

*Master of
Public
Administration*

STUDENT HANDBOOK

University of Alabama

Department of Political Science

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Message from the Director

Welcome to the Master of Public Administration Program at the University of Alabama! This handbook is designed primarily for students who have been admitted to the program, but prospective students will also find it very useful. Admitted students should view this handbook as supplemental to the official University of Alabama Graduate Catalog.

The MPA faculty are looking forward to working with you to help you achieve your professional goals. We are working hard to improve our program year after year and sincerely value student suggestions. Please feel free to communicate with us any ideas you think would help us enhance your experience in the MPA Program.

Sincerely,

Dana Patton, PhD
MPA Director

Mission Statement

The mission of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at The University of Alabama is to prepare students to lead and manage public service organizations. We strive to develop critical thinking skills enabling our graduates to formulate policies and approaches to management while ensuring the integrity of the public service. Our program emphasizes public service values while facilitating intellectual and professional development through learning experiences that integrate theory with practice. We provide an institutional culture that promotes diversity and advances governance while preparing students to reach standards of excellence in the public service.



MPA Degree Overview

Students are required to complete 39 credit hours of coursework. Students complete 21 hours of required Public Administration core courses, 3 hours of required Quantitative Methods, 12 hours of electives, 3 Internship hours, and a Portfolio Project in the final semester. Students with substantial work experience in the public sector may request a waiver of the internship requirement and substitute an additional 3 credit hour elective.

Required Public Administration Core Courses

PSC 562 Public Personnel Administration

PSC 565 Foundations of Public Administration

PSC 662 Organization Theory (Leading & Managing Public Organizations)

PSC 664 Public Policy Analysis

PSC 665 Local Government Administration

PSC 667 Public Budgeting

PSC 668 Program Evaluation

Required Quantitative Methods Course

PSC 522 Quantitative Methods I for MPA Students

Elective Courses

The MPA Program offers electives within the Political Science Department, but we also work with other graduate programs on campus to provide our students cross-disciplinary opportunities. Each semester, prior to advising, the MPA Director distributes a list of pre-approved electives offered in the Political Science Department and in other graduate programs at UA. Students may also request approval for courses the MPA Director did not include on the list. In recent years, students have fulfilled some of their elective requirements by completing courses in the following departments: Community Health Sciences, Criminology & Criminal Justice, Gender and Race Studies, Geography, Higher Education Administration, Management, and Social Work.

Students have an opportunity through elective courses to pursue a Focused Area of Study in Public Policy or Global Affairs & Security. MPA students are not required to choose a focused area of study and may instead complete a variety of approved electives. Students who opt to pursue the focused area of study option will complete 12 hours of electives and an internship

placement in the chosen area.

Elective options in the two Focused Areas of Study vary by semester. Example course topics are listed below for each focused area of study. The list of pre-approved electives distributed by the MPA Director each semester prior to advising will indicate if a course is approved as a Focused Area of Study elective.

Public Policy Focused Area of Study

- Poverty and Public Policy
- Health in All Policies
- Health Policy and Planning
- Higher Education Policy
- Social Welfare Policy

Global Affairs & Security Focused Area of Study

- The Middle East in Global Affairs
- Global Perspectives on Justice
- International Communication
- Politics of Foreign Aid
- Interdisciplinary Approaches in Global Health

Internship Requirement

Internships provide an applied frame of reference for the knowledge, skills, and values learned in the academic classroom. They deepen insights, broaden perspectives, and build on the technical skills and critical thought processes developed in the classroom. They are an especially critical learning experience for pre-career students and students who do not have experience working in public agencies or nonprofit organizations.

The MPA Program requires students to complete 300 hours of work in their internship for 3 credit hours. Students typically pursue an internship after completing 18 hours in the program, but exceptions to the 18-hour completion rule may be made by the MPA Director. Internships may be completed during the semester or, more commonly, during the summer. They may be paid or unpaid.

Students secure their own internships, however, the MPA Director and faculty will communicate opportunities to students as they become aware of them. Students are encouraged to apply for internships well in advance, as some have lengthy application and approval processes.

Once an internship is approved by the MPA Director, the student may register for 3 credit hours

of PSC 679 MPA Internship. The MPA Director will provide an information and evaluation form for the student to complete at least two weeks before the internship begins.

Upon completion of the internship, the immediate work supervisor of the student during the internship will complete the evaluation form and return it to the MPA Director. To receive a final grade for the internship hours, the student must complete an academic exercise that enhances the quality of the internship learning experience. The final grade will be determined based on the evaluation of the immediate work supervisor at the internship site and the quality of the academic exercise.

Portfolio Project Requirement

The purpose of the Portfolio Project is to assess the extent to which MPA students have achieved the core competencies set forth by our accrediting body, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). The five core competencies are:

1. Lead and manage in public governance;
2. Participate in and contribute to the public policy process;
3. Analyze, synthesize, think creatively, solve problems, and make decisions;
4. Articulate and apply public service perspectives; and
5. Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

For each core competency, the student will complete a structured reflection essay assessing the core competency. Explicit instructions regarding the essay are provided to students in their final semester of coursework.

