 

**Joint Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy**

**Assessment Report Academic Year 2016-2017**

**June 30, 2017**

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**Joint Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy Assessment Report for Academic Year 2016-2017**

The 2016-2017 academic year assessment report for the Joint Doctoral Program in Public Administration and Public Policy, a collaboration of the Department of Political Science at Auburn University (AU) and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM), includes the following sections: Program Overview (history and evolution, faculty participation, student profile, and assessment history); Student Learning Outcomes; Curriculum Map; Measurement (old curriculum approach and new curriculum approach); Results (old curriculum approach, new curriculum approach, and context, trends and discussion); Reflection (reflection and changes, communication with faculty and students, and new and continuing quality improvement efforts); and Appendices (assessment instruments and notes from our 2017 faculty meeting).

# Program Overview

The Joint Doctoral Program in Public Administration and Public Policy is a collaboration of the Department of Political Science at Auburn University (AU) and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM). The mission of the program is to build successful researchers, scholars, faculty members, teachers, and leaders for careers in higher education, public agencies, and non-profit organizations. To that end, the curriculum is designed to support the development of students’ substantive knowledge, research skills, and eventual expertise in fields critical to public administration and public policy. The program also builds on and reflects the expertise within the two partnering departments.

*History and Evolution of the Program*

The Ph.D. program was approved by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) in 1985, and was formed at the outset as a joint program of both AU and AUM. Currently this program is the only Ph.D. program at AUM. The focus of the degree program is on training graduate students in both the substance and skills needed for the creation of quality original research in areas related to public administration and public policy writ large (see mission above). In 2016, the faculty of the Community Planning program joined the faculty of the AU Political Science Department, and those faculty now add to the public administration and public policy portions of the program.

At the start of the 2015-2016 academic year, we spent time trying to obtain data on the number of graduates from the program, and even the best lists that were given to us by the AU Graduate School and Office of the Provost were inaccurate. The most recent list of total graduates from the program includes 71 persons beginning in 2003; our best estimate is that we have had between 150-200 students graduate from the doctoral program in total.

According to the same files from the Provost’s Office, the range of time it took students to complete all of the requirements of our doctoral degree and graduate is 0-10 years, with an average of 4 years to completion. This information is also inaccurate. Because of the joint nature of the program some student records are housed only in AUM databases; it is possible that the incomplete years as well as the inaccurate information about matriculation and graduation length

is due, at least in part, to a failure to share information between the Registrar’s offices at the two campuses. At a minimum, we have started internally to track the same information so that moving forward we will have a better sense of graduation rates and length of time to graduation.

We undertook a systematic curriculum review in academic years 2014-2016, which resulted in a curriculum proposal that was agreed to at a Ph.D. faculty meeting held in May 2016 and implemented for the 2016-2017 academic year.1 Under the new model, all students will complete 13 courses, or 39 hours, of coursework plus 10 dissertation hours and the remainder of the required hours for the PhD are transferred from masters degrees. Of the 13 courses, students take 5 core classes and then split the remaining 8 between two fields of study. Initially these included: American politics and policy; global politics and policy; public administration; election administration; nonprofit and community governance; or applied research. At a faculty meeting in January 2017 it was agreed that another field in community planning would be added given the expertise and interest of the newly combined community planning faculty.

In addition to courses, comprehensive exams, the prospectus, and the dissertation, students are offered the opportunity to expand their professional development in three ways. First, we hold monthly brown bag lunches that alternate between information/workshop sessions on topics relevant to graduate students (e.g., developing a CV, how to go on the academic market, etc.) and research presentations by faculty and/or advanced graduate students. Second, we encourage students to increase their methods training and skills by attending summer workshops in quantitative methods for social science offered by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. Given that many Ph.D. programs in political science, public administration, and public policy send students to this ICPSR program, our students’ attendance at ICPSR also serves to increase their network in the discipline by introducing them to other new doctoral students and seasoned professors from other universities. We provide partial funding to support attendance. Third, we encourage students to take their research and present it at academic conferences in political science and public administration.

This encouragement takes multiple forms: working with the students so that they have research to present, providing information about how to submit proposals to attend meetings and which meetings they should attend, and providing partial funding for students on the conference program.

*Faculty Participation*

For the 2016-2017 academic year and between the two campuses, we had 33 tenure track faculty members who could have participated in the Ph.D. program (see Table 1). Among them, 27 faculty members did so, either through chairing or serving on a dissertation committee, reading and scoring comprehensive exams, or teaching a graduate course. Of the faculty, 15 hold Graduate 1 faculty status, 16 hold Graduate 2 faculty status, and 2 have no graduate faculty status. Among the 16 with Graduate 2 faculty status, 10 chaired at least one dissertation committee. Of all of the students who were working on either a prospectus or dissertation (see

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1 Note that the previous entering cohort in 2015-2016 was allowed to select the formal model of study or adopt the new one as they entered during a transition period. All of them decided to adopt the new model.

discussion below), one faculty member chaired or co-chaired over 25% of these.2 The remaining faculty chairs have a range of 1-3 students each (though in one case a faculty member is co- chairing 4 students with junior colleagues who have not yet obtained Graduate 2 faculty status.

