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# Developing an Exit Evaluation for a Public Service Graduate Program

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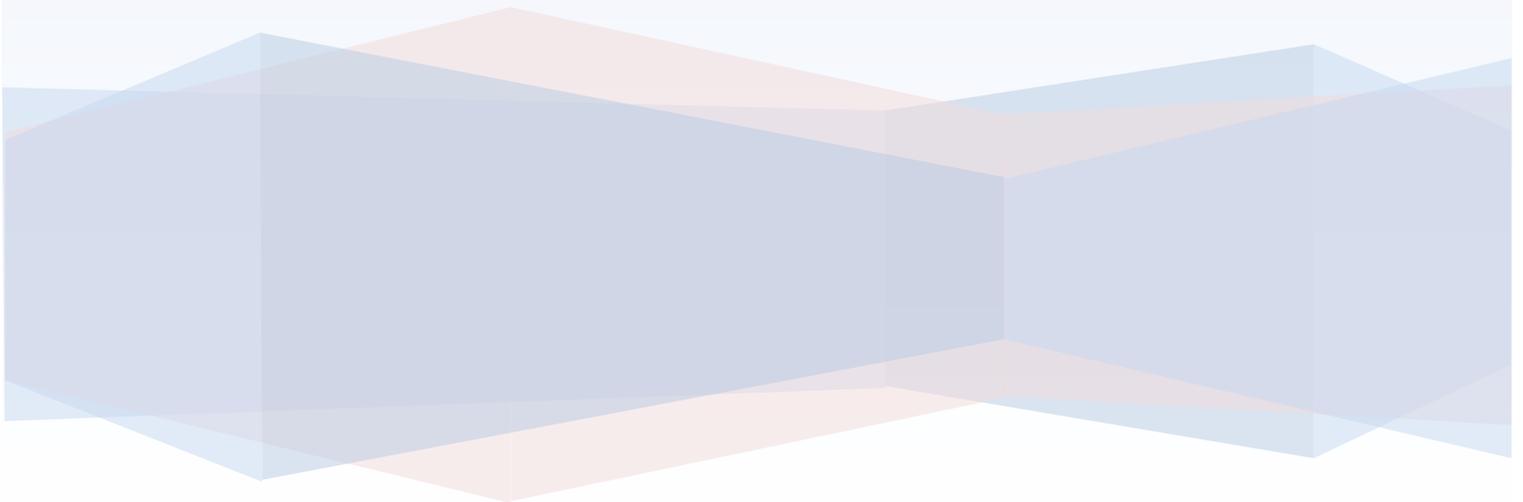
# **Developing an Exit Evaluation for a Public Service Graduate Program**

**Emma Gelsinger**

**Public Policy & Management**

**Spring 2014**

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## **Abstract**

Students in a public service graduate program vary in their motivation, background, professional experience and educational goals. This variety requires evaluations be tailored to the needs of students to ensure effective program development and improvement for the student experience. Student needs can range from assistance with a financial aid application or the effect of faculty advising on their graduate student experience. An exit evaluation that is easily accessible to students and useful to faculty and administrators is essential to any public service graduate program.

A combination of semi-structured interviews, background research, coursework from the Public Policy and Management graduate program, and personal experience as a student and employee in the higher education system has been used to develop a model comprehensive exit evaluation of student experience at the Muskie School of Public Service.

## Introduction

This capstone encompasses the knowledge I have gained during my education while at the Muskie School of Public Service, as well as my combined eight years as a student at both the undergraduate and graduate level, and my experience as an administrative assistant for nearly three years in the higher education system. As a student in the Public Policy and Management program, I focused my coursework on public and nonprofit management and used my field experience to work on developing program evaluation methods. The coursework and experience outside the classroom over the last year has prepared me to look objectively at the Public Policy and Management program in order to prepare an evaluation of the graduate student experience.

Through semi-structured interviews with the Director of Assessment for the University of Southern Maine (USM), the Chief Student Affairs Officer for USM, the Muskie Student Affairs staff, the Chair of the PPM Academic Affairs Committee, the PPM faculty and the students from the Muskie school, I have constructed a survey to evaluate major components of student experience. The survey is designed with closed and open-ended questions for constructive feedback and can be easily adapted to other programs or colleges if desired. Provided with the student evaluation is a supplemental faculty survey with selected mirrored questions. This

additional survey may help to identify areas of miscommunication between faculty and students, or expectations that are not being met.

The tumultuous political and economic environment in Maine today demands that the only Public Policy and Management program in the state produce the highest quality graduates with skill sets, training, and education in public and nonprofit management and policy analysis. Feedback for program development must come from administration, faculty, and most importantly the students. The call to public service can come from many different places; students at the Muskie school come from all ages, genders, ethnicities, professions, socio-economic backgrounds and geographic locations. Even definitions of public service motivation vary from person to person. Hondeghem, et al., (2010) reviews many different definitions of public service motivation including:

- “an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations”
- “the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful...public, community, and social service”
- “the beliefs, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly...”
- “[c]onsideration of another's needs rather than one's own”
- “desire to expend effort to benefit other people”

Aware of these diverse backgrounds and motivations for public service, it is important for the Muskie School to give students the ability to tailor their programs as much as possible to individual student needs and interests as well as professional standards. The Muskie school currently has a wide variety of courses available to its

students, but in every higher education program there is always room for improvement. Tailoring a student experience exit evaluation to the specific needs of a program is vital to identifying both successes and areas that need improvement.

