MPA program earns re-accreditation for seven more years

The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) has re-accredited NKU's Master of Public Administration (MPA) program for the next seven years, which is the maximum period of time allowed. "NASPAA accreditation indicates that an MPA program meets certain benchmarks in terms of quality and value. We are honored that NKU’s program, once again, has received this mark of quality or stamp of approval because it is very important to prospective students, current students, alumni and employers,” said Dr. Julie Olberding, MPA Director. “NKU’s program is one of only six in the state of Kentucky to have achieved this status."

NASPAA accreditation is a voluntary peer review process for programs in the field of public administration, public policy and public affairs. In other words, faculty and staff in a program must decide to apply for accreditation, and then peers from other institutions assess the application and recommend whether to grant accreditation and, if so, for how long. NASPAA-accredited programs are determined to be in compliance with the standards set forth by the field, which include establishing observable goals and outcomes, using information about their performance to guide program improvement, and contributing to the knowledge, research and practice of public service.

Seeking accreditation is a substantial process of self-reflection for faculty and staff. "Re-accreditation offers us a moment in time to reflect upon and strengthen what we do. As one of our most successful programs, the MPA serves as a model for other departments," said Dr. Jan Hillard, Associate Provost for Research, Graduate Studies and Regional Stewardship at NKU. “For re-accreditation, the quality of a program is measured not by a single indicator, but by multiple factors. For the MPA program, factors ranging from faculty scholarship to alumni surveys all pointed in a very positive direction. From this evidence-based perspective, students, employers and the region can be assured our program’s quality and commitment to ongoing improvement.”

Dr. Shamima Ahmed, Chair of the Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice which houses the MPA program, also attributes the program’s success to a variety of factors, including an enriched curriculum offering a balanced understanding of the theory and practice of public administration, highly committed faculty and staff, a very supportive and engaged advisory board and
alumni group, the quality of students, and the program’s emphasis on service learning. “Our goal is to make this program a premier one in this region. The re-accreditation only validates that we are getting closer to that goal,” said Ahmed.

The accreditation process requires a significant commitment of time and energy from the public administration or public affairs program and its host university. At NKU, MPA faculty and staff collected data from students, alumni and employers. They drafted and revised the self-study report, which was submitted in August 2011. Upon receiving word that the report was reviewed and accepted, they hosted a site visit team – consisting of two professors and one public administration practitioner – in March 2012. The site visit is one of the most critical and sensitive parts of the review and accreditation process. During the three-day site visit, the team reviewed applicant and student files, looked at classrooms and other facilities, and interviewed faculty and staff, students and alumni. One of their main objectives was to verify and clarify the description of the program as presented in the self-study report.

And now that NKU’s MPA program has been accredited, it will need to provide an annual report – through the 2018-2019 academic year – that provides evidence of ongoing conformity to the NASPAA standards and continued improvement.

“This was a very rigorous process that spanned multiple years and involved all of our stakeholders,” said Olberding. “We are very grateful for the assistance and support from our students, alumni, department colleagues, university administrators, advisory board members, and other public administration professionals in the region.” She noted that the program has developed strong relationships with professional associations, which help to keep MPA faculty and staff “in tune” with public policy issues and best practices in the region as well as needed skills and competencies for public administrators. These groups include the American Society for Public Administration’s Greater Cincinnati Chapter (ASPA-GCC) and the Northern Kentucky City/County Management Association (NKCCMA).

NKU’s MPA program, which was created in 1989, is the only one in the Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati region, with the next closest programs in Lexington and Dayton. NKU’s program currently has more than 100 students enrolled and more than 400 alumni. Most alumni work as public administrators in the tri-state area, including city and township managers, police and fire
chiefs, executive directors and program managers in nonprofit organizations, and administrators in colleges and universities.

The MPA program requires 39 credit hours, and it has four areas of concentrations in metropolitan governance, nonprofit management, homeland security and emergency management, and general public management. It is designed for working professionals, so most classes are offered on weekdays from 6:15 to 9 p.m. For more information, visit the program’s web site at http://artscience.nku.edu/departments/psscj/programs/publicadministration/mpa.html, or contact Beth DeVantier, MPA Program Coordinator, at (859) 572-5326 or devantier@nku.edu.