Table 1: Faculty Participation by Campus, 2016-2017 ACADEMIC YEAR

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Campus | TotalFaculty | Graduate 1 | Graduate 2 | DissertationChair | DissertationMember | CoursesTaught3 |
| AU | 27 | 13 | 13 | 8 | 14 | 13 |
| AUM | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Total | 33 | 15 | 16 | 10 | 17 | 19 |

*Student Profile*

Our students generally enter the program as either public administration practitioners (with a large proportion of these mid-level officers from the US military) who desire to obtain the degree to advance their professions, or have recently completed a master’s program and hope to go into academia. In the 2016-2017 academic year, we had 49 students taking courses, working on comprehensive exams, or working on dissertations. The majority of these students are American, though we have some international applicants, who in 2016-2017 comprised 8% of the program. There is an equal split between male and female students in the program (see Table 2), and the racial/ethnic breakdown of current students includes 67.3% White, 22.4% Black, 4.1% Asian, 4.1% Hispanic/Latino, and 2% Middle Eastern.

Table 2: Student Demographic Profile, 2016-2017 ACADEMIC YEAR

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | White | Black | Asian | Hispanic/ Latino | Middle Eastern | Total |
| Male | 40.8% | 4.1% | 0% | 4.1% | 2% | 51% |
| Female | 26.5% | 18.4% | 4.1% | 0% | 0% | 49% |
| Total | 67.3% | 22.5% | 4.1% | 4.1% | 2% | 100% |
| N=49 |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Of the 49 active students in academic year 2016-2017:

! 6 first-year students;

! 16 students taking courses either full- or part-time;

! 19 students in the process of taking comprehensive exams, developing a prospectus, or defending their dissertation prospectus;

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2 Previously, three faculty were chairing 50% of the dissertations based on an unduplicated count of students across the three faculty, but two of these have reduced their student loads.

3!This includes 7000/8000 doctoral courses as well as approved 6000 level courses.!

! 14 students working on dissertations, 1 student who graduated, and 2 who are anticipated to graduate in Summer 2017;

! 1 student who left the program;

! 13 students with assistantships in the department (approximately 4 others had assistantships in other units on campus and another 19 were professionals employed full- time,4 though this is not information that we systematically track).

The number of active students dropped by 9 students from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017. This was the case for two reasons. First, we had an unusually large number of graduates in the 2015-2016 year. Second, we intentionally decreased the size of the entering class for 2016-2017 by increasing admissions standards. In addition, over the last two years the program director has made a concerted effort to purge active student record rolls of dissertation students who have not been in contact with their chair or the director in over a year, including about 30 students.

Of these 49 students, 42 were given ratings of making adequate progress in their annual student reviews, 6 students were given ratings of making marginal progress, and 1 student was given a rating of making inadequate progress. The AU Graduate School does not recognize a ranking of marginal progress; this is a designation used within the department. Officially these students are given an adequate ranking with the Graduate School. Students falling into this category do so for one of three reasons: they are making some combination of B’s or possibly C’s or lower in their coursework; they have failed some portion or all of their comprehensive exams in the first sitting; or they have stalled in the prospectus or dissertation stage. Of the 6 making inadequate progress, most are stalled at the prospectus stage. Each student who earned a ranking of marginal or inadequate is given the opportunity to meet with the Ph.D. Director and his or her dissertation chair to create a personalized remediation plan. Note that this number has gone down from 10 to 6 in the past year at the same time there has been a drop in the size of the program.

In academic year 2015-2016 we had 8 graduates (on the high side of average), and in academic year 2016-2017 we had 3 graduates (on the low side of average) (see Table 3). Placement for the program varies. Among the two years of graduates, over a third entered academic positions, but only half of those were in tenure-track jobs. The tenure track placements are consistent with the history of the program—small to medium sized state schools or liberal arts colleges. About a quarter of the students went into government (or were already holding government jobs and have continued in them). Of the rest, one was placed in industry and another in a non-profit organization, and the remainder are unknown.

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4 This figure does not include active-duty military personnel who attend this program full-time as their work.

Table 3: Graduates, 2015-2017 Academic Years5

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AY | Term Graduated | Academic – Tenure T | Academic-Non-TT | PlacementGov’t | Non-Ac orGov’t | Unknown |
|  | Fall Spring Summer |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2016-2017 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 2015-2016 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

Non-Academic or Government may include some combination of industry, for-profit, or non-profit

For the upcoming 2017-2018 academic year, the admissions committee screened 14 completed applications. Of these, 7 were accepted into the program, and as of June 23, 2017, 6 have decided to matriculate (in addition, one formerly admitted student who had deferred will be starting the program). The student who turned down admission to the program did so because of a family concern. All but one of the admitted students earned master’s degrees from schools in Alabama, and all currently reside in either Alabama or Georgia. All but two have US citizenship.

Demographic information on applicants and admitted students is included below in Table 4. The plurality of our applicants is White, and these numbers are followed by Black applicants (in the 2016-2017 academic year this included a combination of African and African American applicants). In this year’s application pool a majority were female, and the admitted students were roughly proportional with respect to gender. In comparing these figures to previous years, the number of applicants overall is down. By demographic group, the number of non-White male applicants is markedly down, as is applicants from other countries.

