

Program Review
School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware
September 2003

Background

Our team of five faculty (4 external and 1 internal) was constituted to conduct an Academic Program Review for the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy (UAPP), College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy, University of Delaware. To do this, we utilized the Urban Affairs and Public Policy Program Self-Study, January 2003 as well as a two-day site visit, May 18-20, 2003 (see attached schedule). The Urban Affairs and Public Policy programs trace their origin to the Ford Foundation urban initiatives of the early 1960s. UAPP granted its first Master of Art in Urban Affairs in 1973 and its first Ph.D. in Urban Affairs in 1976 under what was then a Division of Urban Affairs. The College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy (CUAPP) was created in 1976 as a degree granting unit. In 1997, CUAPP merged with several other academic units to form the College of Human Resources, Education and Public Policy (CHEP), within which the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy (SUAPP) was created. Under SUAPP, three separate (but interrelated) academic programs are offered currently (public administration, environmental and energy policy, and urban affairs and public policy). This program review focuses explicitly on the graduate programs in Urban Affairs and Public Policy. A separate program review is conducted as part of the accreditation process for the public administration program.

In support of the degree programs and an integral component of its distinctive educational mission, SUAPP has six research and public service centers. These centers are the units through which SUAPP students secure public service and research

assistantships. The integration of theory and practice through the research and public service activities of these centers in applied, policy-oriented areas is at the heart of what has come to be known as the “Delaware model.” While the Delaware model of public service positions structured into the curriculum was developed initially in support of its master’s program, most UAPP students, including doctoral students, participate in this distinctive approach to public affairs education through the Centers. The involvement of the Ph.d students in some public service activities is driven, in part, by funding necessities as well as the intention of faculty and students to engage in policy research. Yet we also found evidence that there are some drawbacks to the application of the Delaware model to the doctoral program in lieu of other activities that might enhance the preparedness of those students for future academic appointments. We examine this issue in more detail below.

It is important to note that while our review focused exclusively on the Urban Affairs and Public Policy programs, we found that there are important interfaces between all of the graduate programs in the School. Our recommendations for possible actions necessarily include some that would impact other programs. In our judgment, it is potentially beneficial for SUAPP to foster even closer linkages between its three programs than currently exists.

Unit Goals and Curriculum

Masters Program

The MA in Urban Affairs and Public Policy is a high quality program, with high national visibility and a significant public service role in Delaware and the surrounding region. Through SUAPP’s research centers, students secure meaningful

research/internship experiences that substantiate the value of the Delaware model. The current enrollment of approximately 50 students in the UAPP master's program is easily accommodated through the public service centers. One center alone, the Center for Community Research and Service, provides internships/assistantships for between 20-30 UAPP students per year. The public service faculty in these centers provide a significant percentage of the professional advising and mentoring of masters students.

A recent survey of University of Delaware alumni indicated that UAPP graduates were quite satisfied with their academic experience, and regarded faculty, research opportunities and financial support quite favorably. An open meeting during our site visit with MA students provided additional testimonials that support a positive assessment of the program. One student indicated that his initial internship was not exactly what he desired, but that the problem was rectified in the second year. He conceded, moreover, that the initial position was a valuable learning experience even if it was not precisely what he wanted. SUAPP's research centers have the ongoing challenge of matching the needs of their clients for student assistance with the work expectations of students. We found in our discussions with Center staff and faculty that they appreciate the difficulties of internship placements and that making the match work is a high priority. In providing financial support and meaningful professional experience, the Delaware model is working for the UAPP masters students

Masters students in UAPP are able to concentrate in four areas, Community Development and Non-Profit Leadership, Energy and Environmental Policy, Historic Preservation and Urban and Regional Planning, and all four are sufficiently supported by course offerings and center-based research opportunities. The newest concentration in

Urban and Regional Planning reflects a growing interest in that subject specialization among the MA students, and one that was not being accommodated by the existing three concentrations. This new concentration was conceived in the framework of the program's traditional emphasis on urban and public policy (as differentiated from a professional planning program). As a result, there is no expectation of seeking Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) recognition for the planning concentration in the near future. Even without PAB sanction, the planning concentration will provide an important option for UAPP students to secure both research and public service experience through the centers, as well as future positions in the field. It is obvious that SUAPP's traditional strengths in public policy mesh well with the planning concentration as it has been conceived.

