Gauging Alumni Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Masters of Public Administration (MPA) Program at Texas State University- San Marcos in Meeting Its Mission: A Follow-Up Study

by

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An Applied Research Project
(Political Science 5397)
Submitted to the Department of Political Science
Texas State University
In Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Public Administration

Fall 2008

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Abstract

The Texas State University Master in Public Administration (MPA) graduate program is the setting of this research. According to its mission statement, the focus of the MPA program is to prepare students for careers as managers and leaders in public service. The primary purpose of this research is to survey alumni of the MPA program to obtain their perceptions of the program success in meeting its mission. The alumni survey serves two purposes. The first is to assess the effectiveness of the MPA program in meeting its mission based on the perceptions of alumni. Second, the research provides data that can be used in the MPA program 2009 re-accreditation self-study.

This study is a follow-up to Cindy Cavazos's 2000 ARP, which surveyed graduates from 1991-1999 to gauge their perceptions of the MPA program in meeting its mission. Those findings indicated that, overall, alumni believed that the MPA program was successful in carrying out its mission.

This recent survey was open to alumni to complete in the early fall of 2008. Recent alumni (graduated between 2002 and 2008), the group since the last self study, was the focus of the research. This group was made up of a total of 159 students, and 70 completed the survey. Of the alumni that graduated more than 7 years ago (pre-2002), 42 responded. The results of the present survey are compared to the survey findings from the research conducted in 2000.

The results of the 2008 survey indicate that, overall, alumni are satisfied with the MPA program and believe the mission is being carried out. The items that showed a significant increase in satisfaction, as compared to the 2000 survey, are course work, applied research projects, networking opportunities, technology, emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service, providing professional and educational opportunities to a diverse student body, integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public management, and preparing students as managers and leaders in public service

The following were alumni recommendations to improve the MPA program at Texas State University:
- ➢ Do more to prepare students for the Applied Research Project by introducing the conceptual framework and research methodology class earlier in the program
- ➢ Offer grant-writing classes
- ➢ Provide skills in oral communication (e.g., public speaking)
- ➢ Do more to assist pre-service students and students to find employment and provide career advising as well as internship opportunities
- ➢ Provide more mentoring and networking opportunities for current students and alumni

About the Author

Margina Escobar is a student in the Texas State University MPA program and received her undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin. She is a member of the American Society of Public Administrators (ASPA) organization and ASPA's Section on Women in Public Administration (SWPA). Mrs. Escobar has been employed with the Round Rock Independent School District (RRISD) for 6 years. To contact the author by email write to: marginaescobar@hotmail.com.

Author Gratitude

I would like to take the time to give thanks to those in my life who have helped me in this journey. First, is my heavenly father for blessing me with such a wonderful family and an amazing life – my cup is truly overflowing! Jesus Christ is my rock and foundation. He is my strength and has made all things possible. His grace and mercy are always sufficient. My joy is found in Him. Praise God for his everlasting love and faithfulness.

Thank you to my parents, Jose & Gioconda, for all the sacrifices they made to bring me to this country to live out the American dream. Si se puede! Your example has been instrumental in my life. I see how God has blessed you and you are now reaping the rewards of years of hard work. To my husband, Milton, baby I love you. Thank you for your encouragement, love and friendship. You are my best friend and words cannot say how thankful I am that God has brought you to hold my hand throughout the journey of life. To my sister, Arlette, thanks for always being there for me and having a listening ear and of course thank you for my nephew, Stone whom I love. Thank you to all my family (Tia Lorena, Chris, Jessica, Abuelita Margarita, Tio Chico y familia, Tio Miguel y familia, Tia Candiad, the Quijada family y muchos mas) for your support all these years.

I am so thankful for my church family at House of Power Outreach in Round Rock, Texas- especially the Praise & Worship team (Ratonia, Stephanie, Margarita, Linda and Pastor Rita) and Children's Ministry group. Much thanks to Pastor Tory & Rita Gant and Pastor Joe & Shawna Grimm for years of biblical teaching. You have helped me grow so much in Christ. I am so appreciative of your faithfulness in serving God and for feeding my spirit all these years. Thank you to my friends (Adriana, Rita, Edna, Teresa, Lisa, and many more) and co-workers at RRISD for your encouragement throughout this journey.

Thanks to the faculty and staff at the Texas State MPA program. Dr. Shields for her guidance during this project; Dr. Weinberger (loved all his funny stories) & Dr. Balanoff (taught me real world practical wisdom) because they helped me learn so much about public administration and are my favorite professors. I am grateful to Mary O'Neill who edited my paper and to Dodie in the MPA Office for always being so helpful and kind.

Finally, I thank all of you for your love and friendship. I am so grateful for my family and friends and I am so blessed that you are in my life.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Assessment of any kind is primarily used to find out *if* what is being done is actually making a difference. In higher education many questions arise that provoke the need for assessment data. What data are available or can be gathered to check the effectiveness of a program? How can students be prepared so that they are equipped with the right tools and knowledge? What can be improved or changed in order to meet current needs? How do you know whether a program's mission is being carried out successfully? Many methods can be used to obtain such data, and one of the most effective methods is surveying students who have completed the program–alumni. Essentially, an alumni survey provides a unique perspective and valuable feedback.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research paper is to assess whether the masters in public administration (MPA) program at Texas State University is effectively meeting its mission by gauging the perceptions of the program's alumni. The research focuses on alumni who have graduated since 2000, the time of the most recent program self-study for re-accreditation. The research is a follow-up to Cavazos' 2000 applied research project (ARP). In her paper, Ms. Cavazos developed a conceptual framework from the institutional setting using the program's mission statement (Cavazos 2000, 44). She surveyed Texas State MPA alumni in the spring of 2000 as part of the re-accreditation

process for the MPA program. This study draws upon the Cavazos study to learn the attitudes of current (2002-2008) alumni toward the Texas State MPA program.

In addition, the survey findings can help with the accreditation process. The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) accredits MPA programs. The alumni survey results can be used as part of the data required for the next round of the NASPAA re-accreditation process[1] in 2009. Therefore, the alumni survey serves dual purposes: to provide valuable feedback from alumni to the Texas State University MPA program, as well as to provide data for the self-study.

Furthermore, the study can be used to observe changes and/or similarities in alumni attitudes as compared to the Cavazos study from 2000. Mission-based survey questions continue to be used because, like the Cavazos study, NASPAA requires mission-based assessment.

This research is important because it should give department heads and faculty members the perspective of key stakeholders–alumni. Alumni evaluations and perceptions can help determine whether the program is meeting its mission. Alumni perceptions provide beneficial data to current and incoming students as well as for program improvement. The results should assist faculty in program improvement decisions in areas such as curriculum, instruction, faculty performance, networking opportunities, and the competencies and skills that are woven into the MPA mission statement.

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[1] For further information on the NASPAA accreditation and re-accreditation process, visit the NAPSAA Web site at www.naspaa.org.

Preview of Chapters

The study is divided into six chapters. Each chapter begins with a statement of purpose and concludes with a chapter summary. Chapter 2 presents a review of the scholarly literature on alumni surveys and their use as well as mission-based assessment efforts. Chapter 3 explains the institutional setting of this research–the Texas State University MPA program. In addition, the chapter also develops the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology and operationalizes the conceptual framework in the form of the survey questions found in the alumni survey. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the alumni survey as well as a comparison with the Cavazos (2000) study.   Chapter 6 concludes the study and provides a summary and analysis of the project as well as recommendations for program improvement and future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose

  The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview and examine some of the topics related to assessment in higher education with a focus on alumni surveys. Through a review of the literature, the chapter examines the purposes of assessments, stakeholders involved, assessment methods, the role that mission statements play in the assessment process, the importance of obtaining alumni data, the common components found in alumni surveys, as well as methodological challenges found in conducting alumni survey research.

  The public administration graduate program at Texas State University is the institutional setting for this research (see chapter 3). The MPA program is driven by its mission statement, which focuses on preparing students for careers as managers and leaders in public service (Texas State 2002, 8). Texas State University's MPA program is accredited through NASPAA and has produced four self-study reports to date. Therefore, the NASPAA accrediting standards and their connection to alumni surveys in public administration graduate-level program accreditation are also discussed at the end of this chapter.[2]

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[2] For NASPAA's 2008 Standards see:
http://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/document/OFFICIAL_DOCUMENTS_2008_standards_only.pdf
In addition, for information on the NASPAA accreditation process go to:
http://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/accreditation.asp
For programs interested in seeking NASPAA accreditation visit:
http://www.naspaa.org/accreditation/seeking/seeking.asp

Introduction

There is increased pressure on educational institutions to assess their program effectiveness (Richter & Ruebling 2003, 179). Consequently, the impact of higher education in our society is vast and includes many stakeholders[3] such as legislators, policy makers, students, parents, faculty, employers, industry representatives, accrediting bodies, and the general public (Borden 2005, 61). These stakeholders have a vested interest in the outcomes produced by higher education and the success of graduates, and they are also demanding a greater degree of accountability. One of the most important groups of stakeholders is alumni because they are able to provide feedback on their perceptions and satisfaction with a program. This feedback can, in turn, be used to gauge the effectiveness of a program. Including alumni in the assessment process is vital.

Program assessment is necessary in higher education and can help provide important information regarding institutional effectiveness. That is why assessment methods are widely used to gauge customer satisfaction. Before examining the stakeholders involved in assessment and the different methods of assessment, it is important to define assessment. There is not one universal definition for assessment. Rather, many definitions for assessment exist.

Gates et al. (2002, iii) define assessment as "the start-to-finish process of examining quality or productivity." For Golich (1998, 1) assessment is "an ongoing process of understanding and improving student learning."[4] Wright (2004, 1) notes that

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[3] For examples of stakeholders see Apostolou 1999, 177; Delaney 1995, 6-8; Denoya 2005, F2B-10; Enz, Renaghan & Geller 1993, 91; Lohmann 1999, 13d1-9; Parkyn 1991, 8; and Shields 2002, 2.
[4] This meaning is adapted from T.A. Angelo (November 1995). "Reassessing (and Defining) Assessment" AAHE Bulletin, 48(2): 7-9.

assessment should not be seen as "an end in itself, rather it's merely a tool for getting us, our programs and our students where we want to go." Finally, Walker (1999, 439) asserts that "assessment should be seen as a means of documenting that institutions are doing what they say they do and that students who complete their program receive what is promised."[5]

There are many tools commonly used to generate assessment information for programs in higher education. These can include portfolio collections[6]; capstone experiences[7]; oral exams; existing course syllabi; student grades; course evaluations; exit interviews[8]; and surveys that gauge the perceptions of employers[9], students, and alumni (Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 167; Lohmann 1999, 13d1-10; Shields 2002, 9). The focus of this research is on one assessment technique in particular—the alumni survey.

Alumni can give an institution useful feedback on how well it is doing its job and their satisfaction with the school. Parkyn (1991, 18) notes that "a continued effort at measuring the perceptions of alumni shows them that they are still a valued constituent for the college and permits currents students to benefit from the insights gathered via such a study." In addition, Purezer and Rooney (2002, 109) assert that alumni surveys are utilized to "refine the goals, and methods in the educational enterprise." Furthermore, alumni surveys are commonly used to determine postgraduate outcomes, to obtain

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[5] Walker adapted the meaning for assessment from Thrash, P.A. 1990 "Assessment in the North Central Region" NCA Quaterly, 65 (2): 385-392

[6] See Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 13; Golich 1998, 4; Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 167; and Wright 2004, 2 for further discussion on portfolio collections.

[7] Capstone projects were referenced by Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 13; Castleberry 2006, 32; Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 167; Shields 2002, 9; and Wright 2004, 2.

[8] See Golich 1998, 4; Shields 2002, 9; and Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 167 for further discussion on exit interviews.

[9] For further research, see Bruce Hermes' ARP "Government Employer Assessment of the SWT MPA" available at http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/52.

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feedback on program effectiveness, and to fulfill accreditation requirements (Borden 2005, 61). Assessment activities are often motivated by the accreditation process and required in the self-study document (Borden 2005, 61; Lohmann 1999, 13d1-8).

Accreditation is a form of assessment[10] and is defined by Thai (1985, 2) as "a system for recognizing educational institutions for a level of performance, integrity, and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve." Accrediting agencies serve as knowledgeable, independent organizations that examine programs or institutions to determine if they meet the standards which have been set forth by the profession. When an institution or program is accredited, the public knows an outside agency has given it a stamp of approval. The accreditation process is one way to hold institutions and programs accountable.

Mission statements are often used in the accreditation process for programs and institutions of higher education as a way to gauge effectiveness. Institutions often define their goals through a mission statement. A mission statement can guide the development of assessment and evaluation mechanisms. Assessments help institutions fulfill their unique educational mission by defining measures to gauge whether the intentions of the institution are actually carried out. Furthermore, Nostrand (2003, 176) asserts that programs should find objective and methodological ways of determining whether their mission is being met. This allows programs to evaluate and get feedback on the effectiveness of their mission statements for continuous improvement.

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[10] For an Applied Research Project regarding assessment research and information on developing a comprehensive outcomes assessment program, see the ARP written by Ana Lisa Garza at http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/119/

The role of mission statements in assessment research is extremely important because they tie in the expectations for graduates and other outcomes. Therefore, assessment mechanisms should reflect the mission statement (Lohmann 1999, 13d1-10; Walker 1999, 440).

Stakeholders of Higher Education

Higher education has many stakeholders. Enz, Renaghan & Geller (1993, 90) define professional master's degree program stakeholders as "people who have an interest in graduate-level education and, indirectly, in the success of graduates." The use of both internal and external constituency groups is often called for in assessments. External constituents include alumni, currently enrolled students, parents, employers, professional associations and organizations, accrediting agencies, professionals in the field, and university members outside the program (Denoya 2005, F2B-10; Shields 2002, 2). Internal constituents include faculty members and administrators (Denoya 2005, F2B-10). These stakeholders can give valuable feedback to programs and institutions. Successful assessment programs usually include a variety of stakeholders.

Alumni and students are key stakeholders since they are direct customers receiving the services from the institution and have expectations of what they want to get out of their education.[11] Borden (2005, 61) asserts that "the student and their family often have a keen interest in access to rewarding careers, the opportunities for advanced study, and an enriched quality of life associated with degree completion." Gaining the perspective of alumni and students allows institutions to obtain a different and objective

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[11] See for example: Delaney 1995, 6; Lohmann 1999, 13d1-9; Enz et al. 1993, 91; and Parkyn 1991, 8.

viewpoint they otherwise might not have. Student experiences can give great insight to

programs and institutions about the services they offer.

Faculty members are also constituents of higher education (Apostolou 1999, 177;

Delaney 1995, 8; Lohmann 1999, 13d1-9). In particular, they are interested in knowing

the contributions their courses and curricula make to students (Borden 2005, 61). Faculty

members are considered part of the internal sector of stakeholders and provide a unique

perspective.[12] Faculty members often review the curricula to make sure it provides the

necessary knowledge and skills needed for success in the field.

Accrediting bodies (another stakeholder) are highly involved in assessing

institutional effectiveness because they set the accreditation standards (Apostolou 1999,

177; Delaney 1995, 8). Accrediting agencies continuously review, evaluate, and approve

the quality and effectiveness provided by institutions and programs and require evidence

of assessment.

Stakeholders such as employers, senior-level professionals, and industry

representatives hire and recruit students and alumni to fill professional and managerial

positions (Borden 2005, 61). Therefore, they have an investment in the success of higher

education and of a particular program because those students and alumni will be a part of

the potential workforce one day. Employers can provide valuable feedback about the

quality of the knowledge and skills demonstrated by graduates they employ. Employers

can also give suggestions about how programs can stay abreast of changing knowledge or

skill requirements in the field, and how curricula could be modified to better fit the

evolving nature of the modern workplace.

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[12] See for example Deonya 2005, F2B-10; Enz et al. 1993, 91; and Walker 1999, 440)

Professionals and industry organizations are part of the external sector of constituents since they can identify competencies and skills that are required of employees in their field.[13] Industry representatives are important stakeholders capable of providing feedback about the skills graduates need to be successful in the job market (Lohmann 1999, 13d1-9; Puerzer & Rooney 2002, 9).

Other stakeholders include governors, legislators, and policymakers (Apostolou 1999, 177; Cabrera, Weerts & Zulick 2005, 13). According to Borden (2005, 61) and Gates et al. (2002, xiii), legislators, governors, and policymakers care that public resources are used effectively to benefit the public in regard to cost and quality of higher education.

Finally, the general public is a stakeholder as they have a vested interest in the leaders, schoolteachers, engineers, and other professionals who are produced by higher education institutions. The general public, as well as other stakeholders, demand that higher education be more accountable, efficient, and aligned with public needs (Cabrera et al. 2005, 13). Public needs can include professions capable of providing critical services or expertise (such as the fields of science and medicine). Wright (2004, 4) notes that "US society has a strong and legitimate interest in the quality of higher education." The identification of stakeholders is important because they are the key players.

