

Normed Core Topics:

A method for adding granularity to required competency standards in MPP and MPA programs

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Introduction and outline

Accreditation bodies for Master's programs offering public policy, public administration and similarly titled degrees have been reluctant to specify curricular content in their standards.

There are several reasons for this reluctance. One is respect for mission diversity. NASPAA states that its use of "performance standards" rather than "design standards" enables its accreditation process to respect differences among program missions.² A related reason is to avoid discouraging innovation. The UNDESA/IASIA Standards of Excellence state that standards should not be "interpreted in a manner that might impede the development of special strengths or areas of specialization in each program."³ A third reason is to improve quality by encouraging competency-based curricular design and teaching. This usually includes an admonition to focus on outcomes rather than inputs or outputs. For example, NASPAA does not specify the subjects and topics to be covered in a program's syllabi, but rather the

² "In contrast to design standards (numerical requirements for inputs), NASPAA's accreditation standards are performance standards (outcomes consistent with program mission)." (NASPAA, 2014b: 4-conditions-for-accreditation-review.pptx, slide 7, at <http://accreditation.naspaa.org/considering-accreditation/>, accessed 12 October 2014.)

³ The UNDESA/IASIA Standards of Excellence for Public Administration Education and Training include as point 8 under Program Content (Final Report, pages 9-10): "Curriculum components: The program or training curriculum shall enhance the student's competencies, values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically, equitably, effectively and with efficiency: Subject to the mission of the program, they should include ... These area requirements do not prescribe specific courses. Neither do they imply that equal time should be spent on each area or that these courses must all be offered by public affairs, public policy or public administration programs. Nor should they be interpreted in a manner that might impede the development of special strengths or areas of specialization in each program." (At <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpan034307.pdf>, accessed 17 October 2014.)

“knowledge and competencies that all of its graduates should have to demonstrate that they’ve satisfied the requirements of its degree.”⁴

A crucial element in NASPAA’s 2009 move to a competency-based accreditation process is Standard 5.1 on universal required competencies.⁵ Given the conceptual and practical challenges of relating specific curriculum elements to general competency outcomes, the processes demanded by accreditation agencies tend to be complex. It is therefore not surprising that recent reviews of the NASPAA process conclude that programs find the required steps to meet Standard 5.1 painstaking and burdensome (Diaz, 2014; Piskulich & Peat, 2014; Rubaii & Calarusse, 2014).

The purpose of our paper is to suggest that there may be a less burdensome way to address the standard for universal required competencies. We suggest that an alternative approach would be to identify, at the relatively granular level of “normed core topics,” the common elements of required courses currently being taught in NASPAA-accredited (or otherwise highly regarded) programs. Each normed core topic could be associated with a

⁴ Although NASPAA accreditation addresses “program level assessment and competencies, not simply the competencies associated with an individual course” noting that “the program is assumed to be more than just the sum of its ... courses,” NASPAA also states that individual course assessments are important: “Each course should be designed to instill particular competencies in a student and to contribute to the program level competencies the program has identified. As a result, you should be able to [identify the contributing elements] for each required course. ... Put differently, although accreditation doesn’t explicitly require you to do this for each required course, accreditation does require you to map your curriculum, which will be a challenge if you haven’t done this for required courses” (NASPAA, 2014, Notes for slides 5 and 9).

⁵ “Standard 5.1: Universal Required Competencies: As the basis for its curriculum, the Program will adopt a set of required competencies related to its mission and [to] public service values. The required competencies will include five domains: the ability: to lead and manage in public governance; to participate in and contribute to the public policy process; to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions; to articulate and apply a public service perspective; to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry” (NASPA 2009).

particular NASPAA universal required competency, and each could include a recommended method for assessing learning.

With such an approach, the process for ensuring compliance with universal required competencies would be relatively straightforward: program directors could refer to pre-approved descriptions of normed core topics and ensure that all such topics were incorporated into the syllabi of the program's required courses. For all but the shortest programs, this would still leave ample room for curricular specialization to support a program's particular mission. A program seeking to demonstrate to an accrediting agency that it provides its graduates with the universal required competencies would then only have to provide evidence that its curriculum is designed so that all students are taught these core topics and assessed on them.

We would further suggest that the accreditation standard on universal required competencies (5.1 in the case of NASPAA) should be considered *primus inter pares* because it addresses the essence of what the professional MPP/MPA⁶ designation means – the set of competencies that every person with such a degree is expected to possess. If compliance with this standard can be convincingly demonstrated using the more direct approach proposed here, perhaps some of the other standards could be converted to guidelines.

In our alternative approach to universal required competencies, the laborious work of relating curricular inputs to competency outcomes would be done by (or on behalf of) the accrediting bodies. Program leaders could focus on designing and delivering a curriculum that combines this universal core with their mission specializations and assesses student learning

⁶ "MPP/MPA" is the generic term we use in this paper for Master's programs and degrees in public policy, public administration, public affairs and similarly named fields of study.

against the curriculum, rather than devoting their energies to demonstrating the conceptual linkages between pedagogical inputs and student competency outcomes. This division of labour would likely be welcomed by the programs.⁷

Although we do not claim to have identified the curricular content needed to provide students with all the universal required competencies, we believe we have made substantial progress as part of our work on the [Atlas of Public Policy and Management](http://portal.publicpolicy.utoronto.ca) (at <http://portal.publicpolicy.utoronto.ca>). We have applied a three-level, domain/subject/topic framework with 4 domains and 34 subjects to compare curricular content of 80 programs in the US, Canada, Europe, Singapore and Australia, and to relate curricular content to the universal required competencies outlined in the *NASPAA Self-Study Guide*. These comparisons lead us to conclude that 120 carefully described normed core topics could capture the common curricular content of highly regarded MPP/MPA programs. Furthermore, we believe that students should be able to meet NASPAA Standard 5.1 on required competencies if they were taught these 120 topics in a carefully designed set of courses and/or modules having a total study requirement equivalent to 10 one-semester courses.

