

Penn State School of Public Policy MPP Program Handbook

Fall 2022

Purpose of the Handbook

This Handbook provides students admitted to the Master's Program in Public Policy (MPP) with basic information about the requirements for the degree and the content of the Program. If, after reading the Handbook, you have unanswered questions regarding any facet of the Program, please discuss them with program leadership, faculty, or staff.

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PennState
College of the Liberal Arts

**SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC POLICY**

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General Information

Background

The Master of Public Policy (MPP) Program at the Pennsylvania State University was created in response to a desire by the University expressed in its strategic plan to contribute solutions to the most vexing global problems and make the arts and humanities “agents of change” in achieving this goal. In addition, there was and continues to be a growing demand for individuals with the substantive policy and analytical skills produced by the MPP program, and Penn State was one of the few major research-intensive universities without a school of public policy. Training students that can meet the need for highly skilled policy analysts and experts to address today’s social and economic problems is also consistent with the University’s land grant mission. The program admitted its first class of students to begin study in Fall 2019 and plans to seek accreditation by NASPAA (The Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration) within five years.

Program Mission

The Master of Public Policy program prepares students to analyze challenging problems, propose policies to address them, and lead efforts to resolve them ethically and for the benefit of society.

Organization

The MPP Program is part of the College of Liberal Arts. It is currently the only degree program in the School of Public Policy.

Admission to the Program

Process

The Master of Public Policy degree follows admission procedures outlined by the Graduate School at Penn State. Please visit the Graduate School website to access the application and submit it, along with:

1. Two letters of recommendation (during the application process, you will be asked to provide contact information for two references who will receive an email with instructions on how to submit their recommendation letters through the grad school website).
2. A 1500-word personal statement explaining your career goals and how the Master of Public Policy degree will help you achieve them.
3. English proficiency through TOEFL or IELTS scores (international applicants)
4. Though the GRE is not required, prospective students may submit scores to be considered as part of the admissions decision, and the test results may be especially helpful for international applicants to demonstrate preparedness for a professional master's degree program in the U.S.

General Admission Guidelines

The MPP program typically admits new students for the fall semester only, on a rolling basis, though students with the appropriate undergraduate background may be able to begin the program in the Spring or Summer. All students entering the MPP program must have an undergraduate baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university. Normal admission standards include a 3.0 overall undergraduate grade point ratio (on a 4.0 scale), though students with exceptional strengths in other areas may be admitted with less than a 3.0 GPA. Applicants must have at least two positive letters of recommendation. In addition, applicants must submit a resume describing their past accomplishments and a personal statement (about 1,500 words) of their professional goals, academic records, and/or professional work experiences, and how these lead to interest and the likelihood of success in the MPP program and a career in public policy. Fulfillment of the preceding guidelines does not guarantee acceptance into the MPP program.

Admission Deadlines

Applications should not be submitted any later than July 1st. Anyone wishing to be considered for financial assistance should submit their completed application by March 1st. To learn of the admission decision in a timely manner, students should submit applications early. The admissions committee reviews applications based on the following schedule:

Spring Intake

Submit Your Completed Application By: Expect a Decision By:

Early decision deadline	October 15	November 15
Priority deadline for all applicants	December 1	December 15

Fall Intake	Submit Your Completed Application By:	Expect a Decision By:
Early decision deadline	November 15	December 15
Priority deadline for all applicants	January 15	February 15
Third round deadline for applicants	March 15	April 15

Note: International Applicants are encouraged to apply by January 1 to account for Visa delays.

Applications received after March 15 will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Apply early for maximum funding consideration.

If you need further assistance or have questions about the MPP program application process, please contact program staff by [emailing the School of Public Policy](#).

Programs

Penn State’s School of Public Policy delivers programs and curriculum to students and professionals from any major or field of study with a variety of different policy interests. Students who want to analyze public problems and recommend improvements to help execute good policy will work with interdisciplinary and collaborative faculty at a research-intensive university. Students in the School can also utilize Penn State’s extensive alumni network. The network provides students with alumni, faculty, and partners who build a foundation for learning and career opportunities.

Graduate Degrees

Our professional master’s degree program trains students in the analysis, creation, adoption, implementation, and advocacy of policy. We are teaching tomorrow’s leaders to find solutions and implement policies so that they will make a lasting impact. The core curriculum combines substantive knowledge of the policy process and training in quantitative policy analysis with leadership development and the practical application of hands-on experience in the internship and capstone project.

