What are the core curricular components of Master's-level public management education and how is learning within them assessed?

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1. Purpose and outline

Does an MPA, or MPP, or similarly-named degree from one institution mean the same as a degree with the same name from another institution, either in the same country or from different parts of the world? Does the same degree designation mean the same, or at least similar, content? Are graduates being assessed on the same competencies? Are there common professional standards?

The truth is that, apart from a few scattered and limited studies, we don't know. This paper aims to provide at least a partial answer through a detailed analysis of the curricular content of leading MPP and MPA programs.

Over the last sixty years, the MPA (together now with the MPP) has become the globally recognized "professional" degree for those wishing to pursue management careers and senior positions in the public service. In tandem with the growth in the degrees themselves has been the growth of national and international associations representing the degree-granting institutions, for example, the Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration (CAPPA), the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA). The associations, like all associations, were originally founded to further the interests of their members, but as associations representing academic programs, they also naturally had an interest in the quality and the content of those programs. Unsurprisingly, each of the associations has its own accreditation system with its own standards, though there have been efforts at coordination if not convergence (i.e., NAPSAA and EGPA offer joint accreditations).

Accreditation standards provide a broad sense of what the associations expect generically in MPA and MPP programs (referred to collectively as MPP/MPA programs in this paper), but still leave substantial room for variation among them. We can therefore imagine at least two scenarios: (1) a world where broad accreditation standards create a veneer of similitude among a wide range of programs that, in fact, vary significantly, and (2) a world where the MPP/MPA "brand" in fact refers to programs that have strong commonalities about what constitutes the core of the discipline as well as the profession.

The only way to tell which world we live in is to systematically examine the programs themselves. This paper will provide evidence drawn from a first attempt at this empirical assessment, focusing on ten programs in Canada and the United States. Specifically, our paper uses the database and comparison methodology of the Atlas of Public Policy and Management[2] to analyze the core course requirements of ten MPP/MPA programs to determine whether there are particular subjects that are taught universally or near-universally in all programs. Through this process, we are able to assess quantitatively the extent to which curriculum designers across the continent agree that particular subjects represent an essential dimension of Master's-level education in the field.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2 we summarize our work to date in analytically linking information on accreditation, competency specification, and MPP/MPA

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teaching – particularly the central place we propose for a unit of curricular content we call the *normed topic*. In Section 3 we describe the four subjects that, based on our course-level review of over 30 programs, we conclude constitute the core subjects for MPP/MPA programs: Democratic Institutions and Policy Process; Strategy and Structure; Economic Analysis; and Quantitative Methods. Section 4 describes two further subjects that can be considered near core: Ethics and Accountability; and Public Financial Management.

In order to move to the topic-level of analysis, we need greater detail on course content than is provided in the one-or-two sentence summaries provided by most programs on their public web sites. In Section 5 we select ten highly respected MPP and MPA programs that provide publicly accessible syllabi for the relevant courses and use this sample to identify a number of core topics within the four core courses. In Section 6 we use the same sample of ten programs to identify and compare the techniques by which the learning of such topics is assessed in each subject. In Section 7 we summarize our conclusions and describe the next steps in our project, which include the identification and specification of more normed topics, inside and outside core courses, and topics based on our review of advice from International Governmental Organizations (IGOs). We illustrate, for the subject of Ethics and Accountability, how topics from university courses compare with topics from IGO advice.

2. Core curricular content, competencies and accreditation

In our recent paper, "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, 2014), we suggested that the best way to compare curricular content

is to focus on a unit of content that we call a *normed topic*. We suggested that normed topics

could be specified such that each normed topic contains the volume of curricular content[3]

associated with a single 3-hour class in a Master's-level course, including the assigned readings

or exercises for the class, and that the 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 curricular content can be assessed (e.g., a 30-minute problem set, a 5-page essay

or a 30-minute multiple choice test). We estimated, to a first approximation, that the entire

pedagogical field of public policy and management (the length and breadth of subject matter in

MPP/MPA programs as well as IGO advice) presently contains roughly 1,020 normed topics.

We noted that a MPP/MPA program requires from 10 to 20 one-semester courses for completion

and a one-semester course typically has from 12 to 14 three-hour classes.

These numbers illustrate the importance of identifying core curricular content. A student

taking a 15-course degree where each course has 13 classes[4] would be offered a total of 195

classes, or a potential maximum of 195 normed topics. A student in such a 15-course program

can therefore by taught 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

essential to an MPP/MPA degree? When NASPAA accredits a degree program it requires the

program to show evidence that its curriculum adequately addresses five Domains of Universal

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[3] Including potential curricular content derived from advisory documents produced by IGOs.
[4] These numbers represent medians for degrees that range from 10 to 20 courses and semester lengths
that range from 12 in many Canadian programs to 14 in many American programs.

