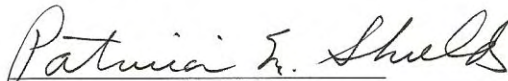# Employers' Assessment of Texas State University MPA Program

by

**Rosalinda Treviño Moore**

An Applied Research Project
(Political Science 5397)
Submitted to the Department of Political Science
Texas State University
In Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Public Administration
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Faculty Approval:

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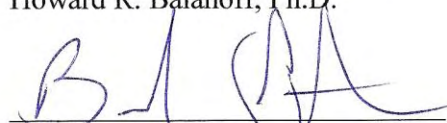Patricia M. Shields, Ph.D.

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Howard R. Balanoff, Ph.D.

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Brad Sinclair, MPA

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## List of Tables

Abstract

*Research Purpose*

The purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions and opinions of employers of graduates of the master of public administration program (MPA) from Texas State University regarding their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The research purpose is descriptive in nature. An employer assessment survey was performed to ascertain the reputation of MPA graduates. The MPA program benefits by knowing how the graduates are perceived by the labor market. The research reviews what employers believe MPA graduates should know, and how the MPA graduates are perceived by their employers.

*Method*

This study uses two techniques to gather the perceptions and opinions of employers of Texas State MPA program graduates: employer assessment survey and content analysis, with categorization of the responses to the open-ended questions and statements on the employer survey. The content analysis only applies to the responses of the open-ended questions and statements that are part of the employer survey.

*Findings*

Employers perceive the Texas State MPA program meets its mission in imparting the knowledge, skills, and abilities to its students to prepare them for public administration service. Overall, the MPA program is highly regarded. The positions that MPA graduates hold in public service support Castleberry's argument that "[t]he advantages of student learning outcomes also extend well beyond college campuses." (2006, 16).

## About the Author

I wanted to get my master's degree right after I received my bachelor's degree, but some of my choices in life prevented me from reaching that goal until now that I am retired from Texas state government. One thing is for sure, I have never lost the desire to learn. My parents inculcated in me the importance of education in order to succeed in life. They made many sacrifices to help me get an education, which has provided me a better life than the one they had in México.

I was raised in México until the age of 15, when my parents moved the family to the United States – the land of opportunity. I received my bachelor's degree in business administration with a concentration in accounting from the University of Texas at Austin. I earned my CPA license two years later after working for the Texas State Auditor's office as an assistant state auditor. However, most of my public service career in state government was at the Employees Retirement System of Texas, where I worked in the finance department approximately 24 years. In the process, and as part of my continuing professional education, I earned many professional designations in public management (CPM), public finance (CPFO), government financial management (CGFM), and employee benefits (CEBS).

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**Acknowledgments**

I want to thank Patricia M. Shields, Ph.D., for advising me and giving me direction in this applied research project; Howard R. Balanoff, Ph.D., for encouraging me to obtain my master's degree in public administration; Jennifer Small for her professional editing, and many other friends and family members that continued to encourage me to finish my degree even though I was a nontraditional student at Texas State University-San Marcos.

I want to thank my parents, Rosalinda V. Treviño (deceased) and Jose Treviño, for instilling in me the desire to obtain an education. They had the foresight to bring their six children to a better way of life in the United States. I wish my mother would have lived long enough to see my graduation from the MPA program at Texas State University-San Marcos.

Most of all, I want to thank my beloved husband, John D. Moore. He has put up with me during endless hours of studying and complaining of too much homework. I have earned many professional designations, and now I will receive my master's degree thanks to his unending patience, love, and support.

## Texas State University-San Marcos MPA Program

Pi Alpha Alpha Inductees, May 2008[1]



## American Society for Public Administration
## Centex Chapter Public Service Recognition Week

The Centex Chapter of ASPA held its annual award ceremony on Friday, May 2, 2008 at the Marriott Hotel in Austin, Texas. The awards banquet honored the people and programs of government, education, nonprofit and advocacy sectors meeting the needs of Central Texas.

The event featured keynote speaker, Brewster McCracken, of the Austin City Council, who spoke about technology as a tool for transformation and meeting citizen's needs, today and tomorrow.

Dr. Kay Hofer, Professor of Political Science, won the Educator of the Year Award.

Also, three James W. McGrew Research Awards were presented to Chance Sparks, Joy Schneider-Cowan and Stephen Este. All three McGrew Award winners are Texas State University-San Marcos MPA Graduates.

Inducted into the Pi Alpha Alpha Honor Society were Jason Alexander, Daniel Reed, Cassandra Casillas, James Twine, Dustin McLemore, and Rosalinda Moore [Picture above].

Congratulations to all the award winners!

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[1] News release was reported in Texas State University's website at http://www.polisci.txstate.edu/news/2008/centex-aspa-may-2008.html.

## Chapter 1   INTRODUCTION

**Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research purpose and to preview the chapters of this applied research project.

Unrelenting pressure for accountability in education has compelled administrators to establish or clarify standards of performance from the highest to the lowest levels of administrative operations and programs in both the public and private sectors. Educational institutions have developed various assessment vehicles to gauge and monitor performance of educational programs and the institutions as a whole. One of those assessment vehicles is employer assessment surveys.

Educational institutions seek feedback from constituents as a way to assess performance and stimulate improvement. "Constituents of higher education include governors, legislators, higher education policy makers, accrediting bodies, parents, faculty, and students." (Apostolou 1999, 178). In addition, educational institutions seek feedback from alumni and employers to improve their educational programs.

This research focuses on the employers' assessment of Texas State University graduates from the master of public administration program in relation to their demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities. Employer assessment is important because employers are the stakeholders empowered to hire the alumni with the requisite knowledge and skills– the final product of the educational institutions. Apostolou declares that the results of a study conducted by Karakaya and Karakaya in 1996[2], show that the researchers believe the employer focus is important because students select an

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[2] See Karakaya and F. Karakaya. 1996. Employer expectations from a business education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 7: 9-16 as cited by Apostolou 1999, 193.

educational institution based on their expectations to obtain a good job after graduation

(Apostolou 1999, 193).

**Descriptive Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to describe the perceptions and opinions of

employers of graduates of the master of public administration program (MPA) from

Texas State University regarding their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The research

purpose is descriptive in nature. An employer assessment survey was performed to

ascertain the reputation of MPA graduates and to find out what employers believe

students should know. The MPA program benefits by knowing how graduates are

perceived by the labor market. This research reviews what employers believe MPA

graduates should know, and how the MPA graduates are perceived by their employers.

The project uses employer surveys as a vehicle to assess how the Texas State

MPA program meets the requirements of employers and to discover how employers

perceive the quality of MPA graduates they employ. The employer assessment is

important because outside forces such as the economy, mandated legislation, the political

environment, and the goods and services customers demand influence what employers

require from their employees. The employer assessment study is a partial requirement of

the re-accreditation process of the MPA program at Texas State University by the

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA).

NASPAA requires that the Texas State MPA program prepare a self-study every seven

years to receive re-accreditation (Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report 2002;

NASPAA 2008).

The employer assessment of the Texas State University MPA program serves as a tool to gauge the perceptions and opinions of employers on how well the MPA program meets its mandate. The Texas State MPA program strives to reach its mission, NASPAA core curriculum requirements, student learning outcomes, and other requirements employers may have for Texas State MPA graduates employed in their organizations. Texas State University administrators may use the results of the study to make modifications to the program mission[3] and curriculum. The Texas State MPA program administrators regularly seek feedback from alumni, practitioners (employers and students), and other users of their educational program so that they may improve upon them.

Collecting data from employers of MPA graduates is important because the graduates and their employers are the ultimate users of acquired program knowledge and skills. To that end, Apostolou (1999, 193) emphasizes, "Understanding what consumers of educational outcomes desire is important to establishing desired outcomes and producing requisite inputs." Hermes (2002), Sinclair (2005), and Lee (2006) conducted employer surveys or interviews to determine what the employers desire from Texas State MPA graduates and the value they place on the program knowledge, skills, and abilities. This research project reviews and summarizes some of their findings and recommendations.

**Preview of Chapters**

This research study is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 2 contains the literature review and introduces the educational program assessment efforts, the assessment in higher education and masters of public administration programs, the

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[3] The Texas State MPA program revised its mission statement in January 2009.

assessments that focus on students, alumni, and employers, and selected methods of

assessment. Chapter 3 includes the research setting at Texas State University-San

Marcos, its MPA program and mission statement, and the accreditation standards for

MPA programs established by NASPAA. Chapter 4 covers the findings of two employer

surveys conducted by Texas State University in 2005 and 2006 by summarizing and

comparing the results of the studies. Chapter 5 develops the conceptual framework of the

reputational employer survey for the Texas State MPA program using categories from its

mission statement, NASPAA standards of curriculum components, MPA program student

learning outcomes, and other skill sets employers expect. Chapter 6 describes the

methodology of the research and operationalizes the conceptual framework. Chapter 7

discusses the results of the employer assessment survey using simple descriptive

statistics, and Chapter 8 presents a conclusion and summary of the results, and

recommendations for future research.

### Chapter 2   EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

*Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities*
*to students and to the public.*
American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation
(AAHEA) – 9th Principle

**Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the educational

program assessment environment in higher education with a focus on alumni and

employers as stakeholders of the master of public administration programs. The research

emphasis is on reputational studies and what employers believe alumni should posses in

knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The literature review introduces the educational program assessment efforts, the

assessment in higher education and masters of public administration programs, the

assessments that focus on students, alumni, and employers, and other selected assessment

methods. The literature review lays the foundation to discover what type of information is

needed from an employer assessment survey to answer the following questions:

- How well is an educational program, specifically an MPA program,

  reaching its mission?

- How well is the MPA educational program complying with accreditation

  standards?

- How well is the MPA program helping students meet the established

  student learning outcomes?

- What do employers believe the Texas State MPA graduates should know

  in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities?

- What is the reputation of the MPA program, according to the employers of its alumni?

**Introduction to Educational Program Assessment**

Educational institutions develop various assessment methods to measure and monitor performance levels of educational programs in order to comply with accountability mandates from both public and private sectors. Castleberry (2006, 16) asserts, "Assessment procedures respond to the demands of stakeholders in education for greater accountability." Apostolou (1999) reports broad-based research efforts in student-learning outcome assessment programs or models.

Guided by Astin's assessment model, Apostolou (1999) discerns that a student-learning outcome assessment program can provide continuous improvement of an educational program by adjusting the resources (inputs) during the strategic planning process. As cited by Apostolou (1999), Astin developed an assessment model in 1993 that consisted of inputs, college environment, and outcomes.[4] Educational administrators use the outcomes from the previous strategic plan to adjust the required resources and the future direction of the educational programs as part of updating the strategic plans and budgets. Escobar (2008, 5) asserts, "Program assessment is necessary in higher education and can help provide important information regarding institutional effectiveness." Measuring outcomes as part of the strategic planning process provides the information required to assess the institutional effectiveness and make any necessary modifications to the educational programs.

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[4] Apostolou (1999) cited Astin, A. W. 1993. *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Educational programs seek feedback from constituents as a way to assess performance and stimulate improvement. In an earlier article, Apostolou (1993, 178) emphasizes, "The process must be continuous and ongoing to be effective. Constituents of higher education include governors, legislators, higher education policy makers, accrediting bodies, parents, faculty, and students." Other constituents are alumni, employers, and the public in general (taxpayers). In this study, constituents of higher education are also referred to as stakeholders of higher education.

*Assessment in Higher Education*

In discussing assessment in higher education, Castleberry (2006, 10) states, "…depending on how one defines assessment, the practice can be considered to be as old as teaching itself...The assessment 'movement,' however, is based on a broader concern than assessing students through grades; it is an attempt to assess the educational framework in which students learn." Assessments that focus on students, alumni, and employers have been developed and studied thoroughly. The development of student learning outcomes and their assessment started in the 1980s (Castleberry 2006, 10-11). Garza (2001, 1) also agreed that "academic assessment efforts have been underway in higher education for more than two decades in the form of in-class examinations, grade point averages, and the occasional student survey." Castleberry (2006, 16) asserts that assessment in higher education is "becoming an increasingly common mandate."

*Assessments That Focus on Students*

Academics have taken the initiative to develop a myriad of assessment tools and methods to assess students and student learning. Newcomer and Allen (2008, 5) maintain that most of the research on outcomes assessment for public service education in the last

twenty years has used student learning outcomes[5]. Therefore, the literature in education

has focused on immediate outcomes[6] such as the student learning outcomes. Researchers

use alumni and employer feedback surveys to assess immediate outcomes of the

knowledge, skills, and abilities "that an individual possesses at the immediate completion

of a course or program." (Newcomer and Allen 2008, 8, 22). The measurement of the

student learning outcomes normally uses students, alumni, and employer perceptions and

opinions about the change education made on the students' knowledge, skills, and

abilities. Newcomer and Allen (2008, 5) state that the change education made in the

student is also influenced by individual and institutional characteristics. Aside from the

outside influences of individual and institutional characteristics, student-learning

outcomes are important, useful, and relevant to determine the knowledge, skills, and

abilities demonstrated by alumni (Newcomer and Allen 2008, 8). This differs from the

notion that "assessments of performance in terms of workplace results of both graduate

students and programs" is an intermediate and longer-term outcome, as other researchers

believe (Newcomer and Allen 2008, 11).[7]

Educational assessments that focus on students use student-learning outcomes.

Colleges and universities develop student-learning outcomes to measure the effectiveness

and quality of their educational programs. The development of student learning outcomes

and assessment has been an evolutionary process. The following section contains several

criteria standard setting bodies, academics, and researchers use to assess student-learning

outcomes.