Successful completion of the Portfolio Project is required for graduation.

Degree Completion

We admit part-time and full-time students to the MPA Program. To help students progress through the program in a timely manner, we offer the required courses on a schedule so students can be sure when a required course will be offered. Core courses are not taught in the Summer semester at this time, so it is important for students to be mindful of the rotation of core courses.

MPA Course Plan

Course	Hours	Semester Offered
Public Administration Core		
PSC 562 Public Personnel	3	Fall
PSC 565 Foundations of PA	3	Fall
PSC 668 Program Evaluation	3	Fall
PSC 664 Public Policy Analysis	3	Spring
PSC 662 Organization Theory	3	Spring
PSC 667 Public Budgeting	3	Spring
PSC 665 Local Government Administration	3	Spring
Total Required PA Core	21	
Quantitative Methods		
PSC 522 Quantitative Methods I	3	Fall
Total Required Methods	3	
Electives		
Elective 1	3	Fall/Spring/Summer
Elective 2	3	Fall/Spring/Summer
Elective 3	3	Fall/Spring/Summer
Elective 4	3	Fall/Spring/Summer
Elective 5 or Internship ¹	3	Fall/Spring/Summer
Total Electives	15	
Total MPA Curriculum Requirements		
	39	
Portfolio Project²		Complete in final semester taking courses.

Students who complete 9 credit hours per semester will complete the degree in 4 semesters, with the internship completed in summer or during a regular semester.

Students who complete 12 credit hours per semester will complete the degree in 3 semesters, with the internship completed in summer or during a regular semester.

¹ Internship is mandatory for pre-career students.

² Required for graduation.

Accelerated Master's Program (AMP)

The MPA Program participates in the Accelerated Master's Program. This program allows highly qualified Political Science and International Studies undergraduate majors to begin the MPA program while still completing their BA degree. Students accepted into the AMP program are able to count up to 15 credit hours of MPA coursework toward their undergraduate credit hours requirements. More information about AMP can be found here: <https://psc.ua.edu/graduate-degree/accelerated-masters-program/>

Course Advising

The MPA Director will schedule course advising each semester. Students are responsible for maintaining up-to-date Course Completion Forms in their UA Box folder. Students should register for their approved courses immediately after their advising appointment.

Transfer Credit

Students may request to transfer up to 12 hours of relevant coursework earned in an accredited graduate program within six years of the expected date of graduation with the MPA degree. Only courses in which as student earned a grade of "A" or "B" will be considered for transfer. Students are responsible for initiating this process by requesting a meeting with the MPA Director to discuss the courses the students wishes to request for transfer. The students should be prepared for this meeting by having a copy of the complete syllabus and all assignments. The MPA Director will then distribute the information to the MPA faculty to make a decision regarding the transfer of graduate hours. If the faculty decide they are in favor of allowing the transfer hours, the MPA Director will complete the necessary paperwork and send it to the Graduate School for their final approval. Transfer credit is not awarded until the Graduate School makes the final determination.

Financial Assistance

The MPA Program has a very limited number of Graduate Assistantship (GA) positions available. All admitted students are considered for these awards; there is no separate application process. The GA positions provide ½ to full tuition, ½ to full health insurance coverage, and a stipend. The students who receive these GA positions work 10 – 20 hours per week under the supervision of the MPA Director. For full consideration for a GA position, applicants should have all application materials submitted no later than March 1st. Graduate Assistantships are typically awarded for one academic year only and typically to first-year, full-time students.

The MPA Program awards the McAdams Scholarship each Spring semester. This is a cash award of a varying amount each year to the most outstanding MPA student(s) currently in the program. Applications

for this award and the award amount are announced early in the Spring semester.

The MPA Program awards the 308 Grace Street Scholarship each Fall semester in the amount of \$10,000. This award is highly competitive and only students who have one to two full semesters completed are eligible to apply. The 308 Grace Street Scholar completes a policy research paper under the supervision of MPA faculty and presents the research findings to an audience of students, faculty, and relevant stakeholders.

The University of Alabama Graduate School offers several Scholarships and Fellowships. The MPA Director is responsible for nominating eligible students for these awards; there is no separate application process though you may be asked to provide additional supporting materials if selected for nomination. Students who believe they qualify for any of these awards should contact the MPA Director upon application to the Program. Apply to the MPA Program early to receive full consideration to be nominated for these scholarships and fellowships as the deadlines for some occur in late Fall and early Spring. More information about these scholarships can be found here: <https://graduate.ua.edu/prospective-students/graduate-school-scholarships-fellowships/>

Many MPA students are hired to work on campus. You may search for jobs on campus here: <https://careers.ua.edu/jobs/>