The paper proceeds as follows. After a brief summary of the research project and the Atlas of Public Policy and Management, we describe the concept of a normed topic: a teaching

⁷ Rubaii and Calarusse (2014, 301) observe: “It is important to remember that while COPRA members, site visitors, and NASPAA staff who support accreditation have multiple years of experience using the competency-based standards, each program undergoing review during the years encompassed by our research are using the standards for self-assessment for the first time. This will continue to be the case until the completion of the 2017–18 cohort year. COPRA acknowledged the continuing need for a slow pace of implementation during and following the 2013 NASPAA annual conference by issuing a policy statement continuing the phase-in of conformance expectations; this research provides evidence grounded in systematic analysis of the data to reinforce their decision.”

element that contains the volume of subject matter teachable in 10 hours of student work, which we propose to be the amount of instruction and study that could be expected during one week for a normal semester-based course. We then describe our methodology for addressing the two key features of a normed core topic (that it is taught in required courses in well-regarded programs, and it is needed to meet a NASPAA universal required competency) and why we conclude that an MPP/MPA accrediting body should specify 120 normed core topics. We generate a preliminary list of normed core topics and provide examples of how they could be combined into a “10-course core.” The paper ends with a recapitulation.

The Atlas of Public Policy and Management

The work described in this paper began in 2008 with a project, supported financially by the Government of Canada and endorsed by the Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration (CAPPA), to identify the concepts taught in the core courses offered in Canadian MPP/MPA programs, and to share the findings on a web platform, now known as the [Atlas of Public Policy and Management](#). The scope of what we now call the Pedagogy of Governance project⁸ has since expanded to include MPP/MPA programs on four continents.⁹ The working papers generated to date by the project are listed in Exhibit 1.

⁸ The name corresponds to the working title of what we hope will become a book: [The Pedagogy of Governance: Curricular Content of the World’s Best MPP and MPA Programs](#).

⁹ A CAPPA-NASPAA Memorandum of Understanding was signed in early 2014 which includes an undertaking to “to explore the potential for the Atlas of Public Policy and Management to become a global resource for ongoing curriculum development among member schools, and a resource for other aspects of professional development with respect to teaching and training of public servants.” In the MOU, found at <https://naspaaaccreditation.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/naspaamou.pdf> (accessed 13 October 2014) the two associations agreed to form a working group to: “Recommend formal cooperative

Exhibit 1: Working papers from the Pedagogy of Governance project
(with links to pdf copies on the Atlas website)

1. [Academic Respectability Meets Professional Utility: Canadian MPA/MPP Programs and Professional Competencies, Clark and Pal, 21 Nov 2011](#)
2. [Where the Streets Have No Name: Mapping the Discipline of Public Management, Clark and Pal, 17 April 2013](#)
3. [Here be Dragons: Taxonomies of Public Policy and Management used in Recent Handbooks, Encyclopedias and Dictionaries, Clark and Pal, 24 January 2014](#)
4. [The New World of Standards in Public Management Pedagogy: Comparing Universal Accreditation Competencies with the Actual Content of MPP and MPA Programs, Clark and Pal, April 2014](#)
5. [What are the core curricular components of Master's-level public management education and how is learning within them assessed? Clark, Eisen and Pal, 21 May 2014](#)
6. Normed Core Topics: A method of adding granularity to required competency standards in MPP and MPA programs. Clark, Eisen and Pal, 1 Nov 2014

The first paper describes the initial work on Canadian MPP/MPA programs. The second describes the three-level (domain/subject/topic) taxonomy, called the [Atlas Framework for Analyzing Curricular Content](#), used in the Atlas and our attempt to apply it to the entire field of public policy and management. The third paper compares this framework with other taxonomies. The fourth paper (Clark & Pal, 2014), which was presented at the annual meeting of the annual meeting of the International Research Society on Public Management (IRSPM) in April, introduces the concept of normed topics and their relationship to NASPAA competencies. The fifth paper (Clark, Eisen & Pal, 2014) provides our analysis of the required subjects in a sample of ten MPP/MPA programs, assigning each required course to one of the

financial, administrative and IT structures (including addressing issues of open sourcing and using the share point server) to help sustain and develop the site into an internationally pre-eminent source of information on public administration and policy curriculum, research, and data; Cooperate with schools to collect curricular content; Share best practices and help expose the Atlas to a broader audience; and, Propose a session at the CAPP or NASPAA annual conference to discuss and demonstrate the site." CAPP and NASPAA further agree to conduct outreach to the American, Canadian and international community to advance the project.

Atlas subjects. The findings are reproduced in Exhibit 2. They imply that the first four subjects listed can be considered core and substantial parts of the next two subjects can also be considered core.

Exhibit 2: The frequency of subjects being required in 10 MPP/MPA programs

Quantitative Methods	10
Economic Analysis	10
Democratic Institutions and Policy Process	10
Strategy and Implementation	9
Public Financial Management	5
Ethics and Accountability	5
Socioeconomic and Political Context	2
Fiscal, Monetary and Tax Policy	2
Leadership	1
Management Sciences	1
Intergovernmental and Global Context	1
Information and Technology Management	1
Human Resource Management	1

Two features of normed core topics

Clark & Pal (2014) suggest that one way to compare curricular content is to focus on a unit of content called a *normed topic*. This is a more granular, “molecular level” analysis than has been done to date, to our knowledge, of MPP/MPA programs and courses. It is made possible by the on-line availability of course syllabi now provided by many programs. Rather than simply looking at core course *titles* across several programs, and concluding that they might all require a course in “Democratic Institutions,” by examining the syllabi for those courses, we can actually begin to see what *topics* are actually taught within the courses. If we assume a 12-week

standard¹⁰ for a typical Master's level course, that means that there will be 12 basic topics taught, one per week.