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[5] See for example Aristigueta and Gomes, 2006; Boyle and Whitaker, 2001; Castleberry, 2006; Cleary, 1990; Jennings, 1989; Nishishiba, et.al, 2005; Williams, 2002; and Yeager, et.al, 2007.
[6] See Carter 2002; Lee 2006; Stone and Bailey 2007; Yamarik 2007.

*Questions Asked on Assessment of Student Learning*

Academics, administrators, and stakeholders of student learning raised questions about assessment. Apostolou (1999, 194) raised global questions about the student learning outcome assessment:

*Has the* curriculum *improved as a result of assessment?*

*Is the student experience fuller and richer?*

*Is teaching more effective (or are students learning better)?*

Questions regarding student learning outcome assessment have evolved. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) education assessment consists of seven required categories,[8] one of which is student and stakeholder focus. In 2008, the NIST questioned the levels and trends in measures of student learning outcomes. The Baldrige National Quality Program of NIST uses several questions to focus their evaluation of student learning and stakeholder outcomes. The questions used for the student learning outcomes center on the levels and trends in key measures of student learning and improvement in student learning, as well as the comparison of the student learning outcomes to the performance of competing organizations and programs (NIST, Baldrige 2008, 22).

**Assessments That Focus on Stakeholders**

NIST assesses the stakeholder-focused outcomes with questions regarding levels and trends in key measures of stakeholder satisfaction or dissatisfaction, the comparison of the outcome satisfaction levels to similar stakeholder satisfaction levels in

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[7] For additional information on immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, see Aristigueta and Gomes 2006, Boyle and Whitaker 2001, Cleary 1990, and Tam 2006, 2007.

other organizations providing similar programs, and levels and trends in key measures of stakeholder perceived value of the education program (NIST, Baldrige 2008, 23).

Jennings (1989, 442) developed three assessment approaches to student-learning outcomes and corresponding inquiries for key stakeholders of MPA education: students, alumni, and employers. Jennings' assessment approaches MPA program student learning outcomes using a *value-added approach*, which applies to students and alumni; a *career development approach*, which applies to students, alumni, and employers; and an *impact approach*, which applies to employers and the public interest.

The overall limitation of assessment methods in measuring the quality of an educational program is that they provide limited information in how to improve educational quality and provide little guidance of what is good or bad about the program (Jennings 1989, 441). For that reason, academics and educational administrators use a variety of methods to gather information.

### *Alumni Stakeholders*

Alumni are stakeholders of an educational program; therefore, their opinions are important because "alumni evaluations and perceptions can help determine whether the [educational] program is meeting its mission." (Escobar 2008, 2). Moreover, Escobar (2008, 1) affirms that one of the most effective methods to gather data to assess and improve an educational program is by "surveying students who have completed the program – alumni. Essentially, an alumni survey provides a unique perspective and valuable feedback." Escobar used alumni surveys to collect data and gauge the

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[8] The NIST education assessment categories consists of 1) leadership, 2) strategic planning, 3) student and stakeholder focus, 4) information and analysis, 5) faculty and staff focus, 6) educational and support process management, and 7) school performance results (NIST, Baldrige 2008, 1).

effectiveness of the Texas State MPA program (2008, 5). According to Escobar,

including alumni in the educational assessment process is vital.

*Findings of Alumni Stakeholder Surveys*

The alumni stakeholder surveys' findings should assist in improving an

educational program (Escobar 2008, 2). For the purpose of the NASPAA re-accreditation

self-study of the Texas State MPA program, Escobar conducted an alumni survey to

follow-up on alumni perceptions of the MPA program's performance in carrying out its

mission (Escobar 2008, 71). Escobar compared the results of the alumni stakeholder

study to a similar study conducted by Cavazos in 2000. "[T]he results of both surveys

were summarized and linked to the elements found in the MPA mission statement"

(2008, 72)[9]. Escobar extended the 2008 study by adding survey questions regarding

faculty performance: the public service orientation of faculty, faculty accessibility, and

timeliness of feedback (2008, 60).

Escobar found "that alumni are very pleased with the MPA program" (2008,

71). Overall, "the program's perceived success in meeting any mission elements

increased by more than 10% since the 2000 Cavazos study" (2008, 74). The mission

elements that resulted in a significant increase in satisfaction were: course work, applied

research projects, networking opportunities, technology, emphasis on the central role of

ethics in public service, provision of professional and educational opportunities to a

diverse student body, integration of theoretical and applied approaches to public

management, and preparation of students as managers and leaders in public service

(2008, 74-75). Escobar's (2008, 75) alumni recommendations related to knowledge,

skills, and abilities were: introduce the class on applied research project conceptual

framework and methodology earlier in the program, offer grant-writing classes, and provide courses to learn skills in oral communication (e.g., public speaking).

The findings of Escobar's alumni stakeholder survey should assist in educational program improvement, as Escobar had envisioned (2008, 2). Another tool used for educational program improvement is employer stakeholder surveys, discussed in the following section.

### *Employer Stakeholder*

Hermes (2002, 6) argues, "…universities and their component academic programs are attempting to learn about themselves from students, alumni, faculty, and external stakeholders, including employers…to document the results of their education efforts." Higher education institutions are interested in employers' perceptions and opinions of the graduates from their educational programs. One way of gathering this information is surveying employers.

Employers hire graduates based on their organization's needs. According to Hermes (2002, 16), the employer "needs trained staff, and is willing to pay for them."[10] Outside forces (the economy, mandated regulations, the political environment, and customer services) influence the employers' expectations and requirements from the workforce. "One reason for the importance of regularly gathering the input of employers [about educational] programs is that the business environment changes faster than curricula at colleges and universities" (Hermes 2002, 16-17). Newcomer and Allen agree. "The socio-political-economic environment changes rapidly, and appropriate education needs to be responsive" (2008, 1).

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[9] For detailed information, see Table 6.1 of Escobar's 2008 applied research project (73-74).
[10] See Reavill 1997, as cited by Hermes 2002.

Assessment tools or instruments of student-learning outcomes include standardized tests, performance assessments, alumni surveys, student self-reported data, and employer surveys (Apostolou 1999, 189,194). Educational institutions often use surveys to gather information about student learning outcomes, program curriculum, and educational programs (Newcomer and Allen 2008, 4). In the field of public administration, Aristigueta and Gomes (2006, 13) posit that the purposes of external employer surveys are to determine the level of importance of skills and coursework from the practitioners' perspective and to determine the level of importance placed by external parties on the effectiveness of the educational programs. In other words, researchers use employer surveys to find out what employers believe students should know.

*What Employers Believe Students Should Know*

Hermes (2002, 22) asked, "What do employers value?" Hermes conducted a study to find out what employers value or believe students should know in the field of public administration. Hermes' 2002 study falls under the category of the value-added approach to outcomes as developed by Jennings (1989, 442), with the question to assess student-learning outcomes of an MPA education, "Did the graduates have an appropriate level of knowledge, values, and skills, and [can] they…apply them ethically and effectively?

Although Newcomer and Allen's (2008, 1) focus was to add value in the public's interest, they recognized the value of the MPA education to both students and employers by phrasing the questions in a similar way as Hermes (2002) and Jennings (1989): "What is the value added from public administration and public policy education:

to the students? [to] their employers? to organizations? to public service? To the strength of governance?

Hermes conducted a study on government employer assessment of the Texas State MPA program in 2002 using the methodology of structured employer interviews with selected local area employers (2002, 50). The Texas State University NASPAA self-study Report (2002, 34-35) reflects on Hermes' findings: "He discovered that employers value the [Texas State] MPA [c]ore curriculum, [and] he found that the mission is consistent with employer expectations."

Specifically, Hermes analyzed the ranking of the knowledge and skill areas into most important, least important, and residual middle ground, and those interviewed valued the Texas State core curriculum areas in the order shown on Table 2.1 (2002, 57):

**Table 2.1: Ranking of Texas State MPA Core Curriculum in Order of Importance**

| Ranking | Texas State Core Curriculum Subject |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Decision-making and problem-solving |
| 2 | Human resources |
| 3 | Program implementation and evaluation |
| 4 | Organization and management concepts |
| 5 | Budgeting and financial processes |
| 6 | Policy formulation |
| 7 | Political institutions and processes |
| 8 | Social institutions and processes |
| 9 | Computer literacy |
| 10 | Economic institutions and processes |
| 11 | Legal institutions and processes |

Hermes stated that the interviewees emphasized the importance of decision-making and problem solving, and human resources with emphatic comments (2002, 57-58).

In addition, the area in the Texas State mission statement that consistently received the highest value was ethics (2002, 60). Also highly valued were communication

skills such as presentation and speaking, writing, and listening (2002, 61). Employers in

Hermes' study also recommended skills and abilities such as: leadership skills, awareness

of diversity, and media relations (2002, 63).

*Career-development approach*

Parallel to the employers' assessment of MPA graduates is Jennings' career-

development approach to MPA student learning outcomes, with its corresponding

questions that apply to students, alumni, and employers (1989. 442): "Do the skills and

knowledge they acquire [in the MPA program] match the demands of practice? How does

the program help the graduates to get positions and advancement? How do their careers

compare to those of nonrecipients [of MPA degrees]?

Sinclair (2005) and Lee (2006) conducted studies on the employer perceptions

of city managers from small cities in Texas and of Texas state agency executive directors

of the value of the NASPAA accreditation standards curriculum components. Chapter 4:

*What Employers Believe Students Should Know* covers the findings of these studies

conducted at Texas State University.

**Reputational Surveys**

Reputational surveys seek the perceptions and opinions of employers, key

stakeholders in MPA programs. A reputational survey is another assessment method used

to evaluate the quality of the MPA programs (Jennings 1989, 440).[11]

Texas State University-San Marcos has conducted reputational surveys of the

MPA program using employer interviews and surveys. The dual purposes of the surveys

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[11] Three other assessment methods are (1) compliance with standards established by NASPAA, (2) placement of graduates in the Presidential Management Intern program, and (3) research productivity (Jennings 1989, 440). Almaguel (1997), Gute (1999), and Ilo (2005) conducted research productivity studies at Texas State University.

are continuous improvement of the educational program and the re-accreditation of the

MPA program through NASPAA's self-study. Table 2.2 documents the reputational

surveys conducted by Hermes (2002) and this applied research project, which is still in

progress.

**Table 2.2: Texas State University Reputational Surveys (2002 – 2009)**

| Year | Author's Name | Title of Applied Research Project | Instrument Type | Key Stakeholder |
|------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 2002 | Hermes, Bruce | Government employer assessment of the SWT MPA | Interviews | Employers |
| 2009 | Moore, Rosalinda T. | Employers' assessment of Texas State University MPA program[12] | Survey | Employers |

*Limitations of Reputational Surveys*

There are some limitations to using employer reputational surveys. The results

of reputational surveys are subjective because they rely on perceptions and opinions of

stakeholders. In the employer research conducted by Hermes, he found that employers

"give unrealistically high marks to the institution and its graduates" (2002, 26).

According to Hermes' source,[13] "Banta speculated that the graduate employees only gave

the researchers permission and contact information about their supervisors when they felt

confident that the employer was 'the type of person who will say positive things about

them'. Or, she concedes, the high ratings could reflect reality."

*Advantages of Reputational Surveys*

In spite of the limitations, the advantages of reputational surveys are also

important. Hermes (2002, 30) asserts that no one else can respond for the expectations of

employers; therefore, the "researchers must continue to gather assessment information

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[12] This Applied Research Project is in progress.
[13] See Banta 1993, 6, as cited by Hermes 2002, 26.

directly from employers." "Employer ratings also have the advantage of higher credibility to many constituencies" because they are external stakeholders of the product of higher education (Hermes 2002, 16).[14] Hermes (2002, 16) believes that "because employers are well recognized as valid stakeholders in higher education, there is considerable support for the gathering of feedback about higher education from employers."

*Assessment Methods*

According to Blake and Laubsch (2005, 43), there are four types of evaluations or assessment methods: formative, summative, quantitative, and qualitative evaluations. Each type of evaluation addresses a different question about student learning.

1   Formative evaluation: What we should be doing and learning?

2   Summative evaluation: What was or was not taught and learned?

3   Quantitative evaluation: What is the statistical measurement of efficacy and efficiency?

4   Qualitative evaluation: What are the perceptions of and recommendations from stakeholders?

The qualitative evaluation takes into account perceptions of and recommendations from stakeholders. This mirrors the student, alumni, and employer assessments of educational programs.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature review provided direction and support for the research purpose. An employer assessment of the graduates of the Texas State MPA program is needed to ascertain what employers believe that MPA graduates should know, and to find out how the MPA graduates are perceived by their employers.

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[14] See Hoey and Gardner 1999, 48 cited by Hermes 2002, 16.

The literature reinforces the need to have continuous improvement of the MPA programs using assessment of student learning outcomes from internal and external constituencies of higher education. The research reviewed student learning outcome assessments, assessment methods, and alumni and employer surveys.

Hewitt, Marshall, and Badger (2006, 126) emphasize the importance of the preparation of graduate students using core courses of broad knowledge and skills in public administration to meet the changing environment, market demand and constituencies of MPA graduate education.

> *The dynamic environment of public administration education (MPA, MPP, and MPAF degrees)[15] requires constant monitoring, assessment, and reflection of not only the established core curriculum[16]...but also the emerging and/or transitioning specialty tracks.*

Graduate educational programs developed assessment criteria as politicians and the public began to ask for accountability of all educational programs. The graduate education for public affairs and administration is no exception to these accountability mandates. Academics in master of public administration programs took the assessment initiative in the 1980s (Castleberry 2006).