*Assessment History*

The history of assessment for this program, when it existed, relied primarily on the comprehensive exams and placement after graduation and without clearly defined student learning outcomes (SLOs). For the assessment report for academic year 2015-2016, we focused largely on: 1) developing SLOs; 2) developing a curriculum map; 3) developing a plan for measurement; and 4) providing program output data. For the assessment report for the 2016- 2017 academic year, we continue to provide information from previous comprehensive exams and program output data, comparing them to the prior year, but also provide baseline outcome assessment data for the prospectus and dissertation stages of the program. For the assessment report for the 2017-2018 academic year, we will provide continuing output and outcome (prospectus and dissertation) data with comparisons, and will provide outcome data for the comprehensive exams in a new format.

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5!These figures reflect employment within six months of graduation.!

Table 4: Demographic Information of Considered Applicants and Accepted Students, 2016-2017 Academic Year

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Considered Applicants | Accepted Students |
| Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| White | 5 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Black | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Nat. Amer. | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Middle East | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hisp/Lat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 5 | 9 | 14 | 3 | 4 | 7 |

# Student Learning Outcomes

The Ph.D. program has six key programmatic SLOs required for assessment. For each, a short- hand name is given and corresponds to the column labels on the curriculum map (see Table 5). Students graduating from the Joint Ph.D. Program in Public Administration and Public Policy will:

1. Explain, analyze, and critique the literature including current scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature);
2. Explain and identify methodological approaches used to address disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology);
3. Design and execute original research on contemporary disciplinary problems and questions, including connecting literature, theory, and methodology (Original Contribution);
4. Apply the most appropriate methodological approaches to advance understanding of a specific disciplinary problem or question (Analysis);
5. Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication);
6. Model and display behavior consistent with professional norms and objectives (Professionalism).

These SLOs are comprehensive and commensurate with the expectations of similar and higher ranked doctoral programs in the disciplines of political science generally, and public administration and public policy more specifically. The faculty approved these SLOs at the May 2016 program meeting and were then communicated to the students at the student orientation and comprehensive exam review meetings. They are placed on the program website.

# Curriculum Map

Mapping our courses and doctoral experiences to the SLOs, we expect students to meet the objectives of the program by the end of their doctoral experience (see Table 5).

Table 5: Curriculum Map

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ˜ | Literature | Methodology | Original Contribution | Analysis | Communicate | Professional |
| POLI 8000/ PUAD 7000 | 1 | 1 |  |  | 1 |  |
| POLI 8010/ PUAD 7010 |  | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |  |
| POLI 8020/ PUAD 7020 | 1 | 1 |  |  | 1 |  |
| POLI 8120/ PUAD 7120 |  | 2 |  |  | 1 |  |
| POLI 8130/ PUAD 7130 |  | 2 |  | 1 | 1 |  |
| Field 1 | 1, 2 | 2 |  | 1, 2 | 2 |  |
| Courses |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Field 2 | 1, 2 | 2 |  | 1, 2 | 2 |  |
| Courses |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Comp Exam | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ProfessionalDevelopment | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1, 2, 3 |
| Prospectus Defense | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Dissertation |  |  | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

Key: 1= Introduced 2= Reinforced 3= Mastery

# Measurement

Prior measurement for assessment was done based on the scoring rubrics for our comprehensive exams. The old approach is discussed below, followed by an overview of our new measurement approach. This approach was instituted for the 2016-2017 academic year for prospectus and dissertation defenses. For the comprehensive exams, we used both the old assessment approach and a new one. The new one did not work, and has subsequently been revised.

*Old Curriculum Approach*

Under the old curriculum, comprehensive exams were given in one week over 3 days, and included a core day, specialty day, and track day. The first (or core) day’s exam tested students on the breadth of their knowledge in public policy and public administration principles generally. For the specialty day, students chose to take the exam either in public administration or in public policy, and were given 3 sets of questions based on area sub-fields (discussed below in the reflection section) and designed to test both the breadth and depth of their knowledge. For the third day of exams, students coordinated with a faculty member, usually their dissertation chair or co-chairs, to identify a specific sub-field in which they chose to specialize; the intent of the third day was for the student to delve into the canon and new and emerging literature in that specific sub-field, relevant middle-range theories tested in the literature, established methodological practices, and emerging questions.

For each question of each day, students were scored on three standards (the equivalent of our previous SLOs), and the scoring rubric ranged from a score of 1 to 5, including:

Standard 1. Knowledge of Relevant Literature on Subject 1.! Not Demonstrated (no or few authors/concepts cited)

* 1. .! Significant problems (some lit there but several concepts/authors wrong)
	2. .! Adequate (enough authors/concepts presented to demonstrate knowledge of several parts of the literature
	3. .! Mastered Material (demonstrates a broad knowledge and understanding of the literature) 5.! Superior Response (demonstrates a superior understanding of concepts, critiques,

linkages, etc. across a broad range of authors and ideas)

Standard 2. Ability to Critically and Creatively Respond to Questions in the Relevant Field 1.! Not Demonstrated (does not address question(s) asked and/or no ability to link literature

to given question)