In that paper we propose that normed topics could be specified such that each normed topic contains the volume of curricular content associated with a single 3-hour class in a Master's-level course, including the assigned readings or exercises for the class. A normed topic's subject matter reflects a curricular norm based on the documented content in MPP/MPA course syllabi including an indication of how student learning of this subject matter can be assessed (e.g., a 30-minute problem set, a 5-page essay or a 30-minute multiple choice test). In that paper we made a preliminary estimate of the number of normed topics in each of the 34 subjects that comprise the Master's-level subject matter in the entire pedagogical field of public policy and management. The total was projected to be somewhat over one thousand normed topics, covering all (core and non-core) courses for which we could examine syllabi.

Such numbers underline the importance of identifying core curricular content. If there are over 1,000 normed topics in the field, then a student taking a 15-course degree where each course has 12 classes would be taught a maximum of 180 normed topics, which is less than one fifth of the field's normed topics. A crucial question therefore becomes: Which of the over one thousand topics taught in MPP/MPA programs are deemed essential to an MPP/MPA degree – which normed topics are core?

¹⁰ The methodology we use to estimate the hours of study associated with different study units in deferent programs is described on the Atlas at [Credit and Course Equivalencies](#). There are variations among institutions in the number of hours of classroom instruction associated with semesters. The length of semesters ranges from 13 to 15 weeks (from 12 weeks of classes plus an exam period in most Canadian and Australian programs and 12-13 weeks plus exam time in the Harvard Kennedy School to 14 weeks of instruction and an exam period in many American programs). Similarly, in the UK the number of weeks in a term varies among universities.

A normed core topic has two defining features: 1) it is taught in a required course in well-regarded programs; and 2) it must be learned to meet a universal required competency.

Exhibit 3: Example of a normed core topic
(Screen image of a page on the Atlas of Public Policy and Management)

[A Teaching Topic in Quantitative Methods](#)

Simple Regression

This topic teaches students an important statistical technique that is used to measure or quantify the relationship between two and only two variables. This technique is called simple regression, or bivariate regression. Regression models that have more than one independent variable are examples of multivariate regression analysis, which is usually taught as a separate topic. Regression models are important for public policy because they can be used to test theories, make predictions and test hypothesis about relationships between variables.

Recommended Readings

Harvard Kennedy School: [API 201](#)

Moore, D., McCabe G., & Craig, B. (2009). Introduction to the Practice of Statistics, Sixth Edition. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company. Pp. 545-560.

NYU Wagner: [GP 1011](#)

Blustein, J. *SPSS: The Wagner Way*. Ch. 7.

Healy, J.F. *The Essentials of Statistics: A Tool for Social Research* (3rd Edition), Wadsworth/Cengage Learning 2013. Ch. 13.

Carleton University: [PADM 5114](#)

Moore, D., McCabe G., & Craig, B. (2009). *Introduction to the Practice of Statistics, Sixth Edition*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy: [JSGS-803](#)

Linda M. Gerber, "Urban Diversity: Riding Composition and Party Support in the Canadian Federal Election of 2004," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 15:2 Supplement (2006), pp. 105-118.

B. Curtis Eaton and Mukesh Eswaran, "Differential Grading Standards and Student Incentives," *Canadian Public Policy* 34:2 (June 2008), pp. 215-36. (<http://library.usask.ca/scripts/remote?URL=http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/25463608.pdf?acceptTC=true>)

John Richard, Jennifer Hove, and Kemi Afolabi, "Understanding the Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Gap in Student Performance" C.D. Howe Institute Commentary, No. 276 (December 2008), available online at http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/commentary_276.pdf.

University of Toronto: [PPG 1004](#)

Stock, James H. and Mark W. Watson. 2011. *Introduction to Econometrics*, 3rd ed. Pearson/Addison-Wesley. Ch. 4-7.

Possible Assessment Questions

1. What is the difference between simple regression and multivariate regression?
2. Why is simple regression a potentially useful tool for policy analysis?
3. Describe the possible shortcomings of a simple regression model as a tool for understanding the causal relationship between a dependent and independent variable.
4. What is omitted variable bias?

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The analytical process to address the first feature is relatively straightforward in subjects where core subject matter is widely agreed and syllabi for required courses include a title for the subject matter to be covered in each class, accompanied by an assigned list of readings. This is the case, for example, for the two most quantitative subjects, Quantitative Methods and

Economic Analysis. The examination of course syllabi from different programs in each subject will identify the topics that receive explicit single-class attention at multiple programs. Exhibit 3 provides an illustrative example of a topic that draws on material from four different programs.

The analytical process to address the second feature of normed core topics – that each must reflect a NASPAA required competency – is more complicated. In Clark & Pal (2014), we describe the steps, based on the NASPAA’s Standard 5.1 and the “examples to illustrate” found at page 69-71 in the [NASPAA Self-Study Instructions](#). Exhibit 4 (an updated version of a similar table in the earlier paper) illustrates how normed topics from specific subjects can be used to provide topic-level detail for the sub-domain-level competencies in the self-study examples. The second column lists NASPAA sub-domain-level competencies and the third column provides the number of 3-hour classes (including 7 hours of readings or exercises for a total of 10 hours of study) in a particular Atlas-named subject that we believe are needed for students to master the competency listed in the second column.¹¹

We have intentionally made the total number of normed topics sum to 120, the number associated with 10 one-semester courses, each having 12 classes in a semester. We think that the number of 10 one-semester-course equivalents provides a reasonable balance between the minimum required to teach the subject matter to a Master’s level of competency (at least 10 courses in our view) and the proportion of a program’s total course requirement that should be devoted to required courses. Given that NASPAA accredits programs with total course

¹¹ These are personal estimates, based on our experience in taking or teaching courses in some of these subjects. They are meant to be illustrative. More definitive estimates could be developed through a peer process organized by an accrediting body if it wished to pursue the normed topic approach advocated in this paper.

requirements as low as 12, and given that programs are expected to exhibit some degree of specialization and provide some scope for electives, it would seem unreasonable to demand more than 10 one-semester course equivalents to teach the universal required competencies.

