



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

PADM 555: MPA Practicum Fall 2025

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Course Description

The School of Public Administration has established its MPA practicum program to place graduate students in organizational settings to afford the student an experiential learning opportunity. The goal of the program is to allow students to integrate their academic background with practical, real-world experiences. Such an experience is vital to producing the future leaders of the government and nonprofit sectors.

The benefits of the internship program are three-fold: (1) the program aids in shaping and defining a student's career goals through exposure to government and nonprofit management while still in school, (2) the combination of academic studies and professional experience synergistically improves learning, and (3) it affords an opportunity for students to return to school and share their experiences with fellow students.

The practicum is a planned and supervised experience with the following requirements:

- An agreed upon practicum plan, co-developed between student, practicum preceptor and MPA Practicum Coordinator.
- Between 120-160 hours of work at an approved practicum location (on site, remotely or both)
- A deliverable that the student will contribute to the practicum organization.
- A formal public presentation by the student at the end of the experience

A student may complete a practicum experience outside of their current place of employment or at their current place of employment. If the practicum is at their current place of employment, the student must complete an experience outside of their normal work obligations. This could be with a different division (for example, work with the HR department on a project if the student currently works in the budget office.)

Exposure to a government or nonprofit agency practicum with hours equivalent to that of a 3-credit hour course offers the student some advantages usually associated with 12-18 month post graduate fellowships. The influences and experiences gained from the practicum will help guide the student in their final semesters of studies into an area of management most suitable for the individual and the prospective organization. Students returning from their practicum

are also able to apply their practice knowledge and experience to subsequent coursework. The insights and knowledge gained by the students have a tremendous impact on their ability to grasp and negotiate the more advanced academic material characteristic of the program's later course load.

Course Objectives

At the end of the practicum, students should be able to:

1. Assess the operational, and managerial aspects of the practicum organization.
2. List and explain the tasks assigned and projects accomplished during the practicum and how they contribute to the student's career goals.
3. Identify and effectively use appropriate communication methods depending on audience characteristics and communication goals.
4. Describe ways in which the practicum has strengthened problem-solving, communication, and presentation skills.
5. Identify key environmental factors affecting the practicum organization.
6. Understand and assess sources of power and authority and how they are distributed within the practicum organization.
7. Describe and evaluate the nature of staff relations in the practicum organization.
8. Explain how the practicum contributed to the establishment of a network of professional relationships.
9. Conduct oneself in a professional manner that cultivates confidence and trust.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy

The final course grade is based on feedback provided by your preceptor, completion of written reports, and a culminating presentation.

Class Meetings: Students are required to attend a check-in meeting every two weeks through Zoom. Meetings should be scheduled in advance with course instructor.

Reports: Throughout the practicum experience, students are required to submit written periodic reports to their instructor (via Canvas) and Practicum Preceptor if requested. The purposes of the reports are to:

1. Provide the instructor with information describing the progress of the practicum experience.

2. Provide a guide to direct the experiential learning.
3. Allow the student to reflect and link to classroom experiences.
4. Assist the student in preparation of a final presentation.

Presentations: All students are required to give a presentation to MPA and other interested faculty and students. MPA students will prepare and present an oral presentation of their internship experience supported by PowerPoint or other appropriate presentation media. The presentation should include a description of the practicum host site/organization and the student's specific role/department/assignment within the organization. The preceptor should be identified and described. The student will present a summary of their practicum experiences and activities and provide a summary of their major learning experiences. Students will have the opportunity to hear what is involved with a practicum and all students will have their education enriched by hearing about the experiences of other students in different settings. This is an excellent opportunity for all students to work on improving their presentation and public speaking skills.

Grading Scale:

The practicum instructor will award a grade of either an "C" or a "NC" for credit or no credit based on satisfactory completion of the requirements outlined above and any additional requirements outlined in SPA policy.

Reports (300-500 words): These reports are designed to help you process your applied experiences and connect them to the academic knowledge you have accumulated through your MPA. You should strive to have half of them finished by midterm, and the second half finished before your final presentations. While these are numbered, for some of you, you may want to complete these in an alternate order. That is completely fine. I will give feedback as the reports are completed. I will also check-in with you at mid-term about your progress in completing these reports.

1. Describe the structure of the organization you are working with. Include an organizational chart and indicate where in the organization your department is located. How was it created and how did it come to be structured in the way that it is?
2. Describe the responsibilities and functions of your assigned department or area of the organization. If working in a department, what does the department contribute to the organization as a whole?
3. Look at the staffing of the department or area in which you work. Name the key personnel and look at their current role in relation to their training and experience. How did they get to their current position? How has their role changed in the past five years?
4. Who are the organization's close internal and external partner organizations? In what ways does your organization collaborate with these partners?
5. What external organizations have an impact on the way your department or organization does business (legislative, regulatory, etc.)? List some of the requirements that each external entity places on the department or organization.
6. Describe the current policy/political environment your organization functions in –

what are the key opportunities and threats to its success?

7. Has the organization conducted an internal evaluation or strategic plan over the past five years? If so, describe the major recommendations/findings. If not, why not?
8. Develop a Directed Learning Question you would like to discuss that describes your experience and your responsibilities. Answer your question.
9. Describe a major project in which you have been involved. Why was the work you were doing important to the organization? What did you learn from this project that you will take back to your classes and that has contributed to your development?
10. Describe some of your personal development experiences during your practicum. What did you learn about yourself? What did you see as your own strengths and weaknesses? What additional professional development do you need that you should try to arrange for next year? Discuss your preparation for the experience and the value you see in it.