University of South Carolina
MPA Program Handbook

Effective July 2019

Purpose of the Handbook

This Handbook provides students admitted to the Master of Public Administration program with basic information about the requirements for the degree and the content of the program. If, after reading the Handbook, you have unanswered questions regarding any facet of the Program, please discuss them with the Program Coordinator or MPA Director. All MPA faculty are also available to assist students. Please do not hesitate to take advantage of our help. We wish you a successful and rewarding course of study.

Faculty and Staff
MPA Program
Department of Political Science
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
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General Information

Background

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program at the University of South Carolina was initiated in 1968 in response to a growing demand for professionally-trained public administrators at the state and local levels of government. Since its inception, the program has granted more than 1,500 MPA degrees, with recent graduates employed in leadership positions in all types of organizations. Typically, about half of our students are pre-service, while the other half are currently employed by federal, state, and local governments or in the private sector. The MPA program is accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA).

Program Mission

The mission of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program at the University of South Carolina is to provide an education that imparts the managerial and analytical skills necessary for students to ethically and effectively serve the public interest in increasingly diverse societies; and to improve the understanding and practice of public affairs through our research, teaching, and service.

Organization

The MPA Program is part of the Department of Political Science, within the College of Arts and Sciences. It is one of four graduate programs offered by the Department. The Department also offers a professional Master's Degree in International Studies (the M.A.I.S.) as well as the M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science.

The Setting

The University

The University of South Carolina was founded in 1801 and was the first state college to be supported by annual public appropriations. The University has expanded through the years and today is the state's largest public institution of higher learning. The Columbia campus is one of eight campuses in the University of South Carolina system, with over 34,000 students enrolled at the Columbia campus and a total enrollment of over 49,000 students systemwide.

Students enrolled in the MPA Program may rely upon a number of units and resources to enhance their learning experience. The University Library contains millions of volumes, thousands of current periodicals and access to a wide variety of electronic resources and data bases. Comprehensive computer facilities are also available in the Humanities and

Social Sciences Computer Laboratory, which is located in the same building as the MPA Program, Gambrell Hall.

The Community

Columbia is the capital of South Carolina and a focal point of government and non-profit activity in the state. Our location thus affords student's ample opportunity for direct observation and participation in public affairs. The campus is located within blocks of the capitol building, most major state offices, and within easy reach of a variety of regional, county, and city agencies. Columbia also hosts a variety of non-profit organizations that play a critical role in our region and state, and firms that are important in the state's economy.

Admissions

Process

In order to be considered for admittance into the MPA program, prospective students must submit a complete application file. A complete file consists of:

1. An application form and accompanying application fee to the Graduate School at USC;

2. Official transcripts of all previous academic work with degrees posted;

3. Scores on the verbal, quantitative and analytic portions of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE); for students with five years of exemplary full-time professional, managerial service, typically in the public/non-profit sector or related area, and a very good undergraduate GPA, the requirement for the GRE may be waived. Students may request a GRE waiver when the rest of their completed application has been submitted;

4. Two letters of recommendation from persons familiar with the applicant's academic and job performance (at least one of these letters would ordinarily come from a former professor);

5. A resume; and

6. A statement of purpose.

Application materials should be submitted to the Graduate School at the University of South Carolina via the web-based application portal on the Graduate School website.

General Guidelines

All students entering the MPA program must have an undergraduate, baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university. Normal admissions standards include at least a 3.0 overall undergraduate grade point ratio (on a 4.0 scale) and a total of 300

on the general sections (verbal and quantitative) of the Graduate Record Examination. Applicants must have at least two positive letters of recommendation. In addition, applicants must submit a resume describing their past accomplishments and a personal statement (about 500 words) of their professional goals, academic records, and/or professional work experiences, and how these lead to interest and the likelihood of success in the MPA program. Fulfillment of the preceding guidelines does not guarantee acceptance into the MPA program.

