

Master of Public Administration Program

Student Handbook 2022 - 2023



University of Idaho
Master of Public Administration Program
Department of Politics and Philosophy
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UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

Congratulations and welcome to the Master of Public Administration Program (MPA) at the University of Idaho (UI). University of Idaho MPA graduates have led the way in supporting Idaho communities, towns, cities, state and federal agencies, and businesses in economic development and effective and efficient public administration for over 50 years. We are pleased that you have decided to continue your academic career, or enhance your professional career, by choosing the MPA program at the University of Idaho.

The MPA degree is open to students from all academic majors because we believe that everyone has something to contribute to the public estate. MPA students come from education, engineering, economics, agriculture, music, law and other fields. To apply, students must submit transcripts from a bachelor's degree earned at a regionally accredited institution of higher education, with a 3.0 grade point average, three letters of reference, a reflective statement of professional interest, and a resume.

The MPA program is offered both on campus and on line. Students may complete the two- year program by taking classes full-time (9 hours per semester), or on a part-time basis (usually the preference for in-service students).

The purpose of this student handbook is to give students the information needed to successfully complete the program in a timely manner. This handbook includes information on:

- A. The MPA Program
- B. Program Components
- C. Program Components: Nuts and Bolts
- D. Graduation
- E. Graduate Assistantships
- F. Student Code of Conduct



A. The MPA Program

The Master of Public Administration is a professional graduate degree that prepares students for careers in public governance and management. It was borne out of the management generalist tradition in the early 1900s, along with the Master of Business Administration, and has maintained its orientation as an interdisciplinary field of study. Public administration is concerned with developing and implementing solutions to public sector problems and concerned with delivering public goods and services. As a field of study, it borrows knowledge from academic disciplines – such as economics, political science, psychology, philosophy, history, and sociology – and applies it to issues in economic and community development, public finance, public personnel administration, city management, criminal justice, and other areas. Most importantly, public administrators are responsible for building the foundations of society.

The UI MPA curriculum was redesigned in 2015 to meet standards for accreditation by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). The degree requires thirty-six hours of coursework with an internship for pre-service students, or field-based research for in-service students.¹ The NASPAA compliant MPA curriculum was launched in 2016 and the development of an online program was approved later that year. MPA students can take advantage of both internship and placement opportunities at the completion of their programs. We have developed a number of internships with towns in Idaho and Washington, and with state agencies. And though some of our students have continued their academic careers in pursuit of the PhD in public administration, all of our recent graduates have been placed in professional positions.

Local Government Perspective

One primary development problem in Idaho and the Rocky Mountain West, according to the Idaho City Management Association, is the lack of trained public administration professionals that will be needed to manage towns and counties as the local government workforce ages. Trained and capable city government professionals provide the public goods and services that are essential to our lives – clean air, clean water, infrastructure, public safety, parks and recreation, streets, and a variety of other services. Like local governments across the country, these services are not only essential to the economic, political and social health of the community, but are mostly invisible. We notice a pothole, or broken streetlight, for example, only because they are odd in the context of a well-functioning town.

Local government provides the foundation for economic development in the United States. Local governments lay in the infrastructure that determines the possibilities of economic development programming. The decision to develop an industrial park, or focus on downtown lifestyle development, or to build the public infrastructure needed to support advanced production – as Lewiston did to attract Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories production facilities or Twin Falls did to attract the Chobani yogurt company – are almost entirely issues of local government. And yet there are only a few public administration programs in the nation that make the connection between local government and economic development.

¹ Pre-service students do not have experience in public administration – these are students that move from an undergraduate degree directly into a graduate program. In-service students are those who care currently or have experience working in the field of public administration.

The problems of effectively delivering public goods and services and conducting economic development will be more complex in the future. Advancements in big data, machine learning, and information and communication technology are improving the effectiveness, cost efficiency, and equity of public services provided by local government. But most towns lack the technical capacity needed to develop smart cities, deal with driverless cars, or to understand how social media can be used to understand public opinion. The MPA program provides managers with the critical thinking, analytical, data literacy, teamwork, and leadership skills needed to meet these emerging challenges.

