

CAPPA ACCREDITATION BOARD

Third Annual Report

September 1, 2008 – August 31, 2009

Background

CAPPA conducted a review of accreditation in 2006 through a committee chaired by Susan Phillips (other members: Monica Gattinger, Evert Lindquist, Lucie Rouillard). The committee recommended the creation of a Canadian accreditation process for Masters degrees in public administration, and the establishment of an Accreditation Committee.

The first Accreditation Board was appointed (after nominations) on September 1, 2006. Its members were: Leslie Pal (chair, three year term), Janice Cochrane (Vice-Chair, three year term), Allan Tupper (two-year term), Mark Sproule-Jones (two- year term), and Iain Gow (one-year term).

Prof. Gow was replaced in 2007 by Prof. Lucie Rouillard, also for a one-year term. Accordingly, all three of those members – Profs. Tupper, Sproule-Jones, and Rouillard, had their terms expire on August 31, 2008, leaving Prof. Pal and Ms. Cochrane. Despite repeated requests to fill the three empty positions on the Accreditation Board, those positions remained empty throughout 2008-2009, despite the burden of having to accept and assess two accreditation reports.

As things stand on August 31, 2008, Prof. Pal's and Ms. Cochrane's terms will end, and a completely new Accreditation Board will have to be appointed. Both Prof. Pal and Ms. Cochrane are happy to aid in whatever they can to ensure a smooth and successful transition to a new Board.

The Accreditation Board's membership in 2008-09 was:

Leslie A. Pal (Chair, three-year term to August 31, 2009)

Janice Cochrane (Vice-Chair, three-year term August 31, 2009)

Meetings

The Board had two meetings in 2008-09, both via teleconference and both to review accreditation reports that had been submitted for the University of Western Ontario and Carleton University. Key decisions taken at those meetings were to accept the reports (both of which recommended accreditation), but there was also discussion of the format of the reports (see below under Reflections). The Chair, of course, was in numerous conversations throughout the two review processes.

Schools/Review Schedule

The schedule for reviews for 2009-20019 (though these need to be re-confirmed with solid dates) is:

Dalhousie
Simon Fraser
University of Guelph/McMaster University
University of Ottawa
University of Victoria
University of Winnipeg
Université Laval

Expenses and Revenues (September 1, 2008 – August 31, 2009)

Please consult the CAPPa annual financial report, since the Accreditation Board's financial transactions (e.g., receipt of accreditation fee, payment of expenses for site visits) were managed through CAPPa.

Reflections

There have been some successes since 2007:

- An independent Canadian Accreditation Board (AB) for programs in public administration was established.
- Contacts were made between the (AB) and US and European counterparts, as well as with the IIAS.
- A list of reviewers (academics and practitioners) was established.
- Three reviews were conducted: Ryerson, University of Western Ontario, and Carleton University.
- There is a list of up to seven programs willing to stand for accreditation in 2009-2010.

The three schools that underwent accreditation reviews found them to be very useful – the reviews started conversations and dialogue both within the programs being reviewed and between those programs and the outstanding members of the profession we were able to recruit to serve, *pro bono*, on these committees.

Generally, there seems to be continued support about the CAPPa members for the accreditation process, though two institutions (Queen's and ENAP) have declined to participate (the Queen's argument is that the School of Policy Studies has several units subject to accreditation reviews, and one more is simply too much of a burden; ENAP makes the point that it graduates more MPAs than the rest of the CAPPa community combined).

There are some important issues that this first three years' experience have exposed. The first is the nature of the accreditation process itself in terms of the standards it applies. The 2006 CAPP report (chaired by Prof. Susan Phillips) urged a "mission-based" review process. This meant that programs would be assessed against their own objectives, not in terms of some set of external standards. Review committees were honestly torn over this, recognizing the importance of diversity and respecting distinct programmatic objectives, but also sensing that there is something that is at the core of both the discipline and the practice of public administration, and students have a right to expect that certain basic standards of pedagogy and professionalism are respected, no matter what the distinctive attributes of any program might be. The issue was not resolved, but remained a tension in the three reports.

