

PRAC Report for the Paul H. O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs (O’Neill)

2020-2021 Academic Year Review

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Introduction

This report concerns the program review and assessment efforts of the Paul H. O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs (O’Neill) during the 2020-2021 academic year. We specifically focus on the undergraduate and graduate programs in Public Affairs and plan to emphasize the Criminal Justice and Public Safety programs in next year’s PRAC report. The focus in this document is on substantial efforts, new developments or changes in our work during the pandemic. Review and assessment tasks that are part of the school’s regular process will be noted but not discussed in great detail.

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

Overview of the O’Neill School

Undergraduate Programs

During the 2020-2021 academic year, O’Neill enrolled 840 undergraduate majors seeking Bachelor of Science degrees in either Public Affairs (BSPA) or in Criminal Justice and Public Safety Management (BSCJPSM). For many undergraduate students, O’Neill is not a first-entry school, and most undergraduate students transfer into O’Neill during or after their sophomore year, most transferring from University College.

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

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

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

From 2018-2020, O'Neill faculty reviewed its full undergraduate program across both degrees, the BSPA and the BSCJPS. As detailed more completely below, this effort has included significant reform of degree requirements, evaluation and alignment of program and course learning outcomes and a comprehensive review of course content, which was completed and submitted for faculty and campus approval in the fall of 2021. Although the changes to the criminal justice and public safety degrees were minimal, the public affairs major received a major overhaul with implementation of the revised programs planned for the 2022-2023 academic year. These efforts were informed by our internal assessment data as well as by helpful input from two external program reviews conducted during prior years.

Because of the impact of the pandemic, review of student performance took on a different look. Though it remained important to track progress toward fundamental learning goals, faculty concentrated most of its energy on supporting students facing the physical, social, emotional and economic challenges associated with the pandemic. Particularly because we are a school of public affairs and because we serve a racially diverse population, issues of social justice also loomed large in classrooms and hallways. As a consequence, faculty reduced or eliminated some of the assignments, particularly standard exams, that were typically used for annual reviews.

Given this choice to accommodate student needs, we turned our attention toward advancing the larger program improvements and assessments on track. Consequently, this report will not devote attention to discussion of our more routine assessments of student learning during the year. To the extent we offer comments, we continue to focus on the public affairs programs because we are still implementing and assessing the large-scale changes that were impacted by the pandemic. We do note that even given the strain of pandemic, it was impossible to ignore the continuing increase in DFW rates in SPEA-K 300 (our undergraduate statistics course). Again, the period of the pandemic was used to develop a response based on significant modifications in the focus and learning outcomes of that course. Though these changes are not yet finalized – we are testing a prototype course over two semesters – this will be noted below.

Graduate Programs

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

During the review year, 460 graduate students were enrolled. Enrollment in both programs fell during the 2020-2021 year, mirroring trends at schools across the country. During 2018-2019, the Public Affairs faculty engaged in a self-study for the purposes of reaccreditation of the MPA program (including the executive education MPA program) through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). The NASPAA site visit occurred in February 2020 and program received re-accreditation in July 2020. The program will begin another review cycle in 2027.

Special Emphasis for the 2020-2021 PRAC Reports

Through most of the past four academic years, including the 2020-2021 academic year that is the subject of this report, the O'Neill School has engaged in a systematic and complete review of its curriculum. The process for reviewing and revising all of our undergraduate programs coincided with and benefitted from the contemporaneous campus review of the criminal justice program and the completion of the accreditation process by the NASPAA, our national accrediting body. Although the accreditation process focuses on graduate programs, the process of self-study and external review provoked and framed ideas relevant to the undergraduate program. We continued to draw on these findings in our assessment and improvement efforts this past year.

In addition to the three charges we address below, we do want to note the O'Neill School has undergone transitions in multiple leadership positions, including Dean of our core school and Executive Associate Dean on our campus. We have been undergoing a strategic planning process and there have been other challenges and responsibilities attendant on these leadership transitions that have impacted the plans we initially had for the year.

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

As in many schools across campus, we were still dealing with modality changes and continued to emphasize faculty and student well-being in planning for 2020-2021. As a result, our regular semester assessments were not completed as the type of learning-outcome focused review would not yield useful comparative information. Additionally, in many cases assignments used for the assessment process were not given by faculty or were modified. We did, however, engage in evaluation of student well-being and confidence. We have deliberately chosen to focus on specific areas of concern, such as statistics and performance in general education courses. Efforts to assess these areas for the 2020-2021 academic year are currently underway (e.g., assessment committees have collected data from faculty and are currently evaluating the information). Information gathered during this belated review will remain relevant as we consider ongoing improvement.

Progress on Implementing PLUS (Charge: 2)

As the O'Neill faculty reviewed the undergraduate programs in both of our degrees, we engaged in a concomitant review of learning outcomes at the course, program, and degree level. We aligned disciplinary and professional outcomes with PLUS and with Statewide Competencies, as appropriate. All syllabi identify how the course advances PLUS outcomes. Faculty are encouraged to link specific outcomes to ways that students can apply what they are learning now and in the future.

After identifying the knowledge, disposition, and skill learning outcomes at the course level, we inventoried these and are now considering the collective learning expectations for students completing each major and degrees. One goal of this work is to assure that students have an acceptable level of exposure to each of the four profiles and that they are aware of how these learning outcomes build upon and enrich one another as they move through the curriculums toward graduation. Our goal is to be able to clearly articulate this learning to students, parents, and the external community in a way that is understandable and practical.

