

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

## **2021-2022 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 2021-2022 academic year. Course and program level review and assessment tasks are part of the school’s annual review and planning process. Annual program reviews occur in May and results are used to direct planning and improvement in individual classrooms and larger curricular changes.

The process and mechanism of these routine reviews, which has been detailed in prior reports, has not changed substantially and will not be the focus of this report. Instead, we will discuss three initiatives grew from these routine reviews. We will emphasize: 1) implementation and early assessment of significant curriculum changes to the BSPA; 2) changes to the statistics courses required for all O’Neill undergraduates; and, 3) the role of adjacent services in improving student outcomes

This report begins with a brief description of the school and its programs. The next section briefly describes our review and assessment process. Both sections are organized according by program and include related learning outcomes and methods of assessment. The remainder of the report outlines initiatives implemented during the review period that resulted from our regular program reviews, including items important to this year’s requested focus areas, the Profiles, the Record and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

### **Overview of the O’Neill School**

#### Undergraduate Programs:

Description: During the review period, O’Neill enrolled 563 undergraduate majors seeking Bachelor of Science degrees in either Public Affairs (BSPA) or in Criminal Justice and Public Safety Management (BSCJPSM). O’Neill is considered a “found major” meaning that many students do not matriculate in until their sophomore year or later.

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

The BSPA faculty have identified and orient major courses to the focus on established learning outcomes. These outcomes, which appear in Appendix A, are used during all course and program level reviews and assessments. During the review year, faculty participated in a review and subsequent redesign of the K300 (statistics) program. The assessment included

review of syllabi, sample assignments, student artifacts and performance metrics. Method and outcomes of this assessment are discussed further below. During the upcoming year, courses in the BSPA Core are slated for review.

The BSCJPSM 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 core curriculum for these majors is virtually identical. Most students in the program select one area for their major and complete a minor in the other area of study.

The BSCJ & BSPS faculty established new program learning outcomes after the most recent external review in 2018. The outcomes listed in Appendix B apply to both majors with differences only in subject focus. Outcomes are used during course and program level assessments that are conducted annually. Assessments includes review of syllabi, sample assignments, student artifacts and performance metrics. During this review year, faculty participated with faculty in the BSPA in a review of the K300 program. Method and outcomes of this assessment are discussed 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, 215 graduate students were enrolled. 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. Graduate faculty review courses regularly according to the requirements of our accrediting organization.

### **Special Emphasis for the 2021-2022 PRAC Reports**

1. Implementing the Profiles into Teaching and Learning. During the review period, a team of O'Neill faculty created a crosswalk that mapped O'Neill established student learning outcomes to the Profiles and to state outcomes (as appropriate) and identifies where learning will be evaluated. Work began with courses included in the IUPUI General Education course list and then moved to the program level. Additionally, all faculty are charged with identifying the Profiles most relevant to their class and telling the student how their learning will be evaluated and assessed. This information must now be included in the syllabus. Syllabi are reviewed by program directors, the faculty coordinator, and the Associate Dean prior to the start of every semester to confirm, among other things, that the Profile/s and methods of evaluation are visible to students. The most challenging aspect of this work has been encouraging faculty to take a focused approach rather than creating a grocery list of Profile outcomes.

2. Listing activities on the Record. When conducting the review noted above, the

review team attempts to identify activities appropriate for the Record. Candidly, this has not been a focus of our work this year. Pressures from faculty departures and the number of adjunct faculty who teach in our undergraduate program compound the challenge of encouraging faculty to prioritize this effort. Going forward, we will instead focus on submitting standard and predictable activities, like our capstone courses.

3. Impact of Covid. Like many schools, we found students and faculty developed a love-hate relationship with remote learning. The modality is convenient, but the quality of the experience is mixed. As we returned more fully to campus, we began meaningful and data-informed conversations about the appropriateness of course modality. We considered participant-observer information, including student feedback and faculty experience, the ability to and ease of meeting learning goals in alternate formats, and student performance data. Based on these conversations, O’Neill began reviewing courses and assigning a teaching mode that served the interest of student learning first and convenience to students and faculty second. For example, general education courses are taught in person using the face-to-face or face-to-face hybrid mix. Similarly, core courses within the MPA use a face-to-face or remote-synchronous approach, while elective courses may be taught in fully synchronous or asynchronous hybrid. We plan to reevaluate modality expectations annually as part of our annual review process.

