GAUGING ALUMNI PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE
MASTERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM
AT SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY IN MEETING ITS MISSION

BY

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ABSTRACT

Many higher educational institutions today have to face issues concerning institutional quality and accountability. The public is asking questions about the cost, pricing, outcomes and effectiveness of these institutions. When U.S. businesses were faced with global competitive difficulties, many responded by implementing quality management and continuous quality improvement principles. There is now a growing trend in higher education to implement these same quality principles.

Continuous improvement in quality includes developing a mission that reflects the purpose and goals of an institution. Continuous improvement works best when an organization is diligent about self-assessment. Effective assessment is helped when an organization has clear purposes and goals - such as those derived from a mission statement.

The Public Administration Graduate Program at Southwest Texas State University is a management/practitioner-oriented program. Its core mission is to prepare its students for careers as managers and leaders of public service; the tenets of its mission statement reflect the means by which the program strives to cultivate its students in the field of public adminstration. The purpose of this research project is to assess whether the MPA program at Southwest Texas State University is effectively meeting the tenets of its mission - via the perception of the program's alumni. The research methodology includes survey research and analysis of existing statistics.

The questionnaire asked alumni to rate aspects of the MPA program that were reflected in the program's mission statement. The survey was sent to alumni (those whose addresses were on record with the graduate alumni office) that had graduated from the program within the past eight years (149 former students). Ninety-one former students completed and returned the survey.

The findings of the research show that the program's alumni do perceive 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.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PURPOSE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, demands for assessment and accountability in the area of higher

education have been escalating. When the National Postsecondary Educational Cooperative held

its first council meeting in 1995, student outcomes assessment was one of eight issues identified

as most pressing (Erwin, 1999, 1). Educational program quality was once considered to be

related to level of resource investment, such as large endowments and library resources. More

recently, however, institutional and program quality have come to incorporate educational

outcomes, in addition to (and sometimes opposed to) material resources.[1] Performance is

enhanced by continuously assessing and improving programs. Many Postsecondary institutions

today use assessment to measure aspects of education, such as student learning, program

effectiveness, and the institutional accomplishment of its mission (Freed & Klugman, 1997, 3).

Graduate programs, particularly in the areas of business and public administration, use an applied

"professional" focus in their curriculums. Assessment can be used to determine whether a

program is successful in instilling the desired professional competencies into their students.

There have been differing opinions on the value of assessment. Some educators have

voiced the opinion that it is difficult to be specific about educational goals and objectives, and

that there are problems involved in measuring the attainment of those goals. Additionally,

educators have expressed concerns over the consequences of educational assessment and the

possibility that educators may be unfairly held accountable for negative assessment results

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[1]Freed & Klugman, 1997, 4. See Also Freed, Klugman, & Fife, 1997,2; and Astin, 1993, 5.

(Jennings, 1989, 438). However, from an educational standpoint, one of the most important reasons for assessment is to bring about curriculum improvement. Feedback obtained from an assessment study can used to improve educational programs. Information collected can be used to make decisions about the overall contribution of an educational program or components of such a program. Information can also be used to strengthen deficiencies or revise the curriculum.

Educational accrediting associations, such as the National Association of Schools for Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) have also become involved with the concept of assessment. Accrediting associations have particular power over educational institutions and departments due to the educational standards often promulgated by these associations. NASPAA was founded in April 1970 as an association of institutions, university schools and other program entities advocating graduate education in public administration/affairs. NASPAA is recognized by the Council on Higher Education as a specialized accrediting agency and is authorized to accredit masters degree programs in public affairs and administration. The association conducts a program of voluntary peer review evaluation of member institution public affairs and administration programs (NASPAA, 1999). In 1977, the association adopted "Standards for Professional Masters Degree Programs in Public Affairs Policy and Administration." (NASPAA, 1999). An accreditation process was instituted that was based on these standards. Mission-based accreditation began with the 1994 accreditation cycle (Ingraham, 1996, 171).The standards state that the program shall assess the performance of its students and shall also assess the accomplishment of the program objectives. Assessment measures can take any form that is deemed appropriate to the program and its circumstances, but a program needs to determine how well it carries out its mission (NASPAA, 1999).

Mission statements are considered an integral part of the assessment process and are also required by many accrediting associations, including NASPAA. One must know what is to be assessed before one knows how to assess it. Furthermore, educational philosophy communicated through the mission, objectives and goals is a signaling device that enables people to distinguish among programs that would otherwise appear to be homogeneous. Mission statements vary from institution to institution, reflecting on the unique character of each educational institution.

The Public Administration Graduate Program at Southwest Texas State University is accredited by NASPAA and is, thus, guided by the standards set forth by NASPAA. The MPA program, which was established in 1973, provides a management/practitioner-oriented curriculum.[2] The program's mission is to prepare its students for careers as managers and leader in public service. The mission statement itself contains elements supporting the program's core purpose of instilling public administration management and leadership skills into its students.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to assess whether the SWT MPA's alumni believe that the MPA program effectively provides the services set forth in its mission. This question is worth researching because the results of this research will help the MPA faculty determine if the program's curriculum and services provide the necessary foundation for preparing students for management and leadership careers in public service.

The current mission statement was developed in 1998. A few revisions to the statement

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[2]The LBJ School of Affairs, located in Austin, Texas, offers a policy-focused curriculum. It is a chiefly daytime program, catering primarily to full-time students. It serves a different clientele than the SWT MPA program (whose students consist mainly of part-time, in-career practitioners). The MPA program at SWT offers courses in Austin with the approval of the LBJ School (SWT, 1995, Sec. 1, P. 3).

were added in 1999. This study surveys alumni who have graduated from the program within the past eight years. Even though the mission has been in existence for only two years, the public administration curriculum has always focused on preparing its students for public administration management, therefore the perceptions of alumni who have graduated from the program over the time span of several years should prove useful for assessment purposes. Particularly, the perceptions of alumni who have graduated within the past two years can be used as starting benchmarks in assessment. This survey can determine if the mission statement made a difference in the alumni's perception of whether the MPA program effectively fulfills its purpose of management and leadership preparation for public service.

PREVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

This Chapter (**Chapter One**) provides the introduction and research purpose for this project. **Chapter Two** reviews the history and concepts of Total Quality Management, while **Chapter Three** explores the movement of Total Quality Management in the field of Higher Education. Assessment and accountability in Higher Education is also discussed, along with the related concept of mission-based assessment. **Chapter Four** reviews the role of NASPAA in the development of standards and assessment protocols for Public Affairs/Administration programs in Higher Education. **Chapter Five** discusses the setting for this project - the MPA program at Southwest Texas State University. This Chapter also develops the conceptual framework for the research performed. **Chapter Six** explains the research methodology used for this project and **Chapter Seven** provides the results of the research. Finally, **Chapter Eight** summarizes the findings and assesses whether the program's alumni believe that the SWT MPA program is effectively meeting its mission.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT MOVEMENT

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The most socially useful learning in the modern world
is the learning of the process of learning ... a continuous
openness to the experience and incorporate into oneself
the process of change.
　　　　　- Carl Rogers, as quoted by Mink, 1994.

INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Management is a management philosophy that, for the last two decades, has

been espoused for business organizations. This management philosophy has caught the attention

of higher education administrators and practitioners who seek continuous improvement in higher

education programs and practices.[3]

This chapter provides background information on Total Quality Management ("TQM").

The origins of the TQM movement is reviewed. The concepts involving total quality and the role

of the Malcolm Baldridge Quality Award are also discussed.

THE ORIGINS OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Prior to the 1970s, America was the world leader in productivity (Schmdit, 1993, 31).

The rest of the world, led by Japan, however, began to catch up and American business leaders,

looking for ways to maintain a competitive advantage, focused upon the philosophy of quality

management and its related concepts, such as continuous improvement. Decades earlier, in

1931, Walter Shewhart, a statistician at the Hawthorne plant at Western Electric, published a

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[3]In a national 1994 survey of 400 higher education institutions that were identified as showing an interest in quality principles, 25% of the respondents reported that they had begun implementation of quality principles on or before 1990. Fifty percent reported that they began implementation of such principles in 1991 or 1992, and twenty-five percent reported that they began quality principles implementation in 1993 and early 1994 (Freed, 1997, 27).

book entitled *Economic Control of Quality of Manufactured Product*. This book became the foundation of modern statistical process control (in which sampling is used to monitor quality) and provided the basis for the philosophy of total quality management or continuous process improvement (Sytsma, 1999).

W. Edwards Deming worked as Shewhart's assistant and protégée. After World War II, Shewhart and Deming lectured on their process, but were mostly ignored by American Business leaders. The two also lectured in Japan, where their ideas were embraced by that country's business leaders. After American business leaders began to feel the competition from other countries, notably Japan, they began to pay attention to Deming and began to heed the concept of quality management and continuous improvement. Even the U.S. military organizations adopted the quality management philosophy. In fact, it was a U.S. Navy psychologist, Nancy Warren, who first coined the term "Total Quality Management" (TQM)(Schmidt, 1993, 31). The term TQM has now become the popular label for the quality movement in organizations and management.

Governmental agencies at the local, state and federal level also began moving toward the TQM principles. The Federal Quality Institute was established in 1988 to introduce senior officials in the federal government to TQM and to be the primary source of information, training and consulting services for federal agencies (Schmdit, 1993, 31).

WHAT IS TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT?

TQM is a management philosophy that focuses on customer satisfaction through quality improvements (Rosenhoover, 1996). This philosophy can be defined as "the totally integrated effort for gaining competitive advantage by continuously improving every facet of organization

culture" (Zhiwei, 1999). Quality is the priority goal and is presumed to be the key to the organizational survival and growth. Continued improvement is a guiding principle in which teams and groups are the primary vehicles for planning and problem solving.

Shewhart had developed an approach toward process improvement which is currently known as the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle. This cycle is a continuous feedback loop in which a plan is developed to improve a process. The plan is then tested and the results of the testing is assessed and acted upon, if successful. The repetition of the cycle leads to continuous improvement. Peter Senge, a noted author in the quality movement[4], has observed that the roots of the PDCA Cycle predate Shewhart and Deming, going all the way back to educator John Dewey. John Dewey asserted that all learning revolves in a cycle consisting of four basic stages: Discovery - the discovery of new insights; Invention - creating new options for action; Production - producing new actions; Observation - seeing the consequences of those actions, which leads to new discoveries, continuing the cycle (Senge, 1999). Dewey discussed goal-setting and contended that goals must be an outgrowth of existing conditions. Goals must be based upon what is already going on in the organization (Shields, 1999, 168).

Another TQM concept consists of sharing the vision and purpose of the organization with others. This vision includes the broader sense of mission: who we are; why we do this work; and why it is important (Wall, 1999, 24). Quality evolves from establishing a vision of what the organization is expected to accomplish and from developing a plan to make connections between goals and objectives, objectives and strategies, and strategies and benchmarks. A quality plan

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[4]The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. 1994. Doubleday.

also establishes concrete ways to collect evidence of organizational progress in achieving its goals (Shields, 1999, 169). TQM must be continued over a long period of time in order to be truly effective (Rosenhoover, 1996).

In TQM-managed organizations, the standard procedure is to keep doing things better. As long as thing are not perfect, there's room for improvement. David Kearns, CEO of Xerox Corporation, once told his colleagues "Quality is a race without a finish line. A focus on quality has made XEROX a stronger company, but we know we'll never be a good as we can be, because we'll always try to be better. We are on a mission of continuous quality improvement." (Schmidt, 1993, 8).

THE MALCOLM BALDRIDGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARD

In 1987, the U.S. Congress created the Baldridge National Quality Award[5] to encourage excellence in all aspects of business management. The Baldrige award is administered by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), under the U.S. Department of Commerce. This award gave further impetus to the United States quality movement and is considered the most recognized quality award in the United States (Rosenhoover, 1996). A board, consisting of leaders in business, professional and trade organizations, accrediting bodies, universities and government, reviews entries for the award. The award is given to organizations that excel in the effective quality management and implementation of a process. A maximum of only six companies per year may receive the award (Rosenhoover, 1996).

