Western Carolina University

Master of Public Affairs

2018-2019 Student Handbook

*Last updated
August 2018*

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PROGRAM MISSION

The Master of Public Affairs program is a professional degree designed to prepare students for leadership positions in the public sector. The program emphasizes the integration of public affairs theory and practice to improve the managerial, analytical, and communication skills of students. The program promotes teaching, applied research, and service activities that will enhance the performance of the public sector with a particular emphasis on the Western North Carolina region.

As befits a graduate program in public affairs, program faculty are concerned that students obtain skills and knowledge enabling them to be effective managers and leaders in the public sector and nonprofit organizations. The program is designed so that, in addition to applied skills, students come to understand the nature of public affairs and the governing principles important to public service. Some electives are offered in an online format particularly during summer session.

As such, the objective of this degree program is to prepare individuals for positions of leadership in these sectors. The curriculum provides a solid base in the political, managerial and analytical aspects of public and nonprofit sector operations.

Job Placement

The MPA program keeps up-to-date information on alumni employment statistics on the program's website. This data can be found here: https://www.wcu.edu/learn/departments-schools-colleges/cas/social-sciences/poliscipublicaffairs/mpa/grad-employment-statistics.aspx

GENERAL INFORMATION

Welcome to the Master of Public Affairs (MPA) Program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The program requires you to complete 39 hours of graduate coursework. As part of these 39 hours, *pre-service* students must complete an internship and submit an internship report. *In-service* students do not complete an internship, but must complete the same number of required hours.

This Handbook is designed as a supplement to the Graduate Catalog, which can be found here: http://catalog.wcu.edu/index.php?catoid=42. Information in the Graduate Catalog is relevant to all graduate students at WCU, and you should become familiar with that information. If this handbook and the graduate catalog do not adequately answer your questions, please see your advisor or the Director of the MPA Program.

The MPA Program is housed in the Department of Political Science & Public Affairs within the College of Arts and Sciences.

PSC/PA Office: Stillwell 358
PSC/PA Phone Number: 828-227-3854
Biltmore Park (Asheville) Location: Phone (828) 654-6498.
E-mail:biltmoreparkinfo@wcu.edu

Faculty and graduate assistant mailboxes are located in the Political Science Department in Stillwell 358.

Faculty offices are located on the third floor of Stillwell Building on WCU's main campus in Cullowhee.

WCU MPA website can be found here: https://www.wcu.edu/learn/departments-schools-colleges/cas/social-sciences/poliscipublicaffairs/mpa/

WCU Graduate School website can be found here: https://www.wcu.edu/apply/graduate-school/

Admission

Any student who satisfies published admission criteria is fully admitted to the MPA program. Students may be provisionally admitted to the program. Upon completion of the required provisions, the student will be moved to full admission. The Graduate School issues a letter with the formal decision of all admissions decisions. Students may begin the program in any semester (fall, spring, or summer).

WCU Graduate School admissions requirements can be found here: http://catalog.wcu.edu/content.php?catoid=32&navoid=701

In addition to the graduate school admission requirements, MPA applicants should have a B average in their last two years of undergraduate study and must obtain a satisfactory score on the GRE General Test. In addition, all applicants must submit an up-to-date resume and a 1-2 page essay that addresses the following question: "Why do you want to pursue an MPA and a career in public service? In your answer, be sure to discuss how your job, educational and life experiences relate to this goal."

Applications for admission must be made using the on-line system: (https://app.applyyourself.com/?id=wcu-grad).

More information on applications, including the military applicant fee refund, can be found here: https://www.wcu.edu/apply/graduate-school/admissions/apply-now.aspx

For more information on how to arrange taking the GRE, please see "Register for the GRE" in Appendix A of this Handbook.

The MPA program admits students on a rolling basis. Students wishing to apply for the graduate assistantship must apply by March 1st for a fall position and October 15th for a spring position. More information on the graduate assistantship can be found below.

Admission recommendations are based on a complete review of the applicant's file. The following enter into that decision: (1) undergraduate and any graduate grades, (2) scores on the GRE, (3) specific previous coursework, and (4) applicable work history.

Students who do not meet full requirements for admission are sometimes admitted provisionally. The specifics of the provision will be spelled out in the admissions letter sent by the Dean of the Graduate School.

<u>Advisor</u>

Each student is assigned a faculty member to serve as an academic advisor. The advisor assists the student in developing a program of study. In addition, the advisor will evaluate requests for transfer credit.