Students with lower grade point averages and/or GRE test scores may be accepted into the program under circumstances justifying a conditional admittance. Students admitted under a conditional status must take 9 hours of approved MPA core courses and complete within 12 months. In each of these approved courses, the student must receive a grade of "B" (3.0) or better. The MPA Admissions Committee monitors the performance and makes final decisions about full admittance for all students who are initially admitted under the conditional status. Please be advised that in all cases the University of South Carolina Graduate School's stipulations and requirements for admissions govern the academic departments.

Deadlines

The MPA program admits new students for the fall, spring, and summer semesters. We normally make admission decisions shortly after the application deadline has passed. The deadlines for completed applicant files to be received at USC are:

April 1: Admission for the Summer Semester
April 15: Admission for Fall Semester
November 15: Admission for Spring Semester

If you need further assistance or have questions about the MPA program application process, please contact the MPA Program Student Coordinator or MPA Program Director, whose contact information can be found on the MPA program website.

Dual/Joint Degree Programs

In addition to the regular program, the MPA program participates in three joint programs:

J.D.-MPA Program: A combined degree program with USC's School of Law in which the student pursues both a MPA degree and a law degree. The combined degree program permits the student to acquire both degrees with a possible reduction of twenty-one credit hours from the total requirements of the individual programs. To be eligible, the student must apply to, and be accepted by, both the MPA program and the School of Law.

MSW-MPA Program: A combined degree program with USC's College of Social Work. The total number of academic hours for both degrees is reduced by 12 credits using requirements in one program as electives in the other. To be eligible, students must apply to, and be accepted by, both programs.

MPA-MPH Program: A combined degree program with USC's Arnold School of Public Health. The total number of academic hours for both degrees is reduced by 12 credits using requirements in one program as electives in the other. To be eligible, students must apply to, and be accepted by, both programs.

More information on joint degree programs can be found in the University of South Carolina Graduate Studies Bulletin.

Concentrations

Concentrations allow students to gain expertise and depth in an area of public management or policy without requiring additional credits beyond those required for the MPA degree. We currently have one concentration, with others in developmnet:

Emergency Management and Planning: This concentration is designed to provide or enhance the skills of professionals who serve or wish to serve in the Emergency Management and Planning field. Students learn about disaster planning and mitigation while developing technical skills important in the field, such as GIS mapping. The 9 credits in the EMP concentration, which are offered in the Geography Department, count toward MPA program electives.

More information on concentrations can be found in the University of South Carolina Graduate Studies Bulletin.

Accelerated MPA Program

The accelerated MPA program is designed for USC undergraduates who wish to complete the MPA degree and the BA degree. This program enables students to earn both degrees within approximately 5 years. Initially, a student completes a simple form to begin taking MPA classes while still an undergraduate student. Completion of the MPA degree is accelerated because up to 12 credits can double count toward the BA and MPA degrees. Students should apply for admission to the accelerated program in the spring semester of their junior year and then the regular MPA program in the last semester of their senior year. All other degree requirements are the same for accelerated and regular MPA students.

More information on the accelerated MPA program can be found on the MPA program curriculum page, and the form to apply to the accelerated program (the Accelerated Bachelor's/Graduate Study Plan, G-ABGSP) can be found on the Graduate School "forms" web page.

Transfer Credits

Students who have completed previous graduate course work may be permitted to obtain transfer credit. Anyone wishing to apply for such credit should write to the MPA Director, and include all pertinent information (including transcripts, course syllabi, and catalogue description of the relevant courses).

In order to qualify for transfer, courses must at a minimum satisfy five criteria:

1. The course must be at the graduate level.
2. The course must be directly related to the public administration curriculum.
3. The student must have earned a grade of B or better.
4. The course must not be more than six years old at the time the student graduates from the MPA program.
5. The rules of the Graduate School at USC also apply to any requests for transfer credit. These can be found on the Graduate School web page.