Required Competencies.[5] We estimated that about 120 normed topics are required to address the curricular content needed to meet NASPAA's required competencies. This implies that shorter MPP/MPA programs seeking accreditation have very little scope to offer electives since virtually all their teaching would need to be in the topics deemed to be required to meet the NASPAA required competencies. For example, a program that required only 10 one-semester courses, each with 14 weeks of classes (or 12 one-semester courses, each with 11.7 weeks of classes) could only teach 120 topics at the Master's level, the same number we estimate is required to teach the NASPAA required competencies, leaving no room for electives.

These estimates were based on extrapolations from the data we had collected at that point. Our estimates of the total number of normed topics in the field were based on high level course descriptors from 27 Master's programs and 200 initial drafts of normed topics based on 160 courses for which we possessed detailed syllabi. Our estimates of the number of normed topics required to address the NASPAA required competencies were based on our pedagogical judgement of how many classes (topics) a seasoned professor in the field would require in each subject to teach enough to meet the NASPAA competency requirements demanded of that subject.

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[5] The five Domains of Universal Required Competencies (Standard 5.1) are: 1) To lead and manage in public governance; 2) To participate and contribute to the policy process; 3) To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions; 4) To articulate and apply a public service perspectives; and, 5) To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry (NASPAA, 2012).

Exhibit 1: A topic grid depicting the authors' estimate of the number and Atlas subject of the normed topics required to teach the NASPAA required competencies

Column groups: **Tools and Skills** (1–10), **Institutions and Context** (11–20), **Management Functions** (21–30), **Policy Sectors** (31–40)

Row	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.9	2.3	1.1	2.3	1.7	2.3	1.9	1.2		1.2	2.4	3.5	2.2	3.5		3.5	2.4	2.5		3.3	2.5	4.4	2.5		3.3												
2	2.3		2.4		1.2		3.4	3.4	3.6	3.4		2.3				2.2	4.7	2.3		4.7																				
3	1.9	3.6		4.7		4.7	1.7	4.7							4.7																									
6																					3.1	2.1		2.1		3.1		2.1												
7											1.3		2.2		2.2	2.2	5.5	2.6																						
8	3.2	3.2		3.2	2.1	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2				2.6			5.5																								
9		4.4			3.2																		3.1			3.1	3.1													
10											4.1		3.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.5	4.5	4.2																				
11	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2		3.2	3.2		3.2	4.7			4.3			4.7																							
12																					1.6			1.6	1.6															
14	1.5	1.5	3.2	3.6		3.2	4.5	3.2	5.6	3.6													1.7			1.7														
15		4.5		3.2																																				
17	1.4	1.3	2.4	1.3		1.4	4.3	5.4		4.3	2.4				2.4																									
18	5.3	5.3	1.8		5.6		1.8		5.4																															
19		5.6		5.7		5.7																																		
21	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.1		5.2		5.1																																
23	4.7	1.2		1.2		3.2	1.9	1.9		2.3																														
24	4.7		2.4		3.2	3.2			2.3																								4.6	4.6		4.6				
25			5.8			5.9	5.9																																	

Legend of Atlas subjects:

Tools and Skills: Strategy and Structure; Economic Analysis; Quantitative Methods; Management Sciences; Leadership; Communication; Professional Practice

Institutions and Context: Democratic Institutions and Policy Process; Socioeconomic and Political Context; Ethics and Accountability; Intergovernmental and Global Context; Civil Society and Advocacy

Management Functions: Public Financial Management; Evaluation and Performance Measurement; Human Resource Management; Information and Technology Management; Program and Service Delivery; Regulatory Policy and Management

Policy Sectors: Fiscal, Monetary and Tax Policy; International Development; Social Policy and Welfare; Health; Education; Employment, Labour and Immigration; Cities, Urban and Regional Development; Environment; 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

Notes to Exhibit 1: As explained in Clark & Pal (2014), each numbered topic corresponds to a second-level competency (below the NASPAA required competency domain) implied by NASPAA's "competency examples" (NASPAA, 2012).They have been placed within the subject boundary of the grid in a manner to depict randomness – the specific grid location is not meant to have meaning.