## Literature Review

Over the last fifty years, higher education has seen an increase in demand for outcome measurement and program evaluation. A review of literature related to exit evaluations for higher education programs revealed two common themes: student experience and academic outcomes. *Outcome-based education* emphasizes the academic 'value added' to students' lives and careers while enrolled in a program, whereas *student experience* reflects attitudes towards faculty and advisors, administration and support, and overall program satisfaction. At first glance, it may seem that these two themes would be assessed and measured independently. However, in the literature even when an evaluation focused either on student experience or academic outcomes, characteristics of both themes were present.

A push for outcome measurement became evident in the 1970's and 1980's. Early articles such as "Assessing Student Outcomes for Psychology Majors" (1988) began to note that "[d]espite the large numbers of students and faculty engaged in psychology education, there has been surprisingly little concern with what and how much is being learned," (Halpern, 181). The emphasis in this article was that the growth in knowledge and skill level during a student's time in a degree program is the true measure of program effectiveness. Keeping in mind their university's need

for program evaluation, assessment at the institutional and departmental level was discussed. It was noted that decisions about budget priorities, accountability, minimal competencies and programmatic change are more commonly found at the institutional level. The article argued that department level assessment can be “tailored for the specific topics emphasized at each institution” and should evaluate six areas of student learning: knowledge base, thinking skills, language skills, information gathering and synthesis, interpersonal skills, and practical experience (Halpern, 182-183).

The necessity of evaluating student experience is noted as far back as 1977 when Hartnett and Katz wrote “[s]tudent influence needs to be safeguarded by establishing more formal procedures for involving students in program planning, evaluation of professors and other important departmental policies and practices,” (657). Problem areas found in the student experience noted in this article include: informed choice (departmental transparency), oversupply of graduates, faculty attention, competition and financial assistance, training and originality, length and plan of study, specialization vs. breadth, and emotional development. Anecdotal evidence collected throughout experience as a student confirms that despite progress in these areas over the years, students continue to struggle with similar problems in higher education institutions today.

A graduate exit survey was recently defined in a study published by the *Canadian Center of Science and Education* (2012) as “a method of collecting information on the quality of graduate education from the perspectives of

graduating students upon completion of their degree programs,” (Ismail, et al., 200). This particular study measured student experience and educational outcomes through the evaluation of learning gains, educational experience, academic and academic support issues, and facilities and resources. Noting the complexity behind higher education evaluation, Ismail, et al. stated, “educational experience and academic performance are two interrelated educational outcomes as educational experience fosters student achievement and confidence,” (201).

Outcome measurement varies by sample size and purpose among higher education institutions. Banta and Schneider published an article titled “Using Faculty-Developed Exit Examinations to Evaluate Academic Programs” (2014) that reviews a study in which financial incentives prompted eleven departmental faculties at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to develop exit evaluations for students (71). Evaluations tended to vary in purpose, format and length for each department, but “the key question that guided the work of most faculty was ‘what should all students know when they finish the coursework for a major?’”(Banta and Schneider, 72). The article also notes that students viewed the process positively, and “as an opportunity for consumers of an educational service to participate in controlling the quality of that service,” (Banta and Schneider, 76). Benefits to the faculty from the development of the exit evaluations also included a better understanding of the curriculum as a whole, and a higher awareness of good test items that were used to improve their own course examinations (Banta and Schneider, 79).

In some cases, an emphasis on measuring academic outcomes may arise from a change in the needs of an institution. In 2009, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) shifted focus to outcome-based education in Malaysia to address an alarming increase in the number of unemployed graduates. The goal was to adjust learning towards professional and career preparation and to evaluate students on both learning outcomes and 'soft-skills' learning (Kaliannan and Chandran, 51). Measured in the assessment were critical thinking and problem solving skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, knowledge, practical skills, teamwork and responsibilities, values, ethics, morality and professionalism, information management and lifelong learning; management and entrepreneurship, and leadership skills (Kaliannan and Chandran, 54-55). The faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies were the first to introduce this evaluation at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTm) which involved entrance and exit surveys for all students in the program. UiTm even went so far as to develop their own software to ensure consistent reporting and analysis of data (Kaliannan, and Chandran, 55).

Large-scale studies can be used to evaluate student experience as well. Brower, et al. (2009) published a study that surveyed over 1300 international and domestic Masters and PhD students in a mid-size Canadian university over the course of nine years. An integral part of this study was assessing satisfaction with supervision through three major components: overall relationship with supervisor, the quality of the graduate supervision, and the relationship with other members of a supervisory committee (Brouwer, et al, 341). The results were compared between the students, controlling for academic discipline and showed that "regardless of

citizenship or programme, a supervisor's allocation of time is essential to effective graduate supervision. Furthermore, a supervisor who spent time discussing progress and research with the student was of importance to all students, and was strongly linked to the overall rating given for the supervisor," (Brouwer, et al, 343).