It takes extra time and effort to develop and report student-learning outcomes, and educational administrators add these responsibilities to already heavy workloads. However, state legislative bodies, accrediting bodies, funding sources, and high-level management in educational institutions mandate assessment. Other factors mandating assessment are (Aristigueta and Gomes 2006, 5):

1. *Higher education institutions competing with each other for students*

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[15] MPA, MPP, and MPAF are acronyms for Master of Public Administration, Master of Public Policy, and Master of Public Affairs, respectively.
[16] See Cleary 1990; Roeder and Whitaker 1993; Breaux et al 2003.

2.  *Foreign countries producing well-prepared students as the job market becomes more competitive and specialized*

3.  *Employers requiring students to have skills and experience when entering the job market*

A multitude of student learning outcome assessment criteria has arisen from different standard-setting bodies, accrediting bodies, and other non-profit or governmental organizations. More important perhaps is that accrediting bodies are mandating student learning outcomes criteria and assessment. The selection of the outcome assessments take time and effort and determine the best fit for the institution developing the criteria: mission, goals and objectives, student learning outcomes, and assessment methods (Aristigueta and Gomes 2006. 5). The following chapter describes the institutional setting for the master of public administration at Texas State University-San Marcos.

## Chapter 3   TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY MPA PROGRAM

> *The MPA program's mission is to prepare students for careers as managers and leaders in the public service.*
> Texas State University MPA Program Mission 2009

> *The primary objective of a master of public administration (MPA) education is to accommodate the professional needs of public administrators at various levels.*
> Holzer and Lin 2007, 345

### Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the institutional setting in which the Texas State University MPA program is administered. Included in this chapter are the mission of the MPA program, the student learning outcomes, and the MPA program accreditation standards through the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). Other areas included are an historical perspective of NASPAA curriculum standards, limitations of the standards, and tools used by Texas State University and other universities to assess mission and curriculum standards.

### Texas State University MPA Program Mission Statement - 2009

The primary objective of the master of public administration program at Texas State University-San Marcos is "to prepare students for careers as managers and leaders" in the performance of public service. In addition, the mission statement elaborates on how the MPA program achieves its global mission[17].

> *Students are prepared for public service leadership and management through course work, professional development opportunities, and applied research projects.*
>
> *The Program is distinguished by emphasizing the central role of ethics in public service; outstanding student research, reinforcing the use of technology in management; providing professional and educational opportunities to a diverse*

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[17] Please see http://www.polisci.txstate.edu/degrees-programs/graduate/MPA/program-mission.html

*student body; delivering classes at convenient times and locations; offering a variety of career support areas; enabling rich and frequent contacts between students and faculty; providing students and alumni with professional networking opportunities; focusing on continuing professional development; emphasizing management in political institutions and processes; and integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public management.*

The program also specifies an accompanying set of objectives.

*Students will be prepared for careers as managers and leaders in public service if they are able to meet the following objectives (student learning outcomes).*

The student learning outcomes or objectives are specified as follows:

1. *Students can demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of the NASPAA Curriculum Components*

2. *Students can demonstrate ability to communicate effectively in writing.*

3. *Students can demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively orally.*

4. *Students can demonstrate the ability to see patterns and classify information, concepts, and theories in public policy and administration.*

5. *Students can demonstrate the ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and management.*

**Compliance with NASPAA Standards**

The MPA program follows a common method of assessment by complying with standards established by the accrediting institution (NASPAA). This research project uses NASPAA criteria as one of the methods of assessment of the MPA program of Texas State University. This method may use direct or indirect tools to assess student-learning outcomes. According to Castleberry (2006, 24), there are two major outcomes assessment

classifications addressed by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). "These methods differ in the type of evidence used to demonstrate the desired learning outcomes."

The direct tools or measures of student learning outcomes include research assistant ratings, course papers and exam ratings, analytical paper ratings, assessment of presentations in the field, and internship supervisor evaluations (Aristigueta and Gomes 2006, 15). Castleberry (2006, 24) stipulates direct methods of assessment "include traditional 'embedded' mechanisms used to gauge the competence of students such as capstone projects, exam scores, third-party testing (e.g., licensure)…" These mechanisms provide "direct evidence of student learning outcomes."

The indirect tools of assessment of student learning outcomes or performance include surveys of students, alumni, and employers (Aristigueta and Gomes 2006, 15). This study uses the indirect tool of employer assessment survey to determine the reputation of the MPA program graduates and how they demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Castleberry (2006, 44) used the MPA student exit survey completed after the oral exam on the applied research project. Castleberry states, "Because the survey is a form of self-evaluation and does not involve the demonstration of student knowledge or skills in a measurable fashion, the student exit survey is an *indirect* method of measuring learning outcomes." The employer assessment survey is also an evaluation based on perceptions and opinions, and not a direct measure providing exam scores or ratings on knowledge.

*Historical Perspective- NASPAA*

The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) was first officially recognized as an accrediting organization for public affairs and masters degree programs in 1986 (NASPAA Milestones 2008). Their work was an important step in making outcome assessment one of the tools used to improve public affairs and administration graduate education. According to Baldwin (1988, 876), "a substantial element of the public administration academic and practitioner community saw that as a significant step to consolidate and legitimate the field and to enhance the quality of public administration education." Baldwin conducted a study to find out "whether NASPAA standards enhance the effectiveness of MPA programs." In the comparison of the accredited and nonaccredited MPA programs, Baldwin (1988, 876, 878) found that the accredited NASPAA programs are perceived by MPA program directors to be significantly more effective (11 percent more effective) than the nonaccredited programs.

NASPAA's membership is comprised of 264 higher education institutions offering undergraduate and graduate programs in public affairs and administration. NASPAA accredited 164 programs at 156 universities representing 62 percent of the NASPAA member institutions. (NASPAA Accredited 2008, 1).

*NASPAA Criteria for Mission Statements and Curriculum*

**NASPAA Standards for Mission Statement and Assessment**

NASPAA accreditation standards (2008, 8) for professional masters' degree programs in public affairs, policy, and administration requires the programs to:

(1) State the mission (Standard 2.1),

(2) Assess its objectives (Standard 2.2), and

(3) Revise programs, objectives, strategies, and operations based on the

assessment (Standard 2.3).

The MPA programs must comply with the following standards.

**Standard 2.1 Program Mission Statement**
*State clearly its educational philosophy and mission and have an orderly process for developing appropriate strategies and objectives consistent with its mission, resources, and constituencies.*

**Standard 2.2 Assessment**
*Assess its students' performance and the accomplishment of its objectives. Assessment procedures and measures may take any form appropriate to the program and its circumstances, but each program shall develop and use procedures for determining how well it carries out its mission.*

**Standard 2.3 Guiding Performance**
*Use information about its performance in directing and revising program objectives, strategies, and operations.*

Standard 2.1 of the program mission stipulates the program develop strategies

consistent with its mission, resources, and constituencies. The employers of MPA

graduates are constituencies of the educational program, and this study addresses these

stakeholders in the employer survey. The survey uses questions based on the mission

statement to request feedback from the employers. Texas State addresses standard 2.2 on

assessment through the development and use of exams, capstone projects, and surveys to

determine how well it carries out its mission. Based on the results of these assessment

procedures, Texas State complies with standard 2.3 by revising the MPA program as

needed to produce continued improvement.

One interpretation of the assessment requirements is that the assessment

"requires demonstrated performance, and it addresses multiple program outcomes" in

order to meet the purpose of NASPAA standards "to promote and maintain educational quality" (Aristigueta and Gomes 2006, 1; NASPAA 2008). Using the University of Delaware MPA program mission and goals, Aristigueta and Gomes (2006, 3, 10) developed a framework for the assessment of activities and intermediate outcomes for each of the eight goals, to reach the end outcomes and to answer the following questions:

1. *How do public affairs, public policy, or public administration program administrators know if they are accomplishing their mission?*

2. *How is performance measured?*

3. *How do we know if students are learning?*

Aristigueta and Gomes (2006, 3) take a multiple outcomes assessment approach and employ multiple assessment techniques. By assessing the activities, they take into consideration Black and Wiliam's assessment approach of 1998 to include "all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning." They also address Jennings' 1989 assessment focusing on knowledge, skills, and values of the MPA graduates and their effectiveness in the workplace.

## NASPAA Curriculum Standards

NASPAA declares, "The primary concern of these standards is to achieve high quality professional education for persons entering…public service" (NASPAA, 1988). The NASPAA (2008, 9-10) curriculum standards state:

*4.1 Purpose of Curriculum. The purpose of the curriculum shall be to prepare students for professional leadership in public service.*

*4.2 Curriculum Components and General Competencies. The common and additional curriculum components shall develop in students general competencies that are consistent with the program mission. **The curriculum***

***components are designed to produce professionals capable of intelligent, creative analysis and communication, and action in public service.*** *Courses taken to fulfill the common curriculum components shall be primarily for graduate students. Both the common and the additional curriculum components need to be assessed as to their quality and consistency with the stated mission of the program. [emphasis added]*

*4.21 <u>Common Curriculum Components</u>. The common curriculum components shall enhance the student's values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively.*

*In the Management of Public Service Organizations, the components of which include:*
*- Human resources*
*- Budgeting and financial processes*
*- Information management, technology applications, and policy*

*In the Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis, the components of which include:*
*- Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation*
*- Decision-making and problem-solving*

*With an Understanding of the Public Policy and Organizational Environment, the components of which include:*
*- Political and legal institutions and processes*
*- Economic and social institutions and processes*
*- Organization and management concepts and behavior*

In addition, NASPAA indicates that the common curriculum components of an educational program should enhance the student's values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively.

NASPAA curriculum standards are included in Texas State MPA program student- learning outcomes. The employer survey questions are linked to the NASPAA common curriculum components (standard 4.2).

***Modifications to NASPAA Standards on Program Mission and Outcomes Assessments***

NASPAA has modified its standards through the years. The organization changed the master degree standards in 1992 to focus on program mission and outcomes

assessments (NASPAA Milestones 2008). Under this change, NASPAA required the

linking of learning outcomes assessments to the strategic planning process and

assessments for accreditation procedures. The link to the strategic planning process and

mission statements is to ensure that the necessary resources and activities are taken into

consideration during or prior to the budget request preparation to meet the goals and

objectives of the organization.

### *Limitations of NASPAA Standards*

Jennings (1989, 440) points out the limitations of NASPAA standards for

knowledge and skills, "they are a set of minimum criteria [although a rigorous process],

and the focus is on inputs (organizational structure, adequate number of faculty, elements

of the curriculum, other services and resources for students, admission requirements).

There is no systematic effort to determine the quality of the graduates of a program—

what they actually learn while in the program, what skills they possess when they

graduate, or how much change they have undergone." In spite of these limitations,

institutions use these standards to assess their programs, the student learning, and their

continuing efforts to reach their established goals and objectives.

### *NASPAA Self-Study*

The formal process to demonstrate compliance with NASPAA standards is the

NASPAA self-study. Every seven years, graduate master programs renew the

accreditation from NASPAA using a NASPAA self-study (NASPAA Commission on

Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA)).

During the process of the NASPAA self-study of the University of Delaware,

Aristigueta and Gomes (2006, 13) used the following assessment tools: student exit

surveys, alumni surveys, focus groups of alumni, employer and internship supervisor surveys, and curriculum reviews. The main point in Aristigueta and Gomes' review of the MPA program of the University of Delaware for the NASPAA self-study was to align the survey questions to the stated goals in order to provide performance information (2006, 13, 15).

The Texas State University MPA program has used the above-mentioned assessment tools since 1993 for the NASPAA self-studies completed to assess the MPA program.[18] During the NASPAA self-study process, Texas State University used the following assessment tools: student exit surveys, alumni surveys, employer surveys and interviews, oral exams, course evaluations, annual faculty evaluations, review of internship records, Committee of Advisory Council program trends, and curriculum reviews (Texas State Self-Study 2002, 14-16).

Texas State University is conducting studies in preparation for the NASPAA self-study for re-accreditation of its MPA program for 2009. MPA program students prepared several applied research projects to assist in this endeavor. Although the NASPAA self-study is required every seven years, Texas State University conducts surveys on a continuous basis, including the exit surveys of new graduates every semester. Texas State University MPA graduates have conducted surveys, interviews, and content analysis as part of their applied research projects, which are the capstone projects of the MPA program. Table 3.1contains a list of the MPA graduates performing surveys and analysis of applied research projects since 1993, and the type of key stakeholder surveyed, if applicable.

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[18] See Almaguel 1997; Beck 1993; Castleberry 2006; Cavazos 2000; Escobar 2008; Garza 2001; Gute 1999; Hermes 2002; Ilo 2005; Lee 2006; Sinclair 2005.

**Table 3.1: Texas State University Surveys and Analysis of Applied Research Projects (1993 – 2009)**

| Year | Author's Name | Title of Applied Research Project | Instrument Type | Key Stakeholder |
|------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1993 | Beck, Terry | A content analysis of applied research projects completed 1987-1991 in the master of public administration program at Southwest Texas State University | Content analysis | Not applicable |
| 1997 | Almaguel, Ana Lidia | Research in public administration: A content analysis of applied research projects completed from 1992-1996 at Southwest Texas State University in the master of public administration program | Content analysis | Not applicable |
| 1999 | Gute, Mary | A comparison of masters level research projects in public administration and public affairs programs in central Texas | Comparative analysis of programs | Not applicable |
| 2000 | Cavazos, Cindy | Gauging alumni perceptions of the effectiveness of the masters of public administration program at Southwest Texas State University in meeting its mission | Survey | Alumni |
| 2001 | Garza, Ana Lisa | Developing a Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Program (COAP) Model for Southwest Texas State University | Survey | Four-year public institutions in the U.S. with a minimum student enrollment of 8,000 |
| 2002 | Hermes, Bruce | Government employer assessment of the SWT MPA | Interview | Employers |
| 2005 | Ilo, Saidat | Research in public administration: A content analysis of applied research projects completed from 1999-2005 at Texas State University in the master of public administration program | Content analysis | Not applicable |
| 2005 | Sinclair, Brad | What do Texas city managers value? An examination of NASPAA accreditation standards | Survey | Employers-city managers of Texas cities with less than 25,000 population |
| 2006 | Castleberry, Thomas E. | Student learning outcome assessment within the Texas State University MPA program | Surveys | ARP committee members and exit students |
| 2006 | Lee, Roy IV | Do NASPAA standards for accreditation matter? Perceptions of executive directors in the state of Texas | Survey | Executive directors of Texas state agencies |
| 2008 | Escobar, Margina | Gauging alumni perceptions of the effectiveness of the master of public administration (MPA) program at Texas State University–San Marcos in meeting its mission | Survey | Alumni |
| 2009 | White, Tiffany H. | Attitudes and opinions of active students of MPA program of Texas State University[19] | Survey | Active students |
| 2009 | Moore, Rosalinda T. | Employers' assessment of Texas State University MPA program[20] | Survey | Employers |

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[19] This applied research project is in progress.