<u>Course Load</u>

A full-time course load is at least 9 hours. Full-time students can expect to graduate in two years. However, students are permitted to matriculate through the program by taking as few as one course per semester.

<u>Time Limit for Degree Completion: The Six Year Rule</u>

Work to be applied toward the MPA degree must have been completed within six years immediately preceding the completion of requirements for the degree. Graduate credits to be accepted in transfer must have been earned within the six-year period. Any extension of time beyond these limits must have the approval of the student's advisor, the head of the Political Science and Public Affairs department, and the dean of Research and Graduate Studies.

<u>Transfer & Elective Credit</u>

A total of 6 credit hours may be transferred from other universities toward the 39-hour program requirement. This requires written approval from the MPA Director. The decision to count these hours towards the MPA degree is based on several conditions:

1. The student's assigned advisor and the MPA faculty must agree that the transferred credit is appropriate to the MPA degree and student's career objectives; and

2. Transfer credit from other universities will be accepted in accordance with university regulations. The Graduate School will accept no more than 6 credit hours of graduate work from other accredited institutions.

In addition to transfer credit from other universities, students may opt to take courses in other graduate programs at Western Carolina University. With the approval of the student's assigned advisor and the MPA Director, the student will be permitted to count courses eligible for graduate credit from other Western Carolina University disciplines.

<u>Graduation</u>

Once a student is nearing completion of the program requirements, he/she must begin the steps in the graduation process. The process begins several months prior to graduation. Initially, the student must file an "Application for Graduation" form. Due dates for graduation applications may change, so check with the Graduate School or Registrar for current information.

Instructions for <u>applying for graduation</u> can be found in Appendix A of this Handbook.

<u>Tuition and Fees</u>

Students can find up-to-date information about tuition and fees here:
https://www.wcu.edu/apply/tuition-and-fees/fall-spring-graduate-tuition-and-fees.aspx
<u>Financial Aid for MPA Students</u>

Scholarships

The WCU Graduate School has a limited number of scholarship opportunities. You can access information about those by visiting
https://www.wcu.edu/apply/scholarships/index.aspx.

MPA students in the past have also proved very competitive for scholarships not directly affiliated with the university. For instance, each year the North Carolina City/County Managers Association offers one $2000 scholarship to a WCU MPA student who is a resident of North Carolina and is interested in a career in local government.

Graduate Assistantships

Many opportunities for employment are available on and off campus. The MPA program, Public Policy Institute, and the Department of Political Science offer up to 10 graduate assistantships every year.

To apply for a Graduate Assistantship, a student must indicate so when they apply to the MPA program. If you are interested in an assistantship, but you did not indicate so when you applied, please contact the program director. Students who are granted an assistantship must enroll in at least 9 credit hours of classes each term and work in the department for 20 hours per week. Work duties include assisting professors in the department with their research (sometimes publishing with them as a co-author), serving as a teaching assistant in selected undergraduate courses, and assisting the department with assessment activities. Graduate Assistantships offer a $4500 stipend per semester.

The department also generally places a number of students in the Public Policy Institute (PPI) and Local Government Training Program (LGTP). Students working in the PPI and/or LGTP gain valuable real world policy experience.

From time to time, students may also receive graduate assistantships to work in other related units on campus. You may wish to contact the Graduate School if you are interested in these options.

ORGANIZATION

The Master of Public Affairs program at Western Carolina University is housed within the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs. The MPA program is headed by the MPA Director who reports to the Political Science and Public Affairs Department Head, who reports to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, who is in turn responsible to the Provost. The University is headed by the Chancellor who is responsible to the Board of Trustees for the University, to the President of the entire University of North Carolina system, and to the system's Board of Governors.

Faculty

The five core WCU MPA faculty are responsible for governance decisions related to course offerings, student policies, networking and outreach events, recruitment, and several other areas of program administration. All core faculty are members of the Political Science and Public Affairs Department at WCU, which is housed in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Jay Gerlach: Ph.D.; Associate Professor, MPA Director; Public Organizational Theory; Public Personnel Management; The Nonprofit Sector

Todd Collins: Ph.D.; Public Policy Institute Director, Professor; Legal Issues in Public Affairs

Dr. Chris Cooper: Ph.D.; Department Head; Professor; Public Affairs Administration, Research Methods, State and Local Government

Heather Rimes: Assistant Professor, Public Personnel Administration; Research Methods; Frontiers in Public Management

