California State University, Los Angeles
Department of Political Science

Master of Public Administration
Graduate Student Handbook

Academic Year
2025-2026

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PREFACE

This handbook describes the MPA program beginning in Fall Semester 2016. All graduate students admitted into the MPA program beginning in Fall Semester 2016 and beyond are subject to these requirements.

Semester MPA Program – 36 units + Comp Exam or Thesis
REQUIRED CORE ***NOTE: Core courses are 3 units, Electives are 1 or 3 units***
POLS 5700 Public Administration as a Field of Practice
POLS 5720 Organization & Management
POLS 5730 Public Sector Human Resources Management
POLS 5740 Public Budgeting and Financial Administration
MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES (SELECT 2)
POLS 5750 Third Sector and Nonprofit Orgs
POLS 5760 Managing Intergovernmental & Intersectoral Relations
POLS 5770 E-Government and Management
ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES (SELECT 2)
POLS 5800 Data Analysis for Public & Nonprofit Managers
POLS 5810 Policy Analysis for Public & Nonprofit Managers
POLS 5820 Program & Policy Implementation & Evaluation
REQUIRED CAPSTONE
POLS 5900 MPA Capstone
ELECTIVES – 9 UNITS (SELECT FROM BELOW)
POLS 5830 Sem: Managing Social Policy
POLS 5835 Sem: Arts and Cultural Administration
POLS 5840 Sem: Issues in the Metro Area
POLS 5845 Sem: Community Development Administration
POLS 5850 Sem: Regulation, the Environment, and California Public Policy
POLS 5855 Sem: Ethics in Public Administration

1 UNIT ELECTIVES, POLS 5861-5875
POLS 5861 Personal Leadership and Development in Administration
POLS 5862 Effective Communication for Public & Nonprofit Administrators
POLS 5863 Effective Public Sector Human Resource Management Practices
POLS 5864 Collaborative Governance
POLS 5865 Negotiation & Conflict Management for Administrators
POLS 5866 Public Sector Contracting Basics
POLS 5869 Managing Stress in the Public Sector
POLS 5870 Nonprofit Governance
POLS 5871 Fundamentals of Strategic Planning for Public Sector Leaders
POLS 5872 Program Evaluation Best Practices for Public Sector Leaders
POLS 5873 Development and Fundraising for Public Sector Leaders
POLS 5874 Managing Organizational Change in the Public Sector
POLS 5875 Fundamentals of Public Sector Project Management
POLS 5876 Nonprofits, Equity, & Activism
POLS 5877 Immigration Policy and Community Organizing
POLS 5878 Best Practices in Public Finance and Budgeting
POLS 5879 Thought Leadership for Social Impact
POLS 5955 (1-3 UNITS) Selected Issues in PA (topic varies; can be repeated for up to 6 units)
POLS 5980 Graduate Directed Study
COMP EXAM (POLS 5960) or MASTER'S THESIS (POLS 5990)

MISSION STATEMENT AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program at California State University, Los Angeles, prepares students for leadership by educating them for professional public and community service within a diverse, dynamic metropolitan environment.

Cal State LA MPA Student Learning Outcomes
Students will develop the following leadership capabilities:

- Knowledge about and the ability to bridge public administration theory, research and practice
- Rigorous critical analysis skills to inform evidence-based public and community problem-solving and decision-making processes in changing contexts
- The incorporation, advancement and reliance on public service ethics in decision-making processes
- The ability to work collaboratively within and across sectoral, jurisdictional and organizational boundaries
- The ability to engage a diversity of perspectives and interests to support culturally responsive, inclusive, justice-oriented and equitable public service
- The ability to identify diverse stakeholders and utilize effective written and oral communication to engage them

Adopted: Sept. 27, 2021

ACCREDITED BY THE NETWORK OF SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC POLICY, AFFAIRS AND ADMINISTRATION



The MPA program was reaccredited in July 2022 for a full seven years. Accreditation is granted by NASPAA only after a rigorous process including a self-study evaluation and site visit from external evaluators. Accreditation is a guarantee of a recognized, high quality, well-run and up-to-date program. For more information, see: http://www.naspaa.org/about_naspaa/naspaa.asp.

CAREERS FOR MPA GRADUATES

Our graduates continue to work in a variety of careers in local, state, and federal governments, as well as in nonprofit organizations. They are primarily managers, analysts, and policy specialists:

- **Managers** implement policies, allocating resources to achieve the objectives of the program and organization.

- **Program managers** administer programs: establishing objectives, stimulating productivity, motivating workers, reporting and evaluating work progress, structuring work, allocating resources, coping with internal and external political pressures, and ensuring that the public interest is reflected in the work of the agency.

- **Staff managers** support the work of program managers, performing such activities as budgeting and financial management, personnel and labor relations, management information systems, organizational analysis, and procurement of supplies and materials.

