

ANNUAL DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT, 2002-2003

TEAM-BUILDING SKILLS

Executive Summary

This year the Department of Public Administration assessed student learning outcomes on an increasingly vital skill for public managers in the 21st century—the ability to effectively work in and manage groups and teams. The assessment utilized a survey of all core courses in the curriculum taught by full-time faculty in order to evaluate the number and type of required team projects along with the extent of explicit and implicit instruction given in requisite team-building skills and dispositions.

One of the most salient findings is that five of the program's classes have considerable content in leadership and team-building skills—PAD 681 (Strategic Management for Public Organizations), PAD 682 (Organizational Behavior), PAD 661 (Creating an Empowered Organization), PAD 663 (Leadership Roundtable), and PAD 644 (Supervision Skills). One class, Creating an Empowered Organization, is in fact designed specifically to enhance team-building skills. Another elective, PAD 612 (Negotiation and Conflict Management), has also been developed with substantial team-building skills content. Also important was the finding that the curriculum as a whole involves extensive use of small-group exercises, in-class and online discussions, case-study analyses, and semester-long and multiple-week team projects that cover a wide variety of subjects.

Faculty met to discuss the findings in April and May of 2003. They reached a consensus that the curriculum is superior in terms of explicit instruction in team-building skills, feedback of student performance, quantity of group exercises, and use of information technology to facilitate team-building. To improve student learning on this objective even further, faculty agreed that they would continue to share their thoughts on improving the quality of student team-building capacity via the departmental listserv. Several of the faculty, moreover, expressed interest in adopting some of the innovative team-building exercises and instruction techniques used in the several of the core faculty's classes. Faculty thought they might also attempt to offer guidance to adjunct faculty on team-building development in their courses. A final idea generated by the faculty consequent to the review of the annual assessment data was that it might be useful to further stress the development of the requisite *dispositions* for the effective management of team projects.

Assessment of Team-Building Skills

There is a story of how an employer in the engineering field preferred to hire college graduates with Physics degrees rather than Engineering degrees, for the sole reason that the Engineering students were used to doing their work individually, and were not, unlike the average Physics student, adept at working effectively in a group environment.

This is not surprising, given that the International City/County Management Association cites *team leadership, delegating, facilitative leadership, interpersonal communication, mediation/negotiation, and coaching and mentoring*—all of which are core traits of successful team work—as seven of the 28 "essential practices" for effective local government management.¹

The importance of team-building skills is now recognized at comparable public administration schools throughout the country. The MPA program at San Francisco State University in fact makes "training students to work in groups and teams, providing positive experiences and the opportunity to assess the importance of using teams to accomplish organizational tasks" one of its eight primary student learning objectives.²

It was hence considered a valuable goal to determine what and how students in our program learn about working effectively in groups and teams. Accordingly, this year the Department of Public Administration assessed student learning outcomes in the area of team-building. The assessment utilized a survey of all core courses in the curriculum taught by full-time faculty in order to evaluate the frequency and type of required team and group work along with the quality and quantity of instruction in the techniques of building and managing effective teams.

Learning Outcome Assessed

Team-building skills.

Goals of the Assessment

Primarily, the assessment will be used to help faculty ascertain whether the program is giving students sufficient *instruction* and *practice* in working in and managing team projects.

Assessment Methodology

Primary method was a survey completed by core faculty. This method was complemented by a review of general content of all elective courses offered in the program.

Assessment Population

The universe of classes for the assessment was all core classes taught by full-time faculty for the spring 2003 semester (or the last time it was taught, if not offered that semester).

- PAD 680: Public Policy
- PAD 681: Strategic Management for Public Organizations
- PAD 682: Organizational Behavior
- PAD 683: Intergovernmental Relations
- PAD 684: Budget—State and Local Government
- PAD 687: Statistics for Managers
- PAD 688: Research and Program Evaluation

¹ *Local Government Management: It's the Career for You!* 2001. Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association.

² *Master's in Public Administration Mission, Goals, and Objectives*. 2002. Public Administration Program, San Francisco State University.

Survey Instrument

The survey of faculty courses was conducted in February and March of 2003. The survey instrument was designed specifically to provide both a qualitative and quantitative assessment of team-building in the program's curriculum.

