and even enhance those latter processes. They also need to see CAPPa, the CAPPa Accreditation Board, and accreditation review committees as facilitative, since CAPPa and its

accreditation regime was predicated on strength in numbers and being mutually supportive in moving forward teaching and research in our fields, as opposed to competition among programs or promoting certain kinds of programs.

### *5. Requesting Information of Programs*

Gathering and providing information on many aspects of programs is a natural part of the process, with self-study processes requiring a lot of historical information, background on the orientation, philosophy, and values of programs and of the departments, schools, or faculties of which they were a part. Some concerns were expressed by one program about successive requests for information from a review committee, which arose out of confusion about the criteria to be used and took a lot of effort to fulfil.

In addition, many programs must undergo university or provincial evaluations. If coordinated with a university or provincial review process, a school or program can find a way to minimize the resources required to undertake a CAPPa accreditation review. However, if this “synchronization” is not feasible, then the financial and non financial costs associated with CAPPa accreditation can become significant. As one program director indicated: “there is a lot of program review fatigue in our Department”.

### *6. Stages of the Accreditation Process: Are There Off-Ramps?*

Accreditation through CAPPa could bring significant reputational benefits to a graduate program in public administration, but comes with significant time and monetary costs for all concerned, even with a positive result. An unsuccessful application amplifies these costs and could damage a program’s reputation amongst its internal and external stakeholders and constituency.

The survey of directors and interviews with recent applicants for accreditation suggest that this calculus is in play for the universe of programs who have pursued, or might consider pursuing, CAPPa accreditation. The challenge is to maintain the integrity of accreditation as a critical arm’s length assessment of program quality, while avoiding the heavy costs from a failed application.

Some universities do not promulgate the assessments of programs, we believe, and we wondered if the current practice of the CAPPa Accreditation Board of publishing final reports might serve to discourage some programs from participating in accreditation reviews, even if most of our colleagues indicated that good learning comes from the perspective and experience of reviewers. Not publishing full reports has the advantage of removing sensitive or critical commentary on programs, but the disadvantage is that it forsakes the opportunity to share with prospective students and other programs what the reviewers found compelling and distinctive about the program. This raises the question, then, of how much of the findings and recommendations in CAPPa accreditation reviews ought to be made public.

### *7. Amount of interest in CAPPa Accreditation*

The survey of directors revealed at best disinterest and in some cases healthy skepticism of the value added from CAPPa accreditation. The survey was sent to 30 directors (the list and emails were provided by CAPPa). Each director received an invitation letter, the questionnaire, and a reminder (for those that had not yet completed the survey). The survey has also mentioned in CAPPa’s November newsletter. The survey was open from November 7 to November 21 (an extension was granted during the course of the survey due to the small response rate and because many institutions had ‘reading weeks’).

Of the thirty directors contacted, 19 opened the invitation letter, 12 opened the survey questionnaires, and 7 completed the survey. The response rate is thus 23%. The survey was sent with SurveyMonkey.



Survey respondents were asked if they would seek accreditation in the next five years. One said “no”, three said they were “not sure”, and two said their programs already had accreditation. The survey also asked respondents if they see any steps that they would recommend that CAPPa take to encourage more programs to seek accreditation. All, except one (who answered, “no”), made reference about the need to explain the benefits of accreditation.

Overall, the surveys and the interviews indicated that the decision to seek accreditation from CAPPa is often (mostly) viewed as a costs/benefits calculation. For most, the costs outweigh the benefits: references were made to its questionable value-added, high transaction-costs, the time and resources required to do a good job, and the feared impacts of a negative decision. Some directors, however, did point to areas where accreditation could add value: accreditation could help programs get more resources from their institution; help documents many institutional and historical information; stir discussions among colleagues about the mission, approach, target audiences, competency, critical learning, experiential learning, and how to monitor progress and performance

Our interviews showed that skepticism existed at the level of individual faculty members, who have the responsibility for making sure that the competency approach makes its way into each and every course. They feared the fall-out from a negative result, but more so had doubts that what they did meshed well with the competencies model.

## **5. Recommendations for the CAPPa Accreditation Board to Consider**

CAPPa has had a long standing commitment to accreditation, establishing the Accreditation Board and investing considerable energy in recruiting board members, delineating procedures, and identifying reviewers to review programs interested in standing for accreditation. The CAPPa Accreditation Board recently moved to a competencies-based approach, and a few programs have sought or considered accreditation under this new approach. The CAPPa Accreditation Board felt it would be timely to establish a review committee to review the new process and to make recommendations, if any, that would make the process as user-friendly as possible. Based on the findings and conclusions presented in Section 4, our committee has identified several suggestions for the CAPPa Accreditation Board to consider. What follows sets out eleven, often inter-related, sets of recommendations, some of which go beyond answering specific questions posed by CAPPa in the Terms of Reference (see Annex 1).

