

***Welcome to Jacksonville State University's
Graduate Program in
Public Administration***

This handbook is intended to be your reference guide as you proceed through the Master of Public Administration degree program. Please refer to it when you have questions about curriculum components, degree requirements, course scheduling, preparation of the Plan of Work, the comprehensive examination, satisfaction of the internship requirement and other matters.

*The information provided is intended as a supplement to the **Jacksonville State University Graduate Catalog**. Students are strongly advised to consult the **Catalog** for relevant information about University programs, academic rules governing graduate studies, and services available throughout your studies at JSU.*

Students are also advised to consult with the Director of the Graduate Program in Public Administration regarding requirements and procedures. Additionally, please do not hesitate to consult with the Director and other faculty members and staff if you have questions or concerns regarding your academic plans or progress. Your concerns and suggestions are extremely important and can influence the way the program evolves. Please share your views - negative or positive- about the program

We are glad you have chosen to study with us!

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About the MPA Program

History of the Graduate Program in Public Administration

The Graduate Program in Public Administration at Jacksonville State University has produced hundreds of graduates who have gone on to successful and - in many cases --distinguished public service careers.

Reflecting its history, in 2013 the Jacksonville State Graduate Program in Public Administration gained accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). To be accredited by NASPAA, a program must meet numerous standards for faculty size and quality, content and structure of curriculum, internship opportunities, and educational support resources such as libraries, computing facilities and placement services.

Program Mission, Domains, and Competencies

The mission of the MPA program at Jacksonville State University is to provide a diverse student population with the knowledge and core competencies to become effective public administrators. Through the use of a standardized public administration curriculum and interdisciplinary cooperation with other programs, our program is able to prepare students for leadership roles in a variety of public and nonprofit organizations. Utilizing traditional classroom, hybrid, and online classes, our program provides quality graduate education that stresses the program values of diversity, leadership, social equity and ethical conduct.

Pursuant to its mission, the **MPA** program has established the following domains and their competencies. A graduate of the Jacksonville State University MPA Program should be able to do the following:

- To lead and manage in public governance;
 - o A graduate of our program will be able to understand how both structure and culture of public service organizations affect organizational effectiveness.
 - o A graduate of our program will know how to effectively manage human resources and provide leadership in this regard.

- To participate in and contribute to the policy process;
 - o A graduate of our program must be able to identify key stakeholders, their positions, coalitions, and the political context.
 - o A graduate of our program must be able to understand and apply the different aspects of the policy making cycle.

- To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;
 - o A graduate of our program will be able to utilize data and analytic techniques, scholarly research, and best professional practices in systematically analyzing and making policy and administrative decisions in public service organizations.
 - o A graduate of our program must be able to apply these concepts to a real world (substantive) case.

- To articulate and apply a public service perspective;

- o A graduate of our program will be able to make informed decisions and manage public service organizations in the public interest by effectively utilizing and balancing key public service values.
 - o A graduate of our program will understand the value of fair and transparent administration and will be able to effectively and ethically engage citizens in public service organizations.
- To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.
- o A graduate of our program will have the ability to develop and exercise intercultural sensitivity with employees and other stakeholders.
 - o A graduate of our program will be able to communicate and engage appropriately, effectively and respectfully with multiple audiences.

Program Administration

The Director administers the program with the assistance of the Public Administration Faculty and other staff. Although reporting to the Chair of the Department, the Director has primary responsibility for admission and advising of students and is available to students on a twelve-month basis. The Director also serves as the Advisor of Record for the MPA Program and should be the first point of contact for questions regarding course selection, the order in which courses should be taken, and other academic-related questions.

The Director consults closely with the MPA Faculty regarding program issues. The Director also works closely with the Office of Graduate Studies Dean. From time to time, the Office of Graduate Studies and the Associate Provost's office is involved in reviewing program modifications or in admission or retention actions. The Provosts' office hears student academic appeals when necessary.

The Structure of the MPA Program

The MPA Components

The MPA degree program consists of four components:

1. Core curriculum required courses (24 credit hours, 8 courses);
2. The internship (if required, 3 credit hours, 1 course); if waived, a 3-hr PA course elective is required;
3. The concentration coursework (12 credit hours, 4 courses); and
4. The Comprehensive Examination/Capstone Project

The Core Curriculum

The core curriculum is designed to provide students with a common body of knowledge and skills central to the work of public managers. This curriculum has evolved with the faculty's continuous study of NASPAA standards, the practices of other MPA programs and the educational needs of public service professionals. The core consists of the following nine courses (27 credits):

REQUIRED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COURSES (27 HRS):	SEMESTER	GRADE
PA 500- Foundations of Public Administration (3) <i>Taken within the first two semesters</i>		
PA 501- Analysis of Policy (3)		
PA 502- Research Methods in PA (3)		
PA 504- Administrative Leadership & Ethics (3)		
PA 531- Public Personnel Administration (3)		
PS 532- Public Finance Administration (3)		
PA 540- Organizational Theory & Bureaucratic Structure (3)		
PA 546- Diversity in the Workplace (3)		
* PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) <i>Taken during the last semester of coursework. If internship requirement is waived, the student will take a 3-hour public administration course elective by advisement. ** Prerequisite(s): Approval by program director and instructor.</i>		
Internship Required: YES NO Waiver Letter: <input type="checkbox"/>		
* ELECTIVE CREDITS (3): Public Administration		

Sequence of Enrollment

In order to be prepared for subsequent courses, students must take PA500 within the first two semesters enrolled or in the first available semester. Students are encouraged to prepare a Plan of Study using the course rotation schedule early in the process. The order in which core courses are taken may be affected by their availability. Students are also encouraged to be in contact with their concentration advisor during their first semester of coursework.

Students generally complete most of the core coursework before taking concentration work; however, this pattern may be modified by the scheduling of concentration courses of particular interest to a student and under advisement of the concentration faculty advisor.

Core Course Scheduling

Each of the core courses is normally offered at least once during a calendar year (see above). However, a faculty sabbatical leave may require a core course be offered during a different semester than is customary. Please plan accordingly.

Concentration Component

The MPA program is designed as a generalist program to train students to work across sectors, and the primary focus is the core curriculum. However, the degree also has a concentration component, which permits students to focus on an area of public management or public policy complements their professional goals. Concentrations are not directly analogous to undergraduate majors, as the choice of concentration does not show up on the diploma and (as noted previously) the MPA program is a generalist program. Thus, there is considerable flexibility in the choice of concentration courses.

The MPA degree at JSU offers you 4 different concentration areas. This allows you to focus your career to what you want to do in the public sector. We offer concentrations in Administrative Management, Criminal Justice, Emergency Management and Political Science.

A concentration consists of a **twelve credit hours of coursework** (four courses). Students should not select concentration courses for convenience or ease of coursework.

The concentration coursework may consist of more extensive treatment of topics from the core courses, for example the concentration in Administrative Management. Or the concentration coursework might consist of courses in areas not treated in core courses.

The work for the chosen concentration will consist of courses offered by other departments or colleges within the University.

Master of Public Administration Degree Requirements and Policies

Credits Required

A minimum of 36 semester hours of graduate course work, to include the internship requirement if not waived must be completed to earn the MPA degree. Students who must complete an internship earn a minimum of 39 credits of work. As discussed above, 24 credits are taken in prescribed core coursework. The remaining coursework consists of a minimum of 12 credits in a concentration.

The public affairs internship, if required, is to be taken during the last semester of coursework. If not required, a 3-hour public administration course elective must be taken by advisement and with approval of department head and instructor. Should an internship waiver be applicable, the MPA Director must approve the waiver and the replacement course work. The form is available from the MPA Director.

The Plan of Study

Every MPA student must file a *Plan of Study* form with the MPA Director before the completion of 12 credit hours of graduate work. The applicant is advanced to the status of 'Candidate' upon approval of the *Plan of Study*. A student failing to submit a *Plan* will have an advising hold placed on his or her account and be denied registration in subsequent semesters pending the filing of an approved *Plan*. Additionally, if a student receives notification of the placement of an advising hold, it is often because the *Plan* was not submitted in a timely manner.

In preparing a *Plan of Study*, students should consult with the Director to discuss the scheduling of their enrollment in the core courses. It is also an appropriate time to plan a concentration. The *Plan*, which must be approved by the Director, outlines the courses a student has taken and intends to take in the program.