- **Staff analysts** develop ways to ensure that program objectives are met. They also look at new ways to meet the public's requests for service. A staff analyst must be familiar with research on social, economic, and environmental problems to propose potential courses of action to decision makers. They are the elements of the program usually involved in briefing papers. Staff analysts work in planning and evaluation units or budget divisions in government.

- **Policy specialists**, the counterparts of staff analysts, work in consulting firms, research institutes or non-profit organizations.

Some of the positions recent graduates have held are:

Human Relations Analyst, Los Angeles County
Appraisal Specialist, Assessor's Office, Los Angeles County
Manager, City of Commerce Aquatorium
Community Residential Services Supervisor, Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center
Assistant Director of Finance, City of Bellflower
Environmental Supervisor, City of Los Angeles
Lieutenant, Special Operations Division, Police Department, City of Pasadena
Senior Investigator, State of California
Manager, Staff Relations, Fire Department, City of Los Angeles
Investigator, U.S. Dept. of Labor

THE MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

Program Core
POLS 5700 Public Administration as a Field of Practice
POLS 5720 Public Sector Organization and Management
POLS 5730 Public Sector Human Resource Management
POLS 5740 Public Budgeting and Financial Administration

Management Perspectives (Select 2)
POLS 5750 Third Sector and Non-Profit Management
POLS 5760 Intergovernmental and Intersectoral Relations
POLS 5770 E-Government and Management

Analytic Perspectives (Select 2)
POLS 5800 Data Analysis for Public and Nonprofit Managers
POLS 5810 Policy Analysis for Public and Nonprofit Managers
POLS 5820 Program Implementation and Evaluation

Program Electives

9 Units of Graduate Electives (3 units may be taken outside of the MPA program with consent of MPA Graduate Advisor)

Program Capstone

POLS 5900 Capstone

Comprehensive Examination or Thesis

Internship

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION*

PROGRAM CORE COURSES (3 units each): 12 Units (4 Courses)

POLS 5700 Public Administration as a Field of Practice
This course provides an introduction to the study of public administration as a field of practice and serves as a foundation for the MPA program. Students must take this course in their first semester.

POLS 5720 Public Sector Organization and Management
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. A study of the most relevant organization and management thinkers and issues. Topics include organization structures and theories of management in the public sector, decision-making, human relations, goal setting, and leadership in government.

POLS 5730 Public Sector Human Resource Management
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. In depth study of personnel and human resource management, providing an opportunity to analyze current issues. Case studies of personnel problems; examination of varying roles of boards, commissions and other legislative bodies; and new frontiers in personnel research and personnel legislation.

POLS 5740 Public Budgeting and Financial Administration
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. Concepts and implementation of budgeting and financial administration. Topics include issues and problems in budget authorization, execution and control, including public policy implications with a special emphasis on budgeting as a management tool.

MANAGEMENT PERSPECTVES (3 units each): 6 Units (Choose Any 2 Courses)

POLS 5750 Seminar: The Third Sector and Non-profit Organizations
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. Study of the increasingly integrated relationship between government and third-sector service providers; professional management of non-profit organizations in a complex environment; completion of a grant writing project.

POLS 5760 Managing Intergovernmental and Intersectoral Relations
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. An introduction to the dynamics and patterns of vertical and horizontal intergovernmental and intersectoral relations; governmental structure; incentives for different levels of government; relationships between and among local, state and federal governments; competition/conflict; cooperation; and collaborative models of decision making. In addition, the course provides participants the opportunity to use collaborative problem-solving skills to address regional policy challenges.

POLS 5770 E-Government and Management
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. The objective is to cover electronic and mobile government issues and applications. Management issues of particular concern include information policy and public access, transparency, privacy security and computer crime.

*****Current course descriptions can be found in Cal State LA's online course catalog at http://ecatalog.calstatela.edu/

ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES (3 units each): 6 Units (Choose Any 2 Courses)

POLS 5800 Data Analysis for Public and Nonprofit Managers
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission; POLS 2810 or equivalent. If you have not had a recent elementary statistics course you should take or sit-in on POLS 2810 or another similar course. In this course, you will work on the statistical and other techniques necessary to carry out research. The course covers different methods of conducting research in public and non-profit organizations, issues of measurement in social science research, review of descriptive statistics, introduction to a statistical software package, probability concepts and applications, sampling, inferential statistics and statistical significance, multivariate analysis, and communication of findings.

POLS 5810 Policy Analysis for Public and Nonprofit Managers
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This course provides an introduction to policy analysis, providing a current assessment of how analysis is used in public and non-profit decision-making, and it provides practical experience with doing applied analysis.

POLS 5820 Policy and Program Implementation and Evaluation
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This course covers conceptual issues and basic methods for policy and program implementation and evaluation for public and non-profit administrators.