Because O'Neill began its curricular review and revisions at approximately the same time

that IUPUI adopted PLUS, we have had the advantage of using the structure throughout the three-year effort to enhance our courses and programs. We have reviewed and aligned the course-level PLUS.

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

During the review year, O'Neill developed a list of additional experience to submit for the Record. A member of the student services staff will prepare and submit these during the 2021-2022 AY. Because of the limitation of the pandemic, the school has not developed meaningful additions to its portfolio of experiential learning opportunities beyond those on its current addition list. In addition, we have had staff turnover in this department that is necessitating a broader examination of roles, responsibilities, and structure.

Program Reviews and Assessments

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

Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs (BSPA)

During the review period, the O'Neill faculty considered and ultimately approved a series of significant changes to the BSPA. These include the consolidation of two majors – Management and Civic Leadership – into a single major with a variety of possible focus tracks for students to follow. Another major, Media and Public Policy was eliminated due to low enrollment and the challenge of ensuring that necessary courses were offered to allow students to complete the degree. This core content of the major has become a concentration within the newly named Public Policy Studies major. All students in the BSPA, regardless of major will complete a common Public Affairs core and will also participate in a smaller group of required courses in their major. This change gives students in the degree a shared experience and base of knowledge and skills. It will also enhance our ability to better evaluate learning across the degree, something that was more challenging when the degrees allowed students many different pathways toward completion and fewer shared learning experiences.

Another important addition is the focus on experiential learning opportunities within individual courses. Moving this focus to the front of our work aligns with the campus goal of increasing the number of opportunities available to students that are reflected on the Record.

The revision of the degree involved meaningful reconsideration of learning goals in both existing courses and newly designed courses. These goals focused on ensuring that students will satisfy both PLUS goals and the learning expectations established by our disciplinary accrediting body. Further, we worked to give students the ability to demonstrate competence and skills desired by area employers. Where appropriate, learning goals were also mapped to state competencies. During the interim between approval of the degree and its availability to students, we will review our assessment process to determine whether it is appropriate or requires revision. We presume that some adaptation will be necessary as we move more students through shared courses and have a better basis for comparison and learning. The committee doing this work includes faculty members who teach in the undergraduate program, the Assistant Dean and the Director of Student Services. The Executive Associate Dean

and the Public Affairs Program Director were ad hoc members.

Master of Public Administration (MPA)

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

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

Assessment plan

Assessments had been conducted periodically since 2012, but usually on an ad hoc basis. The faculty agreed that a more formalized assessment process was needed, and this plan was developed and approved during 2018. Specifically, the faculty of the O'Neill MPA program have identified a set of nine broad criteria to be used to assess the performance of the MPA program. The criteria are broken into two parts: a section laying out what the faculty and leadership expects of itself, and a section describing what we expect of our students and graduates. The process, as depicted below will be ongoing, relying on the combination of program data, course materials and the capstone project to assess program performance. In general, we take a collaborative evaluation approach¹ amongst the faculty, in addition to involving our program stakeholders in the evaluation process, where appropriate.

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

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

- Capstone pre- and post- examination – students in the capstone course take an exam, based on the performance criteria at the start and end of each semester. Base rates of competency and improvement during the capstone experience will be assessed.
- Capstone projects – during the capstone class, students work on several case projects intended to connect and reinforce the various program goals.
- Course materials – each instructor will identify key assignments in their course and provide access to the assessment committee to student work by posting

assignments into designated folders for each of the assessment criteria listed below.

- Instructor assessments – at the start of each semester, instructors identify a set of course learning objectives and provide general assessments of student performance on the same 4-point scale described below. These instructor assessments will be based on the instructor’s perceptions of how well the class, as a whole, met the course learning objectives and will be separate from grades and unavailable to students.
- Student self-assessments – at both the start and end of the semester, all capstone students will assess their own perceptions of their level of competence on the performance criteria.

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

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

- Excellent
- Competent
- Emergent
- Not Acceptable

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

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

Assessments following the above outlined process have been conducted in 2018-2019 (completed) and 2020-2021 (in the process of review, see COVID-impact on assessment above). Below we present findings from the completed 2018-2019 assessment.

Capstone Reform

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

remained a core component.

One result from this process has been a change to capstone (a key requirement of NASPAA). We have streamlined the project, formalized the process for recruiting community partners, added the individual portfolio as a permanent component with a reflective element, and incorporated a speaker's bureau (consisting primarily of O'Neill alumni).

Alumni and Employer Engagement

In reviewing materials for the assessment, it was realized that opportunities for alumni and employer engagement were not tracked in any meaningful way. Informal conversations suggested that these interactions took place, but the scale of activity was not fully known. Going forward, the faculty will consider a more detailed plan for consistent engagement between students, faculty, alumni, executive education partners and prospective employers.

Research Engagement

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

Curriculum Modifications

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

Assessment Modifications

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

Consistency Modifications

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

Conclusion

This PRAC report described the program review and assessment efforts of the Paul H. O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs (O'Neill) during the 2020-2021 academic year. Similar to others, we faced barriers and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic that slowed down our efforts. Still, we outlined some major milestones with regards to program review and assessment in both the undergraduate and graduate Public Affairs programs. We plan to emphasize the Criminal Justice and Public Safety programs in next year's PRAC report.