1. .! Significant Problems (addresses some of the question but does not use literature and/or logic to support it; or, cites literature but response is not relevant to question)
2. .! Adequate (provides some synthesis of the relevant literature and answers questions based on logic/literature)
3. .! Mastered Skill (addresses question through synthesis of material, discussion of relevant debates/critiques about literature, and critically answers questions acknowledging multiple facets/arguments)
4. .! Superior Response (masters material-see 4 above-AND adds own thoughts, critiques, creative solutions, etc., that add or could add originality to the literature/question answer)

Standard 3. Written Communication Skills

1. .! Not demonstrated (response is incomprehensible)
2. .! Significant Problems (contains some answers to questions, but uses extremely poor grammar and spelling and serious problems with organization)
3. .! Adequate (is reasonably organized and responsive to all parts of question, may contain some minor lapses in organization or grammar)
4. .! Mastered Skill (is well-organized, answers all parts of the question in some detail, contains few grammatical problems. Nothing major- authors, concepts- is misspelled)
5. .! Superior Response (is well organized with thesis statements and continuous flow, answers all parts of the question in a detailed, concise manner, is easy to read, and has very few grammatical problems)

Student scores were then averaged for each day, and students either passed or failed that day. If they failed, they were given feedback from the faculty graders and the Ph.D. Director and provided another opportunity to test. In theory, students that failed a second time would then be removed from the program; however, in practice this step did not occur. Instead, these students were offered the possibility of taking additional courses in the deficient areas and if they passed successfully the student would then move on to the prospectus stage.

In addition, faculty reactions to student performance on the exams led to discussions about the reasons for the less than stellar student performance. That led us to note several problems based on the results, triggering the development of the new curriculum (see discussion below in the Results and Reflection sections). The program then closed the loop in an informal way; nonetheless, the program faculty did reflect on the student learning outcomes in an effort to engage in continuous program improvement.

*New Curriculum Approach*

During the 2016-2017 academic year, we created news tools to measure the SLOs, implemented at three points: the comprehensive exams, the prospectus defense, and the dissertation defense. Faculty involved at each of these points will measure students on the appropriate SLOs. Tables 6 and 7 below provide an overview of each of the assessment measures by SLO, whether they are direct or indirect, how rubrics are utilized, and an overview of the data collection process, including how information is provided, by whom, how they are rated, and how the information is analyzed.

We developed instruments that use a 3-point scale on each measurement item, including: 3= exceeds expectations; 2= meets expectations; 1= below expectations.67 For the comprehensive exams, 3 faculty score each student on each SLO and an average of the scores is taken.

Qualitative comments about strong points and needed improvements are also collected. For the prospectus and dissertation, between 4-5 different faculty score each student on each appropriate

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6 The original scale has been changed to what is reflected here; previously the numbers were reversed, and were filled out inconsistently across faculty.

7!The comprehensive exams are also scored on a 3-point scale, but the corresponding words are

3=strong pass, 2=pass, 1=fail. Committee members are encouraged to meet to review answers and scores to determine passage, but they do not have to.!!

SLO and an average of the scores is taken. Qualitative comments about strong points and needed improvements are also collected. Faculty determine by unanimous consent whether the student passes, passes with minor changes, passes with major changes, or fails. (See Appendix A for a copy of these instruments.)

We implemented the use of the prospectus and dissertation defense instruments starting in Fall 2016, and post-hoc compared the old comprehensive exam rubric to the new ones. The results of this process are discussed in the next section.

Table 6: Overview of New Measurement Approach by SLO, Point of Time of Collection

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Literature | Methodology | Original Contribution | Analysis | Communicate | Professional |
| Comps | Yes | Yes |  |  | Yes |  |
| Prospectus | Yes | Yes |  | Yes | Yes |  |
| Dissertation |  |  | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Table 7: Overview of New Measurement Approach by SLO, Point of Time of Collection

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment | Comprehensive Exams | Prospectus  | Dissertation |
| Direct or Indirect? | Direct | Direct | Direct |
| Use a rubric? | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| How collected? | Written material | Written material and observation of presentation | Written material and observation of presentation |
| From whom? | Material provided by students | Material provided and presentation given by students | Material provided and presentation given by students |
| How rated? | Faculty applications of rubric – min 3 faculty | Faculty application of rubric – min 4 faculty | Faculty application of rubric – min 4 faculty |
| How analyzed? | Scores averaged per and across students; open-ended responses. Analyzed for emerging themes and trends | Scores averaged per and across students; open-ended responses analyzed for emerging themes and trends | Scores averaged per and across students; open-ended responses analyzed for emerging themes and trends. |

The Ph.D. Director collects all the data on student-learning outcomes and makes those data available to the Ph.D. faculty prior to its meeting. Those data inform the review of the program and its curriculum.

# Results

As stated above, prior measurement reported on the passage rates of students in comprehensive exams and tracking of placement, when possible. The old approach is discussed below, followed by an overview of our current plans for the new measurement approach.

*Old Curriculum Approach*

The comprehensive exam results from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years are summarized in Table 8. Data on passage from prior years was inconsistent and difficult to compile to make over time comparisons, and thus are not included.