Approved changes in the MA curriculum (which took effect beginning Fall 2003) involve a revised research methods and data analysis core course, a reduction of the core from 15 to 12 credit units (in order to make room for added elective courses in the concentration), improved focus in the Community Development and Non-profit leadership concentration, restructuring the Energy and Environmental Policy concentration, and the addition of two skill courses in the Historic Preservation concentration (Geographic Information Systems and Documenting Historic Structures). In our judgment, these changes will further strengthen the program and address several student concerns. It is likely that the new concentration in Urban and Regional Planning might require a comparable reassessment once it has had several student cohorts. But as it is set forth in the UAPP Self-Study, the planning concentration is consistent with faculty expertise and the agendas of all SUAPP research centers.

One final note. The 20 hour per week work requirement for MA students represents a heavier burden than Masters students typically experience elsewhere (assistantship elsewhere typically are 10 hours per week). For that reason, internships/research placements that compliment the student's concentration are highly desirable. Maintaining the typical three course per semester load for MA students in UAPP will also make this a workable arrangement.

PhD Program

The PhD program has achieved national recognition comparable to that of M.A. programs and has been extremely successful in recruiting a large and talented student body. The successful student recruitment process may be a source of the program's greatest current challenge, which is that it has grown too large for the faculty resources that are available in SUAPP. Over the past six years, the enrollment in the PhD has climbed from 47 students to 55 students (which is actually slightly larger than the MA program). Roughly 28% of students admitted since 1998 are University of Delaware graduates, so the growth may be explained by retention of MA graduates. This in itself is not a problem but a more selective process of transition between the MA and PhD programs would be a way to manage enrollment.

The most significant challenge growing out of the size of the PhD program is providing effective and continuous faculty support. Given that SUAPP has just five tenure-line faculty, and given that the Public Service faculty have significant administrative obligations to the research centers, there is an obvious workload challenge that weighs heavily on the PhD program. Three of the tenure-line faculty chair committees for 22 PhD students (and also serve as members of other PhD student

committees). This is far too onerous to be sustainable, and it is one source of serious concerns expressed by the PhD students. There are fourteen other faculty (most public service) who chair the remaining committees, but the heavy advising and mentoring load in the PhD program is borne by the tenure-line faculty. Scaling back the PhD program to somewhere around 25-30 enrolled students (and offset by growth in the MA program enrollment) could provide the core of advanced researchers that the SUAPP centers need, reduce the advising burden, and enhance the competitiveness of the program.

There are three areas of research specialization offered in PhD program:

Governance, Planning and Management; Social and Urban Policy; and Technology, Environment and Society. All three are well supported by the existing faculty research and teaching strengths. Changes in PhD core curriculum already contemplated by SUAPP faculty are needed to address several program deficiencies. The area of greatest need is to clarify the methods requirement. Currently PhD students are required to take three courses (UAPP 800, 801, 816), one of which is also required of MA students (UAPP 800). Ph.D. students who attended the open discussion session noted that the current arrangement of taking the UAPP 800 with MA students did not provide sufficient depth for their needs. Establishing a method of competency requirement for PhD students (so that some students could bypass UAPP 800 but some may not) is one way to address these concerns. Moreover, the addition of a PhD level research design course (as distinguished from methods or the current UAPP 863 Doctoral Research Paper) would give PhD students more in depth exposure to the complex issues of formulating research questions and designing dissertation strategies.

We heard an expressed desire and a perceived need to provide PhD students more opportunities to gain experience in the craft of teaching. The absence of undergraduate course offerings in SUAPP limits the teaching options for PhD students, but it is possible to structure arrangements with other units within the college or across campus for SUAPP students to serve as teaching assistants or perhaps to teach individual courses.

There was also evidence that the Delaware model works less smoothly at the doctoral level than at the masters level. Students sometimes get assignments that are not challenging enough, and that do not lead to research appropriate to expectations of publishing in peer reviewed journals. If the PhD student cohort is reduced and there proper administrative oversight of doctoral student research assignments, it is likely that the link between the academic program and research centers can help to build the academic careers of the doctoral students while meeting the needs of the centers. And expanding the number of MA students could meet the needs for less challenging public service and research assignments currently absorbed by some PhD students. There needs to be some greater formalization and uniform availability of professional development within the PhD program. This was an widely shared student concern, and we concur with the view that it needs to be addressed.