Dr. JoBeth Shafran: Ph.D.; Assistant Professor, Public Policy Analysis; Public Policy Formulation; Research Methods

Andy Coburn: M.E.M.; Adjunct Faculty

Paul Dezendorf: Ph.D; Adjunct Faculty

Ashley Fay: M.P.A.; Adjunct Faculty

Laura Jeffords: M.P.A.; Adjunct Faculty

Tyler Reinagel, Ph.D.; Adjunct Faculty

Students can find links to faculty webpages and e-mail addresses on the main page of the MPA Program:
https://www.wcu.edu/learn/departments-schools-colleges/cas/social-sciences/poliscipublicaffairs/mpa/

Governance

NASPAA

The MPA program is accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). NASPAA markets itself as the "global standard in public affairs education," and is the accrediting body for 175+ MPA/MPP programs in the United States and internationally. The WCU MPA program was accredited in 2014 for a seven-year time period, at the end of which it may seek reaccreditation.

NASPAA guides the WCU MPA program in many ways. NASPAA provides five core competencies which form the MPA program basis for curricular decisions, instruction, and assessment. These core competencies aim to produce graduates who are able to:
1. Lead and manage in public governance
2. Participate in and contribute to the public policy process
3. Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions
4. Articulate and apply a public service perspective

5. Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

NASPAA also provides guidance regarding faculty composition within the MPA program, and the diversity of students, faculty, and speakers. NASPAA asks that the MPA program assess its effectiveness annually, and requires an annual data report of the program (due October 1 of each year). Finally, NASPAA provides conferences and workshops which focus on everything from MPA program development to faculty and student development and learning.

Advisory Board

The MPA Advisory Board consists of several community leaders with an interest in public service education. Many Advisory Board members are WCU MPA alumni. Some represent the governmental sector. Others, the nonprofit sector. The MPA Advisory Board meets multiple times per year to guide the MPA Director and faculty in curriculum development, student internship/job placement, program outreach, fundraising, and several other areas of program development. MPA Advisory Board members for the 2018-19 academic year are:
- Leslie Anderson (board chair) – President, Leslie Anderson Consulting, Inc.
- Kimberlee Archie – Director, Office of Equity and Inclusion, City of Asheville
- Mike Arriola – Deputy District Director, U.S. Small Business Administration
- Amy Brantley – Assistant Manager, Henderson County, NC
- Paige Dowling – Town Manager, Sylva, NC
- Laura Foor – VP of Marketing and Research, Charlotte Regional Partnership
- Max Haner – Ret., NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources
- Danna Harrell – Deputy Executive Director, Land of Sky Regional Council
- Cindy McMahon – Senior Consultant, WNC Nonprofit Pathways
- Rachael Nygaard – Director of Strategic Partnerships, Buncombe County Manager's Office
- Kendra Penland – Executive Director, Asheville Brewers Alliance
- Caroline Rodier – Assistant Director, Buncombe Partnership for Children
- Kirk Saunooke – Chief Justice, Cherokee Tribal Court
- Angelica Wind – Executive Director, OUR Voice NC

Assessment

The MPA program is assessed annually by the core faculty. Guiding annual assessment are the five core competencies set forth by NASPAA. The WCU MPA program teaches these competencies through core and elective courses, Professional Development Series and other networking events, the internship requirement (PA 685), and capstone (PA 699). Assessment outcomes serve to guide future program administration and governance, as well as shape curriculum delivery. An assessment report is completed by the MPA Director and submitted to WCU annually, and assessment processes and procedures are an integral part of the NASPAA accreditation and program maintenance requirements.

CURRICULUM

General Requirements

The program requires 39 hours of graduate coursework. Students complete: (1) core coursework; (2) concentration requirements; (3) concentration electives; and (4) for preservice students, an internship. In addition to coursework, each student must complete a capstone project. These elements must be completed in order for a student to be awarded the MPA degree. All core courses are offered on weekday evenings in order to serve working professionals as well as full-time students.

In addition to the content implied by the course names, the core curriculum focuses on political and legal institutions and their processes, economic forces and social systems, ethical considerations for public affairs, organizational and managerial skills and practices, concepts and techniques of financial administration, and analytic techniques using computers and statistics to improve decision making.

