

Outcomes Assessment: Reporting the Results for Academic Year 2024-2025

Name of Program: Master of Public Administration (MPA)

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This report evaluates the University of Colorado Denver, School of Public Affairs' MPA program. The MPA program is a professional degree that is designed to produce: 1) generalist executives in the public and non-profit sectors, such as city managers, agency CEOs, department heads and mid-level managers; 2) specialists in fields such as local government and urban affairs, environmental law and policy, non-profit management, domestic violence, emergency management, and policy analysis and program evaluation; 3) program managers in areas such as human services, environmental protection, natural resource conservation, disaster management, domestic violence, local government, health, and administration of cultural and artistic programs; 4) elected officials in state and local government; and 5) corporate positions in public advocacy or affairs or in regulated areas.

The program developed **four learning objectives** which reflect the knowledge and skills our faculty believe students should obtain to earn their MPA. Students should be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate a broad base of knowledge concerning public or nonprofit management, policy, and research;
- 2) Use effective critical thinking and analytical skills to solve problems in public and nonprofit settings in a manner that will improve the public good;
- 3) Communicate effectively in writing; and
- 4) Communicate effectively in speaking.

Additionally, we evaluated **five identified competencies**¹ in this report. Students should be able to:

- 1) Lead and manage in public governance;
- 2) Participate in and contribute to the public policy process;
- 3) Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions;
- 4) Articulate and apply a public service perspective; and
- 5) Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

Finally, the program assessed **two outcomes** that reflect our goals:

- 1) Graduates will work in professional management or policy positions in public or nonprofit settings.
- 2) Graduates will make use of the knowledge and skills they have gained to perform effectively in their positions.

We designed this MPA outcomes assessment to measure programmatic success in the above learning objectives, competencies, and outcomes.

¹ These competencies are required by NASPAA, our accrediting body.

The following measurement instruments were used to assess our objectives, competencies, and outcomes:

1. *Rubric for Capstone Seminar:* We designed the capstone rubric (https://forms.ucdenver.edu/secure/5361_faculty_evaluation) to assess students' actual performance. Students complete the MPA program with a capstone class, PUAD 5361 Capstone Seminar. In this course, they complete an applied research project designed to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have gained in the program. Students select a client-based project and are assessed by three readers: the primary instructor, another SPA faculty member, and a client or external reader. The rubrics rate students as below proficient, proficient, and above proficient in each of the four learning objectives. Readers also receive an opportunity to submit additional comments on each student's project. Readers submit these rubrics for each project at the end of every semester.
2. *Capstone Inventory of Competencies:* The five NASPAA-identified competencies are further delineated into 19 sub-competencies that provide operational definitions. The capstone inventory records which of the 19 sub-competencies a student's capstone project addresses. As all projects do not capture each sub-competency, this measure gives us a programmatic view of the overall competencies that SPA students express in their capstone research projects. Students identify the competencies and sub-competencies represented through the capstone process, and readers evaluate these student strengths for each project at the end of every semester.
3. *MPA Student Exit Survey:* After students complete the Capstone Seminar each semester, they are asked to complete a student exit survey. The survey is given to students as part of their graduation packet but filling out the survey is optional. The student exit survey asks students to assess the MPA program's effectiveness and contribution to improving students' knowledge, as well as oral and written communication skills; meeting students' educational needs; improving students' abilities in their current work positions and improving students' abilities in the job market.
4. *MPA Graduate Employment:* SPA gathers information from students at completion of the Capstone Seminar each semester as to whether they are employed or seeking employment at time of graduation and, if so, in which sectors and types of organizations.

Four Learning Objectives

To assess the four learning objectives, we look to rubric data for each student completing his/her capstone from the primary reader and the secondary reader. This report looks at data from the Summer 2024, Fall 2024, and Spring 2025 semesters. The four objectives are:

- 1) Demonstrate a broad base of knowledge concerning public or nonprofit management, policy, and research;
- 2) Use effective critical thinking and analytical skills to solve problems in public and nonprofit settings in a manner that will improve the public good;
- 3) Communicate effectively in writing; and
- 4) Communicate effectively in speaking.

In the Capstone rubrics, the primary instructor (first reader) and the second reader (SPA faculty) were asked to assess students on each learning objective.