Exhibit 4: The authors’ estimate of the number and Atlas-named subject of the normed topics required to teach each competency subject in NASPAA required competency domains

Required Competency Domains	Required Competency Subjects (NASPAA Competencies Examples)	Number of Normed Topics (Class-Weeks) to Attain Competency
1. Leading and managing in public governance	1.1 Apply public management models and organization theory	3 in Strategy and Implementation 1 in Institutions and Process
	1.2 Appraise organizational environment	1 in Strategy and Implementation 1 in Institutions and Process
	1.3 Lead, manage, and serve a diverse workplace and citizenry	1 in Strategy and Implementation 1 in Leadership 2 in Socioeconomic Context 1 in Human Resource Management
	1.4 Lead and manage people	1 in Strategy and Implementation 1 in Leadership 1 in Human Resource Management
	1.5 Manage projects	2 in Management Sciences
	1.6 Manage information and networks	6 in Information Management
	1.7 Manage contracts and public-private partnerships	1 in Strategy and Implementation 1 in Public Financial Management
	1.8 Resolve conflict and negotiate	2 in Leadership
	1.9 Understand relationship between policy and implementation	2 in Strategy and Implementation

Exhibit continued on next page

Required Competency Domains	Required Competency Subjects (NASPAA Competencies Examples)	Number of Normed Topics (Class-Weeks) to Attain Competency
2. Participating in and contributing to the policy process	<p>2.1 Apply techniques for program evaluation and forecasting</p> <p>2.2 Describe and work within the institutional, structural, and political contexts of policy making</p> <p>2.3 Describe and execute the policymaking process</p> <p>2.4 Incorporate interest groups, executive-legislative relationships, judicial decision-making, and the media in the policy process</p> <p>2.5 Prepare a budget</p> <p>2.6 Recognize the social construction of problems</p>	<p>3 in Evaluation and Perf. Mgt. 1 in Economic Analysis</p> <p>3 in Institutions and Process 1 in Socioeconomic and Political</p> <p>2 in Institutions and Process 2 in Strategy and Implementation 1 in Ethics and Accountability</p> <p>2 in Strategy and Implementation 3 in Institutions and Process 1 in Communication</p> <p>2 in Public Financial Management</p> <p>1 in Socioeconomic and Political 1 in Ethics and Accountability</p>
3. Analyzing, synthesizing, thinking critically, solving problems, and making decisions	<p>3.1 Measuring and improving human performance</p> <p>3.2 Analytical tools for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data</p> <p>3.3 Alternative sources of funding</p> <p>3.4 Plan strategy</p> <p>3.5 Understand and apply the legal context</p> <p>3.6 Understand and apply theories of decision-making and models</p>	<p>1 in Evaluation and Perf. Measurement 3 in Human Resource Management 1 in Strategy and Implementation</p> <p>2 in Strategy and Implementation 10 in Economic Analysis 12 in Quantitative Methods 1 in Management Sciences 1 in Socioeconomic and Political 2 in Evaluation and Perf. Measurement</p> <p>2 in Public Financial Management</p> <p>2 in Strategy and Implementation</p> <p>2 in Institutions and Process 1 in Ethics and Accountability</p> <p>2 in Management Sciences</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exhibit continued on next page</p>

Required Competency Domains	Required Competency Subjects (NASPAA Competencies Examples)	Number of Normed Topics (Class-Weeks) to Attain Competency
4. Incorporating public values into decisions	4.1 Apply concepts of social equity 4.2 Behave ethically 4.3 Behave in a fair and ethical manner toward others 4.4 Distinguish short- from long-term fiscal consequences of decisions 4.5 Exercise ethical responsibility in research and making decisions 4.6 Identify environmental impacts 4.7 Understand and apply criteria appropriate to public affairs, administration, and policy	1 in Ethics and Accountability 1 in Ethics and Accountability 1 in Ethics and Accountability 1 in Economic Analysis 1 in Public Financial Management 1 in Management Sciences 3 in Environment 2 in Professional Practice 6 in Institutions and Process
5. Communicating and interacting productively	5.1 Written communication 5.2 Oral communication 5.3 Demonstrate flexibility 5.4 Demonstrate self-knowledge 5.5 Sensitivity to diversity 5.6 Facilitation 5.7 Negotiation 5.8 Relate to stakeholders 5.9 Work in teams	1 in Communication 1 in Communication 1 in Leadership 1 in Leadership 1 in Socioeconomic Context 1 in Leadership 1 in Leadership 1 in Human Resources Management 1 in Leadership 1 in Professional Practice
Totals	37	120

**Exhibit 5: Estimated number of topics needed
to master each NASPAA require competency domain**

"NASPAA-required Subjects" (Atlas typology)	Competency Dimensions					Total Topics	Course Equivs.
	1	2	3	4	5		
Strategy and Implementation	9	4	5			18	1.50
Economic Analysis		1	10	1		12	1.00
Quantitative Methods			12			12	1.00
Management Sciences	2		3	1		6	0.50
Leadership	4				5	9	0.75
Communication		1			2	3	0.25
Professional Practice				2	1	3	0.25
Democratic Institutions and Policy Process	2	8	2	6		18	1.50
Socioeconomic and Political Context	2	2	1		1	6	0.50
Ethics and Accountability		2	1	3		6	0.50
Public Financial Management	1	2	2	1		6	0.50
Evaluation and Performance Measurement		3	3			6	0.50
Human Resource Management	2		3		1	6	0.50
Information and Technology Management	6					6	0.50
Environment				3		3	0.25
Total Topics Needed for Competency	28	23	42	17	10	120	10.00
Course Equivalentents (at 12 topics per course)	2.3	1.9	3.5	1.4	0.8	10.0	