The *Plan of Study* form can be obtained from the MPA website or the Director. When preparing the *Plan of Study* form, the student must indicate the following data in the appropriate place on the form:

- The term and year in which the course was taken (or will be taken). For instance, a course taken during the fall term of 2020 would read FA2020. If the student is not sure when they will be taking the course in the future, it may be left blank.
- The abbreviation of the department in which the course was/will be taken i.e. PA, MGT, CJ, EM.
- The course number and course title.
- Total number of completed course credits: MPA core courses are listed in the "PA Required Core Course Completion Semester" column, concentration courses taken in other departments in the "Concentration Course Completion Semester" column.
- Whether the internship requirement (PA597, Public Affairs Internship) has been waived or not waived. Students are required to take the internship unless they have applied for and been granted a waiver in writing. See the section "The Internship Requirement" for a more detailed description.

Students should provide the Director a copy of the *Plan of Study* form that bears a signature. It is acceptable and preferred to submit the form in electronic format.

Changing the Plan of Study

A *Plan of Study* may need to be changed as a student's goals shift, or in response to a change in course scheduling. This is especially true with concentration courses, which may be offered less regularly than core courses. Fortunately, a *Plan of Study* is easily changed. To change a *Plan*, a student should inform the Director of the courses to be added or deleted. The Director will then process the appropriate form to change the student's plan.

Six-Year Rule

All of the requirements for the MPA degree must be completed within six years from the end of the semester in which a student first earned course credit for the degree. For example, if a student's first term of coursework was Fall 2022, all degree requirements must be completed by the end of the Fall term in 2027.

Under some circumstances, a student may be granted more time to complete the degree. A student must inform the Director in writing of the need for an extension and the justification for it. If an extension seems warranted, the Director will request that the Office of Graduate Studies grant it. In this case, an extension will normally be approved if the student requests it *prior* to the expiration of the original six-year period. It is more difficult, however, to obtain approval from Graduate Studies once the six-year deadline has passed, regardless of the reason(s). In other words, students who anticipate a problem with meeting the deadline should discuss the situation with the Director as early as possible, prior to the lapsing of the deadline.

Grade-Point Average

A graduate student's overall GPA is calculated on graduate-level courses only. The GPA is determined by dividing the quality points earned by the number of hours attempted. The GPA is not rounded. For reporting purposes, the GPA is truncated to two places past the decimal. All graduate coursework is factored into the GPA, even if a student takes courses not required for the degree, changes majors/concentrations, seeks a second graduate degree, etc.

Any student who does not attain good standing, as specified by his or her program, may be dropped from graduate studies. Good standing is defined as meeting the minimum required GPA for a degree or certificate program. For purposes of this regulation, the summer terms are collectively considered one semester.

Transfer credit cannot be used toward the GPA of JSU coursework to meet the required minimum GPA of any major or graduate certificate program. The maximum number of hours of "C" grades permitted to count toward doctoral degrees, education specialist degrees, master's degrees, master's level professional educator certification programs, or graduate non-education certificates is six semester hours; however, ALL "C" grades are still factored into a student's GPA. If a student earns a grade of "C" or below on more than six semester hours of coursework, the student should consult his or her academic advisor and the Dean of Graduate Studies for advisement.

All JSU graduate-level coursework attempted, including duplications, will be calculated in the GPA (there is NOT a replacement policy at the graduate level).

Incomplete Grades

An Incomplete grade is assigned only after a student has obtained approval from his or her instructor prior to the end of the term in which the grade is to be assigned and made arrangements to complete course requirements within the next major (spring or fall) semester.

All incomplete grade extension for all courses, including those not required, must be completed prior to the degree being awarded. Otherwise, the grade of "I" will be converted to "F" in order for the degree GPA to be calculated.

Generally, an Incomplete grade is appropriate only when the uncompleted coursework is limited to the final examination and/or a final paper. It will not be granted if a student has failed to attend regularly scheduled class meetings during the term. A written contract specifying the work to be completed should be signed by the student and the instructor. Detailed information regarding an Incomplete Grade Completion Plan can be found at the **Office of the Registrar**.

Coursework for a grade of "I" must be completed within the next major (spring or fall) semester which the "I" was granted earn credit. Finishing incomplete coursework in a timely fashion is the responsibility of the student. As noted below, there are no exceptions to this timeline. If the work has not been completed, and the instructor has not reported a regular course grade by the date noted in the Completion Plan, the grade of "I" is automatically changed to failing - an "F" - on the transcript. Per university policy, there are no exceptions to this timeline permitted and the grade shall not be changed once the "F" is posted.

An additional extension may be granted if the student has requested such an extension from his instructor prior to the end of the Completion Plan date. The instructor must then request such an extension in writing from the Office of Graduate Studies. An extension is typically one semester long, and such an extension is not automatic. The instructor has sole discretion in granting it and is not obligated to do so.

Grade Appeal

Students wishing to appeal a grade should always begin by meeting with the instructor of record for the course. Oftentimes, this meeting will result in a satisfactory outcome for the student and instructor. If the student and instructor are unable to resolve the discrepancy, the student may consult with the instructor's department head, and finally, the dean of the school in which the course is offered. This process must be completed by midterm of the subsequent fall or spring semester.

Transfer of Graduate Credit

Transfer credit from other regionally accredited institutions will appear on the JSU transcript only if used to fulfill degree completion and/or professional educator certification requirements. The number of semester hours of graduate credit that may be transferred from a regionally accredited institution to JSU toward a graduate degree program is limited to the following maximums:

- Zero (0) hours toward a graduate certificate of fewer than 30 hours;
- Six (6) hours toward a 30 semester hour program;
- Nine (9) hours toward a 33 semester hour program; and
- Twelve (12) hours toward a 36 or more semester hour program.

Evaluation of transfer credit is made by the appropriate department of the student's major and approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies. A student intending to enroll at another institution and transfer a course to JSU must receive approval of the coursework prior to enrolling in the course to ensure the course will be accepted for inclusion in the student's program of study at JSU.

Transfer credit cannot be used to raise the GPA of JSU coursework to the required minimum GPA of any major, professional educator certification program, or graduate certificate program. The total amount of credit applied from a previously earned graduate degree at JSU and external transfer credit combined is limited to the same maximums as transfer credit that are specified in the Transfer of Graduate Credit section of this catalog. (Please review the [Graduate Certificate Disclosure](#) information.)

Only graduate courses with grades “A,” “B,” “P,” and “S” may be transferred to JSU. Grades of “C” or below will not be eligible for transfer.

Transfer credit must meet time limit requirements as stated under the [Time Limit on Degree Completion](#) section of this catalog. Any exceptions will be made by the Director of Graduate Studies.

To request graduate transfer credit, a student must submit a Transfer Credit Request Form, listing the transfer course(s) and descriptions. In addition, the student must request that an official transcript from the institution at which the credit was earned be sent directly to Graduate Studies at JSU. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the transcript has been received. The [Transfer Credit Request Form](#) is available on the Graduate Studies website.

Application for Graduation

All students must file an Application for Graduation form the last semester of their enrolled program by the set deadline. This form must be completed online through MyJSU. Application for graduation procedures, along with due dates, are located on the [Graduate Studies](#) website. Students who fail to file the Application for Graduation form by the listed date risk having their graduation delayed until the next regularly scheduled graduation. In addition, a student must submit a new application for graduation by the listed date at the beginning of the semester in which they plan to graduate. The specific due dates for the application for each semester are listed in the [Academic Calendar](#).

The Comprehensive Examination

All students pursuing the Master of Public Administration degree must pass a comprehensive examination, the capstone component of the program. All students must complete a Comprehensive Exam Form the last semester of their enrolled program by the set deadline. The link to the form will be provided the the MPA Director. This form must be completed to be eligible to take the exam. The examination requires a student to integrate and demonstrate a mastery of material from the following core courses:

PA 500	Foundations of Public Administration
PA 501	Analysis of Policy
PA 502	Research Methods in Public Administration
PA 504	Administrative Leadership & Ethics
PA 531	Public Personnel Administration
PA 540	Organizational Theory & Bureaucratic Structure
PA 546	Diversity in the Workplace

In the examination, students are expected to demonstrate a grasp of important substantive and analytic concepts, to show familiarity with major works in the field, and to integrate and apply important ideas and concepts. Performance standards for the MPA comprehensive examination reflect this expectation.

Eligibility to Take the Examination

Material from concentration courses, and any core courses listed in the matrix, are included on the exam. Some students may have to retake the examination and taking it before the expected semester of graduation helps to avoid delaying the date of graduation. Except in special circumstances approved by the Director, students may not register to take the examination if they have any incomplete grades on their record or if their grade point average is below 3.00. Students who fail part or all of the examination may retake those parts that they failed. (See Retaking the Examination below).

Examination Schedule

The comprehensive examination is take home written test. It is regularly scheduled in October, March and June/July of each academic year. In exceptional cases, it may be administered at other times to accommodate a compelling student need. The exam is offered online with specific instructions and time limits.