The MPA Curriculum Committee initially determines whether courses are acceptable for transfer credit but the Graduate School has final authority over whether courses will be accepted as transfer credits. Decisions to not accept transfer credits by the MPA Curriculum Committee are final.

Curriculum

A minimum of 39 credit hours (13 courses) are required for the MPA degree. Depending on the student's background, more credits may be required. These hours are distributed as follows:

Possible Prerequisites	6 hours (2 courses; do not count toward 39 credit hours required for MPA degree)
Core Courses	18 hours (6 courses)
Elective Courses	15-18 hours (5-6 courses)
Internship (POLI 779)	3 hours (one course)
Capstone Course (POLI 753)	3 hours (one course)

Prerequisites: At the time of admission, all students' academic files will be evaluated by the MPA Director to determine if prerequisites will be required. Prerequisite courses, if deemed necessary, must be taken at the beginning of the student's program of study. The MPA program requires that entering students have a basic proficiency in Statistics and American Government:

Statistics: Entering students who lack basic skills in statistics (as evidenced by completing an undergraduate course in statistics or quantitative data analysis) are required to enroll in an undergraduate statistics course (e.g. Stat 110), prior to enrolling in POLI 771 (Public Data Analysis). When used to complete a prerequisite requirement, this course cannot be used as an elective and therefore does not count toward the 39 credits required for the program.

American Government: Entering students who have not passed an undergraduate course dealing with the American political process are required to remedy this deficiency before enrolling in POLI 774 (Public Policy Process). To fulfill their prerequisite requirement in American Government, students are encouraged to take POLI 201 or receive a passing score of 70 on the CLEP (College Level Examination Program); however, no graduate credit will be granted for either the use of POLI 201 or a passing score on the CLEP.

Core Courses: All students are required to take the following six core courses:

POLI 770: Perspectives on Public Administration
(3 hours) The study and practice of public administration in the United States.

POLI 771: Public Data Analysis
(3 hours) Problems of gathering and using public data for public administrators and policy analysts. Includes problems of research design and data gathering, interpretation, and use in the analysis of public problems.

POLI 773: Human Resources Administration in Government
(3 hours) Organization, techniques, and theories of personnel management; interpersonal relations in organizations; personnel change and development; changing conditions in the public service.

POLI 774: The Public Policy Process
(3 hours) An examination of the public policy process, including the role of public officials in the process and constraints on its outcomes.

POLI 775: Financial Administration
(3 hours) Organization and techniques of governmental financial management; budgetary theories, intergovernmental financial relations.

POLI 754: Public Accountability and Ethics
(3 hours) An examination of the legal, political, professional, and organizational accountability demands made on administrators; the interplay of these demands with the needs for ethical decision making and integrity.

Internship: A three-credit-hour internship (POLI 779) is required for all students who lack significant administrative experience. Students who have had such experience in the past or who are currently employed in administrative positions may have the requirement waived, as long as they have more than one year of continuous professional, managerial experience. Anyone wishing to waive the internship requirement should address his/her request to the MPA Director. If a student waives the internship, then he/she must take an additional elective to obtain the 39 required credits. The internship requirement is more thoroughly discussed in the section entitled "Internships."

Electives: Students should generally select the fifteen hours (or 18 hours for students not completing an internship) of elective courses from the courses offered in the MPA Program. However, for students in the EMP concentration or students with other particularized interests, electives may be chosen from other programs in the Department of Political Science, other departments, or some combination of these alternatives. Elective courses must be approved by the MPA program director prior to enrollment in the specific course and courses outside of the MPA program will only be approved if they have clear relevance to a student's professional interests. Any courses taken toward fulfilling a concentration can be counted toward the elective requirement.

Capstone Course: All MPA candidates are required to take the following course, preferably during the last semester in the program. Questions should be directed to the MPA Director. The Capstone serves in lieu of a comprehensive exam for the graduate MPA degree and is required of all students.

