



UNF-MPA student learning outcomes and program assessment

Prepared by
G.G. Candler
MPA assessment coordinator

1 November 2024

UNF MPA program assessment includes a number of elements:

1. An alumni survey from 2018 (page 2)
2. Student and alumni skills self-assessment, not submitted for 2023 (page 3)
3. Student skills direct assessments (page 6)
4. Student completion and employment outcomes (page 9)

The University of North Florida Master of Public Administration program graduated its first student in 1978. Over forty years later the number of alumni has reached over 750. The program was first accredited in 1999 by what was then the [National Association of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration](#), and recently received its fourth reaccreditation, valid through 2026. This makes UNF-MPA the only accredited graduate program in public policy, public administration, and related fields offered in northeast Florida.¹

Assessment, and public accountability regarding that assessment, is both a requirement of accreditation, and central to the fields of public policy and administration. This report combines the results of the program's ongoing assessment plan, along with a summer 2018 survey of program alumni, carried out every 4-5 years.

1. Alumni survey

A third alumni survey of the UNF-MPA program was conducted in summer 2018. The survey received 132 responses. This was about 19% of the then 700 total graduates of the program, and a response rate of about 30% of the over 400 alums we have email addresses for. The UNF-MPA program saw an almost complete change of faculty from Fall 2010, and so many of the

¹ Nova Southeastern has facilities in Jacksonville, and offers an accredited online and hybrid degree ([link](#)). Jacksonville University's Master of Public Policy program is not accredited ([link](#), and [link](#)).

results below are presented separately for the years 2011 and beyond (n = 74), with the previous years (n = 58) also serving as a benchmark for current performance.

Table 1
Overall alumni impression of MPA

	Yes 1978-2010	Yes 2011-2018
Improvement in life satisfaction	79.3%	93.3%
Worth the investment in time and money	89.7%	96%

More specifically, the survey gathered information regarding increased income after the MPA. These data are presented in Table 2. The data indicate a strong return on investment.

Table 2
Increase in income after MPA graduation

AY	Statistic	Increase in annual salary one year after	Increase in annual salary five years after
1978-2010	N	50	51
1978-2010	Mean (\$)	11,320	29,541
1978-2010	Median (\$)	7,500	25,000
2011-2018	N	67	53
2011-2018	Mean (\$)	12,552	23,987
2011-2018	Median (\$)	9,000	20,500
Total	N	117	104
Total	Mean (\$)	12,026	26,711
Total	Median (\$)	8,000	21,000

The summer 2018 alumni survey also asked broader questions regarding faculty teaching, research, service, and advising. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Overall alumni program assessment

Faculty...	Percent poor/ fair	Percent Good/ very good	Percent excellent	Mean score (0-5 scale)
...instruction 1978-2010	1.7	69.0	29.3	4.03
...instruction 2011-2018	0.0	48.6	51.4	4.43
...research 1978-2010	3.5	77.2	19.3	3.74
...research 2011-2018	5.6	52.8	41.7	4.15
...public service 1978-2010	12.3	70.2	17.5	3.56
...public service 2011-2018	0.0	57.0	43.1	4.25
Program management '78-2010	18.9	55.1	25.9	3.69
Program management 2011-'18	0.0	27.0	73.0	4.68

The results are clearly positive, with 90%+ assessing faculty teaching, research and public service, as well as program management, as good, very good or excellent throughout its 40 year history. Post 2010 program assessments have improved on previous efforts, with 100% of respondents rating the faculty good, very good or excellent in terms of teaching and public service, as well as program management.

A follow-up survey has been done for 2024, though the analysis has not yet been completed.

2. Student skills self-assessment

Capstone students have been surveyed regarding perceptions of their professional development every year since 2011². Skills assessed are those identified in the program's mission and competencies.

The questions were coded as follows:

0 – Unchanged

1 – Unchanged, as prior experience left little room to improve

2 – Improved

3 – Improved significantly

Results are presented in Table 4 (Table 4a on the next page, then continued on 4b on the page after that). A large portion of students report improvement, or significant improvement in skill levels. Though casual observation appears to show that 2024 results are lower than recent trends, none of the differences are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

² Due to pandemic complications, we surveyed 2021-2023 graduates via qualtrics, and report them together.

