

PRAC Report for the Paul H. O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs (O’Neill) – 2019-2020 Academic Year Review

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Introduction

This report concerns the program review and assessment efforts of the Paul H. O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs (O’Neill) during the 2019/2020 academic year. We specifically focus on the undergraduate and graduate programs in Public Affairs and plan to emphasize the Criminal Justice and Public Safety programs in next year’s PRAC report. The focus in this document is on substantial efforts, new developments or changes in our work. Review and assessment tasks that are part of the school’s regular process will be noted but not discussed in great detail.

This report begins with a brief description of the school and its programs. The remainder is organized according by program with a statement of learning outcomes, methods of assessment, findings and current and proposed actions.

Overview of the O’Neill School

Undergraduate Programs

During the 2019-2020 academic year, O’Neill enrolled 1205 undergraduate majors seeking Bachelor of Science degrees in either Public Affairs (BSPA) or in Criminal Justice and Public Safety Management (BSCJPSM). For many undergraduate students, O’Neill is not a first-entry school, and most undergraduate students transfer into O’Neill during or after their sophomore year, most transferring from University College.

In the Public Affairs program, undergraduates pursue a BS in Public Affairs in one of four majors—Civic Leadership, Public Policy, Management, Media and Public Policy or Sustainable Management and Policy. The Civic Leadership and Public Policy majors each have several emphasis areas, allowing students to specialize their studies according to their interests. Minors in these four categories are also available, as are certificates in nonprofit management, public affairs and public management.

The Criminal Justice and Public Safety Management undergraduate program includes majors and minors in Criminal Justice and in Public Safety Management, as well as several certificates. Majors earn a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice or in Public Safety Management. The CJPS program was last externally reviewed in 2018. The external review site visit team was on campus Sept 3-5, 2018 and issued a final report Nov 9, 2018. The previous external review occurred in January 2010. The changes identified in the most recent review cycle have not been implemented yet. Rather, the CJ faculty have delayed the implementation of these BSCJ changes to Fall 2022 given our staffing limitations and timing with the forthcoming PA curriculum changes. The MSCJPS degree has undergone routine updating/curriculum changes to meet student needs and improve curriculum delivery. This report emphasizes the assessment-

related changes and initiatives for the undergraduate and graduate programs in Public Affairs and we will not engaged in an in-dept overview of all assessment-related initiatives in our criminal justice and public safety programs. This will be the focus of our next PRAC report.

During the past two academic years, including the 2019-2020 review year, O'Neill has engaged in a complete review of its undergraduate program. As detailed more completely below, this effort has included significant reform of degree requirements, evaluation and alignment of program and course learning outcomes and a comprehensive review of course content. This work continues and is scheduled for completion by the end of the 2021 calendar year with implementation of the revised programs during the 2022-2023 academic year. These efforts were informed by our internal assessments data as well as by helpful input from two external program reviews conducted since 2018.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, work on the curriculum revisions continued during the 2019-2020 academic year, though at a slower pace. Much of the routine outcome assessment work typically completed was omitted to continue advancing the larger program assessments on track. Consequently, this report will not devote attention to discussion of our more routine assessments of student learning during the year.

Graduate Programs

O'Neill's graduate programs include two master's level degrees, a Master of Public Affairs (MPA) and a Master of Science in Criminal Justice and Public Safety (MSCJPS), alongside non-degree certificates, and executive programs. Non-degree graduate students can earn certificates in several specialties (e.g., homeland security and emergency management on the CJ side or nonprofit management or public management on the PA side). Many of those who earn graduate certificates segue into the master's programs.

During the review year, 535 graduate students were enrolled. Enrollment in both programs fell during the 2019-2020 year following a trend at schools across the country. During 2018-2019, the Public Affairs faculty have engaged in a self-study for the purposes of reaccreditation of the MPA program (including the executive education MPA program) through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). The NASPAA site visit occurred in February 2020 and program received reaccreditation in July 2020.

Special Emphases for the 2019-2020 PRAC Reports

Through most of the past four academic years, including the 2019-2020 academic year that is the subject of this report, the O'Neill School has engaged in a systematic and complete review of its curriculum. The process for reviewing and revising all of our undergraduate programs coincided with and benefitted from the contemporaneous campus review of the criminal justice program and the completion of the accreditation process by the NASPAA, our notational accrediting body. Although the accreditation process focuses on graduate programs, the process of self-study and external review also provided useful and relevant to the undergraduate program.