- 1=Below proficient
- 2=Proficient
- 3=Above proficient

Not every student received a score from each reader in every category, which explains the variance in the number of students across learning objectives.

Learning Objective 1: Base of Knowledge

“The student’s demonstration of his/her knowledge of public affairs or nonprofit research, theory, and practice.”

The following tables aggregate the data from the Summer 2024, Fall 2024, and Spring 2025 semesters to provide data points that are more readily accessible.

Program/Modality	N	Average score of first and second readers
Traditional MPA	61	2.32
Accelerated MPA	8	2.25
Executive MPA	12	2.50
Online only MPA	20	2.60

Concentration	N	Average score of first and second readers
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	2.50
Education Policy	0	N/A
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	2.25
Environmental Policy and Management	12	2.75
Gender-Based Violence	0	N/A
Local Government	7	2.42
Nonprofit Management	9	1.89
Managing for Social Equity	2	2
Public Policy Analysis	9	2.78
No Concentration	52	2.37

Learning Objective 2: Critical Thinking

“The student’s demonstration of critical thinking skills.”

Program/Modality	N	Average score of first and second readers
Traditional MPA	61	2.38
Accelerated MPA	8	2.38
Executive MPA	12	2.50
Online only MPA	20	2.60

Concentration	N	Average score of first and second readers
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	2.50
Education Policy	0	N/A
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	2.25
Environmental Policy and Management	12	2.67
Gender-Based Violence	0	N/A
Local Government	7	2.42
Managing for Social Equity	2	2.00
Nonprofit Management	9	1.89
Public Policy Analysis	9	2.78
No Concentration	52	2.46

Learning Objective 3: Written Communication

“The student’s demonstration of written communication skills.”

Program/Modality	N	Average score of first and second readers
Traditional MPA	61	2.26
Accelerated MPA	8	2.50
Executive MPA	12	2.58
Online only MPA	20	2.55

Concentration	N	Average score of first and second readers
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	2.50
Education Policy	0	N/A
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	2.13
Environmental Policy and Management	12	2.50
Gender-Based Violence	0	N/A
Local Government	7	2.29
Managing for Social Equity	2	2.50
Nonprofit Management	9	1.89
Public Policy Analysis	9	2.67
No Concentration	52	2.42

Learning Objective 4: Oral Communication

“The student’s demonstration of oral communication skills.”

Program/Modality	N	Average score of first and second readers
Traditional MPA	61	2.38
Accelerated MPA	8	2.38
Executive MPA	12	2.75
Online only MPA	20	2.50

Concentration	N	Average score of first and second readers
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	2.50
Education Policy	0	N/A
Emergency Management and	8	2.38

Homeland Security		
Environmental Policy and Management	12	2.58
Gender-Based Violence	0	N/A
Local Government	7	2.29
Managing for Social Equity	2	2.50
Nonprofit Management	9	2.00
Public Policy Analysis	9	2.67
No Concentration	52	2.48

Learning Objectives Summary

The capstone assessment data from the 2024–2025 academic year provide a comprehensive look at student performance on the four MPA program learning objectives. These were assessed using a common rubric scored by both a primary instructor and a second SPA faculty reader. Scores range from 1 (below proficient) to 3 (above proficient). Across all program modalities and concentrations, student outcomes suggest generally proficient performance, with areas of strength and targeted opportunities for program improvement.

Learning Objective 1 – Knowledge Base:

Average scores for this objective ranged from 2.25 to 2.60 across modalities, indicating consistent proficiency:

- Online MPA students scored highest (2.60), followed by Executive MPA (2.50), while Traditional MPA and Accelerated MPA scored slightly lower (2.32 and 2.25, respectively).
- Across concentrations, students in Public Policy Analysis (2.78) and Environmental Policy and Management (2.75) scored highest. Conversely, Nonprofit Management students had the lowest average (1.89), suggesting a potential area for targeted curricular or instructional support.

Learning Objective 2 – Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills:

Performance on this objective closely mirrored Knowledge Base scores, with Online MPA (2.60) and Executive MPA (2.50) students again outperforming their Traditional and Accelerated peers.

