Dear President Kennedy,

I understand that the future of public administration education is in question at the University of Maine, and I am writing in my capacity as President of NASPAA to make clear Public Administration's contribution as a field, and to the state and nation, and to encourage you to consider this matter in its fullest context.

While Public Administration is an established academic discipline, and scholars in this field have contributed significantly to academic inquiry, public administration also contributes directly to the functioning of effective government; every day public administration graduates contribute directly to the ability of local, state, and national governments to serve our citizens and provide for the social welfare of this country.

The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) is a nonprofit association dedicated to excellence in public service and public service education. Our institutional membership is 270 graduate schools and programs of public administration, public affairs, and public policy, including the University of Maine. Every year, more than 10,000 masters students graduate with a professional master’s degree—the Master’s in Public Administration (MPA). MPAs are sought-after employees, and serve with distinction at all levels of government, nonprofits, NGOs and international agencies, public sector consulting firms and contractors. In recent years, as the problems facing our states and country have only gotten more complex, and the skill requirements of public servants that much greater, the need for graduate-educated MPAs is that much more acute. Yet, there is the real possibility in Maine of the state ceasing to produce enough graduate-educated professional public servants to serve the citizens of Maine.
Degrees in Public Administration are of this world, this time, and this place. They are not academic exercises. The MPA is a true preparation for the most rigorous demands of public service, and includes coursework in Management. Budgeting and finance. Human resources. Procurement. Policy and statistical analysis. Managing effectively within the political and economic processes of government. Delivering results in uncertain and fast-changing public sector environments, and perhaps most distinctively: public service ethics. We prepare students to serve their country and state with the highest commitment to ethical action, and concern for the long view and future generations of our communities and states.

For many decades, NASPAA, as a Council of Higher Education Accreditation-recognized professional accreditor in the field of Public Administration, Public Affairs, and Public Policy has been in the business of advancing the quality of our programs and our graduates through a rigorous process of accreditation to promote high quality public affairs education. This consists of a self study report, a review by our Commission, a three person site visit, and an annual update. At this time 169 masters programs across the country are accredited by NASPAA, including the University of Maine’s MPA program. NASPAA accreditation is a significant investment of time and resources, and the period of re/accreditation is seven years. Once surrendered, however, the entire period of accreditation is terminated, and a program must go through the process from the very beginning.

In short, Public Administration degrees play a critical and irreplaceable role in preparing the next generation of professionals for public service. As professional degrees dedicated to the profession of public service, they stand apart from the rest of the academic curriculum in the social sciences and management. There is a well-established and rigorous path of quality assurance in this field-- NASPAA accreditation-- and the University of Maine has been a long-time member of that community. Once lost, accreditation must be pursued from scratch. While I can only imagine the very difficult choices you and your colleagues are having to make in this time of fiscal reductions, as we are here at my home institution (Florida State University), I urge you to consider carefully the unique contribution of the MPA to the social well-being and development of your state. You are making a short-term decision that will have long-term consequences beyond the academic community of the University of Maine.

Sincerely yours,

Frances Stokes Berry
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