The first component of the survey was designed to assess whether the overall quantity of team work required in the program as a whole conforms to faculty expectations. As with many other managerial skills, "practice makes perfect" with group work. A large part of facilitating a student's capabilities in building and managing successful teams is to require frequent group work both inside and outside of the classroom. *Ceteris paribus*, the more group work a student participates in, the more effective that student will be in managing the numerous issues that rise to the surface whenever work extends beyond the individual. Accordingly, this component of the survey tapped all forms of graded and ungraded team work required in classes taught by full-time faculty.

Second, the survey was designed to address the issue of quality of instruction in team-building skills. The two central concerns were whether students received sufficient instruction in the techniques of building and managing teams and whether students received sufficient feedback from instructors after having worked on team projects. A preliminary goal set was that all students should receive explicit instruction in requisite team-building skills at least once during the course of the degree. In light of these goals, the survey asked the core faculty whether and to what extent they explicitly teach team-building techniques—including team leadership, delegating, interpersonal communication, mediation and negotiation, cooperation, and coaching and mentoring.

Lastly, the proliferation of information technology in the workplace has rendered the ability to efficiently implement and manage "virtual" teams an increasingly important skill. The survey was therefore also used to determine the extent to which the management of virtual team projects forms part of the MPA curriculum.

Analysis of Assessment Data

This section presents the highlights of the data that was collected. One of the most salient findings is that five classes have considerable content in leadership and team-building skills—PAD 681 (Strategic Management for Public Organizations), PAD 682 (Organizational Behavior), PAD 661 (Creating an Empowered Organization), PAD 663 (Leadership Roundtable), and PAD 644 (Supervision Skills). One class, *Creating an Empowered Organization*, is in fact designed specifically to enhance team-building skills. Another elective, PAD 612 (Negotiation and Conflict Management), has also been developed with substantial team-building skills content.

Types of Group Projects and Team Work

It is notable that all of the courses surveyed have considerable discussion content—either online or in the classroom—at most if not all class sessions. There is also extensive use of all of the following activities:

- In-Class Discussions
- Online Discussions
- Small-Group Tasks and Discussions
- Case Study Analyses
- Semester-long or multiple-week teams

Quantity and Types of Team Projects Required

Activity	Classes Using the Activity (with number of times per semester)
Debates	(PAD 680) 1
Role-Playing Activities	(PAD 682) 2-3; (PAD 683) 1
Simulations	(PAD 680) 1
Group Presentations	(PAD 681) 1 / person (PAD 682); (PAD 683) (PAD 680) 6 (PAD 688) 3
Semester-Long Group Projects	(PAD 681) 1 – large case study (PAD 688) 1; (PAD 683) 1
Group Papers	(PAD 682) 6-8 (PAD 680) 1 extensive
Discussions Involving Entire Class	(PAD 681) – each class (PAD 680) – each class (PAD 688) – each class
Online Discussions	(PAD 681) – linked to large case study (PAD 687) – all modules
Online “Chapter Leader” posts	(PAD 681) 1 / person
Develop 2 questions from readings	(PAD 681) 1 / person
Case Study Analyses	PAD 680, PAD 681, PAD 688
Small-Group Discussions	Practically all classes
Formation of Study Groups	PAD 687 PAD 682

Instruction in Team-Building Skills and Dispositions

Skill	Classes with Instruction in the Skill Component
<p>Developing Self-Awareness (PAD 681) Identify each person's role in case on team—facilitator, scribe, timekeeper</p>	<p>PAD 682 PAD 681</p>
<p>Managing Stress (PAD 681) Discussed in class—examples provided</p>	<p>PAD 682 PAD 681</p>
<p>Solving Problems Creatively (PAD 681) Use examples from prior classes</p>	<p>PAD 682; PAD 684 PAD 681; PAD 683</p>
<p>Communicating Supportively (PAD 681) Demonstrate—models</p>	<p>PAD 682 PAD 681; PAD 683</p>
<p>Gaining Power and Influence</p>	<p>PAD 682</p>
<p>Motivating Employees (PAD 663) Texts, examples, videos, etc.</p>	<p>PAD 682 (PAD 663)</p>
<p>Managing Conflict</p>	<p>PAD 682; PAD 683</p>
<p>Compromise (PAD 681) Teach establishment at working group roles</p>	<p>PAD 682; PAD 684 PAD 681; PAD 683</p>
<p>Empowering and Delegating (PAD 681) Discussed in class; demonstrated in class</p>	<p>PAD 682 PAD 681</p>
<p>Getting information from others and helping others</p>	<p>PAD 687</p>
<p>Provide examples, use cases, discuss roles, discuss leadership</p>	<p>PAD 681 (also PAD 663)</p>
<p>Participation and contributions are graded in all classes</p>	<p>PAD 681 (also PAD 663)</p>

