

# **POLICY GUIDE**

## **CENTER FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY**

**of the**

**School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA)  
College of Architecture and Urban Studies (CAUS)**

## **VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**August 2016**

The mission of the Virginia Tech Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP) is to promote good governance and the advancement of capable and ethical public service by providing outstanding education, research, and outreach in the theory and practice of public administration, management, and policy.

CPAP seeks:

- I. To provide qualified public service professionals currently in service and pre- or early-career students who plan to become public service professionals with a rigorous program of study for developing managerial, analytical, and normative evaluation skills in public management and public policy.
- II. To prepare teachers and scholars for faculty service in colleges and universities around the country and the world, thereby broadening the scope of knowledge in public administration and policy studies among administrators and citizenry.
- III. To engage faculty, practitioners, and graduate students in systematic research and study designed to improve the quality of policy making and public service within the varied jurisdictions of government in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the national capital region, as well as nationally and internationally.

CPAP offers two degrees: the Master of Public Administration (MPA) and the Ph.D. in public administration and public affairs. The MPA is offered in Blacksburg, the National Capital Region (NCR), and Richmond. The Ph.D. is offered in Blacksburg and NCR. CPAP also is the home for two graduate certificates, in Homeland Security Policy and in Local Government Management.

Virginia Tech is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations to allow identified students with disabilities access to academic programs. Information for students needing special services can be found at <http://www.ssd.vt.edu/students.htm>. CPAP students with special needs should contact the CPAP chair.

### **I. THE MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM**

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) is a professional degree intended for future and present practitioners in the public service. Its purpose is to educate early career individuals for administrative and analytical posts and to improve the skills of in-career public administrators.

International students should recognize that a substantial portion of the program's subject matter focuses primarily upon public administration, management, and policy in the United States.

## **A. PREREQUISITES**

1. Course in U.S. Government: Entering students must have taken at least one undergraduate course about the institutions of the U.S. government or have equivalent experience, training, or instruction. Equivalent experience is at least three years full-time work in local, state, or federal government. This prerequisite can also be satisfied by completing the CLEP American Government exam with a score of 60 or higher. If this requirement has not been fulfilled upon entry into the program, it should be fulfilled in the first semester.
2. Statistics Course: All students enrolling in PAPA 6514 (Public Administration and Policy Inquiry) must have had a statistics course or be taking one concurrently. In order to enroll in PAPA 6224 (Public Policy Design and Implementation), students must have completed an introductory statistics course or meet an equivalent requirement as approved by faculty members teaching those courses, and have had the prerequisite of PAPA 6514 or equivalent. A diagnostic test to determine proficiency in basic statistics is available for advising purposes. Use of statistical tools and software are required in these courses.
3. In order for a full-time student taking 12 hours each semester to complete the coursework for the degree program in three semesters, he or she must complete all prerequisites, including introductory statistics, before beginning the first fall semester. We advise most full-time students to take three courses each semester, using research and thesis hours if needed to reach the 12 hours that some assistantships require.
4. Students must receive a grade of "C+" or better in all pre-requisites in order to gain entry to the relevant graduate courses.
5. All students are expected to be familiar with the use of standard word processing, spreadsheets, file manipulation, and presentation software, plus e-mail and basic internet applications. Certain courses may require the use of additional statistical, modeling, or other software packages. In the case of students not having these skills, students should arrange appropriate training outside the standard CPAP curriculum.

## **B. REQUIREMENTS**

*Academic Requirements:* It is vital that all students review the overall requirements for graduate admission, coursework, and graduation posted on the Graduate School website at <http://graduateschool.vt.edu/>.

The MPA entails 39 semester hours of credit, including the final portfolio requirement. Nine of the 12 courses necessary for graduation are required; the rest are elective. With the prior approval of the student's advisor, up to six credits of the elective courses may be taken at the 4000-level. If students enroll in a 4000/5000-level conjoint undergraduate/graduate course,

students must register for the 5000-level version of the course. Any student contemplating enrolling in a 4000-level course must meet with his/her advisor and provide the advisor the course syllabus for review. If the advisor finds the 4000-level course meets expectations that it will aid the student in “preparing to be a capable professional,” the advisor will place a statement and brief explanation to that effect, along with a copy of the syllabus, in the student’s file. At the end of the term, the faculty member will review the course experience with the student, and if appropriate, report concerns about quality to the CPAP chair.

The required courses cover topics in public management, public policy, and public service as shown in the table outlining the MPA Curriculum that follows. Elective courses may be taken through CPAP, in other SPIA departments, or elsewhere in the University. Non-course options are explained below.