Types of Assessment Methods

There are many assessment methods available. This section describes two categories of assessment activities as well as several assessment methods commonly used

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[13] See for example: Denoya 2005, F2B-10; Enz et al. 1993, 91; and Shields 2002, 2.

in higher education. There is no right, wrong, or perfect assessment method; rather, program needs can help determine which method is appropriate.   Regardless, effective methodology should guide programs toward improvement.

Assessment activities fall into two categories: internal and external to the classroom. Ishiyama and Breuning (2008, 168) assert that "assessment activities 'internal' to the classroom include analysis of grades, reviewing existing coursework for signs of student learning, examinations of existing course syllabi or student course evaluations." In contrast, assessment activities that are "external" to normal classroom operations include comprehensive exams, exit interviews, use of pre- and post-tests, portfolio collection, a capstone experience, or graduating student surveys (Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 168). Alumni, student, and employer surveys are also considered external methods of assessment.

Portfolio collections are used to analyze and track student work.[14] A portfolio is a collection of work that provides a good snapshot of a student's academic performance (Wright 2003, 2). When a student's work is collected over time, a portfolio can demonstrate academic achievement and changes as well as progress (Wright 2003, 2). Portfolios can include "written work, tapes of performances, student self-assessment and more" (Wright 2003, 2). Anything can be placed in a portfolio as long as it demonstrates products of student learning. When using portfolios as an assessment method, it is good to keep in mind the criteria used to assess performance as well as storage options (Wright

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[14] Reference for example: Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 13; Golich 1998, 4; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 167; and Wright 2004, 2.

2003, 2). Other things to consider are what to place in the portfolio, how often, who

places the materials, and who manages the portfolio.

Capstone experiences are also commonly used as a way to obtain assessment

information and are considered external.[15] Capstones can be projects, courses, and

assignments that capture the knowledge and skills taught throughout a class or program

(Wright 2003, 3). How well students do on a capstone project can reflect their

educational experience. Capstone projects are useful because they help identify areas of

strength and weakness in a program. In turn, this feedback can lead to program

development and improvement.

Surveys that gauge the perceptions of current students are often used as a method

of assessment (Hermes 2002, 19; Lohmann 1999, 13d1-10; and Shields 2002, 9).

Surveys of current students are used to gauge their perceptions while they are attending

the program (Lohmann 1999, 13d1-10).   Results from current student surveys inform

appropriate program improvements.

Employer surveys are another method of assessment. Apostolou (1999, 192)

notes that employer surveys are often used since "understanding what consumers of

educational outcomes desire is important to establishing desired outcomes and producing

requisite inputs." Thayer & Whelan (1987, 193) suggests that regular

practitioner/employer-oriented surveys be conducted so that programs can respond to the

current job market. Employer input is vital in obtaining feedback in regard to skills that

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[15] See for example: Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 13; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 167; Shields 2002, 9; and
Wright 2004, 2.

are needed in a field (Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 8). Results of these surveys should also

be made readily available (Thayer & Whelan 1987, 193) for the purpose of transparency.

Finally, alumni surveys (the focus of this chapter) are an important assessment

method (Lohmann 1999, 13d1-10). McGourty (1999, 13a5-9) defines alumni surveys as

"instruments that measure self-reported perceptions, recollections, and attitudes of former

students who have graduated from an academic program." Alumni surveys provide

perceptual data that reveal whether goals and expectations are met.

In addition, alumni surveys are utilized to "determine postgraduate outcomes, to

obtain feedback on program effectiveness and to fulfill accreditation requirements"

(Borden, 2005, 61). McGourty (1999, 13a5-9) similarly reports that "alumni provide an

important perspective for assessing how effectively an institution's academic programs

prepare its graduates to be successful contributors to society."   Puerzer and Rooney

(2002, 109) also note that alumni surveys are utilized to "refine the goals, and methods in

the educational enterprise."

Identifying the appropriate assessment method based on the data you wish to

collect is vital (Garza 2001, 31). In research involving the effectiveness of mission

statements, alumni play a key role because they can provide valuable feedback.

McGourty (1999, 13a5-9) suggests that assessing alumni perceptions is essential as "post

secondary institutions have been surveying their alumni to collect evidence on academic

effectiveness as part of their overall assessment programs for a number of years."

Effectiveness is generally gauged by identifying and measuring, through means of

assessment, if mission statements are being carried out.

Role of Mission Statements in Assessment Efforts

The role of mission statements in educational assessment efforts is extremely important since they tie in the expectations that a program has for its graduates and the outcomes produced. Mission statements help guide the assessment process and are a good starting point as well as an integral part of the assessment process (Lohmann 1999, 13d1-10). Mission-driven assessment can help an institution fulfill its unique educational niche by defining measures to gauge if the vision and intentions of the institution are actually carried out.

Mission statements are also readily used in the accreditation process for programs and institutions of higher education. NASPAA, an accrediting agency for public administration and public affairs programs, includes in its accrediting standards the demands that programs "state clearly its educational philosophy and mission and to have appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources and constituents" (NASPAA 2008, 2). NASPAA's general information and standards for professional master's degree programs notes that the program mission is a key element in the accreditation process (NASPAA 2008, 2). Standard 2 discusses the program mission.

In standard 2.2, NASPAA (2008, 8) makes clear the importance of mission statements in assessment: "each program shall develop and use procedures for determining how well it carries out its mission." Furthermore, NASPAA requires programs to report "on the assessment procedures and measures which are used to determine how well it (a program) carries out its mission" (NASPAA 2008, 2).

According to Nostrand (2003, 176), it is imperative that information be provided in "an objective and methodological way of determining whether we are achieving our

mission." Programs should be involved in customizing their mission statements to align with the goals that they have for their students upon successfully completing the program (Puerzer & Rooney 2002, 109). Apostolou (1999, 178) asserts that an institution's foundational goals and objectives should be rooted in assessment protocols that are reflected in the mission statement.

Furthermore, Walker (1999, 440) asserts, "mission and educational goals should be reflected in the assessment process." Wright (2004, 1) suggests that "good assessment of student learning begins with the mission, values, tradition and aspiration of your program." Mission statements should be a part of any assessment process, and are a requirement for MPA programs seeking accreditation through NASPAA. In addition, it is important to note that mission statements should be well written and action-and-goal-oriented. One way to assess the effectiveness of mission statements is by gathering alumni data. Alumni can provide a unique perspective that might otherwise be missed. Alumni data can be utilized in many ways, and for many purposes.

Use of Alumni Data

Typically alumni data are used for accountability, as an objective assessment tool, and for improvement of programs.[16] Institutions can use alumni survey data to identify valuable program improvements (Borden 2005, 68; Parkyn 1991, 17). Alumni data can also be used for facilitating strategic planning, decisionmaking, and benchmarking (Davidson-Shivers, Inpornjivit & Sellers 2004, 510; Delaney 1995, 7). Alumni surveys are used in self-studies because "most accreditation bodies require that

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[16] See Cabrera et al. 2005, 13; Kahn 1992, 1655; and Puerzer & Rooney 2002, 109.

programs assess their effectiveness and back it up with documented data" (Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 511).

Recruitment of new students and claims about the public benefits of higher education are common uses for alumni data (Cabrera et al. 2005, 7-8). Positive alumni feedback can highlight an institution's strengths and promote the program. Alumni data should be made public so that students and the general public can see what graduates of the program experienced. In addition, posting alumni data allows for transparency.

Program goals, methods, and mission statements are examples of refined uses of alumni data.[17] Measuring alumni outcomes is another benefit of gathering alumni data (Cabrera et al. 2005, 5). Delaney (1995, 5) asserts that "alumni survey research can assess outcomes for graduates of master degree programs and also be responsive to program goals." In addition, alumni surveys can be used to measure alumni civic engagement or participation (Cabrera et al. 2005, 5).

Another major use of alumni surveys is for program planning and curriculum changes (Cavazos 2000, 25). Faculty and administrators can use alumni feedback in the process of guiding curriculum changes (Cabrera et al. 2005, 7; and Khan 1992, 1653). Parkyn (1991, 17) notes that "data received from alumni based research can provide valuable information useful to the development of a college's program, both curricular and otherwise." There are many different components found in alumni surveys, and they are discussed below.

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[17] See for example: Puerzer & Rooney 2002, 109; Cabrera et al. 2005, 6; and Delaney 1995, 5.

Common Components Found in Alumni Surveys

The research on alumni surveys shows a pattern in the common components. First, alumni surveys generally deal with the preparation for current job and employment satisfaction.[18] This can also include employment experience such as "degree of difficulty finding employment and type of position sought" (Delaney 1995, 8).

Second, alumni surveys often ask about the quality of instruction and content of curriculum.[19] This information can include graduates' expectations of the program as well as course relevancy and satisfaction (Delaney 1995, 8-9).

Third, alumni surveys typically include questions about course scheduling and availability (Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 516), continuing education (McGourty 1999, 13a5-11), recommendation of program to others, as well as institution pride (Nostrand 2003, 166). Student support services (e.g., career advising, mentoring, and library) are also mentioned in many alumni surveys.[20]

Alumni engagement is another topic found in many alumni surveys. This can include alumni participation in civic and political activities as well as institutional activities including alumni events (McGourty 1999, 13a5-9). It can incorporate items dealing with student engagement with faculty and peers (Cabrera et al. 2005, 9) as well as civic engagement through the promotion of citizenship participation.[21] Nostrand (2003, 166) mentions several alumni survey indices dealing with alumni engagement. They include connectivity to the school, active participation, and donor/alumni giving. Cabrera

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[18] See: Borden 2005, 66; Cabrera et al. 2005, 6; and Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 516.
[19] See for example: Cabrera et al. 2005, 6; Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 516; and Kahn 1992, 1655.
[20] See: Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 516; Kahn 1992, 1655; and McGourty 1999, 13a5-11.
[21] See for example: Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 169; and Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 7.

et al. (2005, 6) state that "major gifts from alumni have become the cornerstone of successful fundraising campaigns."

Typically, alumni surveys have a section devoted to assessing competencies and skills. The skills listed below are commonly mentioned in the competencies section and transcend specific programs and fields (found in engineering, healthcare, MPA programs, NASPAA surveys of employers necessary skills needed in employees, and many more fields):

- ➢ Communication skills[22]

- ➢ Critical thinking/problem solving/decision making[23]

- ➢ Writing skills[24]

- ➢ Leadership/management skills[25]

- ➢ Presentation/oral skills[26]

- ➢ Quantitative and qualitative analysis[27]

- ➢ Program evaluation[28]

- ➢ Legal analysis[29]

- ➢ Teamwork skills[30]

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[22] See Apostolu 1999, 179; Castleberry 2006, 34; Denhardt 2001, 531; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 168; and McGourty 1999, 13a5-11.
[23] See Apostolu 1999, 179; Cabrera et al. 2005, 5; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9; Castleberry 2006, 36, McGourty 1999, 13a5-11; and Parkyn 1991, 6.
[24] See Borden 2005, 63; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 10; Castleberry 2006, 33; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 167; McGourty 1999, 13a5-13; and Parkyn 1991, 6.
[25] See Borden 2005, 63; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9; and McGourty 1999, 13a5-13.
[26] See Borden 2005, 63; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9-10; Denhardt 2001, 531; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 167; and Parkyn 1991, 6.
[27] NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.21 (2008)
[28] NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.21 (2008)
[29] NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.21 (2008)
[30] See Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9; and McGourty 1999, 13a5-13.

There are many different components found in alumni surveys. Based on the needs of a program, different components can be included in an institution's or program's alumni survey. When conducting alumni surveys there are often many challenges.

Methodological Challenges in Conducting Alumni Surveys

Alumni surveys bring with them several methodological challenges. One challenge mentioned in alumni survey literature includes having enough time to produce alumni surveys (Cabrera, Weerts & Zulick 2003, 16) as well as choosing the type of survey to meet particular needs. Types of surveys commonly used include mail, phone, and Web-based (Cabrera et al. 2005, 16). It is important to note that the average return rate on alumni surveys ranges from 25% to 60% (Cabrera et al. 2005, 17). It is also imperative to consider the approach when introducing the survey to alumni. Cabrera et al. (2005, 17) suggest a personalized letter from the president or program director stating the purpose of the survey.

Another challenge is not having current mailing addresses for alumni (McGourty 1999, 13a5-10). In gathering alumni data, it is vital to keep a database of the student body that includes current contact information (Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 518). Periodic requests for alumni to update their contact information can help battle this challenge.

Cabrera et al. (2005, 8) warn that survey results may generate disparities. Alumni data can "produce collegiate experiences that may not actually reflect the ones the alumni

underwent while attending college."[31] Opinions regarding experiences in higher

education may change over time. These opinions can either be better than the reality or

not accurate if someone is dissatisfied with their career or employment opportunities. In

addition, Cabrera et al. (2005, 10) note that surveys cannot distinguish between

competencies developed elsewhere and those attained at college. Just because an

alumnus has mastered a particular skill does not mean the skill was learned at the

particular institution they graduated from.

Finalizing the questions contained in an alumni survey is yet another challenge.

Focus groups can help test questionnaire items (McGourty 1999, 13a5-10). Alumni focus

groups are used to "pilot test the questionnaire and clarify ambiguous questions" (Cabrera

et al. 2005, 16). In addition, Cabrera et al. (2005, 16-17) note that "focus groups can

provide a forum for a free-flowing expression of ideas, bringing attention to areas that

might have not been considered and also help with phrasing sensitive questions."

Lastly, there are budget, cost, and student confidentiality issues (Cabrera et al.

2005, 21) as well as the need to create a system of recordkeeping that documents the use

of results from alumni surveys (Lohmann 1999, 13d1-11). Understanding the limitations

and challenges that can potentially be faced in creating alumni surveys can better prepare

researchers to tackle issues early in the process. Since MPA alumni surveys are typically

used to gather information for accreditation, the NASPAA standards are discussed in

detail.

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[31] Referenced from the work of Bok and Bowen "The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of
Considering Race in College and University Admission." Princeton University Press, 1998.

NASPAA Standards

NASPAA is an accrediting agency founded in the 1970s (Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 2) that "sets minimum standards for programs offering degrees in public administration and affairs" (Cavazos 2000, 31). NASPAA accredits "public affairs programs in the U.S. at the masters level to prepare students for leadership positions in the public sector" (Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 2). NASPAA's mission is to "ensure excellence in education and training for public service and promote the ideal of public service" (Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 2).

NASPAA's review and accreditation process "combines program self-study, review by the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) and a two to three day campus visit by a COPRA appointed site visit team" (NASPAA 2008, 2). NASPAA reports their membership includes 250 institutions, of which 139 have been accredited (NASPAA 2008, 2).

The purpose of NASPAA's accreditation standards is to "promote and maintain educational quality and to provide professional education in public policy and administration" (NASPAA 2008, 4). There are nine standards in the accreditation process, as listed below (NASPAA 2008, 4; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 4):

1. Accreditation eligibility for peer review
2. Program mission
3. Program jurisdiction
4. Curriculum: common core and specializations
5. Faculty
6. Admission process
7. Student services
8. Support services and facilities (budget and resources)
9. Off-campus and distance education programs (distance learning)

The following section discusses standards that are typically assessed in alumni surveys (with a focus on MPA alumni surveys) according to the literature. These include program mission, curriculum, faculty, student services, and support services and facilities. It is important for MPA programs embarking upon the assessment process to familiarize themselves with the NASPAA standards commonly assessed in many alumni surveys.

The most common standard mentioned in alumni surveys deals with NASPAA standard 2.0—program mission. NASPAA's accreditation process is mission-based and "must assess the extent in which they are meeting their mission" as well as what measures they will take from the results of the accreditation (Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 4). NASPAA's program mission standard consists of three parts that guide programs in the mission process. Those standards are (NASPAA 2008, 8):

> ➤ 2.1 Mission Statement. The program shall state clearly its educational philosophy and mission and have an orderly process for developing appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources, and constituencies (i.e. alumni).

> ➤ 2.2 Assessment. The program shall assess its students' performance and the accomplishment of its objectives. Assessment procedures and measures may take any form appropriate to the program and its circumstances, but each program shall develop and use procedures to see if it is carrying out the mission.

> ➤ 2.3 Guiding Performance. The program shall use information about its performance in directing and revising program objectives, strategies, and operations.

Another common standard mentioned in alumni surveys deals with standard 4.0, curriculum. Common curriculum components "shall prepare students for professional leadership in public service," and consist of the following elements described in standard 4.21 (NASPAA 2008, 9):

In the Management of Public Service Organizations, the components of which include:
- Human resources
- Budgeting and financial processes
- Information management, technology applications, and policy.