Course Schedule

Because we admit students in the fall, spring, and summer terms, there is no required sequence of courses. Please see your advisor to decide the best sequence for you. We generally recommend, that you take as many of the core courses early in your program as possible. This will allow you to take comprehensive exams closer to the completion of your courses. In addition, your core courses may help you decide where your interests lie, thus your choice of electives will become clearer.

Course Requirements

The program requires each student to complete the Public Affairs core requirements (24 hours) and 15 hours of guided electives for in-service students or 12 hours of guided electives and 3 hours of internship (PA 685) for preservice students.

All students are required to take the following courses:

PA 669 - Legal Issues in Public Affairs
PA 670 - Public Affairs Administration
PA 671 - Public Financial Management
PA 672 - Public Organizational Theory
PA 673 - Public Policy Analysis
PA 674 - Research Methods for Public Affairs
PA 699 - Public Affairs Capstone Experience
PA 677 - Public Personnel Management

Course Descriptions

Course descriptions of core requirement courses can be found here:
http://catalog.wcu.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=32&poid=4117&returnto=691

Detailed descriptions of all courses offered can be found here:
http://catalog.wcu.edu/content.php?catoid=32&navoid=703

Internships

Each student in the Master of Public Affairs Program is required to complete a professional field experience in public affairs. This is typically accomplished through an internship. The internship is intended to give the student practical experience in the administration of a public or nonprofit organization, and should broaden a student's perspective on public management through first-hand application of classroom knowledge. The internship is also a great opportunity to learn more about the five NASPAA competencies which are integral to the WCU MPA curriculum. Internships require a minimum of 200 hours working for a public organization. After completing the internship, students will complete a 10-12 page internship report wherein they will detail how the internship taught them more about those NASPAA competencies.

Internships must be approved by the MPA Director. Please seek an Application for Internship Credit form from the Director. You and your potential internship sponsor will fill this form out. You will then submit the completed form to the MPA Director for approval. If you are currently working in public service or have considerable experience in public and/or nonprofit management, you may petition the MPA faculty for an internship replacement. Students replacing the internship do so by enrolling in another three-hour elective course instead of PA 685 (Internship in Public Affairs). This keeps the MPA required hours at 39 for all students. To request a replacement, submit a 1- to 2-page written justification for why you feel your internship requirement should be replaced, taking extra care to address how your current and/or past public affairs experience teaches/taught you about the five NASPAA competencies. Submit this request to the MPA Director, who will then pass it along to the full MPA faculty for consideration.

Students can learn more about the internship requirement here:
https://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/MPA_Internship_Requirements.pdf

Capstone

Each student is required to take PA 699 (Public Affairs Capstone) in his/her final semester in the MPA program. In this course, the student works with a sponsor from a public or nonprofit sector organization to tackle an issue with which the organization needs managerial help. The topic and sponsor organization for the capstone project should be sought out by the student, and will be approved by the PA 699 instructor. Capstone projects are often considered "file drawer" projects for organizations – tasks the organization would love to tackle if only it had more resources. The capstone student should take ownership of the project, and offer an impactful set of deliverables to the organization at the conclusion of the semester.

Capstone projects are designed for the student to apply many of the skills he/she gained in the MPA program to a real-life management issue. Capstone projects are expected to be completed for an organization in an MPA-related sector or subsector, but not with the student's internship organization or place of employment. As one of the requirements of PA 699, the student is asked to present his/her project at the fall or spring Capstone Conference on the main WCU campus in Cullowhee.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Professional Development Series

Each semester, the WCU MPA program holds professional development events for students. These include speakers at WCU Biltmore Park prior to regular MPA classes as part of the Professional Development Lecture Series, mock job application/interview processes for local government and nonprofit-oriented students, and chances to take part in the annual WCU Graduate School Research Symposium. Often, other professional development events arise through WCU or another organization in the region. Students can find out about these upcoming events through email, the MPA Facebook page, and the MPA Twitter feed.

Professional Organizations

The MPA program has close relationships with the North Carolina City & County Managers Association (NCCCMA) and the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits. Both organizations hold annual conferences. The MPA program encourages students to attend one or both of these conferences. Program funds may be available to help defray the cost of student attendance at one of the two conferences annually.

