

Master of Public Administration Internship Manual



Overview: The Internship is designed to provide practical experience to MPA students, consisting of part-time (preferably paid) administrative employment in a public service setting, including offices in the public and nonprofit sectors. Typically, the student works an average of 15 hours per week for 16 weeks during a full semester or 20 hours per week for 12 weeks during a summer term (240 hours total). The academic component of the public service internship includes completion of assigned readings and a research paper. An internship is required for all MPA students who have not had public service experience. For practitioners, the internship may be waived although internships can be useful for gaining additional experience for professional advancement or to make a career change.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to set expectations for student interns and their sponsors so that both will develop and execute effective plans for this important segment of their public administration curriculum. In accordance with the Academic and Internship Guidelines from NASPAA, the MPA's accrediting body, please reconsider the program mission statement

UND MPA Program Mission Statement

The mission of the MPA Program at the University of North Dakota is to develop public service values and to prepare people to enter into or advance in government and related fields.

The University of North Dakota strives to provide students with a broad public administration education, enhanced communication skills, outstanding analytical and decision-making skills, and a commitment to improve the quality of service provided to members of the community, thereby improving the quality of life. Students are prepared for careers through regular course work, professional development, internships, and applied research projects. Internships are an integral part of the MPA curriculum, enabling students without professional experience to participate in supervised learning outside the classroom, structured to enhance their academic understanding of the field. Graduates will recognize and appreciate theories of public management and administration. They will be able to apply those theories to improve the performance of organizations and collaborate with others to best serve the public interest. Our faculty respond to the changing public service environment through scholarship, service, links to professional associations and organizations, and interaction with government agencies. Faculty will be a resource for local communities, the state of North Dakota, and the society at large.

1.1 What is an MPA Internship?

A significant public sector experience is required of all MPA students. The purpose of the MPA internship provides students who have no administrative experience with an immersion-learning, integrative practicum. Per NASPAA standards, the MPA internship must include at least 240 hours. The internship is, therefore, considered an integral part of the MPA degree.

The internship will be structured to provide the following:

- professional experience
- opportunities to integrate theory and practice
- exposure to the daily routines, processes, and expectations of public service work
- the prospect of a professional reference
- the potential to build a professional network

An internship is an educational work experience in which the student takes on a responsible role as a worker within an organization. Internships provide an opportunity to learn new skills, expand knowledge of a particular field of study, explore career options, and apply academic knowledge to a professional setting. Sometimes, the internship is also used as a laboratory setting for testing and application of theoretical models. Besides on-the-job application of classroom theories and techniques, internships facilitate the development of professional skills such as planning, organizing, and leadership. The public service settings can be varied.

Much is demanded from public administrators and nonprofit leaders. The coordination of numerous regulatory activities, the provision of social services, the execution of strategic plans, the management of vast public enterprises, and the routine functions of organizations all continue to expand in terms of size and complexity. Institutions of higher learning are challenged to anticipate, and hence prepare, graduates for varied career paths. Similarly, the demands and opportunities in professional settings are also quite diverse. MPA interns are expected to learn the policies and procedures of the organization for which they are working and to analyze that experience in the context of theoretical models developed within the MPA curriculum.

1.2 Keys to a Successful Internship

1.2.1 *Strive to make this a meaningful learning experience:*

The internship should be a meaningful placement in a public service setting where students embark on an academic learning experience. Put effort into the academic application. Consider theories, concepts, and models from your coursework in relation to what you observe and practice within the context of the internship. The internship course grade is weighted toward your ability to demonstrate applied academic learning, evaluated by your faculty internship supervisor. A smaller, but no less important, component of the grade comes from an evaluation of your work performance, assessed by your site supervisor.

1.2.2 *Apply the same academic rigor you would for any other course:*

Most students report working just as hard, if not harder, on their internships as they do for classes. Pursuing an off-campus internship along with other classes creates a demanding schedule and requires a lot of time and energy.

1.2.3 *Move past your comfort zone:*

Although most positions will involve some routine work, the placement should extend to administrative experiences and duties. Challenge yourself. Seek out new opportunities and expand your professional horizons.

1.2.4 *Maintain clear lines of communication with your site supervisor:*

The student and site supervisor must set realistic expectations around the internship. There is an expectation that the workplace invests training time in the intern and provides tasks that are in line with their experience and skills. Similarly, interns are there to learn, but also to do so while performing meaningful work. Students are expected to treat this as they would any other professional position they might be hired for and maintain professional workplace behavior, which includes showing up on time, following through on tasks, etc.

1.2.5 *Treat this experience as a stepping-stone into the profession:*

Sometimes interns are offered part-time or full-time employment because of contacts made during their internship, but there is no guarantee that an internship will lead to a job at your site. However, many employers value hiring someone who has had internship experience; therefore, the internship will enhance marketability. Taking on new responsibilities is one way to achieve this. Networking within the internship setting also provides advantages for career advancement.