### **Program Reviews and Assessments**

This section provides an overview of work done as a result of our program review and assessment effort and includes a general overview of our review process.

#### Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs (BSPA)

In 2021, the O’Neill faculty considered and ultimately approved a series of significant changes to the BSPA. The review period represented the roll-out of the new curriculum which includes redefined and streamlined majors with a required Public Affairs core across each major. This common core will both ensure a shared base of essential knowledge and skills but will also facilitate assessment of essential learning across the program.

The review year also was the first year that O’Neill taught and tested a revised version of K300, Statistical Techniques. For several years, we remained frustrated by high DWF rates and the number of students who put off this required course until late in their degree programs, frequently resulting in delayed graduation when they were unable to pass the class. Though instructors had made changes, including incorporating new technology that provided immediate feedback and additional practice opportunities on homework assignments, testing flipped classroom approaches and other strategies, challenges continued.

Beginning in 2021, we started offering two version of K300, loosely identified as “consumer” and “producer” versions. The producer version is designed for students who are more quantitatively oriented or who are inclined to graduate school or careers that will require them to go beyond interpreting statistical data prepared by others to generating and manipulating statistical data.

The “consumer” version of statistics focuses on the ways that statistical concepts and practices are applied to understand information and make decisions. Creating this more applied

version required a slight reduction in the number of concepts covered to allow time to review and reinforce mathematical concepts necessary to understand statistical data. The course also includes frequent self-assessment and practical applications using examples related to the students' majors. Working with their student and faculty advisors, students select a section of the course that best suits their needs.

Both versions of the course are aligned against the same learning goals. The difference is in the teaching approach and the type of projects the students complete. All sections of the course use a common Mile Marker assignment. The grading rubric for the assignment examines learning against specific learning outcomes. Our assessment of this assignment over two semesters confirmed that the two-version approach helped reduce student anxiety about the course and helped them understand "how they will use this" knowledge after college. We also saw increased ability to understand how basic statistical data is created and how it can be effectively used. Though there are bumps that remain, there is also evidence of small improvements in retention in the course.

Students who performed poorly on the Mile Marker assignment during the review period were most often the same students who had the lowest engagement in the form of attendance, homework completion or participation in the optional (and frequent) tutoring sessions or the optional statistics lab course, K301. They also often failed to complete weekly homework. Based on the evaluation done at the end of the academic year, the faculty decided to include more group projects that will be started in class and completed as part of the weekly class homework with the goal of creating peer support networks to encourage student engagement with the class and material. We are also testing a mentor program that brings a student advisor into class regularly as a resource for students not comfortable sharing their concerns, frustrations or anxieties about the class with the instructor or other students.

### Master of Public Administration (MPA)

The O'Neill graduate faculty 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 approach<sup>1</sup> 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

Data for the assessments come from five sources, the first 3 being direct measures and the final 2 being indirect measures.

- Capstone portfolios – a collection of student artifacts that align with NASPAA required learning outcomes.

- 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.

### *Capstone Reform*

During the review period, the graduate faculty focused the reinvention of the graduate capstone. Historically, the graduate capstone consisted of the completion of a project for a community partner. Through assessment reviews, faculty determined that the capstone projects were consistently strong but failed to cover 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. Students are now required to complete a seven-part portfolio that consists of artifacts from prior course work that the student believes exemplifies mastery of each learning outcome along with extensive reflective work related to the artifact, the learning outcome and the student’s own summation of their learning. We also incorporated a speaker’s bureau (consisting primarily of O’Neill alumni).

### **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. Like other units, we faced barriers and challenges due to enrollment challenges and the lingering impact of social and cultural changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the opportunity to reflect and submit this report.

## **Appendix A**

### **Bachelor of Science Public Affairs - Program Learning Outcomes**

**Describe the intellectual depth, breadth, and mental agility of learning to anticipate, recognize, evaluate, and solve problems in public affairs**

- Recognize, characterize and analyze issues and problems in public affairs using appropriate technology to collect, collate and assess data through statistics and other quantitative tools.
- Evaluate information using different analytical methods and tools

**Develop an awareness of one's personal responsibility and service to the public, and to seek principled solutions to problems in public affairs.**

- Recognize and demonstrate sensitivity to diverse points of view.
- Work effectively in a team.