Structure of the Examination

Questions for the Take-Home Comprehensive Exam are divided into Core MPA Course Questions and Concentration Questions.

For the Core MPA Questions: Students will answer ONE question from each of the eight (8) core classes.

For the Concentration Questions: Students will follow the instructions provided with these questions as each concentration has varying requirements.

In the examination, students are expected to demonstrate a grasp of important substantive and analytic concepts, to show familiarity with major works in the field, and to integrate and apply important ideas and concepts. Performance standards for the MPA comprehensive examination reflect this expectation.

You are permitted to use any materials in writing your exam. You must reference/cite where you have obtained any information, but you should never cut and paste answers, only supplement your answers. Exams must be completed individually with the highest standards of academic honesty. Exam essays should be original work and not include any work previously submitted for academic credit. When you submit your exam, you will be required to sign an honesty statement that you did not give or receive any unauthorized assistance on this exam.

Essays will be evaluated using seven dimensions. The information below outlines those dimensions, the evaluation standard, and questions you can use when proofreading your exam prior to submission.

Evaluation of Comprehensive Exam - Dimension Standard Questions to Ask Yourself

Completeness: Discussed the question/statement with sufficient depth. Did you answer the questions asked and all parts of each question?

Breadth: Answered the questions with an understanding of the breadth of theories, concepts, and philosophies of public administration. Do your answers demonstrate a reasonably broad knowledge of the field?

Depth: Demonstrated knowledge of aspects of concepts in public administration. Do your answers demonstrate an understanding of the applications in public administration?

Evidence: Provided appropriate and sufficient citations and references. Are your answers well documented with specific sources or are they merely reflections of personal experience?

Examples: Used appropriate examples to explain the narrative. Did you provide examples as appropriate for the concepts in your essay?

Organization: Organized a logical presentation. Are your answers logical and well organized? Is it easy to follow your line of reasoning from beginning to end?

Style: Used appropriate APA Style. Did you correctly format all of your citations and the reference list?

Examination Grading

Questions are graded independently of each other. After the exam, each answer is provided to two MPA faculty members, who grade the answers anonymously, without knowing the student's identity. All MPA faculty are qualified to grade any question. The faculty use rubrics to assign grades. If both agree on the grade (which can be Pass with Distinction, Pass, or Fail), then that is the grade. If there is disagreement, then the question is assigned to a third faculty member, whose assessment breaks the tie.

It normally takes two to three weeks for the exams to be graded. The MPA Director notifies each student of the results of their exam. After notification, students can review graders' comments on their answers. Students failing all or part of the exam are especially urged to do this as part of their preparation for retaking the exam. They should also schedule an appointment with the Director to discuss their performance and their plans for retaking the examination.

Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

A comprehensive examination (oral, written, or a combination of oral and written) is required of most candidates for degrees. The specific type of examination to be given is determined by each individual department. In preparation for the comprehensive examination, candidates should contact their academic advisor.

The comprehensive examination is to be scheduled during the semester in which the student is enrolled in the last course(s) needed to complete the degree or certification. Dates pertaining to the comprehensive examination and the [Application for Graduation Procedure](#) are found on the Graduate Studies website.

After applying for graduation and completing the Comprehensive Exam Form, the student will be notified of the date and submissions timeline by the MPA Director. The student will be examined on course content and knowledge of the field of study. It is the student's responsibility to contact the MPA Director to receive guidelines in preparation for the examination.

If, after applying, the student elects *not* to take the comprehensive examination that semester, the student must submit a new Application for Graduation and Comprehensive Exam form by the deadline of the semester in which the student *does* elect to take the comprehensive examination. A \$50 degree fee is charged to students each time they submit a new Application for Graduation form.

Retaking the Exam

If the student does not pass the comprehensive examination on the first attempt, the student must meet with the MPA Director to schedule arrangements to retake the comprehensive examination. In order to retake the comprehensive exam in a subsequent semester, the student must submit a new Application for Graduation form. Each time an Application for Graduation form is submitted, a \$50 fee is charged.

Students are allowed a maximum of two attempts to successfully complete the comprehensive examination. If a second attempt is necessary, a passing score on the comprehensive examination must be received by the Graduate Certification Office for the student to remain a candidate for degree completion.

For students choosing the thesis option for their degrees (if available), the thesis defense serves as the comprehensive examination.

The Internship Guide

The internship is a very important component of the Jacksonville State MPA degree program, providing valuable experience that can enhance future employment prospects. Sometimes interns who impress their host organizations are offered permanent positions.

The purpose of the internship is to offer students an opportunity to both observe and participate in the process of program management and/or policy analysis. It complements the knowledge and skills acquired through coursework. The **MPA** Director serves as the internship coordinator helping to connect students with internship opportunities. However, it is the responsibility of the student to secure the actual internship placement. Three hours of credit are awarded for the internship under PA597- Public Affairs Internship. This course will be listed in the core course audit form and the *Plan of Study*.

Program rules stipulate that a minimum of 21 credits be earned before a student registers for an internship. The Director may waive this requirement if a very attractive or especially relevant opportunity arises, or if taking the internship prior to the completion of twenty-one hours will expedite completion of a student's degree.

Internship Requirements:

All degree candidates without a year of full-time (or two years of part-time) administrative experience in a federal, state, or local government agency or nonprofit organization must register for three semester hours of internship credit. The course PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) requires 112 hours of work in the student's internship area during the semester in which the course is taken. Students may complete internship responsibilities in a government agency (federal, state, or local) or a nonprofit organization. Upon successful completion of the internship, students receive a passing grade for PA597 Public Affairs Internship (3) (i.e., a Pass/Fail course).

Students taking the PA597 Public Affairs Internship (3) must enroll in the course during their last semester of coursework.

Students who have at least one year full-time or two years of part-time prior administrative experience with a government agency (federal, state, or local) or nonprofit organization may request a waiver of the internship requirement. (Length of relevant administrative experience is considered at the time applicants seek admission to the MPA program.) A student with appropriate administrative experience may submit a letter from his/her employer to the MPA Program Director. This letter should include the time frame the student has worked for the organization and the student's primary duties. Once the letter is received, an internship waiver will be considered. The approval authority for the internship waiver is the MPA Program Director.

The overall goal of the internship requirement is to ensure that all MPA students have appropriate prior administrative experience. This experience ensures that MPA students have acquired sufficient exposure to the public sector and its values prior to the awarding of the MPA degree.

Identifying Internship Opportunities

The final responsibility for securing an internship rests with the student. It is his/her responsibility to prepare a resume and make it available to the MPA Director and potential internship sponsors, to arrange interviews with agencies offering internships, and to negotiate the specific terms of the internship, including hours, duties and remuneration.

In general, paid internships are preferred. However, remuneration alone should not cause a student to either reject or select an internship. An internship should be chosen (or rejected) based on the quality of experience it offers and the extent to which it advances the professional goals of the student.

The Internship Agreement

After securing an internship, but before registering for PA 597 and beginning the internship, an *Internship Agreement Letter* must be submitted by the supervisor of record. This spells out the nature of the position, and the proposed duties or responsibilities. The student, the MPA Director, and the intern's workplace supervisor must sign this form, which clarifies performance expectations and provides the Director with some authority should an intern report that assigned duties are far different from those spelled out in the contract.

The MPA Director serves as the Internship Advisor and is responsible for guiding the student's internship experience. A student may request a specific faculty member to serve as the internship advisor, but availability is not guaranteed. Students should be prepared to talk by telephone or meet periodically with the Internship Advisor to discuss internship-related problems, issues and experiences.

During the course of the internship, each student must maintain and make available to the Internship Advisor copies of an **Internship Journal**. The journal should include brief periodic descriptions of tasks performed and observations on activities and experiences occurring in the workplace. The journal can be completed daily, weekly or monthly depending on the scope and nature of the internship. The faculty member and the student will agree on the frequency at the start of the internship. The journals can also include reporting on internship activities that are related to MPA coursework.

Internship Evaluation

A grade for the internship will be posted only after the internship portfolio requirement has been satisfied. At the completion of the internship, the workplace supervisor must assess the intern's performance and forward the report to the Internship Advisor. The MPA Program Director will collect the supervisor evaluation via an online survey. It is the student's responsibility to see that this is done.

Waiving the Internship Requirement

A student with significant professional public service experience may have the internship waived. If this requirement is waived, then the degree program is 39 course credit hours. If it is not waived, then the degree program is 36 course credit hours and 3 work credit hours (total of 39 hours).

