Western Michigan University
School of Public Affairs and Administration

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
STUDENT HANDBOOK

School of Public Affairs and Administration

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This MPA Handbook should be used with the WMU *Graduate Catalog*, available at http://catalog.wmich.edu/, which describes policies and procedures for graduate study at Western Michigan University and is the only official description of the program curriculum. Current year Graduate Catalog policies apply to all MPA students whereas only the catalog that was in effect during your first semester as an MPA student describes your required curriculum. Also, please pay particular attention to the sections on "Student Rights and Responsibilities." All other applicable WMU policies are incorporated in this handbook by reference to the Graduate Catalog.

MISSION

The mission of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program is to improve the quality of public service by developing professionals and leaders equipped with knowledge and skills in theories, methodology, and innovative practice in the interdisciplinary field of public administration. Our graduates lead and manage a diverse range of government, nonprofit, and healthcare organizations, and make positive impacts on the lives of citizens locally, nationally, and globally.

The MPA program is accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), the global standard in public affairs education.

OUR VALUES

The MPA Program is modeled around the following core values of public administration:
- Plurality of ideas and perspectives;
- Common good, social justice, and democratic governance;
- Ethical and competent leadership and decision-making; and
- Efficient, effective, equitable, and transparent practice of public service.

MPA PROGRAM GOALS

1. Improve the quality of public service by promoting life-long learning, critical thinking, and professional development that are grounded in our program values and NASPAA competencies.
2. Enhance ethical and competent leadership and decision-making by integrating faculty teaching, research, and service.
3. Maintain and enhance the reputation and recognition of the program through innovation and continuous improvement.
4. Use data-driven decision-making to maintain and enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and transparency of our MPA program.

MPA CURRICULUM

The MPA curriculum provides a foundation in the principles of public administration, addresses the practical responsibilities of the public manager, and reflects on the tasks of administrative leadership. The MPA program includes four components: the core courses, required courses for your area of concentration, elective courses for your area of concentration, and the capstone project paper seminar. In addition, individuals accepted as pre-career students (see FAQs at end of this handbook) are required to complete a professional field experience (internship) requirement. The details of this curriculum are available in the WMU Graduate Catalog. The catalog in effect when you were admitted to the MPA program (i.e., your start semester/term) provides the curriculum that is relevant in your specific case. When the MPA curriculum is changed, current students in the program may choose to pursue the new version, and should work with an MPA advisor to ensure a fluid transition.

The entire curriculum assumes that MPA students possess strong English language verbal, reading, and writing skills, as well as basic computer literacy with word processing and spreadsheets and a working knowledge of the American political processes at local, state, and national levels. Prospective students without those skills are encouraged to acquire them before they begin MPA course work. WMU also provides opportunities for students to continue to develop these skills while in the program including one-on-one support through the Writing Center and numerous workshops offered by the Graduate College.

Each new student should meet with an MPA advisor to prepare an initial program of study before or during their first semester of coursework.

GETTING STARTED

Recommended Course Sequence for MPA Core Courses

Students should follow the courses in this sequence whenever possible. It is understood, however, that the frequency of course delivery may occasionally make it difficult to meet these expectations. Nonetheless, PADM 6000, Legal and Historical Foundations of American Public Administration; PADM 6180, Political and Economic Environment of Public Administration; PADM 6070, Data Analysis for Administrators; and PADM 6060, Analytical Methods; should be among the first courses taken, with the other three courses generally being taken later.

Balancing the Scheduling of the MPA Core and Your Area of Concentration

Most MPA students are working professionals who take one to two courses per semester. Three courses is a heavy load if you are working a full-time job. Usually to balance the core requirements and their area of personal passion, students will seek to take one core course and one concentration course each semester as they move through the program. In addition, it is helpful to have some required concentration courses completed before taking elective concentration courses, but we recognize there will usually be some overlap with these in the student's program of study.

