

Graduate Student Handbook for the Master of Public Administration

School of Public Affairs

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
A PREEMINENT RESEARCH UNIVERSITY



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INTRODUCTION

The University of South Florida's Master of Public Administration program is housed in the School of Public Affairs, which is a part of the College of Arts and Sciences. Our NASPAA-accredited program has been operating since 1977 and we serve the public administration education and research needs of our region and the broader community. This handbook supplements [USF's Graduate Catalog](#).

Program's Mission:

The USF Master of Public Administration (MPA) program provides quality education to prepare students for professional positions in public service. The program trains students to use applied managerial skills, enhanced analytical decision-making, and improved capacity to understand governance and policy issues and solve real-world problems. As part of this mission, the MPA program inculcates a sense of public spirit and trains students to acquire the skills and values needed to act in an ethical manner, engage our communities, respect diversity, and to nurture a sense of accountability and responsibility as public servants.

Program's Vision:

The USF MPA program's vision is to be the program of choice in the communities we serve. We aim to inform policy through applied scholarly work, and to maximize engagement with our communities through the use of applied class projects, internships, and the development of mutually beneficial exchanges with practitioners.

Instruction:

In addition to our core Public Administration faculty, the program draws on a rich and diverse pool of seasoned researchers, scholars, and professionals within the School of Public Affairs and from other units at USF, as well as practicing professionals within the wider Tampa Bay region, to deliver interdisciplinary, comparative, and applied knowledge to its students.

PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Master of Public Administration:

The [MPA](#) is a 36-39 credit hour professional degree program that prepares students for careers, or advanced research and academic pursuits, in public administration. Graduates can expect employment in municipal, regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as across the nonprofit and private sectors. Graduates can additionally opt to embark on work leading to a Ph.D., or other advanced degrees, in this field.

Graduate Certificates:

The School of Public Affairs also offers several graduate-level certificate programs, which can be earned concurrently with our MPA degree, except for Public Management. Current MPA students are not eligible to apply for or receive the Graduate Certificate in Public Management (GCPM) given that the curriculum for this program is exactly the same as the curriculum for the MPA degree.

- The *Graduate Certificate in Public Management* benefits those who currently hold positions in governmental management, as well as professionals who administer public contracts and programs. The course of study helps students develop the competencies required for effective public management. More information on the program and curriculum can be found [here](#).
- The *Graduate Certificate in Management of Non-Governmental and Non-Profit Organizations* assists current and future nonprofit administrators, as well as those who aspire to work for NGO's or nonprofit organizations. The course of study helps students develop their skills in leadership and management, financial oversight, fundraising and grantsmanship, and strategic planning issues. More information on the program and curriculum can be found [here](#).
- The *Graduate Certificate in Data Science for Public Administration* prepares public, private, and nonprofit sector professionals who wish to enhance their quantitative and analytical skills. The course of study helps students develop the ability to conduct data analysis, draw inferences and insights, generate and assess solutions, and communicate the results to diverse stakeholders. More information on the program and curriculum can be found [here](#).

Additional graduate certificates offered by other departments, such as in Human Resources, Project Management, and other specializations, may be completed in conjunction with the master's degree with the approval of the MPA Program Director.

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

Acceptance into the MPA program is contingent upon satisfaction of the minimum requirements for entry into USF's Office of Graduate Studies. For more information on these requirements, please consult USF's Office of Admissions [webpage](#).

In addition, the program has [specific requirements](#) that the applicant must meet in order to be considered for admission. Several specific standards are employed to evaluate an applicant's admissibility into the program. These standards include the following:

- Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited University;
- An overall Undergraduate GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale is strongly preferred. Applicants with relevant work experience can apply with a GPA lower than 3.0, but they should include a statement in their letter of intent directly addressing their readiness for graduate school;
- Letter of intent (or statement of purpose) and career goals;
- Resume (or curriculum vitae);
- Two letters of recommendation (minimum);

- Minimum score of 79 on TOEFL, 6.5 on IELTS, or 110 on Duolingo (if applicable); and ^[1]
- Writing sample (if applicable).
- Foreign transcript evaluation services: All foreign transcripts/documents that are not in English must be accompanied by a certified English translation. We also require a course-by-course evaluation, from a foreign transcript evaluation service, to determine your U.S. equivalent GPA utilizing our 4.0 grading scale. The credential evaluation must be submitted directly to the Office of Admissions. For your convenience, [here](#) is a list of several credential evaluation services, under the academic credentials section.