Local Government Caveat

Though our MPA program takes a local government perspective, it is not possible to understand the field of public administration or the needs of communities without placing them in an intergovernmental context. For example, it is not possible to understand local government law (POLS 565) without understanding it in the context of state and federal law. The MPA program, therefore, is suitable for students with interests in governance writ large – from state, federal, international, to non-profit organizations.



B. Program Components

The MPA degree program requires 36 hours of coursework, including an 18-hour core sequence.

Fall Core Courses

POLS 555: Public Administration Theory (3 cr.)

POLS 565: Local Government Law (3 cr)

POLS 572: Local Government Politics and Administration (3 cr)

Spring Core Courses

POLS 557: Governmental Budgeting (3 cr)

POLS 575: Public Personnel Administration (3 cr)

POLS 558: Research Methods for Local Government and Community Administration (3 cr)

Core courses are offered both on campus and on line every year, in either the fall or spring semester. Full time on campus students should complete the core program in their first year of study. In-service students may choose to complete the program part-time and at their convenience.

Students develop specific interests in public administration by choosing 12 to 15 hours of elective courses in consultation with and approval of their advisor. Though the MPA is a general management degree, it is helpful to begin to develop a niche in the field with the selection of elective courses. An engineer, for example, with an interest in public works may choose courses in construction management; and a student with interests in natural resources management may take additional electives in that field. Other fields that are tangential to public administration include: criminal justice, education, agricultural extension, sciences, law, etc.

Students with little or no public administration experience are required to complete a 3 to 6- hour internship (POLS 598 Internship) to gain hands-on experience in public administration. In- service students must complete 3 hours of POLS 559 Field Based Research in lieu of the internship.

Students must also complete a final comprehensive examination. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to guide program assessment in compliance with NASPAA accreditation requirements. The exam is not graded, and focuses on a student's understanding of broad issues that are relevant to public sector employment:

- What does it mean to lead and manage in public governance?
- How do public administrators participate in and contribute to the policy process?
- What types of knowledge, skills, and abilities do public administrators need to analyze, synthesize, think critically, and to solve problems and make decisions in the public sector?
- What is a public service perspective?
- What types of knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry? Why does diversity matter?



C. Program Components: Nuts and Bolts

A student in the full-time MPA program will typically follow this schedule:

Year 1

Fall

POLS 555: Public Administration Theory (3 cr)

POLS 565: Local Government Law (3 cr)

POLS 572: Local Government Politics and Administration (3 cr)

Spring

POLS 557: Governmental Budgeting (3 cr)

POLS 575: Public Personnel Administration (3 cr)

POLS 558: Research Methods for Local Government and Community Administration (3 cr)

Year 2

Fall

9 credits of Electives (in consultation with Major Professor)

Spring

3 – 6 credits of Electives

3 - 6 credits POLS 598 Internship, **OR** POLS 559 Field Based Research (3 cr)

And the Comprehensive Examination

Programmatic Caveats

- Students may complete the program on a full-time or part-time basis. A full-time graduate course load is 9 hours (3 courses) per semester. A part-time course load can be as little as 3 hours (1 course) per semester. Part-time students must complete the program within 7 years of admission (not recommended).
- Both POLS 598 Internship and POLS 559 Field Based Research are arranged at the convenience of the student. A first-year student, for example, might find an important internship opportunity in the middle or end of their academic study. The purpose of POLS 559 Field Based Research is to give in-service students – who do not need an internship – the opportunity to do a policy, management, or analytical project for their government or agency. In that context, the timing for POLS 559 would be based on the needs of both the student and the employer.
- Students in the JD/MPA program would follow a different route to completion of the degree. Students in the JD/MPA program would begin their core courses in the second year of study. Elective credits would be earned through the JD curriculum.²
- The MPA program does not have a thesis option, which is consistent with professional programs ranging from the MD, JD, and MBA.

