

**Report of the CAPP A Accreditation Review Committee for
the Masters in Public Policy & Public Administration
at Concordia University**

May 2018

Introduction

Our CAPP A accreditation committee visited Concordia University on April 11 and 12 of 2018 to assess the Masters of Public Policy & Public Administration (MPPPA) program. After meeting with current and former students, program faculty and university administrators, and after reviewing the documents provided to us, *we unanimously recommend that CAPP A grant accreditation to the MPPPA program.* Nonetheless, in light of the senior faculty demographics, we see a pressing need for a plan to replace key staff when that becomes necessary. We discovered no evidence of such succession planning during our review.

From the point of view of its students, the program successfully provides an educational program that leads directly to employment in the public service. From the point of view of its faculty, the program successfully trains “good people to do good things” in the public service. In our view, the fact that MPPPA graduates find jobs in the public service is more important than our sense that the program falls short of fully meeting all of CAPP A’s universal competencies.

In this report, we first describe the program and compare the MPPPA program to other similar programs across Canada. We then assess whether the program provides students with the opportunity to master CAPP A’s five competencies. A concluding section makes a number of recommendations for improving the program and ensuring its sustainability.

The Masters in Public Policy & Public Administration (MPPPA)

The Concordia MPPPA (“M triple-P A”) program has been embedded in Concordia’s Department of Political Science since 1984. Students have two options for completing the

fifteen-course degree: (1) about 80 percent of MPPPA students take a paid internship that counts as seven of the fifteen courses; (2) the remaining 20 percent are in a “courses-only” option.

In recent years, as shown in the program-provided table below, MPPPA admissions, acceptances, and enrolment have fallen. In 2017, while applications and acceptances remained relatively constant, the number of students who actually enrolled fell significantly. Whether this is an anomaly or a trend remains to be seen.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Applications	225	204	175	164	129	175	166
Acceptances	75	59	59	61	56	38	34
Enrolment	45	36	30	32	37	31	17

The typical path of a Concordia MPPPA student in the internship option consists of two required courses (theories of public administration and quantitative research methods), two courses directly relevant to the paid internships (program evaluation and a summer course on how to write a briefing note) plus four elective courses. They then begin a four-month internship — all of those seeking internships are able to find one — most often with the federal government in Ottawa. After completing the internship, which is often extended by a second four-month appointment, they write a lengthy analytical report intended to link public administration theory to their internship experience. While no formal records are kept, it seems that the vast majority of those who want to be bridged into permanent public service positions achieve that goal.

The MPPPA students in the “courses only” option take: (1) the same two required courses as the internship students; (2) an elective public administration course; (3) four elective courses in a policy-related concentration; (4) four elective “broadening skills” courses drawn from the general political science curriculum.; and (5) an “extended research essay” that counts as the final four courses.

The nine faculty most closely associated with the MPPPA program are members of the Department of Political Science and have research interests that seem well suited to the curriculum of a public policy program. Few, however, have extensive experience as practitioners of public administration. About half of the courses taught by these nine faculty members are MPPPA courses; other members of the political science department teach the most of the remaining MPPPA courses.

The physical space devoted to the Department of Political Science (and thus to the program) is more than adequate, with modern faculty offices, dedicated classrooms and spacious and functional student resource areas. The program's location in the Hall Building has direct access to Montreal's Metro, and offers a central and easily accessible location within the city centre.

The university administration indicated considerable enthusiasm for the program and its achievements, but the commitment for reinvesting in the further development and expansion of the program is uncertain. As will be discussed in greater detail below, it seems to us that the MPPPA program has had to be creative in "doing more with less". When we raised the possibility of new hires to teach a broader range of courses, we were told that this was unlikely to happen.

How the Structure of the MPPPA Compares to Other Canadian Programs

The MPPPA program differs in two significant ways from other Canadian public management programs. First, it is embedded in Concordia's Department of Political Science rather than being a stand-alone unit. Second, the majority of its students take a paid internship that counts for seven of the fifteen courses required for graduation. As a consequence, students take fewer courses than Masters students in most other schools and, with two or three exceptions, they take only courses that lie within the realm of political science.