This exercise suggests that only 15 of the 34 Atlas-named subjects contain topics needed to address NASPAA required competencies. We can think of these 15 as "NASPAA-required subjects." The data from Exhibit 4 is used to create Exhibit 5, which lists the number of topics in each of the NASPAA-required subjects that contribute to the attainment of each of the five required competency domains.

Preliminary list of normed core topics

We can now bring the two processes (subject matter from required courses and subject matter from required competencies) together to generate a list of normed core topics in each Atlas-named subject. Exhibit 6 displays our proposed list of 12 topics in the two subjects where the degree of consensus among programs is greatest: Quantitative Methods and Economic Analysis.

Determining the normed core topics in the other two core subjects is more challenging. The first of these, Strategy and Implementation, has more a multidisciplinary lineage than either Economic Analysis, which is firmly rooted in the discipline of microeconomic, or Quantitative Methods, which is firmly rooted in statistics and econometrics. Strategy and Implementation draws from political science, management (often associated with business), as well as economics and psychology. Of the 34 subjects used in the Atlas framework, Strategy and Implementation is likely the most uniquely tailored to MPP/MPA degrees.¹² Whereas many subjects taught in MPP/MPA programs would not be out of place in other graduate programs (e.g., economics or political science), courses on Strategy and Implementation tend to have been developed specifically for MPP or MPA degrees.

¹² A good discussion of the unique subject matter in both MPP and MPA degrees can be found in Elwood (2008) and in Henderson and Chetkovich (2014).

**Exhibit 6: Subject definitions and proposed normed core topics
for Economic Analysis and Quantitative Methods**

Economic Analysis	Quantitative Methods
This public policy and management subject, under the Tools and Skills domain, covers the principles and techniques of micro economic theory that are most useful in analyzing economic aspects of public policy. It includes economic incentives and organizations; models of economic behavior; the operation of markets; the price system and how it works; the consequences of market failure and interventions in markets; and policy objectives and instruments. It illustrates how to apply economics to policy issues such as taxation, subsidy programs, education and health policy, and labor markets.	This public policy and management subject, under the Tools and Skills domain, focuses on enhancing the ability of students to analyze and assess empirical quantitative research. A major objective of many courses in this subject is to enable students to distinguish between good and poor quality empirical research. Courses in this subject may also aim to provide students with the knowledge and experience necessary to perform their own quantitative social science research. A major theme in this subject is the connection between social science research and the policy process. Courses taught in this subject are intended to help students develop a greater understanding of the practical applications of empirical research to real-world policy decisions. Some courses in this subject instruct students in the use of software packages for statistical analysis such as STATA, SPSS and Microsoft Excel.
Supply and Demand	Descriptive Statistics
Theory of the Firm	Looking at Data
Consumer Theory	Probability Concepts
Externalities	Sampling
Public Goods and Commons Problems	Confidence Intervals and Hypothesis Testing
Market Failure and Optimal Intervention	Simple Regression
Monopoly, Oligopoly and Carnot Model	Multivariate Analysis
Asymmetric Information and Signaling	Omitted Variable Bias
Game Theory	Randomized Trials
Taxes and Lump Sum Transfers	Research Design
Trade	Ethical Issues in Research
Welfare Economics and Welfare Policy	Panel Data, Fixed Effects and Instrumental Variable

The fourth core subject, Democratic Institutions and Policy Process, is rooted in political science and public administration, and covers a broad area. Indeed, our review of required

courses suggests that both this subject and Strategy and Implementation need more than a single course (12 topics) to teach the core curriculum. As illustrated in Exhibit 7, we propose that 18 topics are needed for each. In other words, MPP/MPA programs need at least three one-semester course equivalents of instruction to cover the 36 normed core topics in the combination of these two subjects.

For many of the topics listed in Exhibit 7, the choice of the Atlas-named subject (and therefore Atlas domain¹³) to which they should be assigned is somewhat arbitrary, since they contain both tools-and-skills (“how to”) institutions-and-context (“why does”) elements. Does this matter from a curricular design perspective? The answer depends on how self-contained a topic is and whether courses are designed around subjects. If a topic can be specified so that it is a relatively self-contained learning unit, then the subject to which it is assigned would be unimportant. On the other hand, if learning is facilitated by exposure to related topics in a particular order, then the placement of a topic within a collection of other topics (i.e., a course) will be important. If courses are organized on a subject-matter basis, then the choice of topics assigned to that subject will be important.

¹³ The Atlas domains are distinguished by the nature of pedagogical preparation and/or the nature of government practice. There are two general preparation domains: Tools and Skills, where subjects and topics tend to have a “how to” orientation; and Institutions and Context, where subjects and topics tend to have a “why does” orientation. And there are two specific practice domains: Management Functions, where subjects and topics are associated primarily with central organizational units responsible for management practices; and Policy Sectors, where subjects and topics are associated primarily with sectoral departments responsible for policy development and execution.