² Students must be admitted to the College of Law before they can apply, through the College of Graduate Studies, for admission to the JD/MPA program



D. Graduation

There are three processes that are required by the College of Graduate Studies that must be completed in preparation for graduation: 1) the selection of a major professor, 2) the completion of a degree study plan, and 3) completion of the application for graduation.

The selection of a major professor is less pronounced in professional degree programs. The major professor is simply the member of the faculty, usually the MPA program director, who conducts admissions, general advising, and ensures that the student is able to complete the program of study. The process of choosing a major professor requires that students download the major professor form from the College of Graduate Studies website and manually complete it with the MPA director.³

Members of the MPA Faculty include:

- Dr. Brian Smentkowski bsmentkowski@uidaho.edu
- Dr. Markie McBrayer markie.mcbrayer@uidaho.edu
- Dr. Michael Overton moverton@uidaho.edu
- Dr. Manoj Shrestha mks@uidaho.edu

The degree study plan is completed after a student has accumulated 15 to 21 hours in the program. The purpose of the degree study plan is to create a contract between the student and the university, which helps the student know what courses are needed to complete the degree requirements. The degree study plan must include the core courses, elective courses, and internship or field-based research. The completed degree study plan must include 36 hours of credits. Below is an example of a study plan for a pre-service student with an interest in professional opportunities in public administration and natural resources management:

Semester	Hours	Course
Fall 2022	3	POLS 555: Public Administration Theory
Fall 2022	3	POLS 565: Local Government Law
Fall 2022	3	POLS 572: Local Government Politics and Administration
Spring 2023	3	POLS 557: Governmental Budgeting
Spring 2023	3	POLS 575: Public Personnel Administration
Spring 2023	3	POLS 558: Research Methods for Local Govt. and Community Admin.
Fall 2023	3	XXX XXX: Elective
Fall 2023	3	XXX XXX: Elective
Fall 2023	3	XXX XXX: Elective
Spring 2024	3	XXX XXX: Elective
Spring 2024	6	POLS 598: Internship OR POLS 559 Field Based Research - 3 cr <i>plus</i> Elective - 3 cr. AND Comprehensive Exam.
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Students must apply for graduation during the last semester of their course work. Students must have a cumulative 3.0 grade point average to graduate. See footnote 3 below.

E. Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantships are available on a limited basis in the Department of Politics and Philosophy. Graduate assistantships typically provide students with an in-state tuition waiver and a stipend (\$14,000/AY) in exchange for 20 hours of service to the Department of Politics and Philosophy. Students should contact the MPA Director for information on graduate assistantships and the application process.

F. Student Code of Conduct

All students at the University of Idaho are subject to rules governing conduct, safety, research, sexual harassment, and non-discrimination. All students should familiarize themselves with these rules, which are posted on various campus websites.

Student Code of Conduct <https://www.uidaho.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students/student-conduct>

Student Code of Conduct: www.webpages.uidaho.edu/fsh/2300.html

Personal Safety on Campus <https://www.uidaho.edu/infrastructure/i-safety/personal-safety>

Public Safety and Campus Security www.uidaho.edu/infrastructure/pss

Copyrights, Protectable Discoveries, and other Intellectual Property Rights www.webpages.uidaho.edu/fsh/5300.html

Responsible Conduct of Research Education www.uidaho.edu/apm/45/21

Policy Against Sexual Harassment www.webpages.uidaho.edu/fsh/3220.html#A.

Non-Discrimination Policy www.uidaho.edu/ocri/policy-procedure/nondiscrimination-policy

College of Graduate Studies Forms www.uidaho.edu/COGS/forms

³ College of Graduate Studies Forms: www.uidaho.edu/COGS/forms