Master of Public Service and Administration
Program Review and Evaluation

Bush School of Government and Public Service
MPSA Capstone: PSAA 676-606
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The **B**ush **S**chool
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Report Submitted to Dr. Jeryl Mumpower, Director of the MPSA Program

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Introduction

Assessing the quality and effectiveness of educational programs is becoming increasingly important in an expanding market of academic institutions. As a relatively new program, the Bush School of Government and Public Service's Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) degree program recognizes the benefits of ongoing self-evaluation. The Bush School is located at Texas A&M University and houses both the MPSA program and the Master's Program in International Affairs (MPIA), along with five graduate certificate programs. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the MPSA program based on criteria set forth by its accrediting institutions.

The MPSA program includes a two-semester Capstone practicum that students complete in lieu of a thesis or end-of-program exams. Each Capstone is comprised of approximately eight students, is directed by a faculty advisor, and must work closely with a designated client based locally or nationally. This Capstone's client was the director of the MPSA program. The MPSA director charged the Capstone with designing and conducting a data collection and analysis program using three different evaluative methods. One purpose of this project was to provide information on the program's strengths and limitations to enlighten MPSA program administration about possible improvements that could be implemented. This was accomplished by collecting alumni feedback.

Additionally, the Capstone project served another purpose of helping the MPSA program meet the requirements necessary for accreditation. Texas A&M University as a whole receives its accreditation from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).[1] The university must comply with the Principles of Accreditation set forth by SACS. A memorandum by former Provost David Prior (2007) emphasizes that SACS expects "ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes." Based on these requirements, all academic departments are directed to evaluate student learning outcomes and make associated improvements as necessary. As a part of this process, the MPSA program is directly accountable to the Office of Institutional Assessment at Texas A&M University.[2] This office requires the program to complete an annual Detailed Assessment Report that calls for the evaluation of student learning outcomes. These learning outcomes should be evaluated through such methods as interviews or surveys of MPSA graduates and the graduates' employers.

The MPSA program is also accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA).[3] The NASPAA accreditation process includes the

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[1] http://sacscoc.org/
[2] http://assessment.tamu.edu/
[3] http://naspaa.org/

completion of a self-study report and a site visit by outside reviewers. In anticipation of the next self-study report to be completed by the program during the 2012-2013 academic year, the Capstone reviewed the newly crafted NASPAA standards to ensure that the MPSA program is in compliance with the reporting guidelines.

To meet the variety of accreditation obligations described above, the Capstone created an alumni survey that was distributed to the MPSA graduates and conducted alumni focus groups. Employer interviews were designed but were not able to be implemented. This report consists of a literature review, follows with a summary of the research methodologies, gives a description of the survey and focus group results, and concludes with lessons learned from the project.

Literature Review

Overall, the available literature on conducting assessments of Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs is rather limited, but some helpful and substantive sources do exist. First, this literature review will explore the focus of the Capstone project: outcome assessment. Jennings (1989, 438) relates that outcome assessment focuses on the "goals and objectives of a program and ways in which the attainment of those goals can be measured." He states that outcome assessment of MPA programs can be controversial because it can be hard to clearly outline the programs' goals and objectives, measure whether or not those goals and objectives have been achieved, and evaluate the consequences of program actions (Jennings 1989). Poister and Ingraham (1991) identify four particular reasons that outcome assessment can be difficult for higher education programs:

1. Assessment can create controversy by suggesting that the faculty and the institutions alone are responsible for the students' learning.
2. Assessment can challenge faculty's individual autonomy by asserting that faculty members are collectively responsible for student learning.
3. The gravity of the assessment may be questioned when some institutions encourage faculty to focus more on research than on teaching.
4. Assessment highlights the tension between campus administration and state legislatures as to which agenda will control higher education.

Various attempts have been made to evaluate the quality of MPA programs, including reputational surveys, the rate of graduates' acceptance into the Presidential Management Fellows program, and assessments of the research efforts being made within the program. Jennings (1989) points out, however, that these methods have limitations from the perspective of program administrators seeking to improve the program. He recommends focusing on outcome assessments that include evaluation of the knowledge, values, and skills of the graduates and the graduates' effectiveness on the job to gauge the true quality of the program. Jennings contends that outcome assessments should have a purpose beyond accountability measures to have the maximum impact on improving the program, and should include students, alumni, faculty, and employers of the graduates. For this reason, individual programs should tailor outcome assessments to meet their needs.

Jennings (1989, 442) goes on to relate, "Value-added assessments are the most manageable for programs and the most educationally meaningful. They provide the best opportunity to evaluate the educational impacts of a program." He stresses that there are different ways to measure the career development of graduates, including surveying and interviewing employers. Higher education institutions have also used end-of-program testing as assessment tools.

Denhardt (2001, 526) emphasizes four main questions that need to be addressed in the assessment of the outcomes for public administration education:

1. "Do we seek to educate our students with respect to theory or to practice?
2. "Do we prepare students for their first jobs or for those to which they might aspire later?
3. "What are the appropriate delivery mechanisms for MPA courses and curricula?
4. "What personal commitments do we make as public administration educators?"

In the first question Denhardt considers the tension present in the discussion of whether to focus the curriculum on theory or practice. He further outlines three camps of thought: (1) theory should inform practice in the workplace; (2) theory does not relate well to practice, so practice is what really matters; and (3) theory is related to knowledge and practice is related to skills, and students need both to be successful. He points out that pre-service students appear to want more practice, likely because they have just emerged from the undergraduate environment, where they were immersed in theory. In-service students, on the other hand, tend to want more theory since they have already gained some practice in the work place.

Denhardt (2001) suggests that the answer to question two might be found by surveying graduates with different levels of experience following the receipt of their master's degree. Furthermore, Denhardt asserts that pre- and in-service students may have different needs from the program. Pre-service students may have a stronger need for analytic skills in the short-term while in-service students are likely to advance to management positions more quickly.

For question three, Denhardt (2001) largely concerns himself with technology and the creation of distance learning. Other considerations contained in this question include the way in which knowledge is conveyed versus instruction in skills, and whether or not an internship should be a program requirement.

In considering the fourth question, Denhardt (2001) believes that the relationship between faculty members and students has an effect on changing both the teachers and students. For example, Denhardt stresses that the faculty member's personality and teaching philosophy greatly influence his or her teaching style. He states, "the teacher's frame of reference, indeed the teacher's basic psychological makeup, is very much involved in the process of education" (Denhardt 2001, 528). Furthermore, Denhardt (2001, 528) contemplates several "metagoals" of MPA programs. These include the "continuous development and renewal of a cadre of practitioners to carry out the tasks of administration" (Denhardt 2001, 528), the development of technical, analytic, and managerial skills, and improving public administration in general.

Alumni Surveys

Surveys are one method that researchers use to evaluate MPA programs. Jennings (1989, 443) notes, "Surveys draw upon the perceptions of program graduates or their employers to determine the extent to which the program provided knowledge and skills that contribute to success in the workplace." Jennings points out several advantages that surveys offer over other assessment methods:

- Surveys can be developed easily.
- They are inexpensive in comparison to other methods.
- They draw upon the experiences of two of the most important stakeholder groups for MPA programs: graduates and employers.
- They can use a basic set of general questions while also being adapted to the needs of particular programs.
- They are considered valid and reliable when researchers take time to develop them carefully to properly measure what they want to know.

Jennings (1989) does, however, point out a main weakness of surveys. He emphasizes that they measure the impression of the graduates and employers about the educational program's quality, rather than what the graduates actually learned in the program.

Roberts (2001) developed survey designs that provided critical feedback to the Fairleigh Dickinson University's MPA program director and that satisfied NASPAA accreditation requirements. His article walks through the steps of planning for, designing, and administering surveys to current students, alumni, and employers of the programs' graduates. The surveys focused on eight areas: overall program satisfaction, instruction, curriculum, program direction, support services, employment outcomes, student affinity, and student characteristics. The alumni were sent two different types of surveys depending on their graduation year. The researcher mailed an exit survey to the homes of alumni who had graduated in the previous year, with a response rate of 39.5 percent. Alumni who had graduated two years prior were mailed an alumni survey and had a response rate of 30.8 percent. Roberts contends that response rates are likely to improve if the stakeholders understand that the survey results will be made available and their feedback will inform program improvements.

Dillman et al. (2009) recommend a mixed-mode survey that uses different types of surveys to increase response rates and tries to reduce the non-response error. In their study, Dillman et al. administered the surveys in one form (such as mail, telephone, Internet, etc.) and then waited one month before administering the survey using a different mode. The response rates improved after using two different survey modes for the same respondent sample. Overall, the researchers stress that response rates tend to be lower for Internet surveys than for other

survey modes. For example, in the first administration, the researchers achieved a response rate of only 13 percent for the Internet survey.

A tool regularly used in designing surveys to ease both the survey taker and the survey analyst's roles is the four- or five-point Likert scale (Likert 1932). These scales are a simple way to rank preferences from one to four (or five). For example, a common use of the five-point Likert scale is applied to determine the level of agreement among respondents. In this scale, 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. By using this simple five-point scale, surveyors can ask questions that are easy to comprehend.

Analyzing survey data relies heavily on simple averages and percentages rather than high-powered statistical methods. The majority of authors reviewed for this report presented their findings through percentages and averages. For example, Denhardt (2001) exclusively used percentages to report his findings, and while Baldwin (1988) and Roberts (2001) primarily used percentages as well, they also used averages to portray results. One major factor that limits statistical analysis is sample size. A small sample size will significantly limit the types of statistical analyses that can be run and will introduce questions about the validity of the results. Large sample sizes will broaden the scope of available statistical tools and help to establish the validity of the researchers' conclusions.

Alumni Focus Groups

Carrying out focus groups first requires the creation of questions, the development of moderating skills, and the administration of a pilot test. One of the most critical components of the focus group is creating questions because "quality answers are directly related to quality questions" (Krueger 1991, 59). Generally, focus groups should stay below ten questions and should be open-ended to bring about discussion.

Well-developed questions are not the only elements needed for successful focus groups, however. Before the focus groups are conducted, it is also necessary to develop moderating skills. The moderator should be comfortable and familiar with the dynamics of group discussion. The moderator must be a good listener and be able to guide the discussion to keep it on topic. During the discussion, the moderator should be aware of what has been discussed and what the subsequent topics are to avoid redundancy. The moderator should know how to employ different techniques, such as probing for information with follow-up questions and pausing for several seconds to wait for responses. Finally, the moderator must be able to manage the discussion of different types of participants, such as "the expert, the dominant talker, the shy participant, and the rambler" (Krueger 1991, 85).

Once the questions are created and moderating skills are developed, the focus group should undergo a pilot test. Krueger (1991) states that pilot tests are necessary to consider questions such as:

- How effective are the prepared questions at soliciting valuable responses?
- What types of interactions occur between study participants?
- What type of personality characteristics are expected from participants?
- How should the room be arranged?
- What procedures are needed during the focus group?
- How advantageous is the questioning order?
- What follow-up questions are needed?
- What note-taking practices are needed?

The pilot test allows for the consideration of these factors and the implementation of necessary modifications.

Before the focus group is conducted, all participants should sign a consent form. The process should also include a pre-written, formal welcome statement, an overview of the discussion topic, and rules for the discussion. The questions should then be presented and discussed, and should be followed by closing remarks (Krueger 1991).

Analyzing the findings from the focus group entails summarizing and codifying the collected data in the form of a report. The responses to the questions provided by the participants are often difficult to quantify, but qualitative analysis is also complex. To limit the ambiguity of the responses, researchers should analyze wording, consider the context that surrounds participants' comments, and be wary of opinions that changed during the discussion. All of this is performed with the goal of making general comments about the findings of participants' views (Krueger 1991).

Although it can be useful, the focus group method also has limitations. Because there are several participants in a focus group, Morgan (1988) argues that researchers have less control, as opposed to analysis based on quantitative methods or even interviewing one person. It can also be difficult to obtain a representative sample to participate in a focus group. Additionally, researchers should take care when analyzing the focus group's findings. Considerations to keep in mind include that some participants are not comfortable speaking in groups, transportation to the location of the study could pose problems, issues of confidentiality and anonymity may arise, and sharing personal opinions in a group setting can be awkward.

Employer Interviews

While surveys have been suggested as an effective way to assess employers of MPA program graduates, additional research suggests that employer surveys can actually prove problematic. Jennings (1989) points out that it can be challenging to administer employer surveys since they have to be sent to the graduates' direct supervisors. The surveys may lack reliability if the supervisors' qualifications to evaluate the MPA programs are questionable (Jennings 1989; Hermes 2002). Conversely, Banta (1993, as cited in Hermes 2002) stresses that supervisors who are knowledgeable about the graduates and have a good understanding of the programs tend to rate the graduate and the program very highly. One reason for this bias could be that graduates are hesitant to share the contact information of their supervisors unless they feel confident that the supervisors will give them a positive evaluation (Hermes 2002). An obstacle to conducting employer interviews might be that employees are reluctant to add to their supervisors' workloads. Employer surveys also tend to have poor response rates. For example, Roberts (2001) reports that only 28 employer surveys distributed by mail were returned out of a total of 300, a response rate of 9.3 percent.

Hermes (2002) highlights, "In order to overcome those problems, Banta [2001] now recommends using a personal form of information gathering, such as focus groups or personal e-mails." Hermes chose to conduct individual, structured interviews with employers of Texas State University's MPA graduates. He interviewed eight employers who were recruited for the interviews via e-mail from the MPA director to program graduates and through the researcher's professional contacts.

Methodology

This section of the report summarizes the mixed method approach that the Capstone designed for collecting and interpreting alumni feedback. These methods included designing and administering an electronic survey and conducting two focus groups. A third method, employer interviews, was designed and attempted; however, due to lack of response this method was not implemented.