Bachelor's Degree:

Students wishing to gain admittance into the MPA program must have a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited College or University in the U.S., or an equivalent institution abroad. Holders of all undergraduate fields are welcome to apply.

GPA and GRE Scores:

A minimum Undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale is preferred among applicants. Applicants with relevant work experience can apply with a GPA lower than 3.0, but they should include a statement in their letter of intent directly addressing their readiness for graduate school;

The GRE is not required for admissions, but students seeking financial support should be aware that some applications for funding opportunities may require GRE scores.

Letter of Intent:

A letter of intent, also known as a statement of purpose, must be submitted with the online application. The letter of intent must clearly describe the applicant's academic and professional background, as well as articulate their interest in public administration. Applicants should consider this letter as an opportunity to express the specific academic goals they would like to pursue within the MPA program and beyond.

Resume:

Applicants should include an updated resume, also known as a curriculum vitae, with their application, that indicates relevant professional experience.

^[1] USF does not require TOEFL, IELTS, or Duolingo scores from applicants in countries where English is the primary language of instruction in schools. The list containing qualifying countries can be accessed [here](#).

Letters of Recommendation:

A minimum of two letters of recommendation must be submitted online as part of the application packet. Prospective students should solicit letters from sources familiar with their academic/work history and performance. At least one of these references should come from an academic instructor. If you have been out of school for a while and can no longer get a letter from an instructor, you can provide letters from professional references. These, however, should focus on those skills that are likely to translate to your success in graduate school. Ask your references to comment, for example, on your analytical abilities, your communications skills, and your ability to understand complex concepts. In all cases, letters that discuss your qualifications in specific detail are much more helpful than those that include more generic assessments. Letters should be addressed to the MPA Admissions Committee.

International Applicant Requirements:

In addition to the program-specific requirements listed above, international applicants from non-English speaking countries must comply with the following requirements:

- ***English Proficiency: TOEFL/IELTS/Duolingo Scores***
International applicants from non-English speaking countries must provide a minimum TOEFL iBT score of 79, a minimum IELTS score of 6.5, -or- a minimum Duolingo score of 110 taken within two years of the desired term of entry.
- ***English Proficiency: Writing Sample***
International applicants from non-English speaking countries need to submit a writing sample along with their graduate application. The writing sample should demonstrate their ability to analyze information and display their communication skills at a graduate-level.
- ***Foreign Transcript Evaluation Services***
All foreign transcripts and documents that are not in English must be accompanied by a certified English translation. The credential evaluation must be submitted directly to USF's Office of Admissions. A list of several credential evaluation services can be found [here](#).

Late applications may be considered, if space is available and time permits, at the discretion of the MPA Program Director. Admissions decisions are ultimately made by the MPA Admissions Committee on a case-by-case basis. The committee reviews the full application packet to determine the applicant's suitability for graduate study.

The entire application packet is designed to be paperless. An application must be completed online [here](#) and the non-refundable \$30 application fee must be paid once the application is submitted. All documents must be uploaded online by the student as PDF files, and applicants can request their recommenders to submit the letters electronically by supplying their email addresses. Documents can be uploaded as they are received. Once the application is complete, it will be released to the department for review.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Advising:

The MPA Program Director serves as the [advisor](#) of all newly admitted and continuing students in the program. The role of the advisor is to guide the student in selecting appropriate courses each semester and to review each student's progress as graduation approaches.

Students' academic progress is monitored every semester, which allows us to provide appropriate advice and guidance. To ensure the effectiveness of student advising, the Program Director reviews students' academic records and meets with those whose GPA falls below a 3.0 to discuss an appropriate course of action, in order to help improve their academic performance. The Program Director also schedules one-on-one meetings with students to learn their progress in the program, the problems they face, and how best our program can improve student services to enhance program-wide student learning and achievement of programmatic goals. Additionally, the Program Director advises students on the requirements and need for timely completion of internships.

The MPA Program Director must approve all deviations from the standard curriculum, including all course selections and substitutions, and all internships and waivers.