An older study published in *Teaching of Psychology* (1997) also focuses on evaluating advising practices between students and faculty. The exit survey in this study was distributed to nearly 200 students and was composed of 148 questions and included topics such as advising services, career services, departmental communications, research and field experiences, personal growth, and departmental courses (Nelson and Johnson, 101). The study found high variability in whether students were being informed of services that were available, in respect for feelings, and in overall helpfulness of their advisor (Nelson and Johnson, 103). Five areas of improvement were presented for advising programs including developing positive faculty-student advising relationships, identifying content areas or goals for advising programs, referral by advisors to other campus resources and advisor training, responding to student diversity and evaluating advising strategies (Nelson and Johnson, 101). This article concludes with the notion that "successful advising goes beyond providing information to students by challenging them to examine their values, interests, abilities, and skills and to develop decision-making skills," (Nelson and Johnson, 105)

## History

The Muskie School of Public Service provides training in policy analysis, public management, community planning and development, public health, and health management. As noted in the history below, the dissolution of the Public Administration master's program of the University of Maine at Orono has made the Public Policy & Management program the leading and only public management program in the state of Maine. The following history of the Public Policy and Management (PPM) program at the Muskie School of Public Service was drawn from the current reaccreditation study being conducted by PPM.

*“ The Public Policy and Management Program (PPM) at the Muskie School of Public Service was created to provide highly trained and qualified public service professionals for the State of Maine. In 1982 the University of Maine System (UMS) Trustees established the Public Policy and Management Program (PPM) at the University of Southern Maine (USM) and authorized both masters' and doctoral degrees.*

*When the first students matriculated in 1984, the curriculum was based on the assumption that challenges facing modern democratic society are, by their very nature, interdisciplinary and complex. This focus on complexity in democratic governance remains central, but rapid and significant changes in the environment of public service have been and continue to stimulate changes in how and what we teach and our goals for student learning. Noteworthy adjustments already undertaken include development of new and expanded distance education modalities, increased skill-building and application, efforts to engage students into real world research and projects, and renewed attention to challenges facing nonprofit organizations, communicating with and engaging a diverse citizenry, achieving more equitable policies, and ensuring accountability.*

*The institutional climate and organizational structures within which PPM carries out its mission also have seen extensive modification. In 1987, the Public Policy and Management Program merged with the USM's Center for Research*

*and Advanced Studies, which included the Human Services Development Institute. The union of previously freestanding professional research units with an academic program helped augment research quality while also providing applied research opportunities for faculty and students. In 1990, the UMS Trustees recognized the PPM program and its affiliated research programs as an "institute," which was named in honor of Senator Edmund S. Muskie. In September 1997, in recognition of its widespread reputation and growing impact, UMS Trustees approved a change to the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service*

*In 1998, the Muskie School initiated a capital campaign for a new building. The Maine State Legislature allocated \$3.5 million and Muskie School faculty, staff, alumni, and friends raised an additional \$8.2 million for the new facility. In the fall of 2008, PPM faculty and students began using the state-of-the-art building. Most Muskie School faculty, students, and staff now are united in a building that we share with elder learners and instructors from the Osher Life-Long Learning Institute.*

*After being first accredited by NASPAA in 1994, by 2008 it was time for the PPM program to seek reaccreditation. Unfortunately, the Great Recession forced the Maine State Legislature to require sequential and substantial reductions in university spending. In an effort to bring the USM portion of the budget into balance, USM's then President Selma Botman sought major restructuring and reductions in personnel and other budget lines. Amidst administrative upheaval, declining resources, loss of faculty and staff, the PPM program acknowledged reluctantly that it was not feasible to move forward with its application for reaccreditation at that time.*

*The restructuring of the University of Southern Maine merged eight schools and colleges into five large colleges. Together with the Schools of Business, Education, and Social Work, the Muskie School today is a member of the College of Management and Human Service (CMHS). At the same time, the University of Maine at Orono decided to close its graduate program in Public Administration, also part of a restructuring process. The elimination of the MPA program at UM was formally accompanied by assumption of its responsibilities by PPM. This resulted in an extended planning process that spanned 2011-2012, including discussion of the PPM mission. There were multiple meetings with stakeholders such as the Maine Town and City Management Association and administrators of the University of Maine System. The loss of University of Maine's MPA program created expectations on PPM for bringing public service education to students throughout the State. Expanding distance education is our first step, but more will be needed to reach audiences who are hours from Portland.*

*A major planning thrust of PPM in late 2012 and 2013 was to develop initiatives in Maine's state capital, Augusta, to maintain and expand the program originally administered by the UM-MPA Program.*

*With USM's restructuring complete and the fiscal situation on a more stable footing, USM has committed continuing resources to PPM. In addition, our new status as the only graduate public service program in the state has strengthened our position within the UMS. PPM has gained capacity in the organizational management area with the transfer from the University of Maine MPA program of a full-time associate professor.*

*As a consequence of these changes, USM has the state's only graduate program, public or private, in public policy or public administration, which provides an opportunity to further our mission "to provide highly trained and qualified public service professionals" who recognize "the complexity of democratic societies," and especially to serve the State of Maine."*

## Methodology

The following five questions were used in semi-structured interviews with faculty, staff and students to collect information about the Muskie School.

- *What is the most important thing you think students should leave the Muskie School with?*
- *What are the strengths of the Muskie School?*
- *What are the weaknesses of the Muskie School?*

(For faculty and staff)

- *Is there information you would like to know about students that you don't already have access to? (i.e., academic, personal, professional)*

(For students)

- *What do you think students should be asked about when leaving the Muskie School?*

The qualitative data from these interviews has been evaluated identifying common themes and a SWOT analysis that reveal the topics of questions to ask in an evaluation. This interview data will be used in combination with basic higher education program evaluation guidelines to develop questions that specifically

address opportunities for growth within the Muskie School and the Public Policy and Management program in particular.