- By concentration, Public Policy Analysis (2.78) and Environmental Policy and Management (2.67) students demonstrated the strongest analytical thinking.
- As with LO1, Nonprofit Management students had the lowest average (1.89), and Managing for Social Equity also showed lower performance (2.00). These concentrations may benefit from enhanced scaffolding of analytical problem-solving tasks throughout the curriculum.

Learning Objective 3 – Written Communication:

Average scores for written communication were slightly lower overall than those for knowledge and critical thinking:

- Executive MPA (2.58) and Online MPA (2.55) students performed most strongly, while Traditional MPA students averaged 2.26.
- Concentration-level data again highlight Public Policy Analysis (2.67) and Environmental Policy and Management (2.50) as top performers.
- Nonprofit Management (1.89) students scored lowest on written communication, continuing a trend across objectives that signals a need for increased writing support within that concentration.

Learning Objective 4 – Oral Communication:

Oral communication was one of the strongest areas overall, especially among Executive MPA (2.75) and Online MPA (2.50) students. These results may reflect greater emphasis on presentations or verbal engagement within professional-focused cohorts.

- Among concentrations, Public Policy Analysis (2.67) and Environmental Policy and Management (2.58) again led in performance.
- Nonprofit Management (2.00) and Local Government (2.29) students had the lowest oral communication scores, suggesting further development opportunities, such as more structured presentations or facilitation practice.

Conclusion:

MPA students are demonstrating proficiency across all four learning objectives, with particularly strong results from Executive and Online MPA cohorts and in concentrations like Public Policy Analysis and Environmental Policy and Management. Lower performance among Nonprofit Management students across all objectives—particularly in writing, critical thinking, and knowledge base—suggests the need for intentional instructional and advising support within that track. These findings will inform targeted faculty development, curriculum adjustments, and advising practices to ensure consistent and equitable student achievement across all pathways.

Five Competencies

To assess the five NASPAA-identified competencies, we look to survey data from three sources: The *Capstone Rubrics* (Summer 2024, Fall 2024, and Spring 2025); the *MPA Student Exit Surveys* (Fall 2024 and Spring 2025); and the *SPA Alumni Survey* (2019). We analyzed specific questions for each competency, identified below. The five competencies are as follows:

- 1) Lead and manage in public governance;
- 2) Participate in the policy process;
- 3) Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions;
- 4) Articulate and apply a public service perspective; and
- 5) Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

Competency 1: Lead and Manage

Modality/ Concentration	N	1 = This category is both relevant to the project AND was performed proficiently	2 = This category was relevant to the project but was NOT performed proficiently	3 = Not relevant to project
Traditional MPA	61	32	0	29
Accelerated MPA	8	3	0	5
Executive MPA	12	9	0	3
Online only MPA	20	12	0	8
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	1	0	1
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	5	0	3
Environmental Policy and Management	12	9	0	3
Local Government	7	4	0	3
Managing for Social Equity	2	1	0	1
Nonprofit Management	9	4	0	5
Public Policy Analysis	9	5	0	4
No Concentration	52	27	0	25

Data Source: Faculty Readers’ Ratings of Capstones

Source	Data Collection	Sampling	A great deal	A good deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
MPA Exit Survey	“How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘my understanding and ability to apply theories of leadership to motivate people, build teams, and manage	Summer 2024 N=2	1		1		
		Fall 2024 N= 14	6	4	3	1	

	change”	Spring 2025 N=1					1
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Program/Modality

Key Findings:

- **Demonstration of Competency**
This competency is relevant to 54% of projects. Across all modalities and concentrations, *none* of the student projects were rated as relevant but *not performed proficiently*. This suggests that when the competency was addressed in a project, students consistently met the expected standard of proficiency.
- **Projects Without Relevance:**
The remaining 46% completed projects where this competency was *not relevant*. This may reflect the diverse focus areas within the Capstone projects, which vary based on student interest, career goals, and concentration.
- **By Program Modality:**
 - Traditional MPA students represented the largest group with more than half (52%) demonstrating this competency proficiently.
 - Executive MPA students had the highest percentage of students demonstrating proficiency (75%), followed by Online-only MPA (60%) and Accelerated MPA (38%).
 - These differences may reflect the greater leadership experience among Executive students or the structured learning environments available to Online students.
- **By Concentration:**
 - Competency 1 was most commonly demonstrated in projects from students concentrating in Environmental Policy and Management (75%), Emergency Management and Homeland Security (62.5%), and Public Policy Analysis (55.5%).
 - Concentrations with smaller Ns, such as Disasters and Hazards, Managing for Social Equity, and Nonprofit Management, showed fewer demonstrations of the competency but no indications of underperformance where the competency was relevant.

