

**Master of Public Administration Program**

**Department of Political Science  
Idaho State University**

revised 05/2006

## **MPA Frequently Asked Questions (F.A.Q.S.)**

**1. What is the history of the MPA program at ISU?**

The M.P.A. program was developed in the mid 1970's to meet the growing public sector demand for administrative education. The placement rate for ISU M.P.A. graduates is high and many successful national, state, and local administrators are graduates of the ISU program. In recent years, graduates have been placed in such positions as university administrators, community development planners, grant administrators and health care managers.

**2. What are the requirements for admittance into the MPA program?**

Students must have a 3.00 GPA in upper-division undergraduate courses, score at the 35th percentile as an average of the three sections of the GRE, have 3 solid letters of recommendation, and must write a goal statement for the program. Reference forms and statement questions are provided to each candidate.

**3. Why do students have to take the GRE's?**

A graduate program is evaluated to a great extent by the average GRE scores of its students. Students must take the GRE before being considered for the program. To take the GRE make an appointment with the ISU Testing and Counseling Center (236-2130). GRE's are not easy. It is strongly recommended that you spend considerable time taking GRE practice tests. According to department policy, students with low GRE scores will be denied admittance to the program until they receive an acceptable score along with meeting other program requirements. The current standard is a GRE score at an average 35th percentile on the verbal, quantitative, and analytical sections of the test.

**4. How many credits may students take per semester?**

Department policy permits graduate students to take a maximum 13 credit hours per semester. Permission to take more credits per semester will not be granted.

**5. How long does it take students to finish the program?**

The MPA program requires 36 hours of course-work. If a student goes to school full-time (12 credits per semester) it will take them 1 1/2 years to complete the course-work. Students also need time to study for comprehensive exams. Full-time students can complete the degree successfully in 3 semesters and 1 summer school session. Part-time students with full-time jobs normally take 3-6 credit hours per semester.

**6. Why are MPA classes held primarily at night?**

Approximately three-fourths of MPA students work in full-time jobs located throughout southeastern Idaho. These students cannot attend classes during the day. Therefore, MPA classes are held in 3 hour blocks once per week at night.

**7. Can students take independent study classes instead of taking regular classes?**

No, it is departmental policy that students cannot take independent study classes to replace regular course-work. For example, you cannot ask to do an independent study on "organizational theory" since it is a regularly offered class. Independent studies are designed for specific research problems. For example, a student may want to investigate different leadership styles in Idaho local governments. This would require extensive reading, research and writing and would be an acceptable independent study topic. An independent study requires 135 hours of documented work for 3 credit hours.

**8. How are internships arranged?**

You are responsible for finding an acceptable internship position. The department has a list of internship contacts and will help place you in an internship position. An acceptable internship position is one in a public or non-profit organization that requires significant administrative work in personnel issues, organization planning, budgeting, etc. Students already working in a public agency are normally allowed to work on a special project where they "step outside" their normal work duties. All internships must be approved by the MPA Director.

**9. How are internships graded and what are the requirements?**

The department relies heavily on a formal evaluation from an on-site internship supervisor and a final paper to determine grades. The final paper is a 10-15 page critical analysis of the internship by the student. The student also keeps a daily journal that documents the required 270 hours (6 credits) of internship work. Students working in an internship position represent both the university and the program and the student's work should reflect appropriate professional behavior.

**10. What are the grade-point requirements for the program?**

Students must maintain a cumulative 3.0 G.P.A. Both A's and B's earned in M.P.A. classes are both considered as strong performances in the program. A grade of C or below in the program is considered a failure and does not fulfill graduation requirements.

**11. What is a graduate committee?**

Every MPA student needs to form a graduate committee of two members from the department. One Graduate Faculty Representative (GFR) from outside the department will be appointed by the graduate school. Students should choose members that they are comfortable with and who will be the student's "advocate" in oral examinations. You must designate one of the department members of the committee as "committee chair."

**12. Should students write a thesis or take written exams?**

Unless you want eventually to complete a Ph.D. in public administration, you should take the written comprehensive examination. A thesis requires a strong background in research methodology and normally is a long, long process. The written examination requires the student to study extensively but can be completed quickly so students can get on with their life and career.

**13. What is a "course of study" and when do students have to complete it?**

A course of study is simply the classes that you take to fulfill your core and specialized area of the MPA. It is available from the Department and must be completed and approved the semester before you plan on graduating. Students should carefully plan their course work with the program director to make sure their classes meet program requirements.