We reproduce, as Exhibit 1, the "topic grid" developed in our earlier paper. It depicts

the 1,020 topics in the field of public policy and management, within the 34 subjects and four

domains of the Atlas framework.[6] The topic grid displays the subjects containing what we are

characterizing as NASPAA-required topics. It suggests that for programs desiring NASPAA

accreditation, such required topics would be taught in subjects with names similar to the Atlas

subjects that have the highest concentration of NASPAA-required topics: Strategy and

Structure; Economic Analysis; Quantitative Analysis; Management Sciences; Leadership;

Communications; Professional Practice; Democratic Institutions and Policy Process;

Socioeconomic and Political Context; and Ethics and Accountability. All this emphasizes the

importance of examining the actual topic-level content in a course and not simply course-level

descriptors to determine the core content of MPP/MPA programs.

3. Four core subjects evident from course-level analysis

Before moving to the topic-level analysis, we can learn something from simple course-

level comparisons. The Atlas project is compiling course-level descriptions for 75 MPP/MPA

programs around the world. Over 30 programs have so far been analyzed and the results are, or

soon will be, viewable on the Atlas. For each program we produce a Course Map displaying our

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[6] As described in Clark & Pal (2014), the 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. The 34 subjects in the Atlas framework are intended to exhaustively cover the subject matter in the field of public policy and management. The names draw on titles of courses, of government organization, and of subject-matter categories used in IGOs, particularly the OECD.

assignment of every course to one or another of the 34 Atlas subjects with an indication of whether the course is required or elective. From the Course Maps created to date it is evident that four Atlas subjects attract the greatest number of required courses. These four subjects – Democratic Institutions and Policy Process; Strategy and Structure; Economic Analysis; and Quantitative Methods – are specified in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2: Descriptions of four core subjects

Subject	Domain	Description on the Atlas
Democratic Institutions and Policy Process	Institutions and Context	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. For some courses in this subject, a key theme is studying the ways that the policymaking world has changed in recent years, forcing reconsideration of the traditional tools of policy analysis and public management. Specifically, it considers how the public policy challenges of the 21st century require policy-makers to see issues from multiple perspectives aside from that of the state – they must also see issues from the perspective of other stakeholders whose actions will be essential to the achievement of government objectives.
Strategy and Structure	Tools and Skills	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, a core subject in the Institutions and Context domain. Strategy and Structure includes analytical frameworks and techniques that are useful for implementing public policy and managing organizational performance to achieve policy objectives.

Economic Analysis	Tools and Skills	This public 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.
Quanti-tative Methods	Tools and Skills	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. Topics covered in this subject include probability theory, statistics and decision analysis. Some courses in this subject instruct students in the use of software packages that are useful for statistical analysis such as STATA, SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

For each program, we can calculate a PEACO (Proportion of Enrolment-Adjusted Course Offerings) score for each subject. The PEACO score is an estimate of the percentage of a typical student's course of study devoted to that subject, through both required and elective courses. Details of the PEACO methodology are provided on the Atlas and in Clark & Pal (2014). For most programs the four subjects noted above are the subjects with the highest PEACO scores in their programs. Exhibit 3 displays the results for six programs and it can be seen that typical students in these programs devote approximately 40 percent of their course time to these four subjects.

Exhibit 3: Estimates of the percentage of course time a typical student devoted to core subjects through both required and elective courses (PEACO scores)

Subject	Berkeley MPP	Harvard MPP	Syracuse MPA	Michigan MPP	Carleton MAPA	Toronto MPP
Democratic Institutions and Policy Process	6%	9%	9%	8%	14%	11%
Strategy and Structure	13%	8%	8%	7%	9%	17%
Economic Analysis	12%	13%	8%	13%	7%	6%
Quantitative Methods	6%	12%	20%	18%	14%	8%
Total	**37%**	**42%**	**35%**	**36%**	**44%**	**42%**

Notes for Exhibit 3: Details can be found on the Atlas at http://portal.publicpolicy.utoronto .ca/en/MPPMPAPrograms/CurriculumComparisonTables/Pages/default.aspx.

4. Subjects that can be considered near core

The Course Maps on the Atlas suggest that there are two subjects than could be considered near core: Ethics and Accountability and Public Financial Management. Both are taught as one-semester required courses in half of the ten sample programs in Exhibit 4. In the sample programs which do not offer a required course in these subjects, most offer elective courses and topics from these subjects appear to be frequently introduced into other core courses. This is particularly the case for Ethics and Accountability. For example, "Efficiency, Effectiveness and Morality" is a high frequency topic within the Democratic Institutions and Policy Process subject, and five of the ten programs devote a full class to this topic. Similarly, "Representation, Accountability and Policy" is a widely taught topic within the same subject, and deals with principal agent problems, accountability and other important topics that are in other programs explored in somewhat more detail in courses explicitly devoted to public management ethics.