Impact of COVID-19 on assessment and plans for the future (Charge: 1)

As in many schools across campus, efforts to convert classes into virtual delivery and provide additional support for students consumed faculty interest and energy during the spring, 2019 semester. As a result, routine end of term assessments were not completed at the close of the semester. Efforts to assess the 2019/20 academic year are currently underway (e.g., assessment committees have collected data from faculty and are currently evaluating the information). Information gathered during this belated review will remain relevant as we consider ongoing improvement.

Progress on Implementing PLUS (Charge: 2)

Over the past two academic years (2018-2019 and 2019-2020) the O'Neill undergraduate curriculum committees have engaged in review and design of all of the schools' undergraduate degree programs. One critical aspect of the curricular revisions involves an evaluation of course learning outcomes for each O'Neill course. These outcomes are now discussed using the language of PLUS as well as to the Statewide Competencies, as appropriate. Faculty have been encouraged to use the PLUS profiles and its student-friendly language to more clearly describe learning goals, expectations and outcomes to their students. They are also encouraged to link specific outcomes to ways that students can apply what they are learning now and in the future.

After identifying the knowledge, disposition, and skill learning outcomes at the course level, we inventoried these and are not considering the collective learning expectations for students completing each major and degrees. One goal of this work is to assure that students have an acceptable level of exposure to each of the four profiles and that they are aware of how these learning outcomes build upon and enrich one another as they move through the curriculums toward graduation. Our goal is to be able to clearly articulate this learning to students, parents, and the external community in a way that is understandable and practical.

Because O'Neill began its curricular review and revisions at approximately the same time that IUPUI adopted PLUS, we have had the advantage of using the structure throughout the three-year effort to enhance our courses and programs. Unfortunately, momentum slowed during the review year as faculty focused on more immediate needs. The review and alignment of all course level PLUS outcomes will be completed by start of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Progress on identifying, developing or redesigning experiences for inclusion in the Record. (Charge: 3)

During the 2019-2020 year, O'Neill identified individuals responsible for increasing the number of submissions to the Record. We took intentional steps to raise awareness of the Record and its value to our students and created the expectation that faculty and responsible staff identify opportunities appropriate and submit them in a timely way. Discussions concerning the revisions of the undergraduate curriculum have included a focus on increasing the number of high impact practices in and across our curriculum and sponsored student programs. A more detailed review of this process follows.

During the summer and fall of 2019, O'Neill worked to educate faculty and staff, including the many associate faculty that teach for the school, about the Record, its purpose, and its value to students. The Assistant Dean and the Director of Student Services made formal

presentations and gave shared informal reminders about the Record in routine faculty and staff meetings. Presentations included information about both how to complete an application for inclusion and how to contact staff with the Institute of Engaged Learning to obtain assistance, if needed.

After this information period, the Assistant Dean and the Director of Student Services began the work of identifying and inventorying appropriate experiences and then working with responsible faculty or staff to submit applications for inclusion. During the review period, conversations involved student services staff who coordinate student internships, First Year Experience service learning opportunities, and study abroad programs. Due to staffing changes, this work has started moving more quickly, including recognition of programs like the Washington Leadership Program, the Community Corps program, and service and leadership experiences offered through our student government organizations as high impact practices appropriate for inclusion in the Record.

An effort to increase the number of faculty submitting experiences to the Record was hampered by the pandemic and overshadowed by the focus on program and curricular review discussions outlined above. That said, discussion about how to enhance and improve the curriculum has included intentional efforts to increase the number of high impact practices offered in our classrooms and across our curriculum. For example, during the review period, the school voted to create a credit-based opportunity for undergraduate students to work directly with faculty members on faculty led research. This opportunity recently has been submitted for inclusion.

Program Reviews and Assessments

This section targets efforts to assess learning in the Public Affairs degree programs O'Neill offers.

Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs (BSPA)

During the review period, as a subcommittee of faculty considered revision of the BSPA degree, they also identified the need to significantly revise the process for evaluating student learning within the program and its courses. The goal of this revision is to ensure consistency in the process to facilitate better year-to-year development and comparisons. Additionally, it was important to identify ways to ensure that students were graduating with the skills and knowledge essential to successful entry and performance in entry level jobs in public affairs related jobs as well as admission to related graduate programs in public policy, administration or law school. The committee doing this work included five faculty members who teach in the undergraduate program, the Assistant Dean and the Director of Student Services. The Executive Associate Dean and the Public Affairs Program Director were ad hoc members.

