University of North Carolina Wilmington
Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program

MPA Student Handbook:
Policies & Procedures

Our Mission:

Advancing effective public governance in southeastern North Carolina and beyond through the education of future leaders, relevant research, and a commitment to service that strengthens communities.
Welcome from the MPA Director

May 2012

On behalf of our faculty and alumni, I want to thank you for choosing to study public administration at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW). Our Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. During our first decade, we experienced a number of important accomplishments. One of the most important was getting accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) in July 2006, our first year of eligibility. Our enrollments have expanded along with the quality of our students. We have a diverse faculty who are national experts in their respective research areas. We are also fortunate to have several practitioners who bring their professional experience to the classroom. We have an active and engaged Community Advisory Board consisting of a wide range of community leaders. In 2010, we hosted the Southeastern Conference on Public Administration (SECoPA) in Wilmington, which brought more than 300 public administration researchers, students, and professionals to Wilmington. We have an Academy of Strategic Management that has trained over 100 public administration professionals in our region. The conclusion of our 10th year also marked the graduation of our 200th alumni. We are very proud of these public servants and all they continue to accomplish in the public and nonprofit sectors in Southeastern North Carolina and elsewhere around the U.S.

As we embark on the next decade, there is much to look forward to as we continue to work to expand our enrollments, grow course offerings, partner with other academic programs like the Master of Coastal and Ocean Policy, expand our alumni, train public administration professionals through the Academy of Strategic Management and QENO, and continue to continue other regional engagement efforts that help strengthen our communities. We are also fortunate to have recently hired Dr. Jeffrey Brudney as the Betty and Dan Cameron Family Distinguished Professor of Innovation in the Nonprofit Sector, the largest endowed professorship at UNCW. Clearly, there is much to look forward to over the next decade. We are glad you decided to join us on this journey.

Sincerely,

Mark T. Imperial, Ph.D.
MPA Director & Associate Professor
MPA Faculty

Program Administration

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Lecturers from the Community

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Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) enrolled its first students in Fall 2001. The initial champion for the creation of the MPA program was Raymond H. Dawson, a longtime leader in the UNC Campus System noted for his commitment to public service and teaching excellence. In 1997, Tom Barth was hired by what was then the Department of Political Science to lead the effort to develop the MPA Program. The effort enjoyed strong support from UNCW. Evidence of this support was hiring Milan Dluhy in 2000 as the Chair of the Department of Political Science to provide additional leadership and support for the MPA program’s development. Mark Imperial was then hired in 2001 to join Stephen Meinhold and Lloyd Jones (now retired) as part of the MPA faculty.

Enrollments have grown from about 39 students in the first year to around 80 students today. Our student body is a healthy mix of traditional full-time students (pre-service) as well as mid-career professionals (in-service) with courses scheduled to ensure that the program remains accessible to these part-time students. To further accommodate the needs of both full- and part-time students, the MPA program offers summer courses as well. The core curriculum is designed to conform to the accreditation standards promulgated by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). We were very proud of the fact that we were accredited by NASPAA in July 2006, our first year of eligibility. The curriculum consists of a collection of required core classes that develop student learning competencies. Students then build additional expertise in an area of professional specialization by completing the requirements associated with one of our concentrations in Public Management, Policy Analysis, Urban and Regional Policy and Planning, Nonprofit Management, Coastal Planning and Management, Environmental Policy and Management, or Marine Policy. There are now more than 200 alumni, many of whom work in local governments, nonprofits, and other government agencies throughout Southeastern North Carolina and beyond.

Our faculty has grown along with student enrollments through the addition of MPA faculty members Laurie Paarlberg and John Brennan. The latest addition to the MPA faculty is Dr. Jeffrey Brudney, who joined the MPA faculty recently as the inaugural Betty and Dan Cameron Family Distinguished Professor of Innovation in the Nonprofit Sector. Jennifer Horan, Dan Masters, and Paige Tan from the Department of Public and International affairs, Chris Dumas and Peter Schuhmann from Economics and Finance, Stephanie Smith from the School of Nursing, and Bruce McKinney from Communication Studies are other full-time UNCW faculty who teach in the MPA program. We are very proud of our UNCW faculty because they are all leading researchers in their respective areas of expertise who regularly publish articles in leading journals, book chapters, government reports, and books. The MPA faculty all have professional experience working in public and nonprofit organizations that can be shared with students as well. We are also very fortunate to have several distinguished professionals from the community and UNCW who teach public administration courses on a regular basis. This provides MPA students with an opportunity to learn from community leaders involved in public governance.
Regional Engagement and Learning Extends Beyond the Classroom

Since our inception, the MPA program embraced regional engagement and fostered opportunities for our students and alumni to network with community leaders and professionals throughout our region. The MPA program has always had strong support from its Community Advisory Board, which consists of community leaders, professionals, and alumni. The Board meets on a semi-annual basis and its members provide support in various ways such as serving as guest lecturers, sponsoring internships, mentoring students, sponsoring MPA events, attending capstone presentations, and attending social events.

The MPA program established the Southeastern North Carolina Chapter of the American Society of Public Administration (SENCASPA) and continues to provide financial and organizational support. This organization provides numerous opportunities for students and alumni to interact with professionals throughout the region. The MPA Program in conjunction with SENCASPA also participates in ASPA’s public service recognition week. The MPA program is actively involved with the North Carolina City/County Manager’s Association (NCCCMMA) and hosts an alumni breakfast at their annual meeting. The MPA Program’s Graduate Student Association (MPA-GSA) was formed in October 2007. It has grown considerably in recent years and now provides regular professional development, volunteer, networking, and social opportunities for MPA Students and maintains the MPA Program’s newsletter. In 2010, the MPA Program hosted the Southeastern Conference on Public Administration (SECoPA) in Wilmington, which brought more than 300 public administration researchers, students, and professionals to Wilmington.

The MPA program continues to partner with other organizations in the region. In 2004, the MPA program joined with various governmental, nongovernmental, and private sector partners to form the Lower Cape Fear Stewardship Development Coalition. The focus of this 14-member 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization is to encourage and recognize outstanding development that protect, conserve, improve, and provide awareness of our natural resources in the Lower Cape Fear region. Faculty from the MPA program also helped create an innovative partnership called QENO or Quality Enhancement for Nonprofit Organizations in 2005 to provide training and support for nonprofit organizations throughout the region. In 2010 – 2011, QENO delivered 2,884 total participant hours of training via 33 professional development events and provided more than 186 coaching hours.

Over the years, faculty members have worked with public and nonprofit officials to address a wide range of community problems. Notable examples of projects include:

- Surveying beachgoers for Wrightsville Beach (2004) to examine their behavior, views of services provided to beachgoers, and economic impacts;
- Evaluating the Burnt Mill Creek Outreach and Demonstration Project for the City of Wilmington (2005) to determine its effectiveness;
- Surveying all property owners in the Town of St. James (2008) in order to help them decide on building a $3.5 million community center;
- Examining the economic impact of the Community in Schools (CIS) program in
Brunswick County (2005);
- Developing Carolina Beach’s Harbor Management Plan (2007).
- Developing Land Use Plans for the towns of Wrightsville Beach (2006), Holden Beach (2009), and Ocean Isle Beach (2009) pursuant to the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA),
- Prepared analyses of the nonprofit sector in eastern and southeastern North Carolina for philanthropic leaders (2009-2010);
- Surveyed local nonprofit organizations to analyze the management capacity of nonprofit organization in southeastern North Carolina (2010-2011);
- Providing support and advice to the New Hanover County Blue Ribbon Commission on the Prevention of Youth Violence;

Projects like these provide opportunities for MPA students to participate directly in the projects while developing professional skills and getting opportunities to network with public and nonprofit officials in our region. Students in the Capstone Seminar and other MPA courses also provide services to local officials and nonprofits. For example, students have authored numerous successful grant proposals, developed Wrightsville Beach’s NPDES Phase II Stormwater Permit (2003), surveyed beachgoers on the North end of Carolina Beach (2004), conducted a needs assessment for the United Way, conducted organizational assessments for more than 18 organizations in southeastern North Carolina; and analyzed the impact of military growth on various dimensions of community life (e.g., education, philanthropic giving, and agricultural land use) (2011) as part of class projects. MPA students are also required to complete an internship or practicum. The internship provides an important professional development opportunity for students by allowing our students to work with organizations in southeastern North Carolina and beyond to advance effective public governance and strengthen communities.

The MPA Program continues to provide training to public and nonprofit officials throughout the region. The two most notable efforts are the MPA Program’s Academy for Strategic Management, which has taught more than 100 public administration professionals within our region and QENO that provides a wide range of training opportunities for nonprofit professionals. From time to time, MPA faculty also provide other types of training, facilitate meetings of local officials, and provide advice to public and nonprofit managers seeking to advance effective governance and strengthen their communities.

Much has been accomplished in a relatively short time and there clearly are many ways for students to develop their learning competencies by getting involved in the wide range of opportunities that exist outside the classroom.

Organization of the MPA Program

The MPA program is located within the Department of Public and International Affairs. The MPA Program Director (i.e., graduate coordinator), Mark T. Imperial, provides overall leadership and administration of the program and reports to the Chair of the Department, Earl Sheridan. The MPA Coordinator, Angela Douglas, assists in these duties and is an integral part of the overall leadership and administration of the program. For simplicity, this *Handbook* simply refers to MPA Director and students can direct their questions to either individual.
Additional support for the administration of the MPA Program is provided by Donna Treolo, PIA’s administrative assistant, and the graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who staff PIA’s teaching lab during the afternoons from Monday to Thursday.

**Organization of the Handbook**

The remainder of the *MPA Student Handbook* describes the MPA program and its policies and procedures by describing the:

- Mission Statement;
- Admissions policies;
- Degree requirements;
- Internship Requirements;
- Student Learning Portfolios
- Capstone Experience
- Thesis Requirements;
- Academic policies and regulations;
- Professional development;
- General policies and procedures;
- Graduate assistants; and,
- Scholarships and awards.

Students are also encouraged to consult the *Graduate Catalog* for additional policies and requirements associated with the successful completion of a MPA degree.

All incoming MPA students are required to read the *MPA Student Handbook* within 30 days of the start of class and attest to the fact that they understand and agree to abide by the policies contained in this manual. The form will be distributed electronically with the *Handbook* to incoming students after the orientation program.
Mission Statement

The MPA program’s curriculum conforms to the accreditation standards of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration’s (NASPAA’s). These standards are “mission-driven” and recognize that the curriculum in each MPA Program should reflect its mission. Accordingly, our mission shapes our curriculum and focuses on the needs of public and nonprofit managers located in Southeastern NC, however, we recognize that some graduates will seek employment at the federal, state, and local level outside UNCW’s service region. Our original mission statement was developed in 2002. However, as a result of the strategic planning process that we embarked on in 2009 that was triggered by NASPAA’s new standards and the fact that our program was nearly 10 years old, we decided to revisit our mission statement, curriculum, program outcomes, and student learning outcomes. During this process, we received extensive input from our current students, alumni, and Community Advisory Board. One product of this process was the formulation of a new mission statement adopted in March 2012:

Advancing effective public governance in southeastern North Carolina and beyond through the education of future leaders, relevant research, and a commitment to service that strengthens communities. (Adopted 3/28/12)

While the new mission statement is considerably shorter and more concise, the changes do not reflect any fundamental change to our mission. Rather, it provides a much clearer statement of our mission based on our experiences over the last 11 years and better reflects our program outcomes and the student learning competencies we want to achieve. The new mission also reflects a deliberate use of terminology designed to reflect and reiterate the core public service values embraced by our program and that we hope to instill in our students.

One focus of our mission is “advancing effective public governance”. Use of the phrase “public governance” reflects the values of inclusiveness, shared power and responsibility, public deliberation, consideration of different values and perspectives, and the importance of being a good steward with public resources. It also reflects the desire that our students can work effectively in policy and management settings and in participative processes that involve diverse public and private sector actors. Accordingly, it is important to expose our students to diverse views in the classroom and for our students to interact with professionals inside and outside the classroom to expose our students to individuals who can model desired public service values.

Our use of the term “future leader” is also deliberate. We have always focused on serving the educational needs of both pre-service students and in-service professionals who seek to advance their careers. We also want our students, both pre-service and in-service, to aspire to be leaders in their communities. This requires developing critical thinking skills and aspiring to do the “right” thing rather than just do things right. Finally, our use of the phrase “commitment to service that strengthens communities” reflects our desire to develop students who not only want to be effective managers, but who are committed to strengthening the broad array of community institutions through their service. It also reflects the commitment on the part of our MPA faculty to strengthen our surrounding community through efforts including:
- Academic and applied research that helps advance our understanding of effective public governance and stronger communities and institutions;
- Modeling public service values through service to our communities and professions;
- Utilizing class service projects, capstone projects, internships, and other fellowships to benefit and strengthen community organizations in various ways;
- Encouraging our students to volunteer and get involved in community programs to advance their commitment to public service and share these values with others in our community;
- Training current and future community leaders through the Academy of Strategic Management and QENO to build capacity in public and nonprofit organizations throughout our region;
- Grant and contract work that helps community organizations develop more effective policies and programs that allows them to be better stewards of our community resources; and,
- Supporting other organizations like QENO, SENCASPA, and the Stewardship Development Coalition whose efforts strengthen our communities as well.

Thus, while our new mission statement is considerably shorter in terms of its wording, it more accurately reflects the public service values that have guided our program since its inception.

In 2009, NASPAA modified its accreditation standards to place added emphasis on student learning competencies in order to ensure that all MPA students graduating from a NASPAA accredited program can demonstrate the ability:

- To lead and manage in public governance;
- To participate in and contribute to the policy process;
- To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions;
- To articulate and apply a public values perspective; and,
- To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

NASPAA then required each MPA program to develop specific learning competencies associated with each of the five core competencies. Rather than attempt to map our current curriculum into the new NASPAA standards, the MPA faculty used a strategic planning process initiated in June 2009 which used a series of periodic retreats to review and reflect on our curriculum, the progress we have made as a program, and to determine what our core program outcomes and learning competencies should consist of. Along the way, we sought feedback from our students, alumni, and Community Advisory Board. The process was deliberately slow so that the MPA faculty collectively could process the new standards and carefully review and consider the learning competencies. In June 2011, we finalized and adopted the 10 student learning competencies (referred to in our Assessment Plan as student learning outcomes) summarized in Table 1, all of which are embodied in our required curriculum. Once formalized, we developed and implemented our new Assessment Plan, which now guides our assessment
Table 1: Student Learning Competencies

**To lead and manage in public governance by:**
- Demonstrating an ability to lead, motivate, and manage a diverse workplace-within and across organizations.
- Demonstrating an understanding the impact of changing market and political conditions on organizational practice and resource streams.

**To participate in and contribute to the policy process by:**
- Demonstrating an ability to analyze policy alternatives and use policy instruments and management tools to address social problems.
- Demonstrating an ability to participate in the policy process, communicate policy alternatives, and work effectively with government and nonprofit institutions, and community stakeholders.

**To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions by:**
- Demonstrating an ability to define, frame, think critically about and analyze important problems.
- Demonstrating an ability to utilize analytical tools to analyze, present, and interpret data, including appropriate design, statistical, and evaluative techniques for both organizational decision making and policy decisions.
- Demonstrating an ability to apply management theories and tools for organizational decision-making including but not limited to strategic planning, performance measurement, group decision making, forecasting, program evaluation, and cost-benefit analysis.

**To articulate and apply a public values perspective by:**
- Demonstrating an ability to identify ethical dilemmas and to then systematically apply ethical principles to identify appropriate courses of action.

**To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry by:**
- Demonstrating an ability to communicate effectively and professionally to diverse audiences.
- Demonstrating an understanding of how to work effectively in diverse groups.

Efforts pursuant to both NASPAA and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). At the conclusion of the strategic planning process we determined that no change to the structure of our required curriculum was required at this time. Instead, we opted to wait and review more of the new assessment data related to the student learning competencies before finalizing any changes to the core curriculum. The assessment data are collected using a variety of assessment tools that rely on a set of rubrics to assess indicators associated with a student’s ability to achieve the student learning competencies. The MPA faculty meet to review and discuss these data on a periodic basis. Some of these assessment tools (e.g., organizational assessment in the Internship Report, Student Learning Portfolios, and Capstone Experience) are described in subsequent sections of this Handbook. Students interested in learning more about the MPA Program’s assessment of our program outcomes and student learning competencies are advised to consult the MPA Program Assessment Plan.
Admissions Policies

The MPA program admits two different types of students. Non-degree seeking students are allowed to take up to 3 courses (9 credit hours) before having to be formally admitted as a degree seeking student. This option is primarily for students who want to just take a couple of courses and have no interest in obtaining a degree from UNCW. Most students apply as degree seeking students and have no limitation on the number of courses that they can take. In some cases, a degree seeking student may be conditionally admitted to the program and the stipulations vary based upon the admission committee’s concerns. Most courses in the MPA program are open to degree-seeking students from other graduate degree and certificate programs with the exception of students from the liberal studies program who require approval from the MPA Director to take MPA courses. Depending on enrollments and course content, there may be instances where some courses are limited to only MPA students.

Deadlines

The MPA program has two admissions deadlines. Students seeking admission in the fall must have their application submitted by June 15th. Students seeking admission in the spring semester must have their applications submitted by December 1st. However, students are encouraged to submit their applications much earlier in the application process. The MPA program practices rolling admissions and begins reviewing applications March 1st for Fall and October 1st for Spring admission. The MPA program does not admit students in the summer.