Advising

All MPA students are expected to meet with an MPA advisor during, or prior to, their first semester/term in the program. The goal of this "mandatory" advising is to develop a preliminary program of study that is fully customized to meet the unique needs of each student with regard to their career interests and goals and any relevant coursework they may have completed. Those not meeting this requirement may see a hold on further course enrollments. Any changes to this preliminary program of study must be reported to the advisor so that appropriate revisions can be made.

Where Do I See Available Courses?

The SPAA website at www.wmich.edu/spaa has a "course schedules" icon on the bottom of the page. This link will take you to a list of courses in the upcoming semester as well as a long-term plan for when various courses will be offered. However, course registration is only done through the GoWMU Portal at http://gowmu.wmich.edu. This website is where you add and drop courses, access the eLearning site for each of your courses, pay student bills, view your course grades, and so forth.

See "Frequently Asked Questions" at the end of this handbook for further information.

Financial Aid

Because the types, amounts, and eligibility standards for financial aid change frequently, students should consult the following websites periodically for the most current information and/or contact the WMU Financial Aid and Scholarships office at (269) 387-6000 or finaid-info@wmich.edu.

- http://www.wmich.edu/finaid
- http://www.wmich.edu/~grad/appointments/
- http://www.wmich.edu/spaa/Masters.htm

It is useful to regularly check the websites for the School and the Graduate College, as well as BroncoJobs, to identify possible scholarships and student employment opportunities.

Professional Development and Career Preparation

The MPA program is a professional academic program that underscores the value of developing professional conducts and records. As a NASPAA-accredited program, the MPA program abides by the "Member Code of Good Practice" found on the NASPAA website (http://www.naspaa.org/about_naspaa/members/code/). Each of the individual members of the MPA program including faculty, staff, and students is also expected to adhere to the following professional "Codes of Ethics" developed by the American Society of Public Administration:

"The Society affirms its responsibility to develop the spirit of responsible professionalism within its membership and to increase awareness and commitment to ethical principles and standards among all those who work in public service in all sectors" (https://www.aspanet.org).

Students are expected to recognize and embrace these and many other relevant professional codes of ethics and conduct (depending on their concentration) as a part of preparation for good citizenship and careers in public service.

Students also have access to a variety of resources from SPAA and other units throughout the University. Current MPA students as well as alumni can be an important resource for networking and collective learning exercise. Many of these resources are provided by SPAA in the form of guest speakers, Engagement Series, support to compete or present papers at local, regional, and national conferences, and job postings. Academic and professional talk programs, conferences, workshops, and activities hosted by the Graduate College as well as other units throughout the university can also serve as valuable opportunities and resources for academic and professional development. The office of Career and Student Employment Services provides resources and support on career search and preparation. While the information on some of these opportunities and resources is emailed to your directly, you will have to explore others.

Moving from Conditional to Regular Admission Status

Successfully meeting the requirements established with a conditional admission status is critical because failure to meet these requirements results in a program dismissal. Unless otherwise specified in a student's letter of admission from SPAA, conditional students must successfully complete six credit hours of MPA core courses and one three-credit hour required course in their chosen area of concentration, with a B or better in each course and with a graduate grade point average of 3.25 or better for these three courses. **These must be the first three courses taken by any student admitted on a conditional status, and so an advising appointment before registration is strongly recommended.** The specific letter of admission from SPAA will guide any conditional requirements because failure to meet these requirements will lead to program dismissal even if a specific student is not on academic probation from the Registrar or the Graduate College. When these requirements are successfully met, a letter moving the student to a "regular" admission status will be sent to the student's address on record.

PROFESSIONAL FIELD EXPERIENCE

Pre-career students have the added requirement of arranging and completing a professional field experience (internship), and this must be coordinated with the assigned faculty member well in advance of the actual field placement. A departmental application form must be completed for this placement, and this generally assumes completion of 24 hours of MPA coursework, including all core courses (except PADM 6800) and any two required concentration courses. The professional field experience involves registering for a specific 3-credit hour course as described in the Graduate Catalog, and gaining at least 300 hours of relevant experience (roughly 20 hours a week for 15 weeks, or one semester). No other course may be used to meet this program requirement.