Prior to 2019, assessment of student learning in the BSPA degree followed this process. The Public Affairs Program Director and two to three other faculty members completed a review of certain courses at the end of each academic year. The Director collected a sample of artifacts from the capstone class and, in some years, from one or more required courses within the major. Reviewers evaluated the artifacts against a rubric with three to five learning outcomes using a mastered, developing, emerging or absent. The focus of these evaluations often involved the

development of skills, such as written communication or ability to complete basic quantitative analysis. Unfortunately, the variability of outcomes and courses reviewed from year to year did not allow effective longitudinal or program-wide assessment.

As product of the ongoing curriculum revisions in this major was the determination to improve and standardize the assessment process. Faculty working on the degree redesign concluded that it would be useful to revise align review process with that used to assess the MPA program. This approach is convenient as our full-time faculty often teach both graduate and undergraduate courses and are therefore familiar with the Master's level assessment process. Additionally, a common approach will facilitate conversations centered on our success in conveying knowledge and skills to undergraduate students that are appropriate to prepare them for entry-level careers in public affairs related jobs and for associated graduate school opportunities.

Like the MPA-level assessment, the BSPA assessments will occur at the end of the spring semester. The assessments will be conducted by the Assistant Dean as well as three full-time and one associate faculty member. Faculty engaged in the review should include at least one member who teaches a courses required of all students receiving the degree. The other members will represent those who teach required classes in one of the BSPA's three majors offered under the revised degree. Reviewer's will use a standard rubric and will examine artifacts from 1) the General Education level course that is required of all BSPS students (V170); 2) one preselected required course from each of the three majors; and, 3) capstone.

This new approach was not used during the review year. Indeed, the spring of 2020 did not provide meaningful opportunities for faculty, who are largely exhausted by the process of quickly revising their courses for online learning, to engage in thoughtful assessment. We believe that the new process marks a meaningful improvement in our approach to assessment. We look forward to feedback from our PRAC report, which might further improve our work.

Master of Public Administration (MPA)

The MPA program received reaccreditation from NASPAA in July 2020. As part of the reaccreditation efforts, the O'Neill IUPUI MPA faculty approved a new assessment process in 2018. The assessment calls for yearly program reviews, both of program performance outcomes and student performance outcomes. This change represented a more formalized assessment process than previously existed, although previous assessments were regularly conducted.

Alongside the improved assessment plan (which we will specify below), there were other major changes as a result of the 2017-2018 assessment: new Mission statement, curriculum redevelopment, and revised admissions requirements.

Assessment plan

Assessments had been conducted periodically since 2012, but usually on an ad hoc basis. The faculty agreed that a more formalized assessment process was needed, and this plan was developed and approved during 2018. Specifically, the faculty of the O'Neill MPA program have identified a set of nine broad criteria to be used to assess the performance of the MPA program. The criteria are broken into to two parts: a section laying out what the faculty and leadership expects of itself, and a section describing what we expect of our students and graduates. The process, as depicted below will be ongoing, relying on the combination of program data, course

materials and the capstone project to assess program performance. In general, we take a collaborative evaluation approach¹ amongst the faculty, in addition to involving our program stakeholders in the evaluation process, where appropriate.

Assessments occur annually at the end of the Spring semester or start of Fall semester. Assessments are conducted and coordinated by the MPA Assessment Committee, chaired by the MPA Director(s), a subcommittee of the PA Governance Committee. The members of the MPA Assessment Committee are MPA Director(s), Assistant Dean, SPEA V600 (Capstone) Instructor(s), two volunteer public affairs faculty members serving staggered two-year terms, Director of Executive Education, Director of Faculty and Academic Services, and Director of Student Services

The committee is charged with implementing the assessment process below, assigning roles and responsibilities, conducting the assessment, and providing recommendations the PA Governance Committee. Below we discuss the contents of the plan that relate to assessment of learning outcomes, course curriculum, and/or the nature of course assignments. Data for the assessments come from five sources, the first 3 being direct measures and the final 2 being indirect measures.

- Capstone pre- and post- examination – students in the capstone course take an exam, based on the performance criteria at the start and end of each semester. Base rates of competency and improvement during the capstone experience will be assessed.
- Capstone projects – during the capstone class, students work on several case projects intended to connect and reinforce the various program goals.
- Course materials – each instructor will identify key assignments in their course and provide access to the assessment committee to student work by posting assignments into designated folders for each of the assessment criteria listed below.
- Instructor assessments – at the start of each semester, instructors identify a set of course learning objectives and provide general assessments of student performance on the same 4-point scale described below. These instructor assessments will be based on the instructor’s perceptions of how well the class, as a whole, met the course learning objectives and will be separate from grades and unavailable to students.
- Student self-assessments – at both the start and end of the semester, all capstone students will assess their own perceptions of their level of competence on the performance criteria.