Table 4a
Student skill self-assessment: post-test (Capstone PAD6066)

	Class	Skills were Unchanged	Skills were Improved	Skills were Improved significantly	Mean score 1-3 scale
Communication: write	2015-17	0	46	54	2.54
Communication: write	2018-20	2	50	48	2.46
Communication: write	2021-23	8	39	54	2.48
Communication: write	2024	0	60	40	2.40
Communication: speak	2015-17	19	56	24	2.03
Communication: speak	2018-20	6	65	28	2.20
Communication: speak	2021-23	8	67	39	2.20
Communication: speak	2024	20	60	20	2.00
Communication: listen	2015-17	10	68	22	2.12
Communication: listen	2018-20	4	60	39	2.35
Communication: listen	2021-23	8	39	54	2.48
Communication: listen	2024	0	73	27	2.27
Local governance	2015-17	4	34	61	2.55
Local governance	2018-20	2	39	59	2.54
Local governance	2021-23	0	46	54	2.54
Local governance	2024	0	53	47	2.47
Problem solving	2015-17	2	56	42	2.46
Problem solving	2018-20	4	48	50	2.46
Problem solving	2021-23	0	23	77	2.77
Problem solving	2024	7	47	47	2.40
Professional ethics	2015-17	5	51	44	2.39
Professional ethics	2018-20	0	46	54	2.54
Professional ethics	2021-23	8	46	46	2.38
Professional ethics	2024	0	60	40	2.40
Management theory	2015-17	2	39	59	2.57
Management theory	2018-20	0	37	63	2.63
Management theory	2021-23	0	54	46	2.46
Management theory	2024	7	60	33	2.27
Economic constraints	2015-17	4	24	71	2.65
Economic constraints	2018-20	2	35	61	2.54
Economic constraints	2021-23	8	23	69	2.61
Economic constraints	2024	0	47	53	2.53

Table 4b
Student skill self-assessment: post-test (Capstone PAD6066)

	Class	Skills were Unchanged	Skills were Improved	Skills Improved significantly	Mean score 1-3 scale
Quantitative skills	2015-17	14	61	24	1.98
Quantitative skills	2018-20	7	65	28	2.17
Quantitative skills	2021-23	0	31	69	2.38
Quantitative skills	2024	7	60	33	2.27
Diverse workforce	2015-17	3	60	38	2.35
Diverse workforce	2018-20	4	52	44	2.40
Diverse workforce	2021-23	31	15	54	2.23
Diverse workforce	2024	20	47	33	2.13
Public policy	2015-17	9	42	49	2.32
Public policy	2018-20	0	39	61	2.67
Public policy	2021-23	0	31	69	2.69
Public policy	2024	0	67	33	2.33
Globalization	2015-17	7	39	54	2.42
Globalization	2018-20	2	41	57	2.54
Globalization	2021-23	0	46	54	2.54
Globalization	2024	7	60	33	2.27
Role of public service	2015-17	2	46	51	2.46
Role of public service	2018-20	0	33	67	2.67
Role of public service	2021-23	0	31	69	2.69
Role of public service	2024	0	73	27	2.27
Concentration expertise	2015-17	2	32	66	2.61
Concentration expertise	2018-20	0	40	60	2.60
Concentration expertise	2021-23	--	--	--	--
Concentration expertise	2024	0	33	67	2.67

Table 5 presents Capstone perceptions of the faculty and student culture of diversity in the program. This was first trialed in 2020, went on hiatus during the pandemic, and returned in 2024. Results are positive.

Table 5
Program culture

		Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Mean 1-4 scale
Faculty culture of diversity/ inclusion	Spring '20	0	0	43	57	3.57
Faculty culture of diversity/ inclusion	Spring '24	0	0	40	60	3.40
Student culture of diversity/ inclusion	Spring '20	0	0	57	43	3.43
Student culture of diversity/ inclusion	Spring '24	0	0	53	47	3.47

3. Student direct assessments

Quantitative analysis assessment

We have had a quantitative analysis assessment exercise since 2015, in which students interpret, in written form, statistical data presented to them. The results are presented in Table 6, and have generally not been positive (and contrary to generally strong student self-assessment of their own quantitative analysis skills), with a variety of factors changing over the years that has made it difficult to identify the problem. The 2024 evaluation, however, was the strongest to date, for both the interpretation ($p = .002$), and critical analysis of quantitative data ($p = .008$).