Other Team-Building and Group Work Instruction

- (PAD 682) *Lectures*: stages of group development, issues in team development, managers as team leaders, pros and cons of teams.
- (PAD 681) Goal identification, objective development, planning techniques and project management skills.
- (PAD 681) *Cases*: discussed along with team skills at problem-solving and working together. *Negotiation at Impasses* taught, as consensus is not the only answer.
- (PAD 681) Roles; agendas; team rules (values identified along with procedures); listening skills stressed; table an action – appropriate if more fact-finding necessary.
- (PAD 687) Description of discussion rules and possible topics.
- (PAD 680) Separation of tasks with “team contract” for final project.

Readings and Assessment Tools

- (PAD 681) Use of the PACE palate—a color-coded exercise based on Meyer-Briggs and Ken Kiersey’s work; identifies strengths and weaknesses; team people up with an array of different strengths.
- (PAD 681) *Mining Group Gold*, by Thomas A. Kayser (1990); other articles distributed in class.
- (PAD 680) Provide links to two *HBR* leadership articles (accompanying *Power Point* presentation also provided on web site).
- (PAD 680) *Rumsfeld’s Rules* given as required reading.
- (PAD 682) Emphasis is on teacher as facilitator → Establishment of “Team” climate in class from first day on:
 - “Apart from planned group activities, considerable effort is given to the introductory activities, compelling interaction immediately and encouraging informal interaction (e.g., suggesting study groups) and discussing how the class is progressing as a whole—also noticing their ‘unique’ performance as compared to other OB classes.”

Feedback on Group Work

- (PAD 687) If a student is having difficulty joining a discussion online or expressing themselves students are given specific feedback for improvement.
- (PAD 687) Feedback of online comments to facilitate better responses.
- (PAD 681) Observation of team interactions.
- (PAD 681) Required agenda preparation.
- (PAD 681) Team minutes.
- (PAD 682) Considerable attention is given to a) observation of how students work together, b) instruments which help students evaluate their teamwork, and c) participation in team/group activities which have students play as *outside observers* of the group dynamics.

What Has the Department Learned Through This Assessment? What Conclusions Regarding Effectiveness of Curriculum and Instruction Can Be Drawn from the Data Collected?

Faculty met to discuss the assessment data in April and May of 2003. They reached a consensus that the curriculum is superior in terms of explicit instruction in team-building skills, feedback of student performance, quantity of group exercises, and use of information technology to facilitate team-building. Faculty were further impressed with both the extent and variety of team-building projects required by the program's core and elective classes.

The faculty did note, however, that students need further assistance in certain areas relevant to the goal of leading successful teams. In particular, faculty noted the following regarding student skills deficits and the need for curriculum modifications:

- Listening skills are lacking
- The ability to accept differences in others is not as well developed as it should be
- We should work on students' listening, negotiating, and acceptance qualities
- There are occasional free-riding problems in group projects
- Improve students' capacity to prioritize tasks and delegate workload fairly & effectively
- Treat of team-building as a "disposition" in addition to a skill
- Delegation skills should be further stressed
- Proper department is not at an optimal level

What Actions Will the Department Take as a Result of This Assessment Data and its Evaluation?

To improve student learning on this objective even further, faculty agreed that they would continue to share their thoughts on improving the quality of team-building skills instruction via the Departmental listserv.

Will the Department Change its Instruction in any Way as a Result of the Information Gained Through This Assessment? If so, how?

An idea generated by the faculty consequent to the review of the assessment data was that it might be useful to further stress the development of the *dispositions* necessary for the effective management of team projects. Several faculty members agreed to continue to share their insights on what this could mean in terms of curriculum development.