### *1. Ensuring All CAPPa Accreditation Materials Are in Both Official Languages.*

Generally, we were impressed with the elegance and clarity of the background and procedures on the CAPPa Accreditation pages of the CAPPa web site. However, we note that not all of the materials were available in French. Accordingly, and in particular, we recommend that:

- The CAPPa Accreditation Board ensure that CAPPa Self Study Template is available in French.
- That documentation and guidance flowing from other recommendations below be available in both official languages.

### *2. Depicting the Accreditation Process in More Detail (Six Phases)*

The recommendation which follows did not arise because of concerns expressed from interviews. Rather, it arose from our deliberations about when, specifically, the leaders of CAPPa-member programs, departments or schools might best benefit from advice, tailored information, and mentorship. It also arose from our discussions with programs which recently underwent review, and the

suggestion that mentorship might be welcome at times other than expressing interest in and getting ready for the self-study. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPP Accreditation Board recognize and manage to these phases:
  - Phase 1: Pre-Accreditation -- Building Momentum
  - Phase 2: Accreditation -- Intent and Eligibility
  - Phase 3: Conducting the Self-Study
  - Phase 4: Preparing for the Site Visit
  - Phase 5: Site Visit
  - Phase 6: Decision and Notification

We think that identifying these phases would allow for the asking and giving of more strategic advice on accreditation, and for supplying better information Accreditation portion of the CAPP web site. And, as described in Recommendation 5.11, it invites the CAPP Accreditation Board and CAPP to continually make a stronger, more positive case for accreditation under Phase 1.

### *3. Facilitate Scoping, Proceeding With, and Exiting Accreditation Review*

Accreditation is a long process requiring time, money, and dedication from many people. It is essential that programs seeking accreditation be provided as much support as possible during the entire process. We must acknowledge the negative impact that being unsuccessful in obtaining accreditation can have on programs and people. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPP Accreditation Board more explicitly work with mentors, program directors, and review committee members to identify what constitutes “readiness” for the first five phases of the accreditation process identified in Rec. 5.2.
- If a mentor or accreditation review committee determines that program or the school or department leadership is not sufficiently prepared to complete one of the phases, it be allowed to exit or delay the process so as to ensure the program will be eventually be ready for review. Exiting one of these phases should not prejudice a later return to the accreditation process.
- If a program has delayed or exited the early phases (which will typically have a lot to do with articulating its mission and distinctiveness, delineating a competency framework, and identifying indicators and data to gauge progress), that the CAPP Accreditation Board, review committee, and mentor add value by assisting the program director to lay the necessary groundwork to inform the CAPP, university and/or provincial review.
- For sake of process integrity and efficiency of the accreditation review process, the last exit opportunity should be after submission of the self-study, and prior to any visit by an external review committee, similar to university or provincial review processes. Indeed, CAPP Accreditation involvement at the early phases should make it far less likely that a program encounter difficulties with faculty, university or provincial reviews.

### *4. Providing Mentorship Throughout the Accreditation Process*

If CAPP intends to make the accreditation process as user friendly as possible, it makes sense to provide support at every stage in the process by someone very familiar with the process (see also Rec. 5.2 above). One theme which emerged from survey respondents who had been considering or involved

in the process was that it should be as supportive and positive as possible, which we agree with, in part because one long-time function of CAPPa has been to be mutually supportive of programs in public policy and public administration. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPPa Accreditation Board assign a mentor to guide programs seeking CAPPa accreditation through all phases of the process, and particularly in the self-study phase.
- The CAPPa Accreditation Board develop a list of experienced mentors.
- The CAPPa Accreditation Board provide training on accreditation for members of the community -- whether scholars or current or former public servants -- who wish to serve as mentors, reviewers, and possibly program leads in the accreditation process.

#### 5. *Acknowledging the Diversity of CAPPa Graduate Programs*

Our recommendations are based on the view that programs would benefit from CAPPa accreditation to help them clarify their mission, approach, target audiences, and competency and experiential learning regimes, including how they monitor progress and performance. Some programs and schools or departments still hold the view that there is an implicit standard as to what a public policy or public administration program should look like. We see a *spectrum* of CAPPa graduate programs, which reflect different postures and regional markets, and cannot be captured by simple distinctions between programs in free-standing schools or disciplinary departments. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPPa Accreditation Board in its guidelines and procedures should explicitly state that it recognizes the diversity of graduate programs, and this diversity is acknowledged and welcomed in all of the accreditation resources.
- CAPPa should make it clear that its accreditation standards and procedures apply to all programs.