Prior to administering the survey and conducting focus group and employer interviews, the Capstone sought, and received, approval for their research project from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University. The IRB serves to ensure Texas A&M University's compliance with federal laws and regulations regarding research involving human subjects. This review process consisted of compiling and submitting all materials that would be used as part of the three research methods. A final copy of survey, focus group, and employer questions were provided (see Appendix I), as well as consent forms to be signed by participants prior to the focus groups and employer interviews (see Appendix II). Additionally, the Capstone provided the IRB office with copies of all e-mails intended for distribution to MPSA program alumni throughout the assessment process.

Alumni Survey

It was expected that MPSA program graduates had Internet access and were accustomed to being contacted by the Bush School through alumni services via e-mail. Additionally, it was expected that the graduates' close and personal connection to the Bush School and the MPSA program would make the likelihood of their response higher than many random surveys that are administered. Three steps needed to be accomplished in designing and implementing the survey prior to its administration.

First, the Capstone contacted the Bush School director of student services (DSS) to obtain MPSA alumni contact information. The information was sent to the group in a Microsoft® Office Excel spreadsheet and included the names and e-mail addresses of both MPSA and MPIA alumni. The list was sorted to reflect only the 208 MPSA alumni with current contact information. This list was used throughout the project for e-mail notifications and survey distribution. A preliminary e-mail was sent by the DSS to alert MPSA alumni about the Capstone project so they would anticipate future e-mails.

Second, the Capstone assembled a comprehensive survey based partially on Roberts' (2001) work and the MPSA program's existing exit survey to analyze the strengths and limitations of the program. The survey included questions about curriculum, the internship program, faculty,

program services and activities, career outcomes, knowledge, and skills. The majority of the questions in the survey were set on a six-point Likert scale, which included the following range:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- No Opinion/Not Sure <u>or</u> Not Applicable

Other questions were either multiple-choice or allowed for open-ended responses. The Capstone met with the MPSA program director to review the survey questions and to ensure the project covered all elements coinciding with NASPAA and SACS accreditation requirements.

Third, after all the survey questions were finalized the Capstone worked with the Bush School director of information systems (DIS) to convert the survey into a digital format. The survey was developed in Adobe® LiveCycle®, a software program that allows organizations to communicate securely with customers through Internet applications. The DIS programmed the survey to meet the specific design functions the Capstone had requested. Then, the group inputted all of the question/response text into the survey shell. Once the layout was established and the questions were entered, the survey was tested by all Capstone members and by the DIS to ensure that there were no technological errors before sending it to the alumni sample.

The Capstone drafted an e-mail template to be sent to alumni on the list generated from the DSS. A link to the survey was included in the e-mail, and the Capstone collected survey responses for a period of three weeks. The replies to the survey came into an e-mail address created by the DIS for the Capstone: MPSACapstone2010@bushschool.tamu.edu. Two reminder e-mails were sent to the alumni to encourage them to complete the survey. Although Dillman et al. (2009) recommended redistribution of the survey in a different format to increase the response rate, the Capstone was unable to do this due to time constraints. The survey responses were stored in a file on the Bush School's shared drive where data was ultimately saved in a Microsoft® Office Excel file for analysis.

Methods of Survey Analysis

For the purposes of this project, specific statistical methods were chosen to carry out the analysis. The team used STATA®, a data analysis and statistical software commonly used in academic as well as professional settings. All responses to open-ended questions were removed from the data for analysis purposes. The remaining multiple-choice responses were coded and labeled accordingly. For example, those based on the Likert scale were coded from six being

Strongly Agree to one being *No Opinion/Not Sure*. Basic descriptive statistics were used to acquire demographic information and to quantitatively understand the data expressed as percentages. After studying the data, some trends were targeted for further analysis.

To understand some of the identified trends in alumni responses, specific relationships between the major components of the survey and characteristics of interest were further analyzed. Those components and characteristics are listed below:

Major Survey Components	Graduate Characteristics of Interest
• Demographic Information • Curriculum • Internship • Faculty • Program Services and Activities • Career Outcomes • Knowledge and Skills	• Graduation Year • Gender • Track • In-Service or Pre-Service • Sector of Employment

For the purposes of this analysis, the unequal variance t-test and Pearson's chi-square test were used to further understand some of the identified relationships. The unequal variance t-test was used to compare the means between two groups on the same variable. The chi-square test was used to better understand specific relationships and differences between two groups by accounting for the entire distribution.

Within the graduate characteristics of interest, the graduates were separated into groups based on graduation year, with those graduating in 2004 or earlier forming the first group and those graduating in 2005 or later forming the second. Twenty-seven respondents made up the earlier graduating classes while 34 respondents comprised the later classes. Although t-tests and chi-square tests were run to compare the respondents who indicated that they studied Public Management with those who studied Public Policy Analysis, due to the issues with the track responses, as discussed below, the results appear to be unreliable. The respondents were also analyzed separately based upon their prior experience. If they had worked in the public service sector before entering the MPSA program, they were identified as being *in-service*. If they had *not* worked in the public service sector before entering the program, then they were identified as *pre-service*. Finally, the respondents were split by the job sector in which they work: federal government or other, which included state or local government and the nonprofit sector.

Alumni Focus Groups

The Capstone developed nine semi-structured questions to encourage elaboration on specific points of discussion during the focus groups. The Capstone used examples provided by

Krueger (1991) to guide the wording of the questions and examples from Osborne and Collins (2001) and Jennings (1989) to inform the content of the questions. The focus group questions complemented the major themes of the survey, including curriculum, faculty, and career outcomes.

The Capstone conducted a pilot test with MPSA alumni residing in the Bryan/College Station, Texas, area. The five participants in the pilot focus group were recruited through the contacts of a local alumni representative. The Capstone practiced note-taking strategies at the pilot focus group, but no data was collected to inform the results. No type of tape or electronic recording device was used during any of the focus group sessions in accordance with IRB standards.

Based on lessons learned during the pilot focus group, the Capstone modified the manner in which it conducted the two subsequent focus groups. These modifications included the following:

- Different personality types, such as the "dominant talker" and the "rambler" (Krueger 1991, 84), were observed during the pilot. Recognizing these traits allowed the moderator to better guide the discussion.
- The room arrangement was altered to improve the flow of the discussion. While focus group participants all sat on one side of the table during the pilot, a circle arrangement with participants surrounding the table was suggested for the later focus groups.
- Questions were re-ordered in a more logical format and arranged by theme.

After the focus group strategies were revised, the Capstone coordinated with the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin to use one of their classrooms to host the first official focus group. The focus group administrators were organized into three note-takers and a moderator. Four alumni participated and represented the classes of 1999, 2004, 2005, and 2009. The tables were arranged so that the respondents and moderator could sit in a circular fashion to promote a conversational environment. The three note-takers sat apart from the focus group so as not to distract the respondents with their writing. The Capstone mission and the importance of alumni/stakeholder input were discussed before asking the prepared questions. Following the focus group and in preparation for analysis, the notes were streamlined and compiled to minimize redundancy.

The Capstone next conducted a focus group via teleconference with MPSA alumni in the Washington, D.C., area. The Capstone members met at the Bush School to lead the focus group, while the participants were able to call in from their various locations. The teleconference was conducted by three members of the Capstone: a moderator and two note-takers. Since a fairly high level of redundancy had been apparent in the notes taken during the Austin focus group, it

was decided that only two note-takers were necessary for the Washington, D.C., focus group. Seven participants called in, representing the classes of 2002, 2008, and 2009. Due to the circumstances of this focus group, the Capstone did not need to be concerned about the room arrangement or position of the note-takers. One difficulty that did arise, however, was that it was not always clear who was talking since all of the conversation took place over the telephone. This did not present a major impediment to the focus group process, however, since the participants were not identified in the notes. The same open-ended questions were asked during this focus group as during the Austin focus group, and they were prepared for analysis in a similar manner.

Methods of Focus Group Analysis

Overall, the responses from the focus groups conducted with participants in the Austin and Washington, D.C., areas were similar. The notes based on participants' responses from these two focus groups were streamlined and compiled for analysis. Redundant information was consolidated and/or eliminated. The responses from the focus groups were then categorized according to the focus group questions and by topics within particular questions. The responses from the survey's open-ended questions were also sorted by theme. Both responses from the survey's open-ended questions and the focus groups were compared and analyzed to identify trends.

In this study, the general findings from the focus groups and the open-ended survey questions are presented in the form of anecdotal and descriptive statements of opinion and as quotes from former students. These statements are used to support and illustrate the quantitative data provided by the survey.

Employer Interviews

An effort was made by the Capstone to obtain employer contact information from the alumni so that employer interviews could be conducted. However, after three separate requests for contact information were sent to the alumni via e-mail, no responses were generated. As a result, no employer interviews were conducted by the Capstone. As identified in the literature review, conducting employer interviews can be challenging, and response rates of employer feedback tend to be low (Jennings 1989; Roberts 2001; Hermes 2002).

Results

In this section, the demographic characteristics of the respondents will first be discussed, followed by highlights from the survey responses. The respective sections of the survey—curriculum, internship program, faculty, program services and activities, career outcomes, knowledge, and skills—will then be explored in greater detail. For a complete list of the survey responses to the Likert-scale questions expressed as percentages, refer to Appendix III. Insights from the Austin and Washington, D.C., focus groups and the survey's open-ended response questions are highlighted in text boxes below.

Demographics

As previously explained, the original dataset for this study was derived from data collected and maintained by the DSS at the Bush School. The dataset included names and e-mail addresses of 208 MPSA program graduates. All 208 graduates were sent an electronic copy of the survey entitled "Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) Program Evaluation for the Bush School of Government and Public Service." The survey remained open for approximately three weeks, during which 61 graduates responded. This is a response rate of 29.3 percent for MPSA program graduates between the eleven-year period of 1999 to 2009.

Table 1

Gender	
Male	37.7 %
Female	62.3 %
Age	
Median	30
Maximum	55
Minimum	24
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	1.6 %
Asian	1.6 %
Caucasian	82.0 %
Hispanic	15.0 %

As displayed in Table 1, overall, more females responded to the survey than did males. Out of the 61 respondents, approximately 38 percent were male and 62 percent were female. The minimum age of MPSA program graduates was 24, the maximum age was 55, and the median age was 30. Approximately 82 percent of the sample was Caucasian, and 15 percent was Hispanic. African American and Asian graduates each comprised two percent of the sample.

As observed in Figure 1, the graduating class of 2003 had the highest response rate based on the number of graduates who responded out of the total number of students who graduated that year. The class of 2007 had the second highest response rate.
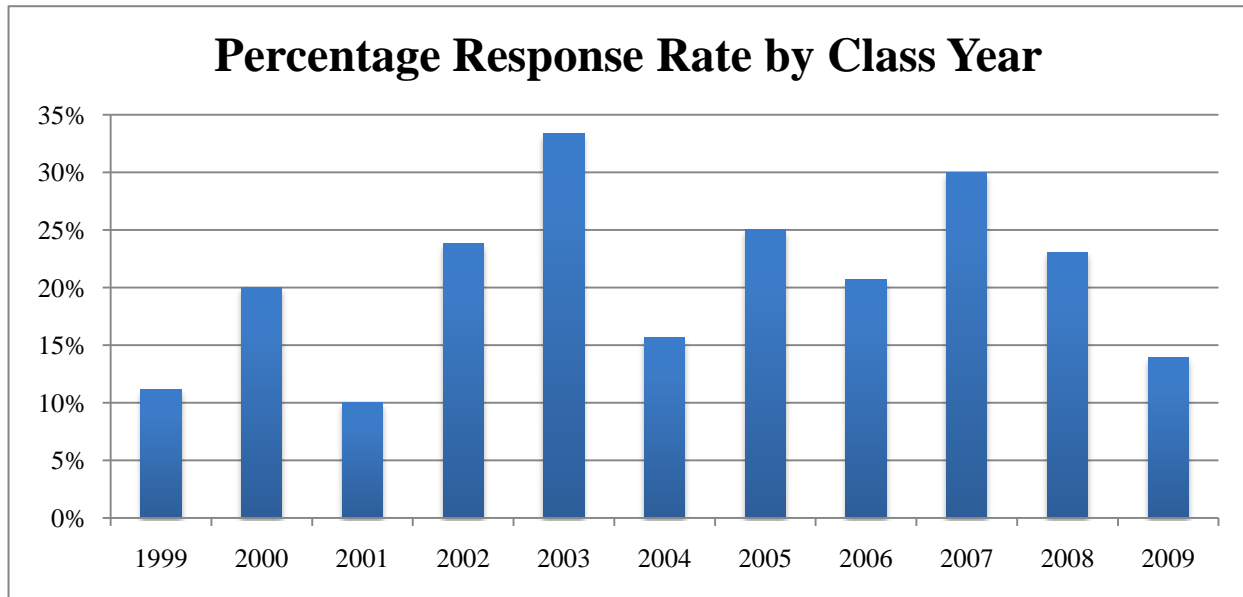
Percentage Response Rate by Class Year

Table 2 reports that approximately 84 percent of the sample indicated that they are currently employed full-time, while eight percent indicated part-time employment, seven percent indicated that they are unemployed, and five percent indicated that they are full-time students. Of those graduates currently employed, 79 percent said that they are in a position related to their MPSA degree. As seen in Figure 2, approximately 56 percent of MPSA graduates worked in the public service sector before attending the Bush School.

Table 2

Employment Status	
Full-time employment	83.6 %
Part-time employment	8.2 %
Unemployed	6.6 %
Full-time student	4.9 %
Part-time student	0.0 %

Current Job Relates to MPSA Degree	
Yes	78.7 %
No	14.8 %
Not Applicable	6.6 %

Table 3

Sector of Current Employment	
Federal Government	37.9 %
State Government	10.3 %
Local Government	8.6 %
Nonprofit	10.3 %
Private	15.5 %
Other	17.2 %

Thirty-eight percent of the sample indicated that they are currently employed with the federal government, while 10 percent are state employees, nine percent are employed in local government, 10 percent work for nonprofit agencies, 15 percent can be found in the private sector, and the remaining 17 percent selected "other employment;" see Table 3.