*Transferring Credit:* With the approval of at least two faculty members, appropriate substitutes for up to twenty percent of the MPA coursework (9 semester hours of credit) may be transferred into the program from previous graduate work done at schools other than Virginia Tech. For graduate courses taken at Virginia Tech, students can appeal to the CPAP Chair to have additional coursework transferred.

*Course Advising and Course Substitutions:* At the time of admission, each student is assigned a faculty advisor who will work with the student to review course options. It is the student’s responsibility to make an appointment with his or her advisor. Students may change advisors with the permission of the CPAP chair and the consent of the new advisor.

Initial discussion of student plans of study and course substitutions takes place during orientation or in individual meetings during which students work with faculty advisors to approve course transfers and to plan initial courses. In Blacksburg, acceptance of transfer courses usually is held as part of the fall orientation. The National Capital Region and Richmond programs set up separate times for advising processes. Students seeking course substitutions should bring a copy of a transcript listing the courses to be substituted and a syllabus describing course content for each course that they wish to transfer.

*Plan of Study:* Students should prepare a Plan of Study form, available on the CPAP website, as soon as possible. The Plan of Study must be completed before the student completes 24 semester hours of coursework and be approved by the student’s advisory committee and committee chair and the Graduate School. All courses on the Plan of Study must be taken for a letter grade except for courses offered on a pass/fail basis only. Once the Plan has been sent to the Graduate School, changes must be made on the appropriate form available from the Graduate School and approved by the student’s advisory committee and committee chair, the CPAP Chair or Associate chair, and the Graduate School.

*Course Load, Other Requirements, and Graduation Procedures:* Students should carefully read the *Graduate School Policies and Course Catalog* ([http://graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate\\_catalog/](http://graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/)) regarding permissible course loads with or without assistantships; the necessity of being registered for 3 hours at the time of the final exam (Portfolio defense); the types of courses and grading options for courses that are eligible for inclusion on the plan of study; and other requirements affecting program eligibility and completion. Students must be enrolled in the semester in which they complete the degree; full-time students must be enrolled for at least three hours during each of the fall and the spring semesters.

## C. PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT

Effective for students entering in Fall 2013 and after, all MPA students in their final semester of study shall present and defend an electronic portfolio that includes a variety of course and other program-related materials. Assessment of the portfolio is based on the six performance objectives below; through the portfolio, each student provides evidence (e.g., course assignments, internship reports, videotaped presentations) showing fulfillment of the evaluation criteria associated with each performance objective.

The portfolio is a project about which students should think about and work toward throughout their time in the program. Its overall purpose is to demonstrate that a student's educational experiences, work, and new knowledge show that she or he has developed the competencies expected of an MPA graduate. The performance objectives that follow reflect the "universal competencies" that we and NASPAA, our accrediting organization, expect MPA students to have developed and strengthened as they complete their degrees.

### 1. CPAP Performance Objectives and Evaluation Criteria

- a. **Performance Objective:** Communicate effectively through organized, concise, and grammatically correct writing.

*Effective communication requires preparation of skillful written presentations, including sensitivity and adaptability to distinctive audiences in an evolving and diverse public service landscape.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

1. *Provide evidence of clear, concise, and professional writing skills.*
2. *Demonstrate ability to use written language to convey complex ideas.*
3. *Demonstrate ability to use graphical displays to convey complex ideas and information.*

- b. **Performance Objective:** Communicate effectively through a structured, appropriate, and well-timed presentation.

*Effective communication requires preparation and delivery of skillful oral presentations, including sensitivity and adaptability to distinctive audiences in an evolving and diverse public service landscape.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

1. *Present research or analysis to a general audience clearly and concisely.*

2. *Actively engage in a serious, sustained, and productive exchange of views about a topic.*

- c. **Performance Objective:** Use qualitative and quantitative research methods appropriate to the nature of the task.

*Capable decision making will be enriched by the appropriate use of analytical methods to identify, describe, explain, and develop rigorous approaches for addressing managerial and policy problems.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

1. *Demonstrate the ability to reason clearly and logically.*
2. *Clearly link a decision to accumulated evidence and knowledge.*
3. *Formulate a research question and use an appropriate research method to investigate it.*

- d. **Performance Objective:** Apply theory to practice in a range of settings.