**Exhibit 7: Subject definitions and proposed normed core topics
for Strategy and Implementation and for Democratic Institutions and Policy Process**

Strategy and Implementation	Democratic Institutions and Policy Process
This public policy and management subject under the Tools and Skills domain deals with concepts and analytic techniques fundamental to managing and leading organizations, including material on organizational strategy, motivating people, performance measurement, managing teams, persuasion, and operations. It is the normative, action-oriented, companion to Democratic Institutions and Policy Process, and includes analytical frameworks and techniques that are useful for implementing public policy and managing organizational performance to achieve policy objectives.	This public policy and management subject under the Institutions and Context domain deals with the fundamental problems of participation and democratic governance in contemporary political systems. It provides students with an understanding of public policy, decision-making in government and key elements of the policy process. This subject also examines the political institutions in democratic societies and their implications for the formulation and implementation of public policy. Students consider how different institutional frameworks meet the tests of democracy, conflict management, effective governance and accountability.
Policy Analysis and Contemporary Governance	The Political Context of Policymaking
Implementation and Policy	The Policy Cycle
Models of Policy Making	Federalism
Policy Evaluation	Political and Administrative Responsibilities
Policy Design and Instrument Choice	International Context of Domestic Institutions
Rules vs. Discretion	Indigenous Rights and Institutions
Recent Trends from Comparative Public Administration	Executive Leadership in Government
The Meaning of Strategy in Public Management	Westminster Parliamentary System
Performance Information as a Management Tool	Courts and Judicial Review
Organizational Performance and Management Reform	Public and Para-public Institutions
Organizational Behaviour	Bureaucracy and the Formulation of Public Policy
Organizational Culture	Institutional Designs and Paths
The Role of Leadership in Strategy and Implementation	New Public Management
Managing Conflict	Public Opinion, Ideas and Policy Frames
Working in Teams and Motivation	Political Parties and Elections
Implementing through Markets	Representation and Accountability
Implementation with Partners	Media, Framing and Agenda Setting
Multi-Level Governance	Actors, Interests and Lobbying

It is interesting to compare the way that different programs design their courses to address the subject matter that we associate with the two subjects in Exhibit 7. The Harvard MPP uses two required courses: MLD-101 Management, Leadership, and Decision Making; and DPI-101 Political Institutions and Public Policy. We assign the first to Strategy and Implementation and the second to Democratic Institutions and Policy Process. The Berkeley MPP uses six courses, five that we assign to Strategy and Implementation because of their tools-and-skills orientation, and one that we assign to Democratic Institutions and Policy Process.¹⁴

The Toronto MPP uses four required courses. We assign two (PPG-1007 Strategic Implementation of Public Policy Objectives and PPG-2003 Integrating Issues Capstone) to Strategy and Implementation and two (PPG-1000 Governance and Institutions and PPG-1001 The Policy Process) to Democratic Institutions and Policy Process.

The Carleton MA uses three required courses: PADM-5116 Policy Analysis and Contemporary Governance; PADM-5117 Public Management; and PADM-5115 Introduction to State and Society. These fit less neatly than the Harvard, Berkeley or Toronto courses into one or other of the two subjects; their constituent topics courses tend to be spread among both, with some duplication. The Policy Analysis course is a combination of tools, and the governance context (including public bureaucracy) within which they are used. The State and Society course historically was virtually unique in MPP/MPA programs as an introduction to the classics of political economy (e.g., Smith, Marx, Weber, Schumpeter), but has evolved into a hybrid that

¹⁴ We have assigned PP-200 Introduction to Policy Analysis, PP-205 Advanced Policy Analysis (double course), PP-250 Political and Agency Management, and PP-299 Political and Organizational Aspects of Public Policy Analysis to Strategy and Implementation. We have assigned PP-220 Law and Policy to Democratic Institutions and Public Policy.

still discusses classics, but brings them to bear on the challenges of modern public policy and governance (e.g., globalization, inequality).