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The breakdown of salaries for MPSA program graduates is displayed in Figure 3, which demonstrates that approximately 27 percent of MPSA program graduates earn greater than $100,000 per year, with the $60,000-$79,000 range ranking second at 25 percent.

Percentage of In-Service vs. Pre-Service Graduates

56% Worked in Public Service Before Getting MPSA Degree
44% Did Not Work in Public Service Before Getting MPSA Degree

Figure 2

Salary Range for MPSA Graduates

15% Less than $39,999
20% $40,000-$59,999
25% $60,000-$79,999
13% $80,000-$99,999
27% $100,000 or More

Figure 3
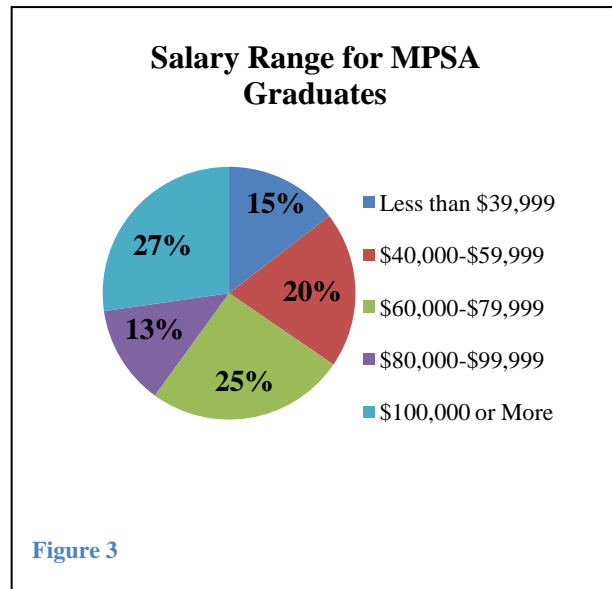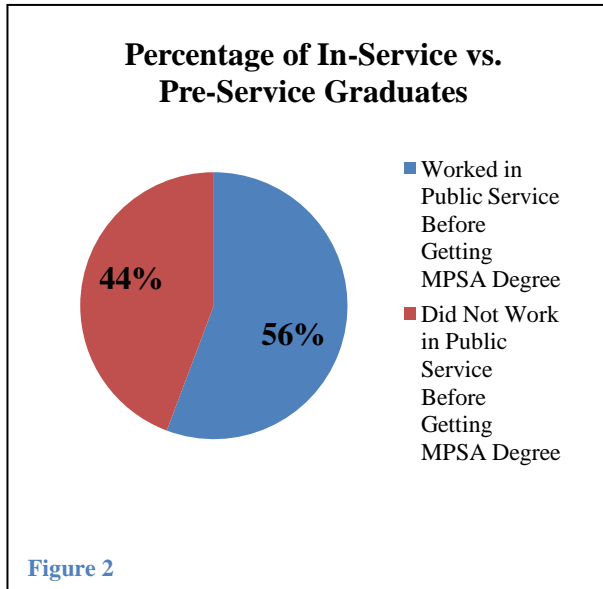
In the MPSA program, students have the opportunity to choose a track of study, currently Public Policy Analysis or Public Management, as well as an elective concentration area. Of the 61 respondents, approximately 44 percent answered that the MPSA program tracks listed on the survey were "not applicable;" see Table 4. Further, 41 percent answered that their MPSA program concentration was "self-designed." Some of the apparent confusion may come from the fact that the track and concentration offerings have changed over the years. For example, the Bush School began by offering only the MPSA degree, which originally incorporated some of the interest areas currently included in the MPIA degree. The MPIA degree program was added later. Other modifications to the tracks and concentrations have occurred in the ensuing years. The Capstone attempted to include all of the tracks and concentrations that the degree program has ever offered, but the changes over the years still proved to muddle the results. In the end, these responses complicated the analysis when separating groups by track or concentration and caused the results to be of little value.

Table 4

MPSA Track	
Public Policy Analysis	11.5 %
Public Management	23.0 %
Business & Government	4.9 %
Environmental & Natural Resources	3.3 %
Health Policy & Management	1.6 %
International Affairs in the Americas	3.3 %
Not Applicable	44.3 %
Other	8.2 %

Highlights from the Survey

In this section, we present highlights from the analysis based on the general alumni perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the various aspects of the program. The strengths and limitations were determined by calculating the percentage of agreement for each survey question built on the six-point Likert scale. The percentage of agreement was assessed based on the percentage of respondents who indicated that they *strongly agreed* with the statement combined with the percentage who responded that they *agreed* with the question. These responses cover questions related to curriculum, faculty, program services and activities, career outcomes, knowledge, and skills.

Several of the survey responses were overwhelmingly positive. These have been labeled as the program's strengths; see Figure 4. They include skills, such as the ability to function in a team, written and oral communication, and presentation skills. They also include program characteristics, including that the MPSA program has a reasonable workload and satisfactory resources and facilities. Additionally, 87 percent of the respondents agreed that, overall, the MPSA program prepared them well for a career in public service and administration.
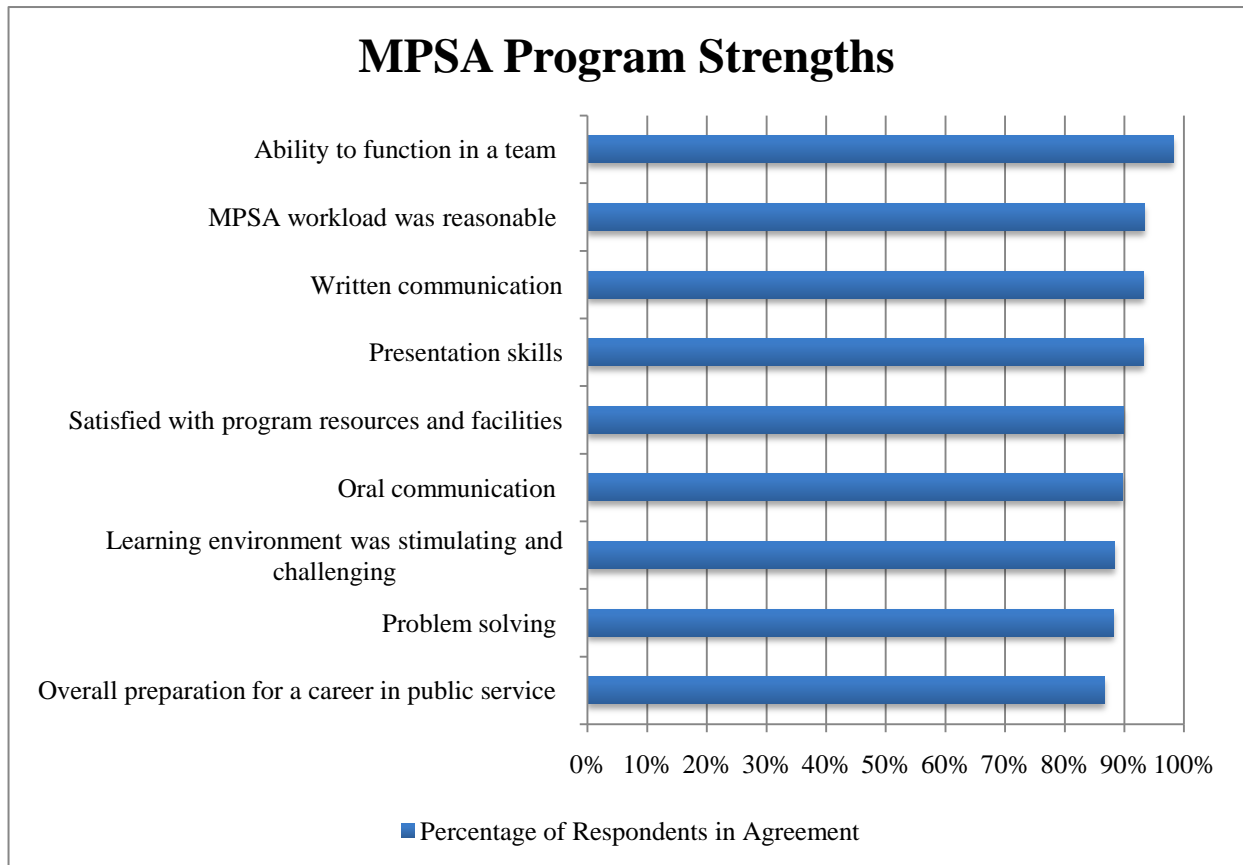

Figure 4

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Program Strengths

A majority of respondents to the focus group and open-ended survey questions viewed the MPSA program's emphasis on group work as satisfactory in supporting their ability to work with a team.

The most important lesson I learned was not a single theory, or a lecture, or a class. It was the idea that working for the government is somewhat thankless and if you can't be a team player you should look elsewhere. Also, you can get almost anything done if you don't care who gets the credit. Some of the team papers at the Bush School were really challenging, but working with other people with different styles is a must.

Another major theme revealed in the focus group and open-ended responses concerned the strength of program resources and facilities. This theme centered on office space because many former students believed that office space was a key component of being satisfied with the MPSA program.

Sharing offices with one another was where some of the greatest interactions and learning occurred over the two years. To hear that this has already changed, due to space constraints, is disheartening. Managing the growth of the school is essential to keeping the close bonds that are formed in the school; without this sense of community, your former student network will weaken over time.

However, there are inconsistencies from the focus group and open-ended responses in the survey. The open-ended responses reveal that, even though 93 percent of respondents expressed that written communication skills were a strength of the MPSA program, they noted that there should be a greater focus on short analysis writing. With a great deal of frequency, respondents expressed sentiments similar to the following:

In the federal government, I find that my written communications are short and to the point. They are not long, academic pieces. In my classes at the Bush School, the most useful classes were the classes that focused on short, to-the-point policy papers. Unfortunately, there were not enough of these classes. Learning to write short papers is a useful skill that we did not practice enough. For any student wanting to enter government service, I believe it is unnecessary to spend time writing 20-page research papers. This is something that is better suited for undergraduate work.

Other survey responses revealed some of the MPSA program's limitations; see Figure 5. These include a low level of contribution to MPSA graduates' knowledge in the following areas: information systems/technology, marketing and public relations, and workforce diversity and management. Survey respondents indicated a low level of agreement that the MPSA program contributed to their grant writing skills. Approximately 48 percent of respondents agreed that the MPSA program had an appropriate amount of practice within the classroom and 52 percent responded that they had received meaningful counsel from their faculty advisors.

MPSA Program Limitations

Category	
Information systems/technology	
Marketing & public relations	
Grant writing	
Workforce diversity & management	
Quality service techniques/principles	
Citizen & volunteer management	
Appropriate amount of practice in the classroom	
Interagency collaboration strategies	
Meaningful counsel from faculty advisor	

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
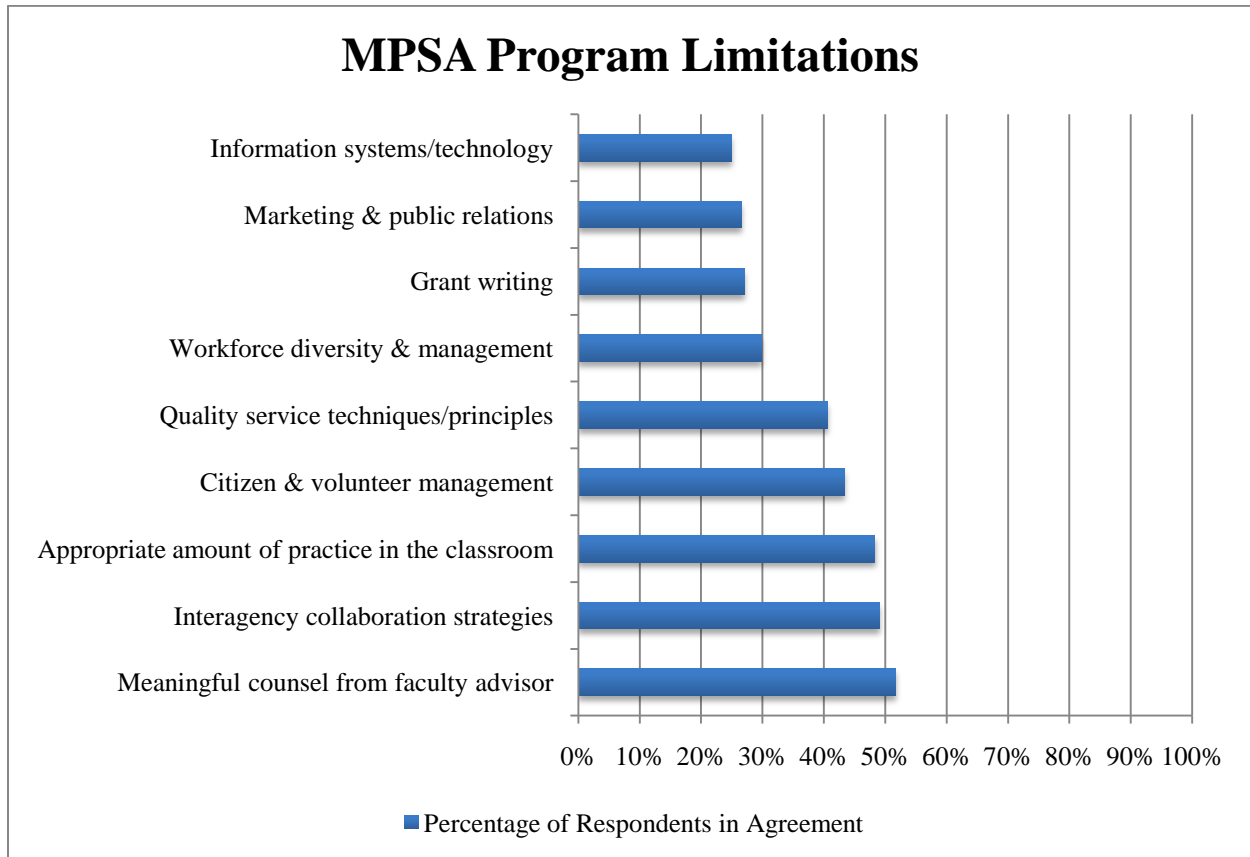
■ Percentage of Respondents in Agreement

Figure 5

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Program Limitations

The most frequent response of focus group and survey respondents concerned the balance between theory and practice in the classroom. While many respondents voiced a desire for more practice in the classroom, others expressed satisfaction with the balance of theory and practice that they had received.