Table 8: 2015-2017 Comprehensive Exam Results8

2015-2016 2016-2017

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Area | Pass Rate | Raw Data | Pass Rate | Raw Data | Combined |
| Overall |  |  |  |  |  |
| New exam takers | NA | 8 | NA | 3 | 8 |
| Repeat exam takers | NA | 3 | NA | 0 | 3 |
| Core Day | 70% | 7 of 10 | 100% | 3 of 3 | 77% |
| Track DayPolicy | 87.5% | 7 of 8 | 100% | 1 of 1 | 89% |
| Public | 50%\* | 1 of 2 | 100% | 2 of 2 | 75% |
| Administration |  |  |  |  |  |
| Track Day | 87.5% | 7 of 8 | 100% | 3 of 3 | 91% |
| Passed All Sections Taken | 54.5% | 6 of 11 | 100% | 3 of 3 | 63% |

\* This data point captures one individual who failed this section of the comps in the fall but passed it in the spring.

Context, Trends and Discussion

A review of the results from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 comprehensive exams suggests that the most significant concerns should be about public administration preparation followed by the core. That conclusion is misleading. First, usually the public administration track exams have the highest passage rate. Second, the scores for the policy track exams are typically marginal (just at passing) and there are rarely strong scores on this exam. As we have reflected on this finding over the years, the reasons for this problem appear to be about our expectations for students and their limited preparation, which was the reason for the curriculum revision. Our hope is that in

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8 Note that for the Core Day there are 3 raters and their scores are averaged. For the Track Days, there are 3 raters per question for a total of 9 raters, and their scores are averaged.

future exams, these failure rates will dissipate. Finally, the failures listed in the core for the 2015- 2016 academic year are related to methods requirements and were discussed below in the 2015- 2017 assessment report reflection section, and parts are expanded on later in this report.

*New Curriculum Approach*

For the new approach, we have begun baseline assessment data collection with the dissertation prospectus and final defense students. Based on the curriculum map, each member of the dissertation committee scores the student on a 3-point scale (exceeds expectations, meets expectations, or below expectations) on 4 of the SLOs for the dissertation (Original Contribution, Analysis, Communication, and Professionalism) and a different set of 4 of the SLOs for the prospectus (Literature, Methodology, Analysis, and Communication). While the committees unanimously decide one the outcomes (pass, pass with minor revisions, pass with major revisions, or fail), these assessment of the SLOs are done individually and then the scores are averaged across the raters per student (with between 3-5 raters per student) and then averaged across the program. Compliance with requests to committee chairs to have committee members fill out the new assessment forms was mixed. Only one of the dissertations defenses occurred after the scoring sheets were created, and information for that defense was collected. Of the 9 prospectus defenses, assessment information was collected from 5 of them.

Table 9 lays out the assessment data for our first wave of data collection for the new process. Because of the limited student enrollment in the program and the fact that this is the first year of this data collection, the sample sizes are small making it challenging to identify trends or generalize. That said, according to the faculty reviews of the prospectus students, on average they scored highest on knowledge of the literature and analysis, and lowest on methodology.

Every one of the students were passed with minor revisions.

Table 9: Assessment Data for 2016-2017

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Dissertation Prospectus Range | Defense Average | Final Dissertation Defense |
| Literature | 2-3 | 2.4 | - |
| Methodology | 2-2.3 | 2.1 | - |
| Original Contribution | - | - | 3 |
| Analysis | 1.9-3 | 2.4 | 2.8 |
| Communication | 2-2.8 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Professionalism | - | - | 2.8 |
| N | 5 of 9 returned | 5 | 1 |

Context, Trends and Discussion

While the instruments and the point of time of the assessments are different over the past couple of years, the evident trend from these data combined with data from previous years is that our most significant struggle appears to be with methodology. Looking across the open-ended comments about methodology, it appears that even the most sophisticated of the proposed analytic approaches across the proposals are simplistic in comparison to the current standards in the discipline. This finding is perhaps a reflection on 1) students’ exposure to and retention of methods training (although that has improved over the past decade); 2) the limited integration of methods training across the curriculum (although we are slowly embedding methods training in more program courses); and 3), it has been many years since most of the dissertation chairs have had significant (or any) methodological re-tooling, and the more methodologically knowledgeable junior faculty tend not to serve as major dissertation advisors as they have not yet qualified for Graduate 2 faculty status, a requirement for serving as chair without a co-chair.

# Reflection

In our previous assessment report, we discussed two major issues, the second of which is on- going, and based on the assessment results still relevant. First, we needed to implement the curriculum changes; this has been done. Second, we needed to enhance students’ competitiveness on the academic job market, including increasing professional development, methods training, and competitiveness on the job market. Our efforts to address these areas are discussed below.

We provided and will continue to provide a number of professional development experiences to augment students’ academic preparation from the courses and dissertation. These include brown bag lunches (see Table 10 for an overview of the proposed 2017-2018 schedule), sending students to other types of training (such as summer programs sponsored by ICPSR), providing non-credit/non- registration courses on using LaTeX or R on a volunteer basis, encouraging students to participate in the Preparing Future Faculty program delivered by the Biggio Center, and by making additional funding available to students on the academic job market to attend conferences and meetings. The purpose of these experiences is both to help round out doctoral students’ professional preparedness and acculturation, as well as to help prepare them for the academic job market.