The benchmarking criteria identified by the Baldridge model include leadership,

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[5]Public Law 100-107, The Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Improvement Act of 1987.

customer focus, strategic planning, management, employee involvement, training, reward and

recognition, employee focus, customer contacts, design of products and services, process

management, supplier quality, data collection and analysis, benchmarking, corporate

responsibility and citizenship, and system assessments (George, 1994, 11 - 12). Judges use a

battery of guidelines and benchmarking methods to evaluate applicant organizations. This

benchmarking criteria can be used by other organizations (not just those who compete for the

award) in assessing the quality of their own business practices. Since the Baldridge Program was

introduced in 1988, the National Institute of Standards and Technology has distributed more than

a million copies of the criteria. (George, 1994, 5). In 1989, a comparable award, the President's

Quality and Productivity Improvement Award, was created to recognize excellence in the overall

management and customer service of federal agencies. Criteria for this award is similar to the

criteria used for the Baldridge award (Schmidt, 1993, 31).

SUMMARY

Chapter Two has provided a general overview of total quality management and of the

Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award. Beginning around the 1970s, American

businessmen began exploring TQM as a guiding philosophy in the management of business

organizations. Continuous improvement plays an important role in TQM. The concept of

quality can mean different things to different people. The Malcolm Baldridge National Quality

Award, however, uses assessment criteria that all organizations can use in measuring their own

organizations. Chapter Three reviews the quality movement in the field of higher education.

THE TOTAL QUALITY MOVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

This literature review chapter explores the quality movement (and its surrounding issues) in higher education. This chapter discusses the Malcolm Baldridge Quality Award for Education. Also reviewed are the related topics of higher education assessment and accountability, the role of accrediting associations in the quality movement, characteristics of effective assessment, the importance of mission statements in the assessment process, various assessment methodologies, and the use of alumni in higher education assessment.

QUALITY CONCERNS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Over the past two decades, concern over the quality of American education has been expressed frequently in the public media and has been debated in numerous forums (Karathanos, 1999). One of the strongest statements regarding the state of American education came in a 1983 report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education:

> Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach those of their parents. (Karathanos, 1999).

During the 1990s, calls for improving American education have come from many sources. In "An Open Letter: TQM [total quality management] on the Campus," the CEOs of six prominent companies-American Express, Ford, IBM, Motorola, Procter and Gamble, and Xerox-stated that "We believe business and academia have a shared responsibility to learn, to teach, and to practice total quality management. If the United States expects to improve its

global competitive performance, business and academic leaders must close ranks behind an agenda that stresses the importance and value of TQM." (Karathanos, 1999). These six companies sponsor an annual Total Quality Forum where information is shared on the role of TQM on U.S. campuses and on the results of collaborative projects between business and academia. Deming also discussed the role of American education in improving the U.S. economy. He stated that "there is deep concern in the United States today about education.... Indeed, if our future lies in specialty products and services, as mass production moves to automation and to other countries, then improvement of education in this country is even more vital than hitherto supposed." (As cited in George, 1994,145).

THE MALCOLM BALDRIDGE QUALITY AWARD FOR EDUCATION

The success of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) for businesses generated an interest in the Baldrige business criteria as a road map to guide quality improvement efforts and to achieve organizational excellence in the business sector. According to Karathanos, the interest in adapting the Baldrige business criteria to education has been strong. The Academic Quality Consortium was among the many organizations, institutions, and individuals who had been urging the Baldrige office to develop criteria for the education sector (Karathanos, 1999). The Baldrige office responded and in 1994-1995 developed the "Education Pilot Criteria" that was pilot tested in 1995 through the same process used in the Baldrige award for business.

In February 1996, the Baldrige office hosted a conference where the participating institutions shared their experiences with the pilot program. Feedback on the pilot program was used to revise and improve the education pilot criteria and the evaluation process. Those efforts

culminated with the development and release of the Education Criteria for Performance

Excellence (Karathanos, 1999).

A set of core values and concepts, which are summarized below, are the foundation for

developing and integrating all requirements in the education criteria (Karathanos):

- **Leadership** - Senior administrators need to create a student-focused, learning-oriented climate and ensure that school policies reinforce the climate for improved learning.

- **Strategic planning** - examines how the school sets strategic directions and how it develops key action plans to support its directions. Also examined are how plans are deployed and how performance is tracked.

- **Student and Stakeholder Focus** - examines how the school determines requirement expectations and preferences of its students and stakeholders. Also examined is how the school builds relationships with students and stakeholders, and determines their satisfaction.

- **Information and Analysis** - This category examines the selection, management, and effectiveness of use of information and data to support key school processes and action plans, and the schools performance management system.

- **Faculty and Staff Focus** - examines how the school enables faculty and staff to develop and utilize their full potential, aligned with the school's objectives. Also examined are the school's efforts to build and maintain an environment and climate conducive to performance excellence, full participation, and personal and organizational growth.

- **Educational and Support Process Management** - this category examines the key aspects of process management, including learning-focuses design, education delivery, and school services and operations. The category examines how key processes are designed, implemented, managed, and improved to achieve better performance.

- **School Performance Results** - examines student performance, student and stakeholder satisfaction, faculty and staff results, and school-specific performance. Also examined are performance levels relative to comparable schools and/or appropriately-selected organizations.

The 1998 Congress authorized the creation of a Baldrige award for education and

appropriated funds for its implementation in 1999. On 23 October 1998, the National Quality

program announced implementation of a Baldrige award for education in 1999.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Self-assessment is an important process in the total quality movement and has also become a topic of note in the field of higher education.[6] The Educational Baldridge criteria notes that self-assessment allows educational institutions to identify strengths and weaknesses, align resources, and improve productivity and effectiveness (Baldridge, 1999). As Shields (1999) writes, "In order to make sense of a goal/aim, it is essential to examine where we are" (Shields, 1999).

There have been differing opinions on the value of assessment. Some people have voiced the opinion that it is difficult to be specific about program goals and objectives, and that there are problems involved in measuring the attainment of those goals. Additionally, others have expressed concerns over the consequences of educational assessment and the possibility that educators may be unfairly held accountable for negative assessment results.[7] However, many educational constituencies believe that the need for higher education assessment and accountability outweighs these concerns.

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[6]In addition to educational assessment publications by authors such as C.R. Pace, A. W. Astin, P. T. Ewell, and Trudy Banta, there are several journals that are devoted to the subject of educational assessment. Such journals include *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Change, Quality Assurance in Education,* and *Benchmarking in Higher Education.* The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the American Association for Higher Education also contain assessment information and news on their websites (see www.nchems.com and www.aahe.org/assessment/assessnw.htm. In 1993, the American Association for Higher Education created the Academic Quality Consortium for the purpose of providing academic institutions the opportunity to exchange assessment information and share the results of their work with other higher education communities (Freed, 1997, 29).

[7]See, for example: Shields, 1999, 2; Terenzini, 1989, 645; and Jennings, 1989, 438.

State officials are becoming increasingly interested in assessment and how well money is spent in higher education. Some states have adopted formal assessment requirements. In 1979, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission Performance Funding Program allocated a portion of the public institution budgets on the basis of evidence that faculty and administrators were collecting information about student performance and that they were using this information to improve programs and services (Banta, 1993, 283). In 1985, only five states had legislatively mandated educational accountability. By 1990, forty states had such mandates (Hudgins, 1991, 3). More recently (1999), lawmakers in both New Jersey and New Mexico begin linking a small share of their public college appropriations to performances. (Schmidt, 1999, A39).

In the past few years, several major reports dealing with assessment had expressed a need for higher education to institute a systematic assessment program (Brandt, 3).[8] Recently, the Virginia State Council on Higher Education voted to adopt a new method of funding public colleges, based on school performance. The Council intends for the state to finance colleges by giving each of them a yearly grant, along with awarding other increases based on how well the educational institutions perform in several areas. The plan calls for college performance to be judged by measuring student graduation and retention rates, beginning in the Fall of 2001. The Council is also leaning toward including assessment of student scores on college exit exams, student success in finding employment after graduation, and faculty productivity, as the funding method is phased in over a period of several years (Roanoke Times and World News. May 19, 1991. A1).

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[8]Brandt notes the following two reports: *Involvement in Learning* (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, National Institute of Education, 1984) and *Integrity in the College Curriculum* (Association for American Colleges, 1985).

HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

Many regional accrediting associations have written assessment requirements into their reaccreditation process. One such association, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is a leader in this area.[9] SACS intends that all its member institutions engage in an ongoing pursuit of quality and that each institution demonstrate how well its fulfills its purpose (Brandt, 1998, 4). The SACS accreditation approval process places major emphasis on the quality and effectiveness of the education provided by the member institution. Each institution is required to document its quality and effectiveness by employing a comprehensive system of planning and evaluation in all aspects of the institution (Brandt, 1998, 4). SACS requires that an institutional effectiveness process include all of the following components: strategic planning, mission, goals, objectives, assessment, evaluation and revision. There should be a continuous improvement process to help ensure that an institution's goals will be achieved. SACS requires that each institution establish a purpose statement, that is its foundation for planning and assessment. SACS also stipulates that the institution utilizes a variety of assessment methods to determine whether the outcomes of the planning and evaluation processes are actually used for institutional improvement.

Following the example of SACS, each of the regional accrediting agencies also began requiring some type of program assessment as part of the program review process (Henninger, 1994). Additionally, more specialized accrediting bodies also developed assessment requirements. For example, In the early 1970s, The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools

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[9]See, for example, Hudgins, 1991; Brandt, 1998; and Henninger, 1994. These authors discuss the role of SACS as being in the forefront of the assessment movement in higher education.

of Business[10] (AACSB) began a serious review of its then-existing accreditation standards and identified the importance of establishing outcome criteria (Henninger, 1994). This review led to the development of a phased project undertaken by the association that was designed to identify the types of skills or knowledge desired of business school graduates and continue through development of measures for evaluating outcomes in business education. The AACSB makes outcome assessments part of its standards for curriculum content and evaluation. For instance, under its curriculum planning standard, the AACSB states that "each degree program should be systematically monitored to assess its effectiveness (Henninger, 1994). The suggested documentation for this task includes graduate placement review and external constituent evaluations of graduates' performance.

Another business school accrediting association, the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs[11] (ACBSP), was formed in 1988 at a time of debate over assessment and accountability, and it is partially a product of the research efforts of the government, regional accrediting agencies and higher education institutions appearing in the latter half of the 1980s (Henninger, 1994). This newer business school accrediting organization emphasizes outcomes assessment and makes assessment one of the organization's accreditation standards. The ACBSP requires, as a condition for accreditation, that evidence is provided to show that significant and favorable learning and attitudinal changes have occurred between enrollment and graduation.

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[10]The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, created in 1919, is one of two organizations in the United States which accredits business schools and programs in colleges and universities (Henninger, 1994).

[11]The Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs, the second organization in the United States which accredits business schools and programs in colleges and universities, was formed in response to dissatisfaction with the AACSB's accrediting philosophy, requirements, and procedures (Henninger, 1994).

ACBSP's outcomes assessment standard requires that "an institution must have an outcomes assessment program with documentation of the results and evidence that the results are being used for the development and/or improvement of the institution's academic programs." (Henninger, 1994, 4).

The ACBSP does not mandate specific skills or assessment tools. Instead, it allows the institutions to develop their own assessment programs. The ACBPS does suggest possible assessment instruments, such as nationally-normed subject content examinations, alumni and employer surveys, student presentation or comprehensive examinations, and/or a thesis or written project (Henninger, 1994, 4).

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

As stated earlier, many accrediting associations mandate that educational programs conduct assessment studies, but do not usually mandate the specifics of an assessment process. A review of the literature on the subject of assessment reveals, however, that assessment programs that produce positive, cooperative changes have certain characteristics in common.

First, successful assessment programs usually involve bring in a variety of institution-internal constituencies (faculty, administrators, etc.) into the assessment process. The heaviest involvement is usually from the faculty, who assume responsibility for the definition and assessment of their programs. Key individuals and groups within the institution should also be involved.[12]

Widespread stakeholder involvement produces many benefits. For example, such involvement

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[12]See, for example: Banta, 1996, 36; Hudgins, 1991, 9; and Brandt, 1998, 10.

can help to lessen resistance to curricular and institutional changes that may come as a result of the assessment efforts. Additionally, strong administrative backing provides an incentive to move ahead with the assessment project and maximizes the chances that the recommendations will be put into action.

A second characteristic of effective assessment programs is that educational goals and objectives (such as those defined in a mission statement) are clear and accessible. Clear developmental objectives should be specified and the educational mission should be well understood, because, in order for assessment to lead to improvements, it must reflect what the institution is committed to and what it values.

The use of external constituency groups in the assessment process is a third characteristic of effective assessment (Banta, 1996, 35; Hudgins, 1991, 9). For instance, currently enrolled students, former students, employers and colleagues at other educational institutions can contribute ideas and comments about program objectives and assessment methods.