I thought the MPSA curriculum was heavy on theory, not enough focus on practice…[W]hat attracted me to the Bush School was the fact that it was supposed to be a school designed for those who wanted to enter public service. It was not (I believe) supposed to be another pipeline for Ph.D. programs elsewhere. It was also not designed to be like the LBJ School or any other MPA program in the U.S. - it was supposed to be different, with an emphasis on service. During my time, I saw the program shift its focus to theory, with a smaller emphasis on practice. If this is what the Bush School wants to be, then so be it. But this is not what attracted me to the program, thus my negative view.

The most useful classes were those that taught through case study, and those who used theory, but in innovative ways. At that stage in my life, I really needed thought provoking, experiential learning.

I grew to believe that one can never learn too much theory in graduate school. Application can be learned in any job, but theory can be applied to every job - including private industry.

Curriculum

In general, survey respondents seemed to be satisfied with the MPSA program curriculum; see Figure 6. More than 90 percent agreed that the MPSA workload was reasonable; 90 percent also agreed that the class schedules were convenient. Additionally, survey respondents generally agreed that the learning environment was stimulating and challenging and that an appropriate amount of theory was taught in the classroom.

MPSA Curriculum

■ Percentage of Respondents in Agreement
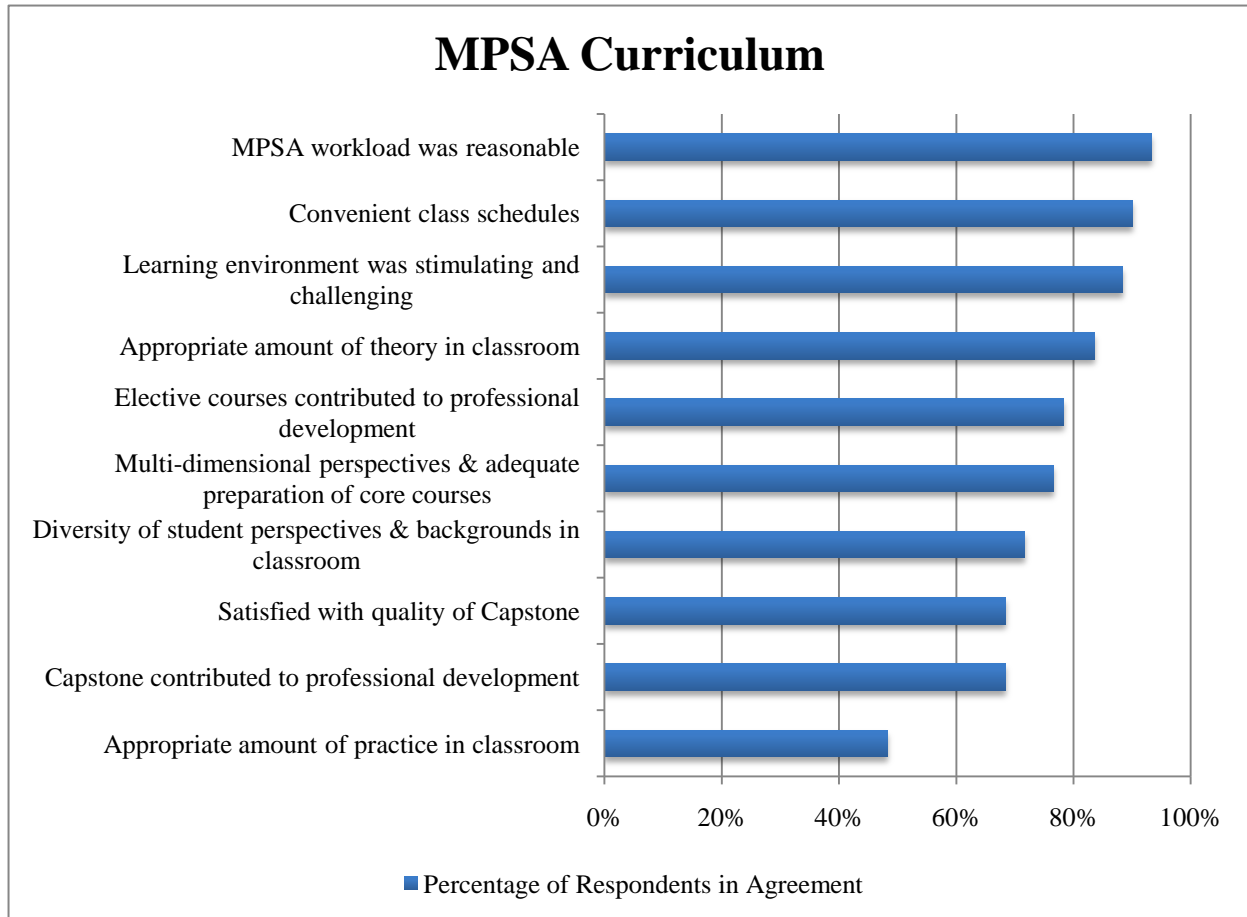
By far, the response with the lowest agreement had to do with practice in the classroom. As previously stated, 48 percent of the survey takers agreed that an appropriate amount of practice was presented in the classroom. While this variable was investigated for differences in response by graduation year, gender, track (Public Management or Public Policy Analysis), experience (in-service vs. pre-service), and job sector (federal government vs. state, local, and nonprofit sectors), no statistically significant difference was found between any of these groups. Denhardt's (2001) assertion that a difference might be seen in the desired level of practice between pre-service and in-service graduates did not hold up in the survey. Respondents, in general, were apparently not satisfied with the level of practice in the classroom.

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Program Curriculum

Workload was also viewed as satisfactory by a large number of focus group and open-ended survey respondents.

Although I felt that the workload of the MPSA program was excessive while I was going through it, I feel now that it was appropriate when compared to my current workload.

Furthermore, a theme that was not addressed in the survey came up frequently in the focus groups and in the open-ended responses, which was a feeling of dissatisfaction with the number and types of track and concentration courses offered in the curriculum.

Creating tracks and concentrations is helpful. While I was there, it felt as if the classes were more generic and students did not have the opportunity to focus in on areas of interest.

I feel that if a concentration is offered to incoming/potential students, there should be classes available to students specific to that concentration while students are in attendance. A student shouldn't have to go outside the Bush School to receive the education that was promised when applying.

A statistically significant difference was found concerning the graduates' satisfaction with the quality of their Capstone based on graduation year. Overall, 68 percent of respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of their Capstone. When the responses were separated between alumni who graduated in 2004 or before versus those who graduated in 2005 or later, 52 percent of the earlier graduates agreed that they were satisfied with their Capstone, while 82 percent of the later classes were in agreement; see Figure 7. It is interesting to note that the MPSA program switched from a one-semester Capstone to a two-semester Capstone in academic year 2006-2007.

Satisfied with Quality of Capstone
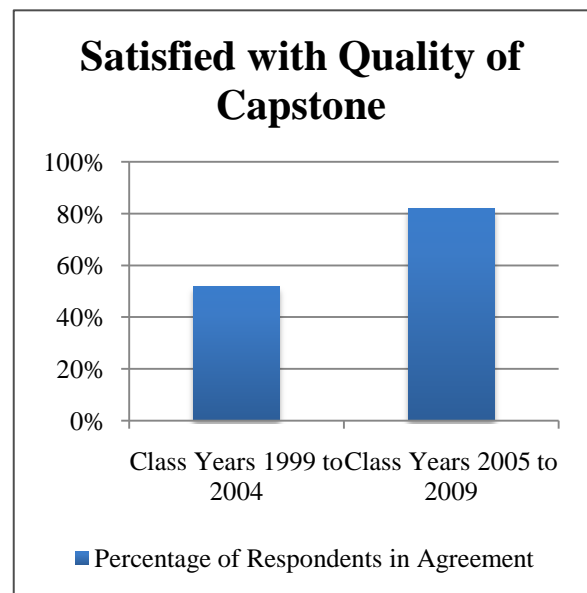
Figure 7

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Capstone Experience

The following statements illustrate the range of satisfaction with the Capstone experience by casting it in both a positive and negative light.

Capstone was a great learning experience. The ability to function in a team is crucial in any sector/industry…[and] student-driven research is an essential element to the development of significant analytical skills.

[The] Bush School places too much emphasis on it. The Capstone is not a selling point to hiring managers.

Internship Program

       In general, the survey respondents agreed that they had a positive internship experience; see Figure 8. Seventy-seven and 75 percent agreed that the internship was a valuable addition to their professional education and provided practical work experience, respectively. Seventy percent of the graduates surveyed agreed that the internship complemented their academic learning experience. The lowest level of agreement was with the preparation the graduates felt they received following their first year in the MPSA program. Sixty-two percent of the respondents agreed that the first year in the program prepared them for their internships.
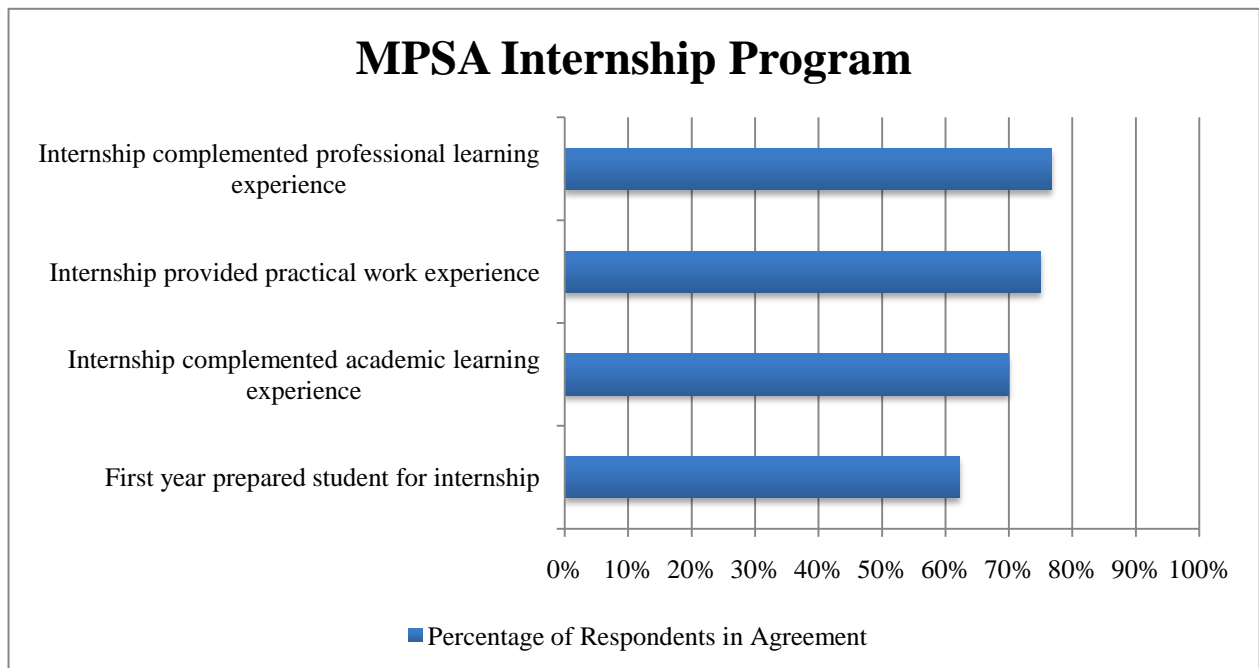
28

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Internship Experience

Most focus group and open-ended responses viewed the MPSA internship program as satisfactory.

I enjoyed how open the requirements were: I didn't find my internship very "intellectually stimulating" but took contacts and experience away from it. It did give me opportunities to observe some of the mechanisms of government and campaign that are rarely seen from the Bush School, and academia in general.

I was able to complete my internship thanks to funding from the school. It is great that the school can do this because I would otherwise have been unable to complete an overseas internship that was unpaid.

The respondents who did not view the internship program as satisfactory tended to focus on the internships themselves or the lack of help in finding an internship.

I thought that the program itself was fine. I was disappointed in the quality of my internship because the public affairs firm I interned with did not give me challenging and meaningful work. I thought that the Bush School program itself was helpful and well organized.

I basically found the internship on my own. More assistance would always be great, but it's understood that practical administrative limitations do exist. There are plenty of businesses that would love a graduate student intern. It's just a matter of getting those built into a pipeline of opportunities.

Faculty

Questions regarding the MPSA program faculty elicited relatively positive responses; see Figure 9. Eighty-seven percent of respondents agreed that MPSA faculty members were accessible and constructive in their interactions with graduates, while 85 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of the program's instruction.