*The application of theoretical understanding and analytical methods in real world settings (such as class simulations, internships, and employment) develops the capacity for similar or larger scale contributions to public management and policy processes after graduation.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

1. *Demonstrate the application of theory to practice in context.*
2. *Describe connections between course concepts and individual professional experiences.*
3. *Provide progress reports describing internship experience (if applicable.)*

- e. **Performance Objective:** Understand the nature and functions of management and leadership in policy formulation, development, and implementation.

*The study of management and leadership prepares students to contribute to activities and governance in local, state, or federal governmental or nonprofit organizations.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

1. *Exhibit leadership.*
2. *Contribute to meeting team objectives.*
3. *Present recommendations that are realistic, achievable, and can be evaluated.*
4. *Demonstrate a sensitive awareness of professional norms.*

- f. **Performance Objective:** Recognize, analyze, and understand the normative dimensions of management and policy issues.

*The commitment to effective action in service of the public should be undergirded by reflective comprehension of the ethical role of the public service professional.*

**Evaluation Criteria:**

1. *Articulate a personal commitment to ethical public service.*
2. *Demonstrate understanding of some key issues and major challenges regarding issues of cultural and normative diversity.*

## 2. CREATING A PORTFOLIO

Where applicable, MPA core courses will provide students with the opportunity to address the performance objectives. It is the instructor's responsibility to determine which performance objectives are applicable to a particular course and to develop assignments that address the objectives. However, it is ultimately *each student's responsibility* to fulfill each of the performance objectives by meeting the evaluation criteria. Instructors are not required to create assignments that explicitly align with the evaluation criteria. Each student will determine which products provide the best evidence of satisfaction of the evaluation criteria. Products can include, but are not limited to, assignments from core MPA courses, assignments from elective courses, personal statements or essays developed specifically for the portfolio, or work products (provided the product was created while the student was enrolled in the MPA program). However, **at least one assignment from each core MPA course must be included** in the portfolio. Thus, at minimum, the portfolio must include 9 distinct products, but students are strongly encouraged to use multiple relevant products to illustrate conformance with each of the criteria; repeated use of one product to demonstrate conformance with more than one objective should be done only if necessary.

Each portfolio also will contain a substantive narrative describing the items that are included and explaining how these products demonstrate conformance with the performance objectives.

Portfolios will be archived and available for viewing by CPAP faculty, students, and anyone given explicit permission by the CPAP faculty. Additionally, students are encouraged, but not required, to make portfolios available to the public via the CPAP website.

Please note that there is no single correct template for portfolio development. Students are encouraged to review past portfolios for ideas, but not necessarily as templates for their own portfolios.

## 3. PAPA 5904 (PROJECT AND REPORT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION)

During the final semester of study, the student will enroll in PAPA 5904, which is offered each Fall and Spring semester. Prior to the first class meeting, the student should conduct a self-assessment to evaluate performance for each objective, and identify areas for improvement.

During the semester, the PAPA 5904 instructor will advise the student on determining which types of products may be most useful for satisfying each performance objective. Working with the PAPA 5904 instructor, the student will craft a written portfolio narrative and presentation, and develop a plan for ensuring conformance with the performance objectives and associated evaluative criteria that the student or the instructor identify as needing additional attention.

At the conclusion of PAPA 5904, the student will have prepared a final narrative, will

have addressed any outstanding issues in demonstrating conformance, and will have developed the final portfolio.

#### **4. PORTFOLIO EVALUATION PROCESS**

The portfolio including the narrative will be finalized and submitted to the student's faculty advisor and committee no later than 10 days before the last day of classes in the semester during which the student defends the portfolio.

##### **a. Portfolio Defense**

During the final week of classes, MPA committees will hold a portfolio defense meeting with each graduating student. This constitutes the MPA final exam. Students will have five to ten minutes to describe how their portfolios demonstrate satisfaction of performance objectives. The committee members and other faculty will then have 15 minutes to ask questions. Without the student present, the committee members will deliberate and reach a final exam result. The committee will inform the student of the exam result, and where appropriate, designate requirements the student must meet for developing additional actions to ensure conformance.

##### **b. Grading**

Committees will evaluate the student's portfolio and oral defense on each of the performance objectives according to the following three possible outcomes: Pass with Distinction, Pass, or Fail.

**1. Fail:** If a student receives a grade of Fail from the committee on any performance objective, the student must submit an outline for addressing this discrepancy to the committee within 48 hours. The committee chair must then agree that the plan will achieve conformance with the objective in order for the student to be declared eligible for graduation. If the committee does not declare the student eligible to graduate, the student must submit a detailed plan ensuring conformance with all performance objectives for which the committee indicated a grade of Fail. The student must submit this plan by the first day of classes in the ensuing Fall or Spring semester and register for any remaining courses, or if all other course requirements are complete request a Start of Semester Defense Exception (SSDE). The student and committee will meet within the first five weeks of the semester to discuss the plan, recommend any changes and complete the portfolio process.