We conclude that in the case of Ethics and Accountability there is near unanimity that knowledge of the certain topics in this subject are in fact essential components of Master's-level education in the field and can therefore be considered core topics in MPP/MPA programs, even if there is not a core course with a cognate name. An interesting question for curriculum designers is whether it is necessary and valuable to explore these topics at length in a full, course-level investigation, or whether the core topics in this subject can be adequately dealt with by integrating the material into other core courses.

The case of Public Financial Management is somewhat different. Whereas half of our sample of ten programs require students to enrol in a one-semester course on this subject, other programs appear to pay relatively little attention to this subject. This seems to illustrate a difference of opinion among curriculum designers over whether or not a basic understanding of public financial management, including how to read government financial documents, is in fact an essential component of Master's-level education in the field, or whether it is a useful elective subject that can be pursued by those who are so inclined.

5. Topic-level analysis of core subjects

In this section we provide an analysis of syllabi from ten programs to identify the topics that instructors widely view as core topics within core subjects. In order get down to the topic level we selected a sample of ten programs which make publicly available a good proportion of their syllabi. The sample includes a mix of MPP and MPA as well as shorter and longer programs, and is displayed in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4: Programs reviewed for which topic-level information is available in syllabi for relevant courses

School	University	Degree	Courses to Graduate	Required Courses
Luskin School of Public Affairs	University of California, Los Angeles	MPP	18	10.3
Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy	University of Michigan	MPP	16	10
Harvard Kennedy School	Harvard University	MPP	18	7.5
School of Public Policy and Governance	University of Toronto	MPP	18	14
School of Public Policy and Administration	Carleton University	MAPA	16	7
School of Public Affairs	American University	MPA	14	7
Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration	George Washington University	MPA	13.3	7.3
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service	New York University	MPA	15	10
Fels Institute of Government	University of Pennsylvania	MPA	12	8
Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy	Universities of Saskatchewan and Regina	MPA	11.5	7.5

Notes for Exhibit 4: Course requirements to graduate are expressed in one-semester equivalents. The University of California, Los Angeles, operates on a quarter system, and the 80 units in six quarters is assumed to be equivalent to the Harvard Kennedy School in terms of semester equivalents; required courses are 46 of the 80 units.

We reviewed all the required core courses that must be completed for graduation in these ten programs and assigned each required course to one of the Atlas subjects. The results are presented in Exhibit 5.

Exhibit 5: The frequency of subjects being required in 10 MPP/MPA programs

Democratic Institutions and Policy Process	10
Strategy and Structure	9
Economic Analysis	10
Quantitative Methods	10
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

Exhibit 5 supports the conclusions drawn in Sections 3 and 4 to the effect that the first four subjects listed should be considered core and the next two considered near core. For the remaining subjects, there is not a strong enough pattern at the subject level to draw conclusions. For courses assigned to these subjects, it will be more fruitful to conduct the analysis at the topic level.

To identify core topics within core subjects we examined the syllabi for required courses in the four core subjects in the sample programs. Generally, each class (or seminar) within the course syllabus has a title, a brief description and a reading list. Based on this information, we have, to the extent possible, categorized each class title (class topic) into one of the public policy and management teaching topics that we had identified and defined through our previous review of syllabi. Where a class title simply did not fit into any previously specified topic, a new

teaching topic was created into which to place it (although these new topics have not yet been specified on the Atlas beyond their name). The teaching topics so defined are getting close to normed topics because they contain a comparable quantum of content – that which can be learned in a single 3-hour class with associated preparatory reading and learning assessment.

Through this process, we were able to identify, within each subject, the specific topics that receive explicit single-class attention at multiple programs. In the following exhibits we show all of the topics that are explicitly addressed at a single-class level in more than one required course from the ten sample programs. For each topic, we provide the topic name and the number of times it appears as a single-class topic in the syllabi examined. Full topic descriptions, with varying amounts of additional material, can be found for most of these topics on the Public Policy and Management Atlas.

3.1. Democratic Institutions and Policy Process

In each of the 10 programs, there is at least one one-semester course on Democratic Institutions and Policy Process. Some programs break up the two components of the subject into two separate courses, whereas others teach them together as a single course. The presence of these courses within core curricula at all leading programs demonstrates that, in broad terms, this subject represents a crucial component of a Master's-level public policy and management education. But what are the specific topics that make up this subject? Exhibit 6 presents the topic names of the most frequently named topics in our sample programs.