### **Question 1 (Students, Staff and Faculty)**

**What is the most important thing you think students should leave the Muskie School with?**

Answers to this question varied but generally addressed three common themes. The first common theme was giving students more opportunities for “hands-on” learning both in and outside the classroom. In an applied master’s program, it is essential to give students practical skills, whether they are computer software skills and report writing, or implementing strategic plans and fundraising. These kinds of hands-on skills are sought out by employers and may give students an upper hand if they lack experience in their field or are shifting professions.

The second common theme, which ties into the first, was professional development and job skills. The state of the job market in Maine requires students leaving a master’s program to compete with job applicants who may have significant experience in their field. Proper preparation for the job market through career development and practical interviewing, job searching, and resume writing skills are a must-have for any student leaving a higher education institution. An important aspect of this theme pointed out by Jim O’Brien, the Coordinator of Student Affairs at Muskie, is that students should understand *how* Muskie has prepared them for their careers. Understanding the benefits they received from the program will help frame the skills they have acquired and better communicate that to their prospective

employers. As alumni, they also have the ability to influence prospective student's decisions to attend the Muskie school through marketing of the skills they learned there.

The third common theme is a networking inside and outside the Muskie School. For any graduate student, a solid network of faculty, community members, and peers is essential. Students should be creating this network from their first day at the Muskie School and continuing to add to it after graduation as alum. Especially in a state like Maine where community ties are common, this kind of networking can open up many doors for Muskie students and graduates.

### Questions 2 & 3 (Students, Staff and Faculty)

**What are the strengths of the Muskie School? What are the weaknesses of the Muskie School?**

#### *SWOT Analysis: Muskie School of Public Service*

Responses to the second and third questions were divided between internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external opportunities and external threats.

#### *Internal Strengths*

- Networking that occurs with faculty while at the Muskie school
- Teaching students how policies are developed at all three levels of government; federal, state and local
- Faculty that bring real-world examples and hands on work to their students
- The MPH program is very active with students
- Very experienced, high caliber, well rounded faculty
- Faculty that are engaged in policy research

- The Cutler institute and the high quality research staff involved with it
- Important faculty and student research

#### *Internal Weaknesses*

- Student may lack faculty advice prior to arrival in class (largely due to electronic PINs and registration)
- Low faculty morale/aging faculty
- PPM has a limited set of core faculty
- Lack of alumni contact and events
- Lack of collaboration with other programs (and their courses)
- Concerns over course schedules and course subjects
- There is not enough feedback from students
- Formal program(s) structure does not give students opportunity for interdisciplinary studies
- Current student and alumni experience are not utilized enough
- More rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods need to be taught

#### *External Opportunities*

- Located in the cultural center of Maine
- Powerful alumni are produced through Muskie
- The nationally known research program is associated with Muskie
- CPD program is very active in the community
- Public events such as the Policy Colloquia and Speak Series offered
- Well known and highly regarded reputation of Muskie
- Proximity to Portland, rural communities and larger cities (Boston), interaction with the local community,

#### *External Threats*

- Administrative obligations get in the way of faculty being involved with students and teaching
- Lack of funding for Muskie (inability to fundraise independently)
- Student affairs should be separate from the administration
- College and higher levels of administrations affecting faculty morale
- Needs more partnerships with community organizations
- Needs increased access to funding, supply of workers and volunteers to address difficult and multi-layered community needs

An important note to take into consideration is that interviewees were not asked specifically to do a SWOT analysis of the Muskie school; they were simply asked about its strengths and weaknesses. The internal weaknesses stands out as a

longer list; this is in part because interviewees were not asked directly about the external threats. This is not to say that Muskie does not have improvement to do internally, but there are many strong external forces that affect Muskie such as state funding for education, cost of education, the current job market, and the political environment. In fact, many of the internal weaknesses provide insight into great opportunities for Muskie and the PPM program in particular to use for improvement. These weaknesses are a good indication of the kinds of questions students should be asked to assist in program development.

It is interesting to see that networking has been identified both as a strength and a weakness. Students at the Muskie school may find that they network very well with Muskie faculty, but that external networking such as contact with alumni and alumni events is lacking. Support, advice, mentoring and job placement assistance from experienced and connected faculty within a program is a core facet of any applied masters program. The cycle of recruiting students, current students, and contact with alumni is a cycle in which one area cannot be supported without the other. A strong alumni bond with current students gives wider access to career opportunities. In the current economic state, any program that emphasizes career placement will have an easier time recruiting students. A strong alumni base also provides opportunities for raising funds that can be funneled to recruitment efforts and additional fundraising events. It is important to ask students about how they learned about the Muskie school, attending alumni events, recommendations for future student recruitment and willingness to volunteer in recruitment efforts.

Another important item revealed in the SWOT analysis is the provision of elective courses and interdisciplinary study for students in Muskie programs. An external review committee submitted a report on the Muskie school (2013) that recommends combining common classes among disciplines in combination with “a core of full-time faculty in every program.” This report also notes that “[T]he creation of such common courses will permit the consolidation of courses, achieve larger class sizes, encourage faculty collaboration, and provide students with greater flexibility and breadth of learning.” Students need to be given the opportunity to not just do basic course evaluations every semester, but to give feedback on the courses they enjoyed, courses they would like to see added, areas of academic interest they did not have access to in the program, class size, individual attention they received from their professors, and other questions regarding course offerings.