The first goal of the internship is to provide candidates with meaningful work experience, which will afford realistic exposure to the world of professional administration and to the organizational environment in which the dynamics of an agency are developed. The second goal of the internship is to acquaint candidates with the values and attitudes of administrators in public serving organizations and to learn about the clientele groups they serve. Third, the internship allows each pre-career MPA candidate to complete an agency project under the joint supervision of an academic advisor and an agency representative. This work may lead to the final Project Paper Seminar research if approved by the project paper instructor.

Internships normally correspond to the semester or summer session that begins in January, May, or September. Internships may be paid or unpaid. It is the student's responsibility to seek an internship site that meets the requirements that are itemized below. Prior to starting professional field experience, the intern and the SPAA together must provide the Affiliation Agreement as required by WMU and signed by SPAA, Business Services, and the sponsoring agency.

The Intern is responsible for:

- Identifying an acceptable internship;
- Ensuring that the departmental application form is submitted to the supervising faculty member;
- Enrolling in the professional field experience course;
- Submitting a letter of understanding from the agency (where appropriate) describing the project/tasks to be accomplished during the internship;
- Completing the tasks as defined in the agency letter of understanding; and
- Following the rules and regulations of the sponsoring agency.

The School of Public Affairs and Administration is responsible for:

- Informing students about internship opportunities, though many students identify these opportunities on their own;
- Approving the agency letter of understanding describing the project/tasks to be accomplished, and verifying that the tasks are at an appropriate professional level for a master's student; and
- Making the professional field experience instructor available to both the intern and the sponsoring agency to discuss questions or problems.

The Sponsoring Agency will be responsible for:

- Clarifying compensation arrangements before the internship begins;
- Providing the intern with significant administrative, non-clerical work experience, such as a specific project or variety of tasks, which will benefit the agency and the intern;

- Identifying a supervisor who will oversee the work of the intern and determine the degree of student success;
- Meeting with an academic advisor or the internship coordinator as needed; and
- Completing a written evaluation of the intern's performance before the professional field experience instructor issues a grade.

APPROACHING GRADUATION

As you approach graduation, there are specific considerations that must not be overlooked. One of these is the detailed information provided below regarding the project paper seminar proposal, basic approach, and requirements for success. Read these carefully in the early stages of your program so that you start to think cumulative instead of course-by-course. Early steps such as continuously adding course readings and your other readings into citation management software (i.e., RefWorks, Endnotes, etc.) may save you many hours at the project paper stage of the program. Doing the HSIRB CITI training far in advance will also save you time during the "home stretch." **This is separate from the Research Ethics module that is required before or during the first semester of coursework fro all WMU graduate students.**

Applying for Graduation (6 months in advance)

WMU requires that you apply for graduation and the deadline is usually at 4-5 months before the expected date of your graduation. The process for this is online through the GoWMU Portal. Make sure you use the name you want to see on your diploma and that your name and address are up-to-date in the GoWMU system.

Upon receipt of the application, the Registrar's Office initiates an audit of the student's transcript to determine if all degree components are being met. The auditor sends letters via wmich.edu email to the students informing them of any remaining requirements. Often this letter states that the student needs to have an official program of study on file. While SPAA seeks to submit these on an ongoing basis, if you receive this message please call 269-387-8930 so that we may prepare and submit a program of study on your behalf.

Please make sure you come to the graduation. You work too hard to get to this stage in life to simply say "it's not that important." Faculty, friends, and family will enjoy congratulating you on your achievements. WMU has graduation ceremonies at the end of the Spring, Summer I, and Fall semesters at Miller Auditorium, which is handicap accessible.