Fourth, data that is collected must be meaningful, valuable and accurate (Banta, 1996, 35). Data should be organized and applied in meaningful ways. Those collecting and using the data must not lose sight of the critical issues and needs driving the assessment efforts.

A fifth characteristic of effective assessment is that the data is analyzed and efforts are made to study what the data means for the program - what is working well and what needs improving. Assessment should be linked with program improvement. This linkage occurs through the process of decision-making.

Various assessment authors have pointed out the need for assessment outcomes to be woven into the decision-making process. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), who

researched twenty years of college outcomes[13], encouraged educational decision-makers to practice an orientation of decision-making that "consistently and systematically takes into account the potential consequences of alternative courses of administrative action for student learning" (Banta, 1996, 51). These two authors contended that higher educational institutions have an obligation to continually focus efforts on a common mission of facilitating and improving learning. As a sixth characteristic of an effective assessment process, a system should be established for distributing and implementing assessment results so that they are available to the people who can use them. There are any number of reporting options, such as newsletters, reports, forums and workshops. It is important to report the result in ways that are meaningful to the campus community.

THE ROLE OF MISSION STATEMENTS IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

As discussed above, mission statements are considered an integral part of the assessment process and are also required by many accrediting associations, including NASPAA. An effective assessment program begins by establishing program objectives. One must know what is to be assessed before one knows how to assess it. Furthermore, educational philosophy communicated through the mission, objectives and goals is a signaling device that enables people to distinguish among programs that would otherwise appear to be homogeneous. The mission can also serve as an organizational vision that shapes how people who work in the agency perceive, remember, and think about the organization and its tasks (Weiss, 1999, 196). Mission statements help people to connect their work with the larger organizational mission, creating

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[13]See *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

focus and a shared sense of priorities.

The contents of mission statements vary from institution to institution, reflecting the unique character of each educational institution. Various authors, however, have reflected on the characteristics of well-written mission statements[14]. Some feel that mission statement should be clear and action-oriented (Weiss, 1999, 197). The statement should address what differences the organization will make for its beneficiaries (Carver, 1997, 13). The mission should also accurately reflect the goals or objectives of an organization (Carver, 1997, 2).

Objectives may be conceptualized as intended outcomes, and the assessment results as the actual outcomes. Program objectives should be established before assessment methods are chosen (Banta, 1996, 17). The program objectives must drive the assessment methods and instruments, not the other way around. Because assessment is a goal-oriented process, it involves comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectation, such as those arrived from an institution's mission. A clear understanding of an institution's missions and values is not in of itself sufficient for the undertaking of the assessment process. The mission and values must be translated into meaningful, specific and realistic goals for each academic program and student service (Banta, 1996, 17).

One example of transforming the college mission into goals can be found at the College of Business at Ball State University. As the first step in the mission-development process, the department chairs met with the dean for the purpose of establishing a mission statement. Next, the curriculum committee met with the department chairs to brainstorm objectives in each of the

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[14]See, for example, Carver, 1997; Weiss, 1999; and Wall, 1999.

content area of the mission statement. The resulting list was then distributed to the participants who subsequently rated the objectives. These objective were then condensed into a list of skills, knowledge and values all College of Business graduate were expected to have obtained. During the 1992 - 93 school year, professors teaching each of the core courses were asked to describe the objectives they were trying to achieve in their courses. Forms were developed to help them identify goals, and the methods used to help in achievement of these goals. The goal statements were then collected and reviewed with the curriculum committee (Banta, 1996, 20).

One of the challenges of conducting assessments based on mission statements is translating goals and missions to concrete, quantifiable terms. There can be difficulties in translating goals into actions (operative goals) especially when goal statements do not reflect the reality of individual or organizational behavior (Doucette, 1985, 190). Goal statements are usually abstract in nature - qualitative outcomes that educators hope to achieve. Objective are concrete - the units of measure are often quantitative.

One assessment author, Doucette, advocates a mission-development conceptual framework that is somewhat different from the usual mission statement process. He advocates developing a mission that is "activity oriented"- one that defines institutional missions as groupings of specific "activities that are themselves comprised as both goals and objectives." (Doucette, 1985, 193). He believes that mission statements can be defined in terms of the specific activities institutions actually engage in. These activities are then defined in terms of the institution's services, the specific clientele for whom these services are provided, and the rationale that is commonly used for providing such services. He believes that these activity statements, which specify services performed, clientele served and rational, are useful in defining

missions because they exhibit the key characteristics of both goals and objectives - the

intentionality of goals and the measurability of objectives (Doucette 1985, 193).

As an example, Doucette used the following statement: "Community colleges offer credit

courses in the natural and physical sciences, such as ... to students of college age or older so that

they can continue study towards a bachelor's degree in these fields at a college or university."

(Doucette, 1985, 193). This statement identifies a provided service (offering courses), a clientele

(college-age and older students), and a rationale (providing opportunities for students to transfer

to four-year colleges). The statement also provides a potential for measurement: transfer rates of

students is a specific objective that can be measured. This activity statement could be grouped

with other related activity statements in order to define a mission statement, such as "providing

opportunities to transfer to four-year institutions."

Doucette implemented a project based on the above concept of institutional missions. He

assisted Arizona's state community college board in defining the mission of the public

community college. The college was especially sensitive to the opinions of important external

constituents such as state legislators and registered voters (Doucette, 1985, 194). The project's

staff compiled a list of 100 activity statements that reflected all the activities community colleges

might engage in (Doucette, 1985, 194). This list was eventually pared down to 60 activity

statements, through the use of pilot testing.[15] The final version of the survey was administered to

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[15]The list of 100 activity statements was first reviewed by board members, administrators, and others, who whittled the list to 95 activity statements. These statements were then presented to a pilot survey of 1,169 students, who were selected because they were a captive audience. The students were also reasonably representative of registered voters, to whom the final version of the survey would be administered. Based on the student responses, the survey was further reduced to 60 activity statements (some items were combined, while others were eliminated outright) (Doucette, 1985, 195).

more than 3,500 state legislators, registered voters, state and local community college governing

board members, administrators and faculty. There were 1,300 survey responses (Doucette, 1985,

195). The survey had asked questions regarding the importance of the activity statements and the

willingness of the respondents to fund such activities with tax dollars. Response to the sixty

activity statements were subjected to a principal components factor analysis. The activity

statements were then categorized into the twelve factors that emerged from the analysis. These

twelve factors (such as associate degree programs, general interest courses, special services for

handicapped students) served as categories (under which the 60 activity statements were placed)

to the school's subsequent activity statement-based mission statement.

As mentioned earlier, assessment works best when it is an ongoing process (Banta, 1996,

29). The point of assessment is to monitor progress toward intended goals as a means of

continuous program improvement. Too often institutions treat assessment as an accreditation

mandate that only needs to be undertaken periodically. If assessment programs are to be

effective, they must become imbedded within the institutional culture. Assessment should be

perceived as in important part of the overall educational mission.

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Various methodologies and techniques are available for use in assessment efforts. The

most obvious consideration is the extent to which the technique provides valid and reliable

measures of educational outcomes. One methodology involves the use of surveys. Surveys draw

upon the perception of program participants, students, graduates or their employers to determine

the extent that the program succeeded in its goals and expectations. The advantages of surveys

are that they are relatively easy to develop and provide direct evidence about the experience of students. Surveys can be tailored to the unique educational objectives of a program. The major weakness of surveys is that they do not provide direct, independent evidence of learning that takes place. Surveys measure perceptions rather than performance (Jennings, 1989, 443).

Another assessment method uses standardized tests for measuring student outcomes. Standardized tests are usually norm-referenced, multiple-choice tests (Astin, 1993, 51). These type of tests have been criticized for a variety of reasons, including the belief that they only test narrow, superficial knowledge. Standardized tests are popular, however, because they can be easily administered and scored in large groups. They also easily yield quantitative scores.

Portfolio assessment is another type of methodology. This methodology uses folders into which faculty or students put products of learning, such as tests or research papers. Material is added to the portfolios on a regular basis and are periodically evaluated for evidence of student achievement (Banta, 1993, 139). Virtually anything can be placed into the portfolio, as long as the items are truly representative of student learning and can tell the faculty something meaningful about the success of the academic program (Banta, 1993, 139). Both of these reasons are important because the ultimate goal is program improvement. There are some weaknesses to portfolio review, however. Refining the process can take a long time. The question of what to collect and by whom often involves much time and debate. Additionally, portfolio assessment may not have the type of outside validity and credibility that are attributable to other assessment measures (Banta, 1993, 148). Portfolio assessment also involves management of a lot of material that must be gathered, stored and carefully evaluated.

Each type of measurement may have its sources of error, and reliance on one measure or

type of measure is likely to produce data systematically biased by that measure's characteristic sources of error. On source of error typical of many assessment measures is that respondents to surveys know that they are being studied (Terenzini, 1989, 658). This knowledge may influence responses in varying and unknown ways. Unobtrusive measures (ones which do not require a conscious response from students) can be useful. For example, one alternative to testing is analysis of student transcripts. The source errors inherent in each type of measurement is one reason why multiple measurement is often desirable - one measure's weakness can be counterbalanced by the strengths of another.

THE USE OF ALUMNI IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The use of alumni can be an important source of information for educational institutions. Some states require the use of alumni surveys as part of an assessment effort. In South Carolina alumni surveys are required by both the legislature and the Commission on Higher Education (Underwood, 1994, 3).

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) has made suggestions regarding the use of alumni research. The Center suggests that responses from alumni surveys should be used in decisions about the academic program and curriculum (Williford, 1989, 4). Alumni research can be used to: affect decisions about problems or needs in the academic program or curriculum, course content, and general education and major requirements; provide information about the formation and operation of student service areas, alumni relations and public relations; and can also provide information to assist in resource allocation and institutional planning decisions (Williford, 1984, 6). Additionally, alumni surveys can provide a basis for evaluating how well the knowledge and skills developed through the

education program relate to the knowledge and skills required in the workplace (Delaney, 1995, 6).

Another assessment author, Parkyn, asserts four more important reasons for using alumni-based assessment: Alumni opinions can provide the opportunity for detached objectivity; Alumni-based outcomes assessment can effectively measure the perceptions of the participants;[16] Alumni can differentiate between developmental outcomes which were the result of the collegiate experience and environment, and those which were promoted mainly through contributing forces beyond the educational setting; and Alumni-based research provides an appropriate context within which to measure long-term objectives (Parkyn, 1991, 6). Parkyn maintains that periodic assessments should ask how alumni who are 5, 10, 15, or 20 years removed from their studies perceive the influence of their educational experience on their life. The bottom line question is: How satisfied are alumni with their educational experience once they have had some reasonable time to live with the results of their education and reflect upon it?

The Public Administration Graduate Program at Columbia University has a very active alumni program and which utilizes feedback provided by alumni. Columbia University's MPA program has four critical objectives: build technical analytical skills; promote public service; build an understanding of politics; and build communication and group skills (Cohen, 1997, 1). The structure of the program curriculum is derived from professional requirements that the faculty have deemed necessary to possess, and from the "demands of MPA students and alumni over the program's first two decades." (Cohen, 1997, 3). Columbia University alumni play a

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[16]Parkyn cites Charles Pace and Peter Ewalt, who both believe that there is a positive correlation between a graduate's perception of the educational program and his or her actual levels of achievement.

number of roles, including helping the faculty in curriculum review and design; and assisting students who are in need of mentors and job connections. Over the past 12 years, Columbia University's MPA program has undergone four formal curriculum reviews. Each one has involved "substantial participation" by the program's alumni (Cohen, 1997, 3). The alumni has commented on the curriculum through the use of two surveys and in a number of formal small-group meetings. Alumni also provide informal feedback. The new director of the MPA program instituted the addition of a survey project to the quantitative analysis core course. In many cases, the input from alumni was an expression of need "for a skill that they wish they had developed in graduate school." (Cohen, 1997). The alumni have also played a critical role in stimulating dialogue between academics and practitioners, and in helping the program develop its professional orientation.

One specific operational measure of success for the program is that students obtain a better job when they leave the program than they had when they entered it. Columbia's Alumni play an important role in helping to determine whether the program has accomplished its goals.

In a final example of development and extensive use of alumni feedback, Ohio University's president called for the university to make a commitment to growth in quality, in 1980. An institutional impact task force was appointed to develop a "coherent, systematic and ongoing" program of assessment of institutional impact (Williford, 1989, 5). The primary goal was that in 5 - 10 years, the university could describe what was happening in its life as an educational institution. The task force spent a year developing an assessment program. This program considered the institutional goals in aiming at the broad impact of the collegiate experience and not at specific knowledge and skills gained from a major field of study.