Application Materials

In order to apply for admission, students must complete the online application available on the Graduate School’s website. Students are encouraged to submit the application as soon as possible. If the GRE or GMAT has not been taken, students can type in the test date instead of their self-reported score. The application can be submitted even though all of the recommendations, transcripts, and GRE/GMAT scores have not been received. In addition to the online application information, degree seeking students are required to submit the following materials:

- Official transcripts from all undergraduate and graduate institutions;
- Three letters of recommendation;
- Official GRE or GMAT scores;
- Personal statement that describes the reasons for obtaining an MPA degree and any other pertinent information that may shed light on your application;
- A current resume with information about your work history;
- A professional or academic writing sample (or excerpt of a writing sample) (Optional requirement);
- International students must submit a minimum TOEFL score of 79 on the Internet-based test (TOEFL iBT) is required for admission to all programs, or IELTS minimum score of 6.5 or 7.0 to be eligible for a teaching assistantship; and,
If there are academic transcripts from foreign universities they may have to be submitted for review by third-party verification services. Students in this situation should apply early in the application process to allow sufficient time for this review process.

There are no exceptions to these application requirements. Non-degree seeking students have to submit identical application materials with the lone exception being that they do not have to submit official GRE or GMAT scores.

**Admissions Decisions**

Applications are screened initially by the MPA Director. Students that meet or exceed standards set by the admissions committee are approved. The remaining applications are reviewed by the admissions committee. There are no minimum standards for admission in terms of a minimum GPA or GRE score. Instead, we evaluate the entire portfolio of information provided by the applicant. While many of our students are pre-service students who recently completed an undergraduate degree, others may have completed their undergraduate degrees over ten years ago. As a result, the admissions committee examines the whole portfolio of information in the application.

That said, the typical average GPA of an incoming class is about a 3.3 and average GRE scores are typically around 1000 (based on the old scoring system). However, there is a lot of variance and students with scores much greater and lower than these averages are admitted or conditionally admitted. When either the GRE or GPA is significantly lower than the average, but other aspects of the application portfolio demonstrate a capacity to complete graduate coursework and a commitment to public service, an applicant may be conditionally admitted to the MPA program. Various conditions and limitations on the ability to take courses are associated with conditional admission. Faculty will then review the overall performance of the student after their first semester to make a final decision on whether to grant full admission.
Degree Requirements

The MPA degree requires 39 – 45 credit hours (depending on whether the internship is waived or students choose the thesis option instead of the capstone requirement) consisting of:

- A core curriculum that focuses on developing and demonstrating student learning competencies (18 credit hours);
- An applied skill-based elective (3 credit hours);
- An approved concentration (12 credit hours);
- An internship or practicum designed to link theory with practice (3 credit hours); and,
- Electives offered inside or outside of the MPA program that advance a student’s professional objectives (6 – 9 credit hours).

Students can transfer up to 6 credit hours from other universities to satisfy some degree requirements provided that they are at the graduate level, come from a degree program at an accredited university, and are related to the study of public administration or public policy. Students should work with their advisor and the MPA Director to complete the necessary paperwork to transfer these credits.

The flexibility in the curriculum lets students customize their course of study while developing and enhancing student learning competencies. Given the flexibility in the curriculum, it is incumbent for students to reflect on their professional development needs in order to select courses that develop and refine the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to advance your professional goals. Your academic advisor should help you think through these choices in order to help you get the most out of our program. Students should also consult the current version of the Graduate Catalog for a current listing of the specific course requirements.

Advising

All incoming students are required to attend the orientation session. The orientation provides an opportunity to meet students and faculty. The MPA Director will explain the curriculum requirements described in this Handbook, provide general advising on the course of study for the first year, and meet individually with students after the general session to ensure that their particular questions and needs are addressed prior to the start of classes. During the orientation, students will be assigned to their academic advisor. Advising assignments are based on the concentrations. If a student starts the program as “undecided”, then the default concentration is Public Management. If a student changes concentrations, then the advisor is typically reassigned as well.

The academic advisor is one of the most important resources available to MPA students. You should meet with and consult your advisor frequently. You should also learn how to use the degree-audit function and bring copies when you meet with your advisor to verify that you are completing required courses. You should also consult with your advisor prior to registering for courses (bring a completed curriculum planner), registering for a directed independent study
(DIS), determining whether to apply for an internship waiver, transferring courses from another institution, completing your graduation application, and applying for permission to enroll in the Capstone Seminar. Many of these forms require your advisor’s approval prior to their submission to the MPA Director. Your academic advisor also provides general career counseling and guidance, provides advice and ideas on potential internships, and can direct you to student support services available on and off campus.

**Full- or Part-Time Study**

The MPA program accommodates full- and part-time students. The recommended course of study for a full-time student is 3 courses (9 credits) in the fall and 3 courses (9 credits) in the spring semester. Six credits in the summer with one of those being the internship. During the second year, students take 3 courses (9 credits) in the fall and 3 courses (9 credits) in the spring semester with one of these courses being PLS 595, the Capstone Seminar in Public Administration. Typically, full-time students do not work more than 20 hours a week in a part-time job or as a GTA or research assistant.

Part-time students generally work full time or have family commitments that prevent full-time study and choose between two options. First, take 1 course (3 credits) a semester and 1 course (3 credits) in the summer. This typically takes 4 to 5 years to complete the program. Second, take 2 courses (6 credits) a semester and 1 or 2 courses (3 – 6 credits) during the summer. This can take 2 ½ to 3 years to complete the program.

Various factors influence choices about how many courses to take in a given semester:

- What are your professional commitments and job responsibilities?
- Do professional commitments make it difficult to work on school assignments and meet with group members outside of the classroom?
- What is your home situation (e.g., married, small children, caring for an aging relative, etc.)?
- Does your job have a busy season that will vary your ability to complete school work?
- Have you been out of school for a while?
- Are there aspects about particular courses that are more difficult or will require more of your time than others?

You should discuss your situation with your advisor. When in doubt, err on the side of taking fewer courses in order to commit yourself fully to your courses. This advice is particularly true in terms of summer courses because they are shorter, more intense, and by definition have most course requirements due at their conclusion.
Core courses (18 Credit Hours)

The content and assignments associated with the core classes in the MPA program are designed to develop and enhance the learning competencies that all graduates should possess. The MPA core courses are:

- PLS 500 - Managing Public and Nonprofit Organizations
- PLS 501 - Quantitative Methods
- PLS 505 - Policy Analysis
- PLS 502 - Public Human Resources Development and Administration
- PLS 503 - Public Budgeting and Finance Administration
- PLS 595 - Capstone Seminar in Public Administration

Students should complete PLS 500, PLS 501, and PLS 505 first because many of our skill-based electives, concentration classes, and electives assume students have completed this coursework. PLS 502 and PLS 503 and the skill-based elective requirement should also be completed prior to registering for PLS 595 because this final course assumes that students have completed all of the core requirements. Given the importance of these courses, students must demonstrate a minimum level of competency in these courses by receiving a B or better or you have to retake the courses. Students are advised to complete all of this coursework with the exception of PLS 595 before registering for the internship/practicum.

Capstone Seminar

The Capstone Seminar in Public Administration is a final integrative learning experience where key concepts from the curriculum are integrated and applied to contemporary issues in public administration. Therefore, students should register for the Capstone Seminar in their final semester of coursework. In order to register for the course, students have to complete the permission to enroll in the capstone course form, which is signed by your advisor and approved by the MPA director.

Students complete an applied research project with a written report and present their findings to the faculty, students, and the community during the reading day prior to the start of final exams. All MPA students are required to attend the presentation on the reading day.

The specific content of the capstone seminar project varies each semester depending on the instructors. The project is typically assigned by the instructor of record and students work individually or as a team depending on the semester. The capstone seminar project constitutes the final written and oral exam for each MPA student. Accordingly, students must demonstrate a minimum level of competency in the course by receiving a B or better or must retake the course. The course also serves as a primary tool for assessing the learning competencies. Students are required to submit an electronic version of their final capstone paper in a form suitable for posting on the MPA program’s website. It must be submitted as a single PDF file to the MPA Director. A subsequent section of this Handbook describes the capstone experience in greater detail.
Applied Skill-based Electives (3 Credit Hours)

Students are also required to take one applied skill-based elective. This requirement is intended to further the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students need to achieve the professional objectives associated with each concentration. While students are required to take at least one applied skill-based elective, students may take additional courses from the approved list as other electives. In some instances, specific courses from the list may be required for a specific concentration. Students should consult with their advisors when selecting the course used to fulfill this requirement and consult the current Graduate Catalog for a listing of applied skill-based electives.

Concentrations (12 Credit Hours)

All students are required to pursue a concentrated area of study in Public Management (12 credits), Public Policy Analysis (12 Credits), Urban and Regional Policy and Planning (12 credits), Nonprofit Management (12 credits), Coastal Planning and Management (12 credits), Environmental Policy and Management (12 credits), or Marine Policy (12 credits). Undecided students are assigned to Public Management as the default concentration. If students have other professional objectives, please consult with the MPA director to determine which concentration has the flexibility needed to achieve your career objectives.

Public Management

The concentration in public management is designed for students seeking careers as analysts, planners, planning directors, town managers, and state level managers and administrators. Students are exposed to broad issues and training in the areas of strategic management, planning, and intergovernmental and inter-organizational relations. This is the broadest curriculum in the program and those who are undecided with respect to their concentration often choose a concentration in Public Management.

All students pursuing a concentration in public management must complete the following requirements:

- PLS 517 - Strategic Planning and Management for Public and Non-Profit Organizations
- PLS 542 - Managing Inter-organizational Relations

These courses expose students to the basic theories and principles of management that are essential in navigating the often times complicated relationships encountered in the administration of local government. Students further their study of public management by taking six credit hours of approved electives (See the current Graduate Catalog for a listing of these courses) and select one or more skill-based electives. This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them to various public management problems. Students in the Public Management Concentration are also expected to:
Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, and think critically about key issues encountered in the administration of local government and the various stakeholders it encounters;

Demonstrate an ability to utilize different theories and decision tools to identify and analyze management and governance problems;

Demonstrate an ability to communicate the results of this analysis to public, private, and nonprofit sector actors, as well as to individual citizens.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.

**Public Policy Analysis**

The concentration in public policy analysis is designed for students who seek careers as policy analysts in public and nonprofit organizations. Students in this concentration pursue positions as budget analysts, policy analysts, regulators, program managers, consultants in public and nonprofit organizations as well as private organizations.

All students pursuing a concentration in public policy analysis must complete the following two requirements:

- PLS 506 - Program Evaluation
- PLS 541 - Public Economics and Cost Benefit Analysis

The required courses in this concentration are analytical and methodological in nature and provide students with general skills needed to analyze policies and programs in different settings. Students combine this coursework with a skill-based elective that further their analytical skills and concentration electives that allow them an opportunity to apply these skills to address specific policy problems (See the current *Graduate Catalog* for a listing of these courses). This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them in situations to analyze public policy problems. Students in the Public Policy Analysis Concentration are also expected to:

- Demonstrate an ability to utilize analytical tools to analyze, present, and interpret data in order to frame policy problems and make decisions;
- Demonstrate an understanding of economic concepts used to analyze policy problems and make decisions;
- Demonstrate a familiarity with the methodology used to evaluate the impacts of policies and programs.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.
Urban and Regional Policy and Planning

The concentration in urban and regional policy and planning is designed for students who are interested in a range of issues and problems confronting urban communities in southeastern North Carolina related to sprawl, land use, sustainability, economic development, housing, transportation, and other social problems. Students typically seek careers as planners, planning directors, analysts, and town managers in urban communities, primarily at the local level of government. Some students are also interested in working in nonprofit organizations that address land use and urban policy issues.

All students pursuing a concentration in urban and regional policy and planning must complete the following requirements:

- PLS 513 - Regional Planning Politics and Policy
- PLS 527 - Planning Theory and Planning Law

These courses expose students to the basic principles of planning and the legal issues associated with regulating land use in urban communities. Students are also exposed to the politics of various land use issues and urban problems confronting southeastern North Carolina. Students further their study of urban and regional policy and planning issues by taking six credit hours of approved electives (See the current Graduate Catalog for a listing of these courses) and select one or more skill-based electives that refine their analytical and professional skills to work as planners in public and nonprofit organizations. This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them to urban and regional policy problems. Students in the Urban and Regional Policy and Planning Concentration are also expected to:

- Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, and think critically about urban land use problems and their societal significance;
- Demonstrate an ability to utilize different theories and decision tools to identify and analyze policy alternatives that address urban and regional policy problems;
- Demonstrate an ability to communicate the results of this analysis to address urban and regional policy problems in a manner that is accurate, clear, concise, and persuasive while also being tailored to the audience’s expertise and needs.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.

Nonprofit Management

The concentration in nonprofit management is designed for students who seek careers in the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit organizations increasingly play an important role in partnership with government and for-profit companies in delivering public services in a variety of fields including health and human services, arts and culture, and the environment. Students in this concentration often pursue positions as nonprofit organization managers, program directors, fund development specialists, marketing and communications specialists, and private consultants.
All students pursuing a concentration in nonprofit management must complete the following requirements:

- PLS 530 - Management Practices in Nonprofit Organizations
- PLS 531 - Resource Development in Nonprofit Organizations
- PLS 533 - Nonprofits, Society and Public Policy

The focus of the required courses is helping students understand the role that nonprofits play in public governance and the unique management issues facing nonprofit leaders. Through their concentration coursework students learn about the governance and regulatory structure of nonprofit organizations and are introduced to strategic decision making tools that are essential to effective leadership. In addition nonprofit concentration students will explore the unique resource structure of the nonprofit sector including the development and management of earned income, donations and volunteers.

Students further their study of nonprofit management by taking 3 credit hours of approved electives (See the current Graduate Catalog for a listing of these courses) and select one or more skill-based electives. This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them in the context of nonprofit management. Students in the Nonprofit Management Concentration are also expected to:

- Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, and think critically about the relationship between nonprofit organizations and their unique roles as private partners in public governance;
- Demonstrate an ability to utilize different strategic decision making tools to identify and analyze management challenges necessary to pursue organizational goals and develop strategies to develop and manage necessary resources;
- Demonstrate an ability to effectively communicate organizational issues to a diverse set of organizational stakeholders, in a manner that is accurate, clear, concise, and persuasive while also being tailored to varied audiences’ expertise and needs.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.

**Coastal Planning and Management**

This concentration is designed for students who seek careers as planners, planning directors, and town managers in coastal communities where protection of beaches, wetlands, water quality, and other natural resources has to be balanced against the needs of economic development and property rights to manage coastal resources in a sustainable manner. This often creates a variety of problems related to public access to beaches and waterways, erosion, water quality degradation, protection of water dependent uses, user conflicts, and hazard mitigation. Some students also work in federal or state agencies addressing these issues from a planning or regulatory standpoint or in nonprofit organizations focused on advocacy or education. Students have also pursued careers in hazard mitigation and emergency management. The courses in this concentration are interdisciplinary in nature and are typically populated by students from other
masters degree programs (e.g., environmental studies, marine science, marine biology, etc.).

Students pursuing a concentration in coastal planning and management must complete the following requirements:

- PLS 521 - Foundations of Coastal and Environmental Management
- PLS 527 - Planning Theory and Planning Law

These courses expose students to the basic principles of planning and the legal issues associated with regulating land and water uses in coastal communities. Students are also exposed to the particular legal framework that influences coastal management in the U.S. (e.g., the Coastal Zone Management Act, Clean Water Act) and in NC (i.e., Coastal Area Management Act). Students further their study of coastal management by taking six credit hours of approved electives (See the current Graduate Catalog for a listing of these courses) and select one or more skill-based electives. This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them to coastal management problems. Students in the Coastal Planning and Management Concentration are also expected to:

- Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, and think critically about coastal problems and their societal significance;
- Demonstrate an ability to utilize different theories and decision tools to identify and analyze policy alternatives that address coastal problems;
- Demonstrate an ability to communicate the results of this analysis of coastal problems in a manner that is accurate, clear, concise, and persuasive while also being tailored to the audience’s expertise and needs.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.

**Environmental Policy and Management**

This concentration is designed for students who seek careers that involve the analysis of environmental policy and management issues. Students in this concentration pursue positions as environmental planners in local governments, environmental policy analysts, regulators, or program managers in federal or state environmental agencies. Students also pursue positions in environmental advocacy or educational organizations. Students also work in the private sector in positions that involve environmental regulatory compliance, hazardous waste management, or land development. The courses in this concentration are interdisciplinary in nature and are typically populated by students from other masters degree programs (e.g., environmental studies, marine science, marine biology, etc.).

All students pursuing a concentration in environmental policy and management must complete the following requirements:
- PLS 543 - Environmental Policy Analysis and one of the following:
  - EVS 540 - Foundations of Environmental Management; or
  - EVS 570 - Advanced Environmental Law and Policy; or
  - EVS 564 - Natural Resource Policy

The focus of the required courses is helping students appreciate how science, values, and politics interact to influence the development and implementation of environmental policy. Students also gain an appreciation of the complexity of issues, problems and challenges associated with environmental problems. Students are also exposed to the framework of institutions associated with the governance of environmental management problems. Students further their study of environmental policy and management by taking six credit hours of approved electives (See the current [Graduate Catalog](#) for a listing of these courses) and select one or more skill-based electives. This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them to coastal management problems. Students in the Environmental Policy and Management Concentration are also expected to:

- Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, and think critically about environmental problems and their societal significance;
- Demonstrate an ability to utilize different theories and decision tools to identify and analyze policy alternatives that address environmental problems;
- Demonstrate an ability to communicate the results of this analysis of environmental problems in a manner that is accurate, clear, concise, and persuasive while also being tailored to the audience’s expertise and needs.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.