MPSA Faculty

Category	Percentage
Accessibility of other faculty members	
Satisfied with quality of instruction	
Diversity of faculty perspectives and backgrounds in classroom	
Satisfied with number of instructors with practical experience	
Meaningful counsel from faculty advisor	

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
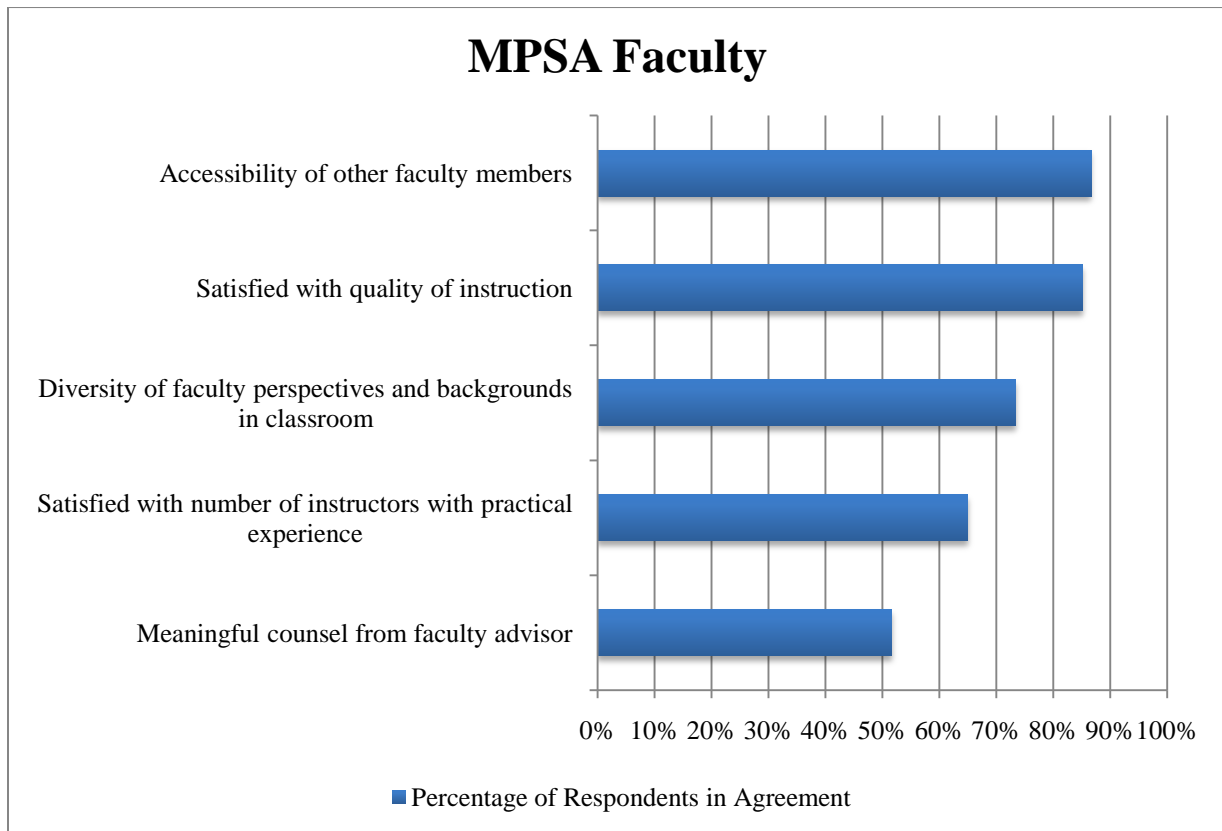
■ Percentage of Respondents in Agreement

Figure 9

Sixty-five percent of the alumni surveyed were satisfied with the number of instructors who had practical experience and shared it in the classroom. The responses to this question appeared to be consistent across various graduate groups. A statistically significant difference did arise, however, between those who had worked in public service prior to entering the MPSA program and those who had not when they were questioned about the counsel they received from their faculty advisor. While 66 percent of in-service graduates (those who had worked in public service before entering the MPSA program) agreed that they had received meaningful counsel from their faculty advisors, 42 percent of pre-service graduates (those who had *not* previously worked in public service) were in agreement; see Figure 10.
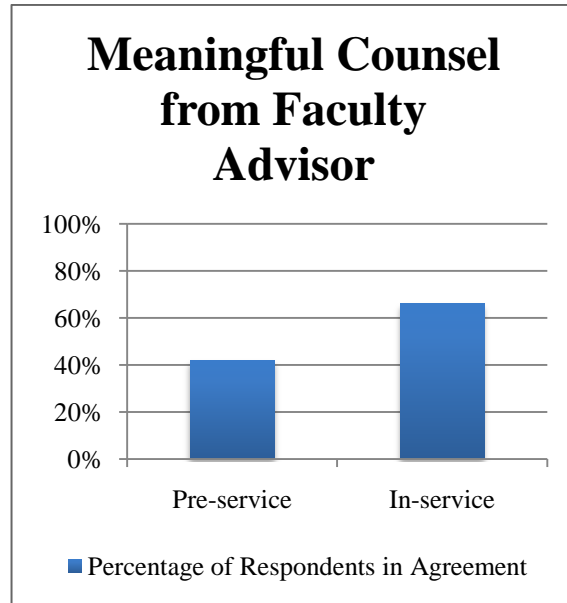
Figure 10

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Program Faculty

Many focus group and open-ended respondents indicated that the faculty was satisfactory.

The MPSA faculty during my tenure where consummate professionals that served as great instructors and mentors.

However, other respondents wanted to see the MPSA program place a greater emphasis on retaining faculty. Additionally, similar to earlier statements about the need for more application in the MPSA program, respondents emphasized the importance of having a balance between practitioners with on-the-job experience and academics.

I strongly support maintaining a balance of lecturers who have had long careers in federal government service and professors with less experience but strong academic credentials. The academics add value to the reputation of the school and the rigor in the classroom, but the practitioners distinguish the school from its competitors. I have leaned on the lessons I learned from each throughout the course of my career.

Program Services and Activities

Respondents were generally satisfied with most of the MPSA program services and activities; see Figure 11. Ninety percent of the graduates noted satisfaction with the program's resources and facilities, while 83 percent were satisfied overall with the MPSA program's staff members. Graduates were also generally in agreement about their satisfaction with the computer staff and help desk, the program's extracurricular activities, and the Professional Leadership Development activities.

Program Services and Activities

Satisfied with program resources and facilities

Satisfied overall with MPSA program staff members

Satisfied with computer staff and help desk

Extracurricular activities contributed positively to MPSA experience

Satisfied with Professional Leadership Development activities

Satisfied with alumni services

Satisfied with MPSA Director Assistant

Satisfied with writing consultant

Satisfied with internship & career services coordinator

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
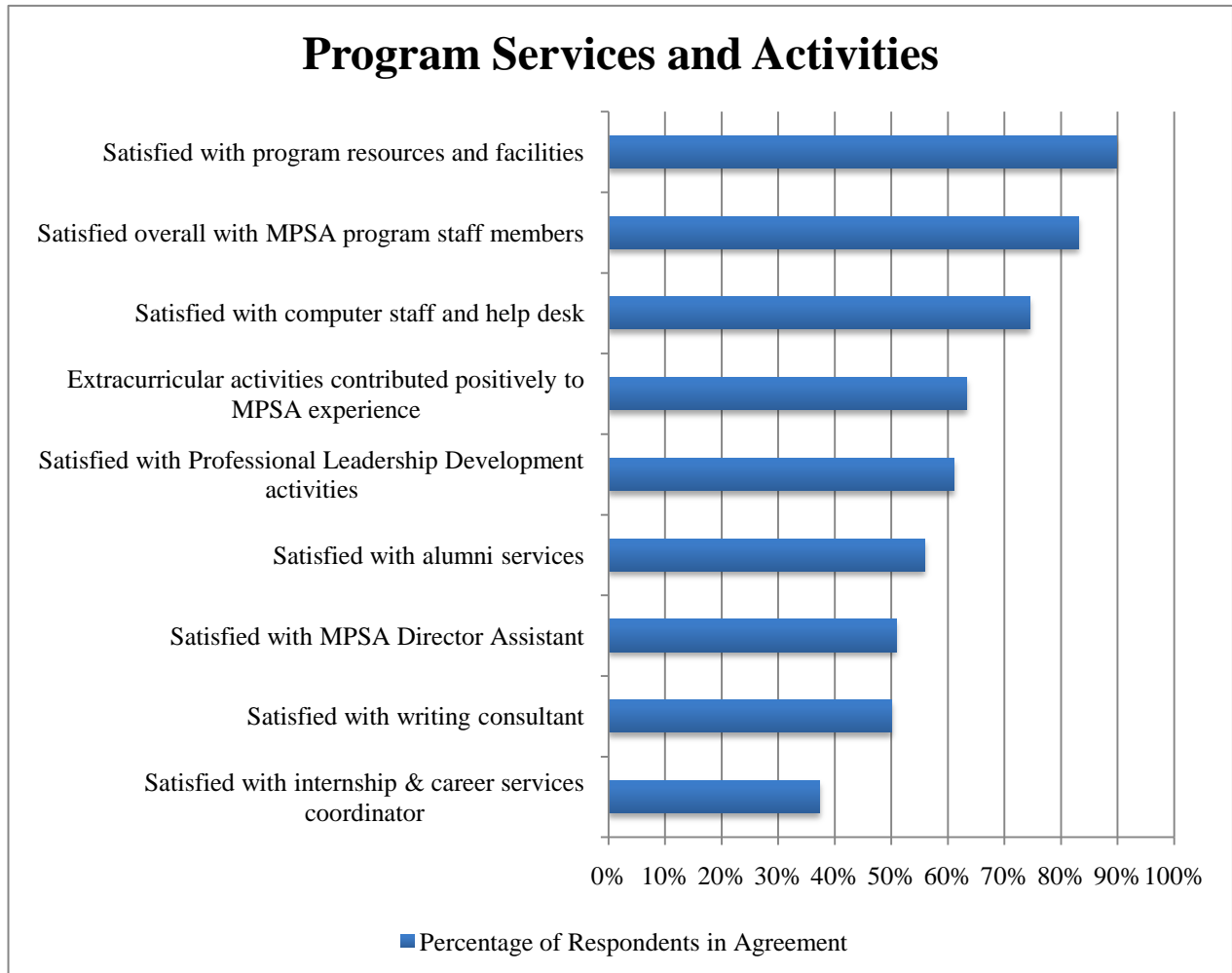
■ Percentage of Respondents in Agreement

Figure 11

Fifty percent of the survey takers expressed that they were satisfied with the writing consultant; no difference between groups of graduates was evident. A statistically significant difference was observed between earlier and later graduation years when the graduates were asked whether or not the Assistant to the MPSA Director position provided useful assistance in an efficient and able manner. Overall, 51 percent of graduates agreed. When the data was disaggregated by class year, however, 30 percent of graduates from 1999 to 2004 agreed, while 69 percent of the graduates from 2005 to 2009 were in agreement; see Figure 12.

Satisfied with MPSA Program Director's Assistant Position

Satisfied with Internship and Career Services Coordinator Position
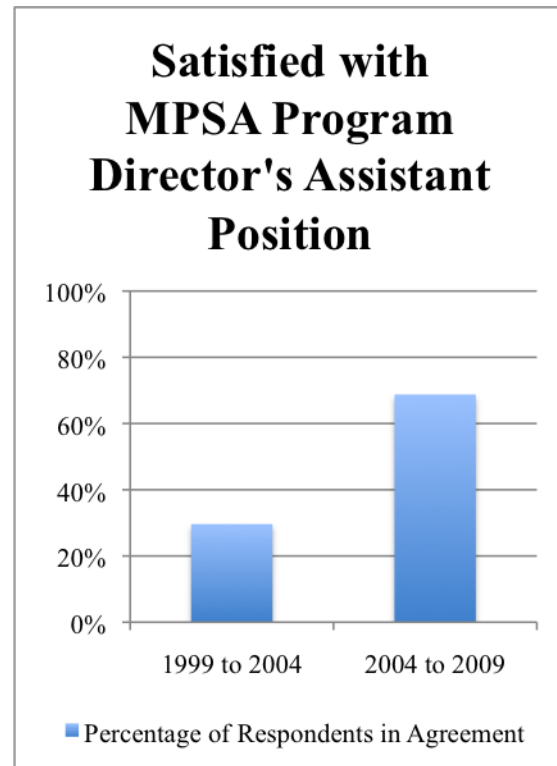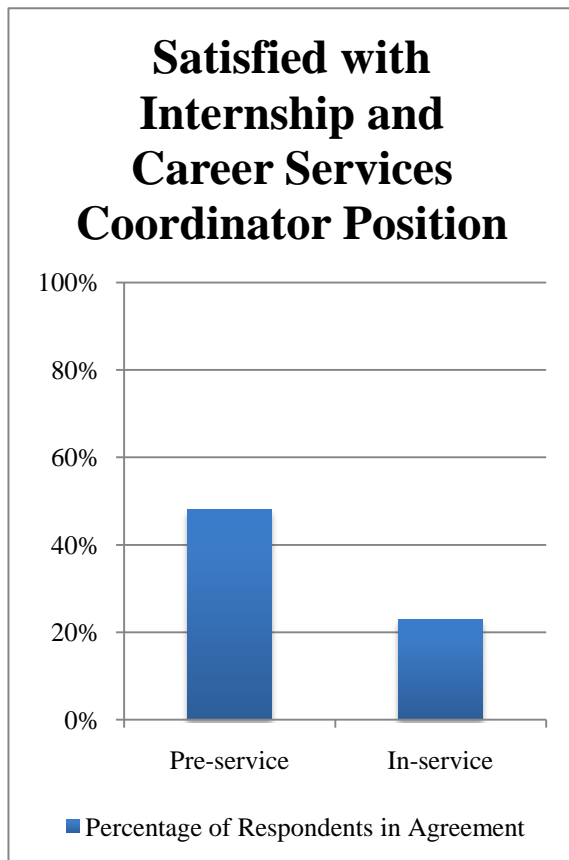
When asked whether or not they were satisfied with the internship and career services coordinator position's efforts to assist them in finding a job following graduation, 37 percent of graduates agreed. However, a statistically significant difference was seen between those who had worked in public service before and those who had not. While 48 percent of the pre-service students were in agreement, 23 percent of the in-service students agreed; see Figure 13.