To qualify for a waiver, the experience must be professional and significant and in most cases must have taken place in a public service organization. At the very least, the experience must have some public service focus and /or application.

The student applies for the waiver from the MPA program by filling out an *Internship Waiver Form*, available from the MPA Director. Such a waiver requires a letter from the student describing the nature of any past or current professional experience, along with contact information for the relevant supervisor(s) in case the program needs to verify the student's status. A resume is extremely helpful but not required. If the Director deems the work experience to have met the objectives of the internship requirement, the Director will approve the request for a waiver. Students granted a waiver should indicate this on their *Plan of Work*.

Professional Development and Career Planning

As noted, student consultation with the Director on career goals occurs as part of the process leading to the development of a student's Plan of Work. Students who are undecided about career direction or location preference should make special appointments with the Director early in their first semester.

Students thinking about professional development and career goals are encouraged to visit [MPA Careers](#) for links to professional associations and public sector job resources. All MPA faculty members, particularly the Director, are available to provide students with guidance in planning a career. It is the responsibility of the student to contact MPA faculty members for this purpose. Regularly, the Director's Office receives job postings from various sources. The Director will post information on such openings on the student email list.

MPA Careers

The MPA program annually monitors the careers of its graduates. Graduates from the 2018-2019 academic year have been successful in finding professional employment –of the graduates who completed the Alumni survey and secured or continued employment in the sector within six months of graduation 22% worked in nonprofits, 47% worked in state government, 16% worked in local government, and the balance were in the private sector or continued education.

Career Services

Skills such as resume writing and interviewing can be acquired through Jacksonville State's [Career Services Office](#). The MPA Director or Career Services Coordinators do not arrange interviews with prospective employers or act as agents for job placements. Their placement role is primarily informational. However, students may interview with prospective employers through Career Services. From time to time, public employers do schedule interviews with graduate students in academic departments on campus.

Professional Development

Students are encouraged to join professional associations early on, as these provide opportunities to network and gain visibility in the career field of choice. A good start would be the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), which has an Alabama State Chapter.

PublicServiceCareers.org, a joint venture of ASPA, the Network of Schools of Public Policy and Administration (NASPAA), and the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM), is the most comprehensive nationwide career site for those looking to work in the public sector.

Connecting with the MPA Program

The MPA Program sponsors various activities designed to facilitate student interaction with fellow students, alumni and faculty; to recognize academic excellence; and to provide forums outside the classroom for the discussion of public policy and management issues. The student email list (listserv) is the primary means of communication of such activities. It is also the source of other important information for students and alumni of the MPA Program. *Students need to make sure they read emails that come via the listserv.* In order to take advantage of all that the MPA program has to offer, students are highly encouraged to attend program events, lectures, and other networking opportunities.

Pi Sigma Alpha National Honor Society

The Rho Chi chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha is the Political Science Honor Society. Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society, is the only honor society for college and university students of government in the United States. The number of Pi Sigma Alpha chapters on campuses across the country is rapidly approaching 700. Pi Sigma Alpha is a member of the Association of College Honor Societies.

Public Administration Website

Periodically the Program publishes and distributes a newsletter to alumni, current students and friends of the program. It includes news on the achievements of current students and alumni, on the activities of faculty, as well as information on the program of use to current students. Since the news gathering process for the newsletter is informal, students and alumni are encouraged to inform the Director of items of personal or professional interest.

Practitioner Advisory Council Board

A Practitioner Advisory Council Board was formed to facilitate the program's relations with the practitioner community in the northeast Alabama regional area. Members have important managerial or policymaking roles in local and state government as well as in nonprofit organizations. The Board will advise the Program faculty on curriculum, employment trends, student recruitment, and continuing education and training needs. Please contact the MPA Director if you are interested in becoming a member of the Advisory Board.

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, this handbook is designed to address many of the major issues that MPA students will confront as they pursue the degree. This handbook should be used in conjunction with the most recent addition of the *Jacksonville State University's Graduate Catalog*.

When a discrepancy exists between the two, information found in the *Catalog must be deemed correct*.

While it is hoped this handbook will facilitate your understanding of the rules and procedures governing the MPA degree, it is not intended as a substitute for personal advisement. Students are encouraged to consult with the Director, with the Office of Graduate Studies, or with particular members of the Program Faculty as the need arises.

The MPA faculty are delighted that you have chosen to pursue a public service career and to study in the MPA program at Jacksonville State University. We look forward to being part of your journey in public service and we are here to help you succeed in achieving your goals.

Appendix: Concentration Profiles

Concentrations are not directly analogous to undergraduate majors, as the choice of concentration does not show up on the diploma and (as noted previously) the MPA program is a generalist program. Thus, there is considerable flexibility in the choice of concentration courses. The course listings below are suggested courses that may fit a student's interest in a concentration. However, a student may select courses outside of the concentration if/s/he believes they provide needed substantive background.

Please be advised that many of the courses listed below are cross-listed under several university departments. Please consult the *Graduate Catalog* for this information (<http://www.jsu.edu/graduate/catalog.html/>).

Minimum Requirements for the MPA with a Concentration in Administrative Management

An overall 3.00 GPA is required on all coursework attempted for the master's degree. Transfer credit cannot be used to raise the GPA to the required 3.00.

Course	Title	Credits
Required Public Administration Courses		
<u>PA 500</u>	Foundations of Public Administration (Taken within the first two semesters)	3
<u>PA 501</u>	The Analysis of Policy	3
<u>PA502</u>	Research Methods in Public Administration	3
<u>PA 504</u>	Administrative Leadership and Ethics	3
<u>PA 531</u>	Public Personnel Administration	3
<u>PA 532</u>	Public Finance Administration	3
<u>PA 540</u>	Organizational Theory and Bureaucratic Structure	3
<u>PA 546</u>	Diversity in the Workplace	3
<u>PA 597</u>	Public Affairs Internship (If required — if not, then the student will take a three semester hour public administration elective course by advisement)	3
Administrative Management Concentration Courses		
Select twelve semester hours of the following:		12
<u>MGT 504</u>	Business Organization and Administration	
<u>MGT 537</u>	Business Leadership	
<u>BA 501</u>	Organizational Communication	
Administrative Management course by advisement ¹		
Total Hours		39
Course List		

39 Graduate Semester Hours Required for this Degree

¹ The remaining Administrative Management required course, as noted above, will be selected from any of the School of Business and Industry classes for which the student has met all prerequisites. This will be determined for each student based on interaction with their Administrative Management concentration advisor.

Internship Requirements

- All degree candidates without a year of full-time (or two years of part-time) administrative experience in a federal, state, or local government agency or nonprofit organization must register for three semester hours of internship credit. The course PA597 Public Affairs Internship (3) requires 112 hours of work in the student's internship area during the semester in which the course is taken. Students may complete internship responsibilities in a government agency (federal, state, or local) or a nonprofit organization. Upon successful completion of the internship, students receive a passing grade for PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) (i.e., a Pass/Fail course).

- Students taking the PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) must enroll in the course during their last semester of coursework.
- Students who have at least one year full-time or two years of part-time prior administrative experience with a government agency (federal, state, or local) or nonprofit organization may request a waiver of the internship requirement. (Length of relevant administrative experience is considered at the time applicants seek admission to the MPA program.) A student with appropriate administrative experience may submit a letter from his/her employer to the MPA Program Director or Graduate Student Adviser. This letter should include the time frame the student has worked for the organization and the student's primary duties. Once the letter is received, an internship waiver will be considered. The approval authority for the internship waiver is the MPA Program Director.
- The overall goal of the internship requirement is to ensure that all MPA students have appropriate prior administrative experience. This experience ensures that MPA students have acquired sufficient exposure to the public sector and its values prior to the awarding of the MPA degree.

Minimum Requirements for the MPA with a Concentration in Criminal Justice

An overall 3.00 GPA is required on all coursework attempted for the master's degree. Transfer credit cannot be used to raise the GPA to the required 3.00.

