

BUILDING AND ASSESSING CORE COMPETENCIES THROUGH AN INTEGRATIVE MPA CURRICULUM

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Abstract

- Principles of competency-driven assessment
 - ▣ Why this change is beneficial
- Building an integrative MPA curriculum directed by mission-specific and universal competencies
 - ▣ An endeavor in logic model strategic planning
- Assessing competencies for continual improvement
 - ▣ A function of herding cats?



Principles of competency-driven assessment

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs
and Administration

Principles of Assessment

- Accreditation standards reflect NASPAA's commitment to support programs for professional education that:
 - commit to the values of public affairs, administration, and policy and model them in their operations;
 - direct their resources toward quantitative and qualitative outcomes; and
 - continuously improve, which includes responding to and impacting their communities through ongoing program evaluation.

Universal Competencies

- ❑ 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

Mission-Driven Competencies

- Open-ended to tailor curricular outcomes to each program's mission
 - ▣ Specializations
 - ▣ Concentrations
 - ▣ Certifications
- For example...
 - ▣ Health Care Administration
 - ▣ Local Governance & Community Development
 - ▣ Nonprofit Management and Leadership

Building an MPA Curriculum

Mission-Driven Logic Model Strategic Planning

Our Mission

- We will prepare public service professionals to help fulfill the aspirations of the citizens, communities, and governments of West Virginia and the region.

Program Goals

- Prepare public service professionals to identify challenges and opportunities and to facilitate positive change.
- Serve the communities of West Virginia and the profession of public administration through expertise and intellectual resources.
- Advance the state of knowledge in the field of public administration.