ELECTIVES: 9 Units (Any Combination of 1- and 3-Unit Courses)

These should be chosen according to your interests; MPA graduate students may take one course (at least 4000-level) outside of the program with the MPA Advisor's consent.

3-Unit Electives

POLS 5830 Seminar: Managing Social Policy
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. The course examines social policy programs at the national level and in California. It explores the role of politics, media, interest groups, and industry in policy administration, and considers the tradeoffs, design and implementation of health, welfare, housing policies.

POLS 5835 Arts and Cultural Administration
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This course examines the basic components of arts and cultural administration in government agencies and, to a lesser extent, nonprofits. Students will learn the foundation and history of arts and cultural administration, the impact of arts on society and the economy, how different types of arts and cultural facilities are managed as well as arts and cultural policies.

POLS 5840 Seminar: Issues in the Metropolitan Area
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This seminar surveys the special problems of cities at the turn of the 21st century, focusing on the discovery of characteristics of the ideal community and their use in administration.

POLS 5845 Seminar: Community Development Administration
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. Theory and process of planned development; role of administration in formulating and implementing development goals at all political community levels; planning, strategy, obstacles, assistance, development of competent personnel and institution-building.

POLS 5850 Seminar: Regulation, the Environment and California Public Policy
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This seminar ties together three crucial topics that public administrators in California need to understand: regulation; environmental problems, particularly the problems of air quality, water quality and toxic waste disposal; and the study of California policy.

POLS 5855 Seminar: Ethics in Public Administration
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This course examines the ethical dimensions of public and nonprofit administration. Students will explore ethical responsibilities, norms and principles, dilemmas, and decision-making in the context of public and nonprofit administration.

POLS 5955 Selected Issues in Public Administration
Prerequisites: POLS 5700 or instructor's permission. This seminar involves the presentation and discussion of selected issues and trends in administrative processes at all levels of government. It may be taken more than once for credit (to a maximum of 6 units).

POLS 5980 Graduate Directed Study
Prerequisites: POLS 5700. Instructor consent to act as sponsor. Independent study of advanced topics in the field; regular conferences with sponsor. May be repeated twice for a maximum total of 6 units. Students contemplating doing a thesis may use POLS 5980 as a course in which they complete their 20-30 page proposal.

1-Unit Electives

POLS 5861 Personal Leadership and Development in Administration
Prerequisites: None. This elective course addresses elements of leadership, including change, your "style," communication, teambuilding, planning, meeting management, working with internal and external constituencies, ethics.

POLS 5862 Effective Communication for Public and Non-Profit Administrators
Prerequisites: None. This elective course addresses elements of effective organizational communication, including theories of managerial effectiveness, active listening, verbal and nonverbal cues, audience awareness, presentation skills, communication barriers, email and social media, and ethics.

POLS 5863 Effective Human Resource Management Practices
Prerequisites: None. This elective course addresses elements of effective human resource practice, including theories of motivation; employee friendly policies; how to make ethical decisions; and prohibited actions and practices.

POLS 5864 Collaborative Governance
Prerequisites: None. This elective course addresses the changing nature of governance skills, which increasingly require intergovernmental and intersectoral cooperation to address complex public problems.

POLS 5865 Negotiation and Conflict Management for Administrators
Prerequisites: None. This elective course addresses the question, "what is the best way for people to deal with their differences?" Introduction to conflict in organizations, and methods of negotiating differences for positive outcomes.

POLS 5866 Public Sector Contracting Basics
Prerequisites: None. The elective course introduces contracting in the public and nonprofit sectors; types of contracts; negotiating, writing, monitoring, revising contracts; accountability and responsibilities; ethics and integrity in procurement.

POLS 5869 Managing Stress in the Public Sector
Prerequisites: None. Examines theories of stress and stress management for effective public and non-profit leadership.

POLS 5870 Nonprofit Governance
Prerequisites: None. This course will review the methods used to govern non-profit organizations and good governance policies for non-profit organizations. It will focus on the responsibilities and roles of non-profit organization executive board members.

POLS 5871 Fundamentals of Strategic Planning for Public Sector Leaders
Prerequisites: None. This course examines the role of strategic planning in the public and nonprofit sectors for effective leadership.

POLS 5872 Program Evaluation Best Practices for Public Sector Leaders
Prerequisites: None. This course will examine contemporary best practices of program evaluation that are used by public sector leaders. This course will review the various fundraising tactics used by public leaders.

POLS 5873 Development and Fundraising for Public Sector Leaders
Prerequisites: None. The course will examine a variety of approaches such as partnership development, grant writing, events, crowdsourcing, individual campaigns, and program sponsorship.

POLS 5874 Managing Organizational Change in the Public Sector
Prerequisites: None. The course explores the practices for effectively managing change in the public and nonprofit sectors. The public and nonprofit sectors are often impacted by large-scale change such as leadership transitions, organizational restructuring, community collaborations, and internal systems changes. The course examines principles and practices of effectively leading an organization through change that include communications, culture, leadership and behavior.

