

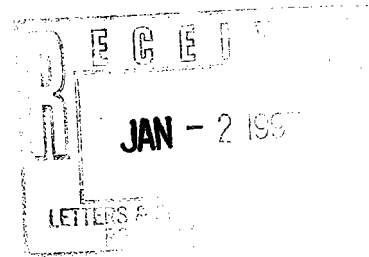
# La Follette

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## **Plan for Assessment of the Graduate Degrees**

December 1996



### ***Introduction***

Under mandate from the University's major accrediting agency, the North Central Association, the University's Board of Regents has directed all units to develop a plan for assessing their programs in general education, in each undergraduate major, and in graduate education. This document represents the plan developed by the Robert M. La Follette Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The College of Letters and Science is developing an assessment plan for general education. The La Follette Institute does not offer an undergraduate major. The Institute does offer two master's degrees (a Master of Arts in Public Affairs and Administration, and a Master of Arts in Public Affairs and Policy Analysis). This document will therefore describe our graduate programs, the goals they seek, and how we plan to measure their effectiveness. Our goal is not to conduct this measurement for its own sake but, rather, to use the assessment process as a way of strengthening our program and, in the end, better serving the students who enroll in our program.

This assessment plan was drafted by the Institute's Director, Donald F. Kettl, in consultation with the members of the Institute's faculty. It was approved

unanimously at a meeting of the Institute's faculty on December 17, 1996. We regard this plan as the product of our joint effort, and it has our strong and solid support.

The plan that follows has five parts:

- identification of the mission and goals of the La Follette graduate program.
- description of the objectives that flow from this mission and these goals.
- development of indicators to measure the degree to which the objectives have been achieved.
- creation of a plan for implementing these indicators.
- incorporation of the findings of this assessment into the Institute's curriculum and program planning.

Please see the appendix for a table illustrating the linkage among the goals, objectives, and indicators.

### ***Mission and Goals***

The fundamental mission of the La Follette Institute's graduate program is a program of recognized national excellence in preparing students for productive and satisfying careers in public affairs. Our students take a variety of jobs after graduation: in government at the federal, state, and local levels; in nonprofit organizations; and in private organizations dealing with public policy. Although where they work varies greatly, the skills they need do not: expertise in the analysis of public policies (the problems government must solve, which options might work in solving them, and which options would prove most effective and efficient) and in the management of public programs (the organizational and procedural approaches to ensuring effective implementation).

The Master of Arts degree programs at the La Follette Institute require the completion of 42 credits. The program typically takes two years of full-time study. The Institute offers two master's degrees:

- Public Affairs and Administration—for students interested principally in careers in public management
- Public Affairs and Policy Analysis—for students interested principally in careers in research and analysis for public decision-making.

Since good policy analysts must understand how programs are managed, and since effective administrators must understand how to analyze alternatives and assess program effectiveness, students often take courses in both degree tracks. Both degrees also allow students to develop an area of concentration, in which they choose courses from a wide range of university departments.

About 25 students begin the two-year master's program at La Follette each fall. Most students attend full time, but some students currently working for state or local government attend part time and bring special perspectives from their experience.

Students often come to La Follette with undergraduate degrees in political science and economics, but also in such fields as business, history, English, or communications. While most come directly from college, others arrive with several years of experience in government or the private sector. Diversity of the student body is an attractive feature of La Follette public affairs education. The Institute actively seeks students with exceptional backgrounds and experience.

## **Objectives**

To serve this mission, the La Follette Institute's graduate program has four objectives:

1. Establish and maintain one of the nation's premier programs in policy analysis and public management. The Institute aims not only to provide a high quality education for its students but also to attract to the University of Wisconsin-Madison a group of the best and brightest public policy students from around the country.
2. Provide students with a high-quality education in policy analysis and public management that will prepare them for careers in the public service and elsewhere. Students enroll in the program in the hope of improving their skills and in developing a broader understanding of the role public affairs in a democracy. The program seeks to ensure that the students are provided with an education that meets their needs.
3. Provide students with education of long-term value. It is not enough simply to give students skills that help them obtain good jobs. To be of real and lasting merit, the program must give students both skills and a broader perspective that will give them a way of tackling problems whose dimensions cannot now even be imagined.

4. Provide a program that allows students to complete their training in a reasonable time. The La Follette graduate program is a professional program; its students are preparing for careers in the public service, and the program seeks to ensure that students can complete the program in a timely fashion.