Project Paper Seminar Guidelines

The Project Paper Seminar is the capstone experience of the MPA program and is required for students in all concentrations. It provides an opportunity for students to integrate theory and practice in a significant problem solving exercise. MPA candidates will conduct an original, analytical research project consisting of professional analysis of a management problem leading to practical implementation in governmental, health care, or nonprofit settings, or theoretical inquiry in the field of public administration. The project, in other words, will produce either academic research that provides new generalized knowledge in the field or a solution to a public management problem, often within the context of a specified agency.

An MPA candidate who has completed at least 30 hours of course works, including all MPA core courses, is eligible to enroll in the Project Paper Seminar. Exceptions to this prerequisite requirement can be made with the written consent of the SPAA Director. However, MPA advisors recommend that students enroll in

the seminar as their last course whenever possible because of its nature as the *culminating course* for the entire program.

Framing Your Capstone Experience

One of the most challenging steps leading to the successful completion of the Project Paper is selecting the problem or issue to investigate. Past experience suggests that some seminar participants devote inadequate thought to this important matter and as a consequence may find themselves caught up in a frustrating and seemingly endless project. The selection of a well-defined, "doable" topic, by contrast, can make the Project Paper one of the most rewarding components of the MPA degree program.

Before undertaking the work of researching and writing the project paper, students must obtain approval of the project topic from their instructor and, where applicable, from an agency representative. Students are encouraged to gain this approval during the semester prior to enrolling in the Project Paper Seminar. Students whose project papers focus on a significant agency issue or problem should involve the instructor and agency representative early in the process of selecting a topic. Involvement by the agency should help students receive full recognition of having helped solve an agency problem, even as a normal component of the work schedule, rather than as an unrelated and outside activity. The project is intended to increase the student's probability of advancement and so any potential political fallout or organizational backlash should be carefully considered in selecting the project.

Throughout the program students should keep this capstone experience in mind, from taking analytical methods early in the program, to considering specific term project assignments that might help develop the student's knowledge of relevant research literature, to perhaps framing the study during the quantitative data analysis course or a budgeting course.

Criteria for Selection of the Project Paper Seminar Topic

The following criteria apply to the selection of the Project Paper Seminar topic.

- The topic should be one that can be completed within the semester in which the student is enrolled in the seminar though, as described above, the student will often be working with the instructor before that semester actually begins.

- All topics involving research with human subjects, as defined by the university, must gain approval from the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Students are strongly encouraged to work with their instructor in advance of the seminar course to prepare the HSIRB application form, protocol, data collection tools, contact scripts, and consent documentation.

- Project papers do not meet the requirements of an official academic thesis as defined by Western Michigan University. The grade is determined by the instructor of record rather than by a thesis committee. However, neither is the paper to be merely an expanded term paper. All capstone projects must contain substantial analytical content appropriate to graduate study and use clear methodologies relevant to the topic and approved by the instructor.

- The paper is not to be simply a report of activities undertaken by pre-career students during professional field experience/internship, a case study describing a single set of related incidents and decisions reached by other work colleagues, or a report of the day-to-day responsibilities of in-career students. However, when approved by the project paper instructor, the project paper report may include material related to a student's professional field experience.

- The length of the project paper will vary depending on the nature of the topics and research design employed for the project, yet these are rarely less than 30 pages of narrative plus the required preliminary materials (abstract, table of contents, executive summary), reference list, appendices, etc.

- Per the university's multiple submission policy, the project paper may not consist of substantial portions of previous work submitted for credit in a prior course without explicit permission from the capstone instructor. Thus, if a research proposal is developed in a prior course and a study of the relevant literature is developed in a prior course, the original assignments with instructor feedback should be provided to the capstone seminar instructor in advance so the seminar grade may reflect the value added.

- The seminar topic, its research design and methodology, and the HSIRB application must receive the approval of the project paper instructor (and HSIRB, where applicable) before the research or project activity can begin.

All Project Paper Reports will be evaluated for grading purposes on the basis of the following criteria: quality and clarity of the writing, thoroughness and quality of the research, completeness of documentation and literature review, and the clarity of the paper's organization. An oral presentation of the paper's topic and findings will also be required and evaluated as part of the seminar grade. The project paper instructor may submit the student's final paper to an outside reader for feedback prior to assigning the final grade for the seminar.