**2. Pass:** If the Committee passes the student on all six performance objectives, a grade of Pass for the portfolio and the final exam will be submitted, and the student will be eligible to graduate.

**3. Pass with Distinction:** In order to Pass with Distinction, students must receive unanimous Pass with Distinction ratings from all committee members on all performance objectives. It is expected that few students will achieve a Pass with Distinction.

#### **D. CRITERIA FOR CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE MPA COMMITTEES**

All MPA committee members are appointed by the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the CPAP chair. For each student's committee, the committee chair (or co-chair) must be a member of the CPAP core faculty, and the committee must include three faculty members total, with a majority consisting of CPAP core faculty. CPAP faculty emeriti/ae, faculty from other departments, and adjunct faculty may serve on a student's committee with approval of the CPAP chair. Appropriate non-faculty personnel may be recommended to the Dean of the Graduate School for inclusion on an MPA committee. Graduate students may not serve on an MPA committee. The full committee must be present for the portfolio meeting, and members must contribute to determining whether the student's portfolio is a Fail, Pass, or Pass with Distinction.

**THE M.P.A. CURRICULUM (39 Credit Hours)**

**Required Courses — 27 Credit Hours**

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT	PAPA 5315: Behavioral Skills for Managers PAPA 5316: Systems Skills For Managers PAPA 6314: Public Budgeting Processes and Their Policy Implications* PAPA 6324: Public Personnel Processes and Their Policy Implications*
PUBLIC POLICY	PAPA 6214: Public Policy Processes and Analytical Approaches PAPA 6224: Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Policy and Programs (prerequisites: a statistics course and PAPA 6514)
PUBLIC SERVICE	PAPA 5014: Concepts and Approaches in Public Administration PAPA 6414: Normative Foundations of Public Administration
METHODS AND ANALYSIS	PAPA 6514: Public Administration and Policy Inquiry (prerequisite: a statistics course)

\*PAPA 6354 may be substituted for one of these classes, when taken as part of the Local Government Management certificate.

**Electives (9 credits) and Non-Course Components (3 Credits)**

Elective Courses	Non-Course Component
Three courses (9 credit hours) composed of other CPAP courses or courses in other departments. Options should be related to public affairs and be discussed with your advisor. For pre- and early career students, internship credit (PAPA 5954) may be used for 3 of these hours.	Student selects 3 credit hours of PAPA 5904, Project and Report [portfolio preparation and defense]

## **II. THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM: Ph.D. IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is academia's highest degree and prepares one for research and scholarship, whether or not in affiliation with a university. The Center offers this degree for both full-time and part-time students. Many of these students are mid-career professionals who have reached a point in their professional development where they can commit the time and energy necessary to earn the Ph.D. degree. Qualified individuals just beginning their careers are also welcome. A master's degree in a relevant field (not necessarily public administration or public policy) ordinarily is required for admission, but this requirement can be waived in exceptional cases. Those earning the CPAP MPA degree may apply for admission to the Ph.D. program as the end of the MPA work draws near.

All Ph.D. students take foundation courses in five core areas: policy, organizations, management, ethics, and theory/context. Advanced Topic courses examine topics in the core areas at a deeper level, and the two capstone seminars are a gateway to advanced research and preparation for the dissertation. Other components of the program include Measurement and Analysis Tools, Concentration Courses, the Qualifying Examination, the Prospectus Defense (the Graduate School's "Preliminary Exam"), and the Dissertation and defense (the Graduate School's "Final Exam").

### **A. PREREQUISITES**

Entering students must have had courses in United States government, microeconomics, and introductory statistics. Students failing to meet this requirement must take these courses as soon as possible and must have completed them prior to enrolling in PAPA 6224. The U.S. government prerequisite may be satisfied by equivalent experience, training, or instruction. Equivalent experience is at least three years full-time work in local, state, or federal government in the U.S. This prerequisite also can be satisfied by completing the CLEP American Government exam with a score of 60 or higher. If this requirement has not been fulfilled upon entry into the program, it should be fulfilled in the first semester. Computer competency is also required.