The outcomes assessment program provided a broad (diverse set of measures) yet flexible set of measuring devices. Assessment of alumni outcomes was a major focus of the assessment program. Coordination of the University's efforts to collect alumni information was needed, so a centralized approach was established, which provided greater potential for utilization and comparison between university units. Two separate alumni instruments were developed. One was a placement survey designed to collect data on employment information. A second instrument was a more-detailed alumni study to survey graduates after they had been away from the university for at least 5 years[17].

The entire alumni population of the classes were surveyed in order to generate a large response pool. This enabled the preparation of detailed reports for use by each academic unit, which helped each unit with their program evaluation and review. The data from the survey was used extensively by the university. Alumni research was utilized in institutional planning and budget review at several levels, and for accreditation review and self-study. Reports of alumni research results were presented to the Deans Council on a regular basis and this information has been incorporated into the decision-making process. Each college received its own personalized reports designed to meets its specific information needs. Staff from the Institutional Research Office met directly with each dean's office staff to review alumni research for that college. These meetings produced feedback about the assessment process.

The individual academic colleges used the research results to develop a number of programs and evaluate different curricular options. For example, The College of Arts and

[17]The questionnaire was developed from scales from instruments used by other universities. Eight separate questionnaires were developed. The first two sections were identical, and the third was college-specific. The staff worked with each college in developing college-specific questions.

Sciences was concerned about the perception of its numerous course requirements. Responses from the alumni survey, however, showed that this required coursework was considered important and relevant to alumni. This finding eliminated the need for a faculty committee to review course requirements. The department also used results from the open-ended questions in the survey to develop a new faculty awards program. The survey revealed that particular members of the faculty had been extremely influential in the graduates' personal development. Using this information, the college instituted the alumni faculty awards program.

The College of Business also used the alumni data to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of the business program. For example, business alumni reported that they did not have enough contact with business executives while they were in school. This led to the development of the "Executive On-Campus Program", through which business executives visit the college and take an active role in the instruction at the undergraduate level (Williford, 1989, 16). Business graduates also reported a need to improve their writing skills. In response to this finding, the college changed courses to incorporate more written assignments, papers and essays.

SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the quality movement in the field of higher education. The importance of using assessment for the purpose of program accountability and improvement has become a consideration in higher education. Assessment is a goal-oriented process, which means that programs need to have clear and explicitly stated purposes and goals. It is from these goals that educational administrators can adopt an effective framework in which to carry out the assessment process. The next chapter presents one of the settings for this project - the role of the

National Association of Schools for Public Affairs and Administration in facilitating quality in

public administration/affairs programs. This discussion will add some insight as to why

assessment has become a topic of concern to higher education administrators, including public

administration/affairs program administrators.

CHAPTER FOUR

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EDUCATIONAL
AND ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four reviews the history of the National Association of Schools for Public

Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) as an accrediting agency and its efforts to set minimum

standards for programs offering degrees in public administration/affairs.

NASPAA

Members and leaders of the National Association of Schools for Public Affairs and

Administration (NASPAA) have also become involved with the concept of assessment.

NASPAA was founded in April 1970 as an association of institutions, university schools and

other program entities advocating graduate education in public administration/affairs. An early

concern of NASPAA was to ensure that public affairs education would remain separate from

business administration education (Henry, 1999).

During the 1970s, business education had outstripped public administration in growth and

influence on most campuses (Henry, 1999). On several campuses, public administration

graduate programs were combined with business administration programs. There was a strong

movement for accreditation of business schools through the AACSB (discussed in the previous

chapter). A number of business school deans proposed that AACSB standards and accreditation

reviews in the combined schools encompass the public administration programs. Public

administration education administrators and educators feared a loss of autonomy, and NASPAA

officials conducted several meetings with AACSB officials to discuss mutual interests and

differences.

The proposed AACSB accreditation expansion to public administration programs never occurred. One by-product of the meetings between NASPAA and AACSB officials, however, was that NASPAA leaders became familiar with AACSB's operations, including its accreditation procedures. As a result, NASPAA officials became more interested in bringing the accreditation process to public administration/affairs programs (Henry, 1999). A committee was formed to develop and oversee program standards and peer review. In 1983, NASPAA members voted to seek recognition of NASPAA as an official accrediting committee. This recognition was granted by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation in 1986 (Henry, 1999).

NASPAA is recognized by the Council on Higher Education as a specialized accrediting agency and is authorized to accredit masters degree programs in public affairs and administration. The association conducts a program of voluntary peer review evaluation of member institution public affairs and administration programs (NASPAA, 1999). NASPAA's current membership consists of 240 member institutions that offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in public affairs and administration. One hundred and thirty-five of these institutions have been accredited (NASPAA, 1999).

NASPAA STANDARDS

In 1977, the association adopted "Standards for Professional Masters Degree Programs in Public Affairs, Policy, and Administration." An accreditation process was instituted based on these standards. This process was implemented in an attempt to promote quality in public administration/public affairs education. The standards address the need for a common curriculum component, which indicates the knowledge base students are expected to acquire as a

result of obtaining a graduate degree in Public Administration. The standards state that these

common curriculum components "shall enhance the students' values, knowledge and skills to act

ethically and effectively." (Standards for the Professional Masters Degree Programs, NASPAA,

1999) The common components consist of the following:

Table 4.1. NASPAA Curriculum Common Components.

Management of Public Service Organizations	- human resources - budgeting and financial processes - information, including computer literacy and applications
Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis	- policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation - decision-making and problem-solving
Understanding of Public Policy and Organizational Environment	- political and legal institutions and processes - economic and social institutions and processes - organization and management concepts and behavior

(Standards for the Professional Masters Degree Programs, NASPAA, 1999).

Rigorous, centralized standards were not desired because these characteristics were

viewed as constraining and inflexible (Ingraham, 1996, 170). NASPAA needed to be able to

encourage flexibility and diversity while still overseeing the quality and accountability of its

member organizations. This issue came to the forefront when an MPA program with a public

policy concentration faced an adverse COPRA (Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation)

review because students in the program were not required to take all the core courses (Ingraham,

1996, 170). An Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Public Service Education was formed in

1992 to review the standards and the accreditation process in order to determine what changes

were necessary. The Committee recommended that the executive council should reaffirm the

importance of innovation and pluralism within the field of advanced education for public

services (Ingraham, 1996, 171). The committee also recommended: that the MPA standards be amended so that COPRA could reach a decision on accrediting a program by balancing its judgment of a program's conformance with the standards with its judgement of how well the program fulfills its overall mission; that each program be required to describe its mission, the process by which it develops its strategies and goals consistent with this mission, and the means by which it assesses whether these goals are achieved (Ingram, 1996, 171). The recommendations were adopted at the 1992 annual meeting. Mission-based accreditation began with the 1994 accreditation cycle (Ingraham, 1996, 171).

In that transition year of 1993-1994, COPRA reviewed nine programs under the old standards and seven programs under the new standards. In the 1994-95 cycle, twenty five programs submitted self-study reports to COPRA using mission-based standards (Williams, 1996, 176). There was general consensus among COPRA members that there was more attention given in self-study reports to program mission, assessment and guiding performance. The stronger reports seem to be those in which there is a well developed and presented sense of mission, and where the program is actively engaged in assessing and guiding performance (Williams, 1996, 176).

SUMMARY

NASPAA, an association that sets standards for graduate degree programs in public affairs policy and administration, oversees the accreditation process of such graduate programs. This process was implemented in an attempt to promote quality in public administration/public affairs education. NASPAA standards prescribe that a public administration/affairs program provide a clear educational philosophy and mission. The standards also call for program self-

assessment. **Thus,** the NASPAA accreditation process provides an impetus for quality improvement in schools of public administrations/affairs. The next chapter presents the local setting for this project - the continuous improvement efforts of the Public Administration Graduate program at Southwest Texas State University.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING
SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five describes the MPA Graduate Program at Southwest Texas State University,

the evolution of its program mission, and its assessment activities. The SWT MPA program is

accredited by NASPAA, which provides guidelines for program assessment. This chapter also

provides the conceptual framework for this research project, since the conceptual framework is

based on the mission of the MPA program.

THE MASTERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

Southwest Texas State University is located in San Marcos, Texas. Last year, in Texas, a

15-member committee was created to study accountability issues in Texas higher education.[18]

The committee, named "The Special Commission on the 21st Century Colleges and Universities",

is charged with the development and improvement of appropriate accountability measures and

benchmarks to measure performance. Another charge of the commission is to study the use of

funding mechanisms to reward performance and provide incentives to address state priorities.

The MPA program at Southwest Texas State University, which is housed under the

Political Science Department, has undergone periodic self-assessment efforts for a number of

years. The program was established in 1973, certified by NASPAA in 1982, and has been

accredited by NASPAA since 1988.[19] The program draws students from many backgrounds,

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[18]Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Sept. 30, 1999.

[19]*See* www.polisci.swt.edu/marequirements

including state and local government agencies, non-profit organizations, and active-duty and retired military personnel. Over the years, the vast majority of students have undertaken the curriculum on a part-time basis. MPA classes are also offered in Austin. The MPA program uses the NASPAA accreditation process that includes a self-study and site review process to evaluate the quality of its program every seven years.

THE 1988 NASPAA SELF STUDY REPORT

The MPA program was initially a thesis program with a required internship. Prior to 1981, there were seven career support areas: Personnel Administration, Public Finance Administration, Urban and Regional Planning, Criminal Justice Administration, Government Information Systems, Human Resources Administration, and Allied Health Services Administration. The areas of International Relations and General Public Administration were subsequently added.

The core curriculum was designed to meet the NASPAA standards. After the 1981 peer review, two courses in research methods and statistics were included in the core required curriculum (SWT, 1988, 11). The MPA Program conducted a self-study in 1988 in preparation for NASPAA reaccreditation. At that time, the program objectives were to serve part-time, full-time, pre-service entry level and executive level students; to prepare students for the public service profession at all levels of government and public sector organizations; to maintain enrollment at current levels while strengthening admission requirements; and to increase research and public service activities of the program. As part of the self-study, exit interviews were conducted with each graduate during the final comprehensive examination. Two problems were identified specifically from these interview: (1) class sizes were growing too large for in-depth

discussions; and (2) there was an identified need for additional training and research methodology (SWT, 1988, **129).** A additional weakness cited by the self-study was the limitation **of** funds needed to continue to improve the program, improve faculty support and reduce class sizes. These weaknesses were addressed by adding a program goal to increase the faculty in order to meet the demands of the increased enrollment and by requiring students to complete an undergraduate statistics/analytical techniques course prior to enrolling in the graduate-level research methods/statistics course. Students also became required to take six credits in graduate-level research methods/statistics (SWT, 1988, 130).

The self-study identified the major strength of the program as the commitment of the faculty and administration in providing a quality education with an emphasis on meeting student needs in a professional and responsive manner (SWT, 1988, 130). Other identified strengths included the high level of practitioner experience (coupled with research and consulting activity) within the P.A. faculty nucleus, the quality design of the curriculum, and the diversity of the student population (SWT, 1988, 130 - 131).

THE 1995 NASPAA SELF STUDY REPORT

A subsequent NASPAA reaccreditation review was conducted in1995. As noted in the previous chapter, NASPAA had recently moved to a mission-oriented/focused accreditation process (in 1994). The MPA program's stated mission in 1995 was "to prepare public and non-profit managers by providing the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to meet the challenges of public service; to advance the art and science of public administration through scholarly and applied research; and to provide for the professional, administrative and technical needs of public service entities in Central Texas and elsewhere" (SWT, 1995, Sec. 1, 4). The

program had evolved to offer eleven career support areas in conjunction with the core curriculum. A public service internship was now required only of students who did not have experience in working with public or non-profit organizations. Additionally, a mentoring program had earlier been established. In preparation for the 1995 self-study, a questionnaire was administered, in 1993, to its alumni in regard to their overall impression of the program, the tangible benefits received from the program, and their interests in continuing their education. Of the 54 respondents, Over 32% percent rated the program "outstanding" and half rate the program "very good". In regard to perceived tangible benefits, the most highly rated benefit was "recognition/feeling of success". This was followed by "greater knowledge/skills" and "better job/promotion" (SWT, 1995, Sec. II, 36).

