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MPA Handbook 2026-2027

HANDBOOK

Master of Public Administration (MPA)

Jacksonville State University

www.jsu.edu/mpa

Welcome to the MPA Program at Jax State!

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 Study, 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, 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 a standardized public administration curriculum and interdisciplinary cooperation with other programs, our program prepares students for leadership roles in a variety of public and nonprofit organizations. Utilizing hybrid and online courses, our program provides quality graduate education that stresses the program values of diversity, leadership, professionalism 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:

1.To lead and manage in public governance;

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

2.To participate in and contribute to the policy process;

- A graduate of our program must be able to identify key stakeholders, their positions, coalitions, and the political context.

- 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.
- 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.

3. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

- A graduate of our program will have the ability to develop and exercise intercultural sensitivity with employees and other stakeholders.
- 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 Dean of the Graduate School. From time to time, the Graduate School 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.

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The Structure of the MPA Program

The MPA Components

The MPA degree program consists of two components:

1. Core curriculum required courses (24 credit hours, 8 courses, starting from Fall 2025). The Capstone Project (Fall 2024 catalog) is one of the 8 core courses.
2. The concentration coursework (12 credit hours, 4 courses); and

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 (24 credits):

Required Public Administration Courses		
PA 5100	Foundations of Public Administration	3
PA 5501	Public Policy Process and Analysis	3
PA 5702	Research Methods in Public Administration	3
PA 5504	Leadership and Ethics in the Public Sector	3
PA 5531	HR Management in the Public Sector	3
PA 5532	Budgeting and Finance in the Public Sector	3
PA 5540	Public Organizational Theory	3
PA 5980	Capstone Project in Public Administration	3

Sequence of Enrollment

In order to be prepared for subsequent courses, students must take PA5100 within the first six hours of coursework 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.

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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 6 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 (PAM)
- Criminal Justice (CJ)
- Emergency Management (EM)
- Generalist (GEN)
- Geographic Information Systems and Technology (GIST)
- Political Science (PSC)

A concentration consists of a twelve(12) 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 Capstone Project must be completed to earn the MPA degree. 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 is offered as an additional 3-credit hour option should the student so choose. The MPA Director must approve the internship placement and enrollment. Additional information is available from the 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 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 2024 would read FA2024. 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.
- 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 2025, all degree requirements must be completed by the end of the Fall term in 2031.

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 Graduate School 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 the Graduate School 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 the Graduate School 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 Graduate School. 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 Credits

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 the Graduate School. 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 Dean of the Graduate School.
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 the Graduate School 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 School's 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 School's 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.

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 Advisor within the College of Social and Behavioral Science**.** The MPA Director or Career Advisor 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.

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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.

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MPA Handbook 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 Graduate School, 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.

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