Recommended Classes of MPA Project Paper Topics

The following are types of projects deemed acceptable by the School's faculty, although other topic categories may be acceptable upon approval of the project paper instructor and the MPA Director.

- Applied Analytical Research: Applied research using analytical and applied research methods to solve a particular policy or management problem of a specific public or non-profit sector agency. Examples of such projects include: program, policy, and project proposals, needs assessments or evaluations, management studies, and budgetary and fiscal studies. While all applied project papers must have a strong analytical component, they may result in the production of practical administrative products as a component of the project paper. These administrative products may include new program proposals, new or revised management plans and systems, employee or operations manuals, strategic agency plans, etc.

- Empirical Scholarly Research: Empirical research into the behavior, events, and other phenomena found in the administration of public and non-profit organizations. This research must follow accepted social science research designs and methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, or blended approaches) for evaluating empirical models and testing hypotheses. The project paper instructor must approve the project's research design early in the research process. Examples of projects of this type include studies of organizational and administrative behavior and processes, organizational development and change, citizen interaction with administrative agencies, and the examination of policy making and implementation.

- Legal or Historical Studies: Legal or historical analyses, using accepted legal or historical research methods, and focused on public, healthcare, or nonprofit policy making and policy or program implementation issues.

- Contemplative Treatise: Students may undertake artistic or philosophical approaches that explore issues of importance to public managers. The paper should be a scholarly examination of theoretical issues and based heavily on a literature review that poses and addresses a central question.

- Other Projects: Occasionally, unique projects not defined above are presented to take advantage of rare opportunities to examine issues or problems relevant to public administration as a field of inquiry or practice. Such projects may be approved by the project paper instructor and MPA Director, provided that they meet the seven criteria for selection of seminar topics described above, and the requirements for original research described below in this manual.

Project Paper Proposal

Each Project Paper research proposal and its research design, which should be completed and submitted to the instructor during the first or second class session, will include the following elements, tailored to the nature of the student's approved seminar project:

Abstract: A concise paragraph describing the topic, project focus, and key research question.

Project Description: An introduction to the topic and its applied importance to the field and practice of public administration

Preliminary Literature Review: A preliminary review of professional and scholarly literature establishing how this project is placed within the context of the wider body of knowledge about the topic. Professional or scholarly literature reviews are not to be annotated bibliographies; they are to be integrative reviews that establish where the student's project can be placed in the broader content and theoretical context of prior published research and analysis. In other words, the literature review should be thematic rather than organized author-by-author or study-by-study. The requirements for the approach and content of acceptable literature reviews should be clearly stated in the course syllabus.

Data Collection Strategies: A description of the information and data sources and methodologies to be used in conducting the project.

Research Question and Methodology: The nature of the methodology to be employed in conducting the project analysis, and a clear statement of the research question(s) and, where relevant, hypotheses of the research.

Project Outline: A preliminary outline of the research paper

Timeline: A schedule of dates of when the student expects to complete the key steps in the research/project analysis process.

Projects involving the use of proprietary agency data, interviews with agency personnel, or on-site observations of agency operations will require a letter of agency endorsement for the project. Students are advised to inform their employers when the employer or its employees are to be part of the content of the project paper.

All projects must entail ***original research and writing***, defined as meeting the following criteria:

- The research project has not been previously conducted. If the study is a replication study, it must not have been previously conducted on the project subjects or the agency unless the project involves longitudinal studies of administrative phenomena.

- The study must contain strong analysis as the basis for project findings, recommendations, and/or products.

- The project has used the appropriate methodologies germane to the topic and its academic or professional field.

- The paper provides an opportunity for the integration of the content of the student's MPA curriculum, as defined by the project paper instructor.

- The paper must represent substantially new research, as defined by the project paper instructor.

At the project paper instructor's discretion, all papers may be subject to analysis by *Turnitin* or other relevant plagiarism software, in compliance with university policy.