In 1995, another questionnaire was distributed to 105 individuals who had graduated from the program in the four previous years. There were thirty-three respondents. Thirty-three percent rated the program as "outstanding", while forty-five percent described the program as "very good". Ninety percent of the respondents found "greater knowledge/skill" to be a tangible benefit. As in the 1993 survey, a large percentage (42%) credited the MPA program with a "better job or promotion"(SWT, 1995, Sec. II, 36). The 1995 survey also asked questions regarding tangible benefits received from the Applied Research Project, which is the capstone of the MPA program. Sixty-Six percent responded that their research project was either published, presented at a conference, or used by their agency. Other perceived benefits included enhanced "writing skills (58%), "conceptual skills (54%) and "quantitative skills". Only six percent of the respondents found no tangible benefit from the Applied Research Project.

The self-study identified the program's strengths as follows: a highly-qualified and

productive faculty; a broad network within the program's service region; and a strong curriculum. The noted weaknesses were fiscal constraints, a lack of financial support for students, and a heavy demand on the program (SWT, 1995, Sec. 1, 5).

After the 1995 review, NASPAA representatives recommended that the MPA mission be updated, using an open process that incorporated stakeholder feedback. Dr. Patricia Shields became director of the MPA program subsequent to the review. She waited until she became more familiar with all the program's aspects before undertaking the mission revision.[20]

MISSION DEVELOPMENT

In January of 1998, the MPA department conducted an all-day retreat to amend the mission statement. The MPA faculty wanted to craft a mission statement that more accurately reflected the purpose of the program and the emerging public administration trends that the faulty wished to incorporate into the curriculum. Department faculty, employer representatives, advisory board members[21], and current students participated in the mission development process. A facilitator conducted the discussion. During the morning session, the participants discussed the objectives of the MPA program and the emerging trends of public administration in general. One key point that emerged was that the participants wanted the mission statement to reflect the management-oriented approach to the curriculum. During the afternoon session, the participants crafted a statement that more accurately reflected the purpose and the goals (as reflected in the departmental strategic plan) of the program. This linkage of the strategic plan and mission

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[20]Dr. Patricia Shields. Interview with author. March 29, 2000.

[21]The Advisory Counsel is a consulting body that provides policy advice for the MPA program. Members consist of members of the MPA faculty, representatives from the public sector (most of these representatives are former students of the program), and current graduate students.

statement allows for administrative coherence. The revised mission statement developed as a result of the retreat is as follows:

> The MPA Program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers in public service.
> The Program serves public, nonprofit, and private sectors primarily in Central Texas. Such service is provided through: course work, professional development, internships and Applied Research Projects.
> The Program responds to the changing public service environment through: faculty scholarship and service, links to professional associations and organizations, and interaction with governmental agencies.
> The Program is distinguished by providing opportunity to a wide variety of students; delivering classes at varied times and locations' offering diverse subspecialties; 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 management.

In addition to revising the program mission, the retreat participants identified various means to improve the program; they also addressed the subject of assessment. The participants added pertinent questions to the Graduate College Exit Questionnaire (This questionnaire asks exiting students to rate various aspects of the their particular curriculum and of the graduate school in general). They also recognized that a mission-based alumni questionnaire should be used as a means of assessment.[22]

In 1999, the MPA department officials decided to use its mission statement as a basis to develop strategic planning objectives and to assess whether the objectives of the program are being met. The mission statement was discussed at a MPA faculty meeting. The faculty determined that the mission did not need major modification, but it did need some slight changes in order to reflect changes that had occurred in the curriculum, such as the increased emphasis of

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[22]Dr. Patricia Shields, Director of SWT's MPA Program. Interview with Author. March 29, 2000.

ethics and technology.

The department included stakeholder input by presenting the mission revision project and the faculty-suggested revisions at an MPA Advisory Council Meeting held on October 2, 1999. The meeting was coordinated by both Dr. Shields and a facilitator who brought the group to a discussion of what the program is and what is should be about. The group discussed the inclusion of leadership, diversity, ethics, and technology into the mission statement. The suggestions made by the Council were then presented back to the faculty (several of whom were present at the Council meeting) before the final revisions were adopted. The 1999-revised mission statement (which is the basis of the alumni survey developed for this project) is as follows:

> The MPA Program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers *and leaders* in public service.
> The Program serves *the diverse community that is* Central Texas. Such service is provided through: regular course work, professional development, internships and Applied Research Projects.
> The Program responds to the changing public service environment through: faculty scholarship, faculty service, links to professional associations and organizations, interaction with governmental agencies; *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 opportunity to a wide variety of students; delivering classes at varied 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 management.[23]

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[23]The recently-added elements to the mission statement have been italicized.

Class enrollment is usually between ten and twenty students.[27] Each class is usually

offered one evening per week,[28] both in San Marcos and at sites in downtown and North Austin.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As written earlier, mission statements are usually unique to each institution.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework of this research project is derived, not from the literature

readings, but from the institutional setting - the Revised Mission Statement of Southwest Texas

State University's ("SWT") Masters of Public Administration ("MPA") program, which is

attached to this paper as Appendix A.

The conceptual framework is an important part of the research project because it acts as

an organizing device for the collection of data. This research project uses a practical ideal type

framework. Practical ideal types can be used as standards or points of reference. These

standards provide benchmarks in order to understand, and possibly improve, reality (Shields,

1998, 219). Even though the mission has been in existence for only two years, the public

administration curriculum has always focused on preparing its students for public administration

management, therefore the perceptions of alumni who have graduated from the program over the

time span of several years should prove useful for assessment purposes. Particularly, the

perceptions of alumni (the percentage of those who agree that the mission elements are being

fulfilled) who have graduated within the past two years can be used as starting benchmarks in

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[27]Total enrollment in the public administration program, for the last few semesters is as follows: Fall 1999 - 90 students; Spring 1999 - 75 students; Fall 1998 - 90 students; Spring 1998 - 95 students; Fall 1997 - 107 students; Spring 1997 - 100 students; Fall 1996 - 105 students; Spring 1996 - 105 students; Fall 1995 - 116 students; and Spring 1995 - 112 students. (Enrollment figures provided by MPA department).

[28]For the Fall and Spring semesters. The schedules for classes taken during the summer session vary from the Fall and Spring semesters.

assessment.

The MPA Program mission elements are categorized by whom the program primarily services, how such service is provided, how the MPA program responds to the changing environment, and the distinguishing elements of SWT's MPA program. For the purposes of this research project, however, the conceptual table (shown below) categorizes the mission elements in a different manner. This was done in order to construct the alumni survey in a more fluid manner. In the survey, the mission elements are categorized by program service profile, general PA curriculum services, faculty performance, professional development/curriculum specifics, and networking opportunities. The conceptualization table provides a cross-reference of its elements to the element numbers in the MPA's mission statement. It should be noted that the questionnaire included items that are not directly related to the mission statement. Additionally, the mission items regarding faculty service and scholarship are not specifically included in the survey because the veracity of these elements are not directly known to the students of the program.

Table 5.1. CONCEPTUALIZATION TABLE
Practical Ideal Type Linked to the Setting and the literature

IDEAL TYPE/CATEGORIES	Mission Item X-Ref	SOURCE
Program Service Profile		SWT Mission Statement (1999)
■ diverse community	# 1	
■ primarily in Central Texas	# 1	
■ providing opportunity for a diverse student body	# 14	
■ Office Staff Support		Whipple (1982)
General PA Curriculum Services		SWT Mission Statement (1999)
■ Courses offered frequently	#2, #15	Underwood (1994)
■ Courses offered at convenient times	#15	
■ Courses offered at various locations	#15	
■ Courses provide preparation for PA management	# 21, mission header	
■ Courses provided preparation for leadership	mission header	
■ Balance between theoretical and applied approaches	#22	Whipple (1982) Delaney (1995)
■ Diverse set of career support areas	#16	
■ Opportunity for applied research	#5	
Faculty Performance		SWT Mission Statement (1999)
■ class preparation		Delaney (1995)
■ knowledge of subject area		Underwood (1994)
■ interested in professional development of students	#20	Whipple (1982)
Professional Development/Curriculum Specifics	#3, #20	SWT Mission Statement (1999)
■ Decision-making/Problem Solving		NASPAA COPRA Standards for
■ financial administration		Professional Masters Degree
■ human resources administration		Programs (1999)
■ organizational theory and management		
■ policy process		
■ Intergovernmental relations		
■ Ethics	#12	
■ Information Systems/Technology	#11, #13	
■ Research	#5	..
Networking Opportunities		SWT Mission Statement (1999)
■ outside-classroom interaction between students and faculty	# 17, 18	Whipple (1982)
■ outside interaction between students in the program	#18	
■ opportunity to talk to other PA administrators	#9,#10,#18	
■ interaction with professional PA associations	#9, #18	Centex minutes - newsletter

SUMMARY

The MPA Program at SWT was implemented in 1973 and, over the years, has evolved its curriculum and services as the program strives to meet the changing needs of its students and the changing elements of public administration. The program administrators recognize the need to monitor program activities and measure its accomplishments to determine if the program objectives are being met.

As the program objectives have changed, the program mission statement has also changed over the years. The purpose of this project is to determine if the program's alumni believe that the program is achieving the objectives that are articulated in its mission statement and to provide benchmark information in order to monitor future program performance. Accordingly, the conceptual framework for this research (practical ideal type) is based on the program mission. The use of the conceptual framework is important because it drives the collection of data that will address the question of whether the alumni believe that the MPA program is achieving its program objectives.

The next chapter explains the research methodology and data collection process. The data analysis procedures is also be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology and data collection process used in this project. The chapter also explains why this particular data collection process was chosen.

SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research was used to gather data on the perceptions of the alumni regarding the MPA Program's effectiveness at achieving its mission. The survey was limited to alumni who had graduated within the past eight years because alumni whose graduation date was beyond eight years would probably not have as vivid a memory in regard to the curriculum as the newer alumni. Additionally, the curriculum and program mission have changed over the years, so the perceptions of the older alumni might not be as relevant as the perceptions of more recent alumni. The survey was pre-tested by distributing it to members of the MPA faculty for review. The survey was also pre-tested by administering it to several current students nearing the completion of the program[29]. The questionnaire (in envelopes bearing the SWT insignia) was mailed to 149 alumni members, using names and addresses obtained from the Alumni Office. A cover letter, printed on SWT letterhead, was written by Dr. Shields in order to explain the importance of the survey to the MPA department. Respondents were given two given two methods of returning the questionnaire: (1) by fax; or (2) by using an enclosed pre-stamped, self-

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[29]A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix B.

addressed envelope. Follow-up postcards were mailed one week after the initial mailing of the survey.

APPROPRIATENESS OF SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research is appropriate because alumni are the target of this research. Surveys are useful in studies that use individuals as units of analysis (Babbie, 1995, 257). For this research, responses from a large population helps give this assessment validity. Mailing surveys is the most efficient and economical means of gathering data from a large population. The advantages of surveys are that they are relatively easy to develop and provide direct evidence of the experience of its students. Surveys offer data collection standardization (Babbie, 1995, 273), but can still be tailored to the unique educational objectives of a program, such as SWT's MPA program. The major weakness of surveys is that they do not provide direct, independent evidence of learning that takes place. Additionally, surveys tend to measure perceptions rather than actual performance (Jennings, 1989, 443). Because the purpose of this research project is to describe alumni perception of the MPA program, survey methodology is an appropriate data collection method for this project. Other methodologies, such as the use of focus groups or interview, were deemed inappropriate because the target population was too large for such time-consuming techniques.

Analysis of existing statistics was used as a secondary method of graduate assessment. The artifact for this analysis is the 1997 - 1998 Graduate Program Self Assessment Program in Public Administration. One advantage of this methodology is that existing statistics can be used to help corroborate (or not corroborate) the findings of a researcher. There are some weaknesses, however. Existing data may not cover exactly what the researcher is interested in (Babbie, 1995,

325). Additionally, the analysis of aggregated statistics depends on the quality of the statistics

themselves. The researcher has to be careful that the existing statistics to be used are a reliable

source (Babbie, 1995, 326 - 327). For this research project, the Graduate Self Assessment

Program is an appropriate source of data because some of the questions asked in this survey

correlate to some elements of the mission statement. However, this survey data is considered to

be secondary because only 23 MPA students were surveyed.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Table 6.1 (shown below) illustrates the operationalization of the conceptual framework.