**Exhibit 6: The frequency of topics receiving full-class-level treatment
in required courses on Democratic Institutions and Policy Process**

Bureaucracy and the Formulation of Public Policy	7
Representation, Accountability and Policy	6
Policy Analysis and Contemporary Governance	6
Institutional Architecture: Federalism	6
Public Services in the Age of Restraint - New Public Service Delivery Models	6
Political Context of Policymaking / Political and Administrative Responsibilities	6
Institutional Designs and Paths	5
Models of Policy Making	5
Efficiency, Effectiveness and Morality	5
New Public Management	4
Democracy	3
Policy Evaluation	3
Actors, Interests, and Institutions	3
Executive Leadership and Constitutional Checks on the Executive	3
Courts, Judicial Review, Rights and Democracy	3
Ideas and Policy Frames	2
International Context of Domestic Institutions	2
Defining Policy Problems and Policy Making Under Pressure	2
The Policy Stream and Policy Windows	2

Clearly, there are some topic areas that are widely viewed to be important components of Masters level education, although as we will see, there is somewhat more dispersion among these topics than in two of the other core subjects, Quantitative Methods and Economic Analysis. All of the topics listed here are taught as required components of the curriculum at more than one leading program. Curriculum designers and instructors in this subject area may

wish to pay particular attention to the nine topics that are dealt with in this detailed way at least half (5) of the programs that we have analyzed.

3.2 Strategy and Structure

Exhibit 7 displays the number of our sample programs that had a full-class treatment of a named topic in a required course teaching the Strategy and Structure subject.

Exhibit 7: The frequency of topics receiving full-class-level treatment in required courses on Strategy and Structure

Performance Information as a Management and Transformation Tool	6
Overview of Recent Trends in Public Administration	6
Working in Teams and Motivation	5
Implementation and Policy	5
Organizations	4
Bounds of Rationality	4
The Concept of Strategy	3
Leadership and Management	3
The Budget Process*	2
Implementation Environment	2
Implementing through Networks	2
Organizational Culture	2

As shown in Section 3, this subject is almost universally recognized as a core component of Master's-level public policy and management education. However, the classification of course material into topics seems to suggest a smaller number of common topics that are taught widely within this subject area. Whereas nine subjects in Democratic Institutions and Policy Process were taught in 5 or more programs, just four topics meet this criterion within Strategy and Structure. Further, while there were 19 topics in Democratic Institutions and Policy Process that are explicitly named and taught at the course level in more than one program, there are

only 12 such topics within Strategy and Structure. This may suggest that there is somewhat less consensus about what material is most important for students to learn in this subject. Whereas almost all programs seem to recognize that Strategy and Structure should be taught as part of the core curriculum, our analysis of the course syllabi in the ten sample programs suggests that there is not complete agreement over which topics in the subject area i are most worthy of detailed study.

3.3 Economic Analysis

The two subjects that we have examined so far are somewhat complementary and in many cases deal with somewhat similar topics. The third core subject we have identified is Economic Analysis. Public policy and management is generally viewed as a multidisciplinary field, and this subject requires students to develop a basic familiarity with the key insights and methods of economics, and to understand their implications for public policy development.

This subject receives core-course treatment at virtually all leading MPP and MPA programs. It appears to be universally accepted that an introduction to basic economic concepts, a working understanding of the fundamentals of a market economy, and the major sources of market failure that can require intervention is a necessary component of Master's-level education in the field. Exhibit 8 shows the topics that are most frequently taught.

**Exhibit 8: The frequency of topics receiving full-class-level treatment
in required courses on Economic Analysis**

Externalities	10
Supply and Demand	10
Monopoly	9
Asymmetric Information: Signalling	8
Consumer Theory	8
Theory of the Firm	8
Market Failure and Optimal Intervention	5
Market Equilibrium	5
Public Goods and Commons Problems	4
Welfare Economics	3
Oligopoly	3
Game Theory	3
Government role in promoting equity	3
Budget Lines	2
Taxes and Lump Sum Transfers	2
Trade	2
Hicks and Slutsky Compensation	2

Exhibit 8 reveals some important differences between Economic Analysis and the two preceding subjects. The large number of topics that are taught at the full-class-level within all or nearly all of the courses is particularly important. Two topics were addressed every one of the ten sample programs. An additional four topics were taught in at least eight courses. This means that six topics were explicitly identified as the key topic of a seminar in eight or more programs. By comparison, no topics in either of Democratic Institutions and Policy Process or Strategy and Structure were taught universally or nearly universally across programs at this intensity. These data suggest that this subject, to a greater extent than either of the other two, is built on around specific topics that are viewed by curriculum and course designers across North America to be essential for understanding the subject. The topics that are taught nearly universally, as shown in Exhibit 8, can therefore be taken to be accepted core topics.