The second issue was somewhat more prosaic – the importance of site visits. CAPP had never expected site visits, with their expense and logistical challenges, to be part of a review. The review protocol was to have an exchange of documents and some conference calls. In practice, all three review committees more or less insisted on site visits (at least with two of the three members, and sometimes covering their own costs if they had other business that could be expensed to a third party). One review committee chair simply refused to participate without a site visit, calling it "a given." In fact, site visits are routine in most accreditation processes, and all three committees agreed that they were invaluable to the process.

The third issue was the format and content of the review reports. Again, the original CAPP protocol for this was that a review would be submitted to the AB, that the program in question would respond, and both these reports (barring an appeal or a substantial dispute) would be posted on the CAPP website. This is what happened with the first review, though the report was very lightly edited in light of the institutional response. The next two reviews invited deeper philosophical reflection. One committee submitted a strong, frank report that ultimately recommended accreditation but pointed out some important challenges. The committee seems to have been unaware of the original CAPP protocol, and was stunned to learn that the report should be posted, reasonably remarking that the information that faculty members and administrators had provided was assumed to be privileged. There were only three or four parts of the report that could have been considered sensitive, and the AB suggested some light edits, but this was refused as a "whitewash." The third review committee decided on a strategy (common among audit committees) of submitting two reports, a short, informative but bland review for public consumption, and a longer, more detailed report for the eyes of the program Director only.

The issue of principle here goes back to what we believe was part of the original CAPP vision for accreditation. With full reports posted on the CAPP website, over time there would be a repository of detailed descriptions of MPA programs across the country, a repository that could be used by prospective students to better understand the programs to which they might apply, and the beginnings of a national professional and academic

dialogue about what constitutes the teaching and practice of public administration in Canada.

The committees, however, had a point. A rigid commitment to transparency can be embarrassing, and moreover self-defeating in that programs, fearing that every blemish will be in the public domain, will guard otherwise useful information.

A final point concerns the structure of the AB. Staggered terms made sense in the beginning to ensure some institutional memory, but are difficult to manage. It might be better to appoint members for two years, with one renewable term (thus selecting chairs from among members).

Recommendations

1. Most obviously, a new Board has to be appointed immediately if the Accreditation experiment is to go forward.
2. The reviewers list will have to be renewed, and those on the list contacted to see if they would wish to remain.
3. Schools who have indicated that they would be prepared to undergo accreditation should be contacted for 2009-2010.
4. The issue of secretarial support for the AB should be reviewed. The first Board relied on donated time from Carleton's School of Public Policy and Administration (indeed, initially volunteer time from a graduate student). It might be better to consolidate this support in CAPPa itself for continuity. [Incidentally, all documents and materials connected to the AB will be shortly forwarded to CAPPa.]
5. CAPPa needs to revisit the issue of site visits, and link it to the fee structure. Site visits cost money, and the current fee of \$2000 will simply not cover them.
6. Ms. Cochrane and Prof. Pal are ready to help in what way they can in the transition to the new AB.
7. The AB would like to thank the following:
 - a. Profs. Gow, Sproule-Jones, Tupper, and Roulliard as members of the first AB.
 - b. Carleton's School of Public Policy and Administration for its support in the person of .
 - c. Ms. , AB support person 2007-2008.
 - d. The colleagues who so generously provided their time as reviewers:
 - i. Ryerson Review: (chair), Vic Pakalnis, Paul Pross.

- ii. University of Western Ontario Review: Keith Banting (Chair),
Denis Proulx, Ralph Heintzman
- iii. Carleton University Review: Réjean Landry (Chair), Ian Clark,
Bryan Davies

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board, August 14, 2009,

Prof. Leslie A. Pal