**Marine Policy**

The marine policy concentration is offered in partnership with the Master of Science in Marine Science (MMS) program in the Center for Marine Studies (CMS). Students from the MMS and MPA programs take the same required concentration courses. MPA students then take at least one marine science course focused on applied policy issues and one additional marine policy related course. The courses in this concentration are interdisciplinary in nature and are typically populated by students from other masters degree programs (e.g., environmental studies, marine science, marine biology, etc.). Given the required science course, MPA students in this concentration often have an undergraduate degree in the physical or biological sciences or an applied area of scientific study (e.g., environmental science, marine science, etc.). Students typically have career interests that involve working in regulatory programs or in fisheries management.

All students pursuing a concentration in marine policy must complete the following requirements:
- MPA Student Handbook Degree Requirements -

- PLS 543 - Environmental Policy Analysis and,
- PLS 544 - Resource Economics or
- ECN 525 - Environmental Economics

The focus of the required courses is helping students appreciate how science, values, and politics interact to influence the development and implementation of marine policy. Students also gain an appreciation of the complexity of issues, problems and challenges associated with marine policy problems. Students also learn about how economic concepts are used to evaluate and manage marine resources. Students then further their study of marine policy by taking three credit hours of an approved elective that are based in the marine sciences and three credit hours of an approved elective that are related to marine policy (See the current Graduate Catalog for a listing of these courses). This coursework allows students to develop and enhance selected learning competencies by applying them to coastal management problems. Students in the Environmental Policy and Management Concentration are also expected to:

- Demonstrate an ability to define, frame, and think critically about marine problems and their societal significance;
- Demonstrate an ability to utilize different theories and decision tools to identify and analyze policy alternatives that address marine policy problems;
- Demonstrate an ability to communicate the results of this analysis of marine policy problems in a manner that is accurate, clear, concise, and persuasive while also being tailored to the audience’s expertise and needs.

Students in this concentration should ensure that their elective coursework focuses on developing and enhancing these and other MPA Program learning competencies.

**Electives (6 Credit Hours)**

Students generally have to complete an additional 6 credits of electives in order to fulfill their degree requirements. Students have the following options: take additional classes offered as applied skill-based electives; take classes offered as concentration classes; take classes listed as electives; take approved electives offered by other departments or universities. Students should consult with their advisor and the MPA Director when planning their program of study and selecting their electives. Students should select electives based on their professional objectives and their need to further develop one or more learning competencies.

**Internship (3 Credit Hours)**

Students must complete a 3 credit internship or practicum unless the requirement is waived by the director of the MPA program. All students must have their internship placement approved by the MPA director or their designee (i.e., the internship coordinator) and their academic advisor. A practicum is only allowed in place of an internship when the student’s professional responsibilities or work requirements make it difficult or impossible to complete an internship. A practicum consists of an applied research project examining a management or policy issue that is either in the student’s work place or it is completed for another organization.
A waiver to the internship requirement is only granted when the student can demonstrate a minimum of five years of significant management or policy-related professional experience or completes a comparable experience that the MPA director determines will be a suitable replacement for the requirement. Requests for a waiver must be made in writing by completing the internship waiver form and be approved by the student’s advisor and the MPA director. If the internship requirement is waived, the student is only required to complete 39 credit hours to graduate. Students who receive a waiver may elect to take PLS 598 as an elective for 3 credit hours if the student’s advisor and MPA director determine it will enhance their professional development.

The specific requirements for registering for and completing an internship are described in more detail in a subsequent section of this Handbook.

Thesis Option

Virtually all students chose to complete the 42 credit option (39 credits if the internship is waived). However, in rare situations a student may want to consider pursuing a 45 credit thesis option. Situations where it might be an appropriate option are when a student plans to continue on to a Ph.D. program or when a student is completing the MPA degree in conjunction with another masters degree at UNCW that requires a thesis. Students pursuing this option must comply with the following general requirements:

- Create a Thesis Committee consisting of a chairperson and two additional members of the Graduate Faculty. At least two members of the committee including the chairperson must be from the Department of Public and International Affairs. This committee will oversee the student’s thesis. Students are advised to create this faculty committee no later than the beginning of their third semester of enrollment.
- Prepare and defend a thesis proposal following departmental guidelines.
- Prepare and defend a thesis that is acceptable to the individual’s thesis committee.
- Complete at least 6 hours of PLS 599 - Thesis in Public Administration
- Students pursuing this option will complete 45 hours of graduate credit, three hours more than students who do not pursue this option. Students are not required to take PLS 595 - Capstone Seminar in Public Administration but may choose to do so as an elective. However, students must complete 3 hours of the internship or practicum requirement unless they receive a waiver. If the student receives a waiver, their credit hour requirement for the thesis option is reduced to 42 hours (three more than it would be normally). They are also allowed to take up to 3 credit hours of PLS 598 as an elective, which would count towards their 42 credit hour requirement.

These requirements are described in more detail in a subsequent section of the Handbook.
Directed Independent Studies (DIS)

A Directed Independent Study (DIS) provides students with an opportunity to complete a concentrated study of a particular topic that is not offered as a course option at UNCW. In order to complete a DIS, the student must find a graduate faculty member who is willing to supervise the DIS. The exact content and requirements associated with completing a DIS are negotiated between a student and the supervising faculty member, however, it is generally a workload that is equivalent to or exceeds that of a typical graduate level course. In order to register for a DIS, the supervising faculty member must complete the graduate DIS form and submit it for approval by the MPA Director. Students should be advised that they are limited to a maximum of 6 credits of a DIS.

Transfer Credits and Online Courses from Other Universities

MPA students may transfer up to 6 credits of graduate coursework from another accredited university and have these credits count towards the MPA degree requirements. When special circumstances warrant, students may petition the Graduate School to transfer 3 additional credit hours. Each such petition must be accompanied by a statement of endorsement from the MPA Director and appropriate dean. Graduate courses taken while the student was an undergraduate are not transferable unless the student had prior written approval from the Dean of the Graduate School at UNCW.

This policy gives students the flexibility of transferring in graduate coursework completed prior to admission to UNCW. It also allows students to take graduate courses (traditional or online) at other universities that may advance their professional objectives. In addition, there are a limited number of online courses available through UNC Online Academic Services that can also be taken that do not count as transfer credits.

Grades earned on transferred work must be equivalent to B or better. Transfer credit will be accepted by the Graduate School only upon recommendation of the MPA Director. The Graduate School must have an official transcript showing the satisfactory completion of courses offered for transfer credit. The courses must have been taken within the allowed time limits for the degree.

Study Abroad

MPA students can also incorporate a study abroad into their course of study. There are a variety of options available. The Department of Public and International Affairs (PIA’s) and other departments on campus (e.g., Environmental Studies) may offer graduate level study abroad opportunities that benefit MPA students with particular professional interests. These include a traditional course with a study abroad component (e.g., during spring break or in the summer following a spring course) or an intensive course taught abroad. The MPA program also has an established relationship with Zeppelin University in Germany. Classes are taught in English and are similar in nature to the courses offered at UNCW. Students choosing this option would generally travel to Germany in the Fall semester of their second year in the MPA.
program. Students from Zeppelin University attend classes in the MPA program as well. Students can also complete their internship abroad or utilize other types of study abroad opportunities as well. Students with these interests are advised to consult with PIA’s study abroad coordinator as early in their course of study as possible.

Graduate Certificates

Some MPA students choose to complete a post-graduate certificate in conjunction with the MPA degree (e.g., Geographic Information Systems, Environmental Studies, Conflict Management and Resolution, etc.). If a student chooses this option, there is some flexibility to count courses towards both the MPA degree and the graduate certificate provided that the requirements of both programs are satisfied. Accordingly, while most post-graduate certificate programs are about 18 credits, they can usually be completed in conjunction with the MPA degree by taking additional courses. The exact number of additional courses depends on the requirements of the certificate program. Students pursuing this option are advised to consult with the MPA Director and the graduate coordinator for the certificate program to ensure the timely completion of the MPA degree and the post-graduate certificate.

Graduation Application & Graduation Ceremonies

Each MPA student is responsible for completing an application for graduation. The application deadline is due the semester before the intended graduation date. Students planning to graduate in May have to submit their graduation applications by November 15th. Students seeking to graduate in the summer or December must submit their graduation applications by April 15th. Students are advised to check the UNCW website for more information on the application deadlines and requirements. Failure to adhere to these requirements may post-pone your ability to graduate and requires paying additional fees.

Your participation in the UNCW commencement ceremony is a meaningful and symbolic way for you and your family to celebrate this significant accomplishment. The commencement activities involve both a formal UNCW ceremony and a smaller departmental ceremony. For May graduation, the MPA program hosts a separate graduation ceremony to recognize all of the December, May, and July graduates for each academic year. Graduates are expected to wear their academic regalia (which can be rented) to these ceremonies.

Graduate students must complete all degree requirements before being eligible to participate in a graduation ceremony. Graduate students who have completed all degree requirements for July graduation, may participate in the December ceremony and their names will be listed in the December commencement program; graduate students who have completed all degree requirements for December graduation, may participate in the December ceremony and their names will be listed in the December commencement program; graduate students who have completed all degree requirements for May graduation, may participate during the May ceremony and their names will be listed in the May commencement program. A graduate student may participate only in the graduation ceremony in the term in which they graduate.
Diplomas are mailed from the Office of the Registrar to the graduate's permanent address within eight weeks of Commencement. Review your permanent address on SeaNet or in the Office of the Registrar and correct if necessary. Graduates will not receive their transcripts or diploma if there is a balance on their student account. Students should review their E-bill account before graduation to ensure you will receive your diploma or transcripts.

**Degree Time Limits**

Each MPA student has five calendar years to complete your degree. The period begins with the student’s first term of work after formal admission to a degree–granting program. Work completed as a non–degree student does not initiate the five–year period for completing a degree program. Courses taken more than five calendar years prior to the admission of a student into a degree program at UNCW normally are not accepted for credit toward fulfilling the requirements of the student’s degree program. In some cases, however, with approval of the student’s advisory committee and department/unit chair, a student may petition the Graduate School to accept for credit work that is more than five years old.

When extenuating circumstances warrant, an extension of the time limit for completing a graduate program may be granted to a student upon his or her petition to the Graduate School. Such petitions must include an explanation and the endorsement of the student’s advisory committee and academic unit’s chair or dean.

**Religious Observance Policy**

In accordance with NC SL 2010-211, you are entitled to two excused absences for religious observances per academic year. You must inform me in writing the first week of class if you will be missing any classes due to religious observance and using one of the two permissible absences for the academic year. In addition, please inform the Registrar the first week of class who will then confirm your intentions to miss class with the impacted course instructors. Any absence for religious purposes will be considered unexcused unless you submit the request in writing the first week to either me and the Registrar.
Internship Requirements

Internships are an important mechanism for professional development. It also provides students with a way to develop and demonstrate student learning competencies in a professional setting. Accordingly, the internship should be taken after completing the core of PLS 500, PLS 501, PLS 505, PLS 502, and PLS 503. Given its importance, it is only waived in situations where an incoming student has 5 or more years of significant management/policy related experience or the student completes a comparable experience that the MPA director determines will be a suitable replacement. A practicum is allowed in place of an internship when the student’s professional responsibilities and work obligations make it difficult or impossible to complete an internship. In both instances, practicum students as well as those receiving an internship waiver are still required to complete the organizational assessment required later in this section of the Handbook.

This section of the Handbook describes the requirements for satisfying the MPA program’s internship/practicum requirement. These requirements are designed to create meaningful internship experience for students and host agencies. They are also designed in accordance with the guidelines established by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Students are advised to read this section of the Handbook carefully and to be sure to comply with all of the requirements needed to satisfy the internship requirement.

Objectives & Purpose

At its core, the internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skill development in a professional setting. In the MPA Program, the internship is a learning experience that serves several objectives and purposes. One of the main objectives is to provide students with a chance to develop and enhance learning competencies by applying them in a professional setting. The internship also provides an opportunity to observe and work directly with diverse community leaders involved in public governance. In some cases, the internship provides an opportunity to participate in or to contribute to the policy process. In many cases, students have the opportunity to work in governmental and nongovernmental organizations in a capacity where they can analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and help make decisions about important societal problems and strengthen communities. It provides an opportunity for students to work with and observe professionals who share a commitment to public service. For many students, it also provides a chance to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry. Thus, students get the opportunity to work in a real organization to apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities from their MPA coursework.

An internship also provides a means for younger students to get some public or nonprofit sector experience to make them more marketable when they graduate. They can also provide an important means of networking and developing contacts that may assist in a subsequent job search. Conversely, older students with significant job experience may find that an internship...
helps with career transitions. More importantly, in both cases the internship can be a path to a
job. Since our inception in 2001, numerous interns have been offered jobs with the organizations
where they served as interns. Thus, it is critical that students work hard during their internship to
impress their supervisors.

A successful internship experience depends on finding a meaningful placement. During
the search process, it is important for students to think about what they want to get out of the
experience. It is important for you to communicate your goals and objectives to your internship
supervisor and that they are available as a resource during your experience. A successful
internship also requires a bit of assertiveness and a willingness to volunteer for tasks and
assignments. If you are passive, you may miss out on important opportunities for professional
development during your experience. Similarly, if you are experiencing difficulties or problems
during the internship it is important to communicate these concerns to the MPA program’s
internship coordinator so we can work to resolve the issues.

Finally, while the internship is designed to primarily serve as a learning experience, the
intern often makes a significant impact on their host organization. Interns have useful skills that
are valued by their host organization. They can help their hosts attract new resources by writing
grant proposals. They can also bring new ideas or perspectives on problems to organizations that
may help improve quality of life in southeastern NC. Never lose sight of the fact that you are
there to make a difference and that you have the opportunity to apply your learning competencies
in a manner that can strengthen our community.

At the same time, it is important to approach the experience with humility and recognize
that many of your co-workers have significantly more work experience. Thus, interns need to fit
in and adapt to your host organization’s culture. You should also try to learn from the diverse
values and perspectives you will encounter. Finally, it is important to recognize that you are
representing UNCW and the MPA program. It is important that you work hard, make a good
impression, and act professionally.

What Counts as an Internship Experience?

The internship experience can be full- or part-time, and can be paid or unpaid. Learning
objectives should be discussed with your immediate supervisor prior to initiating the internship.
Reflection is another integral part of the experience. These characteristics are what help
distinguish an internship from some other volunteer position or job. There are a variety of
professional experiences that serve as an internship. However, to ensure it is educational,
UNCW requires all internships, whether traditional or conducted remotely or virtually, to satisfy
the following criteria:

- The experience must be the extension of the classroom: a learning experience that
provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply
to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee
would perform;
- The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings;
- The experience has a defined beginning and end and a job description with desired
qualifications;

- Prior to beginning the internship, there are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student’s academic coursework. At the end of the internship, there is an established process for reflection on the learning objectives established earlier;
- There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of experience;
- There is routine feedback by the experienced supervisor;
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.

Paid or unpaid experiences that satisfy these and other requirements described in this section of the Handbook qualify as an internship. See the discussion in the following sections for additional requirements.

Are You Eligible for an Internship Waiver?

Students that have 5 years of significant management/policy related experience are eligible to have the internship/practicum experience waived. The internship may also be waived provided that:

- The student completes over 300 hours as a graduate assistant (not a graduate teaching assistant) working for UNCW in a capacity that has job responsibilities similar to an internship/practicum with a governmental or nongovernmental organization.
- The student receives a fellowship to work for a government/nonprofit organization in a professional capacity that is similar to an internship.
- The student works on a grant or contract that involves professional experiences that are similar in nature to working as an intern in a governmental or nongovernmental organization (e.g., developing a land use plan, conducting a program evaluation, etc.).
- The student is accepted to a post-graduate fellowship program (e.g., city management training program, Presidential Management Intern, Sea Grant Fellowship, etc.) that will provide a comparable internship/practicum experience after graduation.

To apply for an internship waiver, a student must complete the internship waiver form and attach a resume with any other necessary documentation to demonstrate eligibility. The form is first approved by the student’s advisor and then by the MPA director. When approved, the student must then complete the organizational assessment requirement described later in this section in a manner that conforms to the requirements in Table 3 for the waiver to take effect.

If the internship requirement is waived, the student is only required to complete 39 credit hours to graduate (42 credit hours if pursuing the thesis option). Students who receive a waiver may elect to take PLS 598 as an elective for 3 credit hours if the student’s advisor and MPA director determine it will enhance their professional development.
How Do You Find an Internship Placement?

The MPA Program does not assign students to host agencies. We encourage host agencies to advertise their internship opportunities on our email distribution list and have students apply using a competitive process. This gives the agency the ability to find the individual they feel is best suited for a position. It reminds students that internships involve a serious commitment. Students get a chance to demonstrate that they can present themselves professionally (e.g., cover letters, resumes, job interviews, etc.). Students may also have to undergo background checks, drug screenings, testing, and other types of requirements associated with the hiring process in public and nonprofit organizations as well.