In the Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis, the components of which include:
- Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation
- Decision-making and problem-solving

With an Understanding of the Public Policy and Organizational Environment, the components of which include:
- Political and legal institutions and processes
- Economic and social institutions and processes
- Organization and management concepts and behavior

Alumni can identify whether these curriculum components were included in coursework and how adequately they were dealt with.

Faculty are another component of the NASPAA standards (standard 5.0), and are incorporated into many alumni surveys. Faculty components include a section on the quality of instruction and efforts for improvement of instructional programs, course content, teaching methods, and innovation of curriculum (NASPAA 2008, 10). Student services (NASPAA standard 7.0) are another component that is found in many alumni surveys. Student services include program advising, career guidance, and placement services (NASPAA 2008, 12). Finally, support services and facilities are mentioned in many alumni surveys (standard 8.0). Support services and facilities include support personnel (secretarial and clerical), library services, and instructional equipment such as computer labs (NASPAA 2008, 12).

Many public administration alumni surveys incorporate some of the NASPAA standards that are used in the accreditation process. Understanding how to tie these standards into alumni surveys can help accreditation become more successful.

Summary

This chapter reviewed some of the purposes for assessment in higher education and described the key stakeholders. Assessment methodologies found in higher education, and the role that mission statements play in the assessment process, were also discussed in the chapter. In addition, the chapter focused on alumni surveys and the use of alumni data, common components of alumni surveys, and methodological challenges of alumni surveys. Finally, an overview of the NASPAA accreditation standards and their relation to alumni surveys was presented.

The next chapter discusses the research setting of this project, Texas State University's MPA Program. The chapter explores the MPA program mission and introduces the conceptual framework table, which is linked to the scholarly literature and setting of this research.

CHAPTER 3 THE INSTITUIONAL SETTING

Introduction

This chapter describes Texas State University and its MPA program. The Texas State MPA mission statement is discussed in detail. In addition, the chapter gives an overview of Cavazos's 2000 ARP as well as an explanation of the purpose of the follow-up study eight years later.   The chapter concludes by providing a conceptual framework table to guide the research and link it to the scholarly literature as well as the Texas State MPA program.

Texas State University MPA Program

Texas State University is a public university with its main campus located in San Marcos, Texas. The city of San Marcos is located between San Antonio and Austin and has a population of 50,000 people.[32] Texas State University also offers classes that meet in Austin as well as at the Round Rock Higher Education Center[33] (RRHEC), built in 2005 and located in the city of Round Rock, north of Austin. The university opened its doors in 1903 to 303 students.[34]   In the fall of 2008, Texas State University enrolled 29,125 students.[35] Texas State University serves a very diverse student body. The fall 2008 enrollment had 23% Hispanic/Latino, almost 6% African American, over 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, almost 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 68% white. In addition, students are enrolled from all over the United States and the world: 68 countries

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[32]Reference http://www.txstate.edu/about/index.html
[33] For more information on the RRHEC visit http://www.rrhec.txstate.edu/about.html
[34] For more information about Texas State University visit http://www.txstate.edu/about/index.html.
[35] See http://www.emm.txstate.edu/ for current information from the Department of Enrollment Management and Marketing at Texas State University.

are represented. Texas State offers 109 bachelors, 88 masters, and 8 doctoral degree programs.[36] The motto of the university is "The rising Star of Texas."

The MPA program at Texas State University is offered through the Department of Political Science. The MPA program was established in 1973 (Texas State 2002, 7) and was certified in 1982 by NASPAA, the accrediting agency for public administration and affairs programs. The program was accredited in 1989 and re-accredited in 1996 and in 2002 (Texas State 2002, 7).

The MPA degree includes a core of 30 hours, including a 3-hour capstone project called an applied research project[37] and a 9-hour career support area[38] (Texas State 2002, 33). The capstone project (the ARP) is described in the Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report (2002, 21) as "a cumulating experience and demonstrates in a concrete and summative way the analytic, policy, organization, and writing skills of the student."   In addition, students are required to pass a comprehensive oral examination (based on their ARP) during the semester they plan to graduate.[39]   There are also two required prerequisite courses: one is an undergraduate statistics class, and the other is an internship for students who do not have public sector experience (Texas State 2002, 36).   Since 1997, the MPA program has produced five national and fifteen regional award-winning

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[36] See http://www.txstate.edu/about/index.html for more information

[37] To read more about ARP's see research done by Saidat Ilo "A Content Analysis of Applied Research Projects Completed from 1999-2005 at Texas State University in the Masters of Public Administration Program" available on-line at http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/11/. In addition, see ARP done by Ana Almagual "Research in Public Administration: A Content Analysis of Applied Research Projects Completed from 1992-1996 at Southwest Texas State University in the Master of Public Administration Program" available on-line at http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/141/.

[38] See the MPA homepage for more information on curriculum requirements: http://www.polisci.txstate.edu/degrees-programs/graduate/MPA.html

[39] See the MPA handbook available on-line on the MPA main webpage (scroll down to section titled Additional Information): http://www.polisci.txstate.edu/degrees-programs/graduate/MPA.html

research papers, which can be found on the Texas State University MPA Web site homepage.[40]

MPA Mission Statement

The mission process began in 1998 and was developed during a day long mission retreat (Texas State 2002, 8). A diverse group of internal and external constituencies helped in the process of creating the mission statement. The MPA program is essentially driven by its mission statement, with a primary focus to prepare students for careers as managers and leaders in public service. The mission statement is reprinted below (Texas State 2002, 8):

> The MPA Program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers and leaders in public service.
>
> The program primarily serves the diverse community that is Central Texas. Such service is provided through course work, professional development opportunities, internships and applied research projects.
>
> The program responds to the changing public service environment through: an innovative curriculum, faculty scholarship and service, links to professional organizations, interaction with governmental agencies, and a commitment to state-of-the-art technology.
>
> The program is distinguished by emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service; reinforcing the use of technology in management; providing professional and educational opportunities to a diverse student body; delivering classes at convenient times and locations; offering a variety of career support areas; enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty; providing students and alumni with professional networking opportunities; focusing on continuing professional development; emphasizing management in political institutions and processes; and integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public management.

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[40] For more information see the Texas State MPA homepage at http://www.polisci.txstate.edu/degrees-programs/graduate/MPA.html and for the list of award winning Applied Research Projects visit http://uweb.txstate.edu/~ps07/awards.htm

The Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report (2002, 13) notes that the "MPA program mission-assessment process first disaggregated the formal mission statement into 24 mission element statements." Assessment methods (such as exit survey or alumni survey) were then linked to each element statement.[41]

Furthermore, NASPAA (2008, 2) requires programs to report "on the assessment procedures and measures that are used to determine how well it (a program) carries out its mission." Therefore, alumni perceptions become a way to get feedback on the program's ability to meet its mission. Additionally, NASPAA (2008, 8) requires that along with a formal mission statement, programs must clearly state their educational philosophy and have an orderly process for developing "appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources, and constituents" (alumni falling into this category). Part of the assessment process includes gauging the perceptions of alumni on the success of the program in carrying out its mission.

Cavazos' ARP

In 2000, Cavazos wrote an ARP titled *Gauging Alumni Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Masters of Public Administration Program at Southwest Texas State University in Meeting Its Mission*. She used five practical ideal-type categories: program service profile, general public administration (PA) curriculum services, faculty performance, professional development/curriculum specifics, and networking opportunities. Cavazos (2000, 48) created a survey that was given to alumni who had

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[41] See appendix A for the Texas State MPA mission statement broken down into 22 mission element statements.

graduated since 1992. There were 149 alumni in this group and 91 responded to the

survey (61% response rate). Her research findings indicated that the program's alumni

"perceived the MPA program to be successful in living up to its mission of preparing its

students to be managers and leaders in the public service sector" (Cavazos 2000, 72).

This research is a follow-up to the Cavazos study, and gauges the perceptions of Texas

State University MPA program alumni from 2002-2008 in meeting its mission. This

study also includes the results of a survey of alumni who graduated before 2002 as well

as a comparison to the Cavazos findings.

Linking Conceptual Framework to Appropriate

The literature indicates a common thread found in alumni surveys (with an

emphasis on MPA alumni surveys) that compromise the descriptive categories of the

conceptual framework. These include program, student, and supportive services; general

PA curriculum services; faculty performance; networking opportunities; competencies

and skills; and program learning outcomes.

Program, Student, and Supportive Services

Program and student supportive services are commonly found in alumni surveys

and mentioned in mission statements. Program service questions in alumni surveys are

designed to gather demographic data such as ethnicity, age, and gender.   An example of

a program service is to provide an environment that offers and promotes diversity, such

as is reflected in the MPA mission statement (Texas State 2002, 8): opportunity for a

diverse student body and serving a diverse community primarily in central Texas. In

addition, program service questions can also assess the program advising available to students (NASPAA 2008, 12) and support services. NASPAA dedicates one section (standard 8.0) to support services and emphasizes the importance of personnel support, including secretarial and clerical staff as well as library services (NASPAA 2008, 12).

General PA Curriculum Services

Second, many alumni surveys deal with questions pertaining to curriculum services. These questions can focus on issues related to course scheduling and availability (Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 516) as well as the convenience of courses (Cavazos 2000, 56; NASPAA 2008, 13). General PA curriculum services questions can also deal with the preparation for public administration management (Borden 2005, 63), leadership in public service (Texas State 2002, 8) and balance between theory and practice (Delaney 1995, 7). In addition, curriculum service also pertains to the opportunity for applied research (Cavazos 2000, 46).   Other general curriculum services include the emphasized central role of ethics in public service, continuing professional development, career advancement, and public service orientation (NASPAA 2008). The program services mentioned above are all elements found in the Texas State University MPA mission statement and are addressed in the alumni survey.

Faculty Performance

Third, faculty performance is a component typically mentioned in alumni surveys as well as in mission statements. Faculty have a big influence in shaping the education of college students; they are supposed to be knowledgeable of the material that they teach,

and have an interest in students' academic success. Faculty performance is therefore an area that is frequently addressed in the accreditation process for many programs.

MPA programs accredited by NASPAA are required to follow standard 5.0, which addresses faculty.   Components include a section on the quality of instruction and efforts for improvement of instructional programs, course content, teaching methods, and innovation of curriculum (NASPAA 2008, 10). In addition, questions pertaining to overall satisfaction with faculty (Nostrand 2003, 170), such as class preparation or knowledge of the subject area (Cavazos 2000, 51), are typically assessed.

The accessibility, public service focus, and timeliness of feedback are also assessed. These three items are new to the alumni survey, and were not assessed in the survey done in 2000. The MPA program mission statement also states that the "program responds to the changing public service environment through: faculty scholarship and service" (Texas State 2002, 8).

Networking Opportunities

Fourth, networking opportunities and chances for alumni engagement are typically assessed. This category can include alumni participation in civic and political activities, as well as institutional activities including alumni events (McGourty 1999, 13a5-9). Furthermore, the extent of student engagement with faculty and peers (Cabrera et al. 2005, 9), as well as civic engagement through the promotion of citizenship participation (Ishiyama & Breuning 2008, 169; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 7), are usually assessed in alumni surveys. Nostrand (2003, 166) mentions several alumni survey

indices dealing with alumni engagement; they include connectivity to the school, active participation, and donor/alumni giving.

Cavazos (2000, 62) included a section on networking opportunities in her survey and mentioned the opportunity to talk with other PA administrators and interact with professional PA associations, such as the Centex chapter of ASPA. The MPA mission statement addresses "enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty and providing students and alumni with professional networking opportunities" (Texas State 2002, 8).

Competencies and Skills

Fifth, alumni surveys and mission statements typically devote a section to addressing competencies and skills related to students' learning outcomes. Effective oral communication and presentation skills, analysis, and evaluation skills are student learning outcomes typically desired, as mentioned by Castleberry in his ARP from 2006.[42] Castleberry's (2006, 57) research findings indicated that preferred learning outcomes are demonstrated by a large majority of MPA students.

The following skills are commonly mentioned in the competencies section of alumni surveys:

➢ Quantitative and qualitative analysis[43]

➢ Program evaluation[44]

➢ Legal analysis[45]

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[42] To review or download Thomas Castleberry's ARP, visit http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/182/
[43] See Apostolu 1999, 178; Borden 2005, 63; NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.21 (2008); Wright 2004, 1-2.
[44] Castleberry 2006, 39-40; Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 510; & NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.21 (2008)

Program Learning Outcomes

Finally, a topic commonly found in alumni surveys and mission statements is the assessment of the quality of the instruction and content of the curriculum that produce program learning outcomes.[46] This can include graduates' expectations of the program, as well as course relevancy and satisfaction with the curriculum (Delaney 1995, 8-9). Alumni can rate whether these curriculum components were indeed incorporated into their coursework and how adequately they were dealt with. In addition, they can rate evidence of program learning outcomes such as writing, communication, and critical thinking skills.

There are many critical professional competencies that are expected from alumni. Employers expect graduates to have knowledge of budget and financial processes, policy, and human resources (Sinclair 2005, 60). Additionally, managing ethical issues and applying ethics is a curriculum specific often mentioned in alumni surveys (Sinclair 2005, 65).

The MPA mission statement incorporates the role of ethics in public service, as well as the use of technology in management (Texas State 2002, 8). Cavazos devoted an entire section of her 2000 survey questionnaire to curriculum specifics found in the MPA mission statement and the NASPAA standards.

MPA programs accredited by NASPAA (2008, 9) must addresses curriculum components mentioned in standard 4.0 and must be taught in accredited programs in order to produce quality public administrators and desired learning outcomes. NASPAA

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[45] NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.21 (2008)
[46] See Cabrera et al. 2005, 6; Davidson-Shivers et al. 2004, 516; and Kahn 1992, 1655.

requires that common curriculum components "shall prepare students for professional leadership in public service."[47]

Furthermore, NASPAA and the regional accrediting body for Texas State University, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools[48] (SACS), mandate identification of outcomes through clearly defined student learning outcomes as part of their accrediting standards on institutional effectiveness. To assess student learning, the student learning outcomes (Castleberry 2006, 30) adopted by the MPA program are:

- *Outcome 1*—Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in writing.
- *Outcome 2*—Students will demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of the eleven curriculum components standards of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration's accrediting body. The curriculum standards represent the body of knowledge an MPA graduate is expected to master.
- *Outcome 3*—Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively orally.
- *Outcome 4*—Students will demonstrate the ability to see patterns and classify information, concepts, and theories in public policy and administration.
- *Outcome 5*—Students will demonstrate the ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management.

The five student learning outcomes can be found in every MPA class syllabus. These comprise the knowledge, skills, and abilities (derived from the mission statement) that graduates should exhibit upon graduation from the program. Lastly, this category discusses student learning outcomes in terms of the following skills:

- ➢ Communication skills[49] (including presentation/oral skills)

- ➢ Critical thinking/problem solving/decision making[50]

- ➢ Writing skills[51]

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[47] Found in NASPAA standard 4.21. For further information see (www.naspaa.org).
[48] For more information SACS and their accrediting standards visit: http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp
[49] See Apostolu 1999, 179; Borden 2005, 63; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9-10; Castleberry 2006, 34; Denhardt 2001, 531; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 167-168; McGourty 1999, 13a5-11; and Parkyn 1991, 6.
[50] See Apostolu 1999, 179; Cabrera et al. 2005, 5; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 9; Castleberry 2006, 36, McGourty 1999, 13a5-11; and Parkyn 1991, 6.

Conceptual Framework Table

The conceptual framework[52] makes a connection to the appropriate literature by organizing the collection of data and theorizing it (Shields & Tajalli 2006, 316). In addition, categories can be treated as "statements of expectation" and students can "make recommendations, assess strengths and weaknesses" (Shields & Tajalli 2006, 323).

Cavazos's (2000, 44) ARP was a practical ideal-type that she stated "can be used as standards or points of reference." As is evident through the scholarly literature, gauging the perceptions of alumni can be very helpful in assessing programs in regard to the effectiveness of the mission statement, in this case the MPA program's mission statement. As Parkyn (1991, 18) notes, "a continued effort at measuring the perceptions of alumni shows them that they are still a valued constituent for the college and permits currents students to benefit from the insights gathered via such a study." Therefore assessing the perceptions of alumni should be very beneficial for both current and incoming students, as well as for program improvement.

This research addresses whether the Texas State MPA program is meeting its goals and purpose. Descriptive categories are used to help organize the data gathered from the literature and the components of the MPA mission statement.