POLI 753: Capstone Seminar in Public Administration
(3 hours) Prerequisite: 30 credit hours, MPA program enrollment, and permission of the department. This course requires completion of an applied administrative or research project developed by the student working with an external project client. Students may develop a project with their employer or the course instructor can assist in identifying a capstone client.

Additional Graduation Requirements

Grade Point Average: To qualify for graduation, students must have at least a 3.00 grade point average in all courses attempted for graduate credit and in all courses numbered 700 or above. Students who do not maintain a 3.00 grade point average are subject to denial of enrollment privileges. Student files are evaluated each semester in order to determine eligibility for continued enrollment

Selected Topics Courses: Students will not normally be permitted to take more than three hours of POLI 79X − Selected Topics. This limit may be increased to six hours with the written consent of the student's advisor and the MPA Director. In no case will the student be permitted to take more than six hours in Selected Topics or its equivalent.

Advisement

On admission to the program, each student will be advised by the Director of the MPA program. During each semester, the MPA Program Director will establish a time period during which students must be advised on next semester's courses. All students are required to meet, in person or via email, with their advisor, generally the MPA Program Director, each semester to be advised. All students must bring to this meeting and complete an advisement form each semester, which will be signed by the student and advisor. This form can be found on the MPA program "forms" web page.

Students must follow all advisement and registration deadlines so that they are adequately advised (avoiding problems when students go to graduate) and so that there are not problems with registering for courses and so that needed courses are not canceled.

MPA Program Summary

Degree Offered: Master of Public Administration

Program Requirements

Length of Program: 39 hours minimum

Prerequisites (do not count toward 39 hours):
- Statistics (3 hours), if unfulfilled
- American Government (3 hours), if unfulfilled

Required Courses:

Core Courses: 18 hours (six 3-hour courses)
1. (POLI 770) Perspectives on Public Administration
2. (POLI 771) Public Data Analysis
3. (POLI 773) Human Resources Administration in Government
4. (POLI 774) Public Policy Process
5. (POLI 775) Financial Administration
6. (POLI 754) Public Accountability and Ethics

Elective Courses: 15-18 hours

Capstone Course: (POLI 753) Capstone Seminar in Public Administration (3 hours)

Internship: (POLI 779) Mandatory for all students unless granted a waiver on the basis of previous work experience (3 hours)

Internships

All students in the MPA program are required to complete an internship with the exception of students with substantial prior administrative experience who must submit a written request for a waiver of the requirement. The internship is an integral part of the student's program which introduces a student to the professional career to which he/she aspires.

Students have served their internships at every level of government in South Carolina as well as in various federal agencies, in private firms, in various professional associations for public administrators, and in nonprofit organizations. Students have performed a wide range of staff and managerial functions

such as planning, research, program supervision, and information systems development.

The MPA Internship Director (usually the MPA Program Director) assists students in locating internship positions and directs the overall internship activity in the MPA program. Students are required to meet with the Internship Director in the semester prior to the intended start of their internship to define internship needs and develop an internship search strategy.

A student may serve an internship during the summer or during the regular academic year. An internship involves serving at least 300 hours in a professional capacity, with regular supervision by another professional. Internships may also combine summer work and work during the regular academic year. (Other arrangements may be made with the approval of the MPA Director, such as experiences extending beyond one semester, involving fewer hours per week.)

At the end of the internship, the student must submit a paper to the MPA Internship Director describing the duties, evaluating the experience, and relating it to his/her academic studies (the Internship Director will provide this assignment to interns during their internship semester). Three hours of academic credit will be granted for successful completion of an internship. A student must enroll in POLI 779 to receive credit for the internship. The internship will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. The intern's supervisor is also sent a survey requesting feedback on the intern's performance, intended to help the student's professional growth and MPA program assessment.