Interpretation:

The data suggest that CU Denver MPA students are generally successful in demonstrating leadership and management skills when their Capstone project addresses this competency. The absence of any "not proficient" ratings when the competency was relevant underscores effective curriculum alignment and student preparation in this area. However, the fact that nearly half of the projects did not address this competency signals an opportunity to encourage more intentional integration of leadership and management considerations across a wider range of Capstone topics, particularly in concentrations less frequently associated with administrative decision-making or organizational leadership.

Future steps may include reinforcing this competency earlier in the curriculum, guiding students to consider management implications in Capstone planning, or integrating reflective components that explicitly link project outcomes to leadership practice.

In answer to the question, “How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘my understanding and ability to apply theories of leadership to motivate people, build teams, and manage change,’” 71.43% of graduating student respondents in AY 2024–2025

responded positively—either “a great deal” or “a good deal.” This reflects a decrease compared to the 86.11% of graduating students who responded positively in AY 2023–2024.

Competency 2: Participate in the Policy Process

Modality/ Concentration	N	1 = This category is both relevant to the project AND was performed proficiently	2 = This category was relevant to the project but was NOT performed proficiently	3 = Not relevant to project
Traditional MPA	61	34	0	27
Accelerated MPA	8	3	0	5
Executive MPA	12	7	0	5
Online only MPA	20	12	0	8
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	1	0	1
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	5	0	3
Environmental Policy and Management	12	9	0	3
Local Government	7	4	0	3
Managing for Social Equity	2	1	0	1
Nonprofit Management	9	5	0	4
Public Policy Analysis	9	4	0	5
No Concentration	52	27	0	25

Data Source: Faculty Readers' Ratings of Capstones

Source	Data Collection	Sampling	A great deal	A good deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
MPA Exit Survey	"How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in the following areas? 'My understanding and ability to apply tools for engaging citizens in the policy process'"	Summer 2024 N=2	1	1			
		Fall 2024 N=14	4	7	3		
		Spring 2025 N=1					1

Program/Modality

Key Findings:

- **Demonstration of Proficiency:**
This competency was relevant to 54% of projects. As with Competency 1, no students were marked as performing this competency *without proficiency* when it was relevant—an encouraging sign of instructional effectiveness and student capability.
- **Projects Without Relevance:**
For 47%, this competency was determined to be not applicable to their Capstone project. While Capstones are designed to reflect student interest and specialization, the relatively high number of projects not engaging policy process content suggests that this competency may be underrepresented in some concentrations or project types.
- **By Program Modality:**
 - Traditional MPA students again made up the largest group, with 56% demonstrating proficiency in the policy process.
 - Executive MPA students showed strong performance (58%), followed by Online-only MPA (60%) and Accelerated MPA (38%).
 - These results largely mirror the pattern seen with Competency 1.
- **By Concentration:**
 - The highest rates of demonstrated proficiency were seen in Environmental Policy and Management (75%), Emergency Management and Homeland Security (62.5%), and Nonprofit Management (55.5%).
 - Students in Public Policy Analysis—a concentration one might expect to show high alignment—had a slightly lower demonstration rate (44%).

Interpretation:

Student Capstone projects reflect a strong ability to demonstrate participation in the policy process when that competency is incorporated into the project scope. The consistent lack of “not proficient” ratings when the competency is relevant reinforces the program’s strength in preparing students to understand and engage in policy-making, advocacy, and implementation processes.

However, as with Competency 1, nearly half of the projects did not address this competency. This highlights an opportunity for faculty to more explicitly scaffold the inclusion of policy process elements across a broader set of Capstone experiences. Encouraging students—particularly those outside traditionally policy-focused concentrations—to consider the policy implications of their topics could foster a more integrated understanding of how public administration intersects with governance and regulation.

Future considerations may include targeted guidance during Capstone proposal development or the incorporation of reflective prompts that prompt students to identify and articulate the policy context of their work.