The conceptual framework developed by Cavazos categorized the elements of the Texas State University MPA program mission statement[53] and is used in this study for comparison's sake. A skills/competencies category was added because the scholarly

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[51] See Borden 2005, 63; Calarusse & Raffel 2007, 10; Castleberry 2006, 33; Ishiyama & Breuing 2008, 167; McGourty 1999, 13a5-13; and Parkyn 1991, 6.
[52] For more information on conceptual frameworks see Shields 1998, 202.
[53] See appendix A for the MPA mission statement elements

literature pointed to the importance of these skills and competencies in alumni from many

fields, including pubic administration. The curriculum specifics category was

incorporated into the program learning outcomes categories since it deals with students'

learning outcomes and alumni perspectives of how well they developed certain skills

(e.g., communication and writing) along with the curriculum specifics. Each descriptive

category has corresponding literature sources and is depicted in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Conceptual Framework Table Linking Normative Descriptive-Type Categories to the Literature

Conceptual Framework	
Descriptive Categories	**Literature Sources**
Program, Student & Supportive Services ▪ Diverse community ▪ Providing opportunity for a diverse student body ▪ Primarily in central Texas ▪ Office staff support- helpfulness of the program staff ▪ Quality of the program advising ▪ Quality of the library services	Cavazos (2000) NASPAA COPRA Standard 7.0 & 8.0 for Professional Masters Degree Programs (2008) Texas State University MPA Program Mission Statement- mission elements 1 and 14
General PA Curriculum Services ▪ Courses offered frequently ▪ Courses offered at convenient times ▪ Courses offered at convenient locations ▪ Balance between theoretical and applied approaches ▪ Opportunity for applied research ▪ Courses provided preparation for PA management ▪ Emphasized central role of ethics in public service ▪ Continuing professional development ▪ Helped in career advancement ▪ Public service orientation	Borden (2005) Cabrera et al. (2005) Cavazos (2000) Delaney (1995) Davidson-Shivers et al. (2004) NASPAA COPRA Standard 2.0 for Professional Masters Degree Programs (2008) Texas State University MPA Program Mission Statement- mission elements 2, 5, 12, 15, 20, 22, 23 and 24

Descriptive Categories	Literature Sources
Faculty Performance ▪ Class preparation ▪ Knowledge of subject area ▪ Interest in professional development of student ▪ Accessibility ▪ Public service orientation ▪ Timeliness of feedback	Cavazos (2000) Cabrera et al. (2005) Delaney (1995) Davidson-Shivers et al. (2004) Khan (1992) NASPAA COPRA Standard 5.0 for Professional Masters Degree Programs (2008) Nostrand (2003) Texas State University MPA Program Mission Statement- mission elements 3 and 17
Networking Opportunities ▪ Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty ▪ Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program ▪ Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners ▪ Interaction with professional PA associations	Cavazos (2000) McGourty (1999) Nostrand (2003) Texas State University MPA Program Mission Statement- mission elements 9, 10, 17, 18 and 19
Competencies/skills ▪ Quantitative analysis ▪ Qualitative analysis ▪ Program evaluation ▪ Legal analysis	Apostolu (1999) Borden (2005) Castleberry (2006) Davidson-Shivers et al. (2004) NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.0 for Professional Masters Degree Programs (2008) Wright (2004)

Descriptive Categories	Literature Sources
Program Learning Outcomes 　▪ Decisionmaking 　▪ Budget & financial administration 　▪ Human resources management 　▪ Organizational/management concepts 　▪ Policy and program formation 　▪ Problemsolving 　▪ Ethics 　▪ Information systems and technology applications 　▪ Program implementation/evaluation 　▪ Political/legal institutions and processes 　▪ Economic/social institutions and processes 　▪ Writing 　▪ Communication 　▪ Critical thinking	Apostolu (1999) Borden (2005) Cabrera et al. (2005) Calarusse & Raffel (2007) Castleberry (2006) Cavazos (2000) Cleary (1990) Davidson-Shivers et al. (2004) Delaney (1995) Denhardt (2001) Ishiyama & Breuing (2008) Khan (1992) Nostrand (2003) NASPAA COPRA Standard 4.0 for Professional Masters Degree Programs (2008) McGourty (1999) Parkyn (1991) Texas State University MPA Program Mission Statement- mission elements 2, 11, 12, and 13

Summary

This chapter explained the setting of this research, the Texas State University MPA program. It discussed the MPA mission statement and connected the scholarly literature and setting to the conceptual framework. In the following chapter the conceptual framework is operationalized, allowing the descriptive categories to be measured.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

Purpose

This chapter operationalizes the conceptual framework by linking each question to the framework. The chapter also describes the methodology used in the study to determine the attitudes and opinions of Texas State alumni about the Texas State University MPA program.

Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework drives the questions that are used in the survey and serves as the organizational structure for the questionnaire. Questions for the survey were created by working closely with the Director of the MPA Program at Texas State University over the summer of 2008. The survey design begins with Cavazos' (2000) alumni survey questions. These questions were reviewed and adjusted to meet the current needs of the MPA program. Cavazos' 2000 ARP survey instrument is attached (appendix B).

The connection between the survey items and the conceptual framework is depicted in table 4.1. The survey questions directly correspond to the Texas State University MPA mission statement and student learning outcomes. Each category found in the conceptual framework from table 3.1 is measured by the survey questions that appear in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework

Descriptive Categories	Survey Question
Program, Student and Supportive Services[54]	
Diverse community and providing opportunity for a diverse student body	What is your gender?
	What is your race or ethnic background?
	What was your age when you graduated from the MPA program?
	Which one of the following best describes the type of organization in which you are currently employed?
Primarily in central Texas	In what city did you reside while enrolled in the MPA program?
Office staff support- helpfulness of program staff	Please rate the MPA program in the following areas: The helpfulness of the program staff
The quality of the program advising	Please rate the MPA program in the following areas: The quality of the program advising
The quality of the library services	Please rate the MPA program in the following areas: The quality of the library services
General PA Curriculum Services[55]	
Courses offered frequently	The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned.
Courses offered at convenient times	The courses were offered at convenient times.
Courses offered at convenient locations	The courses were offered at various locations.
Courses provided preparation for PA management[56]	How well do you feel that the Texas State MPA program prepared you for a career as a manager in public service?
	How well do you feel that the Texas State MPA program prepared you for a career as a leader in public service?
Balance between theoretical and applied approaches	The curriculum provided a balance between theoretical and applied approaches toward public administration.
Opportunity for applied research	The curriculum prepared me for applied research.
Central role of ethics	The curriculum as a whole emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.
Continuing professional development	The MPA program focuses on continuing professional development.
Career advancement	The MPA program has helped in my career advancement.
Public service orientation	The MPA Program has a public service orientation.

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[54] Responses to the last three questions had a 5-point scale: excellent = 1, good = 2, fair = 3, poor = 4, and unsure = 5

[55] Responses to these questions (except the fourth one) ranged in a 5-point scale from strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 5

[56] Responses to these questions ranged in scale from excellent = 1, good = 2, fair = 3, poor = 4, and no opinion = 5

Descriptive Categories	Survey Question
Faculty Performance[57]	
Class preparation	Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Class preparation
Knowledge of subject area	Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Knowledge of subject area
Interested in professional development of student	Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Interested in professional development of students
Accessibility	Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Accessibility
Public service orientation	Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Public service orientation
Timeliness of feedback	Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Timeliness of feedback
Networking Opportunities[58]	
Outside classroom accessibility between students and faculty	Please rate the following areas of networking opportunities while you were in the MPA program: Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty
Outside interaction among students in the program	Please rate the following areas of networking opportunities while you were in the MPA program: Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program
Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners	Please rate the following areas of networking opportunities while you were in the MPA program: Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners
Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations	Please rate the following areas of networking opportunities while you were in the MPA program: Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations
Competencies/skills[59]	
Quantitative analysis	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: Quantitative analysis
Qualitative analysis	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: Qualitative analysis
Program evaluation	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: Program evaluation
Legal analysis	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: Legal analysis

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[57] Response to these questions had a 5-point scale that ranged from excellent = 1, good = 2, fair = 3, poor = 4, and unsure = 5

[58] Response to these questions had a 5-point scale that ranged from excellent = 1, good = 2, fair = 3, poor = 4, and unsure = 5

[59] Response to these questions ranged in a 5-point scale from strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 5

Descriptive Categories	Survey Question
Program Learning Outcomes[60]	
Decisionmaking	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Decision-making
Budget & financial administration	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Budget & financial administration
Human resources management	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Human resource management
Organizational/management concepts	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Organizational theory and management
Policy and program formation	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Policy & program formation
Problemsolving	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Problem Solving
Ethics	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Ethics
Information systems and technology applications	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Information systems and technology applications
Program implementation/evaluation	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Program implementation/evaluation
Political/legal institutions and processes	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Political/legal institutions and processes
Economic/social institutions and processes	Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Economic/social institutions and processes
Writing	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: • Ability to write clearly • Ability to use correct grammar • Ability to use references appropriately in research papers
Communication	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: Ability to speak clearly in front of groups
Critical thinking	The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: • Ability to see patterns and classify information in public policy and administration • Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management

[60] Response to these questions ranged in a 5-point scale from strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 5

For example, the question "In what city did you reside while enrolled in the MPA program?" measures whether the program primarily serves central Texas (found in the **program service profile** category). Questions in this category also measure diversity and office support.

The survey item "The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned" was designed to assess whether courses were offered frequently (found in the **general PA curriculum services** category). The questions in this category measure items such as class availability and convenience, and leadership and management preparation. Likewise, class preparation (under the **faculty performance** category) is measured by the question "Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program: Class preparation." The questions in this category focus on overall satisfaction with the faculty.

The question "Please rate the following areas of networking opportunities while you were in the MPA program: Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations" measures whether students are given the opportunity to network with professional associations (found in the **networking opportunities** category). This category deals with questions pertaining to the opportunities given to alumni to network.

The question "The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas: quantitative analysis" measures whether quantitative analysis skills were developed in the program (under the **competencies/skills** category). Other

competencies and skills mentioned include qualitative analysis, program evaluation, and legal analysis. Alumni were asked to rate the program attributes using either a 5- point "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" scale, or from a 5-point scale ranging from "excellent," to "unsure."

Finally, the question "Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following area: Ethics" measures whether ethics was a primary part of the curriculum (under the **program learning outcomes** category). The questions in this category deal with the curriculum components found in the program and the alumni's satisfaction with these courses. The questions also measure alumni assessment of how well the program contributed to their understanding of NASPAA- mandated curriculum specifics (which are also part of the program's student learning outcomes).

Research Technique

The study uses survey research because it provides a practical way to obtain alumni perceptions of the MPA program. Babbie (2004, 243) notes that survey research is one of the most common modes of observation used in the social sciences, especially in studies that have individual people as the units of analysis. Babbie (2004, 243) also maintains that "surveys are excellent vehicles for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population."

The purpose of this study is to gauge general attitudes of alumni toward the MPA program; therefore, the survey method is appropriate. Given that alumni are the target of this research, it is fitting to gather data on their perceptions of the Texas State MPA program's effectiveness in meeting its mission. Survey research helps gauge the attitudes

and perceptions of alumni.   Survey research in this study is the most effective method in reaching this group.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Survey Research

There are strengths and weaknesses to surveys, just as there are to any mode of research.   Babbie (2004, 274) notes that an advantage to questionnaires is that it "offers the possibility of making refined descriptive assertions about a student body." In this case, the student body is alumni from the MPA program at Texas State University. Surveys are also easy to develop and flexible, and with standardized questions ambiguity is cut (Babbie 2004, 274). Therefore, reliability is strong in survey research because all subjects are presented with the same questions (Babbie 2004, 275).

One major weakness in survey research is that the standardized questions can "appear superficial in their coverage of complex topics" (Babbie 2004, 275). Other weaknesses are that they are inflexible (questionnaires once distributed can't be modified), can have poor participation rates, and can't measure real action or evidence— only perceptions (Babbie 2004, 275). Therefore, survey research is weak on validity since it may not fully address the real issues at hand, and is based on people's attitudes and recollection of events. Opinions regarding experiences in higher education may change over time.

To address the weaknesses of survey research, several methods were utilized. The questions originally used by Cavazos were reviewed by the MPA Director at Texas State University to see which questions could be deleted, added, or revised based on the needs of the current alumni survey for the self-study. The conceptual framework

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continues to drive the questions that end up on the survey instrument. In addition, to help

combat poor participation, an e-mail was sent reminding those who had not completed

the survey that the deadline was approaching. The research purpose was also included in

the e-mail so that alumni could be aware of its function and the use of the findings.

Human error regarding recollection of events is a weakness of survey research that

cannot be addressed.

Survey Distribution

The distribution of the survey was done through the Texas State MPA graduate

list serve.[61] Alumni with e-mail addresses on file were sent the survey. The e-mail

contained a web link for alumni to complete the survey. E-mail was deemed the best

approach because it is now one of the most commons means of communication.

The survey was created by the Texas State MPA program,[62] but it was set up and

managed by the Office of Institutional Research[63] and the Director of the MPA program

at Texas State University. The Office of Institutional Research[64] gathered the responses

and provided and calculated the simple statistics of the alumni survey. The survey results

had the capacity to be sorted to include only alumni that had graduated within the last

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[61] For more information on the Texas State University MPA list serve reference the MPA handbook:
http://uweb.txstate.edu/~ps07/documents/hndbk.pdf
[62] The alumni survey was initially created in 2000 by Dr. Patricia Shields and Cindy Cavazos. The survey
was updated in 2008 by Dr. Patricia Shields.
[63] Because this survey was administered by the Texas State University Office of Institutional Research as
part of the MPA program's re-accreditation efforts, the process meets the Institutional Review Board (IRB)
standards. For more information on Texas State's IRB process see:
http://www.txstate.edu/research/irb/index.php
[64] Special thanks to Richard Batey, Research Analyst at the Texas State University Office of Institutional
Research, for his assistance with this project (i.e. the alumni survey).

seven years, as well as those who had graduated more than seven years ago.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study is the alumni from the MPA program at Texas State University. The sampling frame focuses specifically on alumni who graduated between 2002 and 2008. This is the time period after the alumni survey done by Cavazos in 2000, and also includes alumni data gathered after the 2002 program self-study used in the re-accreditation process. The entire sample included 342 alumni who are on the current MPA alumni list serve.[65] Of that total, 159 alumni graduated between 2002 and 2008.[66]

The contact information for alumni is kept by the MPA department, and they provided the information necessary for this survey (alumni e-mail addresses) to the Office of Institutional Research. The survey was sent by e-mail to alumni in the early fall of 2008 through the MPA alumni list serve. The e-mail contained a short message from the Director of the MPA program, Dr. Patricia M. Shields, and described the purpose of the survey and how the data would be used. The survey was made available for input beginning on September 19, 2008 and closed on October 10, 2008. This gave alumni the opportunity to respond to the survey within a three-week window.

There was a possible technical issue with the list serve because the MPA Program Director contacted[67] individual alumni to see if they had received the e-mail, and several

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[65] As of November 3, 2008, 342 is the current number of alumni on the list serve as provided by the MPA Department at Texas State University.

[66] For Texas State University enrollment and data on degrees awarded see (http://www.ir.txstate.edu/Facts/xfacts.html.)

[67] Of the alumni contacted by the Director of the MPA program, Dr. Shields, over half indicated they had not received the e-mail with the link to the alumni survey. Some e-mail servers could have directed the e-

had not. Although it is unclear, perhaps the e-mail got sent to the spam or junk folder on some e-mail servers. To speculate further, alumni may have multiple e-mail addresses— some of which are not checked regularly—and therefore they did not receive the e-mail in time to complete the survey. This problem could be avoided by switching from an e-mail survey to a mail survey (although it would be costly), or possibly by providing multiple response avenues to get a better return rate. The alumni survey conducted by Cavazos (2000) was sent by postal mail only.

Statistics

This research uses simple descriptive statistics. Babbie (2004, 442) notes that descriptive statistics "summarizes a set of sample observations." In this study, the sample observations are the alumni survey findings that can be summarized by percentage. In other words, the results are represented in terms of percentages. The statistics found in this research were also compared to those found in the Cavazos study from 2000.

Summary

This chapter addressed the methodological aspects of this research. The research technique, strengths and weaknesses of survey research, the distribution method, population and sampling, and statistics were all discussed.

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mail into the spam folder, but it is unclear why some alumni did not receive the survey. It is also not known how many alumni did not get the e-mail due to the technical problem.

The data collection instrument in this study was survey research accomplished through an alumni survey.   In addition, the operationalization of the conceptual framework was addressed to show the connection between the framework and each question. The next chapter discusses the research findings of the alumni survey, organized by the conceptual framework, by analyzing the results.

CHAPTER 5 RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter examines the results of the MPA alumni survey. The survey was created to obtain data for the upcoming re-accreditation self-study from alumni who graduated since 2002, the year of the last accreditation of the MPA program. Additionally, data from alumni who graduated before 2002 were analyzed. Furthermore, the results from this 2008 alumni survey[68] were compared to the research conducted by Cavazos[69] in 2000.