Students with substantial (at least 1 year, full-time) prior administrative experience in a public affairs organization may petition for a waiver of the internship requirement. This petition requires the completion of an internship waiver form, available on the MPA program website under "forms." This completed form must be accompanied by a statement from the student's employer attesting to the length of employment, describing the work duties, and stipulating whether or not the student's performance was satisfactory. No academic credit is attached to a waiver of the internship requirement, meaning that students waiving the internship requirement must complete an additional elective to meet the 39 credit hour requirement for graduation.

For more information regarding internships, please contact the MPA Director.

Job Placement

The Director of the MPA program, individual faculty, and the University Career Center can assist students in defining their career and employment needs and help develop an employment search strategy. Students are requested to meet with the MPA Director and their advisors at least six months prior to the date of graduation and as needed thereafter to discuss placement possibilities.

The MPA degree has proven to be highly attractive to prospective employers, both on a national level and in South Carolina. Graduates of the MPA program are placed in a variety of positions in government and in private industry. Many students move directly from their internship positions to permanent employment in agency posts. The vast majority of our graduates report that their training in the MPA program was useful in their current positions and promises to be useful for their long-range career objectives.

Graduates of the program hold prominent positions in a variety of state agencies, regional planning commissions, county governments, and municipal governments. MPA Graduates have served as a University President, Executive Director of the South Carolina Budget and Control Board, Executive Director of South Carolina's Worker's Compensation Commission, Director of the State Law Enforcement Division, and Commissioner of the South Carolina Department of Youth Services. MPA graduates have also served as state procurement officers, city managers, and county administrators throughout South Carolina.

Financial Assistance

Assistantships: MPA students are eligible for graduate assistantships through the university when they become available. Graduate assistants receive a stipend and may be eligible for reduced tuition rates. If they are available for MPA students, the MPA admissions committee automatically considers MPA students for Political Science assistantships. Students can also apply for assistantships in other units on campus. Information on assistantships can be found here: http://gradschool.sc.edu/prospective/ paying-assistantships.asp?page=paying.

Internships: The MPA Program coordinates regular internship positions for all interested MPA students. These internships provide valuable administrative experience and possibly offer financial support for limited periods of time. Any MPA student interested in an internship should contact the Director of the Program the semester before they would like the internship to start. Though we do not guarantee paid internships for students, in recent

years many internships have been for pay.

Financial Aid: MPA students have also received financial support from a variety of other sources. The MPA program has been approved by the Veterans Administration for eligible recipients of veterans' educational benefits. Students seeking these types of assistance should contact:

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Financial Aid and Scholarships Office
University of South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina 29208
(803) 777-8134

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Housing

A variety of housing accommodations are available both on campus and in the Columbia community. Students who anticipate that they will need on-campus or off-campus housing can contact the Office of Housing at (803) 777-4283.

Ethical Responsibilities of Students

The Responsibilities of
Members of the Carolina Community
and Students in the MPA Program

As students in a professional degree program, as members of the Carolina Community, and as prospective professionals, your future is full of promise and opportunity. With this comes important responsibilities.

As a student in a professional degree program at the University of South Carolina, and a member of the Carolina Community, you are responsible for adherence to the Honor Code and the Carolina Creed. These principles are explained in the documents published here:

Among the important implications of these principles are the prohibition against plagiarism or the presentation of another's work as though it were your own. Moreover, your work in each course is designed and intended to provide you with accumulating benefits and learning opportunities – it is therefore inappropriate to submit work prepared for one assignment in fulfillment of another assignment. (This does not preclude the possibility that you and your instructor may find it helpful to build your response to a new assignment on the foundation prepared in a previous assignment – in all cases, however, you must provide your instructor with your previous work as well as the new work so that a fair assessment of your new work can be made.)

In the unhappy and unlikely event that a student is found to have violated these responsibilities, the responsibility for determining the appropriate course of action rests entirely with the affected course instructor, the MPA Committee, and the University's Office of Academic Integrity. They will reach their decision and notify those involved as soon as practicably possible, recording their actions as appropriate.