Attendance at the brown bags has ranged from 8 to 20 students, and the audience has largely consisted of the students who hope to achieve academic jobs after graduation. We believe that participation in these opportunities has increased students’ understanding of the discipline but it is difficult to ascertain the direct impact of these professional socialization activities.

Nonetheless, we think the programs are important for exposing students to significant professional skills, information, and opportunities that fall outside the focus of their courses and thus they would not otherwise receive. These programs then help to make our students more successful candidates for placement.

To address issues related to methods training (and by extension obtaining the appropriate skills to publish and be successful on the academic job market), we have made two adjustments. We have built in faculty presentations of their current research into the brown bag series in an effort

Table 10: Overview of Brownbag Topics, 2015-2018 Academic Years

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Delivered in 2015-2016 | Delivered in 2016-2017 | Planned for 2017-2018 |
| September | \* | Preparing for | Attending Academic |
|  |  | Comprehensive | Conferences |
|  |  | Examinations |  |
| October | Practice Job Talks for | Faculty Research | Faculty Research |
|  | Students Going on the | Presentations | Presentations |
|  | Academic Job Market |  |  |
| November | Publishing as a Graduate | Dissertation Prospectus & | Dissertation Prospectus & |
|  | Student | Tips for Staying on Track | Tips for Staying on Track |
|  |  | While Writing | While Writing |
| December | Faculty Research | Faculty Research | Planning Your Academic |
|  | Presentations | Presentations | Job Packet |
| January | Dissertation Prospectus & | Faculty Research | Publishing and Journal |
|  | Tips for Staying on Track | Presentations | Quality |
|  | While Writing |  |  |
| February | Faculty Research | [see April] | Faculty Research |
|  | Presentations |  | Presentations |
| March | Practice Presentations for Students Presenting at the | CV Development and the Academic Job Market | Practice Presentations for Students Presenting at the |
|  | MPSA Conference |  | MPSA Conference |
| April | Planning Your Academic Job Packet | Preparing for Comprehensive Exams | Preparing for Comprehensive Exams |
|  |  | Using the LUCIA Lab |  |

\* Dr. Brown did not take over as the Ph.D. Director until August 16, 2015, and as such, because of the planning needed, the brown bags did not start until October of that year.

to expose the graduate students to the emerging research being done in the field and the methodological approaches used to support that research. In addition, we are addressing methods in the curriculum in four ways. In the new curriculum design, in addition to taking at least 3 methods courses, we have added a methods sub-field and have decided to include testing in methods during the core day of the comprehensive exams. The Ph.D. Director will encourage faculty teaching Ph.D. classes to embed assignments in the substantive courses that build on the skills developed in the main methods courses. Science of teaching and learning (SoTL) research on methods training in our discipline demonstrates that when methods are embedded across the curriculum, students both retain more knowledge from their methods courses but also reinforce

old and develop new skills. Finally, we are continuing to send students to attend summer ICPSR training at the University of Michigan in greater numbers in order to expand their methods training beyond what we are able to offer at the university. While there are other methods courses offered at Auburn University and Auburn University at Montgomery beyond what we teach in the department and some students take advantage of these courses, ICPSR training focuses specifically on the advanced methodological skills used in our discipline and also serve to enhance students’ peer networks and acculturation in the discipline, and thus we see this as the preferable approach. We have offered partial funding to one student each summer to attend ICPSR, and hope to increase this to 2-3 students per summer in future years.

*Communication with Faculty & Students*

The PhD faculty met to discuss last year’s assessment report, curriculum changes, new assessment processes, and program improvement in January 2017, and will meet again during the Fall 2017 semester. See Appendix B for a summary of the meeting notes. Several meetings were held with students about the SLOs, new curriculum, comprehensive exams, and expectations for the prospectus and dissertation throughout the year. Students were naturally more interested in finding out information about making progress in the program (e.g., “What do I need to do to pass comps?”) than the nuances of the university approach to assessment.

*New and Continuing Quality Improvement Efforts*

Our expectation is that we will engage in continuing and future assessment activities and reflection based on the following schedule:

1. .! The AU Ph.D. Director will collect assessment material from faculty at the appropriate times including the new assessment of comprehensive exams, encouraging more dissertation chairs to distribute and collect assessment forms from their committee members;
2. .! In May of each year, the AU Ph.D. Director will analyze the data and share the results with the AUM Director;
3. .! In June of each year, the Ph.D. Directors from both AU and AUM will jointly write assessment reports for their campuses per the guidelines on each of those campuses (the content will be the same, the only expected differences will be in terminology and formatting per the expectations provided by the Director of Assessment on each campus);
4. .! In July of each year, these reports will be provided by email to the Ph.D. program faculty, and the faculty will provide any feedback they have by email;
5. .! In the fall of each year, the Ph.D. faculty will meet to discuss the findings and agree on any actionable plans needed to address problems or concerns that are identified from the assessment;
6. .! The Ph.D. Directors from AU and AUM will develop implementation plans for any actionable item, including any necessary revisions to the assessment instruments;
7. .! At the end of the spring semester each year, the Ph.D. faculty will meet to review and agree on those implementation plans; and
8. .! These plans will be implemented in the following academic year, and the consequences will be assessed and reviewed as the changes are implemented and reflected in future assessment report.