Other professional organizations with which the MPA program partners or has in prior years include:
- Western North Carolina Managers Association
- Association of Local Government Catamounts (alumni organization) – www.wcualgc.org
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA) – https://icma.org
- Association of Fundraising Professionals, Western North Carolina Chapter – www.afpwnc.org
- WNC Nonprofit Pathways – www.nonprofitpathways.org

Professional Development Funding

Student funding to attend a professional development event/conference is available in limited supply. To apply for such funding, please contact the MPA Director. Because professional development funding is often donated by generous alumni, friends of the program, or partner programs/organizations, you may be asked to reach out to a donor with a word of gratitude once awarded funding. This reflects well on our MPA program and its students.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students can access Western Carolina University's statement on Academic Integrity here:
https://www.wcu.edu/experience/dean-of-students/academic-integrity.aspx

Many courses in the MPA department require some degree of independent work outside the classroom setting (such as take-home exams). During these times the student is expected to conduct themselves according to the Academic Integrity guidelines provided above, and also within any specific directions given by the course professor. Not all professors allow

open-book and open-note take-home work, so it is important to understand the specific requests of each instructor.

Appendix A
How-To…

… REGISTER FOR THE GRE

The department uses scores on the General Section of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) to help make admissions decisions. The GRE is offered is a standardized test offered by Educational Testing Services (ETS) "measures critical thinking, analytical writing, verbal reasoning, and quantitative reasoning skills that have been acquired over a long period of time and that are not related to any specific field of study." For information on GRE test dates, locations, and scheduling, please visit http://www.ets.org/gre.

…COMMUNICATE WITH THE MPA DEPARTMENT

All contact information for the MPA Department is in the "Organization" section of this handbook.

…GET TO CAMPUS

Students can learn more about how to get to the Biltmore Park campus here: https://www.wcu.edu/discover/locations/biltmore-park/directions-and-parking.aspx

Students can learn more about how to get to the Cullowhee campus here: https://www.wcu.edu/discover/locations/main-campus/directions-to-campus.aspx

…GET IT SUPPORT

Students can learn more about IT Support, including contact information, here: https://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-services/it/

…FIND INFO ON BILTMORE PARK LOCATION

Hours of Operation for WCU's Biltmore Park Campus are as follows:

Monday-Thursday: 8am-9pm
Friday-Saturday: 8am-5pm (Please note that we will be closed on the Saturdays before or after a holiday where there is no class or the university is closed.)

More information about the Biltmore Park facility can be found here: https://asheville.wcu.edu

…FIND INFO ON BILTMORE PARK FITNESS ROOM

Hours of Operation for the Biltmore Park Fitness Room are as follows:

Fitness Area (3rd Floor, Room 339)
Monday-Thursday: 8am-9pm
Friday-Saturday: 8am-5pm

…PURCHASE BOOKS

Students can purchase textbooks at the WCU Bookstore here:
http://books.wcu.edu/home.aspx

Student also may purchase books from their choice of bookseller, but are cautioned to check professor instructions carefully for the specific edition and volume of text needed.

…USE MYWCU

myWCU is a secure site that provides students, faculty and administrative staff with world-class Intranet and Internet services. This is where you can check your campus e-mail, register for courses, and make secure credit card payments. It serves as a portal for most student services.

Students can access myWCU here: https://www.wcu.edu/myWCU/

…ACCESS THE LIBRARY

Students can learn more about Hunter Library here: https://www.wcu.edu/hunter-library/

Biltmore Park students can learn more about off-campus library support here:
http://researchguides.wcu.edu/off-campus/biltmorepark

…GET AN ID CARD
Students can get an ID card at the fall open house at Biltmore Park or can visit OneStop at Killian Annex on the main campus.

Students can find out more about OneStop here:
https://www.wcu.edu/current-students/index.aspx

…MAKE COPIES AT WCU BILTMORE PARK

All copies and printers at Biltmore Park use PawPrint and require payment with a student's CatCard. Students may deposit money on their CatCard online. On-line deposits to the

CatCard account should be applied within an hour. Students may deposit money on their account through myWCU here:
https://citation.wcu.edu/bannerupay/

…GET BLACKBOARD HELP

For help with Blackboard, students can access IT support services and knowledge articles here:
http://blackboardsupport.wcu.edu

…APPLY FOR GRADUATION

Students can learn more about applying for graduation here:
https://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-services/registrars-office/graduation.aspx

…CONTACT

For questions about admissions requirements, please contact Jay Gerlach, MPA Director (jdgerlach@email.wcu.edu)

For questions about taking the GRE, please contact ETS at 1-866-473-4373

If you have a hold on your account, contact the Graduate School at 828-227-3175.

For questions about financial aid, contact financial aid at (828) 227-7290