3.4 Quantitative Methods

Exhibit 9 displays the number of our sample programs that had a full-class treatment of a named topic in a required course teaching the Quantitative Methods subject.

**Exhibit 9: The frequency of topics receiving full-class-level treatment
in required courses on Quantitative Methods**

Simple Regression	10
Multivariate Analysis	9
Confidence Intervals and Hypothesis Testing	9
Looking at Data	6
Descriptive Statistics	6
Sampling	5
Probability Concepts	5
Research Design	5
Omitted Variable Bias	4
Randomized Trials	3
Chi-Square Test	2
Panel Data, Fixed Effects and Instrumental Variables	2
The Challenge of Objectivity	2
Definitions	2
Dummy Variables	2
Statistical Inference for a Single Mean	2
Ethical Issues in Research	2

As is the case for Economic Analysis, in Quantitative Methods includes a handful of topics that are taught in nearly all of the courses reviewed. These topics are focused on regression analysis and confidence testing. Several of the other topics, which are taught in between two and five programs, are closely related to these essential topics that are dealt with in nearly all programs. We can therefore say that developing a basic understanding of regression analysis, and particularly multivariate regression, is a core topic within the Quantitative Methods that all students must learn in order to complete a degree. This subject

includes a dense concentration of topics that are taught at approximately half of all programs (4-5) and relatively few that are only taught at a smaller number of programs. This suggests that, like Economic Analysis, there is somewhat more agreement about what topics are essential to Master's-level exploration of this subject than is the case in Democratic Institutions and Policy Process or Strategy and Structure.

The presence of research methods courses, with an emphasis on quantitative analysis, at all of the programs analyzed demonstrates that a basic knowledge of statistics and research methods is recognized as essential preparation for practitioners in public policy and management. Among the ten programs in our sample, courses differ in the extent to which they attempt to equip students with the skills to conduct their own quantitative analysis. Whereas some require students to learn to use statistical software such as SPSS or STATA, and to conduct small research projects of their own, others are explicitly focused on equipping students to be good consumers of quantitative research rather than producers, and do not require them to develop familiarity with statistical software.

6. How learning is assessed in the core subjects

The specification of a normed topic includes a description of how competency is assessed. To learn more about how this might be specified, we reviewed how learning is assessed in the four core subjects at the ten sample programs. We found that there are seven common assessment tools. These are described in Exhibit 10.

Exhibit 10: Seven common assessment tools

Academic Essay	This assessment tool describes substantial writing projects (generally 10 pages or more) written in the style and format of an academic essay. Generally, students are required to conduct considerable research from multiple sources for these assignments.
Professional Writing Exercise	This assessment tool describes reasonably substantial writing projects (generally 5 pages or more) that require students to produce "mock" versions of writing products that they may be required to complete during future careers as policy practitioners. An assignment where students are asked to complete a "mock briefing note" is an example of this assessment method. Writing assignments may involve either a large or small amount of independent research beyond knowledge of the assigned readings and course material.
Class Participation	This assessment tool evaluates students on the extent to which they contribute to the quality of in-class discussions of course material. Components of this assessment tool include regular attendance, active participation and demonstrated knowledge of weekly assigned readings.
Examinations	This assessment tool describes examinations and tests that are designed to evaluate student knowledge of material taught over a period of at least several weeks. Generally, tests and examinations are administered halfway through academic terms, and at the end of term. This assessment tool includes tests held inside of class time as well as formal examinations conducted outside of it, but does not include in-class quizzes that are focused on measuring knowledge of the material being covered in a single week or class session.
Reading Responses/ Short Assignments /Problem Sets	This category includes a range of assessment tools that are designed to evaluate student learning and engagement on an ongoing basis throughout the term. Short weekly written responses to readings, requirements to develop "response questions" to assigned readings, weekly quizzes and weekly or bi-weekly problem sets are all examples of assignments that fall within this assessment tool category.
Presentations	This assessment tool includes projects in which students, either independently or as part of a group, are required to deliver in-class presentations, either analyzing assigned reading material or presenting the results of additional research undertaken specifically for the presentation. In some cases, students may also be required to lead class discussions as a component of a course requirement.
Group Work (Other than Shared Presentation)	This assessment tool describes written projects that students are required to complete in groups. In some cases, assignments include both a group-authored written project as well as a presentation, with the weight of each component not delineated on the syllabus. These assignments, that include written group work as well as a presentation, are included in this category.