Project Paper Format and Organization

The basic format issues (margins, table format, page numbering, etc., should follow the current version of the Graduate College *Guidelines for Theses, Projects, and Dissertations* at www.wmich.edu/grad.
The School of Public Affairs and Administration has adopted the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (most current edition) as the standard for headings/subheadings, in-text citations, and reference format. The Publication Manual is widely available including at Waldo Library. MPA Project Papers must follow APA requirements for citations and references, yet the information in this MPA Student Handbook (below) takes precedence.

The finished project paper for applied analytical or empirical scholarly research projects should usually contain the following sections, in the following order.

1. Title page (must adhere to Graduate College guidelines)
2. Abstract (a 200 word summary that includes topic, major findings, and conclusions)
3. Executive Summary (a longer summary that describes the paper in greater detail, but not to exceed two pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font)
4. Table of Contents (with page numbers)
5. Introduction (a statement of purpose and organization of the paper, including the expected contribution to knowledge in the field of public administration)
6. Literature Review (a review of the most important documents from related scholarly research and professional sources)
7. Research Design and Methodology
8. Data Analysis and Findings
9. Conclusions and Recommendations (summary of findings, conclusions drawn, recommendations for action or further study)
10. APA-style Reference List (not bibliography)
11. Appendices
    a. HSIRB approval letter or emails (if needed)
    b. Agency approval letters (if needed – when a project is heavily based on data from or access to a specific organization, or uses the resources of specific organizations, agency approval letters may be required by the project paper instructor to protect the student and SPAA)
    c. other appendices

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)

The role of HSIRB is to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects as well as to protect researchers. Research is defined as any systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge. Any research protocol involving human subjects must be submitted to HSIRB for

approval, with the project paper instructor as the Principle Investigator and the MPA student as the Student Investigator, even if the project may result in an approval finding of "approval not required" or "exempt from review." The project paper instructor will determine if submission is required based on the specific proposed research. For example, methods that involve surveying or interviewing people, or using data that includes personal identifying information, will probably need to be approved by HSIRB.

The online CITI training offered by WMU's HSIRB is required of all students prior to beginning the project paper seminar as it contains important information and guidance on the research process and research ethics. This requirement remains even if your research does not involve human subjects research.

Seminar Schedule

The Project Paper Seminar will usually consist of three face-to-face classroom sessions involving all students currently in the section of PADM 6800, plus additional meetings between the supervising faculty member, the student, and the student's supervisor or other agency representative (if needed). Seminar meetings will generally be held on Saturdays during the first and third weeks of the semester (or summer I session), and the third session is ordinarily held near the end of the semester (or summer II session) so that students may formally present their research and findings/outcomes. The formal presentation requirement stems from the faculty's belief, backed up by assessments of potential employers, that MPA graduates must be able to make effective, persuasive presentations before groups of peers or policy makers. The final seminar grade will reflect, in part, the professionalism and effectiveness of this formal presentation. Under exceptional circumstances, and with the project paper instructor's approval, students may be allowed to make their presentations in other venues.

Two copies of the final project paper report must be submitted:
1. A single PDF file with the entire document from cover to cover. Note: the instructor may prefer this in another format to facilitate providing feedback to you, but the School will eventually need this as one PDF file.
2. A soft cover, spiral bound copy to be retained in the library of the School.

Both versions are considered public documents and so please ensure that your final report is of the highest quality and ready to be viewed by the world. The project paper instructor may require changes and resubmission in both formats.

Pi Alpha Alpha National Honor Society

Because Western's MPA Program is accredited by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), we also host a chapter of the Pi Alpha Alpha national honor society, which recognizes outstanding scholarship and accomplishment in the field of public affairs and administration. Pi Alpha Alpha is a member of the Association of College Honor Societies, a national organization dedicated to encouraging fraternal and specialized honor societies in establishing and maintaining high standards, scholarship and achievement of their members.