The connection between Muskie, the community and the Cutler Research Institute was mentioned multiple times during the SWOT analysis and in other questions during interviews. These connections were identified as an internal strength, an external opportunity, and an internal weakness. The stellar reputation and work that the Muskie school does in the community is a great opportunity for students to be involved in projects through their coursework, field experience and capstone projects. The Cutler Research Institute is an opportunity for students to be part of real-world research and gain skills in both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Students need to be asked about their work outside the classroom in both the community and the Cutler Institute while at the Muskie school. These questions

should reflect the work they are already doing outside of the classroom, project ideas for future students and how aware they were of the opportunities already available to them.

#### **Question 4 (Faculty and Staff only)**

**Is there is there information you want to know about students that you don't already have access to?**

Faculty and staff were asked if there was information that they would like to know about students that they couldn't already access. Faculty and staff generally draw on information from student files and interactions in the classroom and office to get a sense of who their students are. The general feedback received was that faculty and staff feel like they do not have the opportunity to get to know students as much as they would like. Up until September 2013, there was not a regular orientation for the Muskie School where students get to meet faculty, staff and other students from all three programs. The Muskie Student Organization, although currently regaining its strength, has lost contact with the administration. Budget cuts have also reduced the ability for staff to hold student events or Muskie School events.

Another important topic that was mentioned is that it is essential to keep track of where/if students are working when they leave the Muskie School. Employment is a very large part of a graduate school career, whether it is developing skills in a position a student already holds or training to begin a new career. Understanding what students *do* with their career is a good way to explore

how programs can be adjusted to fit the needs of students. Interviewees also expressed an interest in hearing from students why they came to the Muskie School and whether or not it was “worth it”. These two questions can assist in directing recruitment efforts and marketing techniques, as well as adjusting at course offerings to meet student interests.

### **Question 5 (Students Only)**

#### **What do you think students should be asked about?**

Students gave feedback on what they thought students should be asked about when leaving the program. Many of the responses revolved around career plans and placement related to their program. Emphasizing that an academic program should be tailored to fit their professional development needs, career counseling should be an integral part of a graduate student experience. Another response was to ask students about their experience writing their capstone. Each student completes a capstone project equal to a three-credit course in order to earn his or her degree in Public Policy and Management from the Muskie School. As a final, comprehensive project, it is important that students are able to give feedback about things that worked and didn’t work for them.

Interestingly, students also suggested asking respondents if the time and energy spent at the Muskie School were “worth it” to them. Graduate school is a large investment for many students, as they are often juggling family, full-time work and school. The combination of proper orientation and academic planning, comprehensive advising and administrative support, and programs tailored to

student interests and needs should allow for a positive graduate experience. If this is not the case, it is important for the Muskie School and the PPM program to use this evaluation to identify the areas in the program(s) that need to be developed.

## **Focus and Layout of Evaluation**

The major focus of this exit evaluation will be the experience of the students in the PPM program while at the Muskie school. Although academic outcomes and learning competencies are important, faculty already assesses academic performance of students. Historically, the PPM program did at one point give out an electronic program evaluation but did not receive many responses. PPM then experimented with face-to-face exit interviews with students leaving the program. Unfortunately, the exit interviews did not provide the data that the PPM program needed for proper assessment of student experience in the program and so the interviews were discontinued. Currently, the PPM program assesses student satisfaction with courses and faculty performance in the classroom at the end of each semester (see Appendix III), but there is no means by which to officially evaluate the experience PPM students have during their time at the Muskie school.

Although this evaluation is designed primarily for the PPM program, other programs could easily adapt it if they chose to do so. The layout of the evaluation includes Likert-scale, close-ended multiple-choice, and open-ended questions (see Appendix VI). The evaluation not only looks at what the student has experienced, but what their overall expectations were for different aspects of their education. The

combination of questions will provide faculty and administrators with a snapshot into what their student body looks like, levels of satisfaction with different aspects of their experience, and an anonymous medium for students to communicate both positive and negative aspects of their experience.

### **Target Areas for Evaluation**

There are a number of topics that need to be addressed in any exit evaluation. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has identified five “Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice” which are: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences and Supportive Campus Environment (NSSE, 2012). The extent to which each of these indicators should be evaluated in this exit evaluation is reflected in recurring topics found while conducting interviews with faculty, staff and students. Using the NSSE benchmarks as a guide, the following major categories of questions will be addressed: demographic data, advising experience, administrative support, professional/career development, networking, academic achievements, academic challenges, overall satisfaction.

### **Supplemental Faculty Survey**

A student’s relationship with faculty is an integral part of the graduate student experience. Faculty in the PPM program range from non-tenure research faculty to ageing tenured faculty. Some faculty may be more available to students, more involved in student success or more distant. Even the most well-intentioned

faculty may not be aware of the specific needs of their own students, or the effect of their actions on a student's performance and experience. In 1977, Hartnett and Katz wrote that "graduate student relations with members of the faculty are regarded by most graduate students as the most important aspect of the quality of their graduate experience; unfortunately, many also report that it is the single most disappointing aspect of their graduate experience," (647). Although faculty in the PPM program are dedicated to their students, this statement is not only still relevant but also even more important to pay attention to as administrative and budget concerns put added pressure on faculty. This added pressure reduces the time and energy spent with students and can negatively affect an essential piece of the student experience. Students need to evaluate faculty not just in their performance within the classroom, but outside the classroom as mentors.