POLS 5875 Fundamentals of Public Sector Project Management
Prerequisites: None. The course addresses public and non-profit project management. The course focuses on both the process of project management and the final product.

POLS 5876 Nonprofits, Equity, & Activism
Prerequisites: None. This course will examine the intersection of nonprofit organizations and activism, particularly the benefits and challenges with aligning social justice work involving diversity, equity and inclusion with the non-profit sector.

POLS 5877 Immigration Policy and Community Organizing
Prerequisites: None. This course covers contemporary U.S. immigration policies and examines how local communities organize to influence policy.

POLS 5878 Best Practices in Public Finance and Budgeting
Prerequisites: None. This course will familiarize students with public organization budgets, equipping them with techniques to project expenditures, monitor budgets, estimate program costs, and formulate budget requests.

POLS 5879 Thought Leadership for Social Impact
Prerequisites: None. This course will provide public and nonprofit administrators with strategies and tools to increase their social impact while advancing their public interest goals through innovative communication strategies. While there are many formal trainings on thought leadership, this course will review proven strategies that students should know as they grow in the public and nonprofit sectors.

POLS 5955 Selected Issues in Public Administration
Prerequisites: None. This seminar involves the presentation and discussion of selected issues and trends in administrative processes at all levels of government. It may be taken more than once for credit (to a maximum of 6 units).

CAPSTONE SEMINAR: 3 units (1 Course)

POLS 5900 MPA Capstone
Prerequisites: Advanced to candidacy; Should be taken in last semester of program. Involves synthesis and practical application of public administration knowledge and skills acquired in the program. Emphasis on critical analysis of case studies and strategic assessment of real-world organizational issues.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OR THESIS

The culminating experience of your degree program is writing a comprehensive examination or thesis. The majority of MPA students have chosen the comprehensive examination because it has been difficult for working professionals to devote sufficient time and commitment to a thesis. You will take the comprehensive examination (POLS 5960) in the same semester as POLS 5900 MPA Capstone, which should be taken in your last semester of the program. The thesis option remains available.

INTERNSHIP

You must complete the equivalent of a one-semester internship in a public or nonprofit organization or an approved field project. You may be able to substitute appropriate professional experience for the internship. To request this waiver, you must complete the Internship Waiver Form and submit it to the MPA Advisor for consideration. There is a link on the MPA Web site to the Internship Waiver Form, and the form is distributed at the MPA New Graduate Student Orientation.

COURSE MODALITY

The program is taught through a mix of in-person, hybrid, and online courses to provide students with valuable opportunities for in-person engagement with instructors and peers as well as flexibility through online coursework. Courses typically meet once per week beginning at 6 pm.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

You may ONLY take the comprehensive examination in the last semester of your program, if you have:

- Maintained a minimum 3.0 average in your program
- Received Advanced Candidacy status
- Completed all outstanding incomplete grades
- Completed your internship requirement

During the registration period for your last semester in the program, you should request a permit from the MPA Graduate Advisor and register for POLS 5960 via the GET (Golden Eagle Territory) registration system. No late "adds" are allowed, which means you must add the course by the third week of the semester in which you plan to take the examination.

The exam is administered in conjunction with POLS 5900 Capstone, which you also must take in your last semester. The exam will consist of an individual written case analysis that requires students to apply and demonstrate knowledge and skills learned in the program. Students will submit a signed honor pledge with the case, which will be subject to review using plagiarism detection software. The honor pledge upholds the ethical standards of the discipline of public administration and its professional association, the American Society for Public Administration, with this statement:

> The Honor System in the MPA program depends upon adherence of all members of the program to high standards of academic behavior. Acts constituting a violation of the Honor Code include giving assistance in a formal academic exercise without due acknowledgement; plagiarism; the submission of the same work of academic credit more than once without permission; willful falsification of data, information or citation; and the failure to take constructive action in the event of committing or observing a violation or apparent violation.
>
> I certify that I have neither given nor obtained assistance in this formal academic exercise without acknowledgement, that I have not plagiarized, that I am not submitting the same work for academic credit without permission, that I have not willfully falsified data, information, or citation, and that I have not failed to take constructive action in the event of committing or observing a violation or apparent violation of this Honor Code.

Each case study analysis is graded anonymously as pass or no pass by two faculty members for:

1. Knowledge of and ability to express theories and concepts and apply them.
2. Clarity in argument
3. Adequacy and relevance of facts, references, and data
4. Organization of material in a coherent, logical form
5. Professionalism in presentation

If you do not pass the examination, you may re-take the examination. The College of Natural and Social Sciences allows only three attempts at the comprehensive examination. A Comprehensive Exam Workshop is offered every Fall and Spring, and students are highly encouraged to attend a workshop as early as possible in their graduate program.

