Learning Goals and Assessment Plan for the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs (CIPA)  
December 2011

Learning Goals
CIPA's learning goals for its MPA graduates fall into the following categories:

A. Problem-Solving and Analytical Skills
   1. Economic Analysis and Public Finance
   2. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis for Public Affairs
   3. Administrative, Political and Policy Processes

B. Specialized Public Policy Subject Matter Competence

C. Writing Skills

D. Group Work, Management and Leadership Skills

E. Communication and Presentation Skills

Assessment Measures for Each Learning Goal

A. Problem Solving and Analytical Skills
   1. Economic Analysis and Public Finance

Learning Goal: In this area, students are expected to learn how to allocate scarce resources among alternative uses in public affairs, learning both how to conduct economic analysis using this principle and how to apply that analysis to important policy issues.

Background: CIPA graduates will take courses in at least three of the following four areas: intermediate microeconomics (which could include the economics of labor markets), intermediate macroeconomics (which may include a course on economic growth), public economics (which could be specifically about public finance), and international economics (which could be about economies in other parts of the world such as developing countries). This structure will guide how students are advised in selecting foundation courses and how courses in the Economics Foundation area are presented in the CIPA course guide.

Measure 1: Percentage of graduates who complete Economic Analysis and Public Finance foundation courses in at least three of these areas.

Measure 2: Percentage of graduates who complete the Economic Analysis and Public Finance foundation courses with a grade point average of A- or better (i.e., 3.7).

Measure 3: Professors teaching core foundation course in this area will sample students’ work to assess students’ strengths and weaknesses in the course with regard to this learning goal. Professors will use this information to evaluate or possibly modify their courses.
Measure 4: An evaluation of the theses that use economic analysis as a primary research method. Core faculty will discuss the criteria for evaluation as we implement our assessment plan.

2. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis for Public Affairs
Learning Goal: In this area, students must be able to define a problem and then choose appropriate tools to determine and evaluate solutions. They are expected to develop their abilities to identify appropriate methods for analyzing or evaluating a given problem and gain confidence in applying various methods in real-world situations.Specifically, our students should understand inferential statistics, econometrics and an array of modeling tools and methods.

Measure 1: Percentage of graduates who complete at least one statistics or econometrics course and a modeling course such as Prof. Loucks’ Public Systems Modeling or Prof. Donaghy’s Methods of Planning Analysis.

Measure 2: Percentage of graduates who complete the Analytical Capabilities for Public Affairs foundation courses with a grade point average of A- or better (i.e., 3.70).

Measure 3: Use the evaluation scores on analytical abilities and problem-solving from the Supervisor Practical Experience Evaluation Survey. This is a survey that the supervisors for Fellows’ internship/professional experience complete after that experience.

Measure 4: Professors teaching the core foundation courses in this area will sample students’ work to examine student strengths and weaknesses in the course with regard to this learning goal. Professors will then use that information to evaluate or possibly modify their course.

Measure 5: Evaluation of the theses that use quantitative methods as a primary research method. Core faculty will determine the evaluation criteria as we implement our assessment plan.

3. Administrative, Political, and Policy Processes
Learning Goal: CIPA graduates should have an understanding of (a) the interplay between politics and administration in the public affairs arena in which they expect to work (national, international, state or local), and among the public sector, private sector, and civil society; (b) how public, private and civil society organizations function respectively and collectively; and (c) how objectives are formulated and pursued within these sectors, organizations, and the public arena.

Measure 1: Professors in core foundation courses will sample students' work to examine student strengths and weaknesses in the course with regard to the learning goal. Professors will then use that information to evaluate or possibly modify their course.

Measure 2: Percentage of graduates who complete the Administrative, Political, and Policy Processes foundation courses with a grade point average of A- or better (i.e., 3.70).
B. Specialized Public Policy Subject Matter Competence
CIPA graduates will each specialize in one subject matter area called a concentration. The available concentration options are:

- Economics and Financial Policy
- Environmental Policy
- Government, Politics, and Policy Studies
- Human Rights and Social Justice
- International Development Studies
- Public and Nonprofit Management
- Science and Technology Policy
- Social Policy

Students should choose their courses in conjunction with an advisor from the particular concentration in which s/he is specializing. This faculty member will be referred to as the student’s concentration advisor.

Measure 1: Percentage of students who have selected a concentration area and a concentration advisor by the first day of classes of the third semester and completed the appropriate paperwork to record these choices.

Measure 2: Percentage of students whose advisors approve their choices of concentration courses by the first day of classes of the fourth semester.

Measure 3: Students write a short essay that articulates their choice of concentration courses and how those courses will help them achieve specialization in a subject matter area. Advisors will evaluate those essays with regard to the student’s ability to articulate their specialized subject matter objectives with reference to both their career objectives and an understanding of some set of core principles in that subject area.

Measure 4: (tentative) Students prepare an essay upon completion of their concentration that is suitable for a professional portfolio in which they reflect on their specialized subject matter competence. Students would also provide examples of work that demonstrate their competency.

C. Writing Skills
We want CIPA graduates to develop and be able to demonstrate professional-level writing skills. Moreover, they should be able to complete professional writing assignments in a timely manner. The written work requirement may be fulfilled through successful completion of a capstone project, professional report, or thesis. The faculty member overseeing the student’s written work requirement will be referred to as the student’s thesis/report advisor.

Measure 1: Percentage of students who have completed a plan for a capstone project, professional report, or thesis approved by his/her thesis/report advisor by the end of the third semester.
Measure 2: Percentage of students who have completed the capstone project, professional report, or thesis approved by his/her thesis/report advisor by the end of the final exam period in the fourth semester.

Measure 3: Evaluation scores and feedback from the Supervisor Practical Experience Evaluation Survey on writing abilities.

Measure 4: Feedback from the Capstone project’s client evaluation on quality of the written deliverables.

**D. Group Work, Management and Leadership Skills**

Measure 1. Evaluation scores for team work from the peer review evaluation used for the Capstone course and from CRP 6010 (Public Administration—a core foundation course taken by many first year CIPA students).

Measure 2. Evaluation scores on team work from the Supervisor Practical Experience Evaluation Survey.

**E. Communication and Presentation Skills**

Measure 1. Evaluation scores for communication and presentation from the Capstone course’s client evaluation. Evaluation scores on communication and presentation skills from peer evaluations conducted in CRP 6010 (Public Administration—a core foundation course taken by many first year CIPA students).

Measure 2. Evaluation scores on communication and presentation from the Supervisor Practical Experience Evaluation Survey.

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**Additional Measures that encompass all of the learning goals:**

Measure 1: Professors of core foundation courses or of other courses that contain a large number of CIPA fellows will be asked to map CIPA’s learning goals (as many as are appropriate) onto their syllabi. The core faculty as a whole will then consider how many courses are addressing each learning goal. All core foundation courses could/should have explicit statements of learning goals.

Measure 2: Particular attention will be paid to mapping the learning goals onto CIPA’s capstone course and, specifically, in using/modifying the client evaluation sheet to optimize its use as a direct measure of student learning of multiple goals.

**Our Assessment Plan**
- In Spring 2012, we will finalize this assessment plan.
- Before the start of the 2012/2013 academic year, we will communicate these learning goals to all current and incoming students.
In Fall 2013, we will begin putting a system of data-gathering into place so that data on some of these measures can be collected by the end of the Spring 2013 semester. Where appropriate, data will be compiled by staff and made available to the Core Faculty before the start of the 2013/14 academic year.

Each semester thereafter, we will evaluate one of these learning goals and consider changes to the program in light of our findings.