A supplemental faculty survey that mirrors questions about student's experiences with, and expectations of faculty will provide insight into areas where the faculty is both successful and unsuccessful (see Appendix VII). The reality is, peer faculty evaluations and student course evaluations are not sufficient to truly evaluate the relationship between students and faculty. If this relationship cannot be effectively evaluated, it also cannot be fixed when something goes wrong. An interview with the Chief Student Success Officer at the University of Southern Maine commented that the demographics of the graduate student body are shifting. More graduate students may be coming to graduate school directly from undergraduate programs and have little experience in the professional world. According to the undergraduate survey distributed to graduating seniors at USM in the spring of

2013, 62% of students indicated that they would be attending graduate school in the fall or within the next 2-3 years. Of those students attending graduate school in the fall, 43% indicated they would be attending USM for graduate school (Graduating Senior Survey). There are many factors that affect this shift, including economic shifts in employment opportunities and the increasing requirement for a Master's degree in professional jobs. These shifts in demographics can cause a disconnect between what students think faculty is responsible for and what faculty think students are responsible for.

Ambrose, et al. (2007) define disengaged faculty (from both departments and institutions) as, "(a) withdrawal from intellectual exchange and collaborations with colleagues, (b) disengagement from the decision-making process, (c) deliberate withdrawal from departmental social activity and (d) disengagement from mentoring relationships (or giving cynical advice to junior faculty)," (496). Any of these behaviors from either senior or junior faculty can affect how the student perceives the faculty as a whole. The perception of division between faculty members can also hinder the confidence a student has in the program itself.

Hartnett and Katz (1977) reference a historical cycle in higher education of poor advising for Master's and PhD students, some of whom grow to be professors with poor advising skills. As tenured faculty retire, budget constraints will likely bring in adjunct and less experienced faculty. An applied Master's program like the PPM program may face student advising issues from both disengaged older faculty and inexperienced adjunct faculty. It is important to remember that most students

in the PPM program are not being educated as a PhDs so that they can teach in an institution similar to the one where they were educated. Faculty members who insist on a “this is how it’s done because this is how it has always been done” attitude may fail to recognize that students bring their graduate experience out into the world with them and that that reputation expands far beyond the higher education system.

## Implementation of Evaluation

After discussion with the Director of Assessment at the University of Southern Maine, an electronic evaluation is not only very possible but also highly recommended. A link to the evaluation can be emailed or placed on Blackboard and Mainstreet so that students can easily access it. To ensure responses, completing the evaluation should be placed on a Graduation Check-List that is sent out to students by the Student Affairs Office. Although it should not be *required of* students in order to receive their degrees, it should be made clear how important it is for this final feedback from them for program development. As dedicated administrators, faculty, and advisors, it is important that Muskie faculty and staff encourage and remind students to complete the evaluation before graduation or shortly after. It is essential to communicate to the students that the evaluation is completely confidential and there will be no identifying information attached to their responses. This confidentiality can ensure honest feedback from students. The evaluation is also meant to be a time for reflection for the student before moving on with the next step in their life. Students within the Muskie School and the PPM

program are trained through their classes to understand the positive effects of feedback and evaluation. In light of recent events, it is also very obvious that students have very insightful and constructive feedback, even in an informal setting

## Conclusion

The development of evaluations that are tailored to public service programs is essential. Receiving feedback from alumni, current students, faculty and staff is a vital part of identifying the important areas for growth in each program. For an applied Master's program in a public service school, the complexity behind a student's motivation to attend and the individual needs of students puts pressure on the administration to provide program growth and development. Student feedback is a core component to ensure programs meet the changing economic, social and political needs of the community around them. An emphasis needs to be placed on the relationship that students have with faculty who are the advisors and mentors of their graduate student experience. Changing trends in faculty and student expectations can disrupt this very vital connection that not only frames academics, but also networking, community engagement, professional development and career planning. Evaluating all these aspects of the student experience needs to be both consistent and adaptable. As community and student needs evolve, the program also needs feedback, analysis and thus the ability to evolve at the same time.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I: Interview Questions

#### Faculty & Staff

1. What do you think is the most important thing students should leave the Muskie school with?
2. What are the strengths of the Muskie school?
3. What are the weaknesses of the Muskie school?
4. Is there anything you would like to know about students that you don't already have access to?

#### Students

1. What do you think is the most important thing students should leave the Muskie school with?
2. What are the strengths of the Muskie school?
3. What are the weaknesses of the Muskie school?
4. Is there anything in particular you think students should be asked about?

### Appendix II: List of Interviewees

Arbique, Deb	Administrative Specialist, Muskie Student Affairs
Ball, Carolyn	Chair of the PPM Academic Affairs Committee
Bogdonoff, Sandra	Director of Development & Planning, College of Management & Human Service
Campbell, Susan	Chief Student Affairs Officer, USM
Conly, Ruth	Administrative Specialist, Muskie Student Affairs
King, Susan	Director of Academic Assessment

O'Brien, Jim                      Coordinator of Student Affairs, Muskie Student Affairs Office

Sloan, Mary                      Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies, USM

Director of Graduate Admissions, USM

Student representatives from all three programs of the Muskie School

Faculty members from the Public Policy & Management Program

### **Appendix III: Current Course Evaluations**

### **Appendix VI: Student Exit Evaluation**

#### **Demographic Information**

##### Age

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 +

##### Ethnicity

- Hispanic or Latino
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or more races

##### Gender

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Transsexual

Other

Relationship Status

Single

Partnered

Married

Divorced

Widowed

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have dependents or anyone you care for in your home?