We expect that the program will meet these objectives through the following sequence of courses and activities:

*Core Courses:* All students complete courses in a core that forms the foundation for subsequent work in public affairs. The core courses, required for both degree programs, examine the political and economic context of public policy and administration. They also develop statistical and analytical skills. Development of rhetorical skills is an integral part of the curriculum, so writing exercises and presentations are part of most courses.

- Quantitative Analysis of Political Data, PA 551—An introduction to statistical tools and methods used in public management and policy analysis.
- Introduction to Public Management, PA 878—An overview, with extensive use of case studies, of the historical issues and current problems of public administration.
- Microeconomics for Policy Analysis, PA 880—An introduction to microeconomic principles used in policy analysis and the study of political, administrative, and regulatory institutions.

From the core courses, students move to more advanced work in one of the two degree tracks: Policy Analysis, and Public Administration. (Many students, however, choose to take most of all of the courses in both tracks.)

*Policy Analysis Track.* Students in the Policy Analysis track take these courses:

- Quantitative Methods, PA 819—A survey of methods of empirical analysis used to support policy analysis and public decision making. Applied regression analysis is emphasized.
- Introduction to Policy Analysis, PA 869—A survey of principles and methods of policy analysis presented through extensive use of case studies.

Students in the Policy Analysis track are also required to take one of the following two courses. Some students take both.

- Public Program Evaluation, PA 871—A survey of theory, design, methods, and ethical issues encountered in evaluation of public programs. -or-
- Benefit-Cost Analysis, PA 881—An overview of the theory and practice of use of benefit-cost analysis in diverse circumstances of policy and program evaluation.

*Public Administration Track:* Students in the Public Administration Track take the following courses:

- Public Personnel Administration, PA 875—Analysis of personnel policies and practices in the public sector and examination of patterns of interaction among political executives, personnel professionals, public employees, and interest groups in the development of personnel policies.
- Advanced Public Management, PA 885—Examination of how managers in public and nonprofit agencies can secure and utilize legal authority, human resources, and funds to accomplish organizational goals.

Students in this track are also required to take one of the following two courses. Some students take both.

- Federal Budget & Tax Policy and Administration, PA 890—Consideration of administrative organization, methods, problems, and implications of government fiscal policy making and how fiscal policies are implemented through budget making and tax collection. -or-
- State and Local Government Finance, PA 891—Explores the spending and tax policies of state and local governments. Focus on factors influencing the mix and level of public spending and the choice of revenue sources. Issues to be studied include the fiscal relations between governments and property tax.

*Area of Concentration.* Students complete their program by choosing an area of concentration, in which to specialize. The remarkable range of graduate courses and programs offered at the University allows great flexibility in tailoring a curriculum that matches a student's career goals. In recent years, students have chosen these areas of concentration, among others:

- Social Service Administration
- Education Policy
- Economic Development
- Energy Policy
- Health Management
- Organizational Theory

- Information Technology
- Environment Policy
- Social Welfare Policy
- Financial Administration

## **Indicators**

The La Follette Institute will use the following indicators to assess the graduate program's performance in meeting its goals and objectives:

1. *Objective: Establish and maintain one of the nation's premier programs in policy analysis and public management.*
  - 1.1. Faculty assessment. The faculty will assess the quality of the program based on a comparison with programs at other major public policy graduate programs. (information now available)
  - 1.2. National rankings. Regular national rankings are made of programs in public affairs. These rankings provide a sense of La Follette's national standing compared with its peers. (information now available)
  - 1.3. Fellowship offers. The percentage of University Fellowships and La Follette Fellowship offers accepted will provide a measure of the Institute's success in attracting the nation's top students. (information now available)
  - 1.4. Minority recruitment. The Institute's ability to attract highly qualified minority students will measure its ability to achieve its goals for increasing the diversity of its student body. (information now available)
  
2. *Objective: Provide students with a high-quality education in policy analysis and public management that will prepare them for careers in the public sector and elsewhere.*
  - 2.1. Oral exit interviews (sample of students). On graduation, students can candidly provide feedback about what they liked about the program, and what suggestions for improvement they can make. A sample of students will be surveyed to probe detailed questions. (information now available)
  - 2.2. Written exit survey (all students). Because it is not possible to conduct oral interviews with all students, a written survey will explore basic questions with all graduating students. (information now available)
  - 2.3. Written survey. Many issues are often not apparent until students have some from the graduate program and some work experience. A

written survey mailed to students several years after graduation will assess graduates' opinions about the curriculum and program. (survey to be developed)