The Atlas of Public Management characterizes the MPPPA program in a "medium course requirement, policy-oriented, lower math-economics content" category. This

characterization is based, however, on MPPPA's courses-only option. The eight course internship-option would likely be placed in the "low course requirement, lower math-economics content" category which contains only one other program – the York University Master of Public Policy, Administration and Law. The York program, however, lacks the internship component of the MPPPA program, a component that the program and its students view as one of its most valuable features.

The "lower math-economics content" reflects the fact that the MPPPA is part of a political science department. There are no "in house" economists to teach economics courses and while political science increasingly uses mathematical tools and techniques, the only quantitative course in the program is the required quantitative methods course.

We note that there is no formal "mission" for the MPPPA program. The self-study presents the mission as follows (p.2): "The aim of the program is to combine academic excellence with professional expertise in order to facilitate an understanding of how public policy is formulated and administered in Canada, Québec, and the world." Many MPPPA course offerings help students to understand the nature of Canadian public policies; few, however, focus on their formulation and administration.

Another view of the mission was provided by Beth Bloodgood, the chair of the political science department. She told us that the aim was "to train good people to go out and do good things." Given how impressed we were with the current and former MPPPA students we met and the clear success of the program in getting jobs in the public service for its graduates, we think that the program clearly achieves this *de facto* mission.

Achieving the CAPPAs competencies

The CAPPAs accreditation guidelines define five student competencies which, broadly speaking, cover: critical thinking; leadership; tools and techniques; values and ethics; and communications. Assessing whether or not students actually possess particular competencies, even well-defined ones, lies well beyond the scope of a two-day visit, even one supported by ancillary documents. Below, we nonetheless provide our impressions of

whether current and former students in the MPPPA program either appear to exhibit the five competencies or have had the opportunity to acquire them. These impressions were developed by speaking to selected students in group settings, as well as to faculty members, usually in pairs.

Overall, we were much impressed by the students we met. They were articulate, engaging, self-confident, and motivated. To a greater extent than the faculty, they were clear about the mission of the MPPPA program — to provide a bridge to employment in the public service or in related organizations. At least in our brief interactions, they exhibited what we interpreted as an ability to lead and manage public organizations. They were diverse in their socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, leading us to think that they would be able to communicate well with Canada's increasingly diverse population.

Competency 1: Critical thinking

Concordia's curriculum blends positivist and post-positivist perspectives in understanding public policy in Canada. While the public administration courses, as a whole, lean toward the positivist, the policy courses emphasize post-positivist, and even postmodern, perspectives on policy and governance (e.g., intersectionality).

One of our strongest impressions is that students feel that they have sharpened their critical thinking skills through their involvement in the MPPPA course work. We heard from one alumna that she felt like her brain had been sucked out during the intensive writing and thinking about public policy, and that a "new brain" with critical thinking skills had been put back in its place. A concrete example of critical thinking came from a student who talked about being asked, in his quantitative methods course, to replicate the empirical work of a published author; he told us of being surprised at the ambiguities he identified. The relatively small MPPPA class sizes — often 10-12 students and usually less than 18 — seem to create a good atmosphere for open debate and, the students believe, for strengthening their capacity to think critically about public sector problems.

Competency 2: Leadership

Explicit instruction in the tools and techniques needed to become leaders in the public service does not exist in the MPPPA program. Leadership as a distinct learning focus exists only in Professor Dodds' elective course on political leadership and only a subset of students take that course. A few students have availed themselves of the opportunity to take courses that aim to strengthen their leadership skills in Concordia's John Molson School of Business. Perhaps some leadership skills are learned implicitly through interaction with senior faculty like Professors Salée, Lachapelle, and Jeffrey who have taken on leadership roles in the public service and in university organizations. There is also the opportunity to interact with leading public servants through the Workshops on Social Science Research (WSSR), an innovative series of one-day workshops organized by Mebs Kanji, a Concordia political scientist.