Ideally, the internship is completed during the summer between years 1 and 2 or during the last year in the MPA program. Given the unpredictability of budgets, the economy, and other factors, obtaining an internship may require a long lead time, particularly if students are seeking an internship outside our service region. Accordingly, it is never too early to start looking for a desirable placement. You should discuss your internship goals and potential placement options with your academic advisor early in your studies to help plan your course of study. The MPA Program’s internship coordinator is another excellent resource to help you find an appropriate placement. Students are advised to be assertive and take advantage of networking opportunities like MPA program Community Advisory Board meetings, SENCASPA luncheons, and other events with MPA alumni and community professionals to network and find possible internship placements.

There are many options for satisfying your internship requirements. As indicated in Table 2, MPA students have completed internships in a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the public and nonprofit sector. They have worked locally as well as in elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad.

All known internship opportunities are posted on the MPA list server so students are advised to review these postings carefully and to follow the application requirements carefully. Application windows are often short and students should be sure to meet applicable deadlines. While finding an internship is primarily the student’s responsibility, if you encounter difficulty please feel free to contact your academic advisor or the MPA Program’s internship coordinator for assistance.
Table 2: Examples of MPA Student Internship Placements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Agencies</th>
<th>Army Corps of Engineer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Agencies</td>
<td>NOAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Agencies</td>
<td>NMFS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Agencies</td>
<td>U.S. Marine Corps, Camp Lejeune</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Agencies</td>
<td>U.S. State Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Agencies</td>
<td>White House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Agencies</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of North Carolina</td>
<td>DENR</td>
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<tr>
<td>State of North Carolina</td>
<td>NC Lt. Governor</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Departments</td>
<td>New Hanover County</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Departments</td>
<td>Pender County</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Departments</td>
<td>Caswell County</td>
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<tr>
<td>City/Town Departments</td>
<td>Wilmington</td>
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<tr>
<td>City/Town Departments</td>
<td>Leland</td>
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<tr>
<td>City/Town Departments</td>
<td>Oak Island</td>
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<td>Holden Beach</td>
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<td>City/Town Departments</td>
<td>Elizabethtown</td>
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<td>Planning Departments</td>
<td>Burgaw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Organizations</td>
<td>Cape Fear Council of Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Organizations</td>
<td>WAVE Transit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>American Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Americans for Tax Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Triangle Land Conservancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>United Way</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Cape Fear Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Creative Wilmington</td>
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<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Greater Wilmington Arts &amp; Cultural Alliance</td>
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<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Hospice</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Wilmington Downtown, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Wilmington Symphony Orchestra</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>NC Coastal Land Trust</td>
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<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Good Shepherd House</td>
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<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>WHQR Public Radio</td>
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<tr>
<td>State/Local Nonprofit Organizations</td>
<td>Amigos International</td>
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<td>Human Resource Departments</td>
<td>UNCW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resource Departments</td>
<td>New Hanover Regional Medical Center</td>
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<td>Human Resource Departments</td>
<td>General Electric</td>
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<td>PPD</td>
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<td>Human Resource Departments</td>
<td>Private sector head hunting firms</td>
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<td>Environmental Health and Safety</td>
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<td>Alumni Relations</td>
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<td>UNCW</td>
<td>QENO</td>
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<td>UNCW</td>
<td>Office of International Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Placements</td>
<td>United Kingdom, India, Africa</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What Type of Internship Should You Look For?

Students have a number of options available in terms of completing their internships including the type of organization, the nature of the internship, the type of experiences, and the professional development opportunities available. Students should be sure to discuss the options and relative merits of a possible internship placement with your academic advisor and the internship coordinator so you get the most out of your opportunity.

One issue that many students confront is whether the internship is paid or unpaid. Students are advised to seek a paid internship whenever practicable and the prevailing wage is typically between $10 and $15 an hour and travel allowances to commute to placements outside our local area are not uncommon. Paid internships are preferred because organizations often have a vested interest in getting more out of the internship when they are investing their own financial resources. Obviously, this is not always possible and in some cases the most beneficial experience may be voluntary. When students agree to a nonpaid internship, they should ensure that their supervisor is committed to providing a beneficial experience.

The other issue is the nature of the job duties and responsibilities. Students should seek internships that provide opportunities to learn from their supervisors and participate in activities that advance their learning and professional development. Since the internship is limited in duration, it is particularly important that students get the most out of their experience. In general, students are advised to look for internships that allow them to work with community leaders and offer some combination of the following opportunities:

**Rotational Model**

In the rotational model, the intern spends time in different organizational sub-units in order to learn how the organization operates and the different sub-units related to the overall mission. During each rotation, the intern may work on tasks as a contributor to an ongoing project or may be assigned to a small project that can be completed during the length of the rotation. The intern may also shadow employees or supervisors as well to observe how leaders make decisions to address organizational problems.

**Project-Based Model**

In the project-based model, and intern is assigned to a broader task or project that will be their main contribution during the internship. Students should seek opportunities that allow them to start and finish a discreet project during their internship in order to add this work product to their professional portfolio. When utilizing this option, students are advised to seek opportunities to shadow their supervisors in order to better understand how their project(s) relate to the broader responsibilities of the sub-unit and the larger organizations.
Job-Shadowing Model

In the job shadowing model, students secure an internship that allows the intern to shadow a chief executive or senior manager for an extended period of time. The intern may also be given some specific small projects to do directly for senior leadership. This model provides the intern with an opportunity to witness how leaders and managers define problems, make decisions, respond to crises, and navigate the political environment both inside and outside the organization. It can also be extremely beneficial when a mentoring relationship develops with the chief executive or senior manager because it can lead to excellent opportunities for professional development.

How Do You Register for an Internship or Practicum?

There is no way for students to register for the internship (PLS 598) in SeaNet. Once a student has secured their internship placement, they should contact the internship coordinator in order to complete the paperwork necessary to register for the course. This requires completing two forms in conjunction with your host agency and direct supervisor:

- **Permission to enroll form**: This form must be completed and submitted to the internship coordinator. It is important to clearly indicate how the internship will be monitored and supervised by the host organization. The faculty supervisor will supervise your work through periodic meetings and evaluate your work through a journal, internship report, and two evaluation forms.

- **Request for Approval of Agency form**: This form must be filled out in conjunction with the host organization. You should identify the direct supervisor in the host organization (be sure to attach their resume) and the organizational sub-unit that you will be working in (if applicable) and what it does. You need to describe in some detail the key job responsibilities, projects, or activities associated with the internship. If there is a specific job description or job add, that should be attached to this form as well.

Since the start and end dates for many internships fail to coincide with UNCW’s academic calendar, there necessarily is some flexibility in terms of when students register for an internship. A good rule of thumb is that the student should accumulate a sizable portion of the required contact hours during the semester (or summer) when they are registered. In all cases, this paperwork should be submitted as soon as the placement has been secured to ensure that your placement is approved by the graduate school prior to starting work.

There is no paperwork required to register for the practicum (PLS 594). Instead, students register for the practicum in SeaNet. However, students must have the approval of the internship coordinator and MPA Director in order to register for a practicum. If students register for the practicum without the requisite approval, they will be dropped from the course.
Internship Requirements

A 3 credit internship requires contact hours with the host agency that are equivalent to working a minimum of 20 hours a week for 15 weeks or 300 hours. A 6-credit internship is the equivalent to working 20 hours a week for 30 weeks or a minimum of 600 hours. The job duties and professional experiences during these contact hours will vary based on the work assigned by your supervisor. Similarly, the “end” date of an internship may vary. In some cases, the internship is for a fixed period (i.e., 300 hours, 6 months, or 1 year) or there is only a limited amount of funding and the internship expires with the funding. In other cases, there may be no end date and the student is effectively hired as a part-time worker in the host organization. Thus, it is not unusual for students to confront the question of when the internship “ends” for grading purposes. There are two basic options if the internship continues beyond the 300-hour requirement. One is to submit the required materials once the 300 hour requirement is satisfied and then continue working. In some cases, it makes more sense to continue working and finish the paperwork when the internship or project is completed, even if that requires more than the 300-hour minimum requirement. Either option is acceptable provided that it has been approved by the internship coordinator and that the 1 year requirement for converting an incomplete is not violated.

In addition to the contact hour requirement, successfully completing the internship requires satisfying the following additional requirements:

Journal

All students are required to keep a journal during their internship. The journal should document the contact hours, the activities associated with the internship, and provide reflection that links their professional experiences to course content and the MPA program’s five sets of learning competencies. There is no minimum journal length but 1 – 2 pages per week is typical. Students are encouraged to take the journal requirement seriously because it will facilitate the preparation of the internship report. Students registering for the practicum keep their journal based on their current job experiences as well as their experiences working on their applied project.

There is no required format. Instead, students are encouraged to keep their journal in a format that encourages reflection. Some students keep a handwritten journal, others keep them electronically on spreadsheet or word processing software, and a few students have created blogs to document their experiences. The journal can also be personal and confidential. While it must be shared with the internship coordinator, it can also be returned to ensure that the writings remain confidential.

Internship Report

The purpose of the internship report is to document the internship experience in a manner that is descriptive, critical, introspective, and reflective. It is also a chance for students to apply theories and concepts they have learned in their core classes to examine the organization where their internship occurred. Thus, students should put effort into their internship report and take
the time to fully reflect on their experiences and provide a detailed explanation of the following:

- **Description of the host organization**: This section should describe the organization, its mission, how the organizational sub-units work together, the organizational chart, the principle inter-organizational relationships, and where the organization and your sub-unit get their resources.

- **Summary of internship activities**: This section should describe in detail the nature of the internship. Be sure to describe your job responsibilities (include a job description), the projects you worked, the nature of your contribution to these projects, and include examples of work products. You also need to describe to whom you and the organizational subunit were accountable and for what results.

- **Organizational assessment**: This section should assess the management and performance of the organization and the subunit where you worked. You should use examples and other data to support your criticisms and recommendations. Your assessment should describe how the organization monitors and measures the performance of individuals, organizations, teams, and networks. Be sure your assessment critiques the leadership and management of the organization. If you worked in teams, critique their performance. Be sure to provide recommendations for improvements where necessary.

- **Reflection on experience**: This section should reflect on your experiences, observations, and the lessons learned. In this section be sure to reflect on: opportunities to lead, motivate, or manage a diverse workplace; opportunities to observe or manage organizational changes; opportunities to analyze policy alternatives and the policy instruments used to address societal problems; opportunities you had to participate in the policy process; conflicts that emerged and how they were resolved; ethical dilemmas that you or your co-workers were exposed to; and, the extent to which the experience allowed you opportunities to develop your oral and written communication skills and their importance. After reviewing these specific areas, students can include any other reflections and lessons learned.

- **Appendices**: Please include copies or hyperlinks to work products (or examples) produced during the internships that make a contribution to your professional portfolio.

- **Electronic submission**: The internship report must be submitted in electronic form as a single PDF file to be archived for the MPA files. If you do not know how to do this, one of the GTAs in the lab can provide assistance.

Given the variability in internship placements, the differing nature of the internship activities, and the complexity of sponsors, there are no set page limits. However, the overall structure of the Internship Report must be consistent with Table 3. The format should be 12 point font, single-spaced, with 1 inch margins. It should have a running header and footer and be professional in nature. The internship report should look professional (e.g., cover, page numbers, running header/footer, page breaks, embedded graphics, etc.) and be well written. Students are advised to take the report seriously to avoid having to revise it.
Table 3: Required Contents of the Internship Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Elements</th>
<th>Be sure to include:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cover &amp; Format</td>
<td>▪ Title ▪ Name ▪ Dates of Internship ▪ No page number, running header/footer, 12 point font, 1 inch margins, single-spaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>▪ Each heading and sub-heading and their page numbers ▪ First page numbered i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Description of the host organization | Describe the host organization and sub-units using theories and concepts covered in course readings and provide examples and other data to support your analysis:  
▪ Describe and analyze the structure of the organization, the sub-units, and how they interact  
▪ Describe the sub-unit you worked in and how it relates to other units in more detail  
▪ Formulate a mission statement for the organization where you were placed  
▪ Organizational chart (develop if none exists)  
▪ Describe where the organization and your sub-unit get their resources  
▪ What leadership styles were observed? Was it effective?  
▪ What techniques are used to motivate employees? Were they effective?  
▪ Describe the cross-boundary and networked relationships involved in managing the organization  
▪ First page numbered i                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Summary of internship activities | Describe in detail the nature of the internship and your duties and responsibilities:  
▪ The job duties and responsibilities associated with the internship  
▪ The projects you worked and the nature of your contribution.  
▪ Describe to whom you and the organizational subunit were accountable and for what results  
▪ You should also include a job description (develop if none exists)                                                                                                                                                        |
| Organizational assessment | Assess the management and performance of the organization and the subunit using theories and concepts covered in course readings and provide examples and other data to support analysis:  
▪ Describe how the organization monitors and measures the performance of individuals, organizations, teams, and networks  
▪ Describe the internal factors that influence organizational performance  
▪ Describe the external factors (political, economic, social, demographic, legal, etc.) that influence organizational performance  
▪ Identify threats and opportunities to the organization and make recommendations for improving organizational performance  
▪ Critique the leadership and management of the organization and your subunit.  
▪ Provide recommendations for organizational improvement                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Reflection on experience  | Please reflect on your experiences, observations, and lessons learned related to:  
▪ Opportunities you had to lead, motivate, or manage a diverse workplace  
▪ Opportunities you had to participate in the policy process  
▪ How did the internship experience influence your views of public service?  
▪ Did you (or your co-workers) experience any conflicts or ethical dilemmas? How were they resolved?  
▪ To what extent did you develop your oral and written communication skills? Where do you need the most improvement?  
▪ Include any other reflections and lessons learned                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Appendices                | ▪ Examples of work products and other materials for your portfolio                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Electronic Submission     | ▪ The internship report must be submitted in electronic form as a single PDF file to be archived for the MPA files.                                                                                                                                                               |
Table 4: Required Contents of the Organizational Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Elements</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>• Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dates of employment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No page number, running header/footer, 12 point font, 1 inch margins, single-spaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>• Each heading and sub-heading and their page numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• First page numbered i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the organization</td>
<td>Describe the organization and sub-units using theories and concepts covered in course readings and provide examples and other data to support analysis:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Describe and analyze the structure of the organization, the sub-units, and how they interact</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Describe the sub-unit you worked in and how it relates to other units in more detail</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Formulate a mission statement for the organization where you were placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organizational chart (develop if none exists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Describe where the organization and your sub-unit get their resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What leadership styles were observed? Was it effective?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What techniques are used to motivate employees? Were they effective?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Describe the cross-boundary and networked relationships involved in managing the organization</td>
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<td>• First page numbered 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary of work activities</td>
<td>Describe in detail the nature of your job duties and responsibilities:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The job duties and responsibilities associated</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The projects you worked and the nature of your contribution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Describe to whom you and the organizational subunit were accountable and for what results</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Organizational assessment</td>
<td>Assess the management and performance of the organization and the subunit using theories and concepts covered in course readings and provide examples and other data to support analysis:</td>
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<td>• Describe how the organization monitors and measures the performance of individuals, organizations, teams, and networks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Describe the internal factors that influence organizational performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Provide recommendations for organizational improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection on experience</td>
<td>Please reflect on your experiences, observations, and lessons learned related to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunities you had to lead, motivate, or manage a diverse workplace</td>
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<td>• How did the job experience influence your views of public service?</td>
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<td>• Did you (or your co-workers) experience any conflicts or ethical dilemmas? How were they resolved?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To what extent did you develop your oral and written communication skills? Where do you need the most improvement?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Include any other reflections and lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>• Examples of work products and other materials for your portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Submission</td>
<td>• The organizational assessment must be submitted in electronic form as a single PDF file to be archived for the MPA files.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizational Assessment (internship waiver and practicum students only)

Students who do not complete an internship because they are granted a waiver or complete a practicum must complete an organizational assessment for the organization where they last worked or currently work. The purpose of the organizational assessment is for students to reflect on their professional experience and demonstrate that they can apply theories and concepts they learned in their core classes to examine the organization where they are employed. Given the variability in professional experiences, there are no set page limits. However, the contents and structure of the Organizational Assessment must be consistent with Table 4. The format should be 12 point font, single-spaced, with 1 inch margins. It should have a running header and footer and be professional in nature. The Organizational Assessment should look professional (e.g., cover, page numbers, running header/footer, page breaks, embedded graphics, etc.) and be well written. Students are advised to take the report seriously to avoid having to revise it.

Self-Evaluation Form

This form exists to give the student a forum in which to evaluate the agency and the internship tasks and overall experience. This form must be turned in at the end of the experience. Students who do not evaluate the internship experience and return this information to the department will not receive a grade for the internship.

Supervisor Evaluation Form

This form exists to give the host agency a forum in which to evaluate the performance of the student intern. It must be given to the internship supervisor at the beginning of the internship. The supervisor should complete the form at the end of the internship. Until this form is returned to the Department, the student will not receive a grade for the internship. Students should also ask to participate in the performance appraisal process along with other employees if their host organization utilizes a system. Participating in the performance appraisal process can provide a useful learning experience. Whenever possible, students should include the results of the organization’s performance appraisal with the supervisor evaluation form.