1.3 Securing an Internship Position

Students should think about the type of organization they would like to work for after graduation, such as a legislature, local / state government agency, or nonprofit organization. They should consult with the MPA Director early in the semester prior to the semester for which the internship is planned for suggestions of organizations that might have internships available. The

Pancratz Center and Handshake will assist with the initial search for the internship and then facilitate its successful completion.

1.3.1 *The Pancratz Center:*

The Pancratz Career Development Center offers services to all Nistler College students. These include assistance in writing cover letters & resumes, interview preparation, internship search strategies, career fair preparation, and strength assessments.

- Contact: UND.pancratzcenter@UND.edu
- Website: <https://business.und.edu/current-students/pancratz-career-center/index.html>

1.3.2 *Handshake:*

Handshake is a resource available to all UND students for searching for internships and jobs, learning about employers attending career fairs, and reporting your internship experience. Once you register as a student in Handshake, build your profile, upload your resume, browse internship opportunities, and apply for positions. The site also assists in developing your profile and resume as well as helpful search strategies.

- Handshake registration and log-in: <https://und.joinhandshake.com>
- The Pancratz Center has a manual with instructions on how to use Handshake: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zfORRSTWAJBczYkUJI24Lscas38W7_eN/view

1.4 Registering and Reporting Your Internship

Once the MPA Director has approved your internship site, the Office of Graduate Programs will provide you with a permission number to register the course (Pols 580) in Campus Connection. In addition, you will report your internship experience on Handshake and complete forms via DocuSign through the Handshake portal. You will submit objectives, fill out all fields, and provide contact information for your employment supervisor. The site supervisor will receive an evaluation in the final few weeks of the experience which will be submitted through Handshake and provided to your Faculty Coordinator. You will also receive a form to submit an evaluation about your experience. Pancratz staff members are available to assist with any questions.

2. Policies

2.1 Eligibility

To be eligible to register for an internship, a student must be accepted in the MPA program, and be in good academic standing (GPA of at least 3.0) and have completed at least 12 credits in the MPA program. Additionally, the student must have identified an acceptable internship position through Handshake and received permission from the MPA Director.

2.2 MPA Internship Waiver Policy

The MPA program, as well as our accrediting body, NASPAA, recognize internships as a valuable component of an MPA curriculum. However, we realize that students begin our MPA program at different stages of their professional careers. Therefore, those MPA students with at least one year of professional experience in a public service sector or other public affairs agency may apply to have the internship requirement for the program waived.

2.2.1. *Who qualifies for an internship waiver?*

Professional public service qualifying for an internship waiver is typically at the administrative level, where duties might include (but not be limited to) working with budgets, completing supervisory tasks (human resources related duties, such as hiring and evaluation, conducting training, etc.), working with entities in the public sector, writing grant proposals, project management, and working with diverse clientele. Experience can be in the public sector, non-profit, or private sectors but should have a demonstrable public service component.

2.2.2. *How to apply for an internship waiver*

To apply for a waiver, students submit the following documents prior to completing your first 18 credits of MPA coursework:

- **Cover Letter:** Send a cover letter to the MPA Director requesting that the internship requirement be waived. In the letter, provide a detailed explanation of why they believe they have met the requirement of having at least one year of professional experience in a relevant organization, referencing the criteria above.
- **Resume:** Send a current resume documenting the work described in the cover letter.

The cover letter and resume will be retained as part of the student's file and may be examined by a NASPAA Site Visit Team during the reaccreditation process. If a student is granted an internship waiver, they will be required to complete an elective course in place of POLS 580. The substitution will be reflected on a Program of Study. The Director will consider all waiver requests. In certain cases, the Director may consult core MPA faculty or the MPA Steering Committee for advice. Students who have their requests denied may formally appeal the decision to the MPA Steering Committee.

2.3 Enrollment and Faculty Assignments

Students pursuing an internship will enroll in Pols 580: Administrative Internship. Three credit hours meets the curricular requirement. A student may enroll in one or two credit hours in certain instances with approval of the MPA Director. For example, if the average weekly hours of the internship are relatively fewer and the internship spans more than one semester.

Students are charged with securing their own internships but are encouraged to approach the MPA Program Director as well as other MPA faculty for ideas and contacts. Students will use Handshake to secure the internship. If a student knows of an internship that is not currently posted on Handshake, please contact the Pancratz Center. They will assist in putting the position into the system. Once a potential position is found, Handshake will contact the MPA Program Director for approval. Handshake will also facilitate the creation of position objectives and provide necessary forms for the student and site supervisor, who will route the forms for signature to the MPA Director through DocuSign.

Once the internship is approved and the forms are filed, the MPA Director assigns a faculty member to supervise the internship and be the instructor of record who sets expectations for academic requirements and determines the letter grade. Faculty are selected based on their expertise and availability. The student enrolls for Pols 580 using the section matching the faculty member. Students and faculty should communicate prior to the start of the internship about a schedule for meeting, paper topic, deadlines, grading expectations, and other matters related to the internship. The student and faculty member should maintain contact monthly, at a minimum.