The society seeks to promote the advancement of quality in the education and practice of the art and science of public affairs and administration. Pi Alpha Alpha objectives foster integrity, professionalism and effective performance in the conduct of government and related public service activities. Pi Alpha Alpha membership identifies those with the highest performance levels in educational programs preparing them for public service careers.

Students in the School of Public Affairs and Administration who have completed at least 20 hours of MPA graduate course work and have attained a GPA of at least 3.70 are eligible for nomination by the faculty.

Faculty members review potential nominees and then invite those to be inducted into the Western Michigan University Chapter of Pi Alpha Alpha. If invited, you should consider this a distinct honor and choose to join PAA, the honor society for your chosen profession.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1) **What is the difference between an in-career student and a pre-career student?**

   An in-career student has been employed full-time by a professionally relevant public agency or nonprofit or health care organization in an administrative or managerial role for at least six months. A pre-career student is a recent college graduate or student who does not have administrative or managerial work experience in the area of public administration, health care, or nonprofit organizations. Applicants with significant experience *outside* of a relevant public, nonprofit, or healthcare agency may be considered pre-career, as would applicants with experience that is not administrative or managerial. This status is established in the letter of admission and only pre-career students must meet the professional field experience requirement.

2) **Can course work taken at the undergraduate level (1000, 2000, 3000, or 4000 level) be used to satisfy MPA degree components?**

   No, only 5000-7000 level courses may be counted toward the MPA degree program. It is possible to use previous undergraduate training or course work as a basis for waiving certain MPA program components if the course work was taken recently and the student earned high grades in that course work. However, if a course is waived as a result of undergraduate course work an equivalent number of graduate credit hours must usually be substituted.

3) **Some courses from other WMU departments which I had hoped to include in my MPA degree program list as prerequisites undergraduate courses that I have not taken. Is it necessary for me to take such undergraduate prerequisites and, if so, can they be counted toward satisfaction of degree components?**

   Departments and instructors determine the extent that prerequisites are enforced. It is recommended that the student contact the instructor scheduled to teach the desired course, describe his/her background, and request an exception to be granted to take the specific course.

4) **Is there a time limit for completing the MPA degree?**

   Yes, Graduate College policy stipulates that all MPA requirements must be completed within six years of enrolling in the first course. The six-year clock starts when the first class is taken, not when the student is admitted to the program. If program requirements are not completed within this time frame, a student may apply for an extension of the six-year limit, using the appropriate form at wmich.edu/grad; however, the department has discretion in deciding whether or not to recommend a program extension to the Graduate College Dean. If an extension is approved, the student is given a new deadline by which the degree must be completed.

5) **Am I required to confer with my academic advisor before enrolling for classes each semester or session?**

   The MPA Committee recommends that all newly admitted MPA students arrange to meet with their MPA advisor before registering for their first MPA courses. At the first meeting the academic advisor

will summarize degree components and answer questions posed by the student. Based on the student's career goals and desired pace through the program, the advisor will suggest course work that should be included in the program of study, which should be developed during the first semester in their program. In case of any anticipated changes, students should consult with an MPA advisor in a timely fashion.

It is also important that students meet again with an academic advisor when nearing the completion of the MPA program. At this meeting the student and advisor should review the student's program of study to ensure that all of the program components have been or will be completed. Often this can be facilitated without the need for a face-to-face meeting.

6) **I am a pre-career student in the MPA program and my undergraduate education was unrelated to the field of Public Administration. My MPA advisor suggested that I take additional courses, the total of which exceeds the standard 39-42 credit hours to satisfy MPA components. Should I follow this advice?**

Advisors have the knowledge and experience to make such curriculum recommendations to help ensure that students are successful in the program. Given the competitiveness of today's job market, the advisor may recommend that students, especially individuals whose undergraduate education was in fields unrelated to public administration, undertake more than the minimum credit hours in order to better qualify themselves for meaningful professional employment and promotions. However, the required curriculum for the program is described in the WMU Graduate Catalog for your term of entry and so MPA advisor suggestions regarding additional courses are advisory rather than binding. There are a limited number of cases when your letter of acceptance may establish additional program requirements.