In this way the program now has implemented a formal process to close the loop and engage in the program’s continuous improvement.

**APPENDIX A**

**Assessment Instruments**

This appendix includes:

Comprehensive Exam Rubric and Reporting Forms Core Committee Member From

Field Committee Member Form Core Summary Form

Field Summary Form

Prospectus Defense Rubric and Reporting Forms Committee Member Form

Committee Chair Addendum Form Summary Form

Dissertation Defense Rubric and Reporting Forms Committee Member Form

Committee Chair Addendum Form Summary Form

**Core Comprehensive Exam Assessment Form- Committee Members**

(rev 6/29/17)

Student Name

Scorer Name

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Policy** | **PA** | **Methods** |
| Explain, analyze, and critique the literature including current scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature) |  |  |  |
| Explain and identify methodological approaches used toaddress disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology) |  |  |  |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written andverbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication) |  |  |  |
| AVERAGE (denominator should be total SLOs scored) |  |  |  |

Scoring:

3= strong pass

2= pass

1= fail

Comments:

**Joint Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy**

**Field Comprehensive Exam Assessment Form- Committee Members**

(rev 4/21/17)

Field

Student Name

Scorer Name

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Question 1** | **Question 2** |
| Explain, analyze, and critique the literature includingcurrent scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature) |  |  |
| Explain and identify methodological approaches used to address disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology) |  |  |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication) |  |  |
| AVERAGE (denominator should be total SLOs scored) |  |  |

Scoring:

3= strong pass

2= pass

1= fail

Comments:

# Core Comprehensive Exams Assessment Form- Summary

(rev 6/29/17)

Student Name

!

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Policy** | **PA** | **Methods** | **Ave** |
| **R1** | **R2** | **R3** | **R1** | **R2** | **R3** | **R1** | **R2** | **R3** |
| Explain, analyze, and critique the literature includingcurrent scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature)! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! |
| Explain and identify methodological approaches used toaddress disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology)! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication)! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! |
| **OVERALL SCORE** |  |

Does student PASS or FAIL (Circle) IF fail, attach remediation plan.

# Field Day Comprehensive Exams Assessment Form- Summary

(rev 6/29/17)

Student Name

Field

!

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Question 1** | **Question 2** | **Ave** |
| **R1** | **R2** | **R3** | **R1** | **R2** | **R3** |
| Explain, analyze, and critique the literature including current scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature)! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! |
| Explain and identify methodological approaches used to address disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology)! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written andverbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication)! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! | ! |
| **OVERALL SCORE** |  |

Does student PASS or FAIL (Circle) IF fail, attach remediation plan.

# Prospectus Assessment Form- Committee Members

(rev 6/29/17)

Student Name

Defense Date

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Score** | **Comments** |
| Explain, analyze, and critique the literature including current scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature) |  |  |
| Explain and identify methodological approaches used to address disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology) |  |  |
| Apply the most appropriate methodological approaches toadvance understanding of a specific disciplinary problem or question (Analysis) |  |  |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication) |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Scoring: | 1= | below expectations |
|  | 2= | meets expectations |
|  | 3= | exceeds expectations |

# Prospectus Assessment Form- Committee Chair Addendum

(rev 6/29/17)

Student Name

Defense Date

Committee Members

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Name | Role | Institution |
| 1 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |

Result

Did the student pass?

Yes, with no revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, with minor revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, with major revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_\_\_

IF NO, What is the remediation plan?

# Prospectus Assessment Form- Summary

(rev 6/29/17)

Student Name

Defense Date

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Average** | **Comments** |
| Explain, analyze, and critique the literature including current scholarship and its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant subfields of the political science, public policy, and public administration disciplines (Literature) |  |  |
| Explain and identify methodological approaches used to address disciplinary problems and questions (Methodology) |  |  |
| Apply the most appropriate methodological approaches to advance understanding of a specific disciplinary problem or question (Analysis) |  |  |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication) |  |  |

Scoring: 1= below expectations 2= meets expectations 3= exceeds expectations

Result

Did the student pass?

 Yes, with no revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Yes, with minor revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, with major revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_\_\_\_-

IF NO, What is the remediation plan?

**Joint Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy Dissertation Assessment Form- Committee Members (rev 6/20/17)**

Student Name

Defense Date

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Score** | **Comments** |
| Design and execute original research on contemporarydisciplinary problems and questions, including connecting literature, theory, and methodology (Original Contribution) |  |  |
| Apply the most appropriate methodological approaches to advance understanding of a specific disciplinary problem or question (Analysis) |  |  |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbal forms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication) |  |  |
| Model and display behavior consistent with professionalnorms and objectives (Professionalism) |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Scoring: | 1= | below expectations |
|  | 2= | meets expectations |
|  | 3= | exceeds expectations |

**Joint Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy**

**Dissertation Assessment Form- Committee Chair Addendum**

(rev 6/20/17)

Student Name

Defense Date

Committee Members

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Name | Role | Institution |
| 1 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |

Result

Did the student pass?