The alumni survey was sent by email through the MPA list serve on September 19, 2008. The survey was available for a full three weeks (closed on October 10, 2008). There are 342 alumni on the current MPA list serve. Of that total, 159 alumni graduated between 2002 and 2008. A total of 112 alumni responded to the survey. Of that total, 70 respondents were recent alumni (graduated 2002-2008 and also referred to as post-2002 alumni), generating a 44% response rate of the total population. The response rate is lower than 50% (Babbie asserts that is the minimum acceptable response rate for analysis and reporting), so there is a concern for response bias because the feedback might not be representative of the sample (Babbie 2004, 261). However, Babbie discusses a response rate that assumes a sample to begin with, not the entire population—as is the case for this research project. In addition, from the total of 112 respondents, 42 were alumni who had graduated more than seven years ago (also referred to as pre-2002 alumni). In the Cavazos study (2000), there were 149 alumni who had graduated within the preceding

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[68] The alumni survey questions from 2008 are located in appendix C.
[69] The survey questions used by Cindy Cavazos in 2000 for her ARP can be found in appendix B.

eight years, and 91 former students completed and returned the survey (a 61% response rate).

The survey data were analyzed using the conceptual framework. The itemized elements of the mission statement appear in appendix A. The six categories of the framework described in chapter 3 are discussed in detail (program, student, and supportive services; general PA curriculum services; faculty performance; networking opportunities; competencies and skills; and program learning outcomes). In addition, a miscellaneous category is included for questions pertaining to other aspects of the MPA program. The statistical analyses used for the survey findings[70] are percentages, averages, and frequency distributions.

Program, Student, and Supportive Services

This category describes many of the mission-based items pertaining to serving a diverse community that is Central Texas (mission item 1) as well as a diverse student body (item 14). Demographic data were therefore obtained. Questions pertaining to student characteristics such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity were asked. In addition, several questions were asked about supportive services including library services, support staff, and program advising. These items were added because they are reflected in NASPAA standard 7.0 (student services such as program advising) and standard 8.0 (supportive services such as library and support personnel) (NASPAA 2008, 12).

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[70] The complete survey findings can be found in appendices D and E

Student and Program Demographics

As depicted in table 5.1, alumni are a diverse group that is equally represented by gender. Exactly half of the post-2002 alumni (graduated 2002-2008) are male and the other half are female. The pre-2002 alumni had more males (62%), as did the alumni in the Cavazos study (56%). Diversity pertaining to race and ethnicity has increased since 2000 (table 5.2). The Cavazos study had 16% Hispanics and 13% African Americans, while in the current alumni group nearly 1 in every 3 (31%) are Hispanic and practically 1 in every 5 (19%) are African Americans. These results indicate that over half of the current alumni are from a minority group. This finding aligns with the mission statement about serving a diverse community.

Table 5.1 Gender Profile

Gender	$N = 70$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 42$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 90$ 2000 Study Percent
Male	50	62	56
Female	50	38	44

Table 5.2 Race/Ethnicity Profile

Race/Ethnicity	$N = 70$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 42$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 88$ 2000 Study Percent
Caucasian American	47	76	69
Hispanic American	31	14	16
African American	19	10	13
Other	3	0	3

In the graduation age range, the current alumni and the group from the 2000 study have a majority of alumni between the ages of 26-30 (see table 5.3). Few alumni tended to graduate at age 21 or under, or at over 46 years of age, in the 2008 study.

Table 5.3 Graduation Age Range

Age	$N = 70$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 42$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 91$ 2000 Study Percent
21 or less	4	5	N/A
22 to 25	11	12	8*
26 to 30	43	21	31
31 to 35	16	21	21
36 to 40	11	24	16
41 to 45	9	10	11
46 and older	6	7	13

* Between the ages of 21-25

When asked about employment in the public, private, or non-profit sectors, all alumni groups responded with the majority employed in the public sector (well over 60%) as shown in table 5.4.   Alumni representation remained fairly constant in the non-profit sector (15% of current alumni and 10% of the alumni group from 2000). However, there has been a significant drop in current alumni employed in the private sector (less than 1 in 10) as compared to the alumni in the 2000 study (1 in 4 were employed by the private sector). In addition, most alumni (over 70%) in all three groups worked full-time while in the program (see table 5.5).

Table 5.4 Employment Sector

Sector	$N = 67$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 41$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 89$ 2000 Study Percent
Public sector	76	71	64
Non-profit sector	15	17	10
Private sector	9	12	25

Table 5.5 Employment Work Status

Employment Work Status	$N = 70$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 42$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 90$ 2000 Study Percent
Full-time	74.2	71.4	86.7
Part-time	22.9	14.3	10
Not Employed	2.9	14.3	3.3

The majority of the alumni (60% and over) in all three groups lived in the Central Texas region while attending the program (table 5.6). Similarly, many alumni continue to reside in Central Texas (table 5.7): 73.6% of current alumni, 63.4% of alumni who graduated before 2002 in the 2008, and 80.7% from the 2000 study. The student characteristics and demographic data clearly show a reflection of the mission statement elements regarding diversity and Central Texas focus. Current alumni who now live out-of-state reside in locations such as New York, New Orleans, North Carolina, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia, and even Istanbul, Turkey. Alumni who graduated before 2002 and reside out of state live in locations such as Colorado, Kansas, and Washington, DC.

Table 5.6 Alumni Residence while in the Program

City	*N* = 69 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	*N* = 41 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	*N* = 89 2000 Study Percent
Austin and Round Rock	60.9	63.4	66.3
San Marcos	21.7	14.6	15.7
San Antonio	0	9.8	5.6
Other	17.4	12.2	12.4

Table 5.7 Alumni Current City Residence

City	*N* = 68 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	*N* = 41 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	*N* = 88 2000 Study Percent
Central Texas	73.6	63.4	80.7
North Texas	4.4	14.6	4.5
East Texas	5.9	12.2	1.1
South Texas	2.9	0	N/A
Out of State	13.2	9.8	13.6

Quality of Supportive Services

In order to gauge alumni perceptions of the quality of services, questions were added to the 2008 alumni survey. The findings (table 5.8) indicate that they were very pleased with the helpfulness of the program staff (over 90% of current and pre-2002 alumni in the 2008 study). A pre-2002 alumnus noted that "the program has caring

professors and staff committed to students, alumni and the advancement of public

administration." In addition, both current and pre-2002 alumni gave high ratings to the

library services. Program advising was rated slightly lower (81%) by pre-2002 alumni in

the 2008 study than by current alumni (90%). Overall, the respondents to the 2008

alumni survey rated every area of services 80% and higher.

Table 5.8 Quality of Services

Item	*N* 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post- 2002)	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2000 Study	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree
The helpfulness of the program staff	70	92	42	91	N/A	N/A
The quality of the program advising	70	90	42	81	N/A	N/A
The quality of the library services	68	87	42	88	N/A	N/A

General PA Curriculum Services

This category seeks alumni perceptions about the mission elements pertaining to

general PA curriculum services. The foundation of the MPA mission statement is the

basis for the questions regarding the preparation to be a leader in public service (mission

items 23 and 24). This section also includes questions that pertain to providing a

curriculum balance that integrates theoretical and applied approaches to public

management (mission item 22), as well as emphasizing the role of ethics in public service

(item 12). In addition, questions regarding the convenience of course offerings, course

times, and locations (mission item 15) are asked.

The responses depicted in table 5.9 show the majority of current alumni agree that the curriculum prepared them for applied research (94%), and that the curriculum as a whole emphasized the central role of ethics in public administration (93%). This is a significant improvement from the Cavazos findings in 2000, when 80% believed they were prepared for applied research and 76% felt the curriculum emphasized ethics.

All three groups had an overwhelmingly positive response when queried about the frequency of classes being offered and the convenience of times—close to 100% agreed. One pre-2002 alumnus commented, "I greatly appreciated the ability to choose night classes, some in Austin, so I could continue working full-time while obtaining my graduate degree." Another discussed the career advancements offered by the MPA program, "it made my résumé more appealing to a broader range of employers."

The one area that was not as highly rated by the alumni who completed the 2008 study was the MPA program's focus on continuing professional development. In the 2008 study, an average of 1 in every 5 respondents rated this question less than "strongly agree" or "agree." One pre-2002 alumnus suggested that the MPA program should "offer continuing education classes to alumni in Austin." Another noted "professional growth of the program's graduates needs to be more emphasized." However, the overall responses in this category were positive.

Table 5.9 General PA Curriculum Services

Item	*N* 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2000 Study	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree
The courses were offered at convenient times.	70	93	42	98	91	96
The curriculum prepared me for applied research.	67	94	42	88	91	80
The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned.	70	96	42	88	91	93
The MPA program has a public service orientation.	69	90	42	91	N/A	N/A
The curriculum, as a whole, emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.	70	93	42	83	91	76
The MPA program has helped in my career advancement.	69	87	42	76	N/A	N/A
The courses were offered at convenient locations.	70	89	42	93	90	86
The curriculum provided a balance between theoretical and applied approaches to public administration.	70	87	42	93	90	77
The MPA program focuses on continuing professional development.	69	82	42	79	N/A	N/A

Table 5.10 shows the respondents' perceptions of the program's success in preparing them for a career as a manager in public service. Most alumni indicated that the program did prepare them for a career as a manager and leadership in public service (see table 5.11). A vast majority from the 2008 study (nearly 90% or more) rated the program by choosing either "excellent" or "good." Three-fourths of the alumni respondents to the 2000 study answered these two questions "excellent" or "good," and the remaining one-fourth chose "fair," "poor," or "not sure" as their response. One current alumnus commented that "the MPA program prepared me for a career in city management."

Table 5.10 MPA Program Preparation for a Career as a Manager in Public Service

Category	N = 70 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent	N = 42 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent	N = 91 2000 Study	Percent
Excellent	41	59	20	48	21	24
Good	22	31	19	45	47	52
Fair	5	7	3	7	12	13
Poor	0	0	0	0	5	5
No opinion	2	3	0	0	6	7

Table 5.11 MPA Program Preparation for Leadership in Public Service

Category	N = 68 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent	N = 42 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent	N = 91 2000 Study	Percent
Excellent	40	59	18	43	22	24
Good	20	29	18	43	44	48
Fair	5	7	6	14	15	16
Poor	1	1	0	0	4	4
No opinion	2	3	0	0	6	7

Faculty Performance

This section discusses the responses to survey questions relevant to faculty performance (see table 5.12). Areas such as the faculty knowledge of the subject area, class preparation, and timeliness of feedback were assessed. When asked if faculty were prepared, almost 100% of the alumni in all three categories (current alumni, pre-2002 alumni, and those from the 2000 study) believed the faculty was prepared for class. Timeliness of feedback and accessibility were also rated very high (over 90%) by the alumni who completed the 2008 survey.

Overall, most alumni agreed that the faculty were interested in the professional development of students. One current alumnus commented that the faculty "demonstrated

and continues to demonstrate a deep commitment and respect for the students and their careers." Likewise, another alumni noted the "MPA program professors gave a lot of attention to students."

Several new questions appeared on the alumni survey regarding the public service orientation of faculty, accessibility, and timeliness of feedback. The public service question was rated high—86% by current alumni and 91% by pre-2002 alumni. The timeliness of feedback and accessibility were rated at over 90% "strongly agree" and "agree" by both groups of alumni. One current alumnus stated, "I appreciate the communication and follow-up." Another noted, "Dr. Shields and the other faculty members were very accessible and contributed enormously to my success." As the results indicate, alumni rate the faculty's performance very highly.

Table 5.12 Faculty Performance

Item	*N* 2008 Study-Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2008 Study-Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2000 Study	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree
Knowledge of subject area	70	98	42	97	91	99
Class preparation	70	100	42	98	91	95
Timeliness of feedback	70	96	42	91	N/A	N/A
Accessibility	69	96	42	90	N/A	N/A
Interested in professional development of students	70	90	42	86	91	81
Public service orientation	70	86	42	91	N/A	N/A

Networking Opportunities

The MPA mission statement has several items[71] that discuss student networking opportunities. The MPA program promotes the membership of its students in the American Society for Public Administration [72](ASPA) because for almost 70 years this group has been one of the most recognized organizations that represent all forums in the public service arena.[73] Texas State University MPA students who choose to join ASPA have a local chapter called CenTex[74] ASPA (for Central Texas). The CenTex ASPA chapter provides many opportunities for professional contacts and networking by holding mixers (social gatherings), conferences, and awards. They work closely with the MPA department in promoting membership and attendance at these events.[75]

Table 5.13 shows that all current alumni who responded to the survey (100%) strongly agreed or agreed that the MPA program provided outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty. Areas of improvement are highlighted by the responses of current alumni (87%) who felt the program offers opportunities for interaction with professional PA associations. By comparison only 51% of respondents in the 2000 survey answered "strongly agree" or "agree." Similarly, outside-classroom interaction among students in the program increased significantly since the 2000 alumni survey (from 56% in 2000 to 88% who answered "strongly agree" or "agree" in the 2008 survey).

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[71] See mission items 9, 10, 17 and 18 in appendix A.

[72] Fore more information about ASPA visit http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index.cfm

[73] For further general information regarding ASPA visit http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/ASPAgeneral.cfm

[74] For more information on the ASPA CenTex chapter visit http://www.main.org/aspa/

[75] See Applied Research Project by Cassandra Casillas at http://ecommons.txstate.edu/arp/

Comments by several current alumni indicate they would like to see more networking among students. There is much diversity in the students' employment, city of residence, and work sector, and many would like an opportunity to meet other students not in their specific classes. For example, one current alumnus noted, "I would enjoy more group interaction between students, either a specified day or time of the week where we could meet or a message board between all students."

Another current alumni commented, "I didn't feel that strong a bond with my fellow MPA students because we were all so busy and had very different schedules, I would have liked if there was some sort of MPA student club that met once a month to do a short volunteer service project or have a brown bag with a professor or local professional." Although significant improvements have been made (from 48% in 2000 to 78% for current alumni "strongly agree" and "agree"), former students continue to ask for more opportunities to speak to PA practitioners, as also noted above in the current alumnus comment (78%).

Table 5.13 Networking Opportunities

Item	*N* 2008 Study-Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2008 Study-Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2000 Study	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree
Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty	69	100	42	80	90	77
Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations	70	87	42	76	90	51
Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program	70	88	42	73	90	56
Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners	69	78	42	69	90	48

Competencies and Skills

This category is new to the alumni survey (it was not included in the 2000 survey). In order to measure alumni perceptions regarding competencies and skills developed, questions pertaining to items such as quantitative and qualitative analysis were asked.

The results shown in table 5.14 indicate that 9 out of 10 current alumni rate qualitative and quantitative analysis and program evaluation skills highly ("strongly agree" and "agree," compared to about 8 out of 10 for pre-2002 alumni). Though the competencies and skills had many "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, there is one area for improvement that can be seen from the findings. In regard to legal analysis skills/competencies, 1 out of 4 current alumni rated it less than "strongly agree" or "agree" (as did pre-2002 alumni). Overall, alumni rated competencies and skills highly.

Table 5.14 Competencies and Skills

Item	*N* 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2000 Study	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree
Qualitative analysis	69	94	42	88	N/A	N/A
Quantitative analysis	70	94	42	83	N/A	N/A
Program evaluation	70	91	42	83	N/A	N/A
Legal analysis	70	75	41	73	N/A	N/A

Program Learning Outcomes

This section contains questions about curriculum specifics and student learning outcomes. MPA alumni rated the curriculum and their perceptions about how the MPA program contributed to their understanding of topics identified by NASPAA as required

for an MPA degree. The MPA program mission statement mentions several of these curricular items, such as emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service (mission item 12), technology (item 13), and focus on providing an innovative curriculum for students (item 6). Items pertaining to student learning outcomes, such as communication and writing, are also included in this section.

Table 5.15 Program Learning Outcomes

Item	*N* 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree	*N* 2000 Study	Percent Strongly Agree & Agree
Ethics	70	93	42	95	89	78
Organizational/management concepts	70	93	41	87	88	74
Policy and program formation	70	95	42	88	90	75
Decisionmaking	70	95	42	91	89	76
Program implementation/evaluation	69	92	42	83	N/A	N/A
Problemsolving	70	93	42	83	89	76
Economic/social institutions and processes	70	90	42	81	N/A	N/A
Budget and financial administration	70	88	42	83	90	79
Political/legal institutions and processes	69	92	42	79	N/A	N/A
Human resources management	70	83	42	76	88	65
Information systems and technology applications	70	80	42	62	89	56
Ability to use references appropriately in research papers	70	96	42	97	N/A	N/A
Ability to write clearly	70	92	42	88	N/A	N/A
Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management.	69	92	42	88	N/A	N/A
Ability to use correct grammar	69	89	41	78	N/A	N/A
Ability to see patterns and classify information in public policy and administration	70	90	42	83	N/A	N/A
Ability to speak clearly in front of groups	70	86	42	76	N/A	N/A

The findings in table 5.15 indicate that there have been many improvements in alumni perceptions of curriculum specifics. In 2000, the average alumni rating of "strongly agree" and "agree" for curriculum was a little over 72%.   In 2008, current alumni rated the curriculum on average a little over 90% ("strongly agree" and "agree").

