

Academic Programs Committee Resolution on the Proposal for an Executive Master of Public Affairs Degree Program by the Sanford School

I. Introduction and Discussion Summary

On 18 October 2023, Subcommittee A of the Academic Programs Committee met to review the Sanford School of Public Policy's proposal for the creation of a new Executive Master of Public Affairs (E-MPA) degree program. Representing the Sanford School were Corinne Krupp, Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Director of Graduate Studies of the Master of International Development Policy; Asher Hildebrand, Assistant Director of Graduate Studies, MPP Program; and Mark Hart, Director, Digital Learning. APC-A was provided with an 80-page proposal document for the E-MPA covering program rationale; target student population and recruitment strategy; curriculum and degree requirements; analysis of peer institutions' programs; financial projections; student experience; program evaluation; and risk assessment. APC-A was also provided with the Master's Advisory Council memo of 18 September 2023. Additionally, the Sanford School representatives provided written answers to a set of questions from APC-A members before the meeting.

a. Applicant Profile Clarification

The committee's discussion of the E-MPA proposal began with a clarification of the target student population the program seeks to attract. While the proposal states that this population "would include...[those who] have not previously earned a...degree...in public affairs, policy, or administration," the unit representatives clarified that "this is not intended as a limitation: we absolutely would consider applicants" with public policy degrees.

b. Adjunct Faculty

The committee asked about a perceived over-reliance on adjunct faculty and possible related risks, e.g., less student-faculty interaction, less academic rigor, student dissatisfaction, reputational damage, etc. The unit representatives responded that their current adjuncts are carefully selected, "high-level professionals who have experience that [regular rank] faculty do not always have" and whose presence "complements current research faculty." They cited as examples a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and a four-star admiral. In their written response, the unit wrote that "feedback from Sanford faculty" resulted in a "higher proportion of adjuncts" teaching in the E-MPA due to the gaps in skills and experience these faculty fill. Some APC-A members were not convinced that regular-rank Duke faculty were not able to teach more courses in the program. The unit wrote that they believed "prospective E-MPA students—as mid-career practitioners seeking advanced and applied training—will want and expect instructors in the program to have senior-level practitioner experience." The committee noted that the proposal of "three of the initial fourteen courses taught by regular-rank faculty, five taught by adjuncts or visiting faculty, and six that could be taught by either regular-rank or adjuncts" is not ideal. APC-A members expressed discomfort with a potential ratio of three regular-rank faculty to 11 adjunct faculty. The unit responded that the "critical mass" of participating regular-rank faculty is likely "between three and seven."

c. Summer Teaching

The committee noted that the E-MPA curriculum is dependent on faculty agreeing to teach during summer sessions, including supervising capstone projects, which take place in Summer Session 2. The unit expressed confidence that the requisite faculty will commit to teach during the summer and cited the \$20,000 overload pay, as well as possible proposals to give Sanford faculty some semester course credit for teaching a summer E-MPA course, as potential inducements.

d. Hybrid Modality

Next, the committee turned to concerns about the hybrid online and in-person modality of the E-MPA. The committee asked what the unit will do to ensure high standards for the online elements and to avoid "online fatigue" and student attrition. The unit wrote that "while we recognize the inherent limits of online instruction, the demand for hybrid degrees remains strong." Mark Hart shared that his experience in online education dates to 2006 and that he is deeply engaged in the development and delivery of all online materials. Faculty are provided with professional-level A/V recording studio services as well as training and technical support for course materials on the Canvas platform. He highlighted the weekly synchronous Zoom sessions held in Sanford's Master of National Security Policy (MNSP) program, during which students meet for "lectures, discussion, [and to hear] high-level guest speakers." This regular Zoom session is complemented by subsequent asynchronous student participation.

One APC-A member noted that the proposed total of three in-person "immersions" over a 15-month (full-time) or 18-month (part-time) degree program is not sufficient for meaningful student-faculty interaction and cohort community-building; the committee member cited the example of Fuqua's Weekend E-MBA program, which features monthly 3-day campus residencies in addition to online instruction. The committee member felt that the E-MPA proposal's "regional emphasis in the Southeast, the Washington, DC area, and other major metropolitan areas" made it reasonable to require more in-person events. In response, the unit said that "this is a national program and for people who will continue working. If there are too many in-person requirements, then employers may not be as open to this." The unit did, however, say they would reconsider and likely increase the number of immersions it requires for the E-MPA.

e. Credit Hours: E-MPA vs. MPP

The committee asked about the considerable difference in the number of credit hours between the proposed E-MPA (30) and the existing Master of Public Policy (51). The unit responded that the main reason for the divergent credit requirements was the "residential versus online/hybrid" format of the two programs. They said that a "51-credit program is impracticable with a hybrid program." They cited Duke's current rule "requir[ing] any new degree bearing the same name as an existing degree program (e.g., an E-MPP) to be offered at the same number of credit hours" as one reason they did not

propose an E-MPP degree.¹ One committee member "imagine[d] a situation where the current MPP students are not very enthusiastic...[about] E-MPA [students] get[ting] an equivalent degree in less time." The unit responded that "some students want that residential graduate-student experience" while a hybrid program would better fit the needs of others. The unit stressed their belief that the E-MPA target student population of mid-career professionals with a minimum of 7-10 years of work experience is squarely in this latter category, and that they

are in the process of organizing a focus group of current MPP students who would meet the experience threshold to test this assumption and gather more data about their views on the prospective E-MPA program.