Graduate Assistantships:

The School of Public Affairs offers limited Graduate Assistant positions for full-time students. Please complete an [application](#) online to be considered for one of these highly competitive positions.

Additionally, we urge all students to consult with USF's Office of Graduate Studies to review University-level funding opportunities. For more information, students are advised to contact Graduate Studies by phone at (813) 974-2846, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).


Scholarships, Grants, Work Study, and Loans:

USF's Office of Graduate Studies houses a Scholarship Library that allows students to access information on sources of funding through computerized databases as well as source books. USF's Office of Financial Aid administers the Federal Work Study program as well as several loan programs.

Students interested in loans or work-study should apply as soon as possible each year (after October 1st) for the upcoming academic year, which begins in August. For more information, or to complete an application packet, students are advised to contact Financial Aid by phone at (813) 974-4700, stop by the first floor of Student Services (SVC 1102), or visit their [webpage](#).

Project Assistants:

Project Assistants are students who are hired to assist faculty with grant-funded projects. Students hired as Project Assistants will complete, for example, data analysis, fieldwork, and/or laboratory analysis related to the project. Students may be hired as salaried or on an hourly basis. The rate of pay varies from project to project. Students are selected for these positions



based upon the skills needed for individual projects. Students should discuss their interest in these positions with their advisor.

In addition, several centers on the USF campus sometimes hire graduate students. The Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) and the Florida Center for Community Design and Research (FCCDR) seek students to work on grant-funded projects from time to time in the areas of transportation, land use, and environmental planning. Students may submit applications for employment at these offices by contacting them directly.

Scholarships and Fellowships:

USF offers a number of financial assistance opportunities, especially to minority students. Preference is given to first-time graduate students in underrepresented disciplines. For more information on financial assistance opportunities, please consult USF's Office of Graduate Studies [webpage](#).

Internships:

Students without managerial experience in public service-related fields must complete an internship experience. Faculty may suggest placement sites or circulate notices of open internship positions, but ultimately students are responsible for securing an internship, with the approval of the MPA Program Director. The internship requires students to complete a minimum of 150 hours of work over the course of the semester; some internship placements may require more hours.

International students are eligible to apply for off-campus internship and employment opportunities once they have completed a full academic year (Fall and Spring semester) at USF. Additionally, international students who engage in full-time [Curricular Practical Training](#) (CPT) may be eligible to enroll in less than a full course load.

To be exempt from the internship requirement, students must have 5 or more years of managerial or executive experience in public administration, nonprofit management, or related fields, or have a military background. Students with some professionally relevant work experience, who don't meet the requirements for the internship waiver, will be required to complete a conceptual research report reflecting on their current and prior work experience, and the extent to which that experience relates to the practice of public management. Requests for the internship waiver and research report need to be submitted to the MPA Program Director for approval.

Transfer of Credits:

With the approval of the MPA Program Director, up to 18 credit hours earned under non-degree seeking status, in a graduate certificate, or at another regionally accredited graduate school, may count towards fulfilling the MPA degree requirements. Credits are not transferred automatically; the MPA Program Director will review the course description and syllabus of each course to determine which, if any, will be accepted towards the MPA degree. Students may transfer only graduate-level (5000-7999) structured coursework with a grade of "B" (3.0 GPA) or better, [per](#)

[USF policy](#). Please be aware that, if eligible, only a maximum of 9 credit hours can be applied towards the core course requirements; the other 9 credit hours can be applied towards the elective requirements.

Satisfactory Progress:

Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA (“B” grade average) in all graduate coursework. Failure to do so will result in the student being placed on academic probation. A student may remain on probationary status for no longer than three semesters. Any student who fails to improve their grades thereafter can be dismissed from the program.

Also, students will only be allowed to have a maximum of two (“C”) letter grades in their core courses; (“C+”) letter grades are also allowed, but (“C-”) letter grades are not accepted in a graduate-level program, [per USF policy](#). Students who obtain a third (“C”) letter grade in a core course will be required to repeat said course. In accordance with the University’s policies, students must complete their master’s degree within five years from the initial time of acceptance into the program.