Faculty Resources

The M.A. and Ph.D. programs benefit from the mix of tenure-line and public service faculty, and the research/service centers to which they are connected. Given that SUAPP has only five tenure-line faculty to support its academic programs, the involvement of Public Service faculty in teaching, advising and in support of research is essential to sustain program quality. Yet it is clear that the demands of funded center

projects (which provide the financial support for students, and that constitutes a key component of the university's external engagement) significantly limits Public Service faculty involvement in regular teaching, advising and in basic research. The fact that a Public Service faculty member will become the Program Director of UAPP beginning academic year 2003-2004 can be viewed in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, it demonstrates that Public Service faculty can fulfill functions typically assigned to tenure-line faculty, and that the distinction between these two groups is essentially a matter of the funding source. Yet, the more limited commitment of time to teaching and program administration by the Public Service faculty member to Program Administration (as compared to that of the current tenure-line faculty member) reflects the fact that Public Service faculty have their primary responsibilities in the funded work of the research centers. It seems appropriate and necessary to continue efforts to integrate Public Service and Tenure-line faculty in UAPP programs. At the same time, we believe that the sustained reputation of the UAPP program requires additional tenure-line positions and, most important, that any loss of the current tenure-line faculty (through retirement or resignation) must be replaced through tenure-line appointments.

The centrality of tenure-line faculty in support of the PhD program is at the heart of recommendations for program improvement by the current PhD students. The existing compliment of tenure-line faculty is insufficient to sustain current PhD enrollments. We've noted above the merits of considering a phased reduction in PhD enrollment. At the same time, an increase of tenure-line faculty to six or seven would create a more workable ratio of faculty to Ph.D. students, and free up time to pursue more basic and applied research. Greater research output will sustain the reputation of UAPP's programs.

The UAPP programs are supported by a highly productive faculty whose scholarly outputs are a healthy blend of basic and applied research. While we did not have the advantage of examining detailed curriculum vitae for the tenure-line and public service faculty, the brief biographies and research assessment supplied in the self-study were sufficient, in our judgment, to substantiate this claim. Faculty research has been published in leading urban journals, including the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *Urban Geography*, the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, and *Urban Anthropology*. The volume of output is significant, although the areas of presentations of papers at conferences and applied documents (as distinguished from articles in refereed journals, monographs and book chapters) are most evident.

Students

The evidence presented in the self-study, complete with our conversations with current students and faculty, support the claim that the M.A. students are getting what they need and want from the program, and that placements after graduation attest to the high quality of their experience. It is obvious that the M.A. students perform tremendous public service to Delaware and the adjacent region, and in the process secure skills that serve them well in professional careers.

The Ph.D. program attracts high quality students from recognized institutions. A range of issues identified by the PhD students and presented to us through their student associations. Several areas of program weakness were identified by the PhD students, which included the following: lack of adequate number of faculty to support the PhD program; limited courses within the specializations; being required (as part of the

financial aid arrangement) to work on project work unrelated to a student's area of research; methodological courses that lack rigor and offer little beyond what is provided to the masters students; no opportunity to gain teaching experience, and no opportunity to improve writing, especially in scholarly communication. In general, the PhD students expressed concerns that the Delaware model of public service work has had too great of influence on a program where the principal intention of the students is to prepare for academic rather than professional careers. As was noted by the president of the Energy and Environmental Student Association (EESA) in a memorandum prepared for the review team, "we feel that the Urban Affairs and Public Policy program is (and should be) a serious academic program that engages the wider academic community in the generation of new and critical ideas. It is, in fact, not a professional school, but an intellectual community built on a strong dual foundation of research and coursework that contributes to the advancement of the field in new and unique ways." We are not sure if the position expressed by doctoral students in the EESA is shared by students in the other two doctoral concentrations. But we suggest that the need to differentiate clearly between the public service model in the Masters program and the appropriate intellectual community suitable to a quality PhD program be addressed through actions at the School level, and involving Center Directors, faculty and students in that process.

We believe that the students (and faculty we talked with) have identified some significant concerns with the PhD program that warrant attention. We recognize that the curriculum is now being revised to address the problems with the methods requirements, and we urge that effort to go forward. In addition, serious consideration should be given to some of the other recommendations of the students and additional suggestions that we

came up with, including the following: develop teaching opportunities for PhD students through collaboration with appropriate units in UD or with community colleges (including assistance through the Center for Teaching Effectiveness); develop a more rigorous research design course for PhD students to assist in preparing dissertation proposals (the current course seems inadequate); initiate a doctoral seminar to enable PhD students to share preliminary and more advanced research on a regular basis; consider adopting the model of other programs (notably economics) whereby PhD students prepare three publishable articles in a general field rather than a single dissertation; reduce enrollment in the PhD student cohort and expand the faculty teaching in the PhD program; and expand the dedicated financial resources to the PhD program.