Grading

Unlike most other MPA courses, the Internship (PLS 598) and Practicum (PLS 594) are graded as either an “S” for satisfactory or a “U” for unsatisfactory. A grade of “U” will lead to dismissal from the program.

Unlike other courses, it is also common for a grade of “I” to be assigned when the student continues working as an intern beyond the end date for the semester that the student is registered for the course. When the internship ends and the required materials have been submitted, the grade of “I” is then converted to either “S” or “U”. Students are advised that the 1-year time limit on completing an incomplete applies to the internship as well.
Practicum Requirements

A practicum is only allowed in place of an internship when the student’s professional responsibilities or work requirements make it difficult or impossible to complete an internship. Registering for the practicum requires prior approval of the MPA director. Accordingly, students who plan to register for this option should discuss their situation well in advance of the start of the semester that they plan to register for the practicum.

The subject matter of the practicum is negotiated between the student, an organization, and the MPA program’s internship coordinator. Essentially, the practicum consists of an applied research project examining a management or policy issue that is either in the student’s work place or it is completed for another organization. In large organizations, it is often possible for a student to essentially work as a consultant for another unit within their organization. In other cases, it is often possible to essentially do a consulting project for another organization. In all cases, there is a comparable requirement in terms of the number of hours that are expected to be allocated to the project. Practicum students are also expected to complete the other requirements associated with an internship as applicable (i.e., journal, evaluation forms). Students are also required to complete the Organizational Assessment report in accordance with the requirements contained in Table 4 in addition to any other required work products. The internship coordinator will specify the specific requirements when the practicum is approved.
Student Learning Portfolios

A student learning portfolio consists of materials that provide evidence of an MPA student’s educational and professional development during their tenure in the program. Hence, it is completed during the capstone course just prior to graduation and documents your educational and professional learning, growth, and development. Thus, it provides students with an opportunity to showcase your best work. Similarly, it provides a structured process for faculty to assess whether MPA students have mastered the general learning competencies:

- To lead and manage in public governance;
- To participate in and contribute to the policy process;
- To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions;
- To articulate and apply a public values perspective;
- To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

The MPA faculty then utilizes this assessment information to determine whether changes are needed in the curriculum. The preparation of the student learning portfolio also requires students to spend time reflecting on their competencies and examine the extent to which they are prepared to pursue their professional objectives. Rather than simply wait until the end of their course of study to prepare their student learning portfolio, incoming students should look through the requirements and give some thought to where they need improvement so that they can build their course of study accordingly.

General Requirements

The student learning portfolio consists of a series of sections. The required sections will vary each academic year because the MPA program assesses some learning competencies on an annual basis while others are assessed on a biennial basis. Thus, students should be sure they complete the correct set of required sections (see below).

Required Narratives

Each section includes a narrative that is descriptive, analytical, introspective, and/or reflective. Many narratives ask students to demonstrate their ability to apply theories, concepts, and skills learned during their course of study. Students should refer specifically to applicable theories and concepts from course materials in their narratives. Students are also required to provide a unique example of a class assignment (e.g., case memo, PowerPoint presentation, etc.) or work product (e.g., paper, analytical report, grant proposal, etc.) in the appendix as evidence that they have mastered the competency. It is important for students to select these examples carefully since they can only be used once in the student learning portfolio. In other words, each required section must have at least one unique assignment or work product as supporting evidence that you have mastered the learning competency. Students are allowed to revise and improve the class assignments used as evidence in their portfolios. Students can also use work
products prepared as part of their internship or practicum as well.

**Format Requirements**

There are no set page limits. Students must answer each question and its sub-elements in detail. The format should be 12 point font, single-spaced, with 1 inch margins. It should have a running header and footer and be professional in nature. The student learning portfolio should look professional (e.g., cover, page numbers, running header/footer, page breaks, embedded graphics, etc.) and be well written. The supporting evidence demonstrating mastery of the learning competencies (e.g., class assignments and work products) should be included as a set of appendices and be referenced appropriately throughout the document. The entire student learning portfolio shall be submitted electronically as a single PDF file. If students are unfamiliar with how to create a portfolio using Adobe Professional or lack access to the software, the GTAs in the lab will assist with your efforts. Students are advised to take the student learning portfolio seriously to avoid having to revise it.

**Approval & Submission Process**

Students are advised to begin working on the student learning portfolio early in the second year in the MPA program. Students should consult with their faculty advisor to ensure they fully understand the required contents and expectations. Students should consult with their advisor to determine the best examples to use to demonstrate their mastery of the learning competencies. During the capstone course, students should submit a draft of the student learning portfolio to their advisor for review. Once the advisor approves the student learning portfolio, it should be submitted to the MPA Director and their student’s capstone course instructor as a single electronic PDF file. Failure to submit an approved student learning portfolio will result in a grade of an incomplete (“I”) in the capstone course.

**Contents of the Student Learning Portfolio**

Each academic year, the contents of the student learning portfolio will vary based on the learning competencies assessed by the faculty. Some learning competencies are assessed on an annual basis while others are assessed biennially. Students should prepare a narrative that explains and demonstrates your mastery of each competency and provides at least one unique course assignment or work product as evidence of your mastery. These requirements are summarized in Table 5 and are described in more detail in the following sections:

**Lead and Manage in Governance (Academic Years beginning with odd numbers: 2013-2014, 2015-2016, etc.)**

There is one learning competency within this category that is assessed using the student learning portfolio. Students are expected to demonstrate that they can lead and manage in governance by:

*Demonstrating an understanding of the impact of changing market and political conditions on organizational practice and resource streams*
### Table 5: Required Contents of a Student Learning Portfolio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Required for Academic Years</th>
<th>Reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. Evidence includes demonstrating your ability to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead and Manage in Governance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating an understanding of the impact of changing market and political conditions on organizational practice and resource streams</td>
<td>2013-2014, 2015-2016, etc.</td>
<td>- Identify important organizational resources needed to maintain and improve performance;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Describe the external factors (political, economic, social, demographic, legal, technological, etc.) that influence organizational practices;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify the threats and opportunities to the organizations mission associated with external changes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Make recommendations for addressing threats and opportunities to organizational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To participate in and contribute to the policy process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating an ability to analyze policy alternatives and use policy instruments and management tools to address social problems</td>
<td>2012-2013, 2014-2015, etc.</td>
<td>- Identify rationales for government intervention (e.g., economic rationales);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Formulate alternatives that rely on different policy instruments to address a problem;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify alternatives that are comparable and reflect an in-depth understanding of the problem;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify criteria appropriate for assessing the alternatives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Analyze alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating an ability to utilize analytical tools to analyze, present, and interpret data, including appropriate design, statistical, and evaluative techniques for both organizational decision making and policy decisions</td>
<td>2013-2014, 2015-2016, etc.</td>
<td>- Interpret quantitative data and measures, understand its limits, and use these data to frame problems and identify possible cause and effect relationships;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Employ analytic tools for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data, including appropriate statistical techniques and concepts;</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Distinguish between fact and opinion, and acknowledge the value judgments associated with their analysis;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Display and interpret data, figures, and statistics to describe problems and assess alternatives;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Use appropriate decision tools to make data driven decisions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Recommend a course of action supported by data and analysis rather than personal opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating an ability to apply management theories and tools for organizational decision-making including but not limited to strategic planning, performance measurement, group decision making, forecasting, program evaluation, and cost-benefit analysis</td>
<td>2013-2014, 2015-2016, etc.</td>
<td>- Discuss a problem in terms of theoretical research and objective information rather than relying on personal opinions and value judgments;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Formulate recommendations for action grounded in management theory;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify and use data derived from decision tools appropriate to define problems and make recommendations to decision makers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### To articulate and apply a public values perspective

**Demonstrating an ability to identify ethical dilemmas and to then systematically apply ethical principles to identify appropriate courses of action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012-2013, 2014-2015, etc.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Assess practical situations in public administration and take principled positions;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identify ethical dilemmas in the practice of public administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gather data appropriate for understanding the dilemma;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consider the views of appropriate stakeholders when resolving the dilemma;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Demonstrate public service values when choosing an appropriate course of action;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Demonstrate awareness of the professional ethical standards in the field of public administration.</td>
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### To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

**Demonstrating an understanding of how to work effectively in diverse groups**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Annual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Meet and communicate on a regular basis;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Define and understand the different roles of group members;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Assign tasks to group members with unique talents to contribute to the task;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Establish clear procedures for making decisions;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Team members support each other and share information;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Stay focused on the task at hand and make productive use of meeting time;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Resolve conflict through open discussion and compromise.</td>
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</table>

**While a team member the students demonstrate they can:**

<table>
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<th>Annual</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Participate and attend meetings;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Make a meaningful contribution to group efforts;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Complete assigned tasks in a timely manner and meet deadlines;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assist others in completing their tasks if needed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Seek input from others in the group and listen to ideas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Treat other team members with respect;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cooperate with other members to complete tasks.</td>
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</table>

### Additional Reflective Essays and Information

<table>
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<th>Annual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Describe what “diversity” means to you in your personal and professional life? (No example required);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Describe you public service values and how they influence your personal and professional life? (No example required);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Resume.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Concentration Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- One comprehensive reflective essay that demonstrates your mastery of all of competencies associated with your concentration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unique example of a class assignment or work product to demonstrate your mastery of each learning competency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students should prepare a reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. In your answer, be sure to provide evidence that you can:

- Identify important organizational resources needed to maintain and improve performance;
- Describe the external factors (political, economic, social, demographic, legal, technological, etc.) that influence organizational practices;
- Identify the threats and opportunities to the organizations mission associated with external changes;
- Make recommendations for addressing threats and opportunities to organizational performance.

Be sure to provide at least one unique example of a class assignment or work product that demonstrates your mastery of this competency.

To participate in and contribute to the policy process (Academic Years beginning with even numbers: 2012-2013, 2014-2015, etc.)

There is one learning competency within this category that is assessed using the student learning portfolio. Students are expected to demonstrate that they can participate in and contribute to the policy process by:

*Demonstrating an ability to analyze policy alternatives and use policy instruments and management tools to address social problems.*

Students should prepare a reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. In your answer, be sure to provide evidence that you can:

- Identify rationales for government intervention (e.g., economic rationales);
- Formulate alternatives that rely on different policy instruments to address a problem;
- Identify alternatives that are comparable and reflect an in-depth understanding of the problem;
- Identify criteria appropriate for assessing the alternatives;
- Analyze alternatives.

Be sure to provide at least one unique example of a class assignment or work product that demonstrates your mastery of this competency.

To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions (Academic Years beginning with odd numbers: 2013-2014, 2015-2016, etc.)

There are two learning competencies within this category that are assessed using the student learning portfolio. First, students are expected to demonstrate that they can analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions by:
Demonstrating an ability to utilize analytical tools to analyze, present, and interpret data, including appropriate design, statistical, and evaluative techniques for both organizational decision making and policy decisions

Students should prepare a reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. In your answer, be sure to provide evidence that you can:

- Interpret quantitative data and measures, understand its limits, and use these data to frame problems and identify possible cause and effect relationships;
- Employ analytic tools for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data, including appropriate statistical techniques and concepts;
- Distinguish between fact and opinion, and acknowledge the value judgments associated with their analysis;
- Display and interpret data, figures, and statistics to describe problems and assess alternatives;
- Use appropriate decision tools to make data driven decisions;
- Recommend a course of action supported by data and analysis rather than personal opinions.

Be sure to provide at least one unique example of a class assignment or work product that demonstrates your mastery of this competency.

Second, students are expected to demonstrate that they can analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions by:

Demonstrating an ability to apply management theories and tools for organizational decision-making including but not limited to strategic planning, performance measurement, group decision making, forecasting, program evaluation, and cost-benefit analysis.

Students should prepare a reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. In your answer, be sure to provide evidence that you can:

- Discuss a problem in terms of theoretical research and objective information rather than relying on personal opinions and value judgments;
- Formulate recommendations for action grounded in management theory;
- Identify and use data derived from decision tools appropriate to define problems and make recommendations to decision makers.

Be sure to provide at least one unique example of a class assignment or work product that demonstrates your mastery of this competency.
To articulate and apply a public values perspective (Academic Years beginning with even numbers: 2012-2013, 2014-2015, etc.)

There is one learning competency within this category that is assessed using the student learning portfolio. Students are expected to demonstrate that they can articulate and apply a public values perspective by:

*Demonstrating an ability to identify ethical dilemmas and to then systematically apply ethical principles to identify appropriate courses of action.*

Students should prepare a reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. In your answer, be sure to provide evidence that you can:

- Assess practical situations in public administration and take principled positions;
- Identify ethical dilemmas in the practice of public administration;
- Gather data appropriate for understanding the dilemma;
- Consider the views of appropriate stakeholders when resolving the dilemma;
- Demonstrate public service values when choosing an appropriate course of action;
- Demonstrate awareness of the professional ethical standards in the field of public administration.

Be sure to provide at least one unique example of a class assignment or work product that demonstrates your mastery of this competency.

To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry (Annually: 2012-2013, 2013-2014, etc.)

There is one learning competency within this category that is assessed using the student learning portfolio. Students are expected to demonstrate that they can articulate and apply a public values perspective by:

*Demonstrating an understanding of how to work effectively in diverse groups.*

Students should prepare a reflective essay that examines your mastery of this competency. In your answer, be sure to provide evidence that a team they worked in was able to:

- Meet and communicate on a regular basis;
- Define and understand the different roles of group members;
- Assign tasks to group members with unique talents to contribute to the task;
- Establish clear procedures for making decisions;
- Team members support each other and share information;
- Stay focused on the task at hand and make productive use of meeting time;
- Resolve conflict through open discussion and compromise.

In your essay, you should also be sure to comment on your performance as a team member and
reflect on your ability to:

- Participate and attend meetings;
- Make a meaningful contribution to group efforts;
- Complete assigned tasks in a timely manner and meet deadlines;
- Assist others in completing their tasks if needed;
- Seek input from others in the group and listen to ideas;
- Treat other team members with respect;
- Cooperate with other members to complete tasks.

Be sure to provide at least one unique example of a class assignment or work product produced by a team that you were part of that demonstrates your mastery of this competency.

_Additional Reflective Essays and Information (Annually: 2012-2013, 2013-2014, etc.)_

Students must also include two additional reflective essays that are designed to be somewhat introspective:

- Describe what “diversity” means to you in your personal and professional life?
- Describe your public service values and how they influence your personal and professional life?

Unlike the other essays, you are not required to include a unique example of a class assignment or work product to support your essay. However, you should include:

- Your resume.

Concentration Competencies (Annual: 2012-2013, 2013-2014, etc.)

The student learning competencies for each concentration are discussed earlier in this Handbook in the section on degree requirements. Your student learning portfolio provides an opportunity to demonstrate that you have mastered these competencies in your area of specialization. Each student will prepare one reflective essay that describes your mastery of the entire set of concentration competencies associated with your concentration. If you have more than one concentration, you must prepare an essay for each concentration. Students must provide one or more unique examples of a class assignment or work product to demonstrate your mastery of the competencies associated with your concentration.
Capstone Experience

The capstone experience is designed to help bridge the gap between coursework and professional practice. Taking courses is one thing, it is quite another to utilize the knowledge, skills and abilities developed during the coursework to investigate an applied problem and to complete a well-written report with recommendations grounded in convincing data and analysis. Thus, it is an opportunity for each student to demonstrate their mastery of many of the learning competencies associated with the MPA curriculum. While students are subject to the supervision and standards set by the supervising faculty member in the syllabi, students work far more independently than in a typical course. The capstone project provides students with an opportunity to exercise their professional judgment and make key choices associated with a project’s design and execution. It also provides each student with a final opportunity to demonstrate your professional competence to faculty, alumni, students, and potential employers. Thus, it is in each student’s interest to perform to the maximum of your ability during the capstone project and produce a final project report that is an important part of your professional portfolio.

Capstone Project Requirements

Depending on the semester and instructor assigned to teach the capstone course, students will either work individually or be assigned to a project team. In either case, the capstone project will be selected by the supervising faculty member(s). Typically, the general project area will focus on an issue that is currently of interest to public and nonprofit professionals in Southeastern North Carolina. Each project requires students to think critically and creatively about an issue. Students will spend the bulk of their time investigating and formulating recommendations to address a real world problem. While the applied project may not constitute original research, each project will nonetheless require significant background analysis that involves reviewing, synthesizing, analyzing, and displaying existing data about an important social problem and using the analysis of these data to support recommendations made to decision makers. Each semester’s applied project also typically involves such things as library research, reviewing best practices and models, exploring costs and benefits, and analyzing policy alternatives. In all cases, the capstone project focuses on using data and analysis to support recommendations to decision makers. Thus, each project provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their critical thinking skills and ability to contribute to the public policy process.

The capstone project also provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability to communicate professionally to diverse audiences. Each project is accompanied by a technical report that is professional in appearance and describes and documents the project and recommendations. It should be written in a manner that is accessible to the public. In general, it should include a table of contents, executive summary, and a list of references in addition to the main body of the report. The substance of the report will generally include a discussion of the problem, reviews the relevant literature, describes methodologies used to collect and analyze data, summarizes the analysis, and concludes by making recommendations for addressing the problem to decision makers. However, the specific contents and structure of the professional
report is likely to vary based on the nature of the applied project. Students are therefore advisable to closely conform to the requirements contained in course syllabi when it comes to the specific contents regarding style, format, and substance of the report.