There were also some major gains in this category. For example, in the area of policy and program formation, findings show that 95% of recent alumni agreed or strongly agreed that the MPA program contributed to their understanding of ethics. This contrasts with 75% for the alumni in the 2000 study. When discussing the MPA program, one current alumnus mentioned the following: "The MPA program and the focus on research and problem solving have been valuable to my career." In addition, an alumnus who graduated more than seven years ago stated "the legal, ethics, and organizational theory training was excellent and useful in my current career."

Improvements in the perception of curriculum are also noted. Human resource management (from 65% in 2000 to 83% for current alumni) and information technology (from 56% in 2000 to 80% for current alumni) have scored higher in the ratings of "strongly agree" and "agree." Overall, the current alumni (compared to the group from 2000) saw gains in every single curriculum-specific item ("strongly agree" and "agree" responses).

The results on student learning outcomes indicate (see table 5.15) that both current (96%) and pre-2002 alumni (97%) strongly agreed or agreed that they developed the ability to use references appropriately in research papers. In addition, the ability to write clearly, use correct grammar, and use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management was rated highly by current alumni (89% and

higher). One current alumnus stated, "I really enjoyed the program. I am a better thinker, writer, and evaluator."

Though the student learning outcomes had many "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, there are areas for improvement that can be seen in the findings. First, the ability to speak clearly in front of groups is one area that can be improved (86% for current and 76% for pre-2002 alumni). Second, current and pre-2002 alumni commented that they wished they had developed better public speaking, presentation, and communication skills while in the MPA program. This is probably because, as public administration professionals, most alumni will have to interact with a wide variety of people and make many presentations. Overall, alumni rated program learning outcomes very high in the "strongly agree" and "agree" responses.

MPA Program Miscellaneous Items

This section includes additional items that are not directly related to the MPA mission statement. Miscellaneous items about the MPA program were included to obtain feedback on questions such as alumni's recommending the program. Table 5.16 indicates that a vast majority of alumni from all three groups would again choose the MPA program.

In addition, table 5.17 shows that almost all alumni from every category recommend the program—93% current, 95% pre-2002 alumni, and 89% from the 2000 study. One current alumnus stated, "I have people ask me about Texas State University's MPA program all the time and have referred numerous people." Similarly, a pre-2002 alumnus stated, "I strongly support the MPA program at Texas State University and have

recommended the program to many subordinates with whom I work." Another pre-2002 alumnus speaks highly of the MPA program at Texas State: "It was the best thing I did for myself, professionally and personally." Based on the results shown below, most alumni have a very positive perception of the MPA program because they would choose it again and recommend it to others.

Table 5.16 Choose the MPA Program Again

Category	$N = 69$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 42$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 91$ 2000 Study Percent
Yes	91	90	81
No	1	0	11
Uncertain	7	10	8

Table 5.17 Recommend the MPA Program

Category	$N = 69$ 2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002) Percent	$N = 42$ 2008 Study- Pre-2002 Alumni Percent	$N = 91$ 2000 Study Percent
Yes	93	95	89
No	1	0	3
Uncertain	6	5	8

Comments and Suggestions from Alumni

The alumni survey asked alumni to write additional comments and suggestions. These questions asked about additional skill development, improvements to the program, as well as any other additional comments. While diverse, the comments did cluster around trends.

First, the comments pertaining to additional skill development had many responses. Over one-third of current alumni and almost one-third of pre-2002 alumni who completed the alumni survey wrote text responses. Of this group, almost 25% of current alumni indicated that they would like to see more grant-writing classes (including grant management). Additionally, several current and pre-2002 alumni indicated they want more skills in public speaking.

Many current alumni (over 15% of those who answered this question) mentioned career advising and development, including job searching and assistance after graduation, interview techniques, recruiting, notice of career opportunities, and internships. One current alumnus wanted "job searching skills and the knowledge of where to search in order to get the right job." Another stated, "An emphasis on how to use my MPA upon graduation, and how to find a field (career) that was right for me—also job placement and recruitment." Similarly, a current alumnus stated, "career guidance would be helpful." Several pre-2002 alumni mentioned wanting more skills in managing employees. One alumnus noted, "I think the managerial aspect of the program could be emphasized more strongly."

Second, there were many responses on improving the MPA program. Almost 50% of current alumni and 35% of pre-2002 alumni wrote comments regarding program improvement. Numerous current alumni (over 15% of this group) commented on introducing students to the Problems in Research Methodology (POSI 5335) during either the first or second semester, as well as introducing the conceptual frameworks earlier in the program. This would allow students to be better prepared to write the required ARP. One current alumnus noted, "Since the MPA program is so research intensive it would be

very helpful to require POSI 5335 in the first semester of the program." Another wrote, "Exposure to the methods used to write the ARP should occur in the first 12 hours of the program."

Over 20% of current alumni also mentioned more emphasis on mentoring and networking. A current alumnus noted, "I think the networking aspect with those that have completed the MPA and gone on to the workforce is essential to current MPA student success." Another current alumnus suggested an MPA student club, stating that it would make the "MPA program even more distinct and prestigious."

There were also comments concerning career opportunities including, internships. A current alumnus suggested improvement of "networking with state and local government entities that can place seniors and juniors in positions or paid fellowships/internships that lead to careers afterwards." Likewise, a pre-2002 alumnus wrote, "develop stronger internship program, and build relationships with institutions outside of Texas to offer students a broader range of opportunities." Another pre-2002 alumnus stated the importance of "teaching/informing graduates who have gone immediately from their undergraduate program to the MPA program on how to promote, network, and sell their skills to public sector employers."

Finally, the last question with text responses asked for any additional comments regarding the MPA program. A little less than one-third of the current alumni and over one-third of pre-2002 alumni who completed the survey responded to this question. Over 85% of these current and pre-2002 alumni made many positive comments about the program in response to this question. A current alumnus wrote, "The program is extremely good and valuable to this region. Texas can be very proud of the program."

Another stated that the "Texas State University Program is deserving of national recognition."

Several simply said the MPA program was "excellent!" A pre-2002 alumnus stated that the MPA program "helped me develop professionally and achieve core goals." Another wrote, "This is the best MPA program in the state." In addition, one pre-2002 alumnus wrote "thanks for continuing to strive for excellence—raising the bar and keeping it at a level that challenges students to excel in all that they undertake." Overall, the alumni were very positive and reinforced the program's mission.

Summary

This chapter described the 2008 alumni survey findings. The results were used to gauge how well the MPA program is carrying out its mission. The results were categorized by current alumni (graduated 2002-2008), pre-2002 alumni (graduated more than 7 years ago), and the results of the 2000 Cavazos survey. The results were organized using the conceptual framework (derived from the literature review in chapter 2) and normative descriptive-type categories (discussed in chapter 3). The alumni responses provide strong evidence that the MPA program is carrying out its mission. The next chapter provides an overview of the study, a comparison to the Cavazos study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

Purpose

This final chapter summarizes this research project and the findings. The results of both the current alumni survey and the 2000 Cavazos survey are linked to the elements of the MPA mission statement.

Summary of Research

The purpose of this research was to do a follow-up study to gauge alumni perceptions of the Texas State University MPA program performance in effectively carrying out its mission, through an alumni survey. The results of the alumni survey will be used in the upcoming re-accreditation self-study for the MPA program. The research findings suggest that alumni are very pleased with the MPA program. Their responses also provide evidence that the MPA program is delivering service to students consistent with its mission.

The literature review (chapter 2) identified the importance of educational assessment research and the benefits of using alumni data as an assessment method. The NASPAA standards were also explained. The setting chapter (chapter 3) introduced the Texas State University MPA program, the mission statement, and student learning outcomes. This chapter also produced the conceptual framework, justified by the thorough discussion of the literature. The normative descriptive categories of the framework are program, student and supportive services; general PA curriculum services; faculty performance; networking opportunities; and a new category (not mentioned in the Cavazos study), competencies and skills; as well as program learning outcomes (which

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include the curriculum specifics).   The research methodologies were explored in chapter

4, as well as the operationalization of the conceptual framework into a survey instrument.

Each question of the survey is linked to a category in the conceptual framework. Chapter

5 explained the research findings of the recent alumni survey and compared it to the one

done in 2000 by Cavazos.

The results of both surveys are summarized and linked to the elements found in

the MPA mission statement (see table 6.1). The table shows the degree to which the

alumni survey provided support for a mission statement element. If over half of the

alumni (at least 51%) rated a mission element, as either "strongly agree" or "agree" or

"excellent" or "good," then it indicates the program met the criteria and the responses

were categorized as "supports." Of all the mission statement items listed, each item

received over 70% support, with the exception of four items denoted by the asterisk mark

that were between 51-70% agreement.

The degree of support was further categorized as "strongly supports" when a

mission element received over 95% "strongly agree" or "agree" responses. If the alumni

survey did not deal with the mission element, then an N/A (not applicable) was used.

The table also indicates whether current alumni's support of the MPA program

differs from the results of the 2000 Cavazos study. A "strong increase" was noted when

there was more than a 10% increase. A "slight increase or decrease" was noted when

there was less than a 3% change.

Table 6.1 Comparison of Alumni Survey Results by Mission Elements

Mission Element	2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	2008 study Pre-2002 Alumni	2000 Study	Change in Level of Evidence from Current Alumni compared to the Cavazos study
The program primarily serves				
1. the diverse community that is Central Texas	Supports	Supports	Supports	Increase (residence during the program) and Decrease (current city residence)
Such service is provided through:				
2. course work	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong increase
3. professional development opportunities	Supports	Supports	Supports	Increase
4. internships	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5. applied research projects	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong increase
The program responds to the changing environment through:				
6. an innovative curriculum	N/A	N/A	Supports	N/A
7. faculty scholarship	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8. faculty service	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9. links to professional organizations	Supports	Supports	Supports*	Strong increase
10. interaction with governmental agencies	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong increase
11. commitment to state-of-the-art technology	Supports	Supports	Supports*	Strong increase
The program is distinguished by				
12. emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong increase
13. reinforcing the use of technology in management	Supports	Supports	Supports*	Strong increase
14. providing professional and educational opportunities to a diverse student body	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong Increase
15. delivering classes at convenient times and locations	Supports	Supports	Supports	Slight decrease (times) and increase (locations)
16. offering a variety of career support areas	N/A	N/A	Supports	N/A
17. enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty	Strongly supports	Supports	Supports	Strong increase
18. providing students with professional networking opportunities	Supports	Supports	Supports*	Strong increase

*Denotes an item that fell between 51% and 70%

Mission Element	2008 Study- Current Alumni (post-2002)	2008 study Pre-2002 Alumni	2000 Study	Change in Level of Evidence from Current Alumni compared to the Cavazos study
19. providing alumni with professional networking opportunities	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong increase
20. focusing on continuing professional development	Supports	Supports	N/A	N/A
21. emphasizing management in political institutions and processes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
22. integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public management	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong Increase
23. Prepare students as managers in the public service	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong Increase
24. Prepare students as leaders in the public service	Supports	Supports	Supports	Strong Increase

Final Analysis and Recommendation for Future Research

This research study was done to assess the perceptions of current alumni to see whether they believe that the MPA program is meeting its mission. This research also provides recommendations to help in program improvement, as well as offer data for the upcoming re-accreditation self-study. The results of the survey indicate that, overall, alumni are satisfied with the MPA program and believe the mission is being carried out. In particular, the mission element of enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty was strongly supported by current alumni (100% rated "strongly agree" or "agree").

The program's perceived success in meeting any mission elements increased by more than 10% since the 2000 Cavazos study. The items that showed a significant increase in satisfaction are course work, applied research projects, networking opportunities, technology, emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service, providing

professional and educational opportunities to a diverse student body, integrating

theoretical and applied approaches to public management, and preparing students as

managers and leaders in public service.

The following were alumni recommendations to improve the MPA program at Texas

State University:

- ➢ Do more to prepare students for the Applied Research Project by introducing the conceptual framework and research methodology class earlier in the program
- ➢ Offer grant-writing classes
- ➢ Provide skills in oral communication (e.g., public speaking)
- ➢ Do more to assist pre-service students and students to find employment and provide career advising as well as internship opportunities
- ➢ Provide more mentoring and networking opportunities for current students and alumni

The study did have some limitations. Technical issues arose when the alumni survey

was sent out through the MPA list serve. Making sure that the list serve was working

properly (through a preliminary test, for example) could have helped. Having a back-up

method to deliver the alumni survey (such as hard copy sent by mail) could have also

produced more responses and more alumni perspectives.

The alumni survey is susceptible to biased feedback based on the experiences of

former students after graduation. There are also concerns with alumni recollection of

items on the survey; for some, graduation was a while ago. This lag in time can make it

difficult to answer some of the questions. In addition, there was not much literature on

alumni surveys specific to MPA programs, and most of the available literature was

outdated.

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Appendix A

Texas State University
Master in Public Administration (MPA)
Mission Statement Elements

Texas State University MPA Program
Mission Statement Elements

The program primarily serves
    1. the diverse community that is Central Texas.

Such service is provided through
    2. course work,
    3. professional development opportunities,
    4. internships and
    5. applied research projects.

The Program responds to the changing public service environment through:
    6. an innovative curriculum,
    7. faculty scholarship and
    8. faculty service,
    9. links to professional organizations,
   10. interaction with governmental agencies, and a
   11. commitment to state-of-the-art technology.

The Program is distinguished by
   12. emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service;
   13. reinforcing the use of technology in management;
   14. providing professional and educational opportunities to a diverse student body;
   15. delivering classes at convenient times and locations;
   16. offering a variety of career support areas;
   17. enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty;
   18. providing students with professional networking opportunities;
   19. providing alumni with professional networking opportunities
   20. focusing on continuing professional development;
   21. emphasizing management in political institutions and processes; and
   22. integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public management

The MPA program's mission is to:
   23. prepare students as managers in the public service
   24. prepare students as leaders in the public service

Appendix B

Cavazos's 2000 Alumni Survey Instrument

SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MPA PROGRAM ALUMNI SURVEY

I. MPA Program

1. Please indicate your opinion of the following statements regarding your MPA experience.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned.	1	2	3	4	5
The courses were offered at convenient times.	1	2	3	4	5
The courses were offered at various locations.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum provided a balance between theoretical and applied approaches toward public administration.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum offered a diverse set of career support areas.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum prepared me for applied research.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum, as a whole, emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.	1	2	3	4	5
The SWT MPA program offered an innovative curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please rate overall faculty performance in the following areas while you were in the MPA program.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	UNSURE
Class preparation	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of subject area	1	2	3	4	5
Interested in professional development of students	1	2	3	4	5

3. Please rate how well the MPA program contributed to your understanding of the following areas.

AREA	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	UNSURE
Decision-making/Problem-solving	1	2	3	4	5
Financial Administration	1	2	3	4	5
Human Resources Administration	1	2	3	4	5
Organizational Theory and Management	1	2	3	4	5
Policy Process	1	2	3	4	5
Intergovernmental Relations	1	2	3	4	5
Ethics	1	2	3	4	5
Information Systems/Technology	1	2	3	4	5
Applied Research	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please rate the following areas of networking opportunities while you were in the MPA program.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	UNSURE
Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty	1	2	3	4	5
Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program.	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners.	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations.	1	2	3	4	5

5. How helpful was the MPA program office staff while you were enrolled in the MPA Program?
   1 = excellent   2 = good   3 = fair   4 = poor   5 = unsure

6. Would you choose the SWT MPA program again?
   1 = yes   2 = neutral   3 = no

7. Would you recommend the SWT MPA program to others?
   1 = yes   2 = neutral   3 = no

8. How well do you feel that the SWT MPA program prepared you for a career as a manager in public service?
   1 = excellent   2 = good   3 = fair   4 = poor   5 = no opinion

9. How well do you feel that the SWT MPA program prepared you to be a leader in public service?

       1 = excellent   2 = good   3 = fair   4 = poor   5 = no opinion

10. Is there a particular skill you wish that you had developed while in the MPA program? If so, please specify _____

11. If Southwest Texas State University were to offer a doctoral program in Public Administration, would you consider enrolling in the program?