[20] This applied research project is in progress.

**Chapter Summary**

      This chapter reviews the mission of the Texas State University MPA program, the student learning outcomes, and the MPA program accreditation through the NASPAA mission and curriculum standards. The next chapter reviews and compares the findings of MPA graduate student studies of city managers and executive directors in Texas and what these employers believe MPA students should know.

## Chapter 4   WHAT EMPLOYERS BELIEVE MPA STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW

> *Do the skills and knowledge they acquire [in the MPA*
> *program] match the demands of practice?*
> Jennings 1989, 442

**Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and compare the findings of Texas State employer assessment surveys and to assess what employers believe MPA graduate students should know. The Texas State MPA program curriculum standards require substantive knowledge areas following NASPAA curriculum standards. Two researchers surveyed the value of mandated NASPAA curriculum components from the perspective of Texas state and local government employers in order to learn how these employers rank this knowledge and other skill set areas.

**Career-development Approach**

Twenty years ago, Jennings (1989, 442) developed several approaches to assess student learning outcomes. One of those approaches, career-development approach, reflects the impact of student learning outcomes on students, alumni, and employers. Arguably, this approach is still applicable as substantiated by Newcomer and Allen (2008, 5) who maintain that most of the research on outcomes assessment for public service education in the last twenty years has used student learning outcomes[21]. The measurement of student learning outcomes normally uses student, alumni, and employer perceptions and opinions about the change education made in the students' knowledge, skills, and abilities (Newcomer and Allen 2008). The career-development approach to student learning outcomes questions are (Jennings 1989, 442):

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[21] See Aristigueta and Gomes, 2006; Boyle and Whitaker, 1998; Castleberry, 2006; Cleary, 1990; Jennings, 1989; Nishishiba et.al, 2005; Williams, 2002; and Yeager et.al, 2007.

*Do the skills and knowledge they acquire [in the MPA program] match the demands of practice?*

*How does the program help the graduates to get positions and advancement?*

*How do their careers compare to those of nonrecipients [of MPA degrees]?"*

Researchers from Texas State University MPA program explored the answer to the first question through alumni and employer surveys. The following section covers some of the findings of employer surveys.

**Texas State University Employer Surveys**

This section reviews and compares the findings of two employer surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 by Sinclair and Lee, two Texas State MPA graduate students. In their studies, Sinclair and Lee asked Texas city managers and state agency executive directors for their opinions and perceptions to determine what these employers believed MPA graduates should know.

*Texas City Managers' Expectations*

In 2005, Sinclair conducted an employer survey of the city managers of small Texas cities to obtain their opinions and perceptions of the value of the NASPAA accreditation standards curriculum components. The purpose was "to assess current city manager perceptions on what knowledge, skills, and abilities are most important in their role by using the common curriculum components for master's degree programs of NASPAA" (57). The cities selected for the survey had populations of less than 25,000 (Sinclair 2005, 54). Sinclair selected the cities from the roster of employed city managers out of the website of the Texas City Management Association. Sinclair received 81 responses from 171 email surveys, which represents a 47 percent response rate.

According to Babbie (2004, 261), "a response rate of 50 percent is adequate for analysis

and reporting."

Sinclair (2005, 69) found that the NASPAA curriculum standards;

administrative ethics; the skill set of writing, public speaking, and bargaining and

negotiating were all considered either very important or fairly important by the city

managers in their roles as public servants. (Please see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Most Important Components as Perceived by Texas City Managers (CM)
and Executive Directors (ED) by Category (*Lee 2006; Sinclair 2005*)**

| Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities | Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Sub-category | Mode (Note A) |
|---|---|---|
| **Management of Public Service Organizations** | Human Resources | very important |
| | Budgeting and Financial Processes | very important |
| | Policy | very important |
| | Information Management and Technology | fairly important |
| **Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis** | Policy and Program Formulation | very important |
| | Policy and Program Implementation and  Evaluation | very important |
| | Decision-making | very important |
| | Problem Solving | very important |
| **Understanding of the Public Policy and Organizational Environment** | Political and Legal Institutions and Processes | very important |
| | Organization and Management Concepts and  Behavior | very important |
| | Economic and Social Institutions and Processes | CM - fairly important ED - moderately important |
| **Administrative Ethics** | Ethical Dilemmas | very important |
| | Application of Ethics | very important |
| **Skill Set** | Writing | very important |
| | Public Speaking | very important |
| | Bargaining and Negotiating | very important |

Note A:    *Mode is the same for city managers and executive directors unless preceded by
CM or ED. Very important (5 points), fairly important (4 points), and
moderately important (3 points).*

Table 4.1 summarizes and compares the responses of the most important

components - knowledge, skills, and abilities by city managers and state agency

executive directors in Texas showing the mode. The mode is the most common response received from the respondents. City managers of Texas cities with a population under 25,000 consider the surveyed knowledge, skills, and abilities as very important except for information management and technology and economic and social institutions and processes, which received a mode of fairly important (Sinclair 2005). Executive directors of Texas state agencies consider the surveyed areas as very important except for information management and technology and economic and social institutions and processes, which received modes of fairly important and moderately important respectively (Lee 2006).

In the city managers' ranking of most important components, Sinclair "found that problem solving, budgeting and financial institutions, and processes, organization and management concepts and behavior, application of ethics, writing, and bargaining and negotiation were the most important…" (2005, 70). Table 4.2 summarizes the city managers' rankings of the importance of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

**Table 4.2: Texas City Managers Ranking in Order of Importance with Percentages of Most Important**

| Public Service Organizations (Sinclair 2005, 59) | | Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis (Sinclair 2005, 61) | | Public Policy and Organizational Environment (Sinclair 2005, 63) | | Administrative Ethics (Sinclair 2005, 65) | | Other Skill Set (Sinclair 2005, 66) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge | % | Knowledge | % | Knowledge | % | Ability | % | Skill | % |
| Budgeting and Financial Processes | 72 | Problem-solving | 42 | Organization and Management Concepts and Behavior | 65 | Application of Ethics Policy | 86 | Writing | 38 |
| Policy | 21 | Decision-making | 35 | Political and Legal Institutions and Processes | 32[22] | Ethical Dilemmas | 14 | Bargaining and Negotiating | 38 |
| Human Resources | 7 | Policy and Program Implementation and Evaluation | 20[23] | Economic and Social Institutions and Processes | 3 | | | Public Speaking | 24[24] |
| Information Management and Technology Applications | 0 | Policy and Program Formulation | 3 | | | | | | |
| **Total Percentages** | **100** | | **100** | | **100** | | **100** | | **100** |

### *Texas Executive Directors' Expectations*

In comparison, Roy Lee IV (2006, 4) conducted employer surveys of executive directors of Texas state agencies to determine the level of importance they "place upon their [MPA graduates'] knowledge, skills, and abilities for effective public management." Lee (2006, 45) selected the Texas executive directors for the survey from the Capitol Complex Directory list. Lee asserted, "Sixty-one agency Executive Directors were sent emails." Lee received 33 responses, which represents a 54 percent response rate. Babbie (2004, 261) believes that a 50 percent response-rate is considered adequate for analysis and reporting while 60 percent response-rate is considered good.

Like Sinclair, Lee (2006) found that the NASPAA curriculum standards for accreditation; administrative ethics; the skill set of writing, public speaking, bargaining

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[22] Percentage adjusted for rounding purposes.
[23] Percentage adjusted for rounding purposes.
[24] Percentage adjusted for rounding purposes.

and negotiating were perceived to be either very important or fairly important by the

Texas executive directors for effective public management as shown on Table 4.1. In the

executive directors' ranking of most important components (Table 4.3), Lee (2006, 58)

found that "knowledge of policy, the ability to make decisions, knowledge of political

and legal institutions and processes, the ability to apply ethics, managerial skills, and

public speaking skills are the most important to possess…" In addition, organization and

management concepts and behavior received a high rating of importance. Lee (2006, 61)

further believes that "[t]he results show that students in graduate programs should

concentrate in specific areas depending on whether they wish to gain employment in state

or local government."

**Table 4.3: Texas Executive Directors Ranking in Order of Importance with
              Percentages of Most Important**

| Public Service Organizations (Lee 2006, 48) | | Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis (Lee 2006, 50) | | Public Policy and Organizational Environment (Lee 2006, 52) | | Administrative Ethics (Lee 2006, 53) | | Other Skill Set (Lee 2006, 55) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge** | **%** | **Knowledge** | **%** | **Knowledge** | **%** | **Ability** | **%** | **Skill** | **%** |
| Policy | 53 | Decision-making | 50 | Political and Legal Institutions and Processes | 55 | Application of Ethics Policy | 87 | Public Speaking | 38 |
| Budgeting and Financial Processes | 28 | Problem-solving | 31 | Organization and Management Concepts and Behavior | 42 | Ethical Dilemmas | 13 | Writing | 31 |
| Human Resources | 16 | Policy and Program Implementation and Evaluation | 16 | Economic and Social Institutions and Processes | 3 | | | Bargaining and Negotiating | 31 |
| Information Management and Technology Applications | 3 | Policy and Program Formulation | 3 | | | | | | |
| **Total Percentages** | **100** | | **100** | | **100** | | **100** | | **100** |

On the other side of the spectrum, city managers and executive directors placed

very little importance on *information management and technology applications* under the

category of *management of public service organizations* (Lee 2006, 46; Sinclair 2005).

Lee and Sinclair speculate that the reasons for this are city size, staff size, state agency

mission, and agency size (Lee 2006, 47; Sinclair 2005). High-level managers such as city

managers and executive directors may be relying on skilled information technology

professionals to handle information systems technology responsibilities (Lee 2006, 47).

Interestingly, when the city managers and the executive directors ranked the

curriculum components, skills, and abilities in order of importance within the five major

categories, the results in perceptions of importance are markedly different. See Tables 4.2

and 4.3 for details. Lee (2006, 61) speculates the discrepancies result from "perceived

importance of the sub-categories of budgeting and financial processes, policy,

organization and management concepts and behavior, public speaking, and bargaining

and negotiating.". Other large discrepancies between the perceptions of city managers

and executive directors exist in the importance placed by executive directors on decision-

making, political, and legal institutions and processes. These discrepancies may be the

result of the different roles and responsibilities of the positions of city managers and

executive directors. Please see Table 4.4 for a summary of the highest-ranking

knowledge, skills, and abilities according to city managers of small Texas cities and

executive directors of Texas state agencies.

**Chapter Summary**

Overall, city managers of Texas cities of less than 25,000 in population consider

the surveyed knowledge, skills, and abilities as very important except for information

management and technology and economic and social institutions and processes, which

received a mode of fairly important. The Texas executive directors consider the surveyed

knowledge, skills, and abilities as very important except for information management and

technology and economic and social institutions and processes, which received a mode of

fairly important and moderately important respectively. Table 4.4 depicts the highest-

ranking sub-categories of knowledge, skills, and abilities according to Texas city

managers and executive directors (Lee 2006, and Sinclair 2005).

**Table 4.4: Texas City Managers and Executive Directors Highest Ranking of Sub-categories of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

| Texas City Managers (Sinclair 2005) | | Texas Executive Directors (Lee 2006) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Sub-category** | **Percent Ranking** | **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Sub-category** | **Percent Ranking** |
| Application of Ethics Policy | 86% | Application of Ethics Policy | 87% |
| Budgeting and Financial Processes | 72% | Political and Legal Institutions and Processes | 55% |
| Organization and Management Concepts and Behavior | 65% | Policy | 53% |
| Problem Solving | 42% | Decision Making | 50% |
| Bargaining and Negotiating | 38% | Organization and Management Concepts and Behavior | 42% |
| Writing | 38% | Public Speaking | 38% |

*Table 4.1: Most Important Components as Perceived by Texas City Managers*

*(CM) and Executive Directors (ED) by Category (Lee 2006; Sinclair 2005)* reflects the

complete picture of all the components of MPA education that are perceived as very

important, fairly important, and moderately important. The top priorities of what city

managers of small Texas cities and executive directors of the state of Texas perceive that

MPA graduates should know are reflected in Table 4.4.

The following chapter describes the four categories included in the reputational

survey of employer assessment of Texas State University to obtain the perceptions and

opinions of supervisors of MPA graduates. The four categories relate to the Texas State

MPA program mission statement, requisite knowledge demonstrated per NASPAA

standards, the Texas State MPA program student learning outcomes, and other employer

expectations (skill sets) of the MPA graduates of Texas State.

