

Program Review Report Summary

1. **Reporting Institution** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed** Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Public Planning
(CIP: 64.0301)
3. **Date** 17 January 2020
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5. Overview

The Certificate in Public Planning offers students the ability to develop skills in public administration, public policy, and geographic information systems (GIS), applicable to careers in urban and regional planning and public administration. Students complete nine hours in geographic information systems, and nine hours in public administration and public policy.

Over the review period, the Department of Political Science has had four students complete this certificate program. Currently, there are no students enrolled in the certificate program. Of those four students who have earned the certificate, three were enrolled in the MA in Political Science Program. While enrollment is small, the public administration and public policy courses do not require any additional faculty, since these courses are already being offered to MA students in political science. Likewise, the GIS courses enroll students from a wide variety of disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach allows us to be more flexible as occupations and professions evolve.

In the Fall of 2016, all Public Policy and Public Administration Program courses required for the certificate program were moved to an online setting, expanding accessibility and flexibility for working professionals. The remaining courses in geographic information systems are slated for online delivery very soon. While some public universities in Illinois are beginning to offer online programs (University of Illinois Springfield offers an MA in political science online), we are not aware of any that offer the Certificate in Public Planning in an online setting. In April 2016, the University Center of Lake County approved this program for inclusion in its online programs, which can help us reach a larger student population.

6. Major Findings and Recommendations

- 6.a. **Description and assessment of any major changes in the program [e.g., (a) changes in the overall discipline of field; (b) student demand; (c) societal need; (d) institutional context for offering the degree; (e) other elements appropriate to the discipline in questions].**

(a) Changes in the discipline.

Our department works to align itself with the recommendations of the American Political Science Association (APSA), the lead professional organization representing Political Science as well as the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). The APSA's mission includes high quality teaching and research, diversifying the profession, and public service through civic engagement and participation. ASPA's mission is to promote the value of joining and elevating the public service profession. The rapid increase in the size, scope and complexity of data sources, the increasingly difficult regulatory environment, and the rising demand for more government services has pushed public administration (and specifically public planning) into the forefront of the public's mind in recent years.

(b) Changes in student demand.

The students who enroll in the public planning certificate are typically members of our MA program. Many of them work full or part-time jobs while attending graduate school, and for some, enrollment in full-time graduate study on campus can be a barrier to admission. As a result, we began offering all the required public administration courses for this public planning certificate in an online, asynchronous format beginning in the Fall of 2016.

Since the fall of 2016, we have had five students enroll in the certificate program and four of them eventually completed all requirements. Three of those five students were also enrolled in the MA Program in Political Science and all three lived locally.

(c) Changes in societal need. Over the review period, public administration as a field has evolved, coinciding with a myriad of changes in how government services are provided, and how political systems implement policy. The data indicates that the job market for those with skills in the field of public administration and public policy is incredibly robust. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts above-average growth in key careers related to these concerns, including urban and regional planning, with a prediction that the number of positions will grow 11% in the next decade, which they describe as "much faster than average." The Certificate in Public Planning option provides essential GIS training to students seeking employment in urban and regional planning. These skills, coupled with taking some coursework in the field of public administration means that students are well equipped and well qualified to move into this rapidly growing and evolving field.

(d) Changes in institutional context. The Political Science Department offers this program in coordination with the Geography Department. Of the required 18 hours for the certificate, nine must be taken from courses in Political Science and nine hours from Geography offerings. Additionally, three courses

at the graduate level in the Political Science Program (PLS 4793/Civic and Nonprofit Leadership, PLS 4893/Budgeting in Government and Nonprofit Organizations, and PLS 5543/Proseminar in Public Administration) serve as electives in the Geographic Information Systems M.S. Degree Program.

6.2 Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement; Assessment.

Assessment.