MASTER'S THESIS

You may write a Master's Thesis instead of taking the comprehensive examination. To do so, you must have better than a 3.5 GPA in your coursework, a Public Administration faculty member willing to supervise the thesis, a proposal deemed acceptable by the faculty, and two other members of the committee acceptable to the MPA Graduate Advisor and the Political Science Department Chair. If you plan to write a thesis, you must begin planning your thesis during the first year of your MPA program. Students should take caution with a thesis. In our experience, courses often expire under the seven-year rule due to unfinished Master's theses. Sample theses are available in the Department and Library. Title 5 of California's Education Code requires that theses meet the following standard:

> A thesis is the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyzes the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendations. The finished product evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation.

Thesis Proposals

A 15- to 25-page proposal is required. Each faculty member on your committee must sign off on the proposal. It should have the following sections:

1. *A statement of the problem and its significance.* What problem will the thesis investigate? How does that problem relate to current problems in the field, to the public administration/public policy literature, etc.? How significant is the problem compared with other problems that might be investigated for these kinds of governments, policies, etc.?

2. *What literature exists on this general problem area?* What has been written about the problem in the last two decades in the public administration or public policy literature? What are the two or three central themes of that literature? What are the gaps in that literature regarding your issue of focus?

3. *What hypotheses will you collect evidence on?* Most theses endeavor to collect evidence concerning some problem, either in a case study or some more systematic gathering of evidence (survey, use of existing Census or survey data, etc.). What are the two or three (or more) hypotheses for which we are collecting evidence? These should relate directly to the literature in the second part of the proposal.

4. *What data or information will be collected as evidence concerning the hypotheses?* What will be the source of the data, and what problems might be expected to arise as a result of the data collection method? What are the weaknesses of this method? The strengths? How will you compensate for the weaknesses? How original is the data?

5. *The Outcome of the Study.* Give us several paragraphs that tell us what you expect to find and why it will be significant. Be sure to explain fully what will be original about the thesis compared to other work.

Usually, the proposal can become with revision the first chapter of the thesis. A thesis is a well-written, original, piece of work that states a problem; explores how it has been treated in the literature; states one or more hypotheses; indicates the data or information that will be used to confirm/disconfirm the hypotheses; and contains one or more chapters that explain the analysis findings, and one or more chapters that draw study conclusions.

MPA CURRICULUM MAP OF COURSES AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

NASPAA Competencies	Lead and manage in the public interest	Participate and contribute to the policy process	Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make evidence-informed decisions	Articulate, apply, and advance a public service perspective	Communicate and interact productively and in culturally responsive ways
MPA Student Learning Outcomes	• PA knowledge • Engage diversity • Effective communication • Ability to collaborate	• Critical analysis skills • Effective communication	Critical analysis skills	Advancement of public service ethics	• Engage diversity • Effective communication • Ability to collaborate
POLS 5700 Foundations	**I**	**I**	**I**	**I, A**	**I**
POLS 5720 Org & Mgt	**I, P**		**P**	**I, P**	**P**
POLS 5730 HRM	**P**		**P**	**P**	**I, P**
POLS 5740 Budgeting	**P**	**I**	**I, P**	**P**	**P**
MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES					
POLS 5750 Non-Profit Mgt	**P**			**P**	**P**
POLS 5760 IG Relations	**P**			**P**	**P**
POLS 5770 E-Governance	**P**			**P**	**P**
ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES					
POLS 5800 Data Analysis		**P**	**P**		**P**
POLS 5810 Policy Analysis		**P**	**P**		**P**
POLS 5820 Program Eval.		**P**	**P**		**P**
CULMINATING EXPERIENCE					
POLS 5900 Capstone	**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**
POLS 5960 Comp Exam	**A**	**A**	**A**	**A**	**A**
I = Competency Introduced; P = Competency Practiced; A = Competency Assessed					

Revised 4.6. 2025

STUDYING FOR THE MPA DEGREE

Once you have been accepted into the MPA program, your job is to work your way through the courses, culminating either with the comprehensive examination or thesis. The MPA Graduate Advisor, public administration faculty and the Graduate Coordinator in the Department office will assist you as much as we can. But remember – it is your responsibility to ensure that you fulfill all the degree requirements, keep track of the courses you complete, and maintain good standing in the program. If you have any questions or find difficulties in completing your program, you should immediately talk with the MPA Graduate Advisor. The following notes are to help guide you and familiarize you with the most important regulations. For further details, you should consult the University Catalog.

General Obligations and Honor Code

Our program is conducted in the spirit of adult education, which assumes that every individual student bears responsibility for ethical conduct. Your admission into the MPA program assumes as a minimum acceptance of the following Honor Code:

> The Honor System in the MPA program depends upon adherence of all members of the program to high standards of academic behavior. Acts constituting a violation of the Honor Code include giving or obtaining assistance in a formal academic exercise without due acknowledgement; plagiarism, the submission of the same work for academic credit more than once without permission; willful falsification of data, information or citation; and the failure to take constructive action in the event of committing or observing a violation or apparent violation.