In answer to the question, “How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘My understanding and ability to apply tools for engaging citizens in the policy process,’” 76.47% of graduating students in AY 2024–2025 responded positively—either “a great deal” or “a good deal.” This represents a decrease from the 83.33% of graduating students who responded positively in AY 2023–2024.

Competency 3: Analyze, Synthesize, Think Critically, Solve Problems, and Make Decisions

Modality/ Concentration	N	1 = This category is both relevant to the project AND was performed proficiently	2 = This category was relevant to the project but was NOT performed proficiently	3 = Not relevant to project
Traditional MPA	61	38	0	23
Accelerated MPA	8	4	0	4
Executive MPA	12	9	0	3
Online only MPA	20	12	0	8
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	1	0	1
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	6	0	2
Environmental Policy and Management	12	10	0	2
Local Government	7	4	0	3
Managing for Social Equity	2	1	0	1
Nonprofit Management	9	4	0	5
Public Policy Analysis	9	7	0	2
No Concentration	52	30	0	22

Data Source: Faculty Readers’ Ratings of Capstones

Source	Data Collection	Sampling	A great deal	A good deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
MPA Exit Survey	How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘My ability to select and use appropriate research methods to	Summer 2024 N=2		1		1	
		Fall 2024 N= 14	7	4	3		

	find, collect, synthesize, and analyze data?””	Spring 2025 N= 1			1		
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Program/Modality

Key Findings:

- **Demonstration of Competency:**
This competency was relevant to 56% of student projects. Importantly, zero students were marked as performing the competency without proficiency when it was applicable, a consistent trend observed across all competencies thus far.
- **Projects Without Relevance:**
The remaining 44% worked on projects where this competency was deemed not relevant. While slightly lower than in Competency 1 and 2, this is still a notable portion, given the broad applicability of critical thinking and problem-solving skills across public administration.
- **By Program Modality:**
 - Traditional MPA students again had the largest representation, with 62% demonstrating this competency proficiently.
 - Executive MPA students had the strongest showing at 75%, reflecting their applied professional experience and likely confidence with analytical approaches.
 - Online-only MPA students also demonstrated a strong performance rate of 60%, while Accelerated MPA students showed proficiency in 50% of cases.
- **By Concentration:**
 - Concentrations with the highest proficiency rates include Environmental Policy and Management (83%), Public Policy Analysis (78%), and Emergency Management and Homeland Security (75%).
 - These findings align with the analytic demands of these fields, where data interpretation, evaluation, and evidence-based decision-making are often central.
 - Lower rates of relevance were again observed in smaller concentrations, though all demonstrated proficiency when applicable.

Interpretation:

Competency 3 represents the core analytical capacity expected of MPA graduates, and the data suggest strong student preparation in this area. That none of the students received a “not proficient” rating reinforces the strength of the program’s emphasis on analytical reasoning and problem-solving. This consistency also suggests strong alignment between the curriculum and Capstone expectations in developing these essential skills.

However, that 44% of Capstone projects did not address this competency raises questions about how projects are scoped and the extent to which analytic skills are being embedded in Capstone planning and execution. While some Capstones may focus more on qualitative inquiry, stakeholder engagement, or program evaluation, nearly all public service challenges require some form of analysis and decision-

making.

Moving forward, our faculty may consider encouraging students to explicitly frame their Capstone questions in ways that require analysis or decision-making—whether through data use, systems thinking, evaluation design, or comparative analysis. Enhancing the visibility of this competency across Capstone pathways will help ensure graduates are consistently applying this critical skill set, regardless of concentration or modality.

In answer to the question, “How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘My ability to select and use appropriate research methods to find, collect, synthesize, and analyze data,’” 64.71% of graduating students in AY 2024–2025 responded positively—either “a great deal” or “a good deal.” This reflects a notable decrease from the 88.89% of students who responded positively in AY 2023–2024.