Yes

No

Length of time between BA and MA

Less than 1 year

1-3 years

3-5 years

5-10 years

10+ years

Are you currently employed?

Yes

No

If employed, which category best describes your area of employment?

State government

City/Local government

Federal government

Research

Policy analysis

Nonprofit organization

Private business

Self-employed

Average number of courses taken per semester

1

2

3

4 or more

**Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

*Advising*

I communicated with my advisor at least once a semester

I was able to contact my advisor when I needed help

My advisor helped me academically

My advisor helped me professionally

My advisor helped me personally

I view my advisor as a mentor

I feel comfortable contacting my advisor after graduation for letters of recommendation or career related questions

*Professional Development and Networking*

I have made strong connections with faculty at the Muskie School

I would like to attend alumni networking events

The Muskie School connected me with professional contacts in the Portland community

I feel the Muskie School has prepared me with sufficient professional development skills

I understand how the PPM program has prepared me for my career

I was aware of Graduate Assistant opportunities available to me in the Muskie School

*Course Offerings/Academics*

I was able to tailor course offerings to fit my personal/professional needs

There are a good variety of elective courses in the PPM program

I was challenged academically by my courses

I was able to apply topics in my coursework to my professional work

I learned useful computer and database skills in my courses

I was aware of opportunities to be involved in research projects at the Cutler Institute

#### *Administrative/Academic Support*

I received sufficient help with the application process

I received sufficient help with financial aid and graduate assistantship applications

The student affairs office was able to address concerns that I had about my academics

My program requirements were made clear to me

#### *Capstone*

I understood the purpose of the capstone prior to starting it

I was able to complete my capstone in one semester

I met with my capstone advisor on a regular basis

I received constructive feedback from my capstone advisor on a regular basis

#### **Open-Ended**

Why did you choose to come to the Public Policy & Management program at the Muskie School?

How did you learn about the Muskie School?

What was the most difficult thing for you as a graduate student?

Describe your overall experience with your academic advisor.

Please identify any courses or course topics you would include in the PPM program that were not offered.

What was your favorite course and why?

What was your least favorite course and why?

If you completed a field experience, please explain the skills you learned/developed.

Describe your overall experience writing your capstone.

What changes would you make to the capstone project?

## Appendix V: Supplemental Faculty Evaluation

### **Demographic Information**

The most common age range for students in the PPM program is:

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 +

The most common length of time between BA and MA for students is:

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10+ years

Average number of courses taken per semester by students:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

### **Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

#### *Advising*

I communicate with my advisees at least once a semester

I am available to my students when they need help

I help my advisees academically

I help my advisees professionally

I help my advisees personally

I am a mentor to my advisees

Advisees feel comfortable contacting me after graduation about letters of recommendation or career related questions

### *Professional Development and Networking*

The Muskie School prepares students with sufficient professional development skills

Students understand how the PPM program prepares them for their careers

Students are aware of Graduate Assistantship opportunities available to them

### *Course Offerings/Academics*

Students are able to tailor course offerings to fit their personal/professional needs

Elective courses in the PPM program provide good variety for students

My courses challenge students academically

Topics learned in courses can be applied to students' professional work

Students learn useful computer and database skills in my courses

Students are aware of opportunities to be involved in research at the Cutler Institute

Program requirements are made clear to students

### *Capstone*

Students understand the purpose of the capstone prior to starting it

Students are able to complete their capstones in one semester

As a capstone advisor, I meet with students on a regular basis

As a capstone advisor, I provide constructive feedback on a regular basis

**Open-Ended**

Why did you choose to work at the Muskie School?

Why do you think students choose to come to the Public Policy and Management program at the Muskie School?

As a capstone advisor, are there any changes you would make to the capstone course?

What do you think is the most difficult thing for graduate students in the PPM program?

COURSE NO. \_\_\_\_\_  
 DIV. \_\_\_\_\_

**USE PENCIL ONLY**  
**LEAVE INAPPROPRIATE ITEMS BLANK**

STUDENT INPUT  
 FOR  
 TEACHING USM

<b>MAJOR</b>	FINE ARTS	BUS ADMIN	EDUCATION	HUMANITIES	SOCIAL SCI	ENG SCI/MATH	NURSING	GRADUATE	BIO SCI	OTHER
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<b>ARE YOU A MAJOR IN THE DEPT. GIVING THIS COURSE</b>					<b>REASON FOR TAKING THIS COURSE</b>				
	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>					REQUIRED <input type="radio"/> INTEREST ONLY <input type="radio"/>				
<b>SEX</b>		FEMALE <input type="radio"/>		MALE <input type="radio"/>						
<b>EXPECTED GRADE IN THIS COURSE</b>		P/F	A	B	C	D	E			
<b>CUMULATIVE GPA</b>		NONE	0.00	2.00	2.50	3.00	3.50			
<b>YEAR IN SCHOOL</b>		YET	1.99	2.49	2.99	3.49	4.00			
		OTHER	FR	SO	JR	SR	GRAD			