## Chapter 5   REPUTATIONAL SURVEY OF MPA PROGRAM AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*Understanding what consumers of educational outcomes desire is important to establishing desired outcomes and producing requisite inputs.*
Apostolou (1999, 193)

### Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to develop the conceptual framework of the reputational employer assessment survey of the Texas State University MPA program graduates. The conceptual framework consists of four sections: Texas State MPA program mission statement; NASPAA curriculum components of the MPA program regarding knowledge, skills, and abilities; Texas State MPA program student learning outcomes; and other skill sets or employer expectations.

The following question encompasses the focus of the employer assessment: "Do employers see the Texas State MPA graduates in ways that are consistent with the Texas State MPA program mission; requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities; and student learning outcomes?"

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the employer assessment uses descriptive categories. The categories are in accordance with the Texas State MPA program mission and student learning outcomes, the NASPAA curriculum standards for MPA programs. The categories have been augmented with other skill sets found in the literature review or other recommendations and results of studies of employer surveys.

The conceptual framework table is linked to the literature review. The conceptual framework serves as a guide or "map" (Shields and Tajalli 2005, 2); "[t]hese conceptual frameworks act like a map that gives coherence to the enterprise."

*Purpose of Descriptive Conceptual Framework*

The research purpose is to describe the employers' perceptions and opinions of the graduates of the master of public administration (MPA) program from Texas State University-San Marcos. This employer assessment is a partial requirement for the MPA program at Texas State for the re-accreditation review by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), the accrediting body of MPA programs.

This section provides a description of the organization and source of the categories used for the employer assessment survey. Employer perception is important because employers are key stakeholders of education. The employers rely on well-trained, knowledgeable, and skillful employees to succeed. The graduates seek employment with employers that have job positions that will be professionally and personally satisfying in terms of status, responsibility, challenge, financial success, and security. The employers in public service, whether elected or appointed, have the hire-and-fire authority.

*Descriptive Categories of Employer Assessment Survey*

The four high level descriptive categories for employers to assess the knowledge and skills of the Texas State MPA graduates are summarized in the following questions.

- Does the behavior of alumni reflect the mission?
- Do alumni have requisite knowledge?
- Do alumni exhibit behavior consistent with student learning outcomes?
- Do alumni have other requisite skill sets?

*Mission Statement*

A graduate program defines itself by adopting a mission statement. Administrators develop a mission statement as part of the strategic planning process. Mission statements serve as a basis or criteria for assessment. The question for the employer assessment is as follows: "Is the program achieving its mission?" Alternatively, "Does the behavior of alumni reflect the mission?"

The development of the mission, vision, strategies, and objectives determines the resources needed (inputs) and the desired outcomes. Administrators assess the accomplishments of the mission to determine needed changes to the mission, the curriculum, the program, or even the continuance of the program. According to Aristigueta and Gomes (2006, 13), the assessment of outcomes requires three components: mission and goals, a way to assess the goals, and a method to test the assessment tools or to measure outcomes. Administrators align the outcomes to the mission and goals in order to assess how the institution is meeting its mission.

The mission statement categories come from the outcome-based areas of the Texas State MPA program mission statement (2009). The categories selected to obtain assessment from employers of the Texas State MPA graduates are:

1. Prepare students for careers as managers.

2. Prepare students for careers as leaders.

3. Instill high ethics in public service.

4. Produce outstanding student research.

5. Reinforce the use of technology in management.

6. Integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management.

7.  Instill a commitment to public service.

*NASPAA Curriculum Components – Requisite Knowledge*

No assessment of outcomes of an educational program is worthwhile unless it

assesses the quality of the program. The quality of the program may be assessed through

the analysis of the knowledge, skills, and abilities imparted by the program. Holzer and

Lin (2007, 345) revisited the professional competencies of public affairs and

administration graduates by reviewing the development of the MPA curriculum design

since its inception in the United States in the 1920s.

Holzer and Lin (2007, 347) agree with the premise that MPA curriculum

components must continuously improve, change, and develop in light of the changing

expectations and demands on MPA graduates entering public service.

> *The development of the MPA curriculum reflects the evolution*
> *of MPA education in the United States. Because the MPA's*
> *curricular components are designed to produce professionals*
> *capable of intelligent analysis, effective communication, and*
> *creative action in public service—consistent with the MPA*
> *program mission—it is of critical importance to assess*
> *curricular quality and to find ways to improve it.*

NASPAA declared, "The primary concern of these standards is to achieve high

quality professional education for persons entering public service" (NASPAA, 1988).[25]

The NASPAA 2008 curriculum standards state that the purpose of the curriculum is to

prepare students for professional leadership in public service. Under NASPAA's

curriculum components and competencies, NASPAA asserts that the curriculum

components help "to produce professionals capable of intelligent, creative analysis and

communication, and action in public service." In order to prepare students for leadership

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[25] See NASPAA curriculum standards in Chapter 3.

in public service, NASPAA standards require that the curriculum components "enhance

the student's values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively."

The NASPAA standards of knowledge in the conceptual framework fall under

three major categories and eight sub-categories.

a. **Management of public service organizations**

1. Human resources

2. Budgeting and financial processes

3. Information, including computer literacy and applications

b. **Application of quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis**

4. Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation

5. Decision-making and problem-solving

c. **Understanding of public policy and organizational environment**

6. Political and legal institutions and processes

7. Economic and social institutions and processes

8. Organization and management concepts and behavior

The Texas State MPA program includes NASPAA's eight curriculum

components of competencies using ten core curriculum courses and three career-support

area courses selected from ten available specialty areas (Texas State MPA program

2008).

*Student Learning Outcomes*

The categories used for the student learning outcomes of demonstrated

knowledge and skills support the five student learning outcomes of the Texas State MPA

program. The MPA program establishes student-learning outcomes to provide a way to

assess the quality of the program and to measure and evaluate what graduates learn. The

five stated student-learning outcomes of the Texas State MPA program are (Texas State

MPA 2009 Mission and Student Learning Outcomes):

> *Students will be prepared for careers as managers and leaders in public service if they are able to meet the following objectives (student learning outcomes).*
>
> *Student Learning Outcomes:*
>
> 1. *Students can demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of the NASPAA Curriculum Components* [to understand the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce.]
>
> 2. *Students can demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in writing.*
>
> 3. *Students can demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively orally.*
>
> 4. *Students can demonstrate the ability to see patterns and classify information, concepts, and theories in public policy and administration.*
>
> 5. *Students can demonstrate the ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and management.*

Assessment of the student learning outcomes is a credible way to determine

whether the MPA program is successful in educating its students to become managers

and leaders in public administration.

*Other Requisite Skill Sets*

NASPAA recognizes that MPA graduates must possess other requisite skill sets.

Therefore, the need arises to assess the expectations of the employers of the students who

graduate from the program. The NASPAA standards look at such expectations (Holzer

and Lin 2007, 348):

> *…Public administration programs should be designed to
> provide graduates with professional public management
> competencies in four basic and broad elements: (1) knowledge,
> (2) skills, (3) values, and (4) behaviors.*

The categories of other skill sets for assessment in the employer survey are:[26]

1. Interpersonal skills[27]

2. Ability to think through ethical dilemmas

3. Project management skills[28]

4. Program assessment skills[29]

5. Bargaining and negotiating skills

6. Quantitative analysis skills[30]

This section provides additional information on other knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers believe MPA graduates should possess. Karakaya and Karakaya (1996, 14) conducted an employer study to assess employer needs regarding their employees' educational attributes. The researchers asked employers to rate 13 capabilities that business graduates should possess. The employers responded that the top four abilities that the MPA graduates should possess are (listed in priority order): [31]

1. *Research skills*
2. *Interpersonal skills*
3. *Oral and written communication skills*
4. *Knowledge of subject area*

---

[26] Please see Texas State Self-Study Report 2002, Hermes 2002, Holzer and Lin 2007, Karakaya and Karakaya 1996, Sinclair 2005, and Lee 2006.
[27] See Manns and Waugh 1989.
[28] See Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report 2002, 33-34.
[29] See Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report 2002, 33-34.
[30] See Texas State NASPAA Self Study Report 2002, 33-34.
[31] See also Apostolou 1999, 193.

In a more recent study, Holzer and Lin (2007, 360-361) suggested adding courses to future MPA curriculum based on employers' perspectives. Holzer and Lin found that employers desired the following knowledge, skills, and abilities:

1.  Communication skills at interpersonal, inter-agency, and intra-agency levels

2.  Theory and applications of information systems and management

3.  Government contracting, privatization, and public-private partnerships

4.  International and comparative public administration knowledge

### *Conceptual Framework Linked to Literature Review*

The conceptual framework linked to the scholarly literature review appears in Table 5.1. The conceptual framework contains the categories and sub-categories selected for employer assessment. It includes the descriptive categories of the mission statement outcomes, the NASPAA curriculum standards, the five student learning outcomes, and other skill sets employers expect for both curriculum and non-curriculum areas. The conceptual framework section links the descriptive categories to the literature review and provides the theoretical structure and the "directive function" for this study (Shields 1998, 210).

Based on the perceptions and opinions of employer-supervisors, the employer assessment survey asks the question: "What knowledge and skills do the Texas State MPA program graduates demonstrate at their jobs after completion of the program?"

*Table 5.1: Conceptual Framework Linked to Literature Review*

| Descriptive Categories and Subcategories | Literature Sources |
|---|---|
| **Mission Statement**<br>Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:<br>1. Ability to be a manager<br>2. Ability to be a leader<br>3. High ethics in public service<br>4. Ability to do research<br>5. Ability to use technology in management<br>6. Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management<br>7. Commitment to public service | Hermes 2002<br>Texas State MPA Program Mission 2009<br>Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report 2002 |
| **NASPAA Curriculum Components**<br>Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate knowledge of:<br>**a. Management of Public Service Organizations**<br>1. Human resource management<br>2. Budgeting and financial processes<br>3. Information systems, including computer literacy and applications<br>**b. Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis**<br>4. Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation<br>5. Decision-making and problem-solving<br>**c. Understanding of Public Policy and Organizational Environment**<br>6. Political and legal institutions and processes<br>7. Economic and social institutions and processes<br>8. Applicable organization and management concepts and behavior | Apostolou 1993 and 1999<br>Aristigueta and Gomes 2006<br>Banta 1993<br>Blake and Laubsch 2005<br>Cavazos 2000<br>Castleberry 2006<br>Escobar 2008<br>Hermes 2002<br>Hewitt, Marshall and Badger 2006<br>Jennings 1989<br>Lee 2006<br>NASPAA Standards 2008<br>Newcomer and Allen 2008<br>NIST 2008<br>NIST, Baldrige 2008<br>Sinclair 2005<br>Texas State MPA Program<br>Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report 2002 |
| **Student Learning Outcomes**<br>Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:<br>1. Knowledge and comprehension of the NASPAA curriculum components. [Ability to understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce]<br>2. Ability to communicate effectively in writing<br>3. Ability to communicate effectively orally<br>4. Ability to see patterns and classify information, concepts, and theories in public policy and administration<br>5. Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and management | Apostolou 1993 and 1999<br>Astin 1993<br>Castleberry 2006<br>Escobar 2008<br>Garza 2001<br>Hermes 2002<br>Jennings 1989<br>NASPAA Standards 2008<br>Newcomer and Allen 2008<br>Texas State MPA Student Learning Outcomes 2009 |
| **Other Requisite Skill Sets**<br>Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:<br>1. Program assessment skills<br>2. Quantitative analysis skills<br>3. Project management skills<br>4. Interpersonal skills with superiors, subordinates, and peers<br>5. Bargaining and negotiating skills<br>6. Ability to think through ethical dilemmas | Hermes 2002<br>Holzer and Lin 2007<br>Karakaya and Karakaya 1996<br>Manns and Waugh 1989<br>Texas State NASPAA Self-Study Report 2002 |

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter developed the conceptual framework of the reputational employer assessment survey of Texas State University MPA program graduates by using four distinct categories: Texas State MPA program mission statement, NASPAA curriculum standards, Texas State MPA program student learning outcomes, and other requisite skill sets. Each of these categories contained sub-categories of knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers expect from MPA graduates. In the next chapter, the methodology of the employer assessment survey is discussed.

**Chapter 6   EMPLOYER ASSESSMENT SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

**Chapter Purpose**

This section provides information on the methodology or techniques used to gather perceptions and opinions from employers; the strengths, and weaknesses of the techniques selected; the population and sampling selection; and the statistics used to gather the information and organize the results of the study. The chapter also includes the operationalization of the conceptual framework.

*Employer Assessment of Texas State University MPA Program Graduates.*

Texas State University conducted the previous NASPAA self-study in 2002. Hermes conducted structured employer interviews to assess the Texas State MPA program as documented in his 2002 applied research project. The next Texas State self-study is due this year, 2009 (every seven years per NASPAA re-accreditation process). For this study, the Texas State University Institutional Research department created an employer assessment survey. The director of the MPA program, Patricia M. Shields, Ph.D., distributed the survey link using email communication.

**Research Technique – Methodology**

This study uses two techniques to gather the perceptions and opinions of employers of Texas State MPA program graduates - employer assessment survey and content analysis with categorization of the responses to the open-ended questions and statements on the employer survey. According to Shields (1998, 214), the employer assessment survey research is an "attitudinal survey research" because this survey is seeking the attitudes and opinions of respondents — employers of Texas State MPA

program graduates. The content analysis only applies to the responses of the open-ended

questions and statements that are part of the employer assessment survey.