Exhibit 8. Illustrative list of normed core topics

Tools and Skills	Institutions and Context	Management Functions	Policy Sectors
Strategy and Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Analysis and Contemporary Governance (1.1) Implementation and Policy (1.9)* Models of Policy Making (1.1)* Policy Evaluation (3.2)* Policy Design and Instrument Choice (3.2)* Rules vs. Discretion (2.3)* Recent Trends from Comparative Public Administration (1.2)* The Meaning of Strategy in Public Management (3.4)* Performance Information as a Management Tool (3.1)* Organizational Performance and Management Reform (2.3)* Organizational Behaviour (1.1)* Organizational Culture (1.3)* The Role of Leadership in Strategy and Implementation (3.4)* Managing Conflict (2.4)* Working in Teams and Motivation (1.4)* Implementing through Markets (1.7)* Implementation with Partners (2.4)* Multi-level Governance (1.9)* 	Democratic Institutions and Policy Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Political Context of Policy Making (2.2) The Policy Cycle (2.3)* Federalism (2.4) Political and Administrative Responsibilities (3.5) International Context of Domestic Institutions (4.7)* Indigenous Rights and Institutions (4.7)* Executive Leadership in Government (2.2)* Westminster Parliamentary Systems (4.7)* Courts and Judicial Review (4.7)* Public and Para-public Institutions (4.7)* Bureaucracy and the Formulation of Public Policy (2.3) Institutional Designs and Paths (4.7) New Public Management (4.7) Public Opinion, Ideas and Policy Frames (1.2)* Political Parties and Elections (4.7)* Representation and Accountability (3.5) Media, Framing and Agenda Setting (1.1)* Actors, Interests and Lobbying (2.4) 	Public Financial Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Statements and Accounting Concepts (2.5)* Planning and Budgeting (2.5)* Costing and Forecasting (4.4)* Capital Budgeting (3.3)* Management Control - A Risk Based Approach (3.3)* Audit and Oversight in Managing Public Money (1.7)* Evaluation and Performance Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Purposes, Types and Questions (2.1)* Fundamental Identification Problem: Causality, Counterfactual Responses, Heterogeneity, Selection (2.1)* Assessing the Confounding Effects of Unobserved Factors (2.1)* Sensitivity Analysis (3.2)* Data Collection Strategies (3.2)* Performance Measurement and Performance Management (3.1)* Human Resource Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Management of Public Sector Organizations (1.3)* Managing People: Performance, Recruitment, Renewal (1.4)* HR, Merit and the Relative Independence of the Public Service (3.1)* Workplace Issues and Labour Relations (5.7)* Politics, Difference and Inclusion in the Workplace (3.1)* Evaluating Talent (3.1)* Information and Technology Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT in the Public Sector - Costs and Challenges (1.6)* Online Service Delivery (1.6)* Open Government (1.6)* IT Solutions to Problems (1.6)* Implementing an IT Solution (1.7)* Managing Consultants and Vendors (1.6)* Program and Service Delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory Policy and Management Nonprofit Management and Advocacy 	Fiscal, Monetary and Tax Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Development Social Policy and Welfare Health Education Employment, Labour and Immigration Cities, Urban and Regional Development Environment and Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Environment and its Problems (4.5)* Environmental Risks and Hazards (4.5)* Regulatory Choices in Environmental Policy (4.5)* Agriculture and Resources Science, Technology and Innovation Industry, Trade and Investment Energy, Transport and Infrastructure Defence, Security and Foreign Relations Policing and Justice Administration Arts and Culture Financial Sector and Pensions Other Policy Sectors
Economic Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply and Demand (3.2)* Theory of the Firm (3.2)* Consumer Theory (3.2)* Externalities (2.1)* Public Goods and Commons Problems (3.2)* Market Failure and Optimal Intervention (3.2)* Monopoly, Oligopoly and Carnot Model (3.2)* Asymmetric Information and Signaling (3.2)* Game Theory (3.2)* Taxes and Lump Sum Transfers (3.2)* Trade (3.2)* Welfare Economics and Welfare Policy (4.4)* 	Ethics and Accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Management Ethics (4.3) Ethics in Management (2.3)* Implementation and Accountability (2.6)* Liberty and its Limits: Speech, Harm, Paternalism and Moralism (3.5)* Lying, Deception, Privacy and Transparency (4.2)* Distributive Justice (4.1)* Socioeconomic and Political Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Race, Gender and Other Group Identities Impact on Decision-making (1.3)* Indigenous Peoples (1.3)* The Immigrant Society (5.5)* What do we know about Inequality? (3.2)* Changing Family Structures, Gender, Work, Inequality and Poverty (2.2)* Education, Labour Markets and Low-Skilled Workers (2.6)* Intergovernmental and Global Context		
Quantitative Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive Statistics (3.2)* Looking at Data (3.2)* Probability Concepts (3.2)* Sampling (3.2)* Confidence Intervals and Hypothesis Testing (3.2)* Simple Regression (3.2) Multivariate Analysis (3.2)* Omitted Variable Bias (3.2)* Randomized Trials (3.2)* Research Design (3.2)* Ethical Issues in Research (3.2)* Panel Data, Fixed Effects and Instrumental Variable (3.2)* 			
Management Sciences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision Analysis (3.6)* Agency Theory (3.6)* Cost-Benefit Analysis (3.2)* Project Management (1.5)* Risk Management (1.5)* Ethical Issues in Research Design (4.5)* 			
Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership in Public and Private Organizations (1.3)* How Values Differ: Psychological Types and Moral Foundations (1.8)* Diagnosing the Leadership Challenge (5.8)* Identifying Resources for Leading Change (5.3)* Strategy for Leading Change (3.4)* Inspiration and Persuasion (5.6)* Negotiation (5.7)* Choosing your Management and Operating Style (5.4)* Getting Attention and Getting Work Done (1.4)* 			
Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Craft of Memo Writing (5.1)* Elements of Rhetoric: Logos, Ethos, Pathos (5.2)* Generating Emotional Impact: Narrative and Storytelling (2.4)* 			
Professional Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting like a Professional (4.2)* Networking that Works (5.8)* Operational Skills (1.2, 5.8, 5.9)* 			

Note: The topics listed in this Exhibit represent a first draft. The topic names will be refined as work continues on their detailed descriptions. The number in parentheses after each topic is the single second-level competency listed in Exhibit 4 that most closely aligns with the topic. The asterisk indicates that the description of the topic is incomplete.

Although work to refine the list of normed core topics is ongoing, an illustrative list is being regularly updated on the Atlas at [120 Normed Core Topics](#) and the November 1, 2014 collection is reproduced in Exhibit 8. The number in parentheses after each topic is the second-level competency listed in Exhibit 4 that most closely aligns with the topic.

The exercise of associating topics with a second-level competency illustrates the complex relationship between scholarly subject matter and professional competency. In the Atlas framework we map scholarly subject matter in what might be called an “academic discipline space” of subjects and domains. In contrast, NASPAA universal required competency domains and second-level competencies exist in a “professional competency space.” Some parts of these two spaces are closely aligned. For example, all the normed core topics in the Quantitative Methods align with a single NASPAA second-level competency. But other parts of the two spaces are not well aligned and many of the topics in other subjects are not exclusively associated with a single NASPAA competency. For example, an understanding of Executive Leadership in Government, a topic within the Democratic Institutions and Policy Process subject, is important for acquiring competency in several NASPAA second-level competencies in addition to the one (“2.2 Describe and work within the institutional, structural, and political contexts of policy making”) that we have designated as most relevant.

Our methodology does not require that a normed topic address only one second-level competency. As the normed topics are refined, it should be possible to identify the handful of competencies addressed through each topic. Similarly, it should be possible to identify the group of topics needed to adequately address each competency. This would enable course

designers to ensure that each NASPAA second-level required competency receives, in aggregate, an adequate amount of instructional time.