Penn State’s Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree and graduate minor are for students who want to analyze public problems and recommend improvements to help execute good policy. The program is open to students from any major with a variety of policy interests.

The Master of Public Policy Program

The MPP degree program is designed to provide professional training in public policy for those seeking careers in the design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. Potential professional careers include the full range of careers for which public policy expertise would be valued, including:

- National, State, and Local Government Agencies
- Think Tanks and Consulting Firms
- Non-profit Organizations
- Lobbying Firms
- Private Sector Organizations Engaged in Public Affairs Representation

Curriculum

Penn State's MPP degree provides students with substantive knowledge of the policy process and training in quantitative policy analysis and evaluation through the core curriculum, applied capstone experience, internships, and career placement. The program has three key focuses:

Policy analysis: The core curriculum focuses on substantive knowledge of the policy process and training in quantitative policy analysis and evaluation with faculty whose expertise lies in the design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation of public policies.

Policy experience: Students gain hands-on experience during the internships and capstone experience. In addition to providing on-the-job training, these projects often lead to future employment opportunities and career connections.

Leadership training: The School of Public Policy's professional development programs and curriculum provide students with access to the requisite skills and knowledge for career success, attain an understanding of complex organizational settings, and boost students' confidence to apply those skills essential for future success. Activities and experiences connect students with policy leaders, alumni, and faculty.

Students may select an existing policy specialization or work with faculty to design a specialization to meet their career goals. A typical schedule would look like the following.

Year 1: Fall Semester

[PPOL 503](#): Statistics for Public Policy 1

[PPOL 801](#): The Public Policy Process

[PPOL 802](#): Economic Analysis for Public Policy

[PPOL 804](#): Public Sector Organization Theory **OR**

[PPOL 805](#): Bureaucracy and the Policy Process **OR**

[PPOL 807](#): Managing Public Organizations

Year 1: Spring Semester

[PPOL 506](#): Statistics for Public Policy 2

[PPOL 808](#): Public Finance and Budgeting
[PPOL 809](#): Public Policy Analysis
[PPOL 810](#): Policy and Program Evaluation

Year 1: Summer Semester

[PPOL 895](#): Public Policy Internship

Year 2: Fall Semester

PPOL Elective
Policy Specialization Elective 1
Policy Specialization Elective 2

Year 2: Spring Semester

Policy Specialization Elective 3
Policy Specialization Elective 4
[PPOL 894](#): Capstone Experience

All courses, including the capstone/thesis project, are 3 credits except for the summer public policy internship (1 credit). The MPP program is 43 credit hours (42 credits for working professionals who may be exempt from the internship requirement).

Students are required to take four policy specialization courses. Generally, these will be drawn from other programs on campus. However, MPP faculty may also teach courses on substantive public policy issues or methods of policy analysis, such as [PPOL 897](#): Special Topics in Public Policy.

Email the [School of Public Policy](#) with specific questions regarding curriculum. You can find general descriptions of courses in the [University Graduate Course Bulletin](#).

(PPOL 895) Internship:

A one credit internship, which is to be taken during the summer between the first and second year.

Internship waiver: students with substantial prior professional policy experience (at least one year of continuous employment with a public policy-related organization) may submit a written request for a waiver of the requirement along with a letter of support from a former workplace supervisor on organization letterhead. This supervisor letter must describe the nature of duties performed, length of employment and evaluation of work quality.

Note: if the internship waiver is granted, students must complete a 1-credit independent study course, which allows them to obtain the 43 credits required for graduation.

(PPOL 894) Capstone Project:

This course requires completion, submission and presentation of the applied project

developed in the course.

Public Policy Specializations

Students in the Master of Public Policy degree program have the option to select an existing policy specialization or to work with faculty to design a specialization to meet their career goals. Currently, there are eleven existing specializations from which to choose. The current specializations are:

1. Data Science/Analytics
2. Criminal Justice
3. Health Policy
4. Labor and Employment Relations
5. Children and Family Policy
6. Information Technology
7. International Public Policy
8. Social Policy
9. Racial Justice and Equity
10. Environmental Policy
11. Gender Equity and Policy

SARI Requirements

The MPP program is considered a professional degree program. All students have been granted a SARI requirement waiver and do not need to complete the CITI Online RCR (Responsible Conduct of Research) Training Program or the Discussion-Based RCR Training.

Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate Degrees

Background

Penn State undergraduates interested in policy advocacy, design and implementation, can apply to the Penn State Master of Public Policy program up to a year early and complete the undergraduate degree and master's degree together in a compressed time frame.

The accelerated integrated undergraduate/graduate (IUG) Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree program provides an opportunity for academically strong students to complete a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts and a master's degree in public policy in approximately five years of study. Through the IUG program, students can save money (tuition costs remain at the undergraduate rate throughout the course of study), enter the professional workforce sooner, and drive real-world results.

The School of Public Policy currently has IUG options available with the following degree programs:

- Bachelor of Arts in African American Studies
- Bachelor of Science in Criminology
- Bachelor of Arts in Communication Arts and Sciences
- Bachelor of Science in Communication Arts and Sciences
- Bachelor of Science in Health Policy Administration
- Bachelor of Science in Political Science
- Bachelor of Science in Sociology

Students admitted to an IUG program must graduate from their undergraduate program prior to being eligible to graduate from their MPP program. **IUG students cannot graduate with both degrees in the same semester.**

Application Process

Penn State undergraduate students in any of the previously listed programs are eligible to start the application process for the IUG program at any point when they have reached Third-Year classification (minimum of 59.1 credits completed). Eligible students must complete their application, be admitted and enrolled in the program prior to starting their Fourth-Year classification (89.1 credits) at the university.

Students should meet with their undergraduate adviser and discuss their interest in the program prior to starting the application process.

Students can be eligible for an application fee waiver if they meet with the Enrollment & Advising Manager for the School of Public Policy prior to applying to the program.

Students must apply through the Graduate School at Penn State. The general application process and procedures are at the [Graduate School website](#).

Admission requirements vary slightly depending on the IUG program. See the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for specific for each program.

After completion of the application process potential IUG students must work with their undergraduate adviser and the Academic Adviser for the School of Public Policy to complete their long-term advising plan and all necessary IUG semester reports.

Advising Process

Once a student has completed their application to the IUG/MPP program and their application has been moved along to the Admissions & Scholarship Committee for review, the Enrollment & Advising Manager will contact the student's undergraduate adviser to begin the joint-advising process.

To avoid problems with fulfilling requirements and graduation, students must work clearly with both the undergraduate adviser and the public policy academic adviser in developing their course plan.

The Academic Adviser and the undergraduate adviser will jointly review the students remaining undergraduate credits, the requirements of shared courses for the IUG, and the students graduate course requirements for their year of dual enrollment. This will assist in the completion of the long-term advising plan. Once the long-term plan has been completed and reviewed, the student is eligible to schedule courses and complete their enrollment in the IUG program. It is the responsibility of the student to notify both undergraduate and graduate advisers if they intend to make any changes to their long-term plan. Failure to do so could jeopardize the student's ability to complete both programs in a timely manner.

The Academic Adviser will oversee completion of all IUG semester reports, collecting all necessary signatures, submitting the forms to the graduate school, and maintain copies of the semester reports within the students IUG file on SharePoint. Ideally, semester reports will be completed within the first few weeks of each semester after the add/drop deadline has passed.

Transfer Credits from Another University

Students who have completed previous graduate course work that has not been used toward a completed degree may obtain transfer credit for up to 10 credits.

The criteria for transferring credits from another university are the following:

1. MUST have been earned at a regionally accredited U.S. institution or an officially recognized degree-granting international institution,
2. MUST be of "A" or "B" grade value ("B-" grades are not acceptable; pass-fail grades are not transferable unless substantiated by former institution as having at least "B" quality),
3. MUST appear on an OFFICIAL graduate transcript, and
4. MUST be earned within the five years prior to the date of registration to a degree program at Penn State

For more information on transfer credits see the Graduate School [policies for current students](#).

Transfer Graduate Credits Taken as an Undergraduate at PSU

Penn State undergraduates may take up to 15 credit hours of 500 or 800 level MPP courses as undergraduates and apply them toward the MPP degree.

The relevant forms may be found on the [resources for current students section of Penn State's Graduate School website](#).