*Employer Surveys*

Jennings (1989, 442-443) states that surveys may be used to gather perceptions

of alumni and their employers to determine the extent to which an MPA program

provides knowledge and skills required in the workplace. Babbie (2004, 243 and 277)

believes that surveys are appropriate for descriptive research purposes using large

populations. Although the population sample of employers of Texas State MPA graduates

is not considered large (about 150 employers for alumni graduating in the last seven

years), the mode of observation provided by online surveys conducted over the Internet is

easy to develop and administer with the appropriate Internet resources (Babbie 2004,

242-243). This mode of observation is also inexpensive compared to other modes of

observation such as interviews or focus groups. According to Babbie (2004, 243),

surveys are excellent vehicles for measuring (or gathering) attitudes.

The Texas State MPA program employer survey instrument contains questions

or statements in the same four descriptive categories: mission statement; knowledge,

skills, and abilities per NASPAA standards; student learning outcomes; and other skill

sets as reflected in the conceptual framework table presented in Chapter 5. Surveys

provide more flexibility in the design of the questionnaire (Babbie 2004, 245). As such,

the surveys can include open- or closed-ended questions, statements for agreement or

disagreement, and ask for ratings of important topics (Babbie 2004. 245).

*Strengths and Weaknesses of Survey Research*

Surveys are a simple and inexpensive assessment technique used in research. Researchers use surveys to gather information, to make further recommendations, or to advance the field of research in a particular area. However, there are limitations to using surveys for gathering information on attitudes and opinions. Therefore, it is advisable to use other assessment techniques in conjunction with surveys to make recommendations or decisions.

The advantages of surveys are that they are easy to develop, data collected is standardized, they are inexpensive to conduct, and it is easy to sample a large population (Babbie 2004, 278). The disadvantages of surveys include the possibility of a low response rate and a weakness in validity (Babbie 2004, 261 and 278).

*Sampling and Population*

The research population includes the employers of Texas State MPA graduates. The unit of analysis is the individual employer responding to the employer survey (Babbie 2004, 243). The distribution of the survey is by an email with a hyperlink to the employer survey instrument. The Texas State University Institutional Research department provided the resources for this study.

Because of the difficulty in reaching employers/supervisors of Texas State MPA graduates, this study used the snowball sampling technique. This technique may increase the response rate of the employer survey. The low response rate is one of the limitations of using self-administered survey techniques (Babbie 2004, 277-278). Babbie (2004, 184) defines snowball sampling as a nonprobability sampling technique, which is appropriate

when the members (units of analysis) of a special population, are difficult to locate.

Babbie states, "…the researcher collects data on the few members of the target

population he or she can locate, then asks those individuals to provide the information

needed to locate other members of that population whom they happen to know" (2004,

184).

According to Patricia M. Shields, Ph.D., "the sampling of employers of

graduates can be challenging. Graduates are often uncomfortable asking their employers

to take the time to complete the survey." Hermes (2002, 74) encountered this challenge in

reaching employers of MPA graduates for his structured employer interviews, "It could

be that graduate employees are reluctant to visibly add to their supervisors' workloads."

Hermes (2002, 75) found reluctance from employers to grant a one-hour interview, "but a

half-hour interview met almost no resistance." Also, Shields believes that a mass mail-out

to employers would yield few respondents with actual experience with Texas State MPA

graduates because there are very few graduates as compared to employers overall.

Therefore, the intent of the employer assessment survey was to focus the search to

employers that had actual experience with Texas State MPA graduates.

*Statistics*

Simple descriptive statistics and content analysis were used to assess and

compile the responses to the email employer survey (Shields 1998, 203). The survey

included some open-ended questions and statements. The responses to the open-ended

questions were summarized and categorized. There were no other documents for content

analysis.

*Pre-testing*

Texas State faculty and other willing practitioners performed time testing of the survey instrument. The Texas State Institutional Research department staff also reviewed the survey prior to distribution. The pre-testing provided an approximate time of completion of the survey, as well as a review and approval process of the employer survey instrument. The employer assessment survey is included in Appendix A.1-3: Employer Survey Questionnaire.

**Operationalization of Conceptual Framework**

The operationalization of the conceptual framework table includes the descriptive categories of the conceptual framework along with a sample of the corresponding survey question. (Please see Table 6.1: Operationalization of Conceptual Framework.) For example, to obtain the employers' opinion of how the Texas State MPA program is meeting one of its mission statements' objectives, the following statement was included in the survey instrument: "In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate high ethics." The survey instrument asks the employer to strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements.

*Evaluation of Responses to Employer Surveys*

A five-point Likert scale (Babbie 2004, 245) was used to evaluate the responses to the employer survey questions related to each of the sub-categories. A Strongly Agree response had a value of five points compared to one-point for a response of Strongly Disagree. Furthermore, additional employer survey questions were included as shown in the next section.

*Additional Employer Survey Open-Ended Questions*

The additional employer survey questions are open-ended statements. The statements or questions request information from the employers regarding the type of government work performed and the level of familiarity they have with the Texas State MPA program. Following are the statements and questions included in the survey.

| |
|---|
| I work for:<br>   o   State government<br>   o   Municipal government<br>   o   Federal government<br>   o   Non-profit sector<br>   o   Private sector<br>   o   Other, please specify: |
| How familiar are you with the Texas State MPA program?<br>   o   Very familiar<br>   o   Familiar<br>   o   Limited familiarity<br>   o   No familiarity |
| How many Texas State MPA graduates have you worked closely with in the past seven years? |
| What kind of positions did these Texas State MPA graduates have? |
| What is the reputation of Texas State MPA program? |

The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed and categorized by content. Chapter 7 includes a summary of the content analysis.

*Human Subjects Protection – Information about the Research*

The employer survey email notification to potential participants included the contact information for the director of the Texas State MPA program for further information about the research. The director of the Texas State MPA program, Patricia M. Shields, Ph.D., distributed the email employer survey. This study contained an

element of social research and used an email survey to gather perceptions and opinions of

employers about their assessment of the knowledge and skills demonstrated by their

employees who were graduates of the Texas State MPA program. There are certain

important ethical agreements in social research (Babbie 2004, 63). Institutional review

boards monitor and protect these ethical agreements (Babbie 2004, 69). At Texas State

University, the proposal of this research project was exempt from review of the

Institutional Review Board (Texas State IRB, 2008).[32]

All social research ensures that the participants of the survey know that

participation is voluntary, there is no harm to the participants, there is anonymity and

confidentiality as appropriate, there is prevention of deception, and that the analysis and

reporting of the results follow ethical guidelines (Babbie 2004, 63-69). The email

notification introducing the employer survey may include a statement that participation is

voluntary and that refusal to participate involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which

the subject is otherwise entitled, and that the subject may discontinue participation at any

time.

The email survey included a statement of the approximate time of completion of

the employer survey. The introductory email to the employer survey included a statement

of the purpose of the employer survey research and the use of its results in the NASPAA

Self-Study Report 2009 of the Texas State University MPA Program NASPAA re-

accreditation. The email introduction to the employer assessment survey includes a

statement that the individual responses and opinions of the respondents are not disclosed

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[32] Please see http://www.txstate.edu/research/irb/index.php for additional information of the Texas State University
    Institutional Research Board.

publicly (Babbie 2004, 66). Only summary results of the responses and opinions are included without disclosing individual names of employers or employees.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an explanation of the techniques used to gather the employer perceptions and opinions to give an indication of the reliability and validity of the results. The next chapter analyzes and discusses the results of the employer assessment survey conducted at Texas State University on the MPA program graduates.

**Table 6.1: Operationalization of Conceptual Framework**

| Descriptive Categories and Subcategories | Survey Questions |
|---|---|
| **Mission Statement**<br>Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:<br>  1. Ability to be a manager<br>  2. Ability to be a leader<br>  3. High ethics in public service<br>  4. Ability to do research<br>  5. Ability to use technology in management<br><br>  6. Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management<br>  7. Commitment to public service | **In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:**<br>The ability to be a manager<br>The ability to be a leader<br>High ethics<br>The ability to do research<br>The ability to use technology in managerial tasks<br><br>Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management<br>A commitment to public service |
| **NASPAA Curriculum Components – Requisite Knowledge**<br><br>  1. Human resource management<br>  2. Budgeting and financial processes<br>  3. Information systems, including computer literacy and applications<br>  4. Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation<br>  5. Decision-making and problem-solving<br>  6. Political and legal institutions and processes<br>  7. Economic and social institutions and processes<br>  8. Applicable organization and management concepts and behavior | **In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of:**<br>Human resource management<br>Budgeting and financial processes<br>Information systems, including computer literacy and applications<br>Policy and program formulation implementation and evaluation<br>Decision-making and problem-solving<br>Political and legal institutions and processes<br>Economic and social institutions and processes<br>Applicable organization and management concepts |
| **Student Learning Outcomes**<br>Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:<br>  1. Knowledge and comprehension of the NASPAA curriculum components [Ability to understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce]<br>  2. Ability to communicate effectively in writing<br>  3. Ability to communicate effectively orally<br>  4. Ability to see patterns and classify information, concepts, and theories in public policy and administration<br>  5. Ability to use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and management | **In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates have the ability to:**<br>Understand and meet the challenges of managing a diverse workforce [with knowledge and comprehension of NASPAA curriculum components]<br><br>Communicate effectively in writing (structure, clarity, brevity)<br>Communicate effectively orally (Presentation skills and speaking skills)<br>Analyze public policy and management problems<br><br>Use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management |
| **Other Requisite Skill Sets**<br>  1. Program assessment skills<br>  2. Quantitative analysis skills<br>  3. Project management skills<br>  4. Interpersonal skills with superiors, subordinates, and peers<br>  5. Bargaining and negotiating skills<br>  6. Ability to think through ethical dilemmas | **Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate:**<br>Program assessment skills.<br>Quantitative analysis skills<br>Project management skills<br>Interpersonal skills with superiors, subordinates, and peers<br><br>Bargaining and negotiating skills<br>Ability to think through ethical dilemmas |

## Chapter 7   EMPLOYER SURVEY RESULTS

**Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the Texas State MPA employer assessment survey. This chapter contains a description of the returned surveys, the general characteristics of the respondents, and the summary results for each of the four major categories. In addition, the chapter provides a summary of the content analysis of survey responses to the open-ended statements and questions regarding the number of MPA graduates the employers work with closely, the positions these MPA graduates hold in those organizations, and the reputation of the Texas State MPA program.

**Description of Returned Surveys**

The Texas State University Institutional Resources department received 28 survey responses from employers of MPA graduate out of a possible 150 approximate population. The total population number is an estimate based on the number of students that have received an MPA degree at Texas State in the last seven years. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the snowball sampling technique used is not a statistical sampling technique. Babbie (2004, 184) states that the researcher may use this technique when the target population is difficult to locate. The Texas State MPA program does not have a complete database of supervisors employing alumni; therefore, the survey was emailed to employers asking the known individuals to respond and to forward the survey to other known employers of MPA graduates.

**General Characteristics**

Ninety-six percent of employers that responded to the survey were from state and local governments and 4 percent from the private sector. Out of the 96 percent from the public sector, 57 percent were from state government and 39 percent were from municipal government entities. (See Table 7.1: Employer Characteristics). These percentages reflect the localized central area of the Texas state workforce. Austin, as the capital of Texas, has a large number of state government employers.

**Table 7.1: Employer Characteristics**

| I work for: | Percent |
|---|---|
| State Government | 57% |
| Municipal Government | 39% |
| Private Sector | 4% |
| Total (28 respondents) | 100% |

*How familiar are you with the Texas State MPA program?* Seventy-two percent of the employers that responded to this question said that they were very familiar or familiar with the MPA program at Texas State (See Table 7.2: Familiarity with Texas State MPA Program). Only three percent responded that they had no familiarity with the program, and 25 percent said that they had limited familiarity. Fifty-four percent of the employers were very familiar with the MPA program.[33]

**Table 7.2: Familiarity with Texas State MPA Program**

| Level of Familiarity | Percent |
|---|---|
| Very familiar | 54% |
| Familiar | 18% |
| Limited familiarity | 25% |
| No familiarity | 3% [34] |
| Total (28 respondents) | 100% |

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[33] Please see Appendix F: MPA Employer Survey Results – General Characteristics for the raw data of the MPA employer survey results.
[34] The percentages were adjusted for rounding purposes.

**Mission-Driven Outcomes**

The seven mission-driven outcomes received means within the range of 4.29

and 4.75 on a 5-point Likert scale, and responses of strongly agree and agree in the range

of 89 percent to 100 percent. This indicates that the Texas State MPA program is meeting

its mission (Table 7.3: MPA Program Mission-Driven Outcomes Results). The highest

ranking received was for commitment to public sector, high ethics, and ability to do

research with responses of strong agreement of 79, 75, and 61 percent respectively.[35]

**Table 7.3: MPA Program Mission-Driven Outcomes Results**

| Item | Count | Mean | Mode(s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Commitment to public sector | 28 | 4.75 | Strongly agree |
| High ethics | 28 | 4.75 | Strongly agree |
| Ability to do research | 28 | 4.57 | Strongly agree |
| Ability to be a manager | 28 | 4.50 | Strongly agree and Agree |
| Ability to be a leader | 28 | 4.46 | Agree |
| Ability to use technology in managerial tasks | 28 | 4.46 | Agree |
| Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management | 28 | 4.29 | Agree |

**Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities – NASPAA curriculum standards**

All of the eight categories in the NASPAA curriculum standards received good

ratings ranging from a mean of 4.18 to 4.68 on a 5-point scale (See Table 7.4:

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities - NASPAA Curriculum Standards Results). The

strongest categories were decision-making and problem solving; policy and program

formulation, implementation, and evaluation; and applicable organizational and

management concepts. Those areas received responses of strong agreement with 68, 61,

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[35] For the raw data of responses, please see Appendix B: Mission-Driven Outcomes – Texas State MPA Employer Survey Results

and 57 percent, respectively. The first two areas at the top of the range — decision-making and problem-solving; and policy and program formulation, implementation, and evaluation — fall under the NASPAA category of the application of quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis. The third area at the top of the range — understanding of applicable organizational and management concepts and behavior — falls under the NASPAA category of understanding of the public policy and organizational environment. In addition, the knowledge area — political and legal institutions and processes — also had a mode of strong agreement, although, it had a lower percentage rate of 48.

