

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 1970s 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, health care managers, and directors of not-for-profit organizations.

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. If a student has a GPA of 3.5 in the final 60 hours of undergraduate work, the GRE requirement is waived.

To take the GRE make an appointment with the ISU Testing and Counseling Center (282-2130). 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.

3. 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.

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

The MPA degree may be achieved through the successful completion of at least 39 semester credit hours of approved course work plus 3 credits of public service internship. The internship requirement may be waived for students who have substantial professional work experience in public service or the not-for-profit sector. The MPA director will determine if a student's experience is substantial, and if so can approve waiver of the internship requirement. Twenty-seven credit hours must be completed in courses selected from prescribed "core areas" with 12 additional credit hours completed in designated optional areas of emphasis.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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. The internship requirement may be waived for students who have substantial professional work experience in public service or the not-for-profit sector. The MPA director will determine if a student's experience is substantial, and if so can approve waiver of the internship requirement.

8. 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 the grade. The internship grade is pass or fail. The student also keeps a daily journal that documents the required 200 hours (3 credits) of internship work. The requirements for the final paper will be discussed with the MPA Director. Students working in an internship position represent both the university and the program and the student's work should reflect appropriate professional behavior.

9. 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.

10. What is a graduate committee?

Every MPA student needs to form a graduate committee of two members from the

department. You must designate one of the department members of the committee as "committee chair." One Graduate Faculty Representative (GFR) from outside the department will be chosen by the student. Consult with your committee chair as to who may serve as your GFR. A listing of members of the graduate faculty is in the Graduate Catalog. Students should choose members that they are comfortable with and who will be the student's "advocate" in oral examinations.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. What are MPA written and oral examinations?

***Written exams are given once each fall and spring semester (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. 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. Starting in the fall of 2011, MPA candidates may elect to take the MPA Capstone course (POLS 6680 Capstone in Public Administration) in lieu of comprehensive exams. POLS 6680 will be taught only in the Spring semester. If you a student elects to take that course, they will write a major paper and defend that paper in front of their committee and they will not have to complete written exams.