Course	Title	Credits
Required Public Administration Courses		
<u>PA 500</u>	<i>Foundations of Public Administration (Taken within the first two semesters)</i>	3
<u>PA 501</u>	<i>The Analysis of Policy</i>	3
<u>PA 502</u>	<i>Research Methods in Public Administration</i>	3
<u>PA 504</u>	<i>Administrative Leadership and Ethics</i>	3
<u>PA 531</u>	<i>Public Personnel Administration</i>	3
<u>PA 532</u>	<i>Public Finance Administration</i>	3
<u>PA 540</u>	<i>Organizational Theory and Bureaucratic Structure</i>	3
<u>PA 546</u>	<i>Diversity in the Workplace</i>	3
<u>PA 597</u>	<i>Public Affairs Internship (If required — if not, then the student will take a three semester hour public administration elective course by advisement)</i>	3
Criminal Justice Concentration		
<i>Select twelve semester hours of the following:</i>		12
<u>CJ 500</u>	<i>Seminar in Contemporary Criminal Justice Issues</i>	
<u>CJ 507</u>	<i>Seminar in Legal Issues</i>	
<i>or</i> <u>CJ 509</u>	<i>Criminal Justice Planning, Evaluation, and Grant-Writing</i>	
<i>Six semester hours of Criminal Justice courses by advisement</i>		
Total Hours		39

Course List

39 Graduate Semester Hours are Required for this Degree

Internship Requirements

- All degree candidates without a year of full-time (or two years of part-time) administrative experience in a federal, state, or local government agency or nonprofit organization must register for three semester hours of internship credit. The course PA597 Public Affairs Internship (3) requires 112 hours of work in the student's internship area during the semester in which the course is taken. Students may complete internship responsibilities in a government agency (federal, state, or local) or a nonprofit organization. Upon successful completion of the internship, students receive a passing grade for PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) (i.e., a Pass/Fail course).
- Students taking the PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) must enroll in the course during their last —

semester of coursework.

- Students who have at least one year full-time or two years of part-time prior administrative experience with a government agency (federal, state, or local) or nonprofit organization may request a waiver of the internship requirement. (Length of relevant administrative experience is considered at the time applicants seek admission to the MPA program.) A student with appropriate administrative experience may submit a letter from his/her employer to the MPA Program Director or Graduate Student Adviser. This letter should include the time frame the student has worked for the organization and the student's primary duties. Once the letter is received, an internship waiver will be considered. The approval authority for the internship waiver is the MPA Program Director.
- The overall goal of the internship requirement is to ensure that all MPA students have appropriate prior administrative experience. This experience ensures that MPA students have acquired sufficient exposure to the public sector and its values prior to the awarding of the MPA degree.

Minimum Requirements for the MPA with a Concentration in Emergency Management

An overall 3.00 GPA is required on all coursework attempted for the master's degree. Transfer credit cannot be used to raise the GPA to the required 3.00.

Course	Title	Credits
Required Public Administration Courses		
<u>PA 500</u>	<i>Foundations of Public Administration (Taken within the first two semesters)</i>	3
<u>PA 501</u>	<i>The Analysis of Policy</i>	3
<u>PA 502</u>	<i>Research Methods in Public Administration</i>	3
<u>PA 504</u>	<i>Administrative Leadership and Ethics</i>	3
<u>PA 531</u>	<i>Public Personnel Administration</i>	3
<u>PA 532</u>	<i>Public Finance Administration</i>	3
<u>PA 540</u>	<i>Organizational Theory and Bureaucratic Structure</i>	3
<u>PA 546</u>	<i>Diversity in the Workplace</i>	3
<u>PA 597</u>	<i>Public Affairs Internship (If required — if not, then the student will take a three semester hour public administration elective course by advisement)</i>	3
Emergency Management Concentration Courses		12
<u>EM 505</u>	<i>Foundations of Emergency Management</i>	
<u>EM 590</u>	<i>Capstone in Emergency Management</i>	
<i>Select two of the following:</i>		
<u>EM 525</u>	<i>Disaster Recovery</i>	
<u>EM 540</u>	<i>Hazard Mitigation</i>	
<u>EM 545</u>	<i>Emergency Preparedness</i>	
<u>EM 555</u>	<i>Disaster Response</i>	
Total Hours		39
Course List		

39 Graduate Semester Hours Required for this Degree

Internship Requirements

- All degree candidates without a year of full-time (or two years of part-time) administrative experience in a federal, state, or local government agency or nonprofit organization must register for three

semester hours of internship credit. The course PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) requires 112 hours of work in the student’s internship area during the semester in which the course is taken. Students may complete internship responsibilities in a government agency (federal, state, or local) or a nonprofit organization. Upon successful completion of the internship, students receive a passing grade for PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) (i.e., a Pass/Fail course).

- Students taking the PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) must enroll in the course during their last semester of coursework.
- Students who have at least one year full-time or two years of part-time prior administrative experience with a government agency (federal, state, or local) or nonprofit organization may request a waiver of the internship requirement. (Length of relevant administrative experience is considered at the time applicants seek admission to the MPA program.) A student with appropriate administrative experience may submit a letter from his/her employer to the MPA Program Director or Graduate Student Adviser. This letter should include the time frame the student has worked for the organization and the student’s primary duties. Once the letter is received, an internship waiver will be considered. The approval authority for the internship waiver is the MPA Program Director.
- The overall goal of the internship requirement is to ensure that all MPA students have appropriate prior administrative experience. This experience ensures that MPA students have acquired sufficient exposure to the public sector and its values prior to the awarding of the MPA degree.

Minimum Requirements for the MPA with a Concentration in Political Science

An overall 3.00 GPA is required on all coursework attempted for the master’s degree. Transfer credit cannot be used to raise the GPA to the required 3.00.

Course	Title	Credits
Required Public Administration Courses		
<u>PA 500</u>	Foundations of Public Administration (Taken within the first two semesters)	3
<u>PA 501</u>	The Analysis of Policy	3
<u>PA 502</u>	Research Methods in Public Administration	3
<u>PA 504</u>	Administrative Leadership and Ethics	3
<u>PA 531</u>	Public Personnel Administration	3
<u>PA 532</u>	Public Finance Administration	3
<u>PA 540</u>	Organizational Theory and Bureaucratic Structure	3
<u>PA 546</u>	Diversity in the Workplace	3
<u>PA 597</u>	Public Affairs Internship (If required — if not, then the student will take a three semester hour public administration elective course by advisement)	3
Political Science Concentration Courses		
Select twelve semester hours of the following:		12
<u>PSC 450</u>	The American Executive	
<u>PSC 512</u>	Intergovernmental Relations	
<u>PSC 521</u>	Administrative Law	
Political Science course by advisement ¹		
Total Hours		39

Course List

39 Graduate Semester Hours are Required for this Degree

¹ The remaining graduate course (as noted above) will be selected from any of the political science classes for which students have met all prerequisites. This will be determined for each student based on interaction with their Political Science concentration advisor or the MPA Director.

Internship Requirements

- All degree candidates without a year of full-time (or two years of part-time) administrative experience

in a federal, state, or local government agency or nonprofit organization must register for three semester hours of internship credit. The course PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) requires 112 hours of work in the student's internship area during the semester in which the course is taken. Students may complete internship responsibilities in a government agency (federal, state, or local) or a nonprofit organization. Upon successful completion of the internship, students receive a passing grade for PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) (i.e., a Pass/Fail course).

- Students taking the PA 597 Public Affairs Internship (3) must enroll in the course during their last semester of coursework.
- Students who have at least one year full-time or two years of part-time prior administrative experience with a government agency (federal, state, or local) or nonprofit organization may request a waiver of the internship requirement. (Length of relevant administrative experience is considered at the time applicants seek admission to the MPA program.) A student with appropriate administrative experience may submit a letter from his/her employer to the MPA Program Director or Graduate Student Adviser. This letter should include the time frame the student has worked for the organization and the student's primary duties. Once the letter is received, an internship waiver will be considered. The approval authority for the internship waiver is the MPA Program Director.
- The overall goal of the internship requirement is to ensure that all MPA students have appropriate prior administrative experience. This experience ensures that MPA students have acquired sufficient exposure to the public sector and its values prior to the awarding of the MPA degree.

ORIENTATION WELCOME PACKET

Recommendations for Surviving Graduate School: Keys to Success

MPA Program
Jacksonville State University

Introduction

Congratulations! Welcome to Jacksonville State University's Master of Public Administration Program—we are thrilled you made the decision to pursue your MPA in our NASPAA accredited program. Now the work begins, and we are here to support you throughout the entire process. Oftentimes, graduate students are plagued by thoughts of how to survive the courses offered in Graduate School.

Before presenting recommendations for surviving Graduate School, here are a few things to consider:

- You are not alone in feeling apprehensive—even the most seasoned graduate student faces these feelings from time-to-time; and
- The feelings of anxiety you may be having now will ease somewhat as you gain more experience in your studies.

To facilitate your success in graduate school, the faculty offer up several recommendations for your review—recommendations that many students find useful while pursuing a graduate degree.