Students are also required to present their findings to an audience of faculty, students, alumni, community advisory board members, and invited guests. This presentation occurs during the reading day and all MPA students are required to attend. The presentation should be professional and make appropriate use of audio-visual aids such that the substance of the technical report and the recommendations are understandable to a general audience. During semesters when there is a large number of presentations, students will first present to a smaller group of faculty, students, and alumni prior to the reading day. The top 2 or 3 presentations will then be selected to be presented again during the in a public forum on reading day. Each project is also presented during a poster reception associated with the capstone presentations. Students are advised to closely conform to the requirements contained in course syllabi when it comes to the specific contents of the presentations and posters.

**How Does the Capstone Project Differ from a Thesis?**

The MPA program does have a thesis option. However, it is only recommended for students with a particular set of career goals (e.g., pursuing a Ph.D. in Public Administration) (see the following section for discussion of the thesis requirements). In almost all cases, MPA students are advised to participate in the capstone experience. There is little to be gained professionally by the additional work involved in completing the thesis. Both options still require independent research with substantial written reports that have to meet high standards in terms of their use of methodology, data, and analysis. The main difference is focus and perspective. While the thesis has academia as its principle audience, the capstone project is oriented towards the world of professional practice. Even students considering pursuing a Ph.D. in Public Administration can benefit from this focus on using theory to inform practice.
Thesis Requirements

Students considering a career in the public or nonprofit sector are advised to pursue the capstone option because it is focused on their professional development needs. In rare situations, a student may want to consider pursing the MPA program’s 45-credit thesis option. This option might be of interest if you plan to pursue a Ph.D. program after graduation or when students are completing their MPA degree in conjunction with another master degree at UNCW that requires a thesis. A thesis involves original independent research on a subject that is sufficiently limited in scope to ensure that it is thorough and makes a scholarly contribution to the public administration literature. If you choose to pursue the thesis option, you should read this section of the Handbook to be sure to comply with all of the requirements needed to the MPA Program’s thesis requirements.

Finding a Topic and Thesis Committee

Given the long time involved in executing the thesis, it is incumbent on students to identify a thesis topic and an MPA faculty member who is willing and capable of serving as chair as soon as practicable. In order to pursue this option, students must find a topic where you are willing to commit a significant amount of time to become familiar with the literature and conduct the research endeavor. There are many ways to find a suitable thesis topic. It might be based on professional or personal experiences, a topic covered in a course as a graduate or undergraduate, and discussions with faculty or students. At the early stages, it is particularly important to explore the feasibility of the research topics and to work to shape it in a manner that makes a thesis possible. MPA faculty can assist in these efforts. However, the operative word in doing a thesis is “independent” research. Thus, students have to have ownership and a genuine interest in their topic.

Once you have identified a suitable topic, it is important to identify the MPA faculty member who will serve as the thesis chair. It is important to find a chair that has sufficient knowledge, interest, and time and is also willing to commit to serving as an advisor and mentor throughout the research process. Thus, the thesis option requires a match between the student, the research topic, and an MPA faculty member. The student should consult with the thesis chair to select the remaining thesis committee members from the graduate faculty. At least two members of the committee including the chairperson must be from the Department of Public and International Affairs. In some cases, ad hoc faculty from outside UNCW can serve as additional committee members. The committee members should be selected based on their ability to contribute to the design and execution of the proposed research. Once the thesis chair and committee are designated, students cannot change the membership without written consent of the MPA Director.

The thesis committee should be formed prior to the development of the thesis proposal to allow the committee members sufficient input to the research design. To allow sufficient time for the development of the thesis proposal and resulting research, the committee should be designated no later than the end of the second semester. Be sure to submit your thesis advisory
committee form as soon as practicable for approval by the MPA Director. Approval of this form will change your banner degree audit to reflect the thesis option. Students are advised to form their thesis advisory committee during their second semester of study and no later than the start of their third semester of study.

**Developing and Defending a Thesis Proposal**

Once the thesis advisory committee is formed, the student must begin developing a thesis proposal that reflects input from the committee. It is important for students to remember that the specific research questions and objectives of the thesis are likely to evolve as part of the process of developing and defending the thesis proposal. Students also have a tendency to be overly ambitious while faculty will remind students that the “best thesis is a finished thesis.” Thus, it is important for students to temper their ambitions with practical constraints to ensure that the research design is one that can be successfully completed in a timely manner.

The development of the thesis proposal is a critical step in the process. In essence, it is a contract between the student and the thesis advisory committee in terms of the research that will be conducted. Students should expect to prepare several drafts of the thesis proposal as they obtain input from their thesis advisory committee and refine the literature review, research questions, and methodology. The content of the thesis proposal should include, but is not limited to:

- **Introduction**: A brief summary of the problem, the research questions/hypotheses, and the basic approach to testing the hypotheses.
- **Literature Review**: Describes the research done on the problem and the literature that supports the hypotheses. Most public administration topics are interdisciplinary so the literature review should review the literature in all relevant areas. The rationale for the research questions/hypotheses and operationalization of terms and concepts should flow naturally from the literature review. This section should essentially constitute this chapter of the thesis.
- **Methodology**: This section needs to operationalize key terms and concepts and describe the plans for data collection and analysis. It should also describe how the hypotheses will be tested and discuss possible threats to reliability or validity that are inherent in the research design. The specific methodology will vary depending on whether it is qualitative or quantitative in orientation. Resources needed to complete the thesis should be discussed as well.
- **Outline of the Completed Thesis**: This section should provide an outline that describes in detail the sections and sub-sections that will constitute the final thesis.
- **Timeline & Milestones**: This section should outline a proposed timeline and milestones for completing the research and defending the thesis.
- **References**: A reference list for all citations in the Thesis Proposal.

The thesis proposal shall be formatted and references cited in accordance with the electronic thesis format guidelines provided on the [Graduate School’s website](http://example.com). The final version must also be submitted to the MPA Director as a single electronic PDF file.
Once completed, the student needs to schedule a time to “defend” the thesis proposal to the thesis advisory committee (distance technology can be used if necessary). The student should provide about two weeks of notice prior to scheduling the defense to provide sufficient time for the committee to review the final draft of the thesis proposal. Students are not advised to schedule the defense if their committee chair advises them to continue work on the thesis proposal.

The defense of the thesis proposal typically begins with a detailed presentation followed by questions from the committee designed to identify the student’s knowledge of the literature, ability to undertake the methodology, and to identify potential problems with the proposed research design that need to be improved. The committee then decides whether the student passes or fails the defense. If a student fails, the committee decides whether to terminate the thesis option (student returns to the capstone degree option) or allow another defense. Typically, the student passes but is required to revise parts of the thesis proposal.

Once the thesis advisory committee unanimously approves the thesis proposal, the student and all committee members sign the Thesis Proposal Notification and Defense Form. This ensures that the student and committee members are in complete agreement about the scope of work. To ensure that students benefit from the input of the committee members in the development and execution of the thesis, a minimum of 6 months must typically elapse between the defense of the thesis proposal and the final oral defense. This means that a student seeking to graduate within the two-year time frame would have to defend their thesis proposal around Fall Break of their 3rd semester of study.

If the thesis research involves human subjects or is otherwise subject to approval by UNCW’s Institutional Review Board, the student must seek the necessary approvals (or exemptions) before data collection begins and copy the thesis advisory committee and MPA Director on all paperwork and approvals. It is the students’ responsibility to ensure compliance with all IRB policies and requirements and that it is done in a manner that conforms to the highest ethical and professional standards.

**Oral Defense of Thesis**

Once the student has completed the thesis research and prepared a final draft of the thesis, the student must schedule a public oral defense. This means that at least a week before the scheduled defense that students post flyers around Leutze Hall and in the buildings for other graduate programs that might have an interest in the subject matter covered in the thesis. The flyer should be sent in electronic form to the MPA Director for distribution on the MPA list server and forwarded to other graduate coordinators for similar distribution. Students are strongly encouraged to attend one or more oral thesis defenses (even if they are from other graduate programs) in order to learn how to successfully defend your research.

At least 15 days before you plan to defend your thesis, you must submit your (almost) final electronic draft to the graduate school for approval. Forms are available on the Graduate School’s website. The theses format approval sheet signed by your committee chair needs to be attached. Once approved, you can schedule the time and date for the defense and the MPA
Director can assist in reserving a suitable location. The defense should be planned no later than two weeks before graduation in order to allow enough time to make corrections and complete the final paperwork. You should also provide the final written copy to your thesis advisory committee at least 10 days before the scheduled defense to allow them sufficient time to review the document.

The format of the public defense involves a public presentation of your thesis research including a question and answer period. Students often have a half hour or more for this presentation and the public part of the session may last well over an hour. Once the “public” session is over, the student will answer questions from the committee in private and an outside reviewer if the graduate school has appointed one. At the conclusion of your defense, copies of the thesis with comments from the committee members will be returned to you and the committee will meet briefly in private to decide if you pass or fail your defense. The decision is conveyed to you immediately and is provided in written format to the MPA Director by completing the Thesis Defense Report Form.

If the student passes, the final copy of the thesis should be edited to conform to the committee’s comments or requirements. The thesis committee may ask to review a revised version to ensure that their comments have been incorporated or may rely on the chair to ensure that this occurs. When the thesis committee is satisfied with the written document, they will each sign the cover page. The thesis is required to be submitted to the graduate school electronically. The guidelines are posted on the Graduate School’s website.

If a student fails the defense or the committee determines that the written document is inadequate, your committee may require that you schedule a second defense and repeated revisions of the written document until they are satisfied. To avoid this problem, students should follow the advice of the chair of their thesis advisory committee in terms of determining when the written thesis and student are ready for the defense. Students are also advised to keep the other committee members updated and to send them drafts as the research progresses so that there are no major surprises when reviewing the final draft of the thesis.
Academic Policies and Regulations

In addition to the policies contained in the *Code of Student Life*, the Graduate Catalog, and other university and MPA program publications, MPA students must comply with the following additional policies and regulations.

Non-degree Seeking Students

The MPA program allows non-degree seeking students to take a limited number of courses for credit. Non-degree seeking students are limited to taking no more than 9 credit hours before they are required to apply for admission as a degree-seeking student. Additional hours must be approved in advance by the MPA director. Since non-degree seeking students are subject to different admissions requirements, the MPA director may limit the courses that a particular non-degree seeking student is allowed to take. The courses may be used to satisfy degree requirements if approved by the MPA director.

Registration

A degree seeking student in the MPA program is limited to registering for, and receiving credit for, a maximum of 12 credit hours in any one semester. A student enrolled in summer classes shall not register for, and will not receive credit for, more than 6 hours in any one session or 9 total hours for all summer sessions. Non-degree seeking students are limited to a maximum of 9 credit hours in a semester and 6 total hours in the summer. Permission of the MPA director is required to exceed these credit hour requirements.

Attendance & Class Participation

Students are expected to be present at all regular class meetings and examinations for the courses in which they are registered. Students are expected to be on time for class. Students are also expected to be active participants in class discussion and group exercises. As part of class participation, many MPA courses expect students to work collaboratively on group projects outside the classroom. Each faculty member sets their own class policies concerning the role of attendance and class participation in determining grades for their classes. Some faculty members may also have policies regarding the use of cell phones, PDAs, laptops, eating in class, etc. It is the responsibility of the students to learn and comply with the policies set for each class.
Grading Policy

Grading at the graduate level is different from the undergraduate level in several important ways. First, there is the expectation that students will follow directions, complete assignments on time, and work independently with minimal faculty supervision. Second, while a grade of a “B” is viewed as above average at the undergraduate level, it signifies work that is barely satisfactory at the graduate level. Third, grades of a B or better are required to satisfy the minimum competency requirement. Finally, students are placed on academic probation if their GPA falls below a 3.0. Thus, students must strive for grades of a B+ or better to make satisfactory progress in the MPA program.

All faculty members are responsible for setting policy concerning course grading. This should be specified on the course syllabus or class website. It is the responsibility of the students to learn and comply with the grading policies set for each class. The general grading scale used by the graduate school is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grade Point</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>Failure &amp; Dismissal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A student who receives a grade of C in a graduate course may repeat that course once. Both the first and second grade will count in determining the GPA, but only the initial hours count toward degree requirements. Students may not repeat a course if they receive a grade of A or B.

Incompletes

An incomplete grade (“I”) may be given when the course instructor determines that exceptional circumstances warrant extending the time to complete course work. The exceptions to this rule are the internship/practicum, DIS, and some study abroad courses that use incompletes for other purposes. In all cases, the extension granted by an incomplete will not exceed one year unless it is approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. The instructor may set the maximum allowable period for completion of the course work, but in no case can the extension exceed one year. At the conclusion of the year, a grade of an “I” turns to an “F” or a “U”. In all cases, it is the student’s responsibility to complete the course requirements within the one-year timeframe.
Retention Policy

Two grades of a C or lower, one grade of F, or one grade of U results in automatic dismissal from the MPA program. Further, if a student falls below 3.0 GPA at any time, he or she goes on academic probation and has three subsequent courses or 9 credit hours to raise their GPA above a 3.0 or they are dismissed from the MPA program. If the student raises their GPA above a 3.0 and it falls below a 3.0 for a second time, they are dismissed from the MPA program. Students must have a GPA above 3.0 to enroll in PLS 595, PLS 594, or PLS 598.

Minimum Competency Requirement

The core requirements (18 credit hours), internship or practicum (3 credit hours), and applied skill-based electives (3 credit hours) are courses that require a minimum level of competency of a B or better or an S. Any student receiving a B- or lower or a U must repeat the course and receive a grade of B or better. Such courses may only be repeated once with failure to receive a B or better or an S (internship) resulting in dismissal from the MPA program. Both the initial and repeated grades count towards determining the GPA but only the initial hours count toward the degree requirements.

Academic Probation

If faculty have concerns about an MPA student’s academic performance, the MPA Director may schedule a conference to discuss these concerns with the student or will notify the student about these concerns via email. If a student’s GPA falls below 3.0, they are placed on academic probation. At which time, the student has 9 credit hours to raise their GPA above 3.0. If a student raises their GPA above a 3.0 and they are placed on academic probation a second time because their GPA falls below 3.0, they are dismissed from the MPA program. Students cannot register for the internship/practicum (PLS 598/PLS 594) when on academic probation. Students cannot register for PLS 595 – Capstone Seminar in Public Administration while they are on probation. Students cannot graduate while on academic probation. Students cannot defend a thesis prospectus or register for thesis credits while on academic probation.

Grade Appeals

Any student considering an appeal of a final course grade should understand that each faculty member has the academic freedom and responsibility to determine grades according to any method chosen by the faculty member that is professionally acceptable, communicated to everyone in the class, and applied to all students equally. However, discriminatory, arbitrary, or capricious academic evaluation by a faculty member is a violation of a student’s rights and is the only valid ground for a final course grade appeal. Such an appeal must be made no later than the last day of the next succeeding regular semester. Grades not appealed by that time become permanent.

These procedures are not to be used in cases involving student academic dishonesty or in cases where a student disputes the final course grade for reasons other than alleged discriminatory, arbitrary, or capricious academic evaluation by a faculty member.
Any student who contests a final course grade under this procedure shall first attempt to resolve the matter with the instructor. Failing to reach a satisfactory resolution, the student may appeal the grade in accordance with the steps outlined below:

1. The student shall present the appeal in writing to the chair of the department within which the contested grade was awarded. The written statement shall limit itself to a factual description of evidence pertaining to the valid ground for the appeal and documentation of all attempts to reach resolution. By conferring with the student and the instructor, the chair will seek resolution by mutual agreement. The chair will provide a written statement of the results of this effort to the faculty member and student.

2. Failing to resolve the issue in Step 1, the student shall present the written appeal and all documentation of attempts to reach resolution to the dean of the college or school, or director in the case of the School of Nursing, in which the protested grade was awarded. The dean or director, by conferring with the student and the instructor, will seek resolution by mutual agreement. The dean or director will provide a written statement of the results of this effort to the chair, faculty member, and student.

3. If Step 2 fails to produce a resolution, the student shall provide a written appeal request to the associate dean of the graduate school. The written statement shall limit itself to a factual description of evidence pertaining to the valid ground for the appeal, documentation of all attempts to reach resolution, and the student’s desired outcome. This initiates the last stage of the grade appeal process.

4. Upon receipt of the written appeal request, the associate dean of the graduate school will convene and chair meetings of the Grade Appeals Committee, which consists of faculty members appointed by the dean of the graduate school. The committee will make recommendations to the dean following the hearing proceedings.

5. If the dean affirms the instructor’s decision, he/she will notify the faculty member, student, chair, and appropriate college or school dean or director in writing. The decision made by the dean is a final university decision and may not be appealed further.

6. If the dean affirms the student’s appeal, he/she shall prescribe the method by which the student will be reevaluated and communicate that to the faculty member, student, chair, and appropriate college or school dean or director in writing. If the reevaluation results in a grade change, the established Course Grade Change procedure will be followed. The grade resulting from the reevaluation is a final university decision and may not be appealed further.