A copy of the survey instrument is also attached to this paper as Appendix B. The first set of

questions ask alumni to give their opinion on a series of questions regarding general curriculum

services of the MPA program (frequency and location of courses, balance between theoretical

and applied knowledge, etc.). Respondents were asked to respond based on a Likert scale

ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (five - point scale). The second set of

questions asked alumni to rate faculty performance in several areas. The responses are based on

a five-point scale from "poor" to "excellent" (with "unsure" as the neutral response). In the third

set of questions, alumni were asked to rate specific curriculum components, based on a five-point

scale ranking from "poor" to "excellent" (with "unsure" as the neutral response). The fourth set

of questions asked alumni to rate the networking opportunities provided by the MPA program.

The responses are based on a five-point scale, ranking from "poor" to "excellent" (with "unsure"

as the neutral response). Questions 5 - 11 included specific questions regarding perceptions of

various aspects of the MPA program, and the last part of the survey gathers demographic data.

TABLE 6.1. OPERATIONALIZING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Operationalization of the Practical Ideal Type

CATEGORIES	DATA SOURCES		ALUMNI SURVEY RESPONSE CODE SHEET
	Alumni Survey Item Nbr.	1997-98 SWT Assessment Survey	
Program Service Profile			
Diverse Community	#19		total responses by sector
primarily in Central Texas	#15		total responses by city
providing opportunity for a diverse student body	#s 12, 13, 15, 17		responses by age, ethnicity, gender
office staff support	#5	# 2 -29	rate from poor to excellent
General PA Curriculum Services			**Items in this category rated on the Likert Scale, SD to SA**
Courses offered frequently	#1A	#2-9, rated from poor to excellent	
Courses offered at convenient times	#1B		
Course offered at various locations	#1C		
Balance between theoretical and applied approaches	#1D		
Diverse set of career support areas	#1E	#2 -16,2-17, rated from poor to excellent	
Opportunity for applied research	#1F	#4-6, coded 1= yes, 2=no	
Courses provide preparation management in public service	#8	#1-12, rated from poor to excellent	
Course provide preparation for leadership in public service	#9		
Faculty Performance			**Items in this category rated from poor to excellent**
Class preparation	#2A		
Knowledge of subject area	#2B	# 2-8 rated from SD to SA	
Interested in student professional development	#2C	#1-1, SA to SD	

	Alumni Survey Item Nbr.	1997-98 SWT Assessment Survey	
Professional Development/Curriculum Specifics			**Items in this category rated from poor to excellent**
Decision-making/Problem-solving	#3A		
Financial Administration	#3B		
Human resources administration	#3C		
Organizational theory and management	#3D		
Policy process	#3E		
Intergovernmental relations	#3F		
Ethics	#3G		
Information Systems/Computer Technology	#3H		
Research	#3I		
Networking Opportunities			**Items in this category rated poor to excellent**
Outside-classroom interaction between students and faculty	#4A	#s 1-16, 2-15	
Outside interaction between students in the program	#4B	#2-34	
Opportunity to talk to other PA administrators	#4C		
Interaction with professional PA associations	#4D		

Descriptive statistics were used to measure the results of this survey. The statistical technique of percentages illustrate the range of student responses to the survey questions. SPSS software was used to tabulate the results since this tool can readily produce mean statistics and frequency distribution charts.

SUMMARY

This project used two research methodologies in collecting data: survey research and analysis of existing statistics. After the surveys were returned, the results were coded using SPSS software and simple statistical descriptors were used to depict the response results. The next chapter relates the results of the data collection.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to assess the ability of the SWT MPA program to meet its mission, using alumni perceptions. This chapter presents the results of the alumni survey described in the previous chapter. The surveys were mailed to 149 alumni. Ninety-one surveys were returned (Sixty-one percent response rate). Babbie (1995, 262) suggests that a response rate of 60% is good. Therefore, the results of the survey are considered to be useful in addressing the purpose of this research.

The conceptual framework for this research project is categorized as "practical ideal type", based on the mission elements (depicted at right). The results of the research will be presented in alignment with the same categories that are depicted in the conceptual framework table depicted in the previous chapter: Program Service Profile, General Public Administration Curriculum Services, Faculty Performance, Professional Development/Curriculum Specifics, and Networking Opportunities. Percent and frequency distributions are used as the statistical analysis methodology for the survey findings. Most of the tables presented in this chapter depict the results in terms of percentages.

PROGRAM SERVICE PROFILE

The MPA program aspires to serve the diverse community of Central Texas and to provide opportunities for a diverse student body. These goals are reflected in its mission statement(see mission items 1 and 14 in Figure 7.1 above).

The MPA Program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers and leaders in public service.

The Program primary serves
1. the diverse community that is Central Texas.

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

The Program responds to the changing environment through:
6. an innovative curriculum,
7. faculty scholarship,
8. faculty service,
9. links to professional associations and organizations,
10. interaction with governmental agencies, and
11. a 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 opportunity to a diverse student body,
15. delivering classes at varied 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.

Figure 7.1 MPA Mission Statement

In order to determine if the program serves a diverse community and a diverse student body, the alumni questionnaire asked a number of questions designed to gather demographic data. The results, shown in the tables below, illustrate the diverse profile of students who have graduated from the program.

As can be seen from Table 7.1, the alumni responses show that they are employed in all sectors of the work force. Nevertheless, public sector employment dominates (64%). Tables 7.3 and 7.4 depict the residences of alumni while they were attending the program and the their current residences, respectively. The Central Texas region is the predominant place of residence for alumni, both while they were attending the program and after they graduated. Approximately 82% of the alumni resided in the Austin - San Marcos area while enrolled in the MPA program. The vast majority (Almost 81%) still live in Central Texas.

Tables 7.2 and 7.4 through 7.6 depict personal profile characteristics of those who responded to the survey. Over fifty-five percent of the alumni were male and over forty-four percent were female. The ethnic profile of the respondents included those in the Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American categories, with the Caucasian category as the most pre-dominant (69%). The second most predominant was the Hispanic category at almost 16%. The ages of the alumni when they graduated from the program showed a wide span. The youngest reported age was 23; the oldest was 53. Most respondents were in the 26 - 30 age group category. All the age groups between 23 and 53 were well-represented, however.

The demographic data shows that the program service elements of the mission do reflect the

community and people that the program strives to serve.[30]

Table 7.1 Employment Sector

Sector n=89	%
Public	64
Non-Profit	10
Private	25
Other	1

Table 7.2 Graduation Age Range (N = 91, frequency table)

AGE	NBR
21 - 25	7
26 - 30	28
31 - 35	19
36-40	15
41 - 45	10
45 and older	12

Table 7.3 Alumni Residence while in program (n = 89)

City	Percent
Austin	66.3
San Marcos	15.7
San Antonio	5.6
Other	12.4

Table 7.4 Current City Residence (n = 88)

Region	Percent
Central Texas	80.7
North Texas	4.5
East Texas	1.1
Out of State	13.6

Table 7.5 Gender Profile (n = 90)

Female	44.4
Male	55.6

Table 7.6 Race/Ethnic Profile (n = 88)

Caucasian	69.3
Hispanic	15.9
African American	12.5
Asian American	2.5

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[30]The 1997-1998 Self-Assessment Survey contains demographic information regarding Master Graduates across all schools. According to this information, The graduate gender breakdown is 35% male and 65% female. The ethnic population is 80% White, 4% African-American, over 9% Hispanic, and over 2% Asian-American.

GENERAL PA CURRICULUM SERVICES

This section discusses alumni perceptions about the mission elements that pertain to general

program service goals, such as the frequency and convenience of course offerings the diversity of career

support areas, as well as the innovation of the curriculum. The section also discusses whether the

alumni believe that the curriculum sufficiently prepares it students to be managers and leaders (The

program goal of preparing students for management and leadership in public administration is the heart

of the MPA mission). The responses are depicted in tables 7.7 and 7.8.

The results show that approximately two-thirds of the alumni feel that the MPA program does

prepare its students to be managers and leaders. The majority of the alumni also agree that The MPA

program fulfills the general curriculum service components of the mission statement. The vast majority

(over 93%) of the survey respondents agreed that the courses were offered frequently enough so that

their degrees could be completed as planned. In the 1997 - 1998 graduate exit survey (attached at the

end of the paper), approximately 44% of the respondents rated the MPA program as "good" to

"excellent" in sufficiency of the frequency of courses offered. Most of the 1997-98 respondents rated

this item as "fair". This suggests that the MPA program has improved in its course scheduling.[31]

Almost 98% of alumni believed that the courses were offered at convenient times and almost

86% felt that the courses were offered at a variety of locations. Almost 77% of the former students

believed that the curriculum offered a balance between the theoretical and applied approaches to public

administration. A majority (over 71%) felt that the curriculum offered a diverse set of career support

areas. It should be noted that 15% had no opinion about the diversity of career support areas. In the

1997 - 98 exit survey, 69% rated the program as "good" to "excellent" in the program's variety of course

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[31] A course rotation schedule was published in 1997 and is shown on the program website.

offerings, while 31% rated this element as "poor" to "fair".

Almost 80% of the alumni agreed that the curriculum prepared them for applied research, while 13% disagreed with this assertion. In the 1997-98 exit survey, 74% indicated that they had carried out an independent research project, while 17% indicated in the negative.

One recently added mission statement (no. 12 in figure 7.1) stresses the role of ethics in the curriculum. According to the alumni survey, Over 72% believed that ethics was emphasized throughout the curriculum, while almost 29% disagreed with this statement. Another recently added mission item (no. 6 in figure 7.1) states that the program offers an innovative curriculum. A majority (66%) of the alumni believed that the program offered an innovative curriculum. Over Sixteen percent had no opinion, while over 17% disagreed.

Almost 75% of the former students rated the program good to excellent in preparing them for a career in public administration management. Almost 73% rated the program as good to excellent in preparing them to be a leader in public administration. In the 1997 - 1998 survey, every exiting student agreed with the statement that the program had provided preparation for future professional work.

The above results show that the majority of alumni respondents believe that the program is meeting the goals of its mission elements within this category. Most importantly, a significant majority of alumni agrees that the program does prepare it students for careers as managers and leaders in public service. The weakest element is the mission statement regarding the offering of an innovative curriculum. A majority of former students agreed that the program offered an innovative curriculum, but it was the smallest majority in this category. Additionally, there was a significant percent of respondents who had no opinion on the innovative aspect of the curriculum. The mission statement regarding ethics also contained a significant percentage of negative responses (compared to the other items in this

category).

Table 7.7 Alumni Curriculum Service Responses (percentage)   1997-98 Exiting Student Responses (Percentage)

	SA	A	N/O	D	SD	E	G	F	P	N/R
Frequency of Courses was Sufficient	31.9	61.5	0	5.5	1.1	18	26	48	4	4
Courses were offered at Convenient Times	44.0	52.7	0	2.2	1.1					
Courses were offered at various locations (n = 90)	30.0	55.6	7.8	5.6	1.1					
Curriculum Balance between theoretical and applied approaches (n = 90)	27.8	48.9	8.9	12.2	2.2					
Curriculum was Diverse	12.1	59.2	15.4	12.1	1.1	39	30	22	9	
Program provided Preparation for Applied Research	33.3	46.2	7.7	11.0	2.2	Yes: 74%			No: 17%	9
Ethics played a central Role	19.8	52.7	8.8	26.5	2.2					
Program offered Innovative Curriculum	16.5	49.5	16.5	16.5	1.1					

n = 91 Legend: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N/O = No Opinion; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree   n = 23 Legend: E = excellent; g = good; f = fair; p = poor; n/r = no response

Table 7.8 Alumni Leadership and Management Preparation Rating Table

	Exc	Good	Fair	Poor	N/O
Management Preparation	23.1	51.6	13.2	5.5	6.6
Leadership Preparation	24.2	48.4	16.5	4.4	6.6
n = 91 Legend: Exc = Excellent; N/O = No Opinion					

FACULTY PERFORMANCE

This category describes the results of the responses to survey questions that pertained to the

faculty performance. In this section of the survey, only one survey item (regarding faculty interest in

student development) was directly related to the mission. The responses to all the survey items in this

category were so positive, however, that the results of all the items in this category bear mentioning. elements of the mission statement. Alumni were asked to rate faculty in three areas (class preparedness, knowledge of subject area, and the aforementioned interest in student professional development). The results are shown below in Table 7.9.

The overwhelming majority of former students rate faculty performance very highly. The vast majority (95%) of the respondents rated the faculty "good" to "excellent" in faculty preparation for classes. Similarly, the overwhelming majority (99%) rated the faculty as "good" to "excellent" in their knowledge of their taught subject. In the 1997-98 exit survey, 91% rated the scholarly and professional competency of faculty as "good to excellent".