Recommendations for Success:

1. Study Strategies: Many new graduate students (as well as some of the more seasoned ones) use the same study strategies they used as undergraduates. The advice for most of you is to refrain from the study strategies you used as an undergraduate, unless of course, those strategies are consistent with what is presented in this document. Graduate studies, for the most part, consist of many work-intensive courses. Therefore, *reading and taking notes* is a vital key to surviving Graduate School. If your ability to become conversant with the literature is deficient, then this deficiency will haunt you during examinations, especially the MPA Comprehensive Examination. Sometimes in your courses you may be allotted an introductory week (except summer terms)—a week in which you are presented an introduction to the course that allows you to get a jump on the reading assignments. Use this week to get ahead on your reading assignments. If you can get a head start and stay ahead, then you will probably face less stress in the course. You will find that less stress generally equates to an increase in your confidence level, which, in turn, promotes a higher probability for success in this and other graduate-level courses.

2. How to Approach Your Reading Assignments: Often students using a highlighter when they read academic literature but do not take the time to write notes in the margins of their readings—notes that indicate what it is they read in the literature. The use of a highlighter is recommended, combined with a concerted effort to write margin notes regarding the text you highlighted in the literature. This activity aids students in their preparation for exams. In addition, if a professor provides you with an exam review sheet and you go back to the text that does not have margin notes, then you are forced to reread the text in order to locate the various items on the review sheet. This will be an enormous time saver in the long run!

3. How to Accomplish #2 Above: If you truly want to master the literature, which is one of the purposes of the program, then you need to adopt a strategy that aids in this endeavor. It is highly recommended that students construct an annotated bibliography for each course they take while enrolled in the MPA Program—both for public administration and concentration courses. You can find information about how to construct an annotated bibliography online at the Houston Cole Library and on various web sites—just type in *annotated bibliography* on any search engine (Google, Yahoo, Dogpile, and others).

4. Establishing a Weekly Work Schedule: The faculty *highly recommends* every student establish a written schedule that includes all of your weekly activities (work, leisure, eating, studying, writing

papers/exams, etc.). In addition to making a schedule, you must adhere to it—procrastination is a “mind killer.” The best time to get a jump on any course is at the very beginning; *do not wait until the last minute to work on your assignments*.

5. Writing Research Papers: Following in the spirit of item #3 above, the time to begin work on research papers is at the very beginning of the course. Students need to start thinking about topics for their research papers within the first week of class, and if you need assistance in topic selection, please contact your professor as soon as possible. Students who wait until the last minute to start to turn in papers that are of poorer quality. Furthermore, please take ample time to proofread your paper, along with all of your assignments, and use any grading schemes/instructions that listed in your course syllabus. Our courses generally have grading schemes/instructions for all assignments—take time to become familiar with all course requirements at the beginning of each semester. The best approach to proofreading semester papers is to finish the paper about four days before it is due and wait 24 hours before proofreading the paper. This procedure allows you a couple of days to fix any errors you discover in your paper.

6. Turning in Assignments: Students must acquire the habit of turning in assignments on time. *Many of your professors do not accept late assignments*, particularly when the student posits an excuse *after* the assignment is late. If you experience any extenuating circumstances that prevent you from turning in an assignment on time, then you need to inform your professor before the due date, not after the fact. Please note: your professors determine if the excuse you provide is valid (proof may be required) and whether or not the excuse warrants serious consideration.

7. Studying for Exams: This recommendation is rather simple—STUDY!

8. Transforming Students into Professional Administrators: The foremost objective in the MPA program is to transform students into masters of public administration. This endeavor is not only an academic process, but it is also a maturation process. The faculty expects students to make the transition from Graduate School novices to professional administrators. If you are currently working as a public administrator, then the faculty strives to make you a better one. In other words, “Where you are, we have been; where we are, someday you will be; and it is up to us to get you to that destination.” In order to promote these expectations, the faculty reinforces in students the following core competencies:

- (1.) a sense of urgency in accomplishing all tasks;
- (2.) a sense of ethics;
- (3.) pride and ownership of your work;
- (4.) the desire to become a connoisseur of learning (to educate yourself in those things which you do not know);
- (5.) the ability to pay attention to detail when it comes to course requirements,
- (6.) critical thinking skills;
- (7.) written/oral communication skills;
- (8.) an appreciation of diversity in the workplace; and
- (9.) a sense of social equity.

It is the fifth item that tends to cause students, as well as professional administrators, the most problems. One thing that students can do to aid in accomplishing item #5 is to thoroughly read the syllabus and become knowledgeable of the course requirements. If you do this, you may discover that you make fewer mistakes in your assignments.

9. A Few Words about Plagiarism: Forget about it, do not even think about it, and, in other words, DO NOT DO IT. In your classes, you will be provided information regarding academic honesty, and it will generally read like the following excerpt from a MPA Program course syllabus.

Academic Honesty: Please note that in all of our courses, we try to build in “real world assessments.” As public administrators, you must accomplish your work in an efficient, effective and

ethical manner all the while promoting social equity. We gauge you on these traits by the following means.

First, we assess your efficiency and effectiveness through your timely submission of assignments. This syllabus informs you of what assignments are due, when they are do, and what format the assignments are required to be in when submitted. It is up to you to meet the deadline for all assignments and have the assignments in the proper format—just like in the real world of public administration. If you do not meet the deadline, then you may be subject to receiving a zero for that assignment just as you would expect to receive some sort of reprimand for your performance in the *real world*. If you meet the deadline, yet your assignment is not in the proper format, you will have points deducted accordingly—once again a *real world* scenario.

Second, we judge a student's ethical approach to his/her work based upon the content of the work. In other words, are you doing your own work, or are you using some other person's work, even if only partially? Each student in this course must complete his or her assignments without any outside help (read as assistance from others). Partial exceptions may be made in cases of documented disability or where academically recognized JSU tutoring service provides limited assistance. Limited assistance does not include having someone plan or write a paper, homework assignment, or examination for you, or even edit it, or give you the ideas to type regarding the aforementioned assignments. In addition, please note that many of the faculty use the Canvas program **HonorLock**[™] to check assignments for plagiarism. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions about this policy.

The instructor reserves the right to call or E-mail students and require an explanation of ideas, arguments, and vocabulary for any paper, homework assignment, or examination offered as their own. If a student fails to provide the proper defense of any of these assignments (the faculty determine if the defense is proper), the grade for the assignment will be a zero, and the student may face further academic disciplinary action. The instructor has a policy of giving students the benefit of the doubt, when one exists, and where warranted. Students who do their own work have nothing to worry about when it comes to this issue.

Finally, social equity is stressed in the fact that all students are treated in a like manner and grades are not assigned for arbitrary or capricious reasons.

10. Ask Questions: In times of doubt about any material covered in your courses, seek out the best references for these courses—your professors. When in doubt about something, please check the syllabus first, and, if you are still confused, contact your professor with any questions you have regarding any course requirements.

11. Keep your Professors Informed: If you are facing some truly tough nonacademic challenges during a semester, let your professors know. Your professors have been down similar roads, we may not be able to solve the nonacademic challenges you may face; however, we will refer you to persons who may be able to assist you.

12. Talk with the Other Graduate Students: It is not a good idea to go through the program wrapped in a bubble. Get to know the other graduate students in the program; in the process you will develop colleagues that you may know a lifetime.

The faculty hope you find these recommendations helpful during your graduate studies, we sincerely wish you the best. Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to your advisor or any of the MPA faculty.

Mastering the Discipline

MPA Program
Jacksonville State University

“Why do professors make it a point to critique students on discussion boards (on-line setting) or in the traditional classroom instead of by individual e-mail, and why are course requirements so challenging (read as difficult, hard, in-depth, and esoteric and a few of adjectives that cannot be repeated in this paper)?” This is a fair two-part question and, as such, deserves a fair response. In the program’s syllabi, you may see a reference to what we call the *real-world* model of teaching MPA courses. Since the faculty cannot replicate every work scenario nor can we create a simulated government agency in which MPA students work in order for us to evaluate their potential as public administrators, the faculty instituted other means for providing these *real-world* experiences. In the discussion that follows, you are presented with a variety of core competencies that we instill in our students, a brief synopsis of how we assess those competencies, and why they are important.

Granted, many MPA students are current practitioners of the craft and have a plethora of experience. However, since the purpose of the MPA Program is to provide students with an education focused on making each student a *master of the craft*, then we have to incorporate assessment methods in order to evaluate that potential. The faculty cannot visit each student at his or her workplace (too time consuming and the travel expenses would never be covered). Therefore, professors in the program incorporate assessment measures into the courses that enable us to provide students with simulated *real world* experience or reinforce the experiences they have already acquired.

The three basic characteristics faculty instill or reinforce in students are (1) attention to detail; (2) a sense of urgency; and (3) a strong appreciation for ethical conduct that is focused on promoting social equity while incorporating the tenets of cultural diversity (more later on ethics, social equity, and cultural diversity). The first two items are covered by the detailed instructions students receive in their course syllabus as well as established deadlines for assignments.