7) **Can credit from graduate-level courses from other universities or courses used to satisfy components of another degree at Western Michigan University (WMU) be utilized to satisfy MPA degree components?**

Yes. The Graduate College policy on the transfer of credits (as outlined in the Graduate Catalog) applies to the MPA program. A student enrolled in a master's program must complete a minimum of 24 semester hours at Western Michigan University and a minimum of 30 new hours of graduate coursework. Transfer credit from outside institutions will be awarded for coursework or other educational experiences substantially parallel in type, duration, quality, and content to the MPA program element for which credit is sought. Credits completed for another master's degree at WMU will only be transferred to meet MPA requirements with approval of the student's MPA advisor. In general the MPA advisor will need a copy of the specific course syllabus for any course that is being considered for transfer credit or a course waiver.

8) **Can the MPA be earned as a second master's degree?**

Yes, a student enrolled for a second master's degree from Western Michigan University must complete a minimum of 24 additional semester hours at Western Michigan University. These cases get complex and so a discussion should happen between the student and an advisor from each program before approving such a program of study.

9) **Can courses in the MPA program be waived without substitution of another course?**

On a limited basis, yes. There are four circumstances under which a course may be waived without substitution of another course.

First, if a student's status is converted to in-career based on actual work experience after starting the MPA program, the professional field experience may be waived by an MPA advisor. This will require an updated resume and a description of the administrative or managerial experience gained by the student in an appropriate professional setting for at least six months of full time work, together with a confirming documentation from the employer.

Second, if a student has a statistics course in the two years prior to admission to the MPA program considered equivalent to the quantitative analysis course, an MPA advisor may waive this course requirement and reduce the hours required for degree completion. At a minimum, the course syllabus and relevant transcript must be provided to document this request.

Third, a student may, with advisor review and approval, have his/her program of study reduced if the student produces evidence of completion of an extensive training program in a non-accredited institution or in a non-credit program sponsored by an accredited educational institution. Programs of this kind must substantially parallel in type, duration, quality, and content to the MPA program element for which credit is waived. Written documentation of the program content and satisfactory completion must be provided to document this request.

To maintain integrity of the MPA curriculum, the goal is for most students to complete all of the required credit hours. University policy establishes an absolute minimum of 30 credit hours for awarding a master's degree, and so a combination of the above factors would not be allowed to reduce a program of study below 30 earned academic credit hours. With these four exceptions, all other waivers require substitution of a course with an equal number of credit hours.

10) Under what conditions may students in the MPA degree be terminated from the program?

This decision is generally driven by policies described in the Graduate Catalog regarding the need to maintain a 3.0 grade point average in order to receive any graduate degree. MPA students may be terminated for serious violations of University rules or standards of conduct. Students admitted on a conditional basis may be dismissed from the MPA program if they fail to meet the requirements stated in their letter of admission and as described earlier in this Handbook. These decisions are not made lightly or without due process. In general the MPA Director would dismiss the student based on relevant documentation and feedback from the MPA committee. This may then be appealed as to the facts of the case to the SPAA Director. Any decision from the School is then also subject to appeal based on relevant university procedures.

11) Can you tell me more about Western Michigan University's joint degree program with the WMU Thomas M. Cooley Law School?

There is separate language regarding this program in the Graduate Catalog and pursuing this joint degree requires a specific individual-level agreement between SPAA and Cooley. This innovative program recognizes the close connection between the law and public sector management. Furthermore, law school students who become attorneys often need enhanced administrative and managerial knowledge in their practices, and MPA alumni can often benefit from a deeper understanding of the law in areas such as administrative law, civil rights, natural resources, and international law. Plus, there are people with career goals that necessitate a JD.

Our joint program can allow reduction of up to nine credit hours in the MPA program through a combination of up to six credit hours of law coursework and waiver of PADM 6110, Administrative Law and Governmental Regulation.