#### 6. *Improving Information on Standards & Procedures in Self-Study Reports*

The Terms of Reference specifically asked for recommendations on how to improve the standards and Procedures document and the Self-Study template. Although we did not detect any strong concerns about either document from our interviews and the survey responses, following a careful reading of both documents and informed by the recent review experiences, we concluded that they could be improved. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPPa Accreditation Board specify more clearly the criteria against which the programs will be assessed in the Standards and Procedures document, such as: a clear delineation of a program's approach, mandate, and context, and a clear delineation of its competency framework, its connection to the flow of the program and particular courses, and indicators of progress and effectiveness.
- The CAPPa Accreditation Board should articulate in the Self-Study guide its own understanding of what comprises a competency-based approach, rather than providing programs with links to advice elsewhere on how to proceed.
- The CAPPa Accreditation Board should set out its expectations delineating how schools and departments might articulate the relationship between each 'competency' and its related 'attribute', and provide guidance on the number of attributes expected, if more than the one currently given.

- The CAPP Accreditation Board should provide better guidance on how diverse forms of *experiential learning* fit into the broader CAPP competency framework and the specific competency frameworks of programs applying for accreditation.
- The CAPP Accreditation Board should consider developing a *fillable Word template* in each language to complement the outline currently provided on the CAPP Accreditation portion of the web site which would facilitate delineating criteria, competencies, experiential learning, and performance indicators.

### 7. *Addressing and Working With Negative Assessments*

We considered the circumstances under which accreditation review committees might produce conditional or initially negative assessments, and relatedly, how such CAPP assessments might differ from and fit with the faculty, university, and provincial review recommendations. Likewise, CAPP programs have very different resourcing contexts, approaches and regional considerations.

We concluded that the ‘clients’ for the CAPP reviews are the program and host institution, and thus that the substantive conclusions (as opposed to formative) of review committees are not for public consumption. Rather, CAPP accreditation reviewers should focus on providing advice on how to approach self-studies and encourage programs to better articulate and operationalize their competencies and unique program approaches. This would also serve to protect the integrity of the CAPP Accreditation Board and allow reviewers to provide formative, supportive advice. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPP Accreditation Board and its review committees advise programs on their readiness to move into Phases 2, 3 and 4, increasing the chances that programs have more positive and constructive faculty, university or provincial reviews.
- The CAPP Accreditation review committees make a distinction between mission-related determinations and recommendations vs. suggestions for continuous improvement that could be taken up by programs and larger institutions if resources and capacity become available, and if they are deemed desirable, given the program’s mission and approach.
- If initial reviews or assessments by mentors and review committees reveal concerns or a lack of readiness, then programs should be encouraged to ‘stop the clock’ and to seek out assistance and advice on how to get better prepared for that phase.

### 8. *Handling Suggestions for Continuing Improvement*

Even if an accreditation review committee believes that a program seeking accreditation has a well-articulated mission-competency-performance regime, it will nevertheless likely have important advice to give in helping programs to make continuous improvement in providing graduate education in public administration and public policy. We believe that this advice may be very strategic and useful to programs and departments or schools, but could be used and made public at the discretion of the program directors. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPP Accreditation Board provide a section in the report template for external reviewers to identify opportunities for improvement by programs. These suggestions would provide program directors and larger institutions advice which could be taken up in short, medium or long term, and provide positive leverage for program directors in accessing resources if deemed prudent.

- Suggestions for continuous improvement should not be made public by the CAPPa Accreditation Board and could be contained in an annex to the main report.

This, we believe, would foster greater sharing of information by programs and accreditation review committees and, as shown in the performance literature, foster more learning by the directors and colleagues at program level.

#### *9. Promulgating Outcomes of CAPPa Accreditation Reviews*

In what follows we are re-stating recommendations made above because the Terms of Reference indicated that we should make recommendations under this title. The rationale for these two recommendations can be found in the sections above. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- Review committees, following the approval of the Accreditation Board, should issue a public statement about why a program has met CAPPa's accreditation standards in a page indicating the mission, unique approach, and accomplishments of the program. This statement could also indicate that the review committee offered suggestions for continuous improvement.
- Following Rec. 5.8, suggestions for continuing improvement should be confidential.