Reading and paying attention to a syllabus is a very respectable start. When you think about it, organizations students may work for have rules and regulations, SOPs, as well as state and federal laws that you must adhere to, and paying attention to the details will aid you in your career. The sense of urgency is instilled or reinforced through the timely submission of assignments and having a penalty for late assignments or not accepting late assignments provides the student with practical experience that reinforces the importance of timely submission of projects. After all, it is better to learn this in the classroom rather than the workplace. Waiting for our students to experience this in the *real world* is not being fair to our students—a deficiency in this area could cost a person his or her job or a promising career.

Correcting students on discussion boards (the on-line environment) or in a traditional classroom setting has a learning purpose to it. As a public administrator, you will be given assignments that require you to work alone, yet many times assignments are done as a team, committee, or taskforce (or other similar title). Working in this type of situation will put your work ethic *out there* for every team member to see, and your team leader (and team members) will analyze the team as a whole and will comment on individual performances of team members. This critique can be done in the presence of others as a learning tool not only for those who are critiqued, but also for the team’s benefit. Imagine it is like a sports team—the coaches provide guidance to the team in order to improve team performance. In addition, the coaches provide feedback to individual players in front of other players in order for it to be a learning experience not only for the player being critiqued, but also for the team.

Please note that everything in your courses has been carefully thought out and is incorporated into these courses in order to provide you the maximum learning experience. This is based on the faculty’s vast

experience in the public sector. The faculty has taken what and how we were taught and asked the question—how can we improve the learning process to give students not only the knowledge they need to succeed, but also the characteristics needed to thrive in the world of public administration? The faculty arrived at this conclusion: students need basic core competencies in order to have a chance of succeeding in this field of study.

First, you need critical thinking skills—observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and meta-cognition (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking). In order to be successful at critical thinking you must have the following abilities.

- Recognize problems, to find workable means for meeting those problems
- Understand the importance of prioritization and order of precedence in problem solving
- Gather and marshal pertinent (relevant) information
- Recognize unstated assumptions and values
- Comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity, and discernment
- Interpret data, to appraise evidence and evaluate arguments
- Recognize the existence (or non-existence) of logical relationships between propositions
- Draw warranted conclusions and generalizations
- Put to test the conclusions and generalizations at which one arrives
- Reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience
- Render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking)

Acquiring these abilities should enable you to accomplish the tasks listed below.

- Raise important questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- Gather and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- Come to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- Think open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences
- Communicating effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems, without being unduly influenced by others' thinking on the topic. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking)

If you want to know more about critical thinking, visit the Wikipedia site (referenced above) or visit <http://www.criticalthinking.org/>.

The second thing you need in order to have a chance of succeeding in the field of public administration is an expert knowledge of the literature. If you can master the literature, then you can master the discourse of the discipline. This is why it is necessary for you to discuss thoroughly the reading material with your professors and fellow graduate students to such a degree that you know and can present the arguments from all sides of an issue. If you cannot master the literature, then you cannot take part in the discipline's discourse and this will prove your undoing. Finally, students need to acquire the *character* of a public administrator.

The character of the public administrator is multifaceted. The public administrator is one who has a keen interest in being a public administrator—interest is the key because without it, then it becomes just a job instead of a passion. The MPA Program faculty assesses your interest by making the courses challenging to the point that if you have some interest you may succeed, and if you are not interested, then you will probably not make it through the courses.

The character of the public administrator is also defined by his or her sense of urgency, attention to detail, leadership abilities, ethics, and concept of social equity including an appreciation for cultural

diversity. A sense of urgency and attention to detail aid the administrator in his or her attempts to take care of the public in an effective and efficient manner, and we assess and instill these characteristics through the aid of assignments and lengthy instructions.

Ethics and leadership are presented in PSC 504 Administrative Leadership and Ethics, and to some degree in all of the courses. A student's sense of ethics is assessed through written assignments—your work is reviewed to determine the originality of the work. In other words, is it your work or the work of another person (SafeAssign™ comes into play here)? In step with ethics, a person's sense for social equity and an appreciation for cultural diversity enable the administrator to pursue his or her career ever mindful of the need for justice and fair treatment for clientele (citizens), while remembering we are from diverse backgrounds and culture; that we are bound by our system of government in which the concepts of democracy, liberty, and equality (Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, and Spitzer 2011) are promoted by our attempts to maintain accountability and transparency in government (for a discussion of these topics see the works of Cooper 1998; Frederickson 1997; Gormley and Ball 2008; Radin 2002; Svava 2007; Van Wart 2008). These concepts are discussed throughout the curriculum and are introduced in the core public administration course PSC 500 Foundations of Public Administration.

All the aforementioned core competencies—honed to a high level of expertise—are what will make you a successful public administrator, and the faculty's goal is to instill each of these core competencies in our students, be it in the traditional classroom setting or through the use of distance education—your assignments and assessment measures are the same. However, at this point, I must say on behalf of the faculty, we cannot rule out *luck*, *fate*, or the *unknown* as factors that account for success. However, the faculty can teach you about luck, unfortunately we cannot teach you luck to the point you can easily acquire it.

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Writing and Graduate School

Requiring to students to write is a method of assessing whether or not a student has acquired the knowledge, core competencies, and can appropriately apply the wisdom he or she has obtained in order to solve a problem. If you cannot write, then you cannot communicate, and if you cannot communicate, then you have not learned.

Dan Krejci, PhD, Former MPA Program Director, Jacksonville State University (2012)

Introduction

In this essay, Dr. Krejci has provided the MPA graduate student with several helpful hints focused on improving his or her written communication skills. In order to achieve a graduate or professional degree, students must effectively demonstrate an uncanny command of the discourse used in his or her chosen field of study. Two methods of assessment used to ascertain if this is accomplished are oral and written communications. This essay focuses on the written communication skills of the student.

This essay begins with the topic of tackling essay questions and the method you can employ when answering these types of questions. After discussing essay answers, he presents the reader with several important notes and recommendations focusing on how a student may improve his or her professional writing abilities. At this point, he presents one crucial caveat—professional writing should not read the same as an e-mail, text message, or a message sent via Twitter. Therefore, please avoid the use of contractions, and colloquialisms in your professional writing. Now, turn your consideration to the subject of writing essay questions.

On the next page is a sample essay question taken from a PSC 502 Research Methods in Public Administration exam. Before answering any essay question, it is best to outline your response. In order to maintain a clear and concise train of thought, begin an essay with an introductory paragraph in which you inform the reader of the purpose, content, and importance of the essay. The best way to approach the introduction is by taking the essay question and turning it into the introductory paragraph. One additional item, your essay responses should be written like it is for an audience that has no knowledge of the subject.

Question: Discuss the various methods of sampling. In your discussion, ensure that you define your terms and the pitfalls and advantages of each method.

Response: Public administrators, in order to ascertain if the programs they manage are effectively accomplishing the legislative intent of the program, employ various research methodologies to determine the impact their programs have on the public. Regardless of the methodology chosen to study the program, the administrator may not be able to study the entire population affected by the program; therefore, the researcher will have to rely upon sampling in order to accomplish his or her program review. The purpose of this essay is to present the reader with various methods of sampling. I begin the discourse by clearly and concisely defining the terms used in the essay in order to familiarize the reader with the *lingua franca* used by research methodologists as it relates to sampling. I then segue into a discussion focusing on the various methods of sampling employed in the field of public administration according to the work of O'Sullivan, Rassel, and Berner (2008). In this discussion, I note the advantages and pitfalls of each method discussed. In the field of public administration, it is imperative that all administrators be well versed in the various research methodologies in order to ascertain the effectiveness of the policies and program they oversee (O'Sullivan, Rassel, and Taliaferro 2011).

If you write your essay in the same logical order that you outlined in your introductory paragraph, then your paper will flow in a reasonable sequence. What follows are some important notes and recommendation aimed at improving your writing abilities. Keep in mind that we all make mistakes in our writing and to improve, we have to practice.

Notes to the Writer

In academic writing, avoid the drawbacks of sentences that begin with phrases like “I believe, I feel, or it is my opinion”—or any similar phrase. The reason to avoid these expressions is simple—these statements, by themselves, cannot support a logical argument. The reason they cannot support an argument is that your opponents can simply argue their feelings, beliefs, or opinions, or better yet, employ clear and concise counter arguments backed up with evidence. Therefore, it is necessary for you to back up every claim you make in your writing assignments with sound evidence (citations from your readings, real world scenarios, even anecdotal evidence is OK, but not necessarily the best evidence, especially when empirical findings are available). In addition, you need to be *more aggressive* in your writing. What do I mean by this last statement?