Students considering a grade appeal may wish to discuss the matter with the MPA Director prior to step 1 in order to obtain additional guidance on the process.
Academic Grievance Procedure

Graduate students who have academic or procedural concerns, other than grades, should attempt to resolve those concerns at the lowest academic level as soon as possible (and no more than 90 days) after the event giving rise to the complaint. The first level for redress is with the appropriate faculty member. Within 30 days of failing to reach a satisfactory resolution with the faculty member, the student may appeal to the department chairman. Failing resolution at the department level, the student may, within 10 business days, appeal jointly to the dean for the student’s academic area and to the dean of the Graduate School. The deans (or their designees) will conduct interviews with all parties to arrive at a resolution of the issue. The mutually agreed upon decision of the deans will be final and not subject to further appeal. Complaints that fall within the categories of sexual harassment, improper personal relationships, personal discrimination, unlawful workplace harassment, or workplace violence should be filed in accordance with Appendix J of the UNCW Code of Student Life.

Academic Honor Code

All students enrolled at UNCW are subject to the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code (hereafter referred to as the Honor Code), which is intended to help every member of the UNCW community appreciate the high value placed on academic integrity and the means that will be employed to ensure its preservation. Students are expected to perpetuate a campus culture where each student does his or her own work while relying on appropriate resources for assistance. In such a climate students enjoy a special trust that they are members of a unique community where one’s thoughts and words are attributed correctly and with proper ownership, and where there is little need for systems to sanction those who cheat. As such, all UNCW students shall commit to the principles and spirit of the Honor Code by adhering to the following pledge:

“As a student at The University of North Carolina Wilmington, I am committed to honesty and truthfulness in academic inquiry and in the pursuit of knowledge. I pledge to uphold and promote the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.”

The MPA program is committed to the university’s honor code. No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated (see the university catalogs, Code of Student life, and publication and writing manuals for examples of dishonesty). Particular care should be taken to avoid plagiarism. Students are encouraged to report occurrences of academic dishonesty to their course instructors or the MPA director. Students found guilty of academic dishonesty, and assigned a grade of F, may be dismissed from the program by the MPA director and will be deemed ineligible to continue in the UNCW Graduate School. Students are advised to read the full UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.

Student Conduct

Acceptance of admission to the MPA program shall be construed as evidence that an MPA student agrees to comply with all rules and regulations of the university as stated in the Code of Student Life, the university catalog, other university and MPA program publications including this Handbook.
The Master of Public Administration (MPA) is a professional degree program. All MPA students are expected to act and behave with professionalism both on and off campus. If faculty have concerns about an MPA student’s professionalism on or off campus, the MPA Director may schedule a conference to discuss these concerns with the student or will notify the student about these concerns via email.

Being professional requires making a commitment to adhere to the highest standards of personal conduct, professionalism, and ethical behavior. This requires making sure your personal conduct does not result in actions that would disqualify you from employment (e.g., North Carolina Department of Administration’s Disciplinary Action and Dismissal Policy) or make it difficult to pass the background checks associated with some internships and employment opportunities. For example, FBI background checks for many federal jobs require interviewing faculty and your student peers and includes questions about illegal activities and your personal conduct while a student.

Violations of our high standards of personal conduct, professionalism, and ethical behavior may lead to suspension or dismissal by UNCW, particularly if the student:

- Fails to comply with Departmental, College, or University regulations and procedures related to student or academic conduct;
- Violates established codes of professional conduct in the field of public administration;
- Is accused or convicted of violating laws reflecting personal conduct that are unbecoming of a public servant, create a danger to the campus community, create a hostile workplace, involve illegal drug use, is involve moral turpitude, or consists of actions that otherwise serve to disqualify a student from employment in the public or nonprofit sector.

A student arrested or accused of behavior that violates these policies is required to notify the MPA Director as soon as practicable. Failure to notify the MPA Director shall be grounds for suspension or dismissal from the program.

**Professional Behavior**

MPA students are expected to act professionally and serve as role models both on and off campus. It is not uncommon that while working on class projects or as GTAs, MPA students will interact with public administration professionals and citizens in the community. It is important for students to recognize that when they do so, they are not only representing the MPA program, but also UNCW and should act and behave accordingly. Similarly, when attending MPA sponsored events (e.g., Capstone Presentation & Awards Ceremony, MPA Community Advisory Board Meetings, etc.) you should dress and behave professionally. You are expected to treat faculty and classmates with respect and communicate professionally both inside and outside the classroom. You should use your time in the MPA program to impress your classmates with your professionalism and never forget that they might be in a position to help you get (or perhaps ensure you do not get) a job that you applied for.
MPA Student Code of Ethics

Purpose

The MPA Program at UNCW strives to foster professional, ethical, and knowledgeable public administrators. Towards this goal the program has adopted an ethical code as a foundation for all students:

Strive for Academic Excellence
- Commit to putting forth your best effort that reflects honesty, integrity, and industry.
- Work to generate original thoughts and ideas.
- Contribute to the learning environment by bringing in relevant professional and life experiences.
- Seek meaningful interactions with faculty and other students outside of the classroom.
- Make attendance and participation a top priority, reflecting your commitment to the MPA learning experience.
- Act in accordance with the UNCW Student Academic Honor Code.

Practice Fairness and Equal Treatment of Others
- Recognize and encourage others for their contributions to the MPA program.
- Demonstrate inclusiveness and responsibility in the context of team projects.
- Show respect for faculty, students, staff, public servants, and all citizens consistent with the Seahawk Respect Compact.

Foster a Culture of Professionalism
- Seek and develop networking opportunities.
- Adhere to appropriate workplace standards in all internship and community project experiences.
- Become familiar with and refer to codes of ethics from appropriate professional organizations (e.g., ASPA, ICMA, APA).

Demonstrate Personal Accountability and Integrity
- Accept responsibility for your own actions, both personal and professional.
- Speak out against all forms of injustice.
- Be mindful that your personal conduct may be a reflection of the quality and stature of the MPA program.

Ethical Conduct

The MPA Program strives to develop future professionals who will work in leadership positions in the public and nonprofit sectors. Therefore, MPA students are expected to act in accordance with the codes of ethics and professional conduct developed by professional associations in the field of public administration including, but not limited to:

- American Society of Public Administration (ASPA);
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA);
- American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP)
Seahawk Respect Compact

In the pursuit of excellence, UNC Wilmington actively fosters, encourages, and promotes inclusiveness, mutual respect, acceptance, and open-mindedness among students, faculty, staff and the broader community.

- We affirm the dignity of all persons.
- We promote the right of every person to participate in the free exchange of thoughts and opinions within a climate of civility and mutual respect.
- We strive for openness and mutual understanding to learn from differences in people, ideas and opinions.
- We foster an environment of respect for each individual, even where differences exist, by eliminating prejudice and discrimination through education and interaction with others.

Therefore, we expect members of the campus community to honor these principles as fundamental to our ongoing efforts to increase access to and inclusion in a community that nurtures learning and growth for all.

Students are also expected to act in accordance with the MPA Student Code of Ethics.

UNCW Statement on Diversity in the University Community

As an institution of higher learning, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) represents a rich diversity of human beings among its faculty, staff, and students and is committed to maintaining a campus environment that values diversity. Accordingly, UNCW and the MPA Program support policies, curricula, and co-curricular activities that encourage understanding of and appreciation for all members of its community and will not tolerate any harassment or disrespect for persons because of race, gender, age, color, national origin, ethnicity, creed, religion, disability, sexual orientation, political affiliation, marital status, or relationship to other university constituents. Accordingly, MPA students are expected to act and behave in a manner that is consistent with the Seahawk Respect Compact. Students with Disabilities information and resources available at http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/disability/

Harassment, Discrimination, and Violence

The MPA program strives to maintain learning and living environments for all students and a work environment for all employees that is free from all forms of harassment. The University is committed to ensuring that all students, faculty, staff, and administrators are treated with dignity and respect. Harassment is highly detrimental to an environment of mutual respect that must prevail if the University is to fulfill its goals. All members of the university community are obligated to learn the behaviors that constitute harassment, are responsible for
their own behavior, and should strive to create a climate where harassment is not tolerated. This policy is applied in a manner that protects academic freedom and the freedom of expression for all parties.

UNCW prohibits unlawful harassment or discrimination of any individual among the university community engaged in educational or employment based on that individual’s race, sex (such as gender, marital status, and pregnancy), age, color, national origin (including ethnicity), creed, religion, disability, sexual orientation, political affiliation, veteran status, or relationship to other university constituents. Further, no student or employee shall be subject to retaliation for bringing a good faith complaint pertaining to unlawful harassment or discrimination or for protesting such behavior directed against another member of the university community.

The University encourages reporting of all perceived incidents of harassment, regardless of who the alleged offender may be. Individuals who either believe they have become the victim of harassment or have witnessed harassment are to utilize the Harassment Resolution Procedures. The University will respond promptly to all complaints of harassment and retaliation whether the behavior is communicated physically, verbally, in print, via the Internet or through other means. When necessary, the University will institute discipline against the offending individual, which may result in a range of sanctions, including but not limited to the following: for students – warning, disciplinary probation, or suspension; and for employees – warning, suspension without pay, or dismissal. If you have questions about this policy or how to report a violation, do not hesitate to contact the MPA Director immediately. For emergencies contact UNCW CARE at 962-2273; Campus Police at 962-3184; or Wilmington Police at 911. For University or community resources visit: http://www.uncw.edu/safe-relate/campusResources.htm. Violence prevention information and resources available at http://www.uncw.edu/safe%2Drelate/.
Professional Development

A commitment to life-long professional development is critical to being an effective leader who advances effective public governance and strengthens communities. Accordingly, students are encouraged to take an active part in their learning and professional development beyond a classroom setting and to take advantage of the wide range of professional development opportunities we provide to students, alumni, and other professionals in our region. To help stimulate your professional development it is also important to recognize that there is an introspective element to our curriculum with the core classes designed to enhance your self-awareness of the organizations that you work within. For example, while you learn many professional skills, it is important to understand where your strengths and weaknesses lie as a leader, manager, or an analyst. You are encouraged to prepare yourself for, and be open to, the variety of ways that you can learn from each course. It is also important to understand that completing a MPA degree is just one significant step on the path to continued professional development. While the MPA program will foster your professional development in a number of significant ways, being an effective leader requires a lifelong commitment to continued professional development. This requires continuing your intellectual journey once you graduate by reading books, attending seminars and workshops, attending training sessions, and looking for opportunities professionally that advance your skill set. You should also join a professional network (i.e., join a professional association) to plug into as a way of fostering your continued professional development. The opportunities for networking and professional development provided by the MPA program are designed to help students begin this journey.

Student Support Services

The MPA program provides a variety of student support services designed to enhance professional development. The most important is your academic advisor who is there to help you develop a course of study and find internship placements that advance your career objectives. Your academic advisor will also provide job search and career planning advice and can work with you to develop a professional resume, cover letters, and a portfolio to support your job search activities (The MPA program provides a web page and space to link your resume and other materials). You advisor can also direct you to other campus resources that provide career development services.

The MPA program provides other professional development opportunities as well. MPA faculty often utilize panels of diverse professionals to reflect on course topics and provide advice on professional development. Many of the panel discussions are open to all MPA students. MPA faculty may include professional development requirements associated with specific courses. The MPA program may sponsor guest speakers or workshops on specific topics. The MPA program also partners with other organizations like the MPA-GSA and SENCASPA to host events that are oriented towards professional development.
Network, Network, Network . . .

One of the important ways to develop as a professional is to learn how to “network”. This is particularly important at the early stages of your career and when making career transitions. The MPA program provides a wide range of networking opportunities. The MPA Program’s Community Advisory Board consists of diverse community leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sector and recent alumni. It meets on a semi-annual basis and has time built into the agenda specifically for students to network with community leaders. Community Advisory Board members also participate as guest speakers, internship supervisors, career mentors, and they attend social events. MPA students are advised to make use of this valuable opportunity to network with diverse community leaders.

The MPA program also supports the Southeastern North Carolina Chapter of the American Society of Public Administration (SENCASPA), whose membership consists of public administrators, MPA alumni, and MPA students. It supports a wide range of professional networking opportunities. The SENCASPA Chapter’s President sits on the Community Advisory Board and works closely with the MPA faculty to coordinate and provide professional development opportunities for MPA students.

The MPA program also supports the North Carolina City/County Management Association (NCCCMA), and a representative of this organization serves on the MPA Community Advisory Board. The MPA Program works with local representatives of the NCCCMA to provide opportunities for MPA students to interact and network with city and county administrators and other senior executives. The MPA Program awards an annual $2,500 NCCCMA scholarship to a student focused on a career in local government in NC. The MPA program hosts an alumni breakfast at the annual NCCCMA meeting in February where students get a chance to network with MPA alumni and other NCCCMA members from Southeastern NC. The MPA program also has a new ICMA student chapter that will provide all students with membership in the organization.

Students should also consider using social networking web sites like Facebook and LinkedIn to advance their ability to network professionally. You should consider joining the MPA Program sections on both sites to better network with our students and alumni. While web-based social networking can be a valuable tool, never forget that these websites are used by potential employers to screen applicants. Accordingly, students are cautioned to consider the appropriateness of postings and those to whom they are linked when participating in these social networking websites.

Communication Matters: Practice, Practice, Practice . . .

If you show up on time, follow directions, and can communicate clearly, you have a high likelihood of succeeding in your professional endeavors. Accordingly, a central focus of many MPA courses is to improve your communication skills. Courses provide opportunities to learn how to write professionally (e.g., memos, working papers, reports, grant proposals, etc.), communicate your analysis (e.g., using statistics, tables, graphs, figures, etc.), and present your
findings to audiences of various types. Students should view these as opportunities to develop your professional portfolio and recognize that the only way to improve communication skills is to use them. Be sure to provide enough time to revise course assignments before turning them in. Students should consider partnering with other students to edit each other’s work. You should rehearse your presentations multiple times before giving them (we can find rooms to rehearse). You should even revise final course assignments based on faculty feedback to further improve them before using them in your portfolio.

For some students, writing is a particular problem that they will struggle with while in the MPA program. If you are one of these students, it is particularly important that you take advantage of the resources provided to improve this critical skill. The MPA faculty can provide assistance. However, you should also consider seeking assistance from the writing center on campus because they can provide valuable assistance. For other students, the big obstacle is public speaking and making presentations. However, it is hard to succeed professionally if you are unable to present your findings, arguments, and recommendations in a public forum. If you are one of these students, you should seek every opportunity to use the friendly confines of the MPA program to develop your public speaking skills. This means volunteering to take the lead in group presentations and looking for opportunities to practice your public speaking, perhaps by taking a leadership position in a student or professional organization. You may also want to consider joining a group like Lamplighters Toastmasters in Wilmington, which is an open membership organization for those interested in improving their speaking and leadership abilities. Several MPA students have used this organization and others like it as a means of improving their communication and leadership abilities.

**Job Search & Career Development**

While MPA faculty and UNCW resources can assist in career development, finding a job after you graduate is the responsibility of every MPA student. Students should select a course of study that focuses on your career objectives. This means that students should be strategic when selecting electives and complete course assignments in ways that allow you to put together a portfolio that allows you to demonstrate your professional skills and abilities.

Your academic advisor can offer a wide range of assistance. They can provide guidance on possible career paths and where to begin a job search. They can review your resume, provide help with your portfolio and selection of references, and help you prepare for job interviews. They can provide suggestions for alumni or other friends of the program that may provide assistance in the job search or may serve as mentors during the early stages of your career.

The MPA program provides some general support for career development and job search activities. It sponsors a wide range of professional development and networking opportunities and guest speakers in classes expose students to different career paths. The MPA program maintains space on its website to link students’ resumes and other information on its web page (See the MPA Director for how to do this). The internship coordinator can provide assistance in terms of searching locally for job opportunities. Students may also consider applying for postgraduate fellowships (e.g., Presidential Management Fellowship, SeaGrant Fellowship, etc.) or other state and local government management training or internship programs.
The MPA Program list server has postings for hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs each year, many of which are located in Southeastern NC. There are also a wide range of web sites that now specialize in posting jobs for different career paths. Students should recognize that many postings have small windows in which to apply and require very specific application materials. The job search can take a long time, particularly when applying for federal jobs where it is not unusual for a start date to be months after being hired. Thus, students need to allow 4 – 6 months or even longer for their job search (depending on the type of position, salary requirements, and geographic location, level of government, etc.). You must approach the job search endeavor as if finding a job is your job. It requires continually searching for and applying for openings, networking and making new contacts, and following up on previous contacts. It also means joining list servers and utilizing other social networking technology to find out about job openings.

In addition to these resources, students are advised to make use of the Career Center on campus. While faculty may be able to provide assistance with resumes, cover letters, and tips on interviews, the Career Center staff are professionals trained to provide this advice to undergraduate and graduate students. They are very knowledgeable about current trends. The Career Center also provides professional development opportunities that can assist in your job search and career development as well.

**Computer Skills Development & Campus Computing Resources**

Students are advised to develop your computing skills during their studies. The MPA program and UNCW provide numerous opportunities for this type of professional development. Students can choose classes in the MPA program and in other departments as part of their skill-based electives, concentration electives, or other electives that advance particular computing and analytical skills. UNCW’s Technology Assistance Center (TAC) offers training in different software, access to special software and computing platforms, assistance with campus computing problems, and free anti-virus software. Students are advised to take full advantage of these resources and opportunities to develop your computing skills.