#### *10. Propose Aligning CAPPa Accreditation Review with University & Provincial Reviews*

Many programs and their departments or schools undergo various review processes, often program-specific, either required by their broader institutions (faculty or university) or the province. These review processes take time and resources, and often deal with topics similar to those covered by CAPPa accreditation. This also raises questions about the value proposition of additional CAPPa accreditation on top of these episodic but regular reviews. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPPa Accreditation Board, mentors to programs seeking accreditation, and the directors of such programs strongly suggest that CAPPa accreditation process should be aligned or dovetail with University or Provincial reviews.

#### *11. Better Communicate the Benefit of Accreditation*

Our interviews and survey feedback indicated that faculty colleagues in many programs (even those which ultimately decided to proceed with accreditation) questioned the benefits of CAPPa accreditation. We believe that some of this derives from faculty colleagues and even directors who are not centrally committed to public administration and public policy as their primary intellectual communities. This suggests that CAPPa and the CAPPa Accreditation Board should continuously promote the importance of CAPPa membership and accreditation not only for Phase 2 and 3 suggested above (see Rec. 5.2), but to lay the groundwork before CAPPa Accreditation review is considered. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- The CAPPa main website be improved in the following ways:
  - Better emphasize and market the value of accreditation as part of CAPPa's mission and the need for a mutually-supportive, learning community. This could be done through CAPPa's web site (see below) and via regular panels at CAPPa and IPAC conferences.
  - The CAPPa website should have a clear mission statement, outlining its commitment to high quality public administration education, and continuous improvement to that end.

- CAPPa Accreditation should have its own icon on the main page (carried through, of course, to the CAPPa Accreditation pages).
- CAPPa could insert a short video showcasing exemplars and explaining how the competency approach could be applied across the traditional curriculums. These videos could also appear in CAPPa Accreditation portion of the web site.
- The CAPPa Accreditation web page and materials be improved in the following ways:
  - The accreditation page should have a mission statement demonstrating that accreditation delivers on CAPPa's commitment to high quality public administration education.
  - The benefits should be profiled at the outset, before the important specifics on the process and guidelines. There should be one or more quotations on the value of accreditation (balloons) by exemplars, and perhaps a video from a program director on the value realized by achieving accreditation.<sup>2</sup>
  - A space (icon) should be provided for programs to post the results of quality assessment processes outside of CAPPa's accreditation. Alternatively, reference to this possibility should be removed from the statement of accreditation standards and procedures.

In short, these two sets of recommendations are inextricably linked. The CAPPa Accreditation portion of the CAPPa website should not be seen to be isolated from the mission of CAPPa, notwithstanding the independence granted to the CAPPa Accreditation Board and its review committees. Both should be committed to fostering learning and mutual support of programs generally interested in furthering teaching in public policy and public administration.

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. the Ontario Association for Treating Youth [here](#) and Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration [here](#).

## **Annex 1 – Terms of Reference from the CAPP Accreditation Board**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE CAPP ACCREDITATION PROCESS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The CAPP Accreditation Board/Conseil d'accréditation has established the Accreditation Review Committee comprising Evert Lindquist (Victoria) as Chair, Paul Brown (Dalhousie) and Geneviève Tellier (Ottawa) as members, to undertake a review of the accreditation process. This work consists of:

- a briefing/meeting with the Chair of the Accreditation Board, and possibly the Board;
- a review of the current accreditation procedures and the feedback received from the two programs that were reviewed under this process, with particular attention to
  - Initial steps in determining if a program should be submitted for review and preparing a program for review after it has signalled its intent,
  - the criteria of evaluation including the possibility of two sets of expectations with one for programs in department-based programs, and one for programs in Schools or Departments of Public Administration/Policy/Management,
  - the self-study template and making the provision of program material more user-friendly,
  - whether the accreditation review teams should make a recommendation on accreditation or be confined to an assessment of how well the program meets the criteria,
  - outlining a clear set of outcomes of the accreditation process in light of the CAPP commitment to the delivery of a high quality of public policy and administration education, and
  - recommendations on improving the accreditation webpage.
- a short emailed survey to the Directors of the CAPP members institutions, approximately 24 schools/departments;
- a follow-up consultation with the directors during the fall directors' meeting;
- 2-3 meetings among the review committee members interspersed in the process;
- an oral midterm report to the Accreditation Board at the October 3rd meeting; and,
- a final report, if necessary, on the findings and recommendations of the committee and due December 16th, 2019.

To assist the review committee in its work, the CAPP Accreditation Board Chair will be available to consult at their request.