Over 81% of the alumni rated faculty interest in the professional development of students as "good" to "excellent", while 14% rated the faculty as "fair", and 3% rated the faculty as "poor" in this area. Similarly, a majority (65%) of the students in the 1997-98 exit survey strongly agreed with the statement that the faculty members are generally interested in the welfare and professional development of students. Thirty-Five percent of the exiting students agreed with this statement while no one disagreed.

As can be seen from the responses, both alumni and exiting student feel very positive about faculty performance. This indicates that the alumni have a very positive view of the MPA program faculty and the clear majority believe that the faculty has an interest in the professional development of its students.

Table 7.9 Alumni Responses regarding Faculty Performance   1997-98 Exiting Student Responses (n = 23)

(n = 91)	E	G	F	P	U	E	G	F	P
Faculty Preparation	46.2	48.4	4.4	1.1	0				
Knowledge of Subject	63.7	35.2	0	1.1	0	65	26	9	
Interested in Student Development	46.2	35.2	14.3	3.3	1.1	Agree: 65%			Disagree: 35%
Legend: E = Excellent; G = Good; F=Fair; P = Poor; U = Unsure									

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/CURRICULUM SPECIFICS

The MPA program strives to provide the necessary professional competencies to its public administration students. This category relates to the mission elements regarding professional development (mission items no. 3 and 20) by asking alumni to rate specific curricular subject areas. The MPA mission also specifically mentions applied research (mission item no. 5), technology (nos. 11 and 13) and the central role of ethics in public service (element no. 12), which are also included in this category.

In order to gauge alumni perceptions about the effectiveness of the curriculum, the alumni questionnaire asked the alumni to rate how well the program had contributed to their understanding of specific curricular areas. Table 7.10 below illustrates the results of the responses.

Overall, the alumni felt that the curriculum provides a good foundation for professional development. Over 82% of the respondents rated the program as "good" or "excellent" in contributing to their understanding of applied research. Almost 79% rated the program as "good" or "excellent" in contributing to their understanding of finance. Ethics received a combined "good/ excellent" rating of over 77%, while Information Technology received a combined "good" / "excellent" rating of 56%.

All of the subject areas were rated "good" or "excellent" by the majority of respondents (with most respondents rating the areas as "good"). The subject area of applied research contained the highest

(over 62%) percentage of alumni rating the item as "excellent". As the table indicates, the majority of respondents feels that the program does a good job in contributing to their professional development in each of the subject areas surveyed. It should be noted, however, that over 32% of the respondents rated this subject areas of human resources and intergovernmental relations as "poor" or "fair". Additionally, the smallest majority of "good /excellent" responses belonged to the area of Information Systems/Technology. The Information Systems/Technology area also contained the greatest percentage of "fair" (over 31 %) and "poor" (11%) ratings. Thus, the area of Information Systems/ Technology seems to be the weakest component (as perceived by all alumni) of the subject areas in which the alumni were polled (see the Statistical Trends section, however). It should also be noted that the department has very recently developed a computer lab in order to better develop the computer proficiencies of its students.

Table 7.10 Professional Development Response Table (in percentages)

	E	G	F	P	U
Decision-Making/Problem-Solving (n = 89)	21.3	55.1	19.1	4.5	0
Finance (n = 90)	27.8	51.1	16.7	4.4	0
Human Resources (n = 88)	19.3	45.5	23.9	9.1	2.3
Organizational Theory (n = 88)	26.1	47.7	19.3	5.7	1.1
Policy Process (n = 90)	28.9	45.6	23.3	2.2	0
Intergovernmental Relations (n = 90)	26.7	38.9	27.8	5.6	1.1
Ethics (n = 89)	31.5	46	12.4	7.9	2.2
Information Systems/Technology (n = 89)	14.6	41.6	31.5	11.2	1.1
Applied Research (n = 90)	62.2	20.0	12.2	4.4	1.1
Legend: E = Excellent; G = Good; F = Fair; P = Poor; U = Unsure					

The alumni questionnaire also contained an item asking alumni to list a skill which he or she

would have liked to have learned or more fully developed while enrolled in the MPA program. Of the 91 respondents to the alumni survey, 53 answered this specific question. The results showed no consensus as to any one skill that alumni would have desired to more fully develop while enrolled in the program. The alumni listed a wide variety of skills which were subsequently categorized into 17 skill areas. The top five areas of desired skills are listed in table 7.11 below. Computer Technology topped the list of desired skills. This desire for more experience in information technology is an interesting side-bar to the fact that the information technology subject-area was perceived to be the weakest in contributing to the professional development of the respondents.

Table 7.11 Top Five List of Desired Areas of Skill (n = 53)

Desired Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Computer Skills/Information Tech.	11	20.8
Finance/Budgeting	8	15.1
Grant Writing	5	9.4
More Analytical/Quantitative Research	5	9.4
Human Resources	5	94.
Other	19	35.9

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

This final category of mission-related items relates to networking opportunities for students of the program. The mission states that the program responds to the changing environment through links to professional associations and organizations (mission item no. 9) and interaction with government agencies (item no. 10). The mission statement also asserts that the program is distinguished by enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty (item no. 17), providing students with professional networking opportunities (item no. 18) and providing alumni with professional networking

opportunities (item no. 19).

The **MPA** program offers its students the opportunity for membership in the Centex chapter of ASPA.[32] Additionally, faculty/student/alumni gatherings are usually undertaken at the beginning and end of each semester.

The alumni questionnaire asked the alumni to rate various networking opportunities provided by the **MPA** program. The results are listed in Table 7.12 below. The majority of alumni believe that the program provides good networking opportunities. The highest rating was in regard to contacts between student and faculty. Almost 77% of the alumni rated faculty accessibility in the "good" or "excellent" range. These results are consistent with the 1997-98 exit survey, in which 78% of the respondents **agreed** (SA/A) that the program **provided** opportunities for outside classroom interaction between students and faculty. Additionally, 60% of the exiting students rated the accessibility of faculty members as "excellent" and 40% rated faculty accessibility as "good".

A small majority (over 55%) of the alumni rated outside-classroom interaction between students **as "good" over** "excellent". Similarly, a slim (just over 51%) majority of former students rated the **opportunity for** interaction with professional public administration associations as "good" or "excellent". **Most (70%) of** the exiting students polled in the 1997-98 study rated the opportunities for interaction **among persons** in the program as "good to excellent", while 21% rated such opportunities as "fair".

The weakest component of this group was the alumni perception of the opportunity for **inter**action with other public administration professionals. Only 48% of the respondents felt that such an opportunity was "good" or "excellent". Thirty-Three percent felt that the opportunity to network with

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[32]American Society for Public Administration. The SWT MPA program has very strong ties with ASPA. Many Centex members are former students of the program. MPA faculty members also belong to the Centex chapter and have served in a variety of officer positions over the years.

P.A. professionals was fair, while 13% of the respondents rated such an opportunity was poor.

Table 7.12 Alumni Rating of Networking Opportunities   1997-98 Student Survey Rating (n = 23)

n = 90	E	G	F	P	U	SA/A	D/SD
Faculty Accessibility	30.0	46.7	20.0	2.2	1.1	78	21
Student Interaction	17.8	37.8	34.4	10.0	0		
Interaction with PA professionals	7.8	40.0	33.3	13.3	5.6		
Interaction with PA Associations	20.0	31.1	33.3	10.0	5.6		

Legend: E = Excellent; G = Good; F = Fair; P = Poor; U = Unsure; SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

The above responses show that over 50% of the alumni rated three of the four above networking categories as "good" or "excellent". The opportunity for networking with other public administration professional was perceived to be the weakest component. Overall, the results show that the respondents believe that the program does provide sufficient networking opportunities.

NON-MISSION RELATED ITEMS

The alumni survey also contained several questions that were not specifically related to the program mission. These questions included items asking whether the alumni would re-choose to take the program again; whether they would recommend the program to others; and whether they would be interested in enrolling in a Public Administration/Public Affairs doctoral program, if such as program were to be offered by the Southwest Texas State University. The results of the responses to these questions are summarized in tables 7.13 and 7.14 below.

The results indicated that most of the alumni were happy with their experience with the program. Over Eighty-one percent of the alumni indicated that they would choose the SWT MPA program again. Eleven percent of the alumni were neutral on this question. Eight-nine percent responded that they would recommend the program to others, while almost 8% were neutral to this question. Similarly, the

great majority of the 1997-98 exiting students surveyed agreed (91%) that they would choose the program again and 96% of these exiting students agreed that they would advise a friend to study in the program.

These responses indicate that the clear majority of the alumni were very contented with the overall program and felt that enrollment in the program had been worthwhile to their careers.

Table 7.13 Alumni Response Percentage Rates to Re-choosing   1997-98 Exiting Student Responses
And Recommending the Program   (N = 23)

(N = 91)	Yes	No	Neutral	SA/A	D/SD
Would Choose Program Again	81.3	7.7	11.0	91	9
Would Recommend Pgm to Others	89.0	3.3	7.7	96	4

Table 7.14 Alumni Interest in a PhD Pgm at SWT

n = 91	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	56.0
no	17	18.7
Unsure	23	25.3

STATISTICAL TRENDS

This research project surveyed alumni who have graduated from the program within the past eight years. The public administration curriculum has always focused on preparing its students for public administration management, therefore the perceptions of alumni who have graduated from the program over the time span of several years should prove useful for assessment purposes. The revised mission statement, however, has been in existence for only the past two years (with a few items that were added in late 1999). It would thus seem logical that alumni who have graduated within the past two years would be more satisfied with the program's mission performance than the satisfaction expressed by the older alumni . This section compares the responses of alumni who have graduated

within the past two years with those who graduated over two years ago, in order to determine if the more recently-graduated alumni were more satisfied that the MPA program serves its mission. The response rates of the more recently-graduated alumni can also serve as a starting benchmark from which to measure future program outcomes.

The results of the response comparisons are depicted in tables 7.15 through 7.18 below. The results show that alumni who have graduated from the program within the past two years responded more positively to the program's overall revised mission performance than those who graduated over two years ago. A slightly greater percentage of recent alumni (over 76%) believed that the program provided "good" or "excellent" preparation for public service management than the alumni who graduated more than two years ago (over 75%). There was also an increase in the percentage of alumni who believed that the program provided preparation for public service leadership (79% of the recent graduates as compared to over 70% of the older alumni). This increase is significant because the core of the MPA mission is to prepare its students for public service management and leadership.

There are other items of note. A greater percentage of the recent alumni indicated that they would choose the program again (almost 90%) and would recommend the program to others (almost 97%) than did the alumni who graduated more than two years ago (in which almost 79% said would choose the program again and almost 87% would recommend the program to others). Recent alumni reported greater satisfaction in the area of curriculum diversity, curriculum innovation, and networking opportunities than that reported by the older alumni.

Recent alumni also reported much greater satisfaction that the program had contributed to their understanding of ethics than the satisfaction expressed by older alumni. Over 89% of the alumni who have graduated within the past two years rated this item as "good" to "excellent", contrasted with almost

73% of the older alumni who rated this item as "good" to "excellent". There was a negligible negative difference in ratings, however, between recent and older alumni as to whether the program emphasized the central role of ethics in public service.

There were a few anomalies in the generally positive statistical trend. Over 73% of the recent alumni rated the area of faculty accessibility as "good" to "excellent". This is a drop in overall satisfaction compared to the alumni who graduated over two years ago, 80% of whom gave a "good" to "excellent" rating. Interestingly, a greater percentage (38%) of the recent alumni rated faculty accessibility as "excellent" than did the other alumni (almost 27%). The area of Intergovernmental Relations showed a drop in satisfaction among the more recent graduates. Over 55% rated this items as "good" or "excellent", which can be contrasted to the almost 75% "good" or "excellent" rating given by the alumni who graduated over two years ago.

The area of applied research showed a mixed result. The alumni survey contained two items in regard to applied research. One item asked formerstudents to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed that the program provided preparation for applied research. The second item asked alumni to rate how well the program had contributed to their knowledge of applied research. Almost 83% of the recent alumni agreed that the program had prepared them for applied research. This is a larger percentage of agreement than that shown by the older alumni (almost 79%). There was a decrease, however, in the percentage of alumni who rated the program as "good" to "excellent" in contributing to their understanding of applied research. Almost 76% of the recent alumni rated this item as "good" to "excellent", while almost 86% of the older rated this item as "good" to "excellent".

