

CAPPA Accreditation
for the Master of Public Administration Program
University of Western Ontario

Report of the Accreditation Review Committee
Keith Banting (Chair), Ralph Heintzman, Denis Proulx
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SUMMARY

The CAPPA Accreditation Review Committee for the Master of Public Administration Program at the University of Western Ontario included Keith Banting (Queen's University), Ralph Heintzman (University of Ottawa) and Denis Proulx (ENAP). Keith Banting was asked to serve as chair of the Committee.

The Committee was assisted by extensive documentation provided in advance by the MPA program, including a self-assessment of the program prepared by its director, Professor Andrew Sancton. In addition, all three members of the committee visited Western on November 12, 2008. During the site visit, the Committee was able to meet with the director of the program, with core and sessional faculty, with current and former students, and with officers of the university, including the chair of the Political Science Department (in which the MPA program is currently located) and the Dean of Social Science.

The Western MPA program has a clear focus on public administration at the municipal level in Canada. It is called the Local Government Program (LGP), and its aim is "to integrate general knowledge of management techniques with the broader understanding of politics and the public sector which is essential for local government executives." The local government focus and the program's target audience of local government managers are reflected in the scheduling and sequencing of courses in the delivery of the MPA. Courses are scheduled for the convenience of part-time students, and full-time students spread their course load over three terms to accommodate the part-time schedule.

The Western MPA program is a good program with an established record of achievement and a well-deserved reputation. Its strength lies in the professional standing of its core faculty, and its distinctiveness in its chosen focus of local government. It has a fine track record, especially with its part-time, mid-career students, largely from municipal governments, who have derived significant benefit from the program and are an enthusiastic community of support. The program is strongly and appropriately focused on public management, but with an emphasis on the politics and political setting of public management, befitting its location in a political science department. Although the department provides the core faculty, the program has successfully recruited instructors from other parts of the university, from other universities, and from the community of practitioners or former practitioners, reflecting the fact that an MPA program focused on public management must draw on a much wider range of competence than is to be found in a political science department alone.

Like almost all university programs, the Western MPA program has been through its ups and downs, but is currently on an upswing, with strong new faculty appointments, new funding for full-time scholarships, a new study centre, and the recovery of full-time administrative support. The program enjoys the support of the department of Political Science and the Faculty of Social Science, and is poised for potential expansion in new markets.

Despite this recent strengthening of the program, it faces a number of challenges as the field becomes much more competitive and dynamic. The challenges faced by the program emerge from the external environment and from the context within the University of Western Ontario. Externally, the sector is being transformed by a recent explosion of public administration and public affairs programs. This is a national phenomenon; but in Ontario alone new programs have emerged at Ottawa, Waterloo-Wilfrid Laurier, Toronto, York, Glendon, Ryerson, and others. Some of these programs have substantial resources, and even long-established programs are growing in size. Several of these programs seem eager to serve the municipal and local government market. Moreover, the new competition is placing a premium on innovation in program design and entrepreneurialism in program leadership in the field generally. Every program, including Western's, must think about its strategic direction in the new competitive environment

Internally, Western's MPA program also confronts a number of management challenges. Some of these issues are inherent in all multidisciplinary programs that seek to balance theoretical and applied knowledge and to blend the insights of scholars and practitioners. Other challenges flow from the particular structure of the Western program, including the program's location within the Political Science department, and the nature of its links with other departments and programs within the Social Science faculty. The Review Committee's comments and suggestions focused on several areas: governance, resources, funding and tuition levels; curriculum design; faculty complement; student experience and student placement; physical facilities and services; and administrative support.

Although this Accreditation Review Committee believes the UWO MPA program faces important challenges in the years ahead, we have no hesitation in recommending its accreditation by the CAPPA Accreditation Board. We accordingly make the following unanimous recommendation to the Board:

The Accreditation Review Committee unanimously recommends the University of Western Ontario Master of Public Administration program be granted accreditation for the full term of seven years.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Banting (Chair), Ralph Heintzman, Denis Proulx