

Graduate Program Review Appeals Committee
Informational Session: June 22, 2006

Public Administration Ph.D.

Program representatives: Thomas Kent (dean), Matthew S. Mingus (associate professor and doctoral director), Robert Peters (director, School of Public Affairs and Administration), Jim Visser (associate professor, Public Administration)

Program's Appeal Summary

The Graduate Program Review Team (GPRT) recognized several compelling program factors that credited the Ph.D. in Public Administration as being a solid WMU program. These factors included it being the only Ph.D. in Public Administration in Michigan; a low cost and administratively viable program, producing many student credit hours and geared toward a strong market of working professionals; and an energetic faculty.

Given these factors, the GPRT recommendation to eliminate the program was both surprising and based on a misinterpretation of the data. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee supported this view, yet the former provost continued with the decision to eliminate this viable doctoral program after 27 years of a productive history. Contrary to the GPRT's findings:

- The Ph.D. is a program with strong, ongoing enrollment demand (11 students were admitted in the 2005 two-year cohort; 5 have already applied for 2007), populated by students with strong GRE scores, and producing graduates who use the program to shift into academic careers or gain significant career advancement.
- The Doctoral Student Annual Review process has significantly reduced the backlog of the old DPA degree with 10 students completing that degree since 2003. Since the Ph.D. program began in 1999, 18 students have completed the degree in an average of 4.8 years. These are impressive results for a program populated by students with full-time employment.
- The overwhelming majority (over 80 percent) of the Ph.D. courses are taught by full-time, board-appointed faculty with active research agendas and good publication records in spite of heavy advising duties, high teaching and dissertation loads, and the need to deliver graduate courses at five WMU locations.

We urge you to retain the program and to authorize its faculty to work with Political Science and other units during the 2006-2007 academic year to strengthen and restructure the program and integrate it with other WMU doctoral offerings. The restructuring plan in our 9-page appeal will enable us to continue benefiting government and nonprofit professionals engaged in human services in Michigan, and to simultaneously enhance the program's appeal to national and international student audiences.

Committee's Questions *

1. Imagining a worst-case scenario in which you received no new resources, no new or replacement faculty hires, and no additional support for TAs, and had to self-fund 100 percent of your growth, what would your program look like three to five years from now?

We're assuming that the merger with Political Science would give us an opportunity to continue the Ph.D. in Public Administration but also to do more joint doctorates with Political Science, all while using the University's existing resources. We'll continue to bring demand for the Public Administration Ph.D. in line with the resources (i.e., restrict the number of students and encourage them to complete the program in a more timely fashion).

2. What's the main difference between the D.P.A. and the Ph.D.?

The Ph.D. is much more research-based.

3. Why don't our competitors offer a Public Administration Ph.D.?
Michigan State was strongly dissuaded from developing a doctoral program because the market was already being met. This is *the* program for those who want to move up in the public administration field in Michigan.
4. Isn't Lansing a better location?
Lots of people from the west side of the state don't apply because of the long drive. What we'll lose in terms of folk who won't commute from Detroit, we'll pick up elsewhere. The master's program wasn't hospitable for full-time workers. Unlike MSU, we do cater to that market.
5. Is the Ph.D. a part-time program?
Five courses a year is a lot for a full-time professional, and students have to complete 12 dissertation hours beyond their normal coursework. Political Science's Ph.D. program calls for 15, so this might be an area where we'd need to make changes for the sake of consistency. The move to nine credit hours may mean a shift in status for international students.
6. The master's in Public Administration has accreditation but the doctorate doesn't. Please speak to that.
You need a master's to get into the Ph.D. The people who've come from real-world jobs need retraining to become a researcher or an academician, but they also bring a lot to the program. This is not another M.A. program. The M.P.A. is for practitioners, but the Ph.D. is to allow folk to step out of the role of practitioner and start thinking the way that an academic would think.
7. So the Ph.D. is becoming more theoretical, academic, and research-orientated?
No, it's more theoretical than the D.P.A. was, but the idea is to make practitioners much better thinkers. We've greatly increased our focus on the theoretical, but the Ph.D. is still at its heart an applied program. It involves plenty of applied-level research, so it does have a practical bent. Doctoral graduates will end up with their feet in both worlds.
8. How would you sum up the basis for your appeal?
The context is almost two years of college-level planning. The workload issues for the Ph.D. had become untenable, but you don't dump a great program for that reason. If we can't work through these and other issues, fair enough, but we believe we can.

* *Q&A text is not verbatim*