**Library Support Services**

Learning how to do research and find information using libraries and web-based search engines and other information sources is an important professional skill. The MPA program provides opportunities to advance these skills in various courses and all incoming students are provided an introductory training session by library staff as part of one of their core classes. UNCW’s Randall Library also provides various services and other forms of training that can advance a student’s skill set. The UNCW librarians are a valuable resource and are there to help students. Students are advised to utilize this resource.
Graduate Student Association (GSA) & MPA-GSA

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) on the UNCW campus is an active student organization that provides graduate students across campus with opportunities to network and work to advance shared interests. It provides financial assistance to students for research-related travel expenses, brings speakers to campus, and sponsors other events that benefit all graduate students. MPA students are encouraged to get involved in the organization and there is a history of having MPA students serve as elected officers. The GSA also provides some financial support to the MPA-GSA.

The MPA-GSA represents the interests of all MPA students and its officers provide an important conduit of information between MPA faculty and students. The MPA-GSA provides some financial support to MPA students. It sponsors professional development opportunities for MPA students. It organizes community service activities. It partners with other organizations (e.g., SENCASPA) to provide networking, professional development, community service, and other social opportunities for MPA students.

Graduate Travel

An important part of professional development is attending conferences, workshops, and other types of training programs and joining professional associations. Students are expected to consider these expenses as part of the cost of your professional development. The MPA program generally does not provide this financial support. On occasion, some travel support may be provided by the MPA program (e.g., pay for a van to drive students to the NCCCMA meeting) or provided to students by individual faculty members as part of a research grant (e.g., funds for a research assistant to travel to a conference). Accordingly, students with a particular need should contact the MPA Director to determine where to look for support.

Limited travel funds may be available to MPA students to present their research at conferences and other types of travel related to professional development through the Graduate School, GSA, MPA-GSA, and other sources on campus. The amount of funds and criteria for the awards varies so students are encouraged to investigate whether their travel is eligible for reimbursement well in advance of your trip. If students seek to be reimbursed it is critical that you have an approved travel authorization in advance of your trip, you must keep your receipts, adhere to campus travel policies, and seek reimbursement no later than a week after returning from your trip.
General Policies & Procedures

There are some additional general policies and procedures that affect all MPA students. These are described in more detail below.

UNCW’s Official Form of Communication is Email

The University of North Carolina Wilmington regards e-mail as an official method of communication with students, staff, and faculty. The UNCW e-mail address is the official address for faculty, staff, and student electronic communications. Students assume full responsibility for the decision to forward email, and any failure to receive email communications due to an alternative email service does not necessarily constitute a defense for failure to respond. While email is an official method of communication, it is not the only official method of communication and does not exclude alternate methods such as written or oral communications. All members of the university community must maintain good email management habits and adhere to the standards of responsible use specified in the UNCW Responsible Use of Electronic Resources Policy (www.uncw.edu/policies/it.html) if the institution is to maintain a quality, collaborative computing environment.

The university electronic mail account that is assigned to each active student is the primary official means for communicating with individual or groups of students. Official university communications include, but are not limited to, enrollment information, grade information, financial information and policy, and announcements, as well as individualized notices. This system affords an efficient method for official messages to be disseminated to both on-and off-campus students. It is the responsibility of each student to frequently access their UNCW electronic mail account as it may contain an official communication from the University.

Students are advised to invest in a smart phone if they have not already done so because they are an important tool to manage your email and your calendar. Professionals in the public and nonprofit sector often rely on electronic calendars and constant access to email in order to communicate.

Email Etiquette & MPA List Server

Students should correspond with faculty and your fellow students in a manner that is professional. The vast majority of bosses, colleagues, and clients in the “real world” will have a much higher opinion of your professional competence if you take the time to communicate in proper English. This means avoiding the use of emoticons, short hand similar to that used in text messages, and be sure to edit your messages and use the spelling/grammar checker before sending your messages to faculty or your fellow students.

The MPA Program maintains an email list server for students. This provides a means of disseminating information about jobs, internships, campus events, MPA program deadlines, organizational meetings, and other information that is of general interest to MPA students. It
also provides a means of notifying students of important deadlines and other requirements. Failure to read these messages is not an excuse because email is the official form of communication with students. Students are advised to read email messages from the University, PIA, and the MPA Program carefully and act on requests in a timely manner.

Students may also post announcements to the MPA list server directly or by forwarding the posting to the MPA Director. Keep in mind that events that are overtly political or advocacy oriented should not be posted. It is for general information exchange, not for lobbying for political candidates or causes. If you have doubts about the suitability of a message, ask the MPA Director.

Electronic Forms

The MPA Program, the Graduate School, and other units on campus require a variety of electronic forms. When these exist, students must fill them out and submit them electronically. If students need assistance, GTAs are available to assist. Forms that have not been converted to electronic forms should be types or be printed out neatly and be completed in accordance with the directions provided.

Leave of Absence

Students who will not use university resources or take classes should apply to the Graduate School for a leave of absence. Students choosing this option must complete a leave of absence form. If a graduate student requests, and is granted a leave of absence, the student must return in the term specified on the Leave of Absence form. If a student fails to continue as a student in accordance with the term specified on the leave of absence form, then he/she must reapply for admission. If students are not registering for class but will use university resources they should register for GRC 600 for continuous enrollment.

Capstone Presentations

All MPA students are required to attend the public presentation for the Capstone Projects. This presentation is held on the evening of the reading day before final exams so that there are no class conflicts. In the event that the UNCW calendar does not have a reading day, the presentations will be the last day of class. You must seek permission of the MPA Director if you are unable to attend the presentations.

Student Information

The MPA director maintains a list of current student information including the phone number, address, emergency contacts, and your degree information (e.g., advisor, concentration, etc.). The MPA Director may periodically survey students to collect additional information. It is your responsibility to keep your personal information up to date and to respond to queries from the MPA Director. As you transition to being alumni, please continue to provide information to the MPA Director since it is required for accreditation and reporting purposes.
Building Security & Campus Safety

All members of the UNCW community share responsibility for maintaining a safe and secure campus. When students receive 24-hour building access or access to the PIA office suite through their ID card or a building key, they are expected to assist PIA faculty in keeping the building safe and secure. Theft from faculty offices and classrooms is often a problem. This means that you should not leave doors ajar if they are supposed to be locked. You should not let anyone unknown to you enter through locked doors because if the person has authorized access they will have a key or access through their ID card. Be sure to lock all doors if you are the last one to leave the office suite or a classroom. You should also report anyone behaving suspiciously to campus police at 962 - 4911.

If you are issued a key to a classroom or faculty member’s office, it is critical that you secure the key and do not lose it. It is very costly to re-key the locks on an office or classroom.

Classes end late and sometimes students are on campus late at night working on projects and class assignments. Be careful when leaving the building alone after dark. If you feel uneasy, campus police can escort you to your car.

You should be prepared to deal with campus emergencies as effectively as possible. If an emergency occurs, do not hesitate to contact campus police. There are call buttons in the classrooms and on campus. The campus also has an emergency siren and broadcast email messages. You can also register your cell phone and receive text message alerts. Hurricanes, tropical storms, flooding, ice, snow, and other adverse weather can cause closures and even evacuation from campus.

You should educate yourself about the campus’ adverse weather policy and act accordingly. There are three (3) general possibilities whenever we have adverse weather:

- **The university will remain in regular operation**: Even though the university may be fully operational, there may be times when travel is unsafe because of weather-related events in surrounding areas. This is particularly true since we have individuals who commute from varying distances. For example, driving conditions for individuals who live outside the immediate area may prohibit safe travel (flooding, icy roads etc.) while Wilmington may only have light rain. In such instances, we encourage employees and to use their best judgment to remain as safe as possible; the adverse weather policy applies for any missed work time. In short, employees have to use vacation (or compensatory time) to cover any absences and students should check with faculty regarding their class attendance policies.

- **The university will “cancel classes”…but remain in operation otherwise**: If classes are cancelled but the university remains open, only employees who earn leave are expected to report to work or use vacation or compensatory time to cover their absences. The adverse weather policy also applies in this situation.

- **The university will close**: The chancellor has delegated authority from North Carolina state government to “close” the university officially for “catastrophic” weather events. When the university “closes”, the campus is vacated. All resident students must
evacuate and only critically-needed employees are expected to report to work. Such critical need employees (UNCW Police and other emergency personnel) are notified in advance of the need for their work during such a crisis. All leave earning employees receive “administrative leave” to cover the time they are away during the closing.

Decisions made regarding cancellations and/or closings will be communicated using a variety of methods. A campus-wide e-mail such as this one will be sent out, TV and radio announcements will be made, and messages will be posted on the main UNCW website [www.uncw.edu], on the emergency information website [www.uncw.edu/alert], and on the Emergency Information Hotline [910-962-3991 or 888-657-5751]. The full adverse weather policy can be found at: http://www.uncw.edu/policies/documents/08.216.pdf.

UNCW One Card

Building access and access to a wide range of UNCW services is linked to your UNCW One Card and your student ID number. You can obtain your student ID at the UNCW One Card Office on campus.

Telephone Service

The MPA Program and Department of Public and International Affairs (PIA) do not provide phones for use in student research. Departmental phones may be used to make local calls only unless you specifically have permission from a MPA faculty member.

Use of Departmental Equipment

Most of the equipment, including computers in faculty offices, the GTA lab, the front office area, and the classrooms is owned by UNCW and is state property. You are not allowed to take any equipment off campus without specific authorization of the Chair of PIA or the faculty member otherwise responsible for the equipment. You should never use a piece of departmental or faculty equipment without first requesting approval to use it. You do not want to be responsible for the disappearance, damage, or destruction of state-owned property. If you are unsure what you can use, consult the MPA Director or Chair of PIA.

Departmental Copy Machine & Laser Printers

You are not authorized to use the departmental copying machine or shared laser printers to print out articles, class materials, print questionnaires, etc. MPA students are responsible for covering their expenses associated with completing and presenting class projects. Unfortunately, the PIA budget does not have funds that allow for students to use the PIA copying machine or the shared laser printers.
Use of Departmental Computers

Computers in the front office area and the GTA teaching lab are not for general use by MPA students unless you have prior authorization of the Chair of PIA or the MPA Director. You are also not allowed access to a faculty member’s office computer without having prior authorization. In all cases, use of these computers must conform to UNCW policy and downloading inappropriate material is cause for disciplinary action. If you find such material or the computer is malfunctioning in any way, please notify the person who authorized the use so that the issue can be addressed.

Financial Aid

Understanding and navigating the complex world of financial aid can be challenging. There are several time sensitive steps that must be completed in order to have your aid in process to pay your tuition bills and where applicable provide additional loan disbursements. Students seeking financial aid are advised to contact the financial aid office and to follow all of the required procedures carefully. Please consult their website for additional information:

- http://www.uncw.edu/finaid/

Depending on your eligibility and need, you may also qualify as a federal work study student. Students are advised to consider this option and depending on your placement and work responsibilities your work study position may qualify for internship credit.

Health & Wellness Services

All graduate students are required to have health insurance. If you don’t currently have health insurance, it is available through registration. Students have to complete an Immunization & Medical History Form. Students have access to other health and wellness services through the Abrons Student Health Center (SHC) as well.
Graduate Assistants

Each year the MPA program receives funds from the Graduate School to support a number of graduate teaching assistant (GTA) positions. Individual faculty may occasionally hire research assistants with grant funds. The job requirements, hours, pay, and length of time will vary based on the grant. In addition, some MPA students work as graduate assistants in other departments and programs on campus. These opportunities are posted on the MPA list server when they are forwarded to the MPA Director. However, not all opportunities are posted on the MPA list server so students need to search for those opportunities, some of which may be professional in nature.

MPA Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

The MPA program awards GTA positions on the basis of merit and are contingent on the availability of funding from the Graduate School. All MPA students and incoming degree-seeking students who have been accepted to the program are provided an opportunity to apply. The awards are typically made for a period of one year and all GTAs are required to complete a graduate assistantship appointment agreement. They are also contingent upon the availability and continuation of funds and the appointment does not include any assurance, obligation, or guarantee of subsequent appointments or employment.

The MPA Director periodically evaluates the performance of GTAs and all MPA faculty members review their performance at the end of the academic year. Retention of your appointment and payment of the full amount of the stipend is based on the satisfactory performance of the responsibilities and remaining in good standing academically (3.0 minimum GPA). You must also be enrolled in a degree seeking program and be registered for one or more classes. You must remain enrolled in a course of study and regularly attend classes. While unusual, it is important to remember that a GTA can be terminated at any time for poor job performance or if there are problems with their academic, personal, or professional conduct. Similarly, if at any time you need to resign your appointment or can no longer perform the required responsibilities you should notify the MPA Director as soon as possible and your stipend will be pro-rated and reduced accordingly. You will be responsible for repayment of any unearned stipend monies.

If graduate teaching assistants make satisfactory academic progress, demonstrate the desired level of professionalism and commitment to the job duties, and perform their job duties to the satisfaction of the faculty, the GTA award is extended to their second year in the MPA program provided that funding is available. The MPA program makes no commitment beyond the second year.

GTA positions pay a stipend for the Academic Year and students are required to work about 20 hours a week. There are no benefits associated with the appointment and there should be no expectation of tuition, insurance, health, or retirement benefits. The term of service runs from the beginning until the end of the academic year and follow the UNCW calendar in terms...
of breaks and holidays (e.g., from when the semester opens until grades are posted). During the orientation at the start of the academic year, GTAs are provided with a calendar indicating the events they are responsible for covering during the academic year and must plan their calendars accordingly.

All of the GTAs work at least 6 hours a week in support of a teaching lab that provides students with help in their writing and course assignments. Between 12:00 and 6:15 PM on Monday to Thursday (and in the mornings as needed), GTAs provide classroom support for faculty in the Department of Public and International Affairs (PIA). This involves grading, covering classes, copying, preparing course materials, help with website development, and other related duties. GTAs also provide support for PIA and MPA program events and functions like Poli-Sci days, orientation, prospective student open houses, graduation ceremonies, the capstone presentation and awards ceremony, and MPA community advisory board meetings. Each GTA is also assigned to a research/service cluster for the balance of their 20-hour time commitment that is designed to further the teaching and service missions for the MPA program. The GTAs receive their assignments at the start of each academic year during their orientation.
Scholarships & Awards

The MPA program provides several scholarships when funding is available. Outstanding students and a distinguished alumnus are also recognized with awards.

Scholarships for MPA Students

Each year the MPA program receives scholarship funds from the Graduate School to support students. These awards come in three forms:

- **Out-of-State tuition remissions** equivalent to the additional cost of the tuition for out-of-state students. This award must go to a graduate teaching assistant. It is for a term of one year;
- **$1,000 new scholar award** that goes to one of the top incoming students and is for their first year in the program;
- **Graduate School Scholarships** that are generally $500 and are awarded annually to incoming and continuing students based on merit.

On behalf of the North Carolina City/County Management Association (NCCCMA), the MPA Program awards a:

- **$2,500 scholarship from the North Carolina City/County Management Association (NCCCMA)**: It is awarded based on merit to a student with career interests in local government. The scholarship is to be used for student tuition, fees, and books. The eligibility requirements are:
  - You must be a resident of NC
  - Your work experience or exposure to local government (city or county)
  - Your career plans as they relate to local government (city or county)
  - You must be admitted as a degree-seeking student to the MPA program.

In addition, the student can be either a full-time student or a part-time student but must have at least 2 semesters remaining until graduation.

When funds are available, the MPA Program has also awarded the:

- **Stephanie Fitzgerald David Public Administration Scholarship** that provides up to $2,200 that can be used to cover the cost of tuition, fees, and books. It is a merit based scholarship and recipients are required to:
  - “possess a demonstrated historical record of community/public service, and/or volunteerism in support of non-profit organizations or programs. Recipients shall further manifest their continuing commitment to perform public or community service and/or volunteerism throughout their graduate tenure at UNCW. A recipient’s failure to demonstrate the continuing commitment to
public/community service or volunteerism during an active scholarship period may result in the ineligibility or non-renewal of the recipient’s scholarship”

In recent years, there have not been funds available to provide this scholarship.

### MPA Program Awards

Each year the MPA program recognizes outstanding students and a distinguished alumnus at an awards reception. The awards include:

- **MPA Graduate of the Year**: Recognizes the student who has demonstrated academic excellence as exemplified by their overall GPA. If there is more than one student within .1 GPA, then other criteria related to academic excellence (e.g., presentations at conferences, conference papers, co-authored manuscripts, publications, work on research grants, classroom teaching, etc.) will be used to determine a single winner. In essence, it is our class valedictorian and typically goes to the student with the highest GPA.

- **MPA Special Achievement**: This award recognizes the one or two students who, in the opinion of the faculty, demonstrated the greatest professional development since entering the MPA program. GPA is not a determining criterion, although some progression academically is a factor. Rather, the award goes to the one or two students who made the most progress in terms of professional development.

- **Ray Dawson Award**: This award goes to the MPA student, who in the opinion of the faculty, has demonstrated the strongest commitment to excellence in public service as evidenced by such things as their academic focus, internship, professional goals, work experience, volunteerism in the community, and a strong commitment to public service.

- **MPA Program Distinguished Research and Service Award**: This award goes to the one or two MPA students who, in the opinion of the faculty, have demonstrated excellence through research or service. GPA is not a determining criterion in making the award. Rather, it goes to the one or two students who deserve to be recognized for their outstanding contributions in terms of research or service.

- **Alumni of the Year**: This award is given to the MPA alumni who has distinguished themselves through the professional service and their support to the MPA program after graduation.

There is no application process for these awards. Instead, nominations are made by the faculty with the winners are recognized at the annual awards ceremony.