The program focuses on four learning objectives, based on the learning goals of EIU's Graduate School. Students will demonstrate 1) the ability to think and write critically, 2) content knowledge, 3) the ability to apply appropriate social science research methods, and 4) the ability to communicate concepts appropriate for graduate-level study. Since we have only had two students complete the program so far, we are unable to provide a full assessment of the curriculum yet. However, all students are assessed within their classes for critical thinking, graduate-level professional writing, communication skills, and methodological skills.

Because only four students have completed the Certificate program since 2016, there is not enough data to provide valid assessment of this pool of students.

6.3 Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.

Changes in instructional resources and practices. Because this certificate program relies entirely on courses that are being offered as part of other degree programs, it requires no additional faculty resources. This has been especially important given that the number of faculty in the political science department has decreased significantly in the last five years.

Changes in curriculum. The most significant alteration to the curriculum came through changing the three 4000-level public administration classes (PLS 4793/Civic and Nonprofit Leadership, PLS 4873/Human Resource Management in Government and Nonprofits, and PLS 4893/Budgeting in Government and Nonprofit Organizations) to an online delivery modality. Subsequently, the political science department added two more courses to the list of electives for the Certificate (PLS 4763/ Environmental Politics and Policy and PLS 5163/State Governments and Policy in the U.S. Federal System). The GEO courses were also adjusted to reflect changes in their course offerings and the curriculum was made more flexible by only requiring one course (GEO 5810/Introduction to GIS), and making the other two courses GEO electives that focus on a specific type of analysis in geographic information systems.

6.4 Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.

This review has highlighted the need for the following actions:

Publicity and Marketing. We are aware that we need to work harder to communicate the value of the program to potential students and increase awareness of the availability of the certificate across the state.

Internal Communication. In addition, we need to streamline our communication with our online MA students to make them aware that many have already completed half of the requirements for the certificate. This would likely encourage many of them to consider taking the three courses in the GEO Department that would allow them to complete the Certificate in Public Planning.

Moving All Degree Requirements Online. The growth in the Graduate Program in Political Science among our online students has been exponential, with 55 students enrolled in graduate courses in the Fall of 2020. Many of them are already taking the three courses required for the certificate while in pursuit of their master's degree. In the Spring of 2021, a plan has been developed to move all the required GEO courses to an online format. This should be in place for the Fall of 2021. This will unlock a larger pool of students and will increase enrollment for the certificate going forward.

With the Certificate in Public Planning moving completely online in the near future, this program will be the only one in the state that provides such in-depth coursework on public administration as well as a depth of practical skills in learning GIS from the GEO Department. This program will be the ideal destination for those working in all levels of government to improve their skills and training to better serve their communities while also advancing their careers.

7. Responses to Institution-Assigned Issues: N/A

8. Outcome

Dean's Comment:

The Certificate in Public Planning is a great example of an interdisciplinary program that draws from the curriculum of two departments: Political Science and Geology/Geography. While the certificate has witnessed low enrollment over the course of its existence, it's worth noting that the program's curriculum incorporates coursework from existing programs and hence there is no need for additional faculty or departmental resources. Additionally, some of the courses required for the program will be moved online in the coming year which will lead to greater access for students. As a result, student interest in the certificate should grow in the coming years.

We recommend a decision of **Program in Good Standing**.

8.1 Decision:

Program in Good Standing

Program flagged for Priority Review

Program Enrollment Suspended

8.2 Explanation

This is a career-focused certificate program that supports local and state government, as well as public sector support firms. Additionally, the certificate is interdisciplinary and maximizes open seats in lower enrolled programs—and extends from the well enrolled PA online program. The move to online will expand the market and student access to the program. The faculty's commitment to adopting flexible program delivery is much appreciated as it meets our learners where they live—which is especially critical for successful master's level and post-baccalaureate certificate programs in the current competitive environment. Finally, I found the narrative to be compelling as it focused on relevancy and the assessment of student learning.

Jay D. Gatrell
Provost & VPAA