**Recognize and incorporate concerns, theories, concepts and other information rooted in the broader concepts of globalization, civic engagement, sustainability, and management in working with public affairs issues and problems.**

- Recognize different approaches to civic engagement practiced in different communities
- Design responses to public problems that incorporate diverse needs and priorities

**Communicate effectively important information and ideas in public affairs both with individuals and in group settings, and using oral, written, visual, and electronic modes.**

- Communicate ideas using written and oral modes
- Communicate ideas using data in various formats

**Recognize, characterize and analyze issues and problems in public affairs using appropriate technology to collect, collate and assess data through statistics and other quantitative tools.**

- Understand basic quantitative approaches to gather and analyzing data
- Use common quantitative methods to guide inquiry and decision making
- Demonstrate familiarity with the ethical considerations associated with data gathering and data use.

**Apply knowledge and theory of the public, nonprofit and private sectors (e.g., microeconomics) to analyze, evaluate and contribute to the development of solutions for**

**public affairs issues and problems.**

- Recognize the components of a healthy civil society
- Learn the structures and stages of the political process and anticipate the ways that the political process impacts civic engagement.
- Understand and apply the theoretical and practical foundations of leadership.
- Learn and use negotiation and conflict resolution skills.
- Evaluate the costs and benefits of different approaches to addressing a civic problem through the lenses of economics, effective policy making,

## Appendix B

### **BSCJ and Program Learning Outcomes**

#### **Describe Major elements of the criminal justice system, policing, courts and corrections**

- Summarize basic terms and definitions critical to criminal justice
- Define crime, legally and socially, discuss how it is measured, and current trends in crime.
- Interpret contemporary events, people, trends, social movements within the broader context of criminal justice.
- Examine the criminal justice system using multi-disciplinary perspectives that recognize both formal and informal ways of giving

#### **Evaluate ethics, values, norms, and motivations in criminal justice, policing, courts, and corrections**

- Examine meanings and motivations of different actors in the criminal justice system through diverse perspectives
- Explain critiques of the criminal justice system
- Recognize and interpret key ethical concepts and dilemmas
- Evaluate and apply ethical schools of thought in relation to activities and decision-making in the criminal justice system

#### **Analyze elements of the criminal justice system considering the diverse experiences and view points present in society (PLUS: Innovator)**

- Identify the size, scope, types, roles and limitations of the criminal justice system
- Differentiate the roles and relationships among institutions and actors in the criminal justice system
- Explain the role of competing viewpoints and systemic pressures and change
- Gather and analyze data related to the criminal justice sector from credible sources to inform, research, practice, and/or decision-making
- Evaluate theories that explain the origins and purposes of different elements of the criminal justice system
- Compare and contrast the approaches and impact of criminal justice systems on the local, national, and global levels.

#### **Communicate about criminal justice issues effectively with varied audiences (PLUS: Communicator)**

- Discuss the constitutional foundations of the criminal justice system, especially the tensions between individual rights and public order
- Demonstrate the ability to listen to, question, and articulate ideas through discussions, interviews, and research
- Demonstrate principles of effective written and verbal communication



**Engage with individuals, organizations and communities to address the operation of and challenges in the criminal justice system (PLUS: Problem Solver)**

- Describe personal orientations and positions on criminal justice questions
- Produce leadership and consensus-building strategies for addressing issues in the criminal justice system
- Evaluate and develop diverse collaborative approaches for addressing issues of justice and the criminal justice system

**Translate understanding of the criminal justice system into strategies to resolve problems or issues in the criminal justice system (PLUS: Community Contributor)**

- Apply criminal justice knowledge to theory to analyze, evaluate and contribute to the development of solutions for criminal justice problems and issues.
- Describe their capacity to participate in system change and problem solving
- Identify career options that aligned with their values and civic identity
- Critique personal and professional experiences related to the roles and actions of elements of the criminal justice system to inform future actions