Information Systems is another area of interest. Overall, a small majority of the total alumni had rated this area as "good" to "excellent". This item, however, does show an upward trend in its rating

when comparing the responses of recent graduates with those of the older alumni. Fifty-three percent of the older alumni rated information systems/technology as "good" to "excellent", while almost 61% of the more recent graduates rated this item as "good" to "excellent".

The responses of the more recent alumni show a generally more positive perception of the program than the responses given by the program's earlier graduates. This seems to indicate that the program's mission positively influenced alumni perception of the program.

Table 7.15 Alumni Comparison of Non-mission items

	0 -2 Yr Graduates (n = 29)			3 - 8 Year Graduates (n = 61)		
	Yes	No	Neutral	Yes	No	Neutral
Would Choose Program Again	89.7	6.9	3.4	78.7	8.2	13.1
Would Recommend Pgm to Others	96.6		3.4	86.9	4.9	8.2
Interested in a PhD Program at SWT	65.5	6.9	27.6	52.5	23.0	24.6

Table 7.16 Top Desired Skills List - Longitudinal Alumni Comparison

0 -2 Yr Graduates (n = 18) 3 - 8 Yr Graduates (n = 35)

Desired Skill	Percentage	Frequency	Skill	Percentage	Frequency
Grant Writing	22.4	4	Computer Skills	25.7	9
More Analytical/Quantitative Research	16.7	3	Finance/Budgeting	20.0	7
Computer Skills	11.1	2	Human Resources	11.4	4
GIS	11.1	2	More Management	11.4	4
Policy	11.1	2	Communications	5.7	2
Other	27.7	5	Other:	25.7	9

Table 7.17 Comparison of Recent Alumni with Older Alumni

	0 - 2 Year Graduates (n = 29)					3 - 8 Year Graduates (n = 61)				
	SA	A	N/O	D	SD	SA	A	N/O	D	SD
Frequency of Courses was Sufficient	37.9	55.2		6.9		29.5	63.9		4.9	1.6
Courses were offered at Convenient Times	58.6	34.5		6.9		37.7	60.7			1.6
Courses were offered at various locations	31.0	62.1		3.4	3.4	28.3*	53.3	11.7	6.7	
Curriculum Balance between theoretical and applied approaches	24.1	65.5	6.9	3.4		30.0*	40.0	10.0	16.7	3.3
Curriculum was Diverse	13.8	65.5	17.2	3.4		11.5	55.7	14.8	16.4	1.6
Program provided Preparation for Applied Research	24.1	58.6	10.3	6.9		37.7	41.0	6.6	11.5	3.3
Ethics played a central Role	20.7	51.7	6.9	20.7		19.7	54.1	9.8	13.1	3.3
Program offered Innovative Curriculum	13.8	65.5	10.3	10.3		18.0	42.6	19.7	18.0	1.6

Legend: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N/O = No Opinion; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree
*n = 60

Table 7.18 Comparison of Recent Alumni with Later Graduates

	0 - 2 Year Graduates (n = 29)					3 - 8 Year Graduates (n = 61)				
	E	G	F	P	U	E	G	F	P	U
Management Preparation	24.1	51.7	10.3	3.4	10.3	23.0	52.5	13.1	6.6	4.9
Leadership Preparation	20.7	58.6	17.2		3.4	26.2	44.3	14.8	6.6	8.2
Faculty Preparation	51.7	48.3				44.3	47.5	6.6	1.6	
Knowledge of Subject	69.0	31.0				60.7	37.7		1.6	
Interested in Student Development	41.4	37.9	20.7			49.2	32.8	11.5	4.9	1.6
Decision-Making/Problem-Solving	17.2	62.1	17.2	3.4		23.7	52.5	20.3	3.4	
Finance	13.8	65.5	20.7			35.0	45.0	13.3	6.7	
Human Resources	13.8	55.2	17.2	10.3	3.4	22.4	39.7	27.6	8.6	1.7
Organizational Theory	25.0	46.4	28.6			27.1	47.5	15.3	8.5	1.7
Policy Process	17.2	55.2	24.1	3.4		33.3	41.7	23.3	1.7	
Intergovernmental Relations	20.7	34.5	34.5	6.9	3.4	30.0	40.0	25.0	5.0	
Ethics	17.2	72.4	6.9	3.4		39.0	33.9	15.3	8.5	3.4
Information Systems/Technology	17.9	42.9	28.6	10.7		13.3	40.0	33.3	11.7	1.7
Applied Research	65.5	10.3	24.1			61.7	25.0	6.7	5.0	1.7

	E	G	F	P	U	E	G	F	P	U
Faculty Accessibility	37.9	35.5	24.1		3.4	26.7	53.3	16.7	3.3	
Student Interaction	17.2	48.3	31.0		3.4	18.3	33.3	35.0	13.3	
Interaction with PA professionals	6.9	48.3	34.5	6.9	3.4	8.3	36.7	31.7	16.7	6.7
Interaction with PA Associations	31.0	27.6	31.0	6.9	3.4	15.0	31.7	35.0	11.7	6.7

Legend: E = Excellent; G = Good; F = Fair; P = Poor; U = Unsure or No Opinion

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study contained a couple of limitation in the survey instruments that should be noted. First, the mission contains two items mentioning management - *The MPA Program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers...in public service...The Program is distinguished by emphasizing management in political institutions and processes..* The survey only asked alumni to rate how well the program prepared them for public service management. The responses to this question can provide measurement of the above management items in the mission. The study, however, would have been more complete if the survey had also specifically asked alumni if they agreed that the program emphasized management in political institutions and processes.

A similar limitation also pertains to the professional development component of the mission. The mission includes focusing on continued professional development. The survey asked alumni to rate faculty interest in the professional development of their students. The questionnaire also asked the alumni to rate how well the program contributed to their professional development in specific areas. The study would probably have been better served if the survey had also contained an item asking alumni specifically to rate how well the MPA program had contributed to their overall professional development.

SUMMARY

This project assesses whether the SWT MPA alumni believe that the program lives up to its mission (and its supporting tenets) of preparing its students for public service management and leadership. The conceptual framework for this research is practical ideal type (as discussed in the previous chapter). This chapter presented the findings for the research undertaken for this project. These results were organized according to the practical ideal type categories developed for this research. These alumni responses showed that over the past eight years, the alumni believe that the MPA program's performance has been consistent with its mission. The results further showed that, within the past two years, alumni have perceived even greater overall alignment of the program's performance with its mission. The next chapter will present a summary of the research outcomes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this project was to gauge how well the SWT MPA alumni believed that the program is meeting its mission. This chapter summarizes the findings by the practical idea type categories discussed in the preceding chapter.

PROGRAM SERVICE PROFILE

One aspect of the program's mission is to provide service to the diverse community of Central Texas and to provide opportunities for a diverse student body. The results of the research project show that the respondents to the survey were comprised of a diverse demographic profile. Their employment profile covered the sectors of public, private and non-profit domains. These results, therefore, denote that the MPA program is successful in meeting the diversity tenets of its mission.

GENERAL PA CURRICULUM SERVICES

The mission elements in this category relate to servicing students by offering courses frequently and at various times and locations; offering an innovative curriculum with a diverse set of career support areas; providing students a balanced approach between the theoretical and applied aspects of public administration; preparing students for applied research, and for roles as managers and leaders; and infusing the role of ethics into the overall curriculum.

According to the research findings, the majority of alumni believe that the MPA program prepares its students to be managers and leaders in public service. Additionally, there was strong agreement that the program courses are offered frequently and at various times and locations. Overall in this category, there was less consensus than the other items on whether the program offered an innovative curriculum, but a clear majority did view the curriculum as innovative. It should be noted

that alumni who have graduated within the past two years showed much stronger agreement that the program offers an innovative curriculum than did alumni who graduated over two years ago.

FACULTY PERFORMANCE

This category relates to questions about faculty knowledge of their subject areas, faculty preparation for classes, and faculty interest in the professional development of their students. As stated in the prior chapter, the item regarding interest in student development is the only item in this category that is directly related to the program mission.

The response to the faculty items in the survey were overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority of alumni highly rated the faculty. The alumni felt that MPA faculty are interested in the professional development of its students. The ratings for faculty preparation and subject knowledge were also extremely high.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/CURRICULUM SPECIFICS

In order to delve more deeply into the aspect of professional development, specific subject areas were listed in the alumni survey, and respondents were asked to rate each particular subject as to how well the program had contributed to their understanding of the specified subject. Alumni were also asked to list a skill they wished they had better developed while in the program.

The majority of alumni rated all the listed subject areas as "good" to "excellent". For all alumni surveyed, the smallest "good" to "excellent" majority was in the area of information systems/technology. The information systems area, however, was rated higher by alumni who have graduated from the program within the past two years. Perhaps, not-so-coincidentally, the largest percentage of all alumni who listed a "desired-for skill" wanted a better knowledge of computer/technology skills. The alumni listed a wide variety of desired skills, with no majority

consensus for one particular skill.

The overall results of this category of items give support to the missions items regarding professional development, and the importance of research, ethics, and information technology to the program.

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

The MPA program offers a number of opportunities for its students to network with other students, ASPA members, and members of the program's alumni. The more formal networking opportunities, such as the mentor gatherings began in the Fall of 1999. Accordingly, such networking opportunities have been included in the program mission.

The research results show that majority of alumni believe that the program does a "fair" to "excellent" job of providing such networking opportunities. The strongest ratings were in regard to faculty accessibility to students and with student-to-student outside-classroom interaction. This result is not surprising because the program has better control over faculty/student networking opportunities than it does over networking opportunities with public administration associations and professionals.

In regard to networking with PA associations, the highest percentage of survey respondents rated this item as "fair". The opportunity to network with other P.A. professionals received the lowest percentage of "good" to "excellent" ratings and the highest percentage of a "poor" rating.

Alumni who have graduated within the past two years showed a higher level of satisfaction than earlier graduates of the program with the program's networking opportunities in all areas except faculty accessibility.

NON-MISSION RELATED SURVEY ITEMS

The alumni survey asked a few questions that were not particularly related to the MPA mission

statement. Notably, the survey asked whether the alumni member would re-choose the program again, and whether the alumni member would recommend the program to others.

The vast majority of alumni responded that they would both choose the program again and would recommend it to others. Interestingly, the number of respondents who indicated that they would recommend the program to others was higher than the number of respondents who indicated that they would choose to enter the program again.

Another survey item asked whether the alumni member would be interested in a PhD program, if one were offered by SWT. The majority of respondents indicated that they would be interested in such a program. Some alumni commented on this item. Several of the comments are as follows:

"When does it start?"
" Doctoral Program(s) in Public Administration is long overdue."
"Definitely Yes!!"
"Too old, too tired."

Table 8.1 below graphically depicts the results of the research into alumni perceptions as to whether the MPA program successfully fulfills its mission. As mentioned in the previous chapter, for purposes of better alumni survey organization, the practical ideal type categories categorized the items differently from the mission statement. In order to depict the graphic results of the research project with better clarity, the table reconstructs the mission elements as they appear in the mission statement. The table also depicts whether the recent alumni showed greater satisfaction with the program's fulfillment of its mission components than that showed by the total alumni population.

Table 8.1 Mission Summary Table

Mission Items	Overall Evidence	Change in Level of Evidence for 0 -2 Year Alumni
The MPA Program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers *and leaders* in public service.	supports	increase
The Program primary serves 1. the *diverse community* that is Central Texas.	supports	increase
Such service is provided through: 2. regular course work,	strongly supports	negligible decrease
3. professional development,	supports	slight increase
4. internships, and	n/a	n/a
5. applied research projects.	supports	mixed
The Program responds to the changing environment through: 6. an innovative curriculum,	supports	strong increase
7. faculty scholarship,	n/a	n/a
8. faculty service,	n/a	n/a
9. links to professional associations and organizations,	supports	increase
10. interaction with governmental agencies, and	supports	increase
11. *a commitment to state-of the-art technology.*	supports	increase
The Program is distinguished by: *12. emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service,*	supports	negligible decrease
13. reinforcing the use of technology in management,	supports	increase
14. providing opportunity to a diverse student body,	supports	negligible
15. delivering classes at varied times and locations,	strongly supports	increase
16. offering a variety of career support areas,	supports	increase
17. enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty,	supports	decrease
18. providing students with professional networking opportunities,	supports	increase
19. providing alumni with professional networking opportunities,	supports	increase
20. focusing on continuing professional development,	supports	negligible
21. ~~emphasizing management in political institutions and processes,~~ and	~~supports~~ *N A*	~~increase~~ *N A*
22. integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public management.	supports	strong increase

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