	This rarely used assessment tool involves a requirement for students to perform additional work outside of the university environment that includes interaction with people outside of the institution. For example, students may be required to identify and conduct interviews with policy experts or government officials and then to provide analyses of these interviews. In other cases, students may be required to undertake a community action project either individually or as part of a group.
Outside of Classroom Project	

For each syllabus within a subject, we examined the extent to which student evaluations are based on seven different learning assessment tools. We then calculate the average amount that each of the seven learning assessment tools are relied upon in each subject, to identify the dominant modes of assessing student learning. These results are displayed in Exhibit 11.

Exhibit 11: The assessment tools used in the four core courses

	Democratic Institutions and Policy Process	Strategy and Structure	Economic Analysis	Quantitative Methods
Academic Essay	22%	18%	3%	0%
Professional Writing Exercise	30%	29%	4%	15%
Class Participation	11%	10%	3%	5%
Examinations	13%	7%	62%	50%
Reading Responses/Short Written Assignments/Problem Sets	6%	8%	21%	27%
Presentations	13%	8%	5%	2%
Group Projects (Other than Shared Presentation)	6%	18%	1%	1%
Outside of Classroom Project	0%	3%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

There are marked differences between the subjects in how learning is assessed. Although we would expect that instructors and grading schemes change from year-to-year and within years, such variation is unlikely to be as large as differences depicted in Exhibit 11.

The exhibit shows that substantial written projects (rather than examinations, group work, presentations, or regular weekly writing exercises) are the predominant tool used for student evaluation in Democratic Institutions and Policy Process. Over half of all grading points in the courses that we examined are awarded for performance on either "academic style essays" or significant professional writing exercises. Examinations do not feature prominently as a tool for student assessment in this area. Combined, seminar participation and "weekly writing responses" make up 17 percent of all points awarded, suggesting that a significant number of professors try to promote regular engagement with the material by monitoring performance on an ongoing, week-to-week basis rather than relying entirely on major assignments at the end of term.

As was the case for Democratic Institutions and Policy Process, courses in Strategy and Structure base almost exactly half (48 percent) of student evaluation is on substantial written projects. Similarly, examinations are not weighted heavily, representing just 7 percent of all points awarded. Finally, a similar amount of emphasis is placed on weekly assignments, problem sets and class participation, showing that some professors see value in encouraging ongoing student engagement through these assessment tools.

One meaningful difference, however, is the greater reliance within the Strategy and Structure subject upon group projects. When combined with the small "outside the classroom

project" component, which also necessarily involves detailed interaction with others, this type of project represents 21 percent of all evaluation, compared to just six percent for Democratic Institutions and Policy Process. Some of the more management-oriented courses teaching this subject try to develop leadership and teamwork skills that are thought essential to management through mandatory exercises that require extensive cooperation.

The dominant assessment methods for courses in Economic Analysis differ significantly from the two preceding subjects. Substantial writing projects represent just 7 percent of all available points, compared to 50 percent for the preceding subjects. The difference is largely made up through a heavy reliance on examinations and short tests. This is the dominant assessment tool in this subject, consuming 62 percent of all of the available grading points in the courses analyzed. Class participation and presentations are infrequently used, but regular problem sets and weekly homework are an important assessment tool in several courses, representing a total of 21 percent of all available grading points. This suggests that while students are not necessarily required to speak in class, professors do often attempt to gauge student learning and engagement on an ongoing basis through other means, particularly by requiring students to regularly submit short assignments and homework.

The dominant assessment tools for courses teaching Quantitative Methods are similar to those in Economic Analysis. Examinations predominate, followed by short assignments, including problem sets and weekly homework. Students are required to submit few or no lengthy written assignments or academic essays. Class participation is generally unimportant as an assessment tool, likely because classes for these courses are focused more on the

transmission of information and skills from teachers to students as opposed to an exchange of opinions and ideas as is emphasized in courses in some other subjects.

Because many classes in courses teaching Economic Analysis and Quantitative Methods tend to be more like lectures than seminars, class participation is not generally viewed as a crucial assessment tool in either subject. Instructors appear to rely on regular, short assignments and problem sets to assess learning on an ongoing basis and identify struggling students.

7. Conclusions and next steps

This paper has tried to answer the question of what constitutes the core of MPP/MPA curricula and how learning is assessed. Using a course-level analysis, we have found that in almost all programs there are four subjects that are invariably taught through required courses and can therefore be considered the core subjects in MPP/MPA curricula: Democratic Institutions and Policy Process; Strategy and Structure; Economic Analysis; and Quantitative Methods. Two other subjects can be considered to be near core: Ethics and Accountability and Public Financial Management. Using a class-level analysis of course syllabi, we have identified a number of core topics within the core subjects and suggest that there are core topics in at least nine other subjects even if the subjects themselves are usually treated as non-core electives. We examined learning assessment methods within the core and found that, for the ten programs in our sample, the methods differed among subjects. For each subject we calculated the distribution among seven different assessment tools.