The eight NASPAA curriculum components are shown below under the three major categories (NASPAA standards 2008).

**In the Management of Public Service Organizations, the components of which include:**
- *Human resources*
- *Budgeting and financial processes*
- *Information management, technology applications, and policy*

**In the Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis, the components of which include:**
- *Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation*
- *Decision-making and problem-solving*

**With an Understanding of the Public Policy and Organizational Environment, the components of which include:**
- *Political and legal institutions and processes*
- *Economic and social institutions and processes*
- *Organization and management concepts and behavior*

**Table 7.4: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities - NASPAA Curriculum Standards Results**

| Item | Count | Mean | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Decision-making and problem-solving** | **28** | **4.68** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation** | **28** | **4.57** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Applicable organization and management concepts** | **28** | **4.57** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Political and legal institutions and processes** | **27** | **4.41** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Information systems, including computer literacy and applications** | **28** | **4.36** | **Agree** |
| **Economic and social institutions and processes** | **28** | **4.36** | **Agree** |
| **Human resource management** | **28** | **4.29** | **Agree** |
| **Budgeting and financial processes** | **28** | **4.18** | **Agree** |

All of the NASPAA curriculum components are important when the positions held by Texas State MPA graduates are as varied as the ones shown on the list of position titles and areas of employment of the alumni. (See "What kind of positions did these Texas State MPA graduates have?" later in this chapter).

**Student Learning Outcomes – Texas State University MPA Program**

The results of the employers' perceptions of the graduates meeting the student learning outcomes highlight the fact that the Texas State MPA program is held in high regard. The range of means received on the student learning outcomes is between 4.39 and 4.67 on a 5-point scale. The three categories at the top of the range of student learning outcomes are communicate effectively in writing, communicate effectively orally, and understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce with 4.67, 4.64, and 4.61 means, respectively. (Please see Table 7.5: Student Learning

Outcomes - Texas State MPA Program for the summary of the results of student learning

outcomes.)[36] All of the five student learning outcomes received a mode of strongly agree.

**Table 7.5: Student Learning Outcomes - Texas State MPA Program**

| Item | Count | Mean | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Communicate effectively in writing (structure, clarity, brevity)** | **27** | **4.67** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Communicate effectively orally (Presentation skills and speaking skills)** | **28** | **4.64** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce [with knowledge of corresponding curriculum components]** | **28** | **4.61** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Analyze public policy and management problems** | **28** | **4.46** | **Strongly agree** |
| **Use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management** | **28** | **4.39** | **Strongly agree** |

**Other Skill Sets – What Employers Believe Students Should Know**

Employers believe students should have other skill sets that may not be included

in an MPA program, or that they wish to emphasize. The survey results of how the MPA

graduates meet other skill sets reflect positively upon the Texas State MPA graduates.

The range of responses had a mean between 4.25 and 4.68 on a 5-point scale. Out of the

six items surveyed, three reflect a mode of strongly agree responses: *interpersonal skills,*

*ability to think through ethical dilemmas, and project management skills*. Employers

believe that Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate well all six surveyed skills in their

organizations. (Please see the summary of the results in Table 7.6.)[37]

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[36] The survey results are also shown in Appendix D: Student Learning Outcomes – Texas State MPA
    Program Employer Survey Results.
[37] See also Appendix E: Other Skill Sets – Texas State MPA Program Employer Survey Results.

**Table 7.6: Other Skill Sets - Texas State MPA Program**

| Item | Count | Mean | Mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interpersonal skills with superiors, subordinates, and peers | 28 | 4.68 | Strongly agree |
| Ability to think through ethical dilemmas | 27 | 4.59 | Strongly agree |
| Project management skills | 28 | 4.54 | Strongly agree |
| Program assessment skills | 28 | 4.43 | Agree |
| Bargaining and negotiating skills | 28 | 4.25 | Agree |
| Quantitative analysis skills | 28 | 4.25 | Agree |

**Survey Comments to Open-Ended Questions**

The Texas State University MPA employer survey included three open-ended questions to the employers working with MPA graduates within the last seven years regarding the type of positions the MPA graduates held at their organizations, and the reputation of the Texas State MPA program.

***How many Texas State MPA graduates have you worked closely with in the past seven years?***

Twenty-five employers responded to this question. Employers have been working closely with 52 percent of MPA graduates within the last three years, which reflects an increase over the 16 percent that have worked with MPA graduates within six years. The results have been summarized under three categories – 1-3 years, 4-6 years, and 7 years or more, as shown in Table 7.7: Working with Texas State MPA Graduates.

**Table 7.7: Working with Texas State MPA Graduates**

| Number of Years | Number of Respondents | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 1 – 3 | 13 | 52% |
| 4 – 6 | 4 | 16% |
| 7 or more | 8 | 32% |
| Total | 25 | 100% |

*What kind of positions did these Texas State MPA graduates have?*

Twenty-five employers responded to the question of what type of positions the Texas State MPA graduates held. Employers were specific in some cases regarding job titles, and in other cases, the employers mentioned the field of work.[38] The list below reflects a summary of the positions held by Texas State MPA graduates.

- Executive positions, executive assistants to assistant city managers and council members, administrative assistants, city managers (2), and assistant city managers (local, state, and higher education positions)
- Division managers and directors, executive management and director levels, second and third level management (office deputy – second level; division director – third level;), managers, supervisory and early management positions, administrators
- Project coordinator
- Equal employment opportunity investigator, employee disciplinary coordinator, human resources classification analyst, human resource consultants, human resource specialists, director of human resources, human resource professionals (human resources, research)
- Finance specialists, accountants, financial analyst, internal auditor, management financial administrators (business, finance, research)
- Information technology analyst (GIS, research)
- Public safety, public works director, planners, fire chief, police sergeant
- Interns

*What is the reputation of Texas State MPA program?*

Twenty-four employers responded to the question regarding the reputation of the Texas State MPA program. One out of the 24 had no opinion. The categories of the responses to the reputation question are presented in Table 7.8: Reputation of Texas State MPA Program. The category of outstanding had 10 responses, which included the comments – outstanding (1), very strong (1), fine reputation (1), very high (2), impressive (1), very positive (2), highly regarded (1), and very disciplined and hard-working employees (1).[39] Based on the content analysis of the reputational comments of the Texas

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[38] Please see Appendix H: Positions Held by Texas State MPA Graduates for detailed data.
[39] For detailed comments, please see Appendix I: Reputation of Texas State MPA Program.

State MPA program, 63 percent of employers believe that the MPA program is

outstanding or excellent, and 34 percent of employers believe that it is very good or good.

Please note that 3 percent of the respondents indicated that they were not familiar with

the MPA program, and 3 percent of the respondents had no opinion on the reputation of

the MPA program.

**Table 7.8: Reputation of Texas State MPA Program**

| Ranking | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Outstanding | 10 | 42% |
| Excellent | 5 | 21% |
| Very Good | 3 | 13% |
| Good | 5 | 21% |
| No opinion | 1 | 3% [40] |
| **Total Respondents** | **24** | **100%** |

Additional comments about the reputation of Texas State MPA program are

shown in Table 7.9. The nine additional comments (out of 24 employers) reflect the

positive reputation of the MPA program overall as a leader in preparing students for

positions in public administration. The comments also support the premise that the Texas

State MPA program is meeting its mission "to prepare students for careers as managers

and leaders in public service. Students are prepared for public service leadership and

management through course work, professional development opportunities, and applied

research projects" (Texas State University MPA Program 2009 Mission).

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[40] The percentages were adjusted for rounding purposes.

**Table 7.9: Comments Regarding Reputation of Texas State MPA Program**

| Comment No./Comment |
| --- |
| 3.  Very disciplined and hard working employees. |
| 6.  Very high from what I can tell, even amongst those who received an MPA from different programs. |
| 9.  Excellent - known for producing quality graduates in all fields. |
| 12. Excellent and a leader in preparing students for the task at hand be it in local, state or federal government positions. |
| 13. Given my experience with a graduate of the program and my interaction with several colleagues enrolled in the program, the caliber of student and the skills and decision-making abilities they add to our agency are impressive. |
| 15. Good reputation. Individuals who are reliable, trustworthy, and committed to excellence. |
| 19. Not yet well known but has a good reputation. |
| 20. More pragmatic than LBJ, perhaps a bit less rigorous but intended for working professionals. Good overall. |
| 22. Very high, based on my personal experience and conversations with other city attorneys. |

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reported the results of the Texas State MPA employer survey and discussed each of the responses to the four major categories of the following items: mission-driven outcomes; knowledge, skills, and abilities as guided by NASPAA curriculum standards; MPA program student learning outcomes; and other skill sets. The employers perceive the Texas State MPA program meets its mission in imparting the knowledge, skills, and abilities to its students to prepare them for public administration service. Overall, the MPA program is highly regarded. The positions that MPA graduates hold in public service support Castleberry's argument that "[t]he advantages of student learning outcomes also extend well beyond college campuses." (2006, 16). The next chapter presents a high-level summary of the research and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 8    CONCLUSION

**Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the research and the findings of the employer assessment survey, as well as to make recommendations for future employer assessment survey research.

**Summary of Research**

The purpose of this research is to gather employers' perceptions and opinions to answer the following questions:

1. How is the Texas State MPA program reaching its mission?

2. How is the Texas State MPA educational program complying with NASPAA accreditation standards?

3. How is the Texas State MPA program helping students meet the established student learning outcomes?

4. What do employers believe the Texas State MPA graduates should know in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities?

5. What is the reputation of the Texas State MPA program according to the employers of its alumni?

Please see Table 8.1 for a summary of the reputational employer assessment results of the MPA program and its graduates. All of the surveyed categories received means within a range of 4.18 to 4.75 out of a possible 5-point scale. This reflects that employers hold Texas State MPA graduates in high regard. These results are supported

by the comments to the open-ended questions and the high-level job positions held by the

graduates.[41]

**Table 8.1: Texas State MPA Program Reputational Survey Results with Corresponding Means[42]**

| Texas State MPA Program Mission | | NASPAA Curriculum - Knowledge | | Student Learning Outcomes | | Other Skill Sets | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High ethics | 4.75 | Decision-making and problem solving | 4.68 | Communicate effectively in writing (structure, clarity, brevity) | 4.67 | Interpersonal skills | 4.68 |
| Commitment to public service | 4.75 | Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation | 4.57 | Communicate effectively orally (Presentation skills and speaking skills) | 4.64 | Ability to think through ethical dilemmas | 4.59 |
| Ability to do research | 4.57 | Applicable organization and management concepts | 4.57 | Understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce [with knowledge of curriculum components] | 4.61 | Project management skills | 4.54 |
| Ability to be a manager | 4.50 | Political and legal institutions and processes | 4.41 | Analyze public policy and management problems | 4.46 | Program assessment skills | 4.43 |
| Ability to be a leader | 4.46 | Information systems, including computer literacy and applications | 4.36 | Use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management | 4.39 | Bargaining and negotiating skills | 4.25 |
| Ability to use technology in managerial tasks | 4.46 | Economic and social institutions and processes | 4.36 | | | Quantitative analysis skills | 4.25 |
| Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management | 4.29 | Human resource management | 4.29 | | | | |
| | | Budgeting and financial processes | 4.18 | | | | |

### 1. *How is the Texas State MPA program doing in reaching its mission?*

All seven items related to the MPA program mission received high means. The

rated items reflect that employers perceive Texas State MPA graduates to have high

ethics, a commitment to public service, ability to do research, ability to be a manager and

a leader, ability to use technology in managerial tasks, and ability to integrate theoretical

and applied approaches to public management. (Please see Table 8.1.) High ethics and

commitment to public service received high means of 4.75. In comparison, Hermes

(2002, 69) found that "[t]he single most highly valued knowledge area in the research

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[41] Please see Table 7.8 and Table 7.9 for details.

project appears to be ethics." Integrating theoretical and applied approaches to public

management received the lowest rating of 4.29. This is also consistent with Hermes'

findings (2002, 70). Hermes stipulates, "Theory may not hold as high a value to the

practitioner employers as it would for academicians."

2. ***How is the Texas State MPA educational program doing in complying with***

   ***NASPAA accreditation standards?***

   All eight items of the Texas State MPA program survey received high means,

which indicates that the MPA program is complying with the NASPAA accreditation

standards according to the employers' assessment. The highest rated items were decision-

making and problem-solving (mean of 4.68); policy and program formulation,

implementation and evaluation (4.57); and applicable organization and management

concepts (4.57). Fifty seven percent of the employers responding to this survey are from

state government, and 39 percent are from municipal government. Therefore, the results

resemble Lee's 2006 findings from the perspective of the executive directors of Texas

state agencies, which rate political and legal institutions and processes and policy issues

higher than city managers do (after application of ethics). In turn, city managers rate

budgeting and financial processes; and organization and management concepts and

behavior; at the top of the scale (after application of ethics). (Please see Tables 8.1 and

8.2.)

3. ***How is the Texas State MPA program helping the students to meet the***

   ***established student learning outcomes?***

   Employers rated the Texas State MPA program graduates highly with means

ranging from 4.39 to 4.67 out of a five-point scale. The three highest rated items were

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[42] The means are based on a 5-point scale.

written communication (4.67), oral communication (4.64), and understanding and

meeting the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce with knowledge of

corresponding curriculum components (4.61). (Please see Table 8.1.)