f. DEI Focus

While the committee was supportive of the E-MPA's "DEI focus in terms of recruitment (both students and faculty)", there was a question about the risk of the program appearing politically partisan if, at a moment when education is being politicized by the media and elected officials, DEI were made "too strong of a pillar" of the program. The unit wrote that they had

discussed this very issue at considerable length during the development of the proposal, and we decided *not* to more explicitly brand or market the program's emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as some peer programs have done—in part to avoid the pitfalls you identify, and in part to ensure that our approach to DEI remains authentic and not performative.

In the meeting, the unit said that because the E-MPA will target mid-career professionals already working in government, non-profits, and certain private-sector jobs, "it [is] an opportunity to talk about how DEI is practiced in their own work." The unit echoed their written response that it was important that the DEI

approach [be] rooted Sanford's historical focus on ethics, its current emphasis on analyzing and addressing structural inequalities across all of its programs and curricula, and its strong relationships with alumni, employers, and community partners representing diverse populations.

The unit acknowledged that they "need a creative approach to recruiting" and welcomed suggestions and guidance from APC. One committee member offered to provide information from their experience in diversity recruiting in the biomedical sciences.

g. AI and Curriculum

The committee briefly asked about the E-MPA curriculum's ability to confront challenges posed by artificial intelligence. The unit wrote and spoke candidly about the difficulty of knowing with certainty how their program will be challenged by quickly evolving technologies such as ChatGPT. In their written answers, they stated that the "purpose-built" nature of the E-MPA offers them "an opportunity to design a curriculum

¹ The unit mentioned that only "Fuqua's E-MBA programs and other existing 'executive' programs were granted an exception when this rule was adopted."

and methodology 'from scratch' that takes into account this new reality, instead of 'retrofitting' existing approaches." In the meeting, Mark Hart expressed "excitement" about finding ways to "use [AI] to the program's benefit" and that Sanford faculty were "already using [AI] in a teaching setting." He mentioned an existing "tech and policy course" as an example of this.

h. Advancing Faculty Research

Finally, the committee questioned the unit on two topics related to the E-MPA's potential impact on Sanford faculty research: (1) the proposal's statement (on p. 6) that "the direct connection with mid-career practitioners will create new opportunities for faculty to disseminate their research and expand their impact"; and (2) whether the proposed faculty hiring plan (on p. 39) will advance the Sanford School's research mission. Regarding the first topic, the unit was asked how many research faculty would be involved. The representatives responded that they have "three firm commitments to teach in the program (one regular-rank tenure-line, one regular-rank practitioner, and one adjunct)" with several other "soft commitments." The unit's written response noted that

the defining purpose of the E-MPA—as a professional degree program that aims to serve a population of students not served by our existing programs—relates more directly to Sanford's teaching mission than to its research mission. That said, we believe the program would still advance the school's research mission both directly (through new hires of research faculty) and indirectly (by generating revenue that can be used to support other research priorities).

In the meeting, Corinne Krupp noted that the E-MPA would be "tapping an underserved group who cannot come back to school [full-time]" and that "current faculty love interacting with these students," i.e., professionals working in government and non-profits whom the faculty consider channels to disseminate their policy-related research. Regarding the second, hiring plan-related, topic, the unit said they viewed the E-MPA as a faculty "recruiting resource" as Sanford is "currently trying to recruit seven faculty at this time."

II. Resolution

a. APC recommends supporting the Sanford School of Public Policy's proposed Executive Master of Public Affairs (E-MPA) degree program provided the following concerns are addressed:

- i. The Sanford School should ensure that their "careful and targeted" engagement of "high-level" practitioners as adjunct faculty continues. Further, APC proposes that Sanford consider whether adjunct faculty may be "connected" to specific regular-rank Duke faculty, in part to ensure rigorous academic standards are maintained in adjunct-taught courses and to provide greater involvement and buy-in by Sanford faculty.
- ii. The proposed plan for only three (of 14) courses in the E-MPA curriculum to be taught exclusively by regular-rank faculty is a concern. APC strongly urges a reconfiguration that ensures increased regular-rank faculty participation.
- iii. The proposed number of in-person "immersions" over the 15- or 18-month period of the E-MPA program should be increased from three to at least four (one per semester/summer session.)
- iv. The unit should ensure that an effective marketing/recruiting strategy reflective of the University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is adopted, and seek appropriate guidance where necessary.

III. Vote – The resolution was approved with 7 yes's and 1 abstention due to a faculty appointment in Sanford.