Program Productivity

The program productivity as measured by enrollment, graduation rates, attrition and time to degree is sound. The enrollment in the MA program over the past six years has ranged between 46 and 58 which is comparable to that of the PhD program (ranging between 47 and 58) over the same period. The credentials of incoming students are solid (based upon GPA and previous place of study) and seem to be improving with each cohort. The graduation rate among MA students allows for a sufficient turnover in the student body, but this is not the case with the doctoral students. By admitting more than 60 students (of course, not all accepted) and graduating only 26 over the period from 1997 to 2002, the size of the PhD student cohort has grown beyond what can be reasonably managed by the faculty. This has contributed to a great many of the concerns set forth by the students, and confirmed through our review of situation, as discussed above.

Adequacy of Financial Support for the Program

The financial tuition waivers and stipends available to support MA and PhD students through tuition waivers and stipends is significant. More than one-half of the all students, and virtually all of the full-time students, receive support. Of the nearly \$1.5 million available for student support, roughly \$800,000 goes to the MA students. Given the size of the PhD cohort, the lesser amount dedicated to doctoral students may be a problem, although it is likely offset by many PhD students pursuing study on a part-time basis and having outside employment. There was insufficient information to determine precisely PhD students' situation. There was anecdotal evidence that outside funding through research grants provides support to student through the research centers. However, there is no indication in the self-study of how much effort goes into externally funded research projects (as distinguished from public service assignments) that would draw upon PhD level research skills. We agree with the self-study statement that "the dollar amount of funding for UAPP students is outstanding." This is clearly an important factor in enabling UAPP to secure quality students in such a competitive graduate recruitment environment. Continued support through UD, as well as additional efforts at external funding, will be necessary to sustain this competitive advantage.

Moreover, it is possible that exchanges between selected departments, such as geography, sociology, and political science and international relations can bring additional teaching opportunities to UAPP PhD students, and further engage faculty from those units in the life of the various UAPP research centers.

Quality and Adequacy of Facilities

In terms of laboratory space (especially in the Center for Historic Architecture and Design), equipment, computing facilities, and office and classroom space, UAPP is sufficiently supported. The program makes use of a combination of fully and partially renovated spaces, often within facilities built originally for other uses. "Urban" programs tend to be housed in these sorts of retrofitted spaces. In the case of UAPP, the overall volume of space, the quality of the spaces, and the proximity of the various programs, is generally supportive of an interactive community. Only in the case of the Center for Historic Architecture and Design is the location sufficiently distanced from the heart of UAPP activities, but the trade-off is more space for collections and student work space.

Competitiveness

It is clear that UAPP is among the leading schools doing urban research, and given its size (faculty/students) it is comparable to the programs at the University of Maryland, College Park and the University of Minnesota. Graduates of the Delaware program are getting jobs in good institutions and faculty are well-known among colleagues in urban disciplines.

Leadership

Clearly the UAPP program has benefited from the skill and connections of the former dean (who is now Provost) in articulating and realizing its distinctive mission. The current administration at the School, program and research center levels seems genuinely committed to sustaining the quality of all its enterprises. It is not clear, however, where the future leadership of the UAPP will come from given that several of the senior faculty are near retirement and there are no junior tenure-line faculty in the

pipeline. We are concerned about the need to nurture new leadership to sustain the high level of faculty and program quality over the next decade.

Public Service/Outreach

Clearly, SUAPP is a leader both within the University of Delaware and nationally in public service and outreach, owing to the purpose and structure of its masters program and through the work of the research centers.

Overall Conclusions About the Program

We were positively impressed with how much is being done by a relatively small faculty. UAPP has done an outstanding job of making itself visible in the urban and policy worlds over the past several decades. As priorities of funding agencies have changed, the program has been nimble enough to respond effectively. As UAPP looks to the future, there is a need to ensure that the faculty dedicated primarily to teaching and scholarship be sustained (and preferably enlarged). Of immediate concern is the program impact of retirement within the foreseeable future of at least two of the tenure-line faculty. Yet no matter what future resources are available to UAPP, the Ph.D program currently is just too large to be sustainable and to ensure the quality that is desired. Steps should be taken to implement appropriate changes, some of which have been discussed earlier in this program review.

Submitted by:

Jane Brooks, University of New Orleans

Janet Johnson, University of Delaware

Judith Martin, University of Minnesota

Christopher Silver, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Robert Waste, California State University, Sacramento