If you begin a sentence with “I believe or I feel, or it is my opinion,” it makes you appear less professional and weakens your arguments. First, people know you are the author of the work, so you can simply leave out the phrase “I believe or I feel.” If your writing is weak, then your argument will appear weak, and if the argument is weak, your ability to influence people through writing is diminished. Instead, be more aggressive in your writing (see the examples on the next page).

Statement 1: I feel the policy process has many pitfalls. It is my opinion that the policy process....

Statement 2: The policy process is full of pitfalls. According to Cochran et al. (2003), the policy process....

Clearly, the way the second statement starts has the better chance of convincing the reader because it is more aggressive. In other words, the writer appears more assured of his or her abilities to convey a clear, concise, and logical argument; supported by evidence. This is what you want to accomplish. Refrain from the editorial approach to academic writing, which is clearly the approach of the first statement above. Truthfully, no one cares how you feel simply because others will feel differently about a topic, and, as such, does not move the discussion forward. However, if you present a clear, concise, logical argument, supported by evidence, then you stand a better chance of convincing your reader.

Recommendations

OK, how do you get better at writing academic papers, essays, and other professional material? First, take the time and explore the Houston Cole Library’s resources that demonstrate effective writing techniques, especially techniques that are designed for academic and other professional writing. You can also search the Internet in general. In addition, I recommend every student obtain a copy of the text entitled *The Craft of Research* by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph Williams (1995, 2003, and 2008). I have the first and second editions of this text, and it is an excellent guide for writing that provides you with valuable insight into the world of research and writing. Third, get ahold of a copy of Strunk and White’s (2009) *The Elements of Style* (your writing should have style). Fourth, follow the formatting guidelines that your professors provide you in their course syllabi, and it helps if you acquired an updated style manual (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is one used in political science, as is *The Chicago Manual of Style*). Finally, read these aforementioned texts. I know that last recommendation sounds silly at first, but allow me to explain.

During my eleven-year sojourn as a graduate student, I was told to buy and read the aforementioned texts, which I did—yet not all members of my cohort read the texts (they brought them to class, but did not read them). In the end, what separated the successful students in the cohort from the *not-so-successful* students was this: the successful students read and adhered to the teachings of the texts. As you all have probably heard, to have an even chance of being good at something, you have to practice, practice, and.....wait for it....practice. Granted, there is no guarantee that you will be a great writer, but

you can improve. You accomplish this by simply writing whenever you have the time. The more you work at it, the better writer you become. However, the pitfall for students is doing the work.

Some students will work harder at avoiding work and spend more time dreaming of ways to take shortcuts to avoid the work, than it actually takes to do the work in the first place. In my travels through the world of academia, as well as my work in the public sector, I have been amazed at the number of students—as well as academicians and professionals—who think that they can take shortcuts and succeed. Yes, you can take shortcuts in your classes, and, at times, you may succeed. However, you must note, in the end, it is all about the knowledge you have obtained and whether or not you are able to use that knowledge via critical thinking and communication skills in order to solve problems.

The last hurdle a student faces in the MPA Program at Jacksonville State University is the written comprehensive examination. In order to pass the exam, the student must demonstrate that she or he has mastered the discourse of the discipline and, the student's concentration area, in order to obtain a Master of Public Administration degree. You cannot *fake* your way through this exam—either you know the material and are able write about it in a professional manner or you do not know the material, and are not able to write about the material. Even if you know the material, if you cannot discuss it through your writing, then you will not succeed in the MPA Program. This is why students have a lot of writing they must do in the courses they take during their tenure in the program. Bottom line: you cannot pass an assignment by writing about your feelings and opinions.

I reiterate, you need to present clear, concise, logical arguments backed up by evidence that supports your claims and apply all of the aforementioned in an appropriate manner in order to solve a hypothetical or real-world problem, critique a theory, defend a policy or process, or present and defend your own hypothesis. After all, communication is one of the core competencies we instill in our students during their tenure in the program.

There you have it, in just a little over three pages, profound thoughts on writing along with recommendations on how you can improve your written communication skills.

Dan Krejci, PhD, Former MPA Program Director, Jacksonville State University (2012)

Annotated Bibliography

MPA Program
Jacksonville State University

The citing of authors and the year(s) of their work—like Rabin, Hildreth, and Miller (1996), and using the parenthetical citation format makes the answers you provide on written exams or assigned semester papers appear and read more professionally—which is a primary objective of graduate school. In addition, the citation of authors demonstrates that you are mastering the literature in your graduate degree program. In other words, the student who is able to demonstrate a mastery of the literature in his or her field, as demonstrated in written exams and assigned semester papers, is the student who is deserving of the graduate degree. Therefore, it is strongly recommend to each student that you start maintaining an annotated bibliography of all your graduate school readings. Use the link below (control + left click to follow the link or right click and click on “open hyperlink”) to connect with the Library at Cornell University for an example of an annotated bibliography.

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>

It is also recommended that you create an annotated bibliography for each course you take instead of creating just on long annotated bibliography. In other words, since you have to take thirteen courses (fourteen for education concentration) then you should have thirteen annotated bibliographies. It should include each text or article you read—to include articles you read for any assigned semester paper. When professors read comprehensive examinations—they will be impressed when you cite, correctly, articles that pertain to the question and are applied effective as evidence in any argument you posit. One additional note: graders of midterm, final, or comprehensive exams are not impressed if you write down everything you know about your field of study or subject question hoping that some of it will stick to the question you are attempting to answer. It is important that you know these things just in case no one has mentioned them to you. If they have, that is a good thing; however, you should also know what the faculty expects from students on exams prior to taking any exam in this program. Should you include something like the following sentence in an answer to your question, you may expect this response in asking what you are referring to in your answer.

Answer: Researchers have presented us with a plethora of budget formats to choose from, yet it appears that regardless of which budget type is chosen, all budgets seem to have one common goal: budgets serve as the tool that chief executives use to indicate their policy objectives.

Response: You need to let the reader know who the researchers are—in this case the statement above is from Miller (in Rabin et al. 1996) or you could have cited something like, “According to Miller (1992),” , because the chapter in Rabin et al. (Chapter 9) was originally published in 1992. Yet, if you only read Miller’s work in Rabin (1996) and not the other book, then you should cite the work as: Miller (in Rabin, Hildreth, and Miller 1996) or Miller (in Rabin et al. 1996).

Jacksonville State University MPA Comprehensive Examination Preparation

MPA Program
Jacksonville State University

For the MPA Comprehensive Examination, we test students on all of your required public administration (PA) courses. It is recommended you check with your concentration adviser to ascertain what concentration courses will be part of the exam. There are important steps you can take to enhance your exam preparation and performance. The exam tips provided below work for both required PA courses as well as concentration courses.

First, to prepare for this exam, start by constructing a work schedule, in which you include the time you allot for exam preparation. It is recommended you start your preparation with the courses that will prove the most challenging and work from there to the courses that cause you the least challenge/worries.

Second, if you do not have an annotated bibliography for each course, you may want to go to Google or some other search engine and conduct a search for “annotated bibliography.” If you are able to provide parenthetical citations in your exam question responses that come from items you read for a particular subject area, this will help you on the exam. In other words, review all the texts and articles you read for each course and create your annotated bibliography for each course. Please note, this is not a recommendation that you reread everything, simply you know the authors’ works for each course you took and the year of their work so you can use them as evidence to support any claims or arguments you present in your comprehensive examination essay responses. The ability to cite authors you have read (name of author or authors and year of their work) is a plus when providing evidence because it demonstrates that you have mastered the literature—that is if you use the authors' work appropriately in your essay.

Third, it is recommended that you review all of your midterm and final exams that you took for each course that will be on the exam, especially the essay questions. Pay particular attention to what feedback your professors provided regarding your essay(s). In addition, if you had the choice of several questions, yet did not have to answer all of them, you should prepare at least an outline (better to write a full essay) for the questions that you did not answer. You may want to visit with your professors to get some additional comments.

Finally, the biggest problem students run into regarding the comprehensive the exam is simply the fact they do not answer the questions, or they write too little when answering the questions. Please bring scratch paper with you and use the scratch paper to outline your answer for each essay question before writing it. Please note you will only have one course exam given to you at a time, so when you get the question, take time to think about it, write an outline, then write your essay using your outline as the guide. Ensure that you include an introductory paragraph in which you tell the reader the content, importance, and purpose of your essay. Also, ensure you have a concluding paragraph in which you recap the essay.