Competency 3: Tools and techniques

Several courses provide the practical tools and techniques required to be successful in the public service. All MPPPA Students learn basic quantitative tools in the mandatory research methods course and are required to prepare reports using those tools. An optional course on program evaluation by Professor Lachapelle is highly regarded by many public sector employers and is prized by students taking the internship option. A special topics courses on how to write briefing notes is taught each summer by an adjunct professor; this popular course is also seen as quite important for students in the internship option. We note, however, that not all MPPPA students can take the latter two courses because of limited enrolment. These three courses provide a basic set of tools to students who take all three. More can be gained by participating the WSSR workshops that are now offered for credit.

While we acknowledge that the on-the-job training provided by the internship experience likely expands and deepens these tools and techniques, we believe that more could be done to strengthen this aspect of the program.

Competency 4: Values and Ethics

Students already enter the program highly motivated to serve the public good. They gain some exposure to public service values and ethics through their core courses. In particular, students in Professor Jeffrey's section of the required course on theories of public administration spend several weeks on ethical principles and cases. In the past, students have had access to a graduate course on ethics and values in public policy making taught by Professor Sokolon in the political science department but this course has not been taught since 2011.

The internship experience puts their public service values to the test, and we found no evidence of any shortcomings in our discussions of internship experiences and our reading of several internship reports.

Competency 5: Communications

Diversity and empathy in public service are "baked into" Concordia's MPPPA program. The students' diverse backgrounds make them experienced cross-cultural communicators. Many are multilingual and multicultural to begin with, and the program cultivates their capacity for tolerance, engagement, and equity across Canada's many lived experiences. Faculty present a diverse mix of ideas in their courses — enabling the students to reach well beyond rationalism and positivism as the frames of reference by which they develop, interpret, and implement public policy in their careers.

Overall, we believe that MPPPA students have the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills in the program. The development of the more specific competencies involving leadership and ethics are encouraged by program but not supported by any dedicated coursework. The development of "tools and techniques" could be expanded beyond the training that currently exists. Finally, we were very much impressed by the communication skills of the students we met and have no doubts of their abilities in that area.

Recommendations for Improvement and Sustainability

The Concordia MPPPA Program is a well-established, high quality and successful program. In light of our accreditation visit, a few recommendations are offered here to help sustain and improve the program.

R1. Preserve and Build on Program Strengths

The past and current success of the MPPPA program rests on a number of key factors – excellent student selection; some well-known and experienced professors; a program evaluation component that is recognized and sought after by public sector employers; small class sizes; a longstanding and well-run internship program that has facilitated learning and employment opportunities; and an innovative WSSR program that has connected students with political leaders and public policy practitioners.

Although the MPPPA has a strong foundation, the program will be tested with the growth of public policy programs across the country including the new Max Bell Public Policy Institute at McGill University. Concordia must preserve and build on its MPPPA program strengths.

R2. Succession planning to protect core competencies and internship placement

Concordia, like other universities, is dealing with an aging faculty and competition for talent and experience. The MPPPA program is particularly vulnerable because of its relatively small scale and because a few key staff play critical roles and could be considering retirement over the next few years. A succession plan and other strategies should be considered to sustain the quality of the core curriculum and internship program.

R3. Financial Support for Students

Compared to other programs across Canada, MPPPA students have a number of financial advantages — Quebec's relatively low tuition fees, low internship fees and significant assistance in gaining internship placements. Because the MPPPA program no longer offers a thesis-based option, however, its students now receive few merit-based scholarships from

the Graduate School. Methods to increase the access of MPPPA students to more scholarships as well as bursaries and teaching assistantships should be explored with the Graduate School as well as with university advancement. Concordia's MPPPA alumni are now well established in their careers, and could be tapped to "give back" to their program.

R4. Strengthen Vision and Mission by Embracing FAS 2025

The MPPPA faculty and students do not share the same sense of the mission of the program. In the 1980s, the hope of the program was to place bilingual anglophone students from Québec in the Québec provincial public service; in practice, however, nearly 4 out of 5 MPPPA students are now headed to Ottawa. Current faculty highlight the importance of linking theory with practice. Students highlight the practical nature of the program and its success in placing students in employment opportunities.