A statistically significant difference was also seen between pre-service and in-service students when they were questioned about whether or not they receive appropriate updates about current MPSA program events and activities. Overall, 56 percent of the respondents agreed that they receive appropriate updates. Forty-six percent of in-service graduates responded in the affirmative, however, while 64 percent of pre-service alumni were in agreement; see Figure 14.

Satisfied with Alumni Services

Figure 14

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Program Services and Activities

As stated earlier, many of the focus group and survey respondents viewed office space as a key factor in their satisfaction with program resources and facilities. Conversely, respondents expressed a level of dissatisfaction with alumni services and internship and career services.
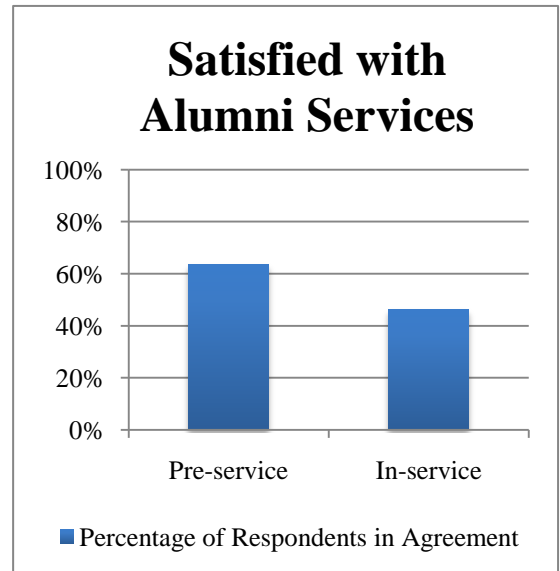
I do not believe that I received much help at all in locating my internship or current job from career services. I do not blame the career services coordinator because I do not believe they had the adequate connections at the state level to be of much help.

The level of satisfaction with professional and leadership development activities and extracurricular activities was mixed within focus group and survey responses.

While I was a student at the Bush school the MPIA program was really taking off as a program. There was a great contrast in the extracurricular development opportunities, such as speakers and special events. There were many fascinating and experienced professionals that visited the school, but they were largely individuals in International Affairs careers. Even more importantly, our class experienced difficulty with job placement.

One theme that stood out within these responses was that these services placed too much of an emphasis on both international affairs and the federal level of government with its alumni services and other activities rather than at the state and local levels.

Career Outcomes

MPSA Career Outcomes

Overall preparation for career in public service

Curriculum prepared graduate for job duties

Curriculum emphasized aspects essential to career advancement

MPSA degree/master's degree required for current position

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Percentage of Respondents in Agreement
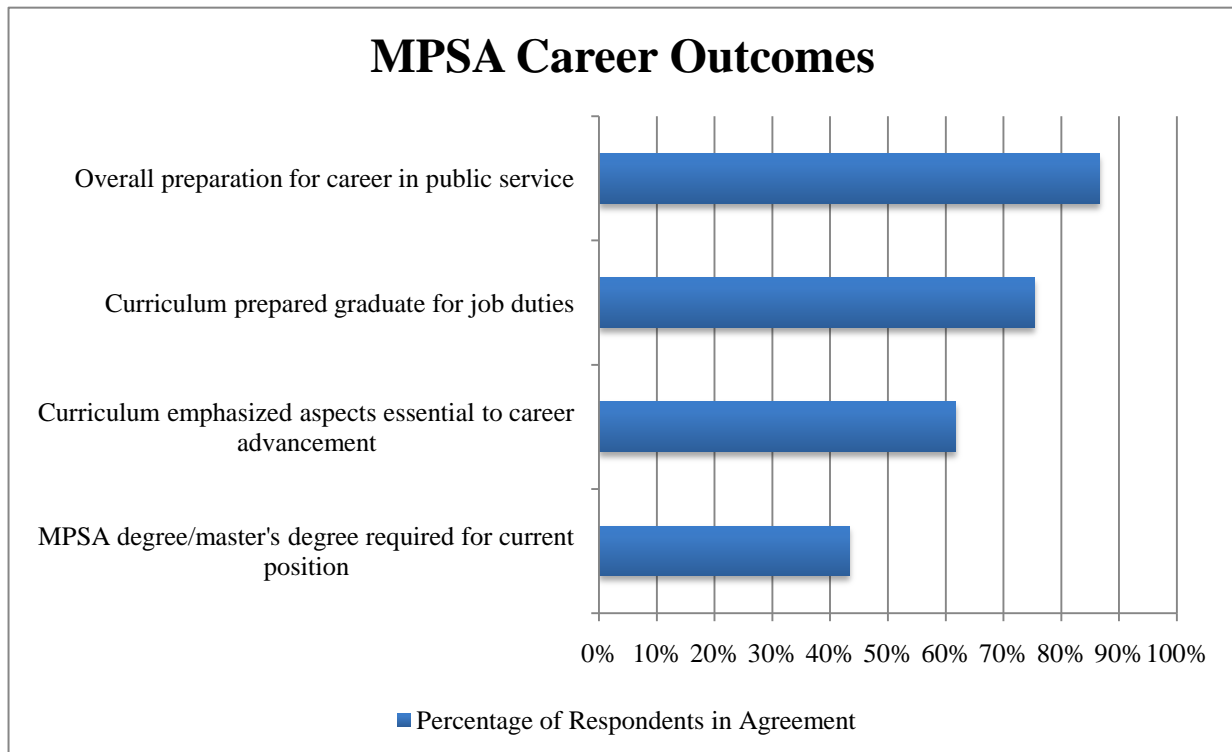
Figure 15

Respondents presented a range of responses to the questions about the career outcomes of the MPSA program, from 87 percent agreement on one question to 43 percent agreement on another; see Figure 15. Seventy-five percent of the respondents agreed that the MPSA program provided them with knowledge, skills, and abilities that they have directly applied to their jobs, and 62 percent agreed that the program curriculum emphasized aspects that have been essential to their career advancement. Approximately 43 percent reported that an MPSA degree or a master's degree is required for their current positions.

Overall Preparation for a Career in Public Service

100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%

Pre-service   In-service

■ Percentage of Respondents in Agreement

Figure 16

At 87 percent, respondents were most in agreement that the MPSA program had prepared them overall for a career in public service and administration. In-service graduates particularly agreed with this statement. Ninety-six percent of in-service graduates agreed that the program had prepared them for a further career in public service. Pre-service students also showed strong agreement, with 79 percent of responses in the affirmative; see Figure 16.

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses – Career Outcomes
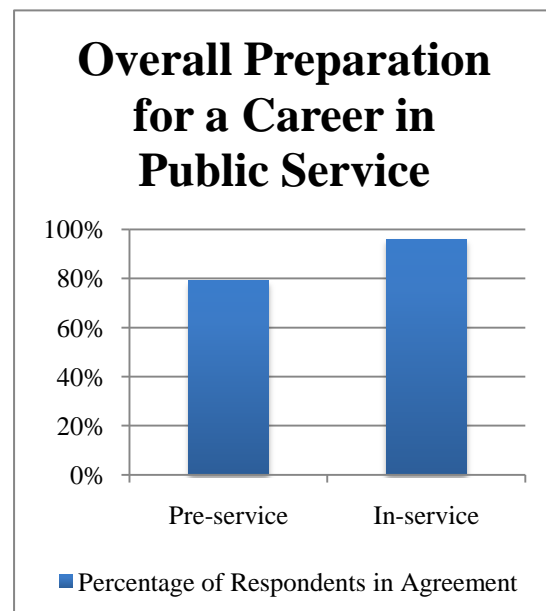
Generally, the responses from the focus group and open-ended survey questions were positive regarding preparation for a career in public service.

While I don't have a job specifically in public service or administration, the degree and exposure to public service was instrumental to my current employment.

I am one of the first mid-career students, and I am very pleased to tell you that my degree doubled my salary from before I entered school to after I graduated, and I had new tools that elevated me to an executive level within my chosen field. Additionally, I have been selected to serve as an advisor to the United Nations, assist with creating model penal codes for peacekeeping missions, and was appointed to an international committee with the International Chiefs of Police.

My career has gone way beyond my expectations since I graduated. I have had so many new opportunities such as being asked to author a book, speaking on Capitol Hill and being designated as a subject matter expert because of my academic degree.

Knowledge

Graduates also gave a wide range of responses as to whether or not the MPSA program had contributed to their knowledge in several different areas; see Figure 17. The respondents indicated the highest level of agreement that the program had contributed to their knowledge in the following categories: program implementation and evaluation, the policy process, applying public service principles and values, and cost-benefit analysis. The graduates showed less agreement with the program's contribution to their knowledge of workforce diversity management, marketing and public relations, and information systems and technology. Approximately 49 percent of respondents agreed that the MPSA program contributed to their understanding of interagency collaboration strategies, and 43 percent responded that the program contributed to their knowledge of citizen and volunteer management.

MPSA Contribution to Knowledge
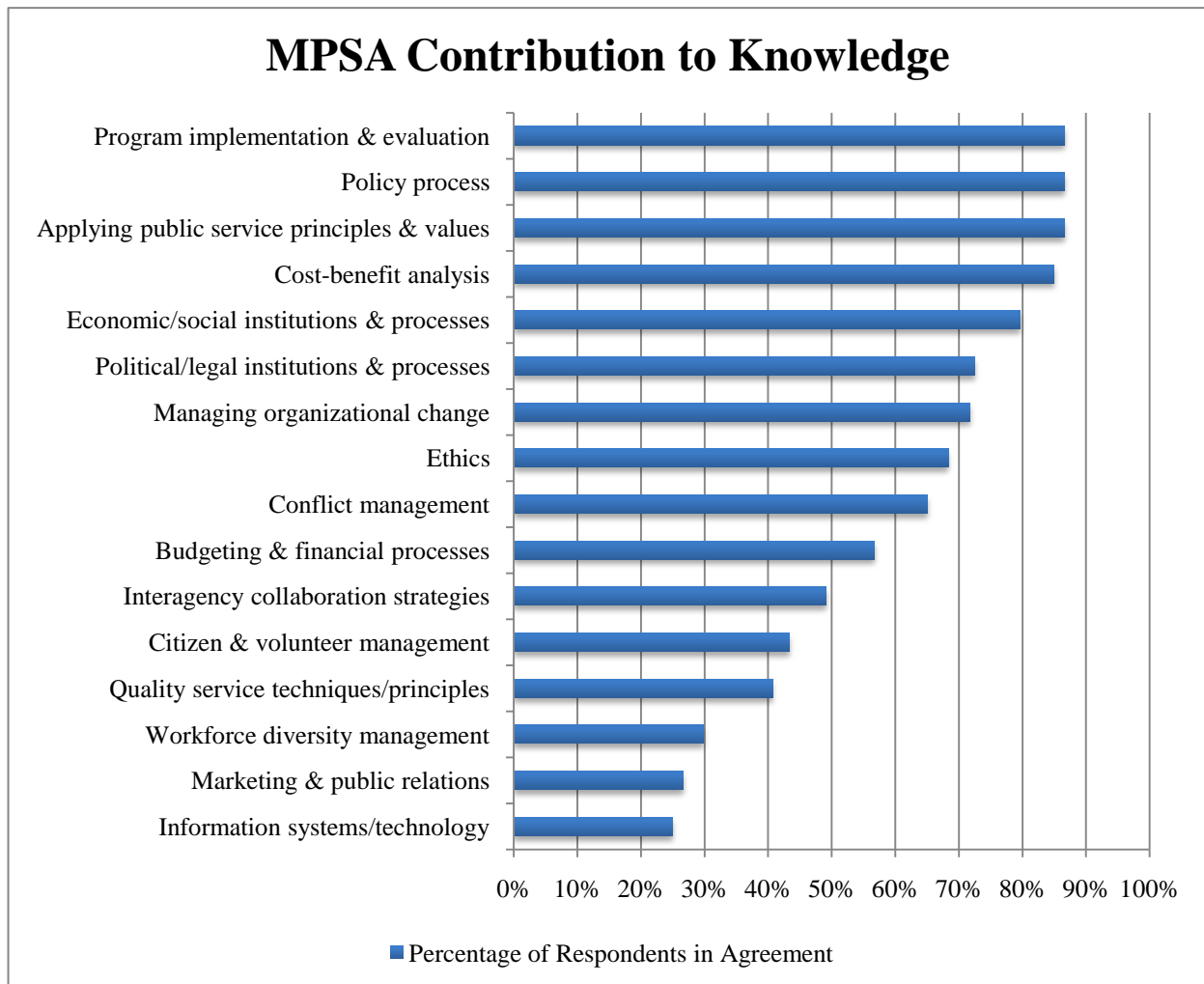
Figure 17

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses - Knowledge

While graduates generally did not comment on specific knowledge areas directly attributable to the program during the focus groups and in open-ended responses, they did highlight a few elements that they feel are lacking but would have been beneficial in their current positions.

Having more practical knowledge that supports the different organizational theories would be helpful in working within a governmental agency that already has well-established rules and regulations… Additionally, working where I do, it would have been helpful to have more insight on how to actually impact and affect change within said agency when you are far removed from any decision making authority.

I think more exposure to federal budgeting including pay-go and scoring would be very helpful. Both the theory and also the practice and how the interaction of politics and budgeting impacts outcomes.