Student Code of Conduct:

USF has a very strict Code of Conduct, which prohibits actions of misconduct, particularly academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty should be taken to include cheating on tests, plagiarism and unlawful “help” on written and other assignments, stealing, buying or referring to an examination before it has been administered, and abating any of the above. Please consult with USF’s Office of Graduate Studies’ documents for a full discussion of [academic policies and procedures](#).

School and Program Communications:

Official communications between the MPA program and its students are carried out through the USF email system. Students are responsible for checking their USF email regularly to ensure that they are receiving program information. All MPA students are also automatically enrolled in the program’s Canvas page. Students should check that site periodically for additional announcements. Our School also uses social media to share information—please follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter \(aka. X\)](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

Core Requirements (24 credit hours):

| | | |
|----------|--|----------------|
| PAD 5700 | Research Methods in Public Administration | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6060 | Public Organizational Theory and Leadership | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6227 | Public Budgeting | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6275 | Political Economy for Public Managers | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6307 | Policy Design and Implementation | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6417 | Human Resources Management | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6703 | Quantitative Analysis in Public Administration | 3 credit hours |
| PAD 6710 | Government Technology for Decision-Making | 3 credit hours |



Internship (3 credit hours, if required):

PAD 6946 Internship in Public Administration* 3 credit hours

**Required for students without five or more years of relevant managerial or executive experience. Students whose internship requirement is waived are not required to complete an additional course in its place.*

Capstone (3 credit hours):

PAD 6056 Practice of Public Management 3 credit hours

Electives (9 credit hours, minimum):

The remaining required coursework—9 credit hours of electives—allows MPA students the opportunity to explore one or more fields of public administration through approved electives within and outside the School of Public Affairs. Three (3) credit hours of electives (1 course) must be taken from the Public Administration or Urban & Regional Planning programs. In some cases, an appropriate class from another department may be approved. Depending on personal interest, students may choose electives in the following areas:

- Public Management
- Nonprofit Administration
- Budgeting and Financial Management
- Public Organizational Management

All non-required PAD and most URP (urban and regional planning) subject courses can be counted as electives towards the MPA degree. Students with specialized interests may consider professionally relevant electives from other departments, with the MPA Program Director's approval. MPA students have found electives in areas such as Emergency Management, Business, Mass Communications, and Public Health, among others.


Graduate-Level Courses:

Students in the MPA program are only allowed to take graduate-level courses (5000-6999). Undergraduate-level courses (1000-4999) will not be accepted towards your degree under any circumstances.

Courses Taken Outside of the University:

In some circumstances, students may be granted permission to take a course at another regionally and NASPAA-accredited graduate program for credit at USF. Permission to take courses at other institutions may be granted if a student can demonstrate a compelling need. For example, a student who is travelling for work or being deployed can make such requests. Credits taken outside of USF cannot exceed the University's limits. These requests must be submitted to the MPA Program Director for approval prior to enrolling in courses outside of USF.

Recommended Curriculum:



Our MPA program does not follow a “cohort” model in which students follow a set order of courses. To accommodate a diverse student population, we assume that students will take between 3 to 9 credit hours each semester, completing the program at a pace that suits their personal circumstances. There are, however, some guidelines we urge all students to follow:

- Several of the core courses teach concepts that serve as key building blocks for subsequent study, and we encourage students to complete these courses as early as possible in the program.
- Each core course is offered at least once per year (half during the Fall semesters and the other half during the Spring semesters). Students should aim to complete all of their core courses as soon as their schedule allows.
- PAD 6060: Public Organizational Theory and Leadership should be taken during the first semester in the program. PAD 5700: Research Methods in Public Administration and PAD 6227: Public Budgeting should also be taken during the first or second semester, if possible.
- PAD 5700: Research Methods in Public Administration must be taken prior to enrolling in PAD 6703: Quantitative Analysis in Public Administration.
- All of the core courses must be completed prior to enrollment in the Capstone course, PAD 6056: Practice of Public Management; this course is to be taken during the student’s final semester in the program.
- The Internship requirement (PAD 6946) also needs to be completed prior to enrollment in the Capstone course, PAD 6056: Practice of Public Management.
- Summer offerings are generally limited and occasionally include core courses. Students continuing their studies over the Summer should consider taking elective courses, and core courses if/when available. Summer is also a good time for fulfilling the internship requirement.