       1 = yes   2 = unsure   3 = no

II. PERSONAL DATA

12. What is your gender?
       A = female B = male

13. What is your race or ethnic background?
       A. African American   D. Native American
       B. Asian American   E. Caucasian
       C. Hispanic   F. Other _____

14. How many years has it been since you graduated from the MPA program?
       A. 0 - 2 years
       B. 3 - 5 years
       C. Greater than 5 years

15. In what city did you reside while enrolled in the MPA program? _____

16. In what city/state do you currently reside?   _____

17. What was your age when you graduated from the MPA program? _____

18. Please circle your employment status while enrolled in the MPA program.
       A. employed full time
       B. employed part time
       C. not employed

19. Which one of the following best describes the type of organization in which you are currently employed?
       A. public sector
       B. nonprofit agency
       C. private business

20. Please enter any additional comments regarding the MPA program. _____
_____

Appendix C

2008 Alumni Survey Instrument

MPA Alumni Survey

I.   MPA Program

2. Please indicate your opinion of the following statements regarding your MPA experience.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned.	1	2	3	4	5
The courses were offered at convenient times.	1	2	3	4	5
The courses were offered at convenient locations.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum provided a balance between theoretical and applied approaches to public administration.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum prepared me for applied research.	1	2	3	4	5
The curriculum, as a whole, emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.	1	2	3	4	5
The MPA Program focuses on continuing professional development.					
The MPA Program has helped in my career advancement.					
The Texas State MPA Program has a public service orientation.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please rate overall MPA faculty performance in the following areas.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	UNSURE
Class preparation	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of subject area	1	2	3	4	5
Interested in professional development of students	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility					
Public Service Orientation					
Timeliness of Feedback					

3. The MPA program contributed to my knowledge and comprehension of the following areas.

AREA	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Decision-making	1	2	3	4	5
Budget and Financial Administration	1	2	3	4	5
Human Resources Management	1	2	3	4	5
Organizational/Management concepts	1	2	3	4	5
Policy and Program Formation	1	2	3	4	5
Problem Solving	1	2	3	4	5
Ethics	1	2	3	4	5
Information Systems and Technology Applications	1	2	3	4	5
Program Implementation/Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
Political/Legal Institutions and Processes					
Economic/Social Institutions and Processes					

4. Please rate the MPA Program in the following areas.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	UNSURE
Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty	1	2	3	4	5
Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program.	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners.	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations.	1	2	3	4	5
The helpfulness of the program staff.					
The quality of the program advising.					
The quality of the library services.					

5. The MPA Program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Ability to Write Clearly					
Ability to use correct Grammar					
Ability to use references appropriately in research papers					
Ability to speak clearly in front of groups					
Ability to see patterns and classify information in public policy and administration					
Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management.					
Quantitative Analysis					
Qualitative analysis					
Program Evaluation					
Legal Analysis					

6. Would you choose the Texas State MPA program again?
      1 = yes   2 = no   3 = uncertain

7. Would you recommend the Texas State MPA program to others?
      1 = yes   2 = no   3 = uncertain

8. How well do you feel the Texas State MPA program prepared you for a career as a manager in public service?
      1 = excellent   2 = good   3 = fair   4 = poor   5 = no opinion

9. How well do you feel the Texas MPA program prepared you to be a leader in public service?
      1 = excellent   2 = good   3 = fair   4 = poor   5 = no opinion

10. Is there a particular skill you wish that you had developed while in the MPA program?
    If so, please specify _____

11. How would you improve the Texas State MPA Program? _____

II. PERSONAL DATA

12. What is your gender?
    A = female B = male

13. What is your race or ethnic background?
    A. African American   D. Native American
    B. Asian American   E. Caucasian
    C. Hispanic   F. Other _____

14. How many years has it been since you graduated from the MPA program?
    A. 0 - 2 years
    B. 3 - 5 years
    C. 6 -7 years
    D. Greater than 7

15. In what city did you reside while enrolled in the MPA program? _____

16. In what city/state do you currently reside?   _____

17. What was your age when you graduated from the MPA program? _____

18. What was your employment status while enrolled in the MPA program?
    A. employed full time
    B. employed part time
    C. not employed

19. Which one of the following best describes the type of organization in which you are currently employed?
    A. public sector
    B. nonprofit agency
    C. private business

20. Please enter any additional comments regarding the MPA program. _____
_____

Appendix D

2008 Current Alumni (Post-2002)
Survey Results, Including Comments

1. Please indicate your opinion of the following statements regarding your MPA experience.							
		Value	1	2	3	4	5
Item	Mean	Count	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The courses were offered at convenient times.	1.43	70	45 (64 %)	20 (29 %)	5 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
The curriculum prepared me for applied research.	1.49	67	38 (57 %)	25 (37 %)	4 (6 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned.	1.50	70	40 (57 %)	27 (39 %)	1 (1 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
The MPA program has a public service orientation.	1.54	69	42 (61 %)	20 (29 %)	4 (6 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)
The curriculum, as a whole, emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.	1.56	70	37 (53 %)	28 (40 %)	4 (6 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
The MPA program has helped in my career advancement.	1.57	69	43 (62 %)	17 (25 %)	5 (7 %)	4 (6 %)	0 (0 %)
The courses were offered at convenient locations.	1.59	70	39 (56 %)	23 (33 %)	6 (9 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
The curriculum provided a balance between theoretical and applied approaches to public administration.	1.64	70	38 (54 %)	23 (33 %)	6 (9 %)	2 (3 %)	1 (1 %)
The MPA program focuses on continuing professional development.	1.75	69	32 (46 %)	25 (36 %)	9 (13 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)

2. Please rate overall MPA faculty performance in the following areas.							
Item	Mean	Value	1	2	3	4	5
		Count	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsure
Knowledge of subject area	1.20	70	57 (81 %)	12 (17 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Class preparation	1.36	70	45 (64 %)	25 (36 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Timeliness of feedback	1.41	70	44 (63 %)	23 (33 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Accessibility	1.43	69	42 (61 %)	24 (35 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Interested in professional development of students	1.49	70	45 (64 %)	18 (26 %)	5 (7 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Public service orientation	1.63	70	40 (57 %)	20 (29 %)	8 (11 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (3 %)

3. The MPA program contributed to my knowledge and comprehension of the following areas.							
		Value	1	2	3	4	5
Item	Mean	Count	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Ethics	1.50	70	41	24	4	1	0

Item	Mean	Value Count	(59 %)	(34 %)	(6 %)	(1 %)	(0 %)
Organizational/management concepts	1.50	70	40 (57 %)	25 (36 %)	5 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Policy and program formation	1.51	70	38 (54 %)	29 (41 %)	2 (3 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
Decision-making	1.54	70	36 (51 %)	31 (44 %)	2 (3 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
Program implementation/evaluation	1.59	69	37 (54 %)	26 (38 %)	3 (4 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)
Problem solving	1.60	70	35 (50 %)	30 (43 %)	3 (4 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Economic/social institutions and processes	1.67	70	31 (44 %)	32 (46 %)	6 (9 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
Budget and financial administration	1.70	70	31 (44 %)	31 (44 %)	6 (9 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Political/legal institutions and processes	1.71	69	28 (41 %)	35 (51 %)	4 (6 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Human resources management	1.74	70	33 (47 %)	25 (36 %)	9 (13 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)
Information systems and technology applications	1.94	70	25 (36 %)	31 (44 %)	8 (11 %)	5 (7 %)	1 (1 %)

4. Please rate the MPA program in the following areas.

Item	Mean	Value Count	1 Excellent	2 Good	3 Fair	4 Poor	5 Unsure
Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty	1.42	69	40 (58 %)	29 (42 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
The helpfulness of the program staff	1.46	70	43 (61 %)	22 (31 %)	5 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
The quality of the program advising	1.53	70	43 (61 %)	20 (29 %)	4 (6 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)
The quality of the library services	1.60	68	38 (56 %)	21 (31 %)	8 (12 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (1 %)
Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations	1.66	70	35 (50 %)	26 (37 %)	7 (10 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program	1.67	70	34 (49 %)	27 (39 %)	7 (10 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners	1.83	69	32 (46 %)	22 (32 %)	10 (14 %)	5 (7 %)	0 (0 %)

5. The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas.

Item	Mean	Value Count	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neither Agree or Disagree	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Ability to use references appropriately in research papers	1.37	70	48 (69 %)	19 (27 %)	2 (3 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to write clearly	1.47	70	43 (61 %)	22 (31 %)	4 (6 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)

Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management.	1.49	69	41 (59 %)	23 (33 %)	4 (6 %)	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to use correct grammar	1.55	69	39 (57 %)	22 (32 %)	8 (12 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to see patterns and classify information in public policy and administration	1.59	70	36 (51 %)	27 (39 %)	7 (10 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Qualitative analysis	1.61	69	33 (48 %)	32 (46 %)	2 (3 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Quantitative analysis	1.64	70	31 (44 %)	35 (50 %)	2 (3 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to speak clearly in front of groups	1.66	70	37 (53 %)	23 (33 %)	7 (10 %)	3 (4 %)	0 (0 %)
Program evaluation	1.67	70	31 (44 %)	33 (47 %)	4 (6 %)	2 (3 %)	0 (0 %)
Legal analysis	1.96	70	24 (34 %)	29 (41 %)	14 (20 %)	2 (3 %)	1 (1 %)

6. Would you choose the MPA program again?

Category	Count	Percent
Yes	63	91 %
No	1	1 %
Uncertain	5	7 %

7. Would you recommend the MPA program to others?

Category	Count	Percent
Yes	64	93 %
No	1	1 %
Uncertain	4	6 %

8. How well do you feel the MPA program prepared you for a career as a manager in public service?

Category	Count	Percent
Excellent	41	59 %
Good	22	31 %
Fair	5	7 %
Poor	0	0 %
No opinion	2	3 %

9. How well do you feel the MPA program prepared you to be a leader in public service?

Category	Count	Percent
Excellent	40	59 %
Good	20	29 %
Fair	5	7 %
Poor	1	1 %
No opinion	2	3 %

Demographics

12. What is your gender?		
Category	Count	Percent
Male	35	50 %
Female	35	50 %

13. What is your race or ethnicity?		
Category	Count	Percent
African American	13	19 %
Hispanic American	22	31 %
Caucasian American	33	47 %
Other	2	3 %
Other, please specify:		
1. Asian		

14. How many years has it been since you graduated from the MPA program?		
Category	Count	Percent
0 - 2 years	35	50 %
3 - 5 years	24	34 %
6 - 7 years	11	16 %
greater than 7 years	0	0 %

17. What was your age when you graduated from the MPA program?		
Average age at graduation = 31.51		
Category	Count	Percent
21 or less	3	4 %
22 to 25	8	11 %
26 to 30	30	43 %
31 to 35	11	16 %
36 to 40	8	11 %
41 to 45	6	9 %
46 to 50	4	6 %
51 to 55	0	0 %
56 to 60	0	0 %
60 and over	0	0 %

18. What was your employment status while enrolled in the MPA program?		
Category	Count	Percent
Employed full-time	52	74 %
Employed part-time	16	23 %
Not employed	2	3 %

19. Which one of the following best describes the type of organization in which you are currently employed?		
Category	Count	Percent
Public sector	51	76 %

Non-profit sector	10	15 %
Private sector	6	9 %

15. In what city did you reside while enrolled in the MPA program?	Responses Compiled
Austin/Round Rock	40
San Marcos	15
San Antonio	2
Other	12

16. In what city/state do you currently reside?	Response Compiled
Central Texas	50
North Texas	3
East Texas	4
South Texas	2
Outside of Texas	9

Text Responses

10. Is there a particular skill you wish that you had developed while in the MPA program?

1. Better Public Speaking. Also, better finance/budget skills. I didn't get Hofer as my teacher which most students would find as a good thing but her students were able to graduate and apply for budget analyst positions.

2. I wish I would have been exposed to more info on American Healthcare compared to other nations

3. More in finance area.

4. Policy development and policy analysis.

5. Job searching skills and the knowledge of where to search in order to get the right job. And, Access and Excel classes would be good for the program to offer to students who do not have a great deal of work experience.

6. Governmental Accounting, Grantsmanship, Applying for jobs

7. Honestly, I would like to see the MPA program take over urban planning & urban policy from the geography department.

8. Critical analysis. Thinking in systems.

9. Public speaking

10. A better understanding of the carreer opportunities.

11. As a current grant writer, I would like to see grant writing and research classes offered. Overall, the research process was difficult; a research class will help the ARP process.

12. More emphasis on program evaluation

13. The ability to verbally communicate/public speaking

14. More Budget and financial administration skills

15. Starting up a government contractor services company to assist local and state governments with current problems.

16. I would have liked to use technology more in class related homework. For example, could we occasionally substitute a case study in a textbook with a video online that we could later discuss in class? I think increasing the use of multimedia in classwork could make the material more interesting and vivid.

17. More Grants management and policy analysis

18. Grants

19. An emphasis on how to use my MPA upon graduation, and how to find a field (career)that was right for me. Also job placement and recruitment.

20. Operational Management of Employees, recruiting, and other personnel management issues that are less specific to Public Administration but still vital to a successful management career in any field.

21. More public budgeting skills.

22. Writing grants

23. Policy, program evaluation, analysis & writing

24. I would like to have seen more career development in the program, such as applied skills and a focus on what types of employment are available. For those of us not already working in the public sector, it is difficult to present theoretical skills instead of acquired skills to a potential new employer, so some career guidance would be helpful.

25. Proposal writing, grant writing

26. My writing and speaking skills have improved dramatically. Dr. Shields and other faculty members are very accessible and contributed enormously to mys success.

11. How would you improve the MPA program?

1. Improve the focus components of the degrees. I don't feel that the requirements for any of the focuses provided a student w/ that much more of an expertise in that field. Also, take advantage of the proximity to the LBJ School by making an open effort to co-host some events. I know one is public policy and one is public admin but they compliment each other. If txstate students were able to go to some of the high profile speaker series (which we

had none of) we would be able to better network and show our analytical abilities. Along with this theme, don't be afraid to copy some practices of the LBJ school. The one example I can give is that LBJ students get business cards w/ their prospective graduation dates and info so that they can hand them out at events.

2. I would suggest a required course in Economics.

3. I think it would be good to introduce the ARP concept sooner and use more real time/real world examplts

4. teach people a few basics: project manangement, basic excel skills, and writing short position papers

5. It is already very good. Human resource management and employment laws could be beefed up.

6. POSI 5335 Problems in Research Methodology, although a difficult and challenging course, was pivotal in helping me hone and sharpen my research skills. Since the MPA program is so research intensive it would be very helpful to require POSI 5335 in the first semester of the program. The research methods I learned in the course were solid, and I wish I had that knowledge to use for all my other classes.

7. By offering classes on Access and Excel in order to prepare a student for the work force. In addition, interview technique training classes and job searching skill classes.

8. Reduce amount of people gettting in. Require 2-3 letter recommendation. Push faculty to get better job connections once one graduates. Had problems getting better employment after graduating. Program must advertise more acrosss Texas and fight off LBJ and Bush Schools to get appropriate students.

9. Exposure to the methods used to write the applied research paper should occur in the first 12 hours of the program. Texas State should develop a Ph.D. or a D.P.A. degree.

10. Offer more classes closer to the San Antonio area.

11. I would like to see Texas State start a PhD progam in public administration.

12. Perhaps add public speaking and presentations as an election. As an associate director I speak before a variety of groups on health care issues and have never taken a public speaking course. I can see where this would be helpful to public administration careers.

13. Some classes did not prepare me in general for a carreer in public administration. more rigidity needed in classes.

14. I recommend implamenting research classes into the MPA program. In addition, students should be introduced to ARP's throughout the entire MPA program.

15. The majority of classes need to be offered in Austin.

16. I would ensure that the courses such as Budget/ Finance were beneficial and included a grant management component.

17. Have a relationship with those already in the field maybe a mentorship because I went into the MPA program right after receiving my Bachelors and had no idea how to go about getting a job, what kinds of positions are available for MPA grads, and how the degree can benefit someone with no working experience.

18. More emphasis on publci speaking

19. Increase clarity of Research Methodology course

20. Have the students give you monthly feedback. Make sure the feedback is given to an administrative assistant to type, so that handwriting trends are not an issue and the program administrators have a true feedback system.

21. Better qualitative preparation. More focus on local government.

22. The main thing the program lacked was a strong sense of community. Because most of the students are commuters who live and work in Austin, I felt very disconnected from the rest of the campus in San Marcos. At the same time, I didn't feel that strong a bond with my fellow MPA students because we were all so busy and had very different schedules. I made friends with classmates, but would have liked to have an opportunity to meet other MPA students who weren't in my specific classes as well. I did attend the ASPA mixers, but I didn't feel that it was really enough interaction, especially since the group is more professional rather than student-oriented. Also, many students weren't able to attend the mixers for various reasons so attendance was always up and down. I would have liked if there was some sort of MPA student club to join, even if it was something very informal that only meets maybe once a month to do a short volunteer service project or have a brown bag with a professor or local professional. That would definitely encourage a stronger sense of MPA student community. It would also provide an opportunity for leadership development, since students would need to communicate with each other more and organize any activities for the club. I also think that an MPA student club would make the MPA program even more distinct and prestigious, especially if students wearing t-shirts were working as volunteers in

the community or networking. Of course students are busy so not everyone could participate, but if the club didn't require frequent meetings (once a month seems adequate), and the meetings were held in Austin (NOT San Marcos) many people could probably participate. I would have loved to have an MPA specific student club to be involved in when I was a student. The other clubs I joined at Texas State were so undergraduate-focused that I didn't feel connected enough to stick with them. It would also be great if there was a student-only MPA listserve where students could share info on classes, get reminders about assignments, and share networking or community info with each other. That would also help students stay involved with each other and the program, in a less formal and more candid way than the main MPA listserve offers.