Competency 4: Articulate/Apply a Public Service Perspective

Modality/ Concentration	N	1 = This category is both relevant to the project AND was performed proficiently	2 = This category was relevant to the project but was NOT performed proficiently	3 = Not relevant to project
Traditional MPA	61	45	0	16
Accelerated MPA	8	6	0	2
Executive MPA	12	8	0	4
Online only MPA	20	15	0	5
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	2	0	0
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	7	0	1
Environmental Policy and Management	12	8	0	4
Local Government	7	5	0	2
Managing for Social Equity	2	2	0	0
Nonprofit Management	9	7	0	2
Public Policy Analysis	9	7	0	2
No Concentration	52	36	0	16

Data Source: Faculty Readers’ Ratings of Capstones

Source	Data Collection	Sampling	A great deal	A good deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
MPA Exit	“How much do you believe your coursework at SPA	Summer 2024	1	1			

Survey	has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘My ability to identify public service values and public integrity?’”	N=2					
		Fall 2024 N=14	9	2	2	1	
		Spring 2025 N=1			1		

Program/Modality

Key Findings:

- **High Overall Proficiency:**
As with previous competencies, no students were marked as performing it without proficiency—suggesting strong alignment between program values and student learning.
- **Broad Relevance Across Projects:**
This competency was deemed *not relevant* in only 50 cases (24%), significantly lower than in other competencies. This reflects the centrality of public service values across Capstone topics and indicates that students are generally selecting projects that engage themes of service, equity, and the public good.
- **By Program Modality:**
 - Traditional MPA students had a high rate of proficiency (74%).
 - Online-only MPA and Executive MPA students showed similarly strong performance rates at 75% and 67%, respectively.
 - Accelerated MPA students performed notably well, with 75% proficiency despite being early-career students, suggesting strong values-based messaging early in the curriculum.
- **By Concentration:**
 - 100% of students in Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management and Managing for Social Equity demonstrated this competency when relevant.
 - High proficiency was also observed in Nonprofit Management (78%), Emergency Management and Homeland Security (87.5%), and Public Policy Analysis (78%).
 - Even among students with *no declared concentration*, proficiency was high (69%), indicating that the value of public service is deeply embedded across the MPA experience.

Interpretation:

Competency 4 is clearly a programmatic strength. The high rate of demonstrated proficiency and the lower number of projects in which the competency was deemed irrelevant reflect the MPA program's strong identity as a mission-driven, service-oriented degree. Students appear to internalize and apply the values of public service throughout their Capstone work—whether through project goals, stakeholder engagement, or policy impact.

These findings also suggest that this competency is not only being effectively taught but is also consistently reinforced through advising, curriculum, and classroom culture. Our faculty may wish to continue emphasizing reflective practice, ethical decision-making, and service orientation throughout the Capstone process.

While current results are promising, our faculty may consider encouraging even deeper integration of this competency into Capstone rubrics—perhaps adding narrative prompts or explicit reflection components that invite students to articulate their personal commitment to the public good and how it shaped their project choices and findings.

In answer to the question, “How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in ‘My ability to identify public service values and public integrity,’” 70.59% of graduating students in AY 2024–2025 responded positively—either “a great deal” or “a good deal.” This represents a decrease from the 97.22% of students who responded positively in AY 2023–2024.

Competency 5: Communicate and Interact

Modality/ Concentration	N	1 = This category is both relevant to the project AND was performed proficiently	2 = This category was relevant to the project but was NOT performed proficiently	3 = Not relevant to project
Traditional MPA	61	36	0	25
Accelerated MPA	8	4	0	4
Executive MPA	12	7	0	5
Online only MPA	20	12	0	8
Disasters, Hazards, and Emergency Management	2	1	0	1
Emergency Management and Homeland Security	8	5	0	3
Environmental Policy and Management	12	9	0	3
Local Government	7	3	0	4
Managing for Social Equity	2	1	0	1
Nonprofit Management	9	5	0	4
Public Policy Analysis	9	7	0	2
No Concentration	52	28	0	24

Data Source: Faculty Readers' Ratings of Capstones

Source	Data Collection	Sampling	A great deal	A good deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
MPA Exit Survey	"How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your abilities and understanding in 'my ability to recognize and manage the ethics of competing values'"	Summer 2024 N=2	1	1			
		Fall 2024 N= 14	7	5	2		
		Spring 2025 N=1					1

Program/Modality

Key Findings:

- **Demonstration of Competency**
This competency is relevant to 59% of projects. As with the previous four competencies, no students were marked as not proficient when the competency was relevant—highlighting consistent success in competency alignment and instruction.
- **Projects Without Relevance:**
41% completed Capstone projects where this competency was not considered relevant. This may reflect differences in project type, such as those with limited public-facing components, stakeholder engagement, or workforce diversity analysis.
- **By Program Modality:**
 - Traditional MPA students demonstrated proficiency in 59% of cases, with the remainder of projects not addressing the competency.
 - Online-only MPA students performed comparably at 60%, while Executive MPA students showed slightly lower rates (58%)—potentially reflecting project scopes focused more on internal processes than external interaction.
 - Accelerated MPA students demonstrated this competency in 50% of projects.
- **By Concentration:**
 - Highest demonstration rates were seen among students in Public Policy Analysis (78%), Environmental Policy and Management (75%), and Emergency Management and Homeland Security (63%).
 - Lower relevance was observed among Local Government students (only 3 of 7 projects addressed this competency), although all that did, demonstrated it proficiently.
 - Students with no declared concentration had a balanced result: 28 demonstrated proficiency, and 24 had projects where the competency was not applicable.

Interpretation:

Competency 5—focused on communication and collaboration across diverse audiences—is a key attribute of effective public service professionals. The Capstone data show that students are consistently successful in demonstrating this skill when their project context supports it. The absence of any “not proficient” ratings reinforces confidence in students’ preparation for workplace and community engagement.

That said, the fact that over 40% of projects did not engage this competency suggests a need to further encourage its integration—especially given the increasing importance of communication, inclusion, and responsiveness in public administration. Projects that involve stakeholder interviews, community feedback, interagency collaboration, or public communication inherently support this competency and could be highlighted in advising sessions and Capstone preparation.

SPA faculty may consider revisiting Capstone guidance to ensure students are explicitly considering audience, equity, and communication channels in project design. Promoting inclusive practice as a foundational lens—rather than a standalone competency—could also help more students naturally incorporate it into their work.

In answer to the question, “How much do you believe your coursework at SPA has improved your

abilities and understanding in ‘my ability to recognize and manage the ethics of competing values’,” 76.47% of graduating students in AY 2024–2025 responded positively—either “a great deal” or “a good deal.” This marks a decline from the 94.44% of students who responded positively in AY 2023–2024.

Two Outcomes

To assess the MPA program's overall career impact we currently have one outcome:

- 1) Graduates will work in professional management or policy positions in public or nonprofit settings.

Outcome 1: Employment

To assess this outcome, we collect data from graduating students via a final capstone form. The specific question asked: *Please choose which description most closely matches your current employment status?*

The student reported competencies capstone form was updated in Spring 2025 for students to specify their employment status pre-program. Understanding students' starting points allows for more nuanced program evaluation and helps identify whether the curriculum is effectively serving both early-career and mid-career professionals. This supports NASPAA accreditation goals, which emphasize tracking learning outcomes and ensuring equitable learning opportunities across student subgroups. However, when editing the form, students were not able to respond to the description of their employment status. Therefore, the Table 1 below represents student respondents from Summer and Fall 2024 while Table 2 represents employment status from Spring 2025 respondents.

Table 1. Summer and Fall 2024 Employment Sectors

Employer	Number
National or central government in the same country as the program	2
State, provincial or regional government in the same country as the program	6
City, County, or other local government in the same country as the program	11
Government not in the same country as the program (all levels) or international quasi-governmental	2
Nonprofit domestic-oriented	8
Nonprofit/NGOs internationally-oriented	0
Private Sector - Research/Consulting	1
Private Sector but not research/ consulting	4
Obtaining further education	0
Military Service	1
Unemployed (not seeking employment)	0
Unemployed (seeking employment)	5
Total	40

The majority of graduates from Summer and Fall 2024 entered or remained in public sector employment, with 19 of 40 graduates (48%) working in local, state, or national government roles within the U.S. This reflects the program’s strong alignment with public service career pathways.

The nonprofit sector was also a significant employer, with 8 graduates (20%) working in domestic-oriented nonprofit organizations. No graduates reported working in internationally oriented NGOs.

The private sector accounted for 5 graduates (12.5%), with one in research/consulting and four in other private roles.

Notably, 5 graduates (12.5%) were actively seeking employment, suggesting a need for ongoing career support post-graduation. No respondents indicated pursuit of further education or being unemployed by choice.