### **B. COURSE PREPARATION FOR CORE AREAS**

A minimum of 90 credit hours is needed for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. A maximum of one half of the coursework, or 30 of the 60 credit hours of coursework required for the CPAP Ph.D., may be transferred from an accredited university other than Virginia Tech upon approval by two core faculty evaluating the student's plan of study. The 60 course work credits include 18 hours of foundation courses, 15 hours of advanced topics and capstone courses, 6 hours of measurement, 9 hours of electives, and 12 hours of research concentration. These courses must correspond to the requirements of the five curriculum core areas. Students must also take 30 hours of research and dissertation credit, three hours of which must be constituted by participation in 15 sessions of the Doctoral Mentoring Program (DMP) or other activities approved by the faculty for DMP credit.

1. *Foundation Courses* broadly survey sub-fields of public administration and public policy. These courses are offered by the Center but, as noted above, equivalent coursework at other

universities on occasion may substitute for some of these courses, subject to faculty approval.

At least 3 credit hours must be completed or transferred in at the foundation level in each core area except Policy, which requires 6 credit hours. Students complete at least 18 credit hours of foundation coursework in the core areas, at least 9 hours of Advanced Topics, and at least 6 hours of coursework in Measurement and Analysis Tools components. Students should complete foundation courses before enrolling in Advanced Topics classes. Before enrolling in the two-course sequence of Capstone Seminars, however, they must have completed all foundation courses and passed the qualifying examination.

2. *Advanced Topics Courses* examine specialized areas. These courses are designed to expose the student to an in-depth analysis of some specialized aspects of a core area of the Center's curriculum.

3. *Capstone Seminars* provide the opportunity to develop ideas that may form the foundation for the dissertation. They represent the most advanced formal coursework at the Center. The seminars are to be taken in sequence: Capstone A followed by Capstone B. They need not be taken in contiguous semesters. Capstone A is a research seminar that offers students the opportunity to develop ideas for a paper that may support a dissertation topic. Capstone B is a writing-intensive seminar in which students refine rough drafts developed in Capstone A. The final paper for Capstone B should be of publishable quality in a refereed journal. Admission to the capstone seminar sequence is contingent upon successful completion of all foundation coursework and the qualifying examination.

## **C. RESEARCH METHODS**

A basic knowledge of statistics and familiarity with computers is assumed upon admission. Students taking PAPA 6514, Public Administration and Policy Inquiry, or substitute research methods courses approved by the faculty, will be expected to use qualitative and quantitative inquiry and computing skills. If they have not already completed this coursework elsewhere, students are required to complete a graduate-level, intermediate statistics course, which covers techniques through multiple regression. Where appropriate, based on the student's research interests and with the approval of the student's adviser, coursework covering other techniques in advanced qualitative and quantitative analysis may be substituted for multiple regression, such as ethnographic field work, textual analysis, historical research, survey design, simulation, operations research, or mathematical programming. Students may enroll in these advanced courses prior to or while enrolled in either PAPA 6514 or PAPA 6224.

## **D. RESEARCH CONCENTRATION**

1. *Focused Study*: Students complete nine credit hours of focused study consisting of either coursework, independent studies, internship, and/or field studies. Students complete this work during their CPAP doctoral studies and may not transfer work completed prior to their enrollment in the Ph.D. program. This work should permit the student to delve more deeply into a subject-matter field or an area of theory or research methodology. Faculty advisors will counsel students on the need to take additional credit study or noncredit training in data collection or analysis tools needed for their anticipated dissertation projects as part of the

## Research Concentration requirement.

Students are encouraged to use the Research Concentration as an opportunity to begin work on the dissertation. For example, the nine credit hours may include special study in a potential dissertation research methodology, an independent study on a preliminary review of the literature base for the dissertation, some background coursework, or some form of applied field work. Students work with a member of the faculty to determine the activities for the nine credit hours. However, the Concentration also may be used to pursue field experiences or special study independent of the dissertation topic.

The Research Concentration may be completed *before or after* the qualifying exam. Students are encouraged to discuss with their advisors the appropriate time to complete the nine hours of research concentration work and the three credit concentration lecture.

2. *Concentration Lecture*: A lecture is prepared and presented by students after completing the nine credit hours of research concentration work. This lecture (three credit hours of PAPA 7964) integrates the Concentration work and must be presented before the faculty advisor and at least six other students or guests, including faculty. The lecture may focus on either the anticipated topic of the student's dissertation or another major area of research concentration that the student expects to offer as part of his or her academic credentials upon completion of the Ph.D. degree. This lecture is given before the dissertation prospectus defense. Where appropriate, part of this lecture should lay out the student's five-year plan of research for post-doctoral investigation. Students are responsible for assembling the audience for the lecture.