3. *Objective: Provide students with education of long-term value.*
  - 3.1. Tracking of alumni careers. Following the careers of alumni provides valuable information about what the La Follette program prepares them to do. The information will be collected from the Institute's existing alumni mailing list and categorized according to the source of employment. (information now available)
  - 3.2. Interviews with sample of alumni. The Institute's alumni have over the years provided extremely valuable feedback about the program: which courses proved most valuable, what recommendations for improvement they would make. The Institute has a regular program of communicating with alumni through the La Follette Institute Alumni Association. These interviews will be refined and codified. (information now available; instrument to be refined)
  - 3.3. Analysis of feedback from alumni. All La Follette alumni regularly receive the La Follette Institute Alumni Newsletter. Alumni regularly submit unsolicited reactions and comments after receiving the newsletter. The data collected through this feedback will be refined and codified. (information now available; instrument to be refined)
  - 3.4. Interviews with sample of employers. The employers of the Institute's alumni are a wealth of information about the skills graduates possess and which skills might most need to be further nurtured. A survey will assess employers' attitudes about the skills possessed by the program's graduates. (survey to be developed)
  
4. *Objective: Provide a program that allows students to complete their training in a reasonable time.*
  - 4.1. Time to degree. It ought to be possible for students to complete the degree in a timely fashion. What is the average time required to complete the La Follette degrees? (information now available)
  - 4.2. Percent of students admitted who graduate. Most students admitted ought to complete the degree. What percentage of students who begin the program complete a degree? (information now available)
  - 4.3. Percent of students provided financial support. As many students as possible, within the resources provided by the College, ought to receive financial support. What percentage of students receive financial support? What is the level of that support? (information now available)

## **Implementation Plan**

As noted above, the La Follette Institute has for years already been collecting much of the data required by this assessment plan. Some instruments (such as the survey of graduates and the sample of employers) need to be developed. Other instruments (such as the feedback supplied by the alumni) need to be refined.

The La Follette Institute plans to assemble and analyze available information beginning in the 1997-98 academic year. During the 1998-99 academic year, the Institute will complete work on the instruments needing design and refinement. By the end of the 1998-99 academic year, the assessment plan will be fully implemented.

## **Feedback**

The data collected through this assessment plan, of course, have no value for their own sake. They are meaningful only as they help refine and polish the La Follette graduate program. It is a program that has already been recognized as outstanding in national surveys. For example, a recent *U.S. News and World Report* survey ranked it #10 among all public affairs programs in the nation, a remarkable accomplishment for a program so small and so new.

Continued success is by no means assured. The feedback provided through the assessment plan will allow the Institute to:

- refine the Institute's curriculum to better meet the needs to its students.
- determine better how to connect the Institute's inputs (especially its faculty positions and student financial aid) with its goals and objectives.
- determine how best to address any problems that the assessment plan reveals. In particular, if the indicators show that the graduate program does not fully meet its objectives, the La Follette faculty and staff will carefully analyze the situation to determine why:
  - factors under the Institute's control that can be adjusted, including course offerings, the content of courses, and administrative support from the Institute's student affairs and placement offices.
  - factors not under the Institute's control, including inputs.

The Institute's faculty will make available to faculty the results of the assessment process. The faculty will engage in an ongoing review of the program to pursue its goal of excellence.



## Robert M. La Follette Institute of Public Affairs Assessment Plan

<b>Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>prepare students for careers in public service: policy analysis and public management</li> </ul>			
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish and maintain one of the nation's premier programs in policy analysis and public management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide students with a high quality education in policy analysis and public management that will prepare them for careers in the public sector and elsewhere</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide students with education of long-term value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide a program that allows students to complete their training in a reasonable time</li> </ul>
<b>Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluation of the quality of the graduate programs by the faculty</li> <li>rankings in national survey of graduate programs</li> <li>proportion of Univ. Fellowship and La Follette fellowship offers accepted</li> <li>success in attracting highly qualified minority students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oral exit interviews (sample of students)</li> <li>written exit survey (all students)</li> <li>assessment of placement experiences (by placement director)</li> <li>written survey (several years after graduation; all students)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tracking of alumni careers</li> <li>interviews with sample of alumni</li> <li>analysis of feedback provided by alumni</li> <li>interviews with a sample of employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>time to degree</li> <li>percent of students who graduate</li> <li>percent of students provided financial support</li> </ul>