4. ***What do employers believe the Texas State MPA graduates should know in***

***terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities?***

City managers of small Texas cities and executive directors of state of Texas

agencies perceive that MPA graduates should have knowledge in the areas presented in

Table 8.2 listed in order of importance.

**Table 8.2: What Employers Believe MPA Graduates Should Know in Order of
          Importance**

| Texas City Managers (Sinclair 2005) | Texas Executive Directors (Lee 2006) |
|---|---|
| Application of Ethics Policy | Application of Ethics Policy |
| Budgeting and Financial Processes | Political and Legal Institutions and Processes |
| Organization, Management Concepts & Behavior | Policy |
| Problem Solving | Decision Making |
| Bargaining and Negotiating | Organization, Management Concepts & Behavior |
| Writing | Public Speaking |

In the area of other skill sets, six items were surveyed, and all received high

means (Table 8.1). The highest ratings were received in interpersonal skills (4.68), ability

to think through ethical dilemmas (4.59), and project management (4.54). The lower rated

skills were program assessment skills (4.43), bargaining and negotiation skills (4.25), and

quantitative analysis skills (4.25).

5. ***What is the reputation of the Texas State MPA program according to the***

***employers of its graduates?***

The Texas State MPA graduates are highly regarded by their employers.

Ninety-seven percent of the employers gave the graduates ratings from good to

outstanding: outstanding (42%), excellent (21%), very good (13%), and good (21%). The

remaining three percent had no opinion or were not familiar with the MPA program.

(Please see Table 7.8 and Table 7.9.)

**Recommendations for Future Research**

According to the Institutional Research department website of Texas State

University, the student learning outcomes assessment is "an internal evaluation of [five-

eight] learning outcomes for each academic program with a minimum of [two]

assessment methods for each outcome."[43] Texas State University uses the results of the

assessments to "identify specific topics where improvement is needed."

Based on the results of the employer assessment survey, the Texas State MPA

program graduates are highly regarded by their immediate supervisors. The MPA

graduates received ratings of good to outstanding according to the responses to the open-

ended questions. The high-level positions and responsibilities held by the Texas State

MPA graduates also reflect the high regard employers place on these graduates.

It was difficult to locate the immediate supervisors of Texas State MPA

graduates to conduct the employer assessment survey. Hermes found a similar challenge

in his employer assessment in 2002. According to a report (CBM009 Report) to the

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the university database,[44] there have

been 149 MPA program graduates from Texas State from 2002-2008. Only 28 employer-

respondents out of a possible 149 were received for this survey using the snowball

sampling method. The snowball sampling method is not a statistical sampling technique;

therefore, the validity of the results is considered questionable. Future research would

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[43] Assessment of student learning outcomes found in http://www.ir.txstate.edu/Reports/sla.html.

[44] This comes from the university website from *Table 4. Degrees Awarded by Major, Ethnicity, Gender, Age and Level in Recent Semesters at Texas State University-San Marcos* with the selection of College of Liberal Arts, Political Science, Public Administration (329.00MPA).

benefit by using a statistical sampling technique to allow extrapolation of the results.

Therefore, the recommendations for future research are:

(1)   Develop and maintain a database of immediate supervisors of Texas State

   MPA program alumni.

(2)   Use a statistical sampling technique for future employer assessment

   surveys in order to have more valid and reliable results.

(3)   Use ratings to measure the importance employers place on specific

   knowledge, skills, and abilities (in addition to the rankings of agreement

   and disagreement).

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# Appendices

**Appendix A.1: Employer Survey Questionnaire**

## TEXAS ★ STATE
### UNIVERSITY
#### SAN MARCOS

## Master of Public Administration
## Employer Assessment

**Please rate the following statements using the scale provided.**

| In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| The ability to be a manager | | | | | |
| The ability to be a leader | | | | | |
| High ethics | | | | | |
| The ability to do research | | | | | |
| The ability to use technnology in managerial tasks | | | | | |
| Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management | | | | | |
| A commitment to public service | | | | | |

| In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Human resource management | | | | | |
| Budgeting and financial processes | | | | | |
| Information systems, including computer literacy and applications | | | | | |
| Policy and program formulation, | | | | | |

**Appendix A.2: Employer Survey Questionnaire - continued**

Employer Assessment

Page 2 of 3

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| implementation and evaluation | | | | | |
| Decision-making and problem solving | | | | | |
| Political and legal institutions and processes | | | | | |
| Economic and social institutions and processes | | | | | |
| Applicable organization and management concepts | | | | | |

| In your organization, Texas state MPA graduates have the ability to: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Analyze public policy and management problems | | | | | |
| Use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management | | | | | |
| Communicate effectively in writing (structure, clarity, brevity) | | | | | |
| Communicate effectively orally (Presentation skills and speaking skills) | | | | | |
| Understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce | | | | | |

| Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Program assessment skills | | | | | |
| Quantitative analysis skills | | | | | |
| Project management skills | | | | | |
| Interpersonal skills with superiors, subordinates, and peers | | | | | |
| Bargaining and negotiating skills | | | | | |
| Ability to think through ethical dilemmas | | | | | |

**Appendix A.3: Employer Survey Questionnaire - continued**

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I work for:

- State Government
- Municipal Government
- Federal Government
- Non profit sector
- Private sector
- Other, please specify:

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How familiar are you with the Texas State MPA Program?

- Very familiar
- Familiar
- Limited familiarity
- No familiarity

---

How many Texas State MPA graduates have you worked closely with in the past seven years?

---

What kind of positions did these Texas State MPA graduates have?

---

What is the reputation of Texas State MPA program?

---

click here to submit your response

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**Appendix B: Mission-Driven Outcomes – Texas State MPA Employer Survey Results**

# TEXAS ★ STATE
## UNIVERSITY
### SAN MARCOS

**Master of Public Administration Employer Survey Results**

Respondents = 28

| In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Value** | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |
| **Item** | **Mean** | **Count** | **Strongly Agree** | **Agree** | **Neither Agree Nor Disagree** | **Disagree** | **Strongly Disagree** |
| High ethics | 4.75 | 28 | 21 (75 %) | 7 (25 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| A commitment to public service | 4.75 | 28 | 22 (79 %) | 5 (18 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| The ability to do research | 4.57 | 28 | 17 (61 %) | 10 (36 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| The ability to be a manager | 4.50 | 28 | 14 (50 %) | 14 (50 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| The ability to be a leader | 4.46 | 28 | 13 (46 %) | 15 (54 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| The ability to use technology in managerial tasks | 4.46 | 28 | 13 (46 %) | 15 (54 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Ability to integrate theoretical and applied approaches to public management | 4.29 | 28 | 11 (39 %) | 14 (50 %) | 3 (11 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |

**Appendix C: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (NASPAA Curriculum Standards) – Texas State MPA Program Employer Survey Results**

| In your organization, Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Value | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Item | Mean | Count | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Decision-making and problem solving | 4.68 | 28 | 19 (68 %) | 9 (32 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation | 4.57 | 28 | 17 (61 %) | 10 (36 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Applicable organization and management concepts | 4.57 | 28 | 16 (57 %) | 12 (43 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Political and legal institutions and processes | 4.41 | 27 | 13 (48 %) | 12 (44 %) | 2 (7 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Information systems, including computer literacy and applications | 4.36 | 28 | 10 (36 %) | 18 (64 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Economic and social institutions and processes | 4.36 | 28 | 11 (39 %) | 16 (57 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Human resource management | 4.29 | 28 | 11 (39 %) | 14 (50 %) | 3 (11 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Budgeting and financial processes | 4.18 | 28 | 11 (39 %) | 12 (43 %) | 4 (14 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) |

**Appendix D: Student Learning Outcomes – Texas State MPA Program Employer Survey Results**

| In your organization, Texas state MPA graduates have the ability to: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Mean | Value | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| | | Count | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Communicate effectively in writing (structure, clarity, brevity) | 4.67 | 27 | 19 (70 %) | 7 (26 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Communicate effectively orally (Presentation skills and speaking skills) | 4.64 | 28 | 18 (64 %) | 10 (36 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Understand and meet the challenges of managing in a diverse workforce [with knowledge of corresponding curriculum components] | 4.61 | 28 | 18 (64 %) | 9 (32 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Analyze public policy and management problems | 4.46 | 28 | 16 (57 %) | 9 (32 %) | 3 (11 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Use reasoned arguments to judge evidence in public policy and public management | 4.39 | 28 | 14 (50 %) | 11 (39 %) | 3 (11 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |

**Appendix E: Other Skill Sets – Texas State MPA Program Employer Survey Results**

| Texas State MPA graduates demonstrate: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Item** | **Mean** | **Value** **Count** | **5** **Strongly Agree** | **4** **Agree** | **3** **Neither Agree Nor Disagree** | **2** **Disagree** | **1** **Strongly Disagree** |
| Interpersonal skills with superiors, subordinates, and peers | 4.68 | 28 | 19 (68 %) | 9 (32 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Ability to think through ethical dilemmas | 4.59 | 27 | 16 (59 %) | 11 (41 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Project management skills | 4.54 | 28 | 15 (54 %) | 13 (46 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Program assessment skills | 4.43 | 28 | 13 (46 %) | 14 (50 %) | 1 (4 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Bargaining and negotiating skills | 4.25 | 28 | 11 (39 %) | 13 (46 %) | 4 (14 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |
| Quantitative analysis skills | 4.25 | 28 | 9 (32 %) | 17 (61 %) | 2 (7 %) | 0 (0 %) | 0 (0 %) |

**Appendix F: MPA Employer Survey Results - General Characteristics**

| I work for: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Category | Count | Percent |
| State Government | 16 | 57 % |
| Municipal Government | 11 | 39 % |
| Federal Government | 0 | 0 % |
| Non-profit sector | 0 | 0 % |
| Private sector | 1 | 4 % |
| Other | 0 | 0 % |
| **Total Respondents** | **28** | **100 %** |
| How familiar are you with the Texas State MPA Program? | | |
| Category | Count | Percent |
| Very familiar | 15 | 54 % |
| Familiar | 5 | 18 % |
| Limited familiarity | 7 | 25 % |
| No familiarity | 1 | 4 % |
| **Total Respondents** | **28** | **101 % (Rounding)** |

**Appendix G: Working with Texas State MPA Graduates in the Past Seven Years – Employer Survey Results**

| How many Texas State MPA graduates have you worked closely with in the past seven years? |
|---|
| 1. 10 |
| 2. I'm not sure. Several… |
| 3. 4 |
| 4. at 20 graduates |
| 5. 100+ |
| 6. About five |
| 7. 1 |
| 8. 2 |
| 9. 3 |
| 10. 1 |
| 11. 10+ |
| 12. I have worked closely with at least seven MPA students/graduates. |
| 13. At least one that I am aware of. |
| 14. 1 |
| 15. 8 |
| 16. 1 |
| 17. 20+ |
| 18. Two |
| 19. Two |
| 20. Two or three. |
| 21. Four |
| 22. 2 |
| 23. Six |
| 24. Two (2) |
| 25. 12 |

**Appendix H: Positions Held by Texas State MPA graduates**

| What kind of positions did these Texas State MPA graduates have? |
|---|
| 1. HR Consultants, ACM Executive Assistants, HR Specialists, Council Executive Assistant |
| 2. Directors |
| 3. Executive positions |
| 4. Interns, Director of Human Resources, City Managers (2), Assistant to City Managers, Public Works Director, Planners, Admin Assistants, Fire Chief, |
| 5. Management and Research |
| 6. Various supervisory and early management capacities |
| 7. Project Coordinator |
| 8. Police sergeant, assistant to the city manager |
| 9. EEO Investigator, Employee Disciplinary Coordinator, HR Classification Analyst |
| 10. Business |
| 11. Interns, Planners, Division Managers, Finance Specialists, HR Professionals, GIS |
| 12. Accountant type positions. |
| 13. Management in financial administration. |
| 14. Financial management |
| 15. Division Director, Executive Assistant, Manager, Analysts (IT and Financial), Accountants |
| 16. Internal Auditor |
| 17. Finance, Human Resources, Public Safety, Administration |
| 18. Division Director (3rd Level Management)and Office Deputy (2nd Level Management) |
| 19. Management and staff positions |
| 20. Upper level management. |
| 21. Director level and executive management |
| 22. Managers |
| 23. City manager, assistant to the city manager, human resources director, public works director, development coordinator |
| 24. Managerial |
| 25. Positions in municipal and state entities, as well as higher education |

**Appendix I: Reputation of Texas State MPA Program**

| What is the reputation of Texas State MPA program? |
|---|
| 1. Very good! |
| 2. It has a fine reputation. |
| 3. Very disciplined and hard working employees. |
| 4. Very Good |
| 5. Outstanding |
| 6. Very high from what I can tell, even amongst those who received an MPA from different programs. |
| 7. I have no previous knowledge of the Texas State MPA program. |
| 8. Very good |
| 9. Excellent - known for producing quality graduates in all fields. |
| 10. Good |
| 11. Excellent |
| 12. Excellent and a leader in preparing students for the task at hand be it in local, state or federal government positions. |
| 13. Given my experience with a graduate of the program and my interaction with several colleagues enrolled in the program, the caliber of student and the skills and decision-making abilities they add to our Agency are impressive. |
| 14. Good |
| 15. Good reputation. Individuals who are reliable, trustworthy, and committed to excellence. |
| 16. Excellent |
| 17. Very positive. |
| 18. Highly regarded. |
| 19. Not yet well known but has a good reputation. |
| 20. More pragmatic than LBJ, perhaps a bit less rigorous but intended for working professionals. Good overall. |
| 21. Very strong |
| 22. Very high, based on my personal experience and conversations with other city attorneys. |
| 23. In my experience, "Excellent" |
| 24. Very positive. |