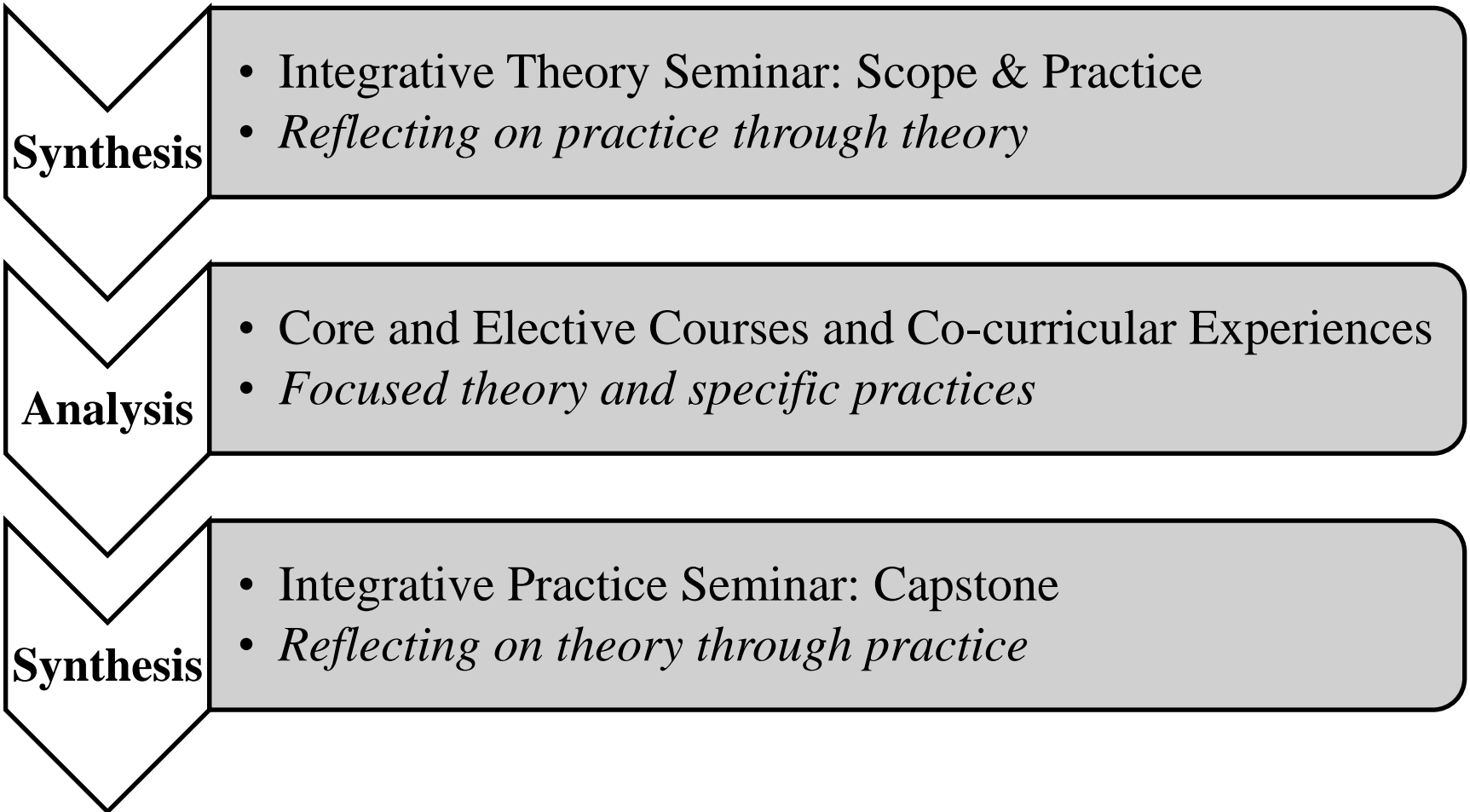
Developing the Logic Model

- Review and revise mission statement with key stakeholders
 - ▣ Faculty, students, alumni, internship supervisors, advisory board members
- Connect mission statement to NASPAA universal competencies and mission-specific competencies
- Identify key integrative strategies
- Define student learning outcomes and link to specific activities
- Identify student learning assessments – summative, formative, integrative

Program Objectives

- Specific strategies for engaging students in all three academic areas across the curriculum and program
 - Learning
 - NASPAA Universal and Mission-Specific Competencies
 - Service
 - Employ service learning strategies
 - Research
 - Co-produce knowledge with students
- Learning objectives translated into acceptable outcomes language

Integrative Curriculum



Keeping an Eye on the Target

- Introduce competencies to students in Orientation
- Include competencies and expected student learning outcomes in syllabi
- Directly link competencies with assignments (strategies)
- Incorporate student learning outcomes in grading/evaluation rubrics
- Share expected student learning outcomes with external assessors (Internship Supervisors, Capstone Sponsors)
- Reflect as a class and individually on the achievement of student learning outcomes to meet competencies



Continuous Improvement

Assessing Learning Outcomes

- Lorna Earl (2004)
 - ▣ *Assessment as Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximize Student Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Formative assessment **for** learning
 - ▣ Assess value of course content, activities, and assignments to student learning progress
- Summative assessment **of** learning
 - ▣ Summarize, measure, and judge the quality of student work to certify and report learning outcomes
- Integrative assessment **as** learning
 - ▣ Analysis that produces learning through conceptual integration

Formative Assessment (for)

- **Plus/Delta Exercises (Learner)**
 - ▣ Participatory discussion of course content, assignments, and activities in reflection on anticipated learning outcomes (competencies)
 - ▣ What's working? (Plus)
 - ▣ What could be changed for improved learning? (Delta)
- **Progress Reports (Learner)**
 - ▣ Public service projects produce pre-service contracts, mid-project assessments, and post-project reflections for continuous learning
- **SWOT Analysis (Program)**
 - ▣ Outgoing students provide an analysis of their experience in the program to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in achieving student-oriented objectives
 - ▣ Faculty consider how to improve learning based on results

Summative Assessment (of)

- Course Assignments
 - ▣ Instructors use a **learning outcome rubric** to evaluate management memos, analytical essays, financial analyses, and other course assignments
- Public Service Internship
 - ▣ Internship supervisors use a **service learning contract** to evaluate student work during placement
- Capstone Project
 - ▣ Project sponsor and instructor uses a **project memorandum of agreement** to evaluate student team final report and presentation

Integrative Assessment (as): Learner

- Analytical assignments that integrate content to assess a situation; tailored to student career goals (theory to practice)
 - ▣ Public Service Traditions Film Analysis
 - Illustrate Constitutional, Discretionary, or Collaborative Tradition of public administration (Stout, 2013)
 - ▣ Public Management Application Papers
 - Case analysis applying integrated management concepts
- Professional Portfolio
 - ▣ Prepare an integrative statement of distinct skills, knowledge, and attitudes appropriate to career goals
 - ▣ Present artifacts demonstrating competencies

Integrative Assessment (as): Program

- Self-study produces learning through integration of assessment data
 - Faculty
 - Reflect on and revise core curriculum and course components
 - Create improved assessments of, for, as learning
 - Students
 - Summative assessments of student learning outcomes
 - Student reflection on how they built competencies
 - Alumni
 - Assess appropriateness of competencies to career development
 - Internship Supervisors and Service Learning Sponsors
 - Provide feedback to the students, instructor, and program on achievement of student learning in project outcomes
 - Advisory Board (Public Service Professionals)
 - Reflect on program's ability to meet its mission, defined competencies, and student learning through integrative strategies

Is it worth it?

- Mission-driven, competency-based learning outcomes, ongoing assessment, and continuous improvement is A LOT OF WORK!!!
- It requires coordination among often unwilling collaborators
- It requires genuine engagement, not lip-service
- It can produce incredibly valuable information that helps us achieve our mission for learning, service, and research

Discussion

- Many thanks!