Table 6
Quantitative analysis exercise, by Capstone learning outcomes
(%, and on 0-3 scale for mean score)

	Insufficient major	Insufficient minor	Prof. Adequate	Prof. Mastery	Mean Score
Statistical interpretation: Spg '16-20	12.3	43.1	24.6	20.0	1.52
Statistical interpretation: Spg '21-23	15.4	41.0	35.9	7.7	1.36
Statistical interpretation: Spg '24	0.0	21.4	35.7	42.9	2.21
Critical analysis: Spg '16-20	13.8	46.2	16.9	23.1	1.49
Critical analysis: Spg '21-23	17.9	43.6	33.3	5.1	1.26
Critical analysis: Spg '24	0.0	28.6	28.6	42.9	2.14
Table presentation: Spg '16-20	3.1	7.7	38.5	50.8	2.37
Table presentation: Spg '21-23	5.1	5.1	33.3	56.4	2.41
Table presentation: Spg '24	0.1	7.1	35.7	57.1	2.43

We have worked on a second assessment for this competency, in part due to the historical poor results shown in Table 6. In spring 2018 we piloted a quiz dealing with central concepts in statistical analysis, then implemented it in both Introductory and Capstone classes in 2019 (with some pandemic disruptions). Results have been promising. To date (2024) we have had 40 Intro, and 47 Capstone students take the quiz. An improvement has been identified, Capstone students have answered 7.5 correct, compared to 5.6 in the introductory class ($p < .001$). This exercise still leaves ample room for improvement in the Capstone class. More important, the format allows easy identification of key concepts that Capstone students have not understood, that can then be addressed.³

³ For example, Capstone students were especially weak understanding the concept of the unit of analysis (38% correct), a regression beta coefficient (28%), and a regression coefficient for a dummy variable (12%), dichotomous/ 'dummy' variables (13% in correlation, 17% in regression), the unstandardized regression coefficient (21%), and the regression adjusted r^2 (36%). This was a multiple choice quiz, with five answers for each, so guessing should have yielded 20% right.

Public management essay

Table 7 presents overall results for our ‘public management essay’. In this component of the program’s assessment, incoming students (PAD6060 Public Administration in Modern Society) write an essay on a prominent historical article about American public administration. In the Capstone class students write a second essay, this one on a similar article. The table combines the scores from 2010 to 2024 (Intro n = 215; Capstone n = 268 for all classes for which results are available. Capstone students score both substantively, and statistically higher than incoming MPA students.

Table 7
Intro and Capstone compared,
public management essay

Assessment item	Class	Mean score	Probability
Discipline knowledge	Intro	1.82	<.001
	Capstone	2.43	
Critical analysis	Intro	1.79	<.001
	Capstone	2.53	
Research	Intro	1.83	<.001
	Capstone	2.31	
Writing	Intro	2.19	<.001
	Capstone	2.52	
Combined	Intro	1.93	<.001
	Capstone	2.45	

Table 8 breaks down the public management essay results by learning outcomes. In a change from previous reports, the results are presented as a three year running average. Sample size from Intro classes was 33, and Capstone 56. Results remain consistent with recent trends, and show improvement through the program.

Table 8
Public Management essay, by learning outcomes (%)

	Class	Insufficient major	Insufficient minor	Prof. Adequate	Prof. Mastery	Mean Score
PM theory (%)	Intro-AY 2021-23	24.2	18.2	21.2	36.4	1.70
PM theory (%)	Caps-Spg 2021-23	0.0	9.5	35.7	54.8	2.45
PM theory (%)	Caps-Spg 2024	0.0	18.8	25.0	56.3	2.38
Crit. analysis (%)	Intro-AY 2021-23	21.2	15.2	30.3	33.3	1.76
Crit. analysis (%)	Caps-Spg 2021-23	0.0	4.8	26.2	69.0	2.64
Crit. analysis	Caps-Spg 2024	0.0	0.0	12.5	87.5	2.88
Research (%)	Intro-AY 2021-23	27.3	12.1	21.2	39.4	1.73
Research (%)	Caps-Spg 2021-23	2.4	4.8	33.3	59.5	2.50
Research (%)	Caps-Spg 2024	6.3	12.5	18.8	62.5	2.38
Writing (%)	Intro-AY 2021-23	6.1	15.2	27.3	51.5	2.24
Writing (%)	Caps-Spg 2021-23	0.0	11.9	14.3	73.8	2.62
Writing (%)	Caps-Spg 2024	0.0	12.2	12.2	75.6	2.63