Yes, with no revisions \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, with minor revisions\_\_\_\_\_

 Yes, with major revisions\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_\_

IF NO, What is the remediation plan?

# Dissertation Assessment Form- Summary

(rev 6/20/17)

Student Name

Defense Date

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Average** | **Comments** |
| Design and execute original research on contemporary disciplinary problems and questions, including connecting literature, theory, and methodology (Original Contribution) |  |  |
| Apply the most appropriate methodological approaches toadvance understanding of a specific disciplinary problem or question (Analysis) |  |  |
| Clearly and effectively communicate in written and verbalforms disciplinary material in the comprehensive examination, the dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation (Communication) |  |  |
| Model and display behavior consistent with professionalnorms and objectives (Professionalism) |  |  |

Scoring: 1= below expectations 2= meets expectations 3= exceeds expectations

Result

Did the student pass?

Yes, with no revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, with minor revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Yes, with major revisions\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 No\_\_\_\_\_\_

IF NO, What is the remediation plan?

# APPENDIX B

**Notes from January 2017 PhD Faculty Meeting**

**Joint PhD in Public Administration & Public Policy Auburn University & Auburn University Montgomery Graduate Student & Faculty Meeting Minutes**

**3346 Haley Center**

**Friday, January 20, 2017**

12:00 noon Research Presentations by Drs. David Hughes (State Supreme Court Polarization)

& Nick Howard (Senate Committees)

! Attended by 12 faculty (7 from AU, 5 from AUM) and 6 graduate students

2:00 pm Faculty Meeting

! Attended by 20 faculty (15 from AU, 5 from AUM)

Program updates

! Assessment

o! The 2015-2016 assessment report was distributed (for the second time) before the meeting; there were no questions or comments

o! The new assessment approach and forms were discussed; faculty were asked to remind the program director before each defense (currently the reminders only go to the committee chair and members, not the program director) and to have committee members fill out all appropriate forms

! Student information

o! There are currently 48 students—an additional student just graduated

o! 16 are currently taking classes (4 part-time, 5 will take comps in the fall)

o! 1 other is working on comps

o! 11 are working on the prospectus (4 are largely inactive)

o! 19 are working on dissertations (5 active, 6 unclear, 8 inactive)

Committees—faculty assignments for the upcoming year include:

! Admissions (Mitchell, Andrew, Jon, Soren, Nick)

! Assessment (Mitchell with review from Andrew—no volunteers)

! Comprehensive exams

o! Core (Cindy- chair, Kathleen, Kelly, Linda, Soren, Mitchell, Nick, David)

o! American public policy (Bridgett- chair, Nick, David, Soren, Steve)

o! Applied research (Mitchell- chair, Kathleen, Soren, Kalu, Nick, David)

o! Election administration (Kathleen- chair, Mitchell, Bridgett)

o! Global public policy (Andrew- co-chair, Jill- co-chair, Stacey, Kelly, Kalu, Paul)

o! Nonprofit and community governance (Kelly- chair, Kathleen, Linda, Megan, Mitchell)

o! Public sector administration (Jon- chair, Kelly, Joe, Cindy, Kathleen, Yunmi, Kalu, Linda)

! Faculty participation (Mitchell- chair, Jill, Murray) Comprehensive exams

! It was agreed that for the first year of the new curriculum model, students will have no notes, 8 hours for the core day, and 4 hours for each field day; 3 levels of scoring—fail, pass, strong pass with 3 readers for each day—readers are encouraged to meet to review answers and decide on scoring, but if each ad hoc committee prefers, they may score the exams individually with an average taken by the program director

! These decisions will be revisited after 1 year of implementation

Field proposals

! Urban planning and policy—the newly included community planning faculty believe that there is a market in the area for a field in urban planning and policy; the faculty discussed this and agreed to begin offering classes and the field as of 2018 with the caveat that the name of the field be changed from “urban planning and policy,” as within the disciplines of political science, public policy, and public administration urban policy has a specific meaning and that will not be covered in the courses offered by the community planning faculty

! Political theory and public law—there was discussion about whether another field of political theory and public law should be added; there was confusion among the faculty about how the two would fit together and whether public law isn’t already a component of American politics and policy, where it has historically been taught; for now the faculty decided not to approve the new field, and encouraged faculty who teach theory to offer courses that fit naturally as electives in one or more of the current fields

Other business

! Budget and new programs/activities—the AU department chair announced that the program has approximately $54,000 (though no budget spreadsheet has been distributed)

o! Currently, money from this fund is used to support student travel to ICPSR

o! The faculty agreed to allow funding for 2 students at $4,000 each for the summer to support research—this should be competitive, with

preference given to graduate students writing dissertations who plan to pursue academic positions

o! Other money many be used to support faculty research on a case-by- case basis for faculty who are active in a variety of ways in the PhD program

o! Some money will be set aside to update software in the AUM computer lab to support statistics courses

! Website—The program director noted that the website needs to be updated, and hopes to identify resources to make that happen, preferably by the end of the summer

4:00 pm Adjourn