You additionally are expected to exercise courtesy to faculty, staff, and fellow students; respect the facilities and amenities of the University; and observe common rules regarding classroom behavior, punctuality, and timely fulfillment of assignments. Students who contribute actively to classroom discussions, interact with their colleagues, and avail themselves of the multiple opportunities for education offered through their courses and University activities generally gain a good deal more from their degree programs than those who see the degree simply as something to be gotten through as quickly and with as little effort as possible.

Your Program Plan

As an MPA student, you have the responsibility of keeping track of your program progress with the support of the MPA Graduate Advisor. You can access the program requirements and your progress through the University's online GET system.

New students are recommended to meet with the MPA Graduate Advisor to discuss their program of study, career aspirations, and possible elective courses that might align with career goals and interests. Students also should regularly check in with the MPA Graduate Advisor regarding their program progress. Any questions about the program or curriculum should be directed toward the MPA Graduate Advisor as opposed to other students to ensure accurate advising.

Your program consists of a minimum of 36 semester units plus a comprehensive examination or thesis. You must complete your approved program with a grade point average of 3.0 ("B" average) or higher. Courses with grades below a C must be repeated.

Grade replacements are not permitted for graduate students. Therefore, even if students repeat the courses due to low grades, both grades will remain on the transcript. In other words, the grade earned by repeating the course will not replace the previous grade.

Remember: You are responsible for ensuring that you fulfill the requirements of your program plan. You can verify your progress with your program plan and course grades through GET. You are welcome to take additional courses; however, only those approved and officially substituted by the MPA Graduate Advisor may be counted toward your program. If changes or substitutions are approved for your program, you should follow up with the MPA Graduate Advisor to complete course substitutions.

Advancement to Candidacy

All graduate students must be advanced to candidacy to enroll for the comprehensive examination or for thesis units. To advance to candidacy, the following conditions must be met:

- Completion of 12 semester units of 5000-level courses with a cumulative minimum GPA of 3.0

To request advanced candidacy standing, students should complete and submit the Advancement to Candidacy form to the MPA Graduate Advisor before registering for their last semester of coursework, which will include the POLS 5900 Capstone and POLS 5960 Comprehensive Exam. The form can be found on the MPA Web site or in the Department of Political Science Office. The MPA Graduate Advisor will submit the request for advancement to candidacy if the above conditions have been met. Please note that once they have been advanced to candidacy, students must maintain continuous enrollment.

Advising

At the beginning of your studies, you are recommended to meet with the MPA Graduate Advisor to discuss your program plan. Although the program is straight forward, you should periodically check with the MPA Graduate Advisor to see that you are on the right track. If you want to change your program, substitute a course or add a course not on your program, you should see the MPA Graduate Advisor to gain approval and ensure an official change is made.

Other MPA faculty also are available for academic and career advisement, although questions about program policies or your program progress should be directed toward the MPA Graduate Advisor. MPA faculty office hours are posted on the Political Science Web site, outside the Department office, and on course syllabi. You may sign up for an appointment in person with the faculty member, or by contacting the faculty member via telephone or email. Please note that there are no faculty office hours between semesters, during final examination weeks, or during the summer semester if faculty are off-duty.

Remember: It is solely your responsibility to plan your program so that you complete your degree efficiently and comfortably. You should make sure that you consult the MPA Graduate Advisor regularly to ensure you are meeting all requirements.

Internships

The MPA program requires an internship. You must complete the equivalent of a one semester internship in public administration, a nonprofit organization, or an approved field project. Appropriate professional experience may be substituted for an internship. Most students can use their professional experience to fulfill this requirement. To qualify, experience must be professional and/or administrative in nature as opposed to a clerical-level position. You can request an internship waiver by completing the MPA Internship Waiver Form and submitting it to the MPA Graduate Advisor for consideration.

Registration for Courses

Your registration dates and deadlines are indicated in your personal GET Account (NOTE: The University requires that you pay the registration fees prior to registering). Two MPA courses require permission to register: POLS 5700 (all newly admitted MPA grad students are given a permit and must register for this course in the first semester of attendance) and POLS 5960, the comprehensive exam. If you register for the Capstone Course (POLS 5900) prior to your last semester, you will be dropped from that course during the pre-registration period. Most MPA students take 6 to 8 units per semester. A full-time course load for graduate students is 8 units, and we usually do not recommend registering for more than three 3-unit, 5000-level courses.