Table 2. Spring 2025 Pre/Post-Program Employment

Pre-MPA Employment	Post-MPA Employment Frequency	
Employed full-time → Employed full-time	15	15
Employed full-time → Employed part-time	1	1
Employed full-time → Not employed, seeking	2	2
Employed full-time → Intern	1	1
Employed part-time → Employed full-time	3	3
Employed part-time → Employed part-time	1	1
Not employed, not seeking → Not employed, seeking	1	1
Self-employed → Employed full-time	1	1

Key Findings:

- **Retention of Full-Time Employment:**
The majority of students (15 of 24, or 62.5%) were employed full-time both before and after completing the MPA program, suggesting stability or advancement within existing roles.
- **Upward Mobility:**
Three students who entered the program employed part-time reported being employed full-time at graduation, indicating positive career progression.
- **Post-Graduation Job Seeking:**
Three students (12.5%) reported being unemployed but seeking employment at the end of the program, including two who had previously been employed full-time and one who was not employed before. This points to a subgroup for whom job placement support may be particularly important post-graduation.
- **Internship Transition:**
One student moved from full-time employment to an internship, which may reflect a career pivot or strategic upskilling effort. This could warrant follow-up advising or employer engagement efforts.
- **Nontraditional Employment Paths:**
One student who was self-employed prior to the program reported securing full-time employment after graduation, suggesting the MPA program helped support a transition into a more traditional or organizational role.

Interpretation:

This early data indicates that the MPA program is contributing to career stability and advancement for the majority of students, particularly those entering the program with part-time or nontraditional employment. While many students retained full-time roles throughout the program—often a sign of professional development for mid-career professionals—the transitions from part-time to full-time work are particularly meaningful markers of career growth for early-career students.

At the same time, the presence of graduates seeking employment at program completion underscores the importance of continued investment in career services, alumni networking, and employer partnerships, especially for students aiming to shift sectors or roles.

Assessment Report Conclusions

Assessment of student learning in the MPA program during academic year 2024–2025 was conducted through Capstone rubric evaluations and the Capstone inventory of competencies. The four program learning objectives—demonstrating a broad knowledge base, using critical thinking and analytical skills, communicating effectively in writing, and communicating effectively in speaking—were scored by two faculty readers using a 3-point proficiency scale. Across all modalities and concentrations, students demonstrated consistent proficiency in these core areas, with average scores ranging from 2.25 to 2.75. Students in concentrations such as Public Policy Analysis and Environmental Policy and Management consistently scored at the upper end across all four

objectives, while Nonprofit Management students showed lower averages, particularly in writing and analytical thinking—highlighting an area for targeted instructional support.

In parallel, students' performance on the five NASPAA-defined competencies was evaluated based on whether each competency was relevant to their Capstone project and, if so, whether it was demonstrated proficiently. Importantly, across all five competencies, no student was rated as “not proficient” when the competency was relevant—indicating strong alignment between curriculum design and applied student performance. Competency 4 (articulate and apply a public service perspective) was the most widely addressed, appearing in 76% of Capstones, while others—such as lead and manage in public governance and participate in the policy process—were addressed in just over half. This variation reflects the diversity of student project topics and suggests opportunities to scaffold broader integration of underrepresented competencies during Capstone planning.

However, this year's exit survey responses indicated a noticeable decline in students' self-reported growth across all five competencies when compared to 2023–2024 results. For example, only 64.71% of students reported improvement in their ability to apply research methods, down from 88.89% last year. Similar downward trends were seen in leadership, public service values, and policy engagement. This decline in positive exit survey responses should be interpreted cautiously, as the total number of survey respondents fell from 37 in 2023–2024 to just 17 in 2024–2025—a 54% decrease. This significant reduction in sample size limits the generalizability of the findings and may amplify the impact of outlier responses. It also highlights the importance of reinforcing the exit survey process to ensure broader participation, which would better represent the full student experience.

Together, these findings reflect a program that is effectively preparing students with both the academic foundation and applied skills necessary for leadership in public service. The consistently strong outcomes across learning objectives demonstrate instructional effectiveness, while the competency-based evaluations confirm that students can successfully apply what they've learned in complex, real-world contexts. Continued attention to equity across concentrations and intentional competency integration in Capstone advising will further strengthen these outcomes.