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

There are over 600 registered student organizations at USF. Information about student organizations can be found on USF’s Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement [webpage](#).

There are student organizations that may be of special interest to MPA students specifically:

- **Robert R. Green International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Student Chapter:** The USF ICMA student chapter introduces and integrates students to local government and provides professional, social, and networking opportunities.

- **American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Student Chapter:** The USF ASPA student chapter strives to connect theory and practice by putting an emphasis on value systems such as professionalism, social equity, and code of ethics.
- **Student Planning Organization (SPO):** The SPO provides professional support, advising, and networking opportunities to MPA students interested in urban and regional planning.

Enrolled MPA students can log onto [BullsConnect](#), using their USF NetID and password, to join a student organization.

Community Engagement:

MPA students have numerous opportunities to engage with local governments throughout the Tampa Bay region. Students may network by attending public meetings attended by elected and appointed officials:

- [Hillsborough County Government](#)
- [City of Tampa](#)
- [City of Temple Terrace](#)
- [Pinellas County Government](#)
- [City of St. Petersburg](#)

USF's Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP) offers service learning and applied research opportunities for MPA students seeking relevant, real-world experience in community engagement. For more information, students are advised to contact OCEP by phone at (813) 974-4829, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Mentor a Public Administration Student Program:

This mentorship program is conducted each academic year. All MPA students are eligible to participate. The program matches MPA students with local administrators or nonprofit managers who provide shadowing opportunities, career advice, resume critiques, and valuable opportunities to network. A call for student participants goes out each Fall semester and the program runs through the Spring term. All MPA students are highly encouraged to participate.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND SERVICES

International Students:

International Services at USF World is the advising office for international students. Prospective or current MPA students can access information regarding employment, career planning, immigration compliance, and their visa status. For more information, students are advised to contact USF's International Services by phone at (813) 974-5102, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Writing Center:

USF's Writing Studio is a free resource for undergraduate and graduate students. At the writing studio, a trained writing consultant will work individually with you on anything you're writing (in or out of class), at any point in the writing process—from brainstorming to editing.

Appointments are recommended, but not required. For more information, or to make an appointment, students are advised to contact the Writing Studio by phone at (813) 974-8293, by [email](#), stop by the second floor of the Library (LIB 233), or visit their [webpage](#).

Subject Librarians:

Research librarians are available to MPA students through USF's Library services. The assigned subject research librarian offers expert advice in finding resources for course-relevant research projects. To get in contact with the research librarian subject expert, click [here](#).

- To view library subject guides for starting points in public administration research topics, click [here](#).
- To view online guides to learning the library, including navigating their webpage, accessing and searching databases, and much more, click [here](#).
- To view the library's instructional tutorial videos, click [here](#).

Student Services:

USF's Office of Student Success (formerly known as Student Affairs) coordinates education and support services for enrolled students. For more information on seeking career services, housing resources, veteran services, counseling, victim's assistance and advocacy, and student health services, please consult the Student Success [webpage](#).

Student Accessibility Services (SAS):

USF's Office of Student Accessibility Services (formerly known as Student with Disabilities Services) has numerous resources for MPA students with documented disabilities. For more information, students are advised to contact SAS by phone at (813) 974-4309, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Important Resources for USF Students:

- Canvas Navigation [Student Guides](#)
- Canvas Navigation [Video Tutorials](#)
- [Tampa Campus Student Life](#)
- [Campus Resources](#)
- [USF Bookstore](#)
- [Housing and Dining](#)
- [Technology Resources](#)
- [Financial Resources](#)
- [Health and Safety](#)
- [Internships and Student Employment](#)
- [Activities and Programs](#)
- [Arts and Culture](#)

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- [Athletics and Fitness](#)
 - [Graduation Preparation](#)

STUDENT-TO-STUDENT MESSAGE

The purpose of this handbook is to help you succeed in your graduate studies and to prepare you for a career in public administration. Our MPA students have offered some of their own recommendations for success in the program:

- Become active in one of the School of Public Affairs' student organizations;
- Monitor your Canvas and USF email accounts frequently;
- Get to know the faculty and staff members, and consult with them often;
- Attend regional and national conferences if/when possible; and
- Take advantage of our mentorship and internship opportunities.