In cases when the internship opportunity does not perfectly match the academic calendar, students should approach the MPA Director for guidance. Under certain circumstances, and with MPA Director approval, students may enroll in Pols 580 when the internship begins several weeks before or continues several weeks beyond the start or end time of a semester.

2.4 Academic Expectations and Grading Policy

Pols 580: Administrative Internship is a graded (A-F) course. The instructor of record is charged with setting academic expectations and assigning the grade for the course. Because each internship position is different, academic paper topics will vary. However, in all instances, the paper will be based on approved peer-reviewed literature (books and journal articles) and may also include popular press, internet, and government documents. Students, with input on appropriate topic from faculty and their site supervisor, write a research paper that incorporates academic literature with experiences in the internship position. Thus, students are expected to link theory to practice in order to demonstrate the ability to integrate the field experience to their academic training. Topics may be based on a significant task or project for which an intern is responsible during the internship. Ideally, the research that goes into the paper, and thus the paper itself, benefits the organization. Although it is not a requirement, students are encouraged to submit the paper to their site supervisor at the conclusion of the internship.

Besides the research paper, which counts for 50 percent of the grade for POLS 580, there are other requirements designed to document and reflect on the experience. This might include maintaining a Calendar/Time & Duty log (documenting activities) and a Journal (reflective narrative). These other required elements are graded on an S/U grading scale (satisfactory or unsatisfactory). The sponsoring agency also contributes 30 percent to the final grade upon consideration of the instructor. The internship site supervisor submits a mid-term and final evaluation of the student's performance. Ideally, these evaluations are treated like a performance review so that the supervisor and student discuss the evaluation before it is submitted to the instructor of record.

Grading Criteria:

- Research paper: 50%
- Midterm and final site evaluations: 30%
- Documentation required by instructor of record: 20% (S/U grading scale)

2.5 Code of Conduct / Notice of Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity at UND

The UND Code of Student Life applies to students in all capacities related to the internship. The University is a learning community dedicated to the intellectual and personal growth of our students. It is an environment where all students, faculty, and staff are treated with dignity and respect. The Code addresses the rights and responsibilities of all UND students and includes processes intended to ensure fair treatment of all students. A copy of the UND Code of Student Life can be found here: <https://und.edu/student-life/code-of-student-life.html>

The University of North Dakota (UND) is committed to the principle of equal opportunity in education and employment. UND does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, creed, marital status, veteran's status, political belief or affiliation or any other status protected by law. The University's policies and procedures for complaints of discrimination or harassment, as well as other notices related to equal opportunity at UND, are found at: <https://campus.und.edu/equal-opportunity/required-notices.html>

3. Frequently Asked Questions

Can I be paid or provided benefits as an intern?

Department policy expects that interns receive some remuneration for their work. At the same time, we realize that not all public and nonprofit organizations have funds to provide to interns. The department will evaluate the internship experience to determine if unpaid internships meet the needs of the student intern.

Can I use my existing job as my internship?

The primary goal of the internship is to provide students with new experiences. If you hold a position that provides the relevant work experience for an MPA degree, you can petition to have the internship requirement waived and instead take an additional three-credit elective. However, some students may wish to gain additional experience within the agency or organization where they are currently employed. The Department will consider these students' requests. If permission is granted, the intern must perform duties substantially different from those required as an employee.

What happens if I need to leave my internship midway through?

If termination of an internship becomes necessary, the internship supervisor should initiate such cancellation through the MPA Director. Interns are not to leave their assignments without the permission of the MPA Director. Since POLS 580 is treated as a class, the student should take steps to formally withdraw from the course, following UND policy. Not completing your internship and not withdrawing from the course will result in a failing grade for POLS 580.

What do I do if things go wrong?

Occasionally problems arise during an internship. We strongly encourage the individuals involved to discuss the situation, negotiate on their own, and work toward agreement. Early intervention can usually lead to a solution that is acceptable to all involved. If a problem arises with the internship, it is important to deal with it immediately. The place to start is with the internship supervisor at the position site. Often, clarification or modification of internship expectations will resolve the issue. If the issue cannot be resolved at the internship site, students should contact the instructor of record to help resolve the problem. Often the faculty supervisor can mediate the issue to the satisfaction of all parties. If the faculty member is unsuccessful, the student should approach the MPA Director. If intervention is warranted, the MPA Director will gather information from the site supervisor, faculty supervisor, and the student concerning the nature of the problem. A meeting of all parties, and perhaps a site visit, may be advisable in which case the MPA Director acts as convener and mediator. The MPA Director will make recommendations, encourage parties to discuss the issue, and work out an acceptable solution. When advisable, a field assignment may be changed with the approval of the MPA Director. Steps to initiate such a change should originate with the MPA Director. In cases where it is impossible to complete the internship experience, the MPA Director will work to secure a new assignment or find other acceptable solutions so that the student can complete the internship requirement.