

NASPAA Accreditation to AUC and the Promotion of Egypt's Public Service Education

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The American University in Cairo's (AUC) Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) have become the first degrees in the Middle East and in Africa to be accredited by the most credible global accrediting body, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, NASPAA. NASPAA was established in the United States in 1970. It has over 200 members, many of which rank among the most prestigious graduate programs in public affairs in the United States.

NASPAA began accrediting public affairs programs in 1980, but only began accrediting international programs in the past few years. AUC's programs are only the third and fourth degrees to be accredited worldwide, joining the MPP offered by Korean Development Institute's (KDI) School of Public Policy and Management and the MPA offered by China's Tsinghua University.

The accreditation study included three phases, beginning with becoming a member of NASPAA and broadening participation in NASPAA programming. AUC then submitted an application to be considered for accreditation, and in December 2012, the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) informed AUC that the university's two flagship programs, the MPA and the MPP, had been judged eligible to submit self-study reports for accreditation consideration.

The faculty and staff of the Public Policy and Administration Department (PPAD) agreed to work together make this venture a success. PPAD prepared an action plan to ensure that the department would complete the two degree self-studies by August 15, 2014, in order to make the 2013-2014 cycle.

The accreditation process has required the PPAD to make many modifications and changes to bring PPAD's academic operations into line with the NASPAA guidelines. Changes have included introduction of standardized course syllabi, developing a course management form, setting standards for Academically Qualified (AQ) and Professionally Qualified (PQ) faculty, developing diversity and assessment plans, introducing faculty teaching observation, organizing regular meetings between the Department Chair and School Dean and the current students and alumni.

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These changes have played important roles in enabling PPAD to identify gaps in its systems and to understand how to overcome them to further improve the programs' quality over time.

The accreditation effort responds to the increasing interest in Egypt to ensure the quality of public policy, public affairs, and public administration. This in turn is driving demand for higher education and training standards for the profession of government and public service. Preparing quality human resources can make a tremendous contribution to achieving effective and efficient delivery of public services.

Accreditation programs such as NASPAA's reflect a growing consensus among academics, practitioners and relevant stakeholders that external review and validation through the peer review process serves as the most effective tool to assure a program quality. In the context of public affairs education, the NASPAA has now taken on the broader role of accrediting programs on an international level, building on its 35 years of experience accrediting schools in the US and recognizing the growing importance of public affairs programs in international professional education.

NASPAA maintains a rigorous and comprehensive peer review accreditation process. After passing the eligibility phase, a participating program goes through a number of major steps in the process of accreditation: preparing self-study, site visit by external accreditors, and then a decision by the NASPAA's COPRA.

Preparing a self-study is a critical task, requiring that a report be prepared on the basis of seven mission-based standards: (1) Managing the Program Strategically, (2) Matching the Governance with the Mission, (3) Matching Operations with the Mission: Faculty Performance, (4) Matching Operations with the Mission: Serving Students, (5) Matching Operations with the Mission: Student Learning, (6) Matching Resources with the Mission and (7) Matching Communications with the Mission.

After reviewing the self-study, COPRA appoints the members of the site visit team (SVT), which comprises both well-known academics and practitioners. SVT not only reviews documentary evidence supporting the data and information presented in the self-study but also engages in discussions with stakeholders, such as faculty, students, university administrators, alumni, employers and donors. This information enables the SVT to understand and assess the strengths and weaknesses of a program. They also look into the availability and quality of physical facilities such as student dormitory, medical services, classroom and computational facilities. The SVT submits their report to COPRA, which then makes an independent decision whether or not to accredit a program. After accrediting a program, which remains valid for a period of seven years, COPRA follows up on the program's performance by requiring annual submission of an accreditation maintenance report.

Being accredited by NASPAA brings numerous benefits to programs successfully accredited, including providing a sound basis for continuous improvement in the program, confirming the quality of the program to students, employers, and others; increasing the program's visibility, demonstrating the program's commitment to excellence in public affairs education, and providing greater opportunities for interaction with leading public affairs programs around the world.

AUC MPA and MPP Programs

The PPAD Program Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee with active support from PPAD faculty, staff, students and alumni along with all the cooperation and help of relevant offices and departments at AUC went through a difficult, year-long process of preparing self-study reports and then submitting them within the given deadline. Although the COPRA highly commended the self-study reports, they also made some observations, which PPAD quickly fixed. COPRA then appointed a SVT comprised of two distinguished US academics and a practitioner, who paid an on campus visit from March 30 to April 2, 2015. The SVT held meetings with the Program Directors, faculty, Department Chair and the School Dean, AUC senior administrators, current students, alumni, and employers and also examined and cross-checked the documentary evidences submitted for their review. In view of a supportive report from the SVT, the COPRA in its meeting held this past summer granted unconditional seven years accreditation to both the MPA and the MPP programs.

This was a historic moment for PPAD, as two of its programs received NASPAA accreditation, a testament of high quality program offered at AUC which are at par with the relevant programs in US universities. This recognition further increases AUC's visibility on the global map and strengthens its role as Egypt's Global University.

Promoting Egypt's Public Service Education

AUC plays a path setting role in liberal arts higher education in Egypt. As the champion in public service education, PPAD intends to share its knowledge and skills with other Egyptian universities, preparing them to seek accreditation for their public administration/management graduate programs by NASPAA or any similar credible accreditation agency and thus to promote public service education in Egypt.