**14. What are MPA written and oral examinations?**

**\*Written exams are given three (2 times per school year.**

Students completing written examinations answer five questions over classes from their core area. Some professors will provide reading lists and other professors will not. This decision is up to each faculty member. In the last three years, about 75% of students have passed their written examinations and 25% have failed. Students who fail the written examination are given a chance to retake the areas (not the same questions) that they have missed during the next scheduled comprehensive exam dates. Once a student has passed the written examinations, an oral examination is scheduled with the student, the two departmental committee members and the GFR. The oral examination is an opportunity for the student to show case their knowledge of the field. All three committee members vote on whether to award the MPA degree to the student. The GFR evaluates the quality of the MPA candidate, the process, and ultimately the program.

**IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Master of Public Administration**  
**Admissions Scoring**

1. Applicant GRE Percentile

80<sup>th</sup> percentile or above: 10 points  
60<sup>th</sup> -79<sup>th</sup> percentile: 8 points  
40<sup>th</sup> - 59<sup>th</sup> percentile: 7 points  
20<sup>th</sup> - 39<sup>th</sup> percentile: 6 points  
Below 20<sup>th</sup> percentile: 0 points

2. Applicant Upper-Division GPA

4.00: 10 points  
3.80 - 3.99: 9 points  
3.60 - 3.79: 8 points  
3.40 - 3.59: 7 points  
3.20 - 3.39: 6 points  
3.00 - 3.19: 5 points  
Below 3.00: 0 points

3. Reference Letters

Rated on a Scale of: 0 points (very poor) to 10 points (excellent).

4. Goal Statement

Rated on a Scale of 0 points (very poor) to 10 points (excellent).

**MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (M.P.A.)  
IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY  
M.P.A. DIRECTOR - DR. MARK MCBETH**

**ENTERING THE M.P.A. PROGRAM**

1. Make application to the Graduate School - \$55.00 fee.
2. Submit application to the Department of Political Science for a graduate assistantship (**optional**).
3. Submit three (3) letters of recommendation to the Department of Political Science. These may be from former professors, employers, supervisors, or anyone else in a position to reasonably speak of your preparation and likelihood for success in graduate work. Be sure that the required reference forms are attached to each letter.
4. Submit a Statement of Career Objectives to the Department of Political Science. This should be from one (1) to three (3) pages in length and should address your hopes for your career with particular emphasis on why you have decided to pursue the M.P.A.
5. Have your transcripts sent to Graduate Studies (P.O. Box 8075, Pocatello, ID 83209). This should include all undergraduate and graduate transcripts from this or any other institution you have attended.
6. Sign up for and take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). You can sign up for it at the University Counseling and Testing Center. There is a fee - \$115.00. On an individual request basis, we have also accepted GMAT scores. This is possible if you have already taken that test and obtained an acceptable score; otherwise, the GRE is required. You will not be admitted into the program without an acceptable score.

**REQUIREMENTS**

You want to be a **classified** student. For the M.P.A. degree you obtain this status by:

1. Scoring an average of at least the 35th percentile on the GRE aptitude test (you may need to take it more than once);
2. Having an overall 3.00 grade point average from your last two years of undergraduate work or 3.00 in 12 credits of graduate work;
3. Having three (3) letters of recommendation sent to the Department of Political Science;
4. Submitting a statement of career objectives to the Department.



**IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Master of Public Administration**

**Academic Reference Letter**

The candidate for admission should sign, date, and circle their preference below:  
 I do/do not waive the right to examine this reference letter.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Candidate Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_ has applied for admission to the Idaho State University Master of Public Administration (MPA) program in political science. You have been chosen by the applicant as a reference. Please answer the questions below. Please **return this sheet** and answer questions 1-5 in the form of a **reference letter on a separate sheet of paper**.

1. In what capacity do you know the applicant?
2. How long have you known the applicant?
3. Please discuss the applicant's academic strengths.
4. Please discuss the applicant's academic weaknesses.
5. Do you think that the applicant is ready to undertake graduate school work? Why or why not?
6. In terms of college students that you have been associated with where would you rate this applicant in terms of overall academic ability? Please place a check under each criterion that indicates your rating of the candidate's ability.

Rating	Verbal Ability	Writing Ability	Research Skills	Dependability	Motivation to Succeed
Top 10%					
Top 11% - 25%					
Top 26% - 50%					
Below top 50%					

Please sign and date your review

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Reference Writer

Date\_\_\_\_\_

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**Department of Political Science**  
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Top 10%					
Top 11% - 25%					
Top 26% - 50%					
Below top 50%					

Please sign and date your review

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Reference Writer

Date\_\_\_\_\_

## **MPA Goal Statement**

Please type your answers and fully develop your responses. The goal statement is an important part of the selection process.

1. Please describe your academic background paying particular attention to course-work that has prepared you for Master's level study in public administration.
2. Please describe any experience you have had in public service (including non-profit administration). Include any volunteer work.
3. Please explain why you want to pursue a MPA degree including how the degree would influence your career path.
4. What do you believe is the fundamental role of a public administrator in democratic government?

**IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**MPA Requirements**

**I. Core Courses**

Choose six of the following nine courses. Each student must choose at least one course from each area and Political Science 551 is required for **all** students.

**Area #1: Management of Public Service Organizations**

POLS 554     Public Personnel Administration  
POLS 552     Financial Administration and Budgeting  
POLS 558     Public Administration Ethics  
POLS 541     Administrative Law

**Area #2: Methodology and Policy Analysis**

POLS 622             Political Science Research Methods  
POLS 553             Public Policy Analysis  
POLS 622             Public Administration Research Methods

**Area #3: Public Policy, Organizational Theory, and Public Grantwriting**

POLS 551     Organizational and Bureaucratic Theory  
                  **(required of all students)**  
POLS 505     The Administrative Process  
POLS 557     Public Grantwriting

**II. Specialized Areas**

Each student must take 12 credits in a specialized area. Courses that are used to fulfill a core requirement cannot also be counted as a specialized course.

**Specialized Area #1: State, Local, and Non-Profit Administration**

(Choose 4 courses)

POLS 503     The Presidency  
POLS 506     Intergovernmental Relations  
POLS 509     Community & Regional Planning  
POLS 541     Administrative Law  
POLS 557     Public Grantwriting  
POLS 612     State & Local Seminar  
POLS 669     Independent Problems  
ECON 539     State & Local Finance  
GEO 599     Introductory GIS  
SOC 566     Sociology of Community

### **Specialized Area #2: Environmental Administration.**

(Choose 4 courses — Political Science 555 is required)

POLS 541	Administrative Law
POLS 553	Public Policy Analysis
<b>POLS 555</b>	<b><i>Politics of Environmental Problems (required)</i></b>
POLS 566	Public Lands Policy
GEOL 503	Principles of GIS

*Students may take other graduate level courses with an environmental emphasis from Biology, Geology, or Engineering, or other departments as approved by your MPA committee chair.*

### **Specialized Area #3: Public Health Administration**

(Choose 4 courses)

POLS 553	Public Policy Analysis
POLS 557	Public Grantwriting

*Students may take other graduate level courses from Health Care Administration (HCA), Health Education (HE), and Master of Public Health (MPH) as approved by your MPA committee chair.*

### **Specialized Area #4: The Legal Environment of Administration**

(Each student must choose 4 courses. **Sociology 531 and Political Science 543 are required**).

POLS 504	Legislative Process
SOC 531	Criminology (required)
POLS 542	Constitutional Law (Separation of Powers)
POLS 543	Constitutional Law (Civil Liberties) (required)
POLS 541	Administrative Law
POLS 506	Intergovernmental Relations
POLS 669	Independent Problems

### **III. Public Administration Internship**

Each student must complete six (6) credit hours of an approved internship.

**Master of Public Administration in Political Science  
Application Checklist**

1. Send a completed Application for Admissions to Graduate School, and \$55.00 application fee, to:

Graduate Studies  
Campus Box 8075  
Idaho State University  
Pocatello, ID 83209-8075

2. Ask each college or university you have attended to send two official transcripts to:

Graduate Studies  
Campus Box 8075  
Idaho State University  
Pocatello, ID 83209-8075

3. Have official transcripts of your scores on the GRE general examination sent to:  
**(You will not be admitted to the program until you have a satisfactory GRE score)**

Graduate Studies  
Campus Box 8075  
Idaho State University  
Pocatello, ID 83209-8075

4. Have **three** letters of recommendation, preferably from professors who know your recent academic work, sent to:

Department of Political Science  
Campus Box 8073  
Idaho State University  
Pocatello, ID 83209-8073

5. Send a statement of personal goals to:

Department of Political Science  
Campus Box 8073  
Idaho State University  
Pocatello, ID 83209-8073

6. To apply for financial assistance, send a completed Application for a Graduate Teaching Assistantship, by March 15, for fall and November 1, for Spring to:

Department of Political Science  
Campus Box 8073  
Idaho State University  
Pocatello, ID 83209-8073



If you have a reading knowledge of any foreign languages, list such languages and indicate for each whether you read with fair, good or excellent facility.

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Purpose of taking graduate work.

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What do you plan to do after receiving your degree?

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Honors, fellowships or scholarships, if any, which have been awarded to you.

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Assisting positions held while in college, if any, and dates.

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If employed since graduation, give positions held (including present position, if any) with names of institutions or firms, and dates. In case of teaching positions, give rank or title and the subjects taught.

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Names and addresses of three college teachers who will serve as reference and ***Have Been Requested*** by you to send recommendations to the dean of the college or the chairman of the department concerned.

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Student's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***(Idaho State University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity institution and does comply with the various State and Federal statutes and Executive Orders designed to insure equal opportunity.)***