Perhaps the time has come for those who care about the Concordia MPPPA to explore developing a consensus about the nature of its mission in today's environment. Public sector problems have evolved. New leaders are required to steer Canada through policy and administration issues that are as complex and difficult as ever experienced. Can Concordia evolve from a place to training "good people to do good things" to a school for "great people to do great things"?

One way forward is for the program to embrace parts of the vision articulated in its Dean's FAS-2025: A Living Document. That vision calls for the Faculty to become a "uniquely defined powerhouse of interdisciplinary teaching, learning and scholarship in Canada and beyond" (p.4), in part by breaking down silos within the Faculty through increased interdisciplinary teaching and research. For example, courses that cannot now be offered by political science faculty might be offered to MPPPA students by faculty in other FAS units. We discussed this possibility with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Andre Roy, who led the construction of FAS-2025.

R5. Deepen and Expand Training on Tools and Techniques

The practical side of the MPPPA curriculum should be strengthened to meet forward

looking challenges. Over the next twenty years, the public sector is going to be dealing with significant challenges related income inequality, labour market adjustment, climate change, and geopolitical tensions stemming from many factors, including weakening democratic institutions and fiscal sustainability. The need for evidence-based decision making and transparent reporting is pressing in the face of declining trust in political leaders and public institutions.

Concordia should strengthen the MPPPA core curriculum by offering courses focused on program development and implementation, risk management and options analysis, the science and art of negotiations, public finance and budgeting, among others. Another option might be to reduce the weight accorded to the internship and offer two or three additional core courses focused on tools and techniques.

Concluding Remarks

Over the years, the MPPPA program has seemed to do “more with less”. While many programs offer a larger number of policy and administration courses, the MPPPA combines a small number of courses with an internship that “counts” as seven courses, reducing the need for faculty involvement. The courses-only option contain eleven courses and a research essay that counts as four courses (12 credits). In another example of creativity in the face of limited resources, the program has expanded the practical side of its curriculum by offering course credit for attending WSSR workshops and for attending workshops related to the internship.

The Concordia political science department and its faculty are clearly committed to the MPPPA program and enthusiastic about its contribution both to Concordia and to public service. Nonetheless, there is a clear need to hire additional faculty who can help to better align the course offerings with the professional aims of the program. Greater support from the central administration would be required to do this, however, and that support seems unlikely. Alternatively, cross-department cooperation such as that envisioned by FAS-2025 might provide a way forward. In the end, we are confident that the MPPPA program will find a way to maintain its high quality in the face of future challenges.

The CAPP Accreditation Review Committee of the Concordia MPPPA Program

The CAPP Accreditation Review Committee undertook its site visit at Concordia on April 11 and 12, 2018. The members of the Review Committee were:

Kevin Page, President, Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy, University of Ottawa

Anthony Perl, Professor of Urban Studies and Political Science, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.

Saul Schwartz, Professor, School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University, Ottawa

In preparation for the accreditation process, the Concordia Department of Political Science, in which the MPPPA program resides prepared a self-assessment document and provided copies of two previous assessments of the department. In addition, we requested, and were given, examples of internship reports, various course outlines and an account of the teaching loads related to the MPPPA faculty

As well as reviewing these documents, the Committee held discussions with several groups and individuals to determine how the School addresses CAPP competencies and whether accreditation should be granted. It met separately with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Andre Roy.

The Committee met with several groups of current and former students:

- We met with a group of five alumni over lunch on April 11 and with another pair of graduates on April 12.
- We spoke to two groups of students, including the students who represented Concordia, for the first time, in the CAPP case competition.

- Professor Schwartz met with two MPPPA students in Ottawa, where they were doing their internships.

The committee met with eight of the nine faculty associated with the MPPPA program, talking with them two at a time. We also met with Mebs Kanji, the professor who created and now manages the WSSR workshops. Near the end of the visit, we met with the chair and associate chair of the department of political science.

Finally, we met with Eve Pankovich, the longtime administrator in charge of the logistics of placing MPPPA students in internship positions.

We would like to thank the faculty, staff and students at Concordia for their warm welcome, for their willing cooperation and for ensuring that our visit went smoothly. Special thanks go to Professor Graham Dodds for orchestrating the process.