Incomplete Grades

Students who do not complete the work for a particular course due to extenuating circumstances may be granted an “incomplete” grade with the instructor’s permission. An incomplete grade cannot be granted when it is necessary for the student to attend a major portion of the class when it is next offered. Students have up to but no longer than ONE calendar year to make up the incomplete regardless of breaks in attendance, a leave of absence, etc. The official policy states that the single year may be extended prior to the expiration of the one-year period by the College Graduate Dean, “for contingencies such as, but not limited to, military service and health problems or an incapacitating nature verified by a physician’s statement.” Incomplete grades that are not made up become graded IC (Incomplete Charged) and are factored into the overall GPA as a grade of “F.”

Seven-Year Rule

You have seven years to finish your degree once you start taking 5000-level courses on your program. Courses at CSULA expire seven years after they are taken, and they must be re-taken for them to count toward your degree. The College allows three courses to be petitioned for renewal, but students may only petition for revalidation one time. Needless to say, re-taking courses involves considerable inconvenience and cost, and the whole procedure has to be agreed upon by the College Graduate Studies Sub-Committee, which in the past has required an explanation in person as to why you did not complete the coursework within the normal timeframe.

Speaking practically, the "seven-year rule" means that the University's expectation is that you will work steadily on your program once you commence. An extended leave of absence for whatever reason may involve re-taking courses because of their expiration or may result in your not being able to complete the requirements for a Master's degree.

Continuous Enrollment and Leaves of Absence

Students maintain their continuing student status for registration purposes by attending at least one of the two semesters immediately preceding the semester in which they plan to enroll (excluding the summer term). Absence for more than one of any two consecutive semesters without an approved leave of absence will cancel continuing registration eligibility.

If you intend to interrupt attendance for more than one semester, you must file an application for Academic Leave, which can be granted for up to two semesters with the possibility of renewal for one additional year. Granting Academic Leave is routine, but if you do not file for a Leave of Absence, you will need to reapply for admission. If you are readmitted, you will be subject to the catalog requirements in force (including any new requirements) when you return to your studies. Graduate students who have advanced to candidacy must maintain continuous enrollment.

Adding Courses After the Semester Has Begun

The last day to add a course through GET with no record is the same day of the third week as the day the class began if the course is not fully enrolled; however, adding a course after the first week is NOT recommended unless there are special circumstances because graduate courses meet only once per week and cover extensive material each week.

Dropping Courses After the Semester Has Begun

The policy on dropping or withdrawing from courses is one of the areas where CSULA is very different from other universities and causes more problems for students than most other areas of policy.

First, you get a free drop during the registration period BEFORE the semester begins or during the first 11 days of the semester with no record. No signatures are required. You can drop a course via the GET registration system.

After the first 11 days, you can withdraw from a course with the instructor and Department Chair's signatures, and you will receive a "W" on your grade report. Current university policy allows you to accumulate a maximum of 18 units of "W" grades. After 18 units of "W" grades, you will not be permitted to withdraw from a course once the semester has started.

After the 11th week of semester, you only can withdraw for “extremely serious and compelling reasons,” which usually turn out to be serious and extreme cases of medical problems or changes in work hours. You will need the instructor, Department Chair, and Dean’s signatures, and you will have to provide outside, written verification of the reasons for the drop. This process typically requires that you drop all enrolled courses and not just one course.

Collecting signatures during the 12th to 15th weeks in the semester is difficult, so do not wait until Thursday or Friday and expect that the faculty, Chair, and Dean will be available to sign your form. Start early.

Be very careful of these rules! If you do not withdraw properly or wait too long, you will receive a WU for the courses, which stands for “withdrawal unauthorized” and counts on your GPA as a grade of “F.”

Your GPA

Graduate students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or above in the course work on their master’s degree program and in all courses completed after admission to the program. Anything less is unacceptable, and a student in this position initially is placed on academic probation and then disqualified from further classes if their GPA is not raised to 3.0 within 12 units or two semesters in residence, whichever is later. Courses for graduate students also cannot be renewed (retaken where the lower grade is replaced with a higher grade).

There is a big difference between graduate students and undergraduates in this respect; if your GPA is below 3.0, you only can take the courses on your program and two additional courses not on your program to raise it. You cannot take an unlimited number of courses to raise your GPA. We are limited by the University rules. Obviously, it is better never to arrive at this situation than to have to get out of it.

APPLICATION FOR GRADUATION

University Procedure

The University processes applications for graduation four times a year (Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer). The University commencement ceremony is held only once in the Spring Semester. Students who wish to have their name printed in the booklet for the Spring ceremony must file by the previous Fall or the Winter, Spring, and Summer semesters of the current year. For example, May 2025 graduation candidates include those who filed for the Fall 2024, Winter 2025, Spring 2025, and Summer 2025 graduation.

It is solely the student's responsibility to file for graduation during the filing periods that are noted on the Graduation Office Web site at http://www.calstatela.edu/graduation. The University's Graduation Information and Graduation Application, which must be approved by the MPA Graduate Advisor, can be found on the Graduation Office Web site.