The committee utilizes all capstone examinations, projects, and student self-assessments, with student names redacted from the current academic year. The committee also utilizes all instructor assessments. The committee randomly select a set of 3-5 student course materials, with student names redacted, that have been completed in the previous year to review.

¹ O’Sullivan, R.G. (2012). Collaborate evaluation within a framework of stakeholder-oriented evaluation approaches. *Evaluation and Program Planning*. 35(4): 518-522.

Each of the five areas of competencies below will be assessed by a team of two core faculty members. These teams may review materials however they choose, but each team must score the overall breadth of student attainment on each assessment criterion according to the following levels of attainment:

- Excellent
- Competent
- Emergent
- Not Acceptable

The teams also consider student self-assessments and instructor assessments when determining the level of attainment.

While the committee can recommend changes to improve student performance no matter the result of the assessment, recommendations are required if any of the assessors determine that 10% of the work is Not Acceptable, or if 75% of the work is not categorized as Competent or Excellent. The committee then makes a formal recommendation to address any deficiencies. Prior to the start of each semester, the faculty assigned to teach the relevant MPA courses will collaborate to the extent practicable to implement any recommendations or course content objectives, with the approval of the PA Curriculum Committee.

Assessments following the above outlined process have been conducted in 2018-2019 (completed) and 2019-2020 (in the process of review, see COVID-impact on assessment above). Below we present findings from the completed 2018-2019 assessment.

Capstone Reform

The initial round of assessment reviews of learning outcomes relied in large part on a review of previous capstone programs as a key data source. During this review, the capstone projects were consistently strong, but were not seen as covering the full breadth of key learning outcomes for the comprehensive MPA program. Students were getting a good experience working with community organizations but were engaging a limited skill set in developing their project reports. During the spring 2019 semester, the MPA capstone was revised in order to ensure that a) students engaged with the full breadth of material from the MPA core courses; b) the capstone served as a better source of assessment data; and c) community engagement remained a core component.

Community projects were revised in order to ensure that the capstone projects cover the full breadth of expected skills. Student teams now work on three much more narrowly defined projects rather than one, relatively undefined project.

In the revised capstone, students also take a pre-test and post-test of MPA core class content. The pre-test is intended to signal to students the key things that the faculty believe they should have learned in the program and also serves as an informational resource for the instructor to tailor the capstone course to any areas of deficiency (allowing for class-to-class flexibility to alter the focus as needed). The tests, taken together, also serve as a primary data source for the MPA program's assessment process.

Alumni and Employer Engagement

In reviewing materials for the assessment, it was realized that opportunities for alumni and employer engagement were not tracked in any meaningful way. Informal conversations

suggested that these interactions took place, but the scale of activity was not fully known. Going forward, the faculty will consider a more detailed plan for consistent engagement between students, faculty, alumni, executive education partners and prospective employers.

Research Engagement

A broad theme of the 2018-2019 assessment is that students were not adequately describing/understanding the connections between theory, research, and practice. Going forward, the faculty plan to pilot some activities to better connect students with research, including research "happy hours" and incorporation of more research oriented class activities.

Curriculum Modifications

As might be expected with a significant curriculum change, some minor issues arose during the year, including courses not enrolling enough students to offer during the year and a lack of flexibility to take elective courses. Concentration requirements were made more consistent as a result (each concentration now has at least 6 elective credits, where some concentrations only had 3 previously).

Assessment Modifications

In conducting the first round of assessments, it was found that some of the initial performance objectives were redundant and thus consolidated, and that data was lacking in some cases. Revisions were made to ensure limited redundancy and sufficient data for assessment.

Consistency Modifications

During the initial review of student learning outcomes a clear distinction was noted (and confirmed by students). Going forward, there will be much more consistency in course content and expectations across different faculty and delivery types. Regardless of the delivery, each section of each course will use the same textbook and the same learning outcomes to ensure quality and consistency across delivery modes

Conclusion

This PRAC report described the program review and assessment efforts of the Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs (O'Neill) during the 2019/2020 academic year. Similar to others, we faced barriers and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic that slowed down our efforts. Still, we outlined some major milestones with regards to program review and assessment in both the undergraduate and graduate Public Affairs programs. We plan to emphasize the Criminal Justice and Public Safety programs in next year's PRAC report.