Concentration assessment

Finally, Table 9 presents the results for the cumulative, through AY2023-4, Concentration assessment. The exercise consists of an essay in which students are asked to discuss the major challenges facing their concentration area. Generalist Option students are asked to discuss major challenges facing the UNF-MPA mission competency of “understanding local governance in a global context.” Students are assessed on their critical policy thinking, and on their knowledge of the literature in their concentration area.

Table 9
Concentration assessment exercise, by Spring 2013-23 Capstone competency
(with Capstone mean, 2021-3 in parenthesis)

	Insufficient major	Insufficient minor	Prof. Adequate	Prof. Mastery	Mean (Caps '21-3)
<u>Nonprofit</u> (n = 71)					
Critical policy thinking (%)	1.4	7.0	8.5	83.1	2.73
Management literature (%)	2.8	4.2	11.3	81.7	2.72
<u>Local government</u> (n = 52)					
Critical policy thinking (%)	5.8	5.8	21.2	67.3	2.50
Management literature (%)	3.8	5.8	25.0	65.4	2.52
<u>Health admin</u> (n=15)					
Critical policy thinking (%)	14.3	7.1	28.6	50.0	2.14
Management literature (%)	0.0	21.4	21.4	57.1	2.36
<u>Public Policy</u> (n = 19)					
Critical policy thinking (%)	10.5	5.3	15.8	68.4	2.42
Public policy literature (%)	0.0	10.5	15.8	73.7	2.63
<u>National Security</u> (n=1)					
Critical policy thinking (%)	0	0	100.0	0	2.0
Management literature (%)	0	0	100.0	0	2.0
<u>Generalist option</u> (n = 63)					
Critical thinking (%)	2.2	24.4	11.1	62.2	2.33
Literature (%)	6.7	24.4	6.7	62.2	2.24

Given the relatively small sample sizes for each academic year (the AY2020-21 graduates included 3 nonprofit, 9 local government, 3 public policy, 1 health administration, and no national security or generalist graduates), we have presented these results cumulative. A clear trend of solid learning outcomes can be seen. To compare AY 2023-4 results with the cumulative results to date, the overall numbers are presented in parentheses in the final column.

4. Student completion and employment outcomes

Beyond the student satisfaction and income data presented above in Section 1, we also provide to our accrediting body the following data on student completion rates, and employment data by sector.

Table 14

Student time to completion (cumulative years)

AY	Enroll	2 years	3 years	4 years	6 years	6+ years	Total	Continuing
2010-15	32.8	16.8	3.8	1.2	0.4	0.4	22.6	0
2015-16	23	8	13	14	15	0	15	0
2016-17	23	10	15	0	0	0	15	1
2017-18	34	13	22	24	0	0	24	1
2018-19	18	12	15	15	0	0	15	0
2019-20	26	14	16	16	18	0	18	1
2020-21	25	10	15	15	15	15	15	2
2021-22	20	5	8	8	8	8	8	3
2022-23	11	4	4	4	4	4	1	5
2023-4	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	16

Table 15

Placement data by field of employment, six months after graduation, by AY

	2016-18	2020	2021	2022	2023
National or central government	1	1	0	1	1
State government	8	3	1	2	2
City, county, or other local government	12	2	4	5	6
Overseas government	0	1	0	0	0
Domestic nonprofit	17	4	3	3	2
International nonprofit	0	0	0	0	0
Private sector – research/ consulting	2	1	1	7	0
Private sector – not research/ consulting	14	2	6	0	0
Obtaining further education	2	0	0	0	0
Military service	3	0	1	0	0
Unemployed (not seeking employment)	0	0	0	0	0
Unemployed (seeking employment)	0	2	0	0	0
Status unknown	8	0	2	4	0
Total	67	16	18	22	11