Completion of the MPA degree is fulfilled by the successful passage of the comprehensive exam or completion of a thesis. MPA candidates must file for the appropriate semester that they anticipate they will attempt the comprehensive exam.

Note: If you do not pass the exam, you are allowed to repeat it the next time the exam is given. If you do not graduate during the term that you declared on your graduation application, you must file a Request to Change Graduation Term form and pay a late filing fee. More information can be found on the Graduation Office Web site.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST

Once you have received your letter admitting you to both the University and the MPA program, you may begin working toward your degree. This checklist summarizes the process outlined in the Handbook.

1. Attend the MPA New Student Orientation and follow up after the semester begins by making an appointment with the MPA Graduate Advisor to discuss your program plan.

2. Discuss with the MPA Graduate Advisor whether you need an internship, or whether it will be waived due to your professional experience. Complete and submit the Internship Waiver Form to the Graduate Coordinator in the Political Science Department. If you need an internship, start planning now.

3. Begin your program with the required introductory course POLS 5700 in the first semester admitted.

4. Continue with your core and elective courses. Consult the planning schedule distributed by the MPA program to see when courses will be offered (this schedule is tentative, but efforts will be made to adhere to it).

5. Plan to register early to get the courses you wish to take. Registering for 8 units of 5000-level courses per semester constitutes a full-time course load, although most students will take 6 units (two 3-unit courses) of 5000-level courses due to work and personal commitments. Taking more than three 3-unit courses is not recommended.

6. Maintain a B average (3.0) on your 36-unit program. If your GPA drops below a B (3.0), you will be placed on academic probation. If you cannot get up to a B average with the courses left on your program, we can add only two courses to the program to make up for the deficiency.

7. Think about how the MPA courses fit together for you and look ahead to the comprehensive exit examination. Prepare yourself to complete it successfully by completing course readings, taking notes, and keeping and organizing all your course materials. **Be sure to save all course materials in preparation for the Comprehensive Exit Exam. Attend a Comprehensive Exam Workshop early in your program, which is offered every Fall and Spring.**

8. Submit the Advancement to Candidacy form to the MPA Graduate Advisor to receive Advanced Candidacy standing before registering for your classes for your last semester.

9. In your last semester, take the POLS 5900 Capstone and register for the POLS 5960 comprehensive examination. You need to request a permit from the MPA Graduate Advisor to register for POLS 5900 and POLS 5960. Enrolling in POLS 5960 requires a nominal processing fee but no tuition.

10. Apply for graduation for the semester in which you take the comprehensive exam – plan ahead. The application filing periods, which typically are one semester in advance of the graduating semester, are published here: http://www.calstatela.edu/graduation. It is the student's responsibility to file by the listed deadline. Please contact the MPA Graduate Advisor with any questions.

11. If you wish to write a thesis, consult with a faculty advisor during the first year of your program, and be aware that an acceptable thesis usually takes at least a year and usually more to complete.

12. Become familiar with the University Catalog sections in the Department and graduate studies for the year when you began study. Access the catalog here: http://ecatalog.calstatela.edu/index.php.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FACULTY NUCLEUS

Jessica DeShazo, Ph.D. (Northern Arizona University, 2014). Associate Professor. Public Administration and Public Policy, Public Budgeting, and Environmental Policy and Administration.

Xian Gao, Ph.D. (University of Nebraska, 2020). Assistant Professor. Digital Government, Collaborative Governance, Smart City, Social Media, and Public Policy.

Chongmyoung Lee, Ph.D. (North Carolina State University, 2014). Associate Professor. Public and NonProfit Management, Performance Measurement and Management, Research Methods and Quantitative Analysis, and Organizational Studies.

Marla Parker, Ph.D. (University of Illinois at Chicago, 2014). Associate Professor. Public Management, Public Values, Science and Technology Policy and Higher Education, and Diversity and Cultural Competency.

Ellen Shiau, Ph.D. (University of Southern California, 2012). Associate Professor. Urban Politics and Public Policy, Civic Engagement, Nonprofit Organizations, and GIS Methods and Analysis.

PAST PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FACULTY AT CAL STATE LA

The MPA program at Cal State LA has existed since the 1950s. The contributions of the following MPA faculty, to the evolution of our program (as well as the Department and University) and to the field of public administration, are recognized and appreciated. The timeline of dates of service is provided.

Arthur J. Misner (1955-1983)
Eugene P. Dvorin (1958-1992)
Robert B. Callahan (1960-1983)
Robert H. Simmons (1962-1985)
George Litke (1963-1992)
Vergil Stevens (1963-1985)
J. Theodore Anagnoson (1983-2006)
Byran O. Jackson (1986-1992)
Naomi J. Caiden (1993-2008)
Siegrun Fox Freyss (1996-2013)
Stephen K. Ma (1990-2015)
Greg Andranovich (1993-2017)

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