Skills

As with knowledge, the respondents demonstrated a wide range of agreement that the MPSA program had contributed to their skills in a number of areas; see Figure 18. Ninety-eight percent of the survey takers indicated that the MPSA program contributed to their ability to function in a team. Ninety percent or more of the respondents also agreed that the program contributed to their presentation, written communication, and oral communication skills.

MPSA Contribution to Skills

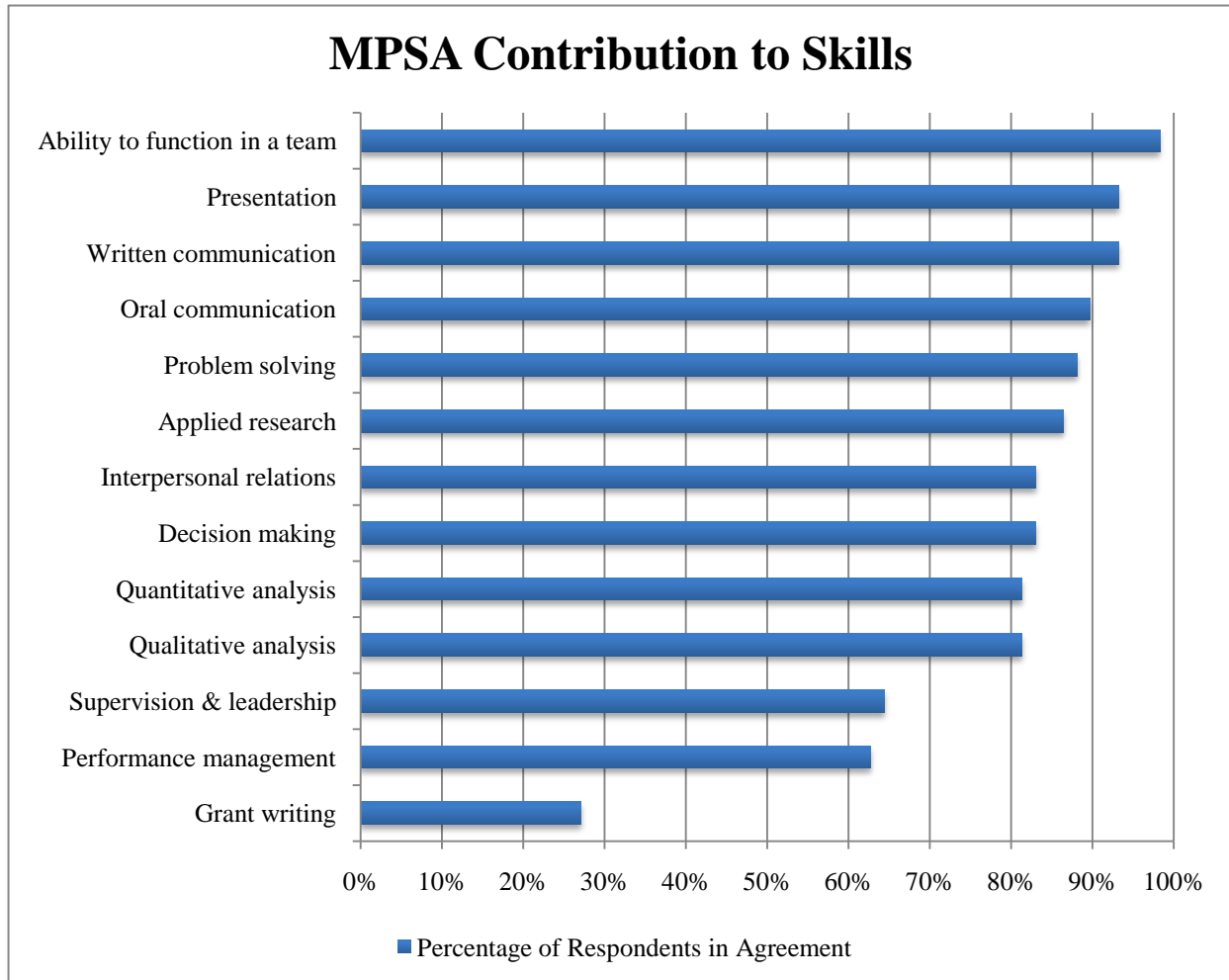Percentage of Respondents in Agreement

Figure 18

The three categories with the lowest level of agreement were supervision and leadership, performance management, and grant writing. Overall, 27 percent of respondents agreed that the MPSA program had contributed to their grant writing skills. A statistically significant difference was observed between the responses of the graduates working in the federal government and those working in other job sectors (state, local, and nonprofit). While 14 percent of the graduates working at the federal level agreed that the program had contributed to their grant writing skills, 44 percent of graduates in the state, local, and nonprofit sectors indicated that the program had taught them these skills; see Figure 19.
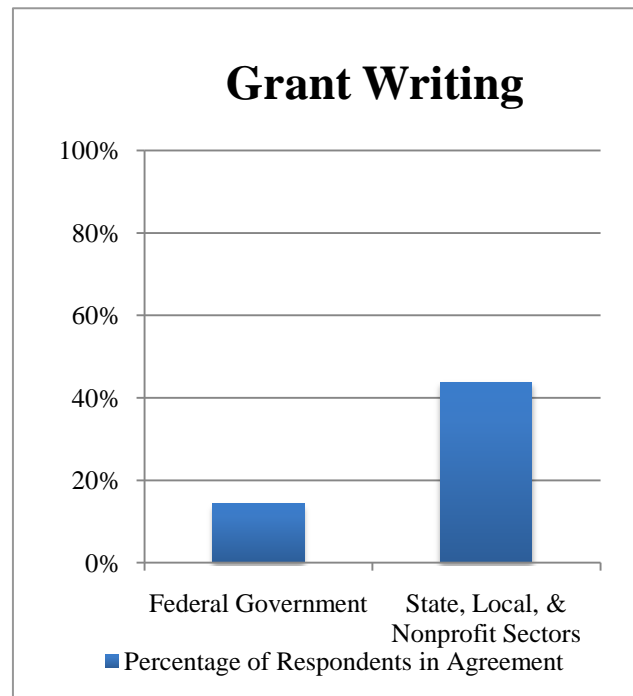
Figure 19

Focus Group and Open-Ended Responses - Skills

Respondents expressed their satisfaction with the MPSA program's contribution to skills, such as ability to function as a team, presentation skills, and written and oral communication skills. A polarizing issue that emerged, however, was the MPSA program's contribution to graduates' quantitative analysis skills. Some of the respondents viewed their quantitative analysis skills as satisfactory, while others preferred either a greater or a lesser focus on quantitative methods.

I use STATA and run regressions on a daily basis. I make presentations, write memos, and deliver the information - brown-bag style - to groups around D.C. There is no end to the amount of training I could credit to my MPSA degree.

For students seeking careers in policy analysis and development I would suggest a strong emphasis on quantitative skills (statistics, economics, and analysis). It seems that the program may already have increased this emphasis since I graduated (2000) because I noticed that there is a policy analysis track. However, I have noticed that the candidates seeking employment in my organization from the Bush School haven't always had strong quantitative skills (at least as evidenced on resumes) relative to candidates from other programs (e.g., LBJ, Michigan, Duke.)

One semester is more than plenty for statistics. All semesters thereafter should be optional.

Lessons Learned

Through the process of assessing the quality of the MPSA program from the perspective of the alumni and in line with SACS and NASPAA accreditation expectations, the Capstone can offer a number of "lessons learned." Listed below are suggestions for program staff or future Capstones who may undertake similar projects or program assessments.

Lesson #1: *Initiate preliminary work the semester before the Capstone begins.*

Although it is possible to complete this project in one semester, future Capstones should be aware that time constraints and outside considerations can complicate the process. It is advisable that any future Capstones establish a timeline prior to the first spring meeting.

Lesson #2: *Include additional questions in future alumni assessment surveys.*

When the need arises to conduct another survey, the following questions may assist the survey administrators in evaluating program outcomes:
- Are you an international student?
- Did you participate in the economics/political science five-year program while at the Bush School?
- In what city/state do you currently reside?
- In what city/state did you complete your undergraduate degree?
- In what city/state did you graduate from high school?
- For the question "Please select the appropriate sector of your current employment," separate "federal government" and "federal contract work."

Lesson #3: *Conduct face-to-face focus groups whenever possible.*

As explained in the Methodology section, the Capstone conducted two face-to-face alumni focus groups: one pilot in Bryan/College Station and one for data collection purposes in Austin. The Capstone planned an additional face-to-face focus group in Washington, D.C., that did not come to fruition. While the teleconference with the Washington, D.C., alumni was an acceptable alternative, a face-to-face focus group would have been preferable. The interaction and ability to observe facial expressions was found to be beneficial and informative during the Bryan/College Station and Austin focus groups.

Lesson #4: *Attempt an alternative way to solicit contact information for employers to participate in the employer interviews.*

NASPAA recommends that MPA programs collect feedback from the employers of their

graduates. As previously stated, the Capstone made three attempts to collect employer contact information from the MPSA alumni. The initial attempt was made with the first e-mail transmittal of the electronic survey by notifying the respondents of the Capstone's intention to collect this information. Two subsequent reminders were sent via e-mail as part of the reminders to complete the survey, but no responses were received. Hermes (2002) had more success in obtaining employer participation by sending an e-mail from the program director. This could be an alternative to an e-mail from the Capstone. Hermes also made direct contact by telephone with area employers of whom he had previous knowledge in order to secure their participation.

Appendix I: Documents Submitted to IRB

Survey Questions

GRADUATE SURVEY
Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) Program Evaluation for the Bush School of Government and Public Service

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey conducted by the Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) capstone team, lead by Dr. Eric Lindquist. The purpose of this survey is to assess the effectiveness of the MPSA program from the perspective of program graduates. The information gathered will be used to strengthen and inform ongoing accreditation and assessment processes, and to recommend and make program improvements. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Your responses are important to this research and will remain confidential. Texas A&M University releases no information as to how any particular individual answers the survey and does not sell or give away the lists of respondents who participate in our research.

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

For additional information, you may contact Dr. Eric Lindquist, Institute for Science, Technology and Public Policy at Texas A&M University: (979) 862-3857 or e-lindquist@tamu.edu.

I. Demographic Information: The following information will help us interpret the survey results. Please select the appropriate response for each question.

1. What is your age? (Drop down menu or manual fill-in)

2. What is your sex? (Click to select)
    a) Male
    b) Female

3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Click to select)
    a) African American
    b) American Indian
    c) Asian
    d) Caucasian
    e) Hispanic
    f) Other: _____

4. What year did you graduate with your MPSA degree? (Drop down menu)

5. What was your track while you were in the MPSA program? (Click to select)
    a) Public Policy Analysis
    b) Public Management
    c) Advanced Public Management
    d) Business and Government
    e) Environmental and Natural Resources
    f) Health Policy and Management
    g) International Affairs in the Americas
    h) Other: _____
    i) Not Applicable

6. What was your concentration while you were in the MPSA program? (Click to select)

    a) Nonprofit Management
    b) State and Local Policy and Management
    c) Energy, Environment, and Technology Policy and Management
    d) Security Policy and Management
    e) Health Policy and Management
    f) Self-Designed
    g) Other: _____
    h) Not applicable

7. What is your current employment status? (Select all that apply)
   a) Full-time
   b) Part-time
   c) Unemployed
   d) Full-time student
   e) Part-time student

8. If you are currently employed, are you in a position that relates to your MPSA degree? (Click to select)
   a) Yes
   b) No
   c) Not applicable

9. Please select the appropriate sector of your current employment. (Click to select)
   a) Federal government
   b) State government
   c) Local government
   d) Non-profit agency
   e) Private business
   f) Self-employed
   g) Other:_____
   h) Not applicable

10. If you are currently employed, how many years have you been working for your current employer? (Drop down menu, including Not applicable)

11. If you are currently employed, what is your job title? (Fill in the blank)

12. If you are currently employed, please select the salary range for your present job (optional). (Click to select)
   a) Less than $39,999
   b) $40,000-$59,999
   c) $60,000-$79,999
   d) $80,000-$99,999
   e) $100,000 and more

The following sections will serve to assess your views on key aspects of the MPSA program curriculum, internships, faculty, program services, and career outcomes. Please indicate your satisfaction with the following statements by selecting from the list of appropriate responses for each question: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or No Opinion/Not Sure.

II. Curriculum	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
13. There was an appropriate amount of theory taught in the classroom.						
14. There was an appropriate amount of exposure to practice in the classroom.						
15. The core courses provided multi-dimensional perspectives and adequate preparation for a career in public service and administration.						
16. The elective courses I took contributed meaningfully to my professional development.						
17. My fellow students brought a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives to the classroom.						
18. The Capstone seminars contributed meaningfully to my professional development.						
19. I was satisfied with the quality of my Capstone seminar.						
20. Class schedules were set up in a convenient fashion.						
21. The workload required to complete my MPSA degree was reasonable.						
22. The learning environment was stimulating and challenging.						
23. Overall, I was satisfied with the MPSA program curriculum.						

24. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the MPSA curriculum? (Fill in the blank)

Questions 19-21 apply only to MPSA graduates who participated in the internship program. If you did not participate in the internship program, please select the Not Applicable option. Please indicate your satisfaction with the following statements by selecting from the list of appropriate responses for each question: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or Not Applicable.

III. Internship Program	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
25. My first year in the MPSA program prepared me for my internship.						
26. My internship complemented my academic learning experience.						
27. My internship allowed me to gain practical, "hands-on" work experience.						
28. My internship was a valuable addition to my professional education and provided insights (either positive or negative) into the kind of career experiences I wanted after graduation.						

29. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the MPSA internship program? (Fill in the blank)

IV. Faculty	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
30. I was satisfied with the quality of instruction in the MPSA program.						
31. I was satisfied with the number of instructors who had practical experience and shared it in the classroom.						
32. The instructors brought a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives to the classroom.						
33. My faculty advisor counseled me in a meaningful way pertaining to academic matters and my professional preparation at the Bush School.						
34. Apart from my faculty advisor, the other faculty members in the MPSA program were accessible and constructive when I sought to interact with them.						

35. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the MPSA faculty? (Fill in the blank)

V. Program Services and Activities	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
36. The Bush School's extracurricular activities (Public Service Organization, Student Government Association, Public Servant, intramurals) contributed positively to my experience in the MPSA program.						
37. I was satisfied with the MPSA program's resources and facilities.						
38. The Bush School computer staff and help desk provided the technical assistance and help that I needed in an efficient and able manner.						
39. The Bush School writing consultant provided me with useful assistance in an efficient and able manner.						
40. The Professional Leadership Development activities provided me with useful knowledge, insights, and opportunities to practice valuable skills.						
41. The internship and career services coordinator (Director of Student Services) at the Bush School provided useful assistance in my efforts to secure my internship and my job following graduation.						
42. The internship and career services coordinator at the Bush School provided useful assistance in my efforts to secure employment after graduation.						
43. The Assistant to the MPSA Director provided me with useful assistance in an efficient and able manner.						
44. Overall, MPSA program staff members were helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable.						
45. As an MPSA graduate, I receive appropriate updates about current MPSA program events and activities.						

46. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the MPSA program services? (Fill in the blank)

VI. Career Outcomes	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
47. The MPSA curriculum provided me with knowledge, skills, and abilities that I directly apply to my job duties.						
48. The MPSA curriculum emphasized aspects that have been essential to my career advancement.						
49. The MPSA degree or a master's degree is required for my current position.						
50. Overall, I feel the Bush School prepared me well for a career in public service and administration.						

51. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the MPSA's impact on your career outcomes? (Fill in the blank)

The following sections will serve to assess your views on the knowledge and skills that you obtained through the MPSA program. Please indicate your satisfaction with the following statements by selecting from the list of appropriate responses for each question: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or No Opinion/Not Sure.

VII. Knowledge/Skills

52. The MPSA Program contributed to my KNOWLEDGE in the following areas:

Content Area	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
Applying public service principles and values						
Policy process						
Program implementation and evaluation						
Interagency collaboration strategies						
Ethics						
Political/legal institutions and processes						
Economic/social institutions and processes						
Managing organizational change						
Workforce diversity management						
Conflict management						
Cost-benefit analysis						
Budgeting and financial processes						
Quality service techniques/principles						
Marketing and public relations						
Citizen and volunteer management						
Information systems/technology						

53. The MPSA Program contributed to my SKILLS in the following areas:

Content Area	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
Decision making						
Problem solving						
Applied research						
Written communication						
Oral communication						
Presentation						
Quantitative analysis						
Ability to function in a team						
Interpersonal relations						
Supervision and leadership						
Performance management						
Grant writing						
Interview techniques						

VIII. Open Response Questions

54. What skills or knowledge areas have you needed in your career but do not feel that the MPSA program adequately prepared you for? (Fill in the blank)

55. Looking back on your MPSA experience, which components were most beneficial to you (i.e., courses, brown bag presentations, office space, laptops, program services, extracurricular activities, etc.)? (Fill in the blank)

56. Please share any suggestions you have on how the program can better prepare students for work in public service and administration. (Fill in the blank)

57. Do you have any comments, observations, or suggestions regarding your Capstone experience? (Fill in the blank)

58. Do you have any final comments or suggestions? (Fill in the blank)

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Masters in Public Service and Administration (MPSA) Program Evaluation for the Bush School of Government and Public Service

1. What elements of the MPSA curriculum were most beneficial to you? What elements of the MPSA program were least beneficial to you?

2. Which skill sets learned in the MPSA program prepared you for your career?

3. How do you feel the MPSA program prepared you for a career in public service?

4. How would you evaluate the quality of the MPSA educational experience, in regards to workload, student-teacher relationships (mentoring/advising), grading practices (consistency/fairness), and professor feedback?

5. What would you like to see sustained in the MPSA program? What would you like to see changed in the MPSA program?

6. What advantages do you see that you have over your peers with this MPSA degree?

7. How did the extracurricular activities supplement your educational experience in the MPSA program?

8. Given the growing cohort of MPSA alumni, what would you recommend to improve alumni services?

9. What skills were you able to transfer from capstone and internship to your career?

Appendix I - Continued

Employer Interview Questions

EMPLOYER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) Program Evaluation for the Bush School of Government and Public Service

This Bush School-sponsored project is gathering information on the way former students and their employers assess the Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) program. You were selected to participate in this interview because you are knowledgeable about MPSA program graduates. The purpose of the interview is to get feedback from knowledgeable people like you on different aspects of the MPSA program and ways to improve the program in the future.

1. In what sector have you supervised Bush School graduates?
(Federal government, State government, Local government, Non-profit agency, Private business, Other)

 (*If response falls under government or non-profit*): Is the Bush School graduate well prepared for a career in public service and administration?

2. To your knowledge, how many years has the Bush School graduate worked at your organization/company?

I am now going to list several areas of knowledge and skills that the Bush School attempts to provide students in the MPSA program. As we go through please indicate whether you agree or disagree if the Bush School graduate is prepared in each category. Please feel free to state if you are unsure about any particular response. You may also indicate if the knowledge area or skill is not needed in your organization/company.

3. The Bush School graduate was prepared in the following areas:

Knowledge Area	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Not Relevant
Applying public service principles and values				
Policy process				
Program implementation and evaluation				
Interagency collaboration strategies				
Ethics				
Political/legal institutions and processes				
Economic/social institutions and processes				
Managing organizational change				
Workforce diversity management				
Conflict management				
Cost-benefit analysis				
Budgeting and financial processes				
Quality service techniques/principles				
Marketing and public relations				
Citizen and volunteer management				
Information systems/technology				

Similar to the questions that were just asked, please indicate whether you agree or disagree if the Bush School graduate is prepared in each category. Please feel free to state if you are unsure about any particular response. You may also indicate if the knowledge area or skill is not needed in your organization/company.

4. The Bush School graduate was prepared in the following areas:

Skills	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion/Not Sure	Not Relevant
Decision making				
Problem solving				
Applied research				
Written communication				
Oral communication				
Presentation				
Quantitative analysis				
Ability to function in a team				
Interpersonal relations				
Supervision and leadership				
Performance management				
Grant writing				
Interview techniques				

5. Do you have any specific comments or suggestions about how the Bush School graduate was prepared for their career with your organization/company?

Appendix II: Consent Forms

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) Program Evaluation for the Bush School of Government and Public Service

You have been asked to participate in a focus group session as part of a research project being conducted in Austin, TX or Washington, D.C. This Bush School-sponsored project is gathering information on the way former students assess their experiences with the Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) program. You were selected to participate in this focus group because you are especially knowledgeable about the MPSA program. The purpose of the focus groups is to get feedback from knowledgeable people like you on different aspects of the MPSA program and ways to improve the program in the future.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions involving a variety of issues concerning the MPSA program. We would like your assessment of the curriculum and the quality of your educational experience. The session will gather your feedback by taking hand-written notes. The session is expected to last from one and one-half an hour to two hours.

All focus group discussions will be confidential. Participants' names will be replaced with numbers to protect identities. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published or submitted to the Bush School. Session notes will be kept in locked locations and will only be available to members of the research team. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Texas A&M University or the Bush School. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without negative consequences. You may contact Dr. Eric Lindquist, Texas A&M University, (979) 862-3857 or elindquist@bushschool.tamu.edu if you have any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Be sure you have read the information above, asked questions and received satisfactory answers. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant & Printed Name	Date

Signature of Investigator & Printed Name	Date

EMPLOYER CONSENT FORM

Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) Program Evaluation for the Bush School of Government and Public Service

You have been asked to participate in an interview as part of a research project being conducted by the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. This Bush School-sponsored project is gathering information on the way former students and their employers assess the Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) program. You were selected to participate in this interview because you are knowledgeable about MPSA program graduates. The purpose of the interview is to get feedback from knowledgeable people like you on different aspects of the MPSA program and ways to improve the program in the future.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions involving a variety of issues concerning the MPSA program. We would like your assessment of the quality of the MPSA graduate with which you work. The session will gather your feedback by taking hand-written notes. The session is expected to last from thirty to forty minutes.

All interview discussions will be confidential. Participants' names will be replaced with numbers to protect identities. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published or submitted to the Bush School. Session notes will be kept in locked locations and will only be available to members of the research team. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Texas A&M University or the Bush School. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without negative consequences. You may contact Dr. Eric Lindquist, Texas A&M University, (979) 862-3857 or elindquist@bushschool.tamu.edu if you have any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Be sure you have read the information above, asked questions and received satisfactory answers. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant & Printed Name	Date

Signature of Investigator & Printed Name	Date

Appendix III: Survey Responses to Likert-Scale Questions as Percentages

CURRICULUM	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
There was an appropriate amount of theory taught in the classroom.	16	67	7	8	--	2
There was an appropriate amount of exposure to practice in the classroom.	2	47	18	28	3	2
The core courses provided multi-dimensional perspectives and adequate preparation for a career in public service and administration.	22	55	15	7	--	2
The elective courses I took contributed meaningfully to my professional development.	42	37	17	3	--	2
My fellow students brought a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives to the classroom.	32	40	17	7	5	--
The Capstone seminars contributed meaningfully to my professional development.	23	45	12	15	2	3
I was satisfied with the quality of my Capstone seminar.	25	43	12	17	2	2
Class schedules were set up in a convenient fashion.	32	58	5	2	3	--
The workload required to complete my MPSA degree was reasonable.	30	63	3	3	--	--
The learning environment was stimulating and challenging.	40	48	10	2	--	--

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
My first year in the MPSA program prepared me for my internship.	18	44	20	11	--	7
My internship complemented my academic learning experience.	22	48	13	8	2	7
My internship allowed me to gain practical, "hands-on" work experience.	37	38	7	8	3	7
My internship was a valuable addition to my professional education and provided insights (either positive or negative) into the kind of career experiences I wanted after graduation.	53	23	8	7	2	7

FACULTY	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/Not Sure
I was satisfied with the quality of instruction in the MPSA program.	34	51	10	3	2	--
I was satisfied with the number of instructors who had practical experience and shared it in the classroom.	20	45	12	20	3	--
The instructors brought a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives to the classroom.	23	50	18	8	--	--
My faculty advisor counseled me in a meaningful way pertaining to academic matters and my professional preparation at the Bush School.	28	23	17	18	8	5
Apart from my faculty advisor, the other faculty members in the MPSA program were accessible and constructive when I sought to interact with them.	45	42	7	3	--	3

PROGRAM SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
The Bush School's extracurricular activities (Public Service Organization, Student Government Association, Public Servant, intramurals) contributed positively to my experience in the MPSA program.	33	30	20	8	2	7
I was satisfied with the MPSA program's resources and facilities.	42	47	5	5	--	--
The Bush School computer staff and help desk provided the technical assistance and help that I needed in an efficient and able manner.	39	36	5	3	3	14
The Bush School writing consultant provided me with useful assistance in an efficient and able manner.	29	21	14	10	--	26
The Professional Leadership Development activities provided me with useful knowledge, insights, and opportunities to practice valuable skills.	27	34	14	12	7	7
The internship and career services coordinator at the Bush School provided useful assistance in my efforts to secure employment after graduation.	17	20	24	16	14	10
The Assistant to the MPSA Director provided me with useful assistance in an efficient and able manner.	34	17	8	3	--	37
Overall, MPSA program staff members were helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable.	34	49	12	5	--	--
As an MPSA graduate, I receive appropriate updates about current MPSA program events and activities.	19	37	17	20	7	--

CAREER OUTCOMES	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
The MPSA curriculum provided me with knowledge, skills, and abilities that I directly apply to my job duties.	28	48	10	8	--	7
The MPSA curriculum emphasized aspects that have been essential to my career advancement.	23	38	22	8	2	7
The MPSA degree or a master's degree is required for my current position.	23	20	8	25	15	8
Overall, I feel the Bush School prepared me well for a career in public service and administration.	30	57	8	2	--	3

The MPSA Program contributed to my KNOWLEDGE in the following areas:

Content Area	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
Applying public service principles and values	37	50	10	2	--	2
Policy process	37	50	12	2	--	--
Program implementation and evaluation	27	60	2	10	2	--
Interagency collaboration strategies	8	41	24	20	3	3
Ethics	28	40	18	10	2	2
Political/legal institutions and processes	19	53	17	7	2	2
Economic/social institutions and processes	39	41	10	8	--	2
Managing organizational change	38	33	12	12	5	--
Workforce diversity management	11	19	33	16	16	5
Conflict management	20	45	8	17	7	3
Cost-benefit analysis	33	52	8	5	2	--
Budgeting and financial processes	15	42	17	20	5	2
Information system/technology	5	20	18	38	13	5
Citizen and volunteer management	10	33	18	27	3	8
Quality service techniques/principles	10	31	20	25	5	8
Marketing and public relations	8	18	25	32	13	3

The MPSA Program contributed to my SKILLS in the following areas:

Content Area	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion/ Not Sure
Decision making	22	61	14	3	--	--
Problem solving	32	56	10	2	--	--
Applied research	46	41	8	5	--	--
Written communication	46	47	7	--	--	--
Oral communication	40	50	9	2	--	--
Presentation	49	44	3	3	--	--
Quantitative analysis	44	37	7	8	3	--
Qualitative analysis	29	53	7	8	3	--
Interpersonal relations	32	51	10	3	2	2
Supervision and leadership	29	36	27	7	2	--
Performance management	31	32	22	10	5	--
Grant writing	7	20	15	31	12	15
Ability to function in a team	46	53	2	--	--	--

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