Aggregating the normed core topics into courses and modules

Given that a 12-week course can address 12 normed topics, teaching 120 normed core topics will require at least 10 one-semester-course equivalents of instruction. If a program wished to ensure that all students are exposed to all topics in a list such as that in Exhibit 8, it should carefully design its “10-course core.”

There are multiple ways to combine any collection of topics into coherent study units, where the units could include a variety of lengths, such as one-semester courses (12 weeks), half-course modules (6 weeks), or smaller units such as half-modules (3 weeks). For any particular program, the best set of topic combinations to deliver this 10-course core would depend on its mission, its faculty resources, and the rest of its curriculum. If a program designated more than 10 courses as required it would have even more options for allocating the 120 required topics among its required courses.

Exhibit 9 shows two examples of course line ups that could include all 120 normed core topics within 10 course equivalents of instruction. In both examples, the first two courses are named after core subjects that have 12 normed core topics. Because the two other core subjects (Strategy and Implementation; Democratic Institutions and Policy Process) have 18 normed core topics, choices need to be made on where to deal with the 6 topics that cannot be fitted into a regular 12-week course. In Example A, they are combined with topics in other subjects within the same domain: 6 topics from Strategy and Implementation are combined with the 6 from

Management Sciences to form a course that we have called Strategic Decisionmaking; 6 topics from Democratic Institutions and Policy Process are combined with 6 from Ethics and Accountability to form a course called Ethics and Governance. In Example B, they are combined with topics in other subjects including those in different domains: 6 topics from Strategy and Implementation are combined with 6 from Democratic Institutions and Policy Process to form a course called Strategy and Governance; 6 topics from Management Sciences are combined with the 6 from Ethics and Accountability to form a course called Ethics and Decision Sciences.

Exhibit 9: Examples of how the “10-course core” of 120 normed core topics could be aggregated into one-semester courses and half-course modules

Example A (some courses combine subjects within a domain)	Example B (some courses combine subjects across domains)
Economic Analysis Quantitative Methods Strategy and Implementation Institutions and Process Strategic Decisionmaking Ethics and Governance Leadership and Communications Program Evaluation Module (0.5) Public Financial Management Module (0.5) Human Resources Management Module (0.5) Information Management Module (0.5) Socio-economic Issues Module (0.5) Environmental Sustainability Half-module (0.25) Professional Practice Half-module (0.25)	Economic Analysis Quantitative Methods Strategy and Implementation Institutions and Process Strategy and Governance Ethics and Decision Sciences Leadership and Communications Program Evaluation Module (0.5) Public Financial Management Module (0.5) Human Resources Management Module (0.5) Information Management Module (0.5) Selected Policy and Management Topics

Normed core topics from other subjects can be combined in various ways to create 12-week courses. In both examples in Exhibit 9, the 9 topics in Leadership are combined with 3 in Communications to form a one-semester course. For other subjects where normed core topics have relatively little in common the topic collections are probably best considered to be separate

units, even if the units are combined into a 12-week course. For example, if a course called Financial and Personnel Management included the 6 normed core topics in Public Financial Management and the 6 normed core topics in Human Resources Management, the course could easily be taught as two separate halves, perhaps with different instructors for each half.

In a similar vein, disparate topics could be grouped into selected-topics courses as illustrated in Example B, where the three last modules in Example A are taught in a 12-week course named Selected Policy and Management Topics.

Conclusions

We freely admit that our analysis hinges on several assumptions, and that those assumptions can be challenged. However, let's return to the fundamental issues and challenges that are driving the debate around accreditation and standards in the field. At one level they are quite obvious, but nonetheless bear repeating.

1. MPAs (or MPPs) have the same degree designation, though more specialized hybrids (e.g., Masters of Non-Profit Management, or Masters of Public Management and International Affairs) have proliferated recently. It is not unreasonable to expect that something called an MPA or an MPP in one university should have some resemblance to something called an MPA or an MPP in another university.

2. The various accreditation systems are designed to support this homology by developing expectations of what is to be taught – at least as a core – in something designated as an MPA or MPP.
3. The challenge that stems from these two preceding points is two-fold: First, how to “compare” programs – what is the “content” of an MPA? Second, does this “content,” however defined, amount to a Platonic ideal of what is “best” in public policy and management education?
4. In order to address these challenges, one needs some sense of the discipline of public management (and public policy) as a whole.

Up until the 2009 introduction of the NASPAA competencies approach, the answers to these questions were typically offered on the basis of an analysis of courses – that is, the course titles – to ascertain what was actually taught in programs, leavened by a sense of what is needed in practice. The NASPAA initiative breaks with this and proposes that the focus be on outcomes – competencies – and that courses and curricular content contribute to meeting those competencies.

Our approach contributes to this effort, but in a more systematic way. First, thanks to recent on-line availability of course content, including full syllabi, we have been able to construct a database of what is actually taught (in terms of courses, required and elective) in 80 MPP/MPA programs around the world. Second, again thanks to on-line syllabi, we were able to identify topics taught across many of these courses. From our examination of the topics identified to date, we were able to construct normed topics (where a normed topic represents

the amount of subject matter covered during one week in a course) and make a projection that it would take somewhat over 1,000 normed topics to effectively map public management and public policy as academic fields *in terms of what is actually taught under those banners*. Third, with the aid of some (we think) reasonable assumptions, we have compared core courses across programs, found the ones that are indeed “core” – contained in virtually every significant program on different continents – and begun to specify the normed topics taught in them. And finally, we have (again with some assumptions) linked these normed core topics to the NASPAA competencies.

In our view, normed core topics could provide accreditation processes with a way of balancing fidelity to NASPAA competency standards with freedom for academic programs to design their curricula to meet and deliver those standards in innovative ways.

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