[Request for an undergraduate student to take a 500-level course](#) under the [Graduate Enrollment Services – Forms for Students Section](#)

[Transfer of Penn State Nondegree Graduate Credits to Penn State Graduate Degree form](#) under the [Graduate and Enrollment Services – Forms for Students Section](#).

Advising

On admission to the program, each student will be advised by the MPP program advising manager or staff. During each semester, MPP adviser(s) will establish a time period during which students must be advised on next semester's courses. Depending on faculty, staff and student needs, this might take place in large group advising sessions or individual meetings. All students are required to meet with the adviser each semester to be advised and complete an advising form.

IUG student advising is more complicated. Students must a) create an individualized plan of study before beginning the program, b) be advised each semester as described above, and c) complete additional paperwork every semester and before both undergraduate and graduate graduation. The advising staff in both the MPP and undergraduate programs will assist IUG students with these procedures.

Internships

All Penn State Master of Public Policy students must complete an internship as part of the program. Our team, along with Penn State's career services staff, will work with students to find an internship that meets their professional goals and will provide relevant hands-on experience in public policy. The MPP Director of Professional Development and Student Engagement assists students in locating internship positions. Students are urged to meet initially with the Director of Professional Development and Student Engagement early in their first semester in the program to discuss preferences and develop an internship search strategy.

Internship Requirements

Internships must be 300 hours or more to be counted for credit. Students must be engaged in professional tasks. Duties must be relevant to the public policy curriculum. The internship supervisor must complete an assessment survey at the end of internship.

Internship Waivers

Students with substantial prior policy-relevant work experience (at least one year continuous) may petition for a waiver of the internship requirement. This requires completing an internship waiver form and submitting a letter on organizational letterhead from the student's supervisor attesting to the length of employment, describing the work duties, and stipulating whether the student's performance was satisfactory. No academic credit is attached to a waiver of the internship requirement, meaning that students waiving the internship requirement must complete an additional 1-credit course to meet the 43-credit hour requirement for graduation.

Job Placement

Penn State has the largest and most supportive alumni network of any university in the world. It also has a variety of career resources for all students, which can be found at the links below. In addition, students should work with the [Career Development Director](#) on developing a search strategy several months prior to graduation.

[Student Affairs Career Services](#)

[Student Affairs Career Resources for Graduate Students](#)

Financial Assistance

The MPP program has a limited amount of financial assistance to be distributed to MPP students. For information on financing your education please see the student aid pages for graduate and professional student scholarships and funding:

[Penn State Office of Student Aid](#)

[Penn State Graduate School](#)

Ethical Responsibilities of Students

As students in a professional degree program and as prospective public policy professionals, your future is full of promise and opportunity. With this comes important responsibilities.

As a public policy professional, you are expected to act ethically in the interests of the public with special attention to the well-being of vulnerable populations and marginalized groups.

Also, please familiarize yourself with the Penn State Student Code of Conduct on the [Student Affairs website](#).

Clifton Strengths Assessment Policy

Background

Becoming a leader in public policy includes a robust academic experience, supported by rich professional experience. An important part of that professional experience is understanding yourself as a leader so that you have the skills and tools necessary to navigate effectively in the public policy space. A part of the comprehensive professional development activities and course options is the opportunity to take a Clifton Strengths Assessment.

Once you have completed the assessment, you will participate in a coaching session with Dr. Catherine Baumgardner, Director of Professional Development and Student Engagement, and develop a strengths plan for your first year, in preparation for additional use and application during your internship. This opportunity for strengths engagement is unique to our MPP programs, and will not only support your educational experience, but also your professional growth throughout your career.

Requirements

You will receive additional information regarding the Clifton Strengths Assessment at orientation from Dr. Baumgardner. After orientation students must complete the following steps as part of their professional development:

- Request a code to complete the Clifton Strengths Assessment from the [Penn State College of the Liberal Arts website](#) within two weeks of orientation.
- Share your results with [Dr. Baumgardner](#) and schedule an appointment with her to review your results and develop your plan.
- All students should complete the Clifton Strengths Assessment prior to entering their internship
- The Clifton Strengths Assessment will have additional uses and applications during your internship and will be utilized as part of graded work.

Failure to complete the strengths assessment can hamper your professional development and growth within the program.

Students that have questions or concerns regarding the Clifton Strengths Assessment should contact [Dr. Baumgardner](#).