23. Offer more classes during the day to encourage full time students not just persons going back to school

24. Add grants...add Ph.D. level.

25. I think the networking aspect with those that have completed the MPA and gone on to the workforce is essential to currnet MPA students success. Most graduates of the programs would be more than willing to help the current students succeed.

26. I would like to see more emphasis on the Manager/employee relationship, or the basics of being a good manager. I believe this would better equip students to take on management positions sooner after graduation.

27. Enhance the networking with state and local government entities who can place seniors and juniors in positions or paid fellowships/internships that lead to careers afterwards.

28. More opportunities to network. And since most of students are working we need more ways to transition from our current career to a career using our MPA.

29. more professional development

30. I would have students participate in conferences and research more frequently that it does occur.

31. I would enjoy more group interaction between students--either a specified day and time of the week where we could meet or a message board between all students.

32. Have more class visits from graduated working professionals. I feel like I learned quite a bit from those that were already in the workforce such as human resources managers, capitol employees, etc...

33. Offer a PhD program in Public Administration

20. Please enter any additional comments regarding the MPA program.

1. I strongly believe 5335 should be changed into a two part class. The first part should be required in the first semester and result in a paper similar to the one it results in now. This would allow students to know if they will be able to handle the most difficult part of the program prior to taking all the courses. More importantly, it will allow students to gain the important writing and research skills prior to taking most other classes, and therefore give them the opportunity to practice these skills over and over making papers for other classes better and better. Once it is time to take the 2nd part of the class, the whole semester can focused on writing and revising the Literature Review and Prospectus for their ARP. This will give the students more time to really decide what they want their ARP to be about, and be better at writing then they currently are. Right now, you don't truly learn how to write and research until after you have written papers in all your other classes and then you struggle your way through a topic and are forced to continue on that path for your ARP. When I did my ARP I got a lot of great suggestions during the oral review that were not pointed out prior, leaving me little time to fully implement them. I think if students are more prepared for the research, lit review rough draft course there will be more time to perfect the ARPs.

2. I really enjoyed the program. I am a much better thinker, writer, and evaluater.

3. The program is extremely good and very valuable to this region. Texas can be very proud of the program.

4. Texas State Univ. MPA program is deserving of national recognition, and the faculty demonstrated and continues to demonstrate a deep commitment and respect for the students and their careers.

5. Need more employment help after graduating. Having problems getting jobs.

6. MPA program may start by looking at a succession plan of professors (core staff). Question: how many current professors (core) are eligible to retire ?

7. Dr. Shields brought me to a academic level I didn't know I could reach.

8. It was a great program. Maybe technology classes could have been a little more hands on. professors gave a lot of attention to students, especially MPA program professors. Thanks!

9. Excellent program.
10. Thank you for the opportunity to offer my opionions of the Texas State MPA program. I enjoyed my experience in the MPA program and value my degree.
11. I appreciate the communication and follow up that Dr. Shields maintains with alumni!
12. Great Program!
13. excellent program!
14. Great Program, hope to see a Doctoral degree come along soon
15. Excellent Program!
16. I have people ask me about TSU's MPA program all the time and have referred numerous people. I believe it is the best program in the state to prepare you for work in the public sector.
17. Great!
18. The MPA program prepared me for a career in city management. I would not hestitate to recommend the Texas State MPA program to anyone wishing to further their potential, especially if they are interested in a career in city management.
19. I felt that the MPA program and the focus on research and problem solving has been valuable my career. I am a program analyst for a public agency.
20. I feel that the program does well in getting the students to net-work and to understand the importance of it.
21. The MPA program is one of the best in the country!! Thank you.

Appendix E

2008 Alumni (pre-2002)
Survey Results, Including Comments

1. Please indicate your opinion of the following statements regarding your MPA experience.							
Item	Mean	**Value**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
		Count	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The courses were offered at convenient times.	1.52	42	21 (50 %)	20 (48 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
The MPA program has a public service orientation.	1.60	42	23 (55 %)	15 (36 %)	2 (5 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)
The curriculum prepared me for applied research.	1.64	42	21 (50 %)	16 (38 %)	4 (10 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
The courses were offered frequently enough so that my degree requirements could be completed as planned.	1.69	42	19 (45 %)	18 (43 %)	4 (10 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
The courses were offered at convenient locations.	1.76	42	14 (33 %)	25 (60 %)	2 (5 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
The MPA program has helped in my career advancement.	1.79	42	22 (52 %)	10 (24 %)	7 (17 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)
The curriculum provided a balance between theoretical and applied approaches to public administration.	1.81	42	12 (29 %)	27 (64 %)	2 (5 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
The MPA program focuses on continuing professional development.	1.90	42	15 (36 %)	18 (43 %)	7 (17 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)
The curriculum, as a whole, emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.	1.95	42	11 (26 %)	24 (57 %)	5 (12 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)

2. Please rate overall MPA faculty performance in the following areas.							
Item	Mean	**Value**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
		Count	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsure
Knowledge of subject area	1.26	42	32 (76 %)	9 (21 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Class preparation	1.48	42	23 (55 %)	18 (43 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Interested in professional development of students	1.55	42	26 (62 %)	10 (24 %)	5 (12 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Accessibility	1.62	42	22 (52 %)	16 (38 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (2 %)
Public service orientation	1.62	42	20 (48 %)	18 (43 %)	4 (10 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Timeliness of feedback	1.71	42	18 (43 %)	20 (48 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (2 %)

3. The MPA program contributed to my knowledge and comprehension of the following areas.							
Item	Mean	**Value**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
		Count	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Ethics	1.62	42	18	22	2	0	0

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Item	Mean	Count	(43 %)	(52 %)	(5 %)	(0 %)	(0 %)
Organizational/management concepts	1.71	41	19 (46 %)	17 (41 %)	3 (7 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)
Policy and program formation	1.76	42	18 (43 %)	19 (45 %)	2 (5 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)
Budget and financial administration	1.79	42	17 (40 %)	18 (43 %)	6 (14 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Problem solving	1.81	42	16 (38 %)	19 (45 %)	6 (14 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Decision-making	1.81	42	12 (29 %)	26 (62 %)	4 (10 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Program implementation/evaluation	1.83	42	17 (40 %)	18 (43 %)	4 (10 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)
Human resources management	1.90	42	15 (36 %)	17 (40 %)	9 (21 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Economic/social institutions and processes	1.95	42	14 (33 %)	20 (48 %)	4 (10 %)	4 (10 %)	0 (0 %)
Political/legal institutions and processes	1.95	42	15 (36 %)	18 (43 %)	5 (12 %)	4 (10 %)	0 (0 %)
Information systems and technology applications	2.26	42	8 (19 %)	18 (43 %)	13 (31 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)

4. Please rate the MPA program in the following areas.

Item	Mean	Value Count	1 Excellent	2 Good	3 Fair	4 Poor	5 Unsure
The helpfulness of the program staff	1.67	42	20 (48 %)	18 (43 %)	3 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	1 (2 %)
The quality of the library services	1.76	42	17 (40 %)	20 (48 %)	3 (7 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)
The quality of the program advising	1.79	42	20 (48 %)	14 (33 %)	6 (14 %)	1 (2 %)	1 (2 %)
Outside-classroom accessibility between students and faculty	1.88	42	17 (40 %)	17 (40 %)	6 (14 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (5 %)
Opportunities for interaction with professional public administration associations	1.90	42	18 (43 %)	14 (33 %)	7 (17 %)	2 (5 %)	1 (2 %)
Outside-classroom interaction among students in the program	2.10	42	14 (33 %)	17 (40 %)	6 (14 %)	3 (7 %)	2 (5 %)
Opportunities to speak to public administration practitioners	2.14	42	13 (31 %)	16 (38 %)	8 (19 %)	4 (10 %)	1 (2 %)

5. The MPA program contributed to the development of my skills in the following areas.

Item	Mean	Value Count	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neither Agree or Disagree	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Ability to use references appropriately in research papers	1.45	42	24 (57 %)	17 (40 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Qualitative analysis	1.57	42	23 (55 %)	14 (33 %)	5 (12 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management.	1.64	42	20 (48 %)	17 (40 %)	5 (12 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to write clearly	1.71	42	17 (40 %)	20 (48 %)	5 (12 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to see patterns and classify information in public policy and administration	1.74	42	19 (45 %)	16 (38 %)	6 (14 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Quantitative analysis	1.76	42	17 (40 %)	18 (43 %)	7 (17 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Program evaluation	1.76	42	19 (45 %)	16 (38 %)	5 (12 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to use correct grammar	1.90	41	14 (34 %)	18 (44 %)	8 (20 %)	1 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Legal analysis	2.07	41	13 (32 %)	17 (41 %)	6 (15 %)	5 (12 %)	0 (0 %)
Ability to speak clearly in front of groups	2.10	42	10 (24 %)	22 (52 %)	6 (14 %)	4 (10 %)	0 (0 %)

6. Would you choose the MPA program again?

Category	Count	Percent
Yes	38	90 %
No	0	0 %
Uncertain	4	10 %

7. Would you recommend the MPA program to others?

Category	Count	Percent
Yes	40	95 %
No	0	0 %
Uncertain	2	5 %

8. How well do you feel the MPA program prepared you for a career as a manager in public service?

Category	Count	Percent
Excellent	20	48 %
Good	19	45 %
Fair	3	7 %
Poor	0	0 %
No opinion	0	0 %

9. How well do you feel the MPA program prepared you to be a leader in public service?

Category	Count	Percent
Excellent	18	43 %
Good	18	43 %
Fair	6	14 %
Poor	0	0 %
No opinion	0	0 %

Demographics

12. What is your gender?		
Category	Count	Percent
Male	26	62 %
Female	16	38 %

13. What is your race or ethnicity?		
Category	Count	Percent
African American	4	10 %
Hispanic American	6	14 %
Caucasian American	32	76 %
Other	0	0 %
Other, please specify:		

14. How many years has it been since you graduated from the MPA program?		
Category	Count	Percent
0 - 2 years	0	0 %
3 - 5 years	0	0 %
6 - 7 years	0	0 %
greater than 7 years	42	100 %

17. What was your age when you graduated from the MPA program?		
Average age at graduation = 34.42		
Category	Count	Percent
21 or less	2	5 %
22 to 25	5	12 %
26 to 30	9	21 %
31 to 35	9	21 %
36 to 40	10	24 %
41 to 45	4	10 %
46 to 50	2	5 %
51 to 55	1	2 %
56 to 60	0	0 %
60 and over	0	0 %

18. What was your employment status while enrolled in the MPA program?		
Category	Count	Percent
Employed full-time	30	71 %
Employed part-time	6	14 %
Not employed	6	14 %

19. Which one of the following best describes the type of organization in which you are currently employed?		
Category	Count	Percent
Public sector	29	71 %
Non-profit sector	7	17 %

Private sector	5	12 %
15. In what city did you reside while enrolled in the MPA program?		**Responses compiled**
Austin		26
San Marcos		6
San Antonio		4
Other		5
16. In what city/state do you currently reside?		**Responses compiled**
Central Texas		26
North Texas		6
East Texas		5
Outside of Texas		4

Text Responses

10. Is there a particular skill you wish that you had developed while in the MPA program?
1. I think the managerial aspect of the program could be emphasized more strongly.
2. I wish I had done more on managing employees, but the legal, ethics, organizational theory/change/etc. training was excellent and useful in my current career.
3. Spoken communications
4. emergency presentations to high level government officials
5. procurement and contract management
6. How to interact with elected officials. Wide variety of experience, goals, beliefs and committment levels. You need to be ready to adapt to a lot of different people.
7. An emphasis on formulating oral and written arguements (public speaking). The financial tools were very helpful, but I would strongly recommend there also be time given to forcasting methodologies. The computer courses should be brought up-to-date to focus on what tools are actually being used by the industry. Also, it would be helpful to students to have hands on experience with at least one financial system and use this to develop a budget, learn to load a budget, and go through various exercises typical for executing a budget as well as a year-end close-out.
8. No, the program was broad enough to cover all aspects of public management.
9. Project Management - Concepts, tools and practical applications.
10. I'm evaluating the program from a distance of some years. I would liked the opportunity to have had more exposure to the topics I selected "disagree".
11. More understanding of group dynamics and management. More public speaking. More economic and international understanding.
12. I would have liked to have more instruction in statistical analysis. Although I never wanted to be a statistician, as a public manager I am a consumer of statistical information and knowing more about how statistical models are developed would be helpful.

11. How would you improve the MPA program?
1. It was a good program, but sometimes expectations were lower than I'd like to see. I think it's safe to say that you could raise the bar a little and make your expectations a bit higher for student performance.
2. I completed the program 13 years ago - perhaps these courses are in place now. I would have benefitted from more communications-oriented class offerings. I also am waiting for the PhD program.
3. Less theory, more hands-on work with professionals
4. More practioner involvement in the MPA classes.
5. -Add a Phd Program to improve the programs standing, while enhancing quality of research done at Texas State.
6. Offer continuing education classes to ex-alumns in Austin - downtown - where many have easy access to parking in the evening hours. Thinking of City Hall and the parking available there.
7. Less ARP emphasis, more practical skills
8. I commuted from New Braunfels and went to class in San Marcos and Austin. Some classes to the south in NB or using SAC facilities in Universal City would have been convenient.
9. I would recommend leading practioners come to speak and interact with students on a regular basis. Practioners should cover local, state, and federal government, and should include those from government "think tanks" to discuss relevant issues (e.g., current status of economy and implications on government institutions, transportation, environment, budgeting and policy "best practices", elections). I also highly recommend working with one or more municipalities/states and encourage students to complete an internship program (e.g., DC Government has a Capital City Fellowship Program for recent graduates).
10. Develop stronger internship program, build relationships with institutions outside of Texas to offer students a broader range of opportunities. Use the internship program to open doors beyond Texas. This will enhance the value of the internship, the value of the program, and will help raise the profile of the program.

11. Professional growth of the program's graduates needs to be more emphasized. Right now most of the students/graduates are practioners and there is no clear goals on career/professional assistance after graduation.

12. Given the wide range of government and non-profit organizational structures, I don't think one could improve the MPA Program without increasing the credit hour requirements. I would urge the Faculty to continue with the heavy emphasis on practical application rather than more theoretical coursework - I believe this is the strength of the program at Texas State University and separates it from other programs that are more "academic."

13. require the program evaluation course

14. Teaching/informing graduates who have gone immediately from their undergraduate program to the MPA program how to promote, network, and sell their skills to public sector employers.

15. More social outreach.

20. Please enter any additional comments regarding the MPA program.

1. I greatly appreciated the ability to have night courses, and some of them held in Austin where I lived, so that I could continue working full-time while obtaining my graduate degree.

2. I recommend the program all the time!

3. I am retired and was in one of the earliest MPA programs and I hope that it has been improved with a balance of classroom and real life learning situations. I am strongly against group-think management because the group's efficiency cannot surpass that of the least intelligent group member.

4. I strongly support the MPA program at TSU and have recommended the program to many subordinates with whom I work, at least two of which are currently enrolled in the program.

5. This is the best MPA program in the state. It is far superior to the one at Texas Tech University and more than adequately serves the need of it's students.

6. Thanks for continuing to strive for excellence - raising the bar and keeping it at a level that challenges students to excel in all that they undertake.

7. The research project was critical to the overall excellence of the program.

8. Great program. Glad to see so many of same professors still there. Good luck with your ARP!

9. As an alum outside of Texas, I see the need for the MPA program to work toward developing opportunities for its students nationally, if not globally. I understand the mission of the program and its demographics. The program has its niche and serves its students well, however, if the program desires a national reputation befitting of its quality, the program has got to look beyond the State of Texas, and make it a priority to forge relationships that deliver value to students and prestige to the program.

10. I chose the MPA Program at Texas State because I new I wanted a career in local government, the program was accredited and it was close to home. However, in retrospect I made the best choice because the Program focused on real world, practical skills and applications. Given the choice between Texas State and Harvard, I would not hesitate in choosing Texas State. Don't change a thing - the program is outstanding.

11. It was the best thing I did for myself, professionally and personally.

12. The program has caring professors and staff committed to students, alumni and the advancement of Public Administration.

13. Helped me develop professionally and achieve core goals.

14. I came to the MPA program to expand my "marketability" beyond my current discipline. This program did exactly what I had hoped it would. It made my resume more appealing to a broader range of employers. More importantly, my level of competency increased substantially so that I was able to contribute in a significant way in policy decisions where I worked. Later when I became an elected official I relied a great deal on the knowledge I gained through the MPA program.