**COMPARING THIS COURSE TO OTHERS YOU HAVE HAD AT USM, please answer the following questions.**

THE INSTRUCTOR			THE COURSE		
WELL PREPARED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	OFTEN UNPREPARED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	1. How prepared was the instructor for class?	NOT USUALLY <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	ALWAYS <input type="radio"/>	14. Were class meetings profitable and worth attending?
UNCLEAR <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY CLEAR <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	2. How clearly were the objectives of the course presented?	VERY INTERESTING <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	UNINTERESTING <input type="radio"/>	15. How would you rate the subject matter of this course?
VERY LITTLE <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	3. How enthusiastic was the instructor about the subject?	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY LITTLE <input type="radio"/>	16. Did you develop significant skills in the field as a result of taking this course?
VERY CLEAR <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	OFTEN UNCLEAR <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	4. How clearly did the instructor present ideas and theories?	TOO SLOW <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	TOO FAST <input type="radio"/>	17. How was the pace at which the material in the course was covered?
VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY LITTLE <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	5. How much were students encouraged to think for themselves?	POOR <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	EXCELLENT <input type="radio"/>	18. What is your overall rating of the primary textbook(s)?
UNCONCERNED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY CONCERNED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	6. How concerned was the instructor for the quality of his or her teaching?	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY LITTLE <input type="radio"/>	19. Were students required to apply concepts to demonstrate understanding?
NOT AT ALL <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	7. How orderly and logical were the instructor's presentations of the material?	LIGHTER <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	MUCH HEAVIER <input type="radio"/>	20. How did the work load for this course compare to that of others of equal credit?
OFTEN CLOSED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY OFTEN <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	8. How open was the instructor to other viewpoints?	VERY LITTLE <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/>	21. How much intellectual discipline was required in this course?
ALWAYS <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	RARELY <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	9. Did the instructor show respect for the questions and opinions of the students?	EXCELLENT <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	POOR <input type="radio"/>	22. What is your overall rating of this course?
RARELY <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY OFTEN <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	10. How often were examples used in class?	<b>EXAMINATIONS</b>		
LITTLE <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	11. Did the instructor inspire confidence in his or her knowledge of the subject?	VERY PROMPT <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	TOO SLOW <input type="radio"/>	23. How promptly were assignments and tests returned?
VERY CONCERNED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	UNCONCERNED <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	12. How genuinely concerned was the instructor with students' progress?	RARELY <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	ALWAYS <input type="radio"/>	24. Could tests be completed in the allotted time?
EXCELLENT <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	BELOW AVERAGE <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	13. Overall, how would you rate the instructor?	VERY CLEARLY <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	NOT CLEAR <input type="radio"/>	25. Did the instructor let you know what he or she expected on tests and assignments?
<b>COMMENTS</b>			VERY LITTLE <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY MUCH <input type="radio"/>	26. Did exams reflect the important aspects of the course?
			UNCLEAR <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	VERY CLEAR <input type="radio"/>	27. How clear were examination questions?
			COMPLETELY <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	UNFAIR <input type="radio"/>	28. How fair were the grading procedures?
			EXCELLENT <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	POOR <input type="radio"/>	29. Overall, how would you rate the examination procedure?

**LABORATORY ITEMS — if applicable**

- L1 How well were the labs integrated with the lectures?
- L2 Did the labs provide a learning experience?
- L3 How helpful was the lab instructor?
- L4 What is your overall rating of the laboratories?

VERY WELL	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	NOT AT ALL	<input type="radio"/>
VERY MUCH	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	VERY LITTLE	<input type="radio"/>
VERY MUCH	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	VERY LITTLE	<input type="radio"/>
EXCELLENT	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	POOR	<input type="radio"/>

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY INSTRUCTOR**

1.	<input type="radio"/>				
2.	<input type="radio"/>				
3.	<input type="radio"/>				
4.	<input type="radio"/>				
5.	<input type="radio"/>				
6.	<input type="radio"/>				
7.	<input type="radio"/>				

## MUSKIE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Course Number & Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE BUBBLE SHEET:

- (1) On top of the bubble sheet, indicate the course number where indicated, ex: PPM610
- (2) Completing other information at the top of the bubble sheet is optional.
- (3) Do not complete the section at the bottom of the bubble sheet entitled "Lab Items"

*Note: The section on examinations applies to all course assignments/papers and not just examinations.*

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**ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ON THIS SHEET – IF YOU NEED ADDITIONAL SPACE FOR YOUR COMMENTS, PLEASE USE THE BACK OF THE SHEET.**

- (1) Did the instructor encourage questions and discussions?
- (2) Was the instructor available for discussion outside of class?
- (3) Were the exercises, papers, and exams in this course returned with constructive feedback?
- (4) What were the best aspects of this course?
- (5) How could the course be improved?
- (6) Do you have additional comments about this course?

**Procedures to Assure Confidentiality:** Your individual judgement is sought and will be treated confidentially. *The faculty member will not have access to these forms until after grades have been submitted.* Responses to the open-ended questions will help evaluate important aspects of this course. In addition to providing feedback to the individual faculty member, responses to the questions will be used by the Dean in counseling faculty members, and by the Personnel Committee in making retention, tenure, and promotion decisions.