The paper points to a number of next steps for our project. The first is to specify more normed topics in both core and non-core subjects. We would like to develop a comprehensive

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body of normed topics specified in a way allows normed topics to also be expressed in terms of normed competencies. We believe that the concept of a core for professional programs like the MPP and MPA should take account of competencies needed by practitioners and contemplated by accrediting bodies. If Master's competencies in public policy and management could be expressed as aggregates of normed competencies, then it should be possible to design more efficient quality assurance and accreditation processes. Rather than expecting programs to determine for themselves which pedagogical tools best respond to a vague set of high-level competencies, accrediting and quality assurance bodies could specify the normed topics that they expect to be mastered by students along with the assessment method that would demonstrate mastery.

The second step is to refine existing teaching topics and advisory topics to make them normed topics, i.e., to ensure that they have a content quantum that could be taught at a Master's level in a 3-hour class plus preparatory reading, with a proposal on how best to assess topic learning. Although this paper has focused on teaching topics, it is worth illustrating how an appropriate alignment of teaching and advisory topics could encourage pedagogical use of practice-oriented subject matter. Exhibit 12 is a screen image of Ethics and Accountability subject page on the Atlas. It displays the teaching topics and advisory topics currently associated with this subject. We see that most of the teaching topics have their intellectual roots in moral philosophy and political science, whereas the intellectual roots of the advisory topics tend to lie in the accounting and economics disciplines. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine how instructors in courses in Ethics and Accountability could put the material from some of the advisory topics to good use in the classroom.

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**Exhibit 12: The MPP/MPA teaching topics and IGO advisory topics
in the subject of Ethics and Accountability**

A Public Policy and Management Subject in the Institutions and Context Domain

Ethics and Accountability

This subject under the Institutions and Context domain deals with the principles of management ethics, with a particular focus on the application of these principles in the public sector. These course generally include a consideration of the meaning of ethics and an introduction to the concept of ethical competence. Some courses will examine the specific ethical frameworks that govern the work of public servants, ministers, legislators and other government officials. Specific topics include: conflict of interest, accountability, political neutrality, service to the public, codes of conduct, principal-agent theory, stakeholder theory and "the new public management."

Teaching and Advisory Topics in Ethics and Accountability

TEACHING TOPICS IN ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY	ADVISORY TOPICS IN ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY
Compromise and Disagreement	Code of Conduct for Public Officials
Conflict of Interest	Good Transparency Practices for Financial Policies by Financial Agencies
Distributive Justice	Good Transparency Practices for Monetary Policy by Central Banks
Equality of Opportunity	
Ethics and Morality	Increasing Integrity and Trust in Public Procurement
Free Speech and Religion	Principles for Managing Ethics in the Public Services
Historical Injustice and Global Justice	Reducing the Export of Corruption
Implementation and Accountability	Resource Revenue Transparency
Liberty and Its Limits: Paternalism	State Owned Enterprises: Disclosure and Transparency Policy
Liberty and Its Limits: Speech and Harm	State-Owned Enterprises: Implementation of Accountability Policies
Lying, Deception, Privacy and Transparency	
Managing Leaders: Ethics in Governing	Anti-Corruption and Democratic Governance
Markets and Regulation	Public Procurement
Means and Ends: The Problem of Dirty Hands	
Responsibility and Accountability	
Trust, Accountability and Legitimacy	

Compass Courses on Ethics and Accountability
- Toronto PPG-2011: Ethics and the Public Interest
- Harvard DPI-201: The Responsibilities of Public Action

Concepts, References and Reports on Ethics and Accountability
- Concepts used in Ethics and Accountability
- Reference Collections in Ethics and Accountability
- Study Reports addressing Ethics and Accountability

Related Public Management Subjects
- Oversight, Risk Management and Control
- Budgeting and Financial Management
- Democratic Institutions and the Policy Process

Additional Resources on Ethics and Accountability

Source: Atlas of Public Policy and Management at
http://portal.publicpolicy.utoronto.ca/en/ContentMap/ethicsandaccountability/Pages/default.aspx

Finally, we plan to apply the methodologies described in this paper to identify differences in curricular content of differently named degrees (particularly the MPP and MPA) and of similarly named degrees in different parts of the world.

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