



Public Administration

COLLEGE OF PUBLIC SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
COLORADO SPRINGS

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Internship Handbook

REVISED DECEMBER 2025

Internship Guidelines for Students

Introduction

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at the UCCS College of Public Service includes professional experience among the requirements for degree completion. Pre-service students are classified as those who do not have at least one year of professional experience in a public administration-related field (e.g., government, nonprofit, national security, homeland security, or emergency management). Student employment is not eligible to count as relevant work experience. Pre-service students must complete a 3-credit hour internship **in addition** to other degree requirements, bringing the total number of credit hours required for graduation to 39. Situations may vary for dual-degree students; please contact the MPA internship coordinator for additional information.

Determination of Requirements

The MPA program director examines each student's application and determines whether an internship is required or should be waived; each student is notified of this decision in his/her admission letter. Those who believe vital experiences have been overlooked may ask the MPA program director to reconsider the decision by submitting a written request.

Some students who are initially required to complete an internship later obtain experience while still in the MPA program, which would merit a waiver. In such circumstances, the student may request a waiver of the internship requirement from the MPA program director.

PAD 6910 is not available for in-service students who are not required to complete an internship. Those in-service students who are interested in similar professional development opportunities may be able to construct an Independent Study (PAD 9500), developing a plan tailored to meet their individual needs best.

Purpose of the Internship

Students gain useful experience in public and/or nonprofit management, research, and evaluation through their work. The objectives of the internship as it relates to the student are •

- Expose MPA students to the challenging career opportunities in public service;
- Provide pre-service students with real-world work experiences that link classroom training and the actual practice of public administration and

- Help students to determine their abilities and interests and to balance those with agency requirements and expectations, thereby offering experiences that allow students to make informed career decisions.

Additional objectives of the internship program for the host agency, the community at large, and the MPA program at the College of Public Service are to:

- Make positive contributions to the host agency via high-quality work and educationally enriched skills and perspectives, thereby improving the overall quality of public service;
- Build and strengthen relationships between the College of Public Service and the communities it serves; and
- Aid in program assessment by garnering input from professionals in the community and student interns.

Internship Guidelines

The following guidelines have been established for the MPA internship program:

- Internships may be hosted by organizations in the public or nonprofit sectors. Occasionally, a private sector internship may be approved. These must be approved in advance by the MPA internship coordinator and the relevance for the student and organization should be proven.
- Internships may be completed locally, in another city or state, or internationally.
- At a minimum, students are required to complete a total of 240 work hours for the host agency.
- The work hours are generally completed during an academic semester, although arrangements may be made to carry hours over more than one semester; internships may also be completed over the summer. Work schedules are arranged with the internship agency.
- Internships may be paid or unpaid.
- Students may work part-time or full-time.

Internship Process and Requirements

Students should discuss the intent and timing of the internship process with their academic advisors. Interns will not be placed until the student has completed at least 9 credit hours in the MPA program.

Students should contact the MPA internship faculty coordinator at least one semester prior to their planned enrollment in the internship course to discuss internship intent, goals, and opportunities. Students are expected to provide an updated resume and unofficial transcript in advance of the meeting.

Students are responsible for identifying potential internships and may initiate contact with organizations; they may also contact faculty who have expertise and connections in the specific area of interest for suggestions concerning internship placement. The MPA internship coordinator maintains a list of contacts and open positions and may facilitate this process. However, the **final responsibility for obtaining an internship position lies with the student**. Nevertheless, students should not commit to placement before receiving program approval. After obtaining advisor approval, students should contact the MPA internship coordinator to plan the internship process. The internship coordinator will provide a permission number, which is required for students to register for PAD 6910.

Students must meet requirements of both the internship host agency and the MPA program. The **Internship Letter of Agreement** is to be completed and signed by all parties prior to the start of the internship. This Letter outlines the agency's needs and the student's educational goals for the internship position. It also describes the tasks and responsibilities of the internship position. Signatures from the student intern, agency supervisor, and MPA internship coordinator indicate that all are in agreement with the information contained within the letter, which then serves as the framework for the internship.

The MPA program pledges that graduates will have the following competencies, as enumerated by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), our accrediting body. Therefore, these competencies should be addressed, as appropriate, during the internship. They include the ability to:

- Lead and manage in public governance;
- Participate effectively in the policy process;
- Analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions;
- Articulate and apply a public service perspective;
- Communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.

Students are responsible for identifying at least three of the competencies that will be addressed during the internship. These will be noted in the Letter of Agreement, and the student will assess progress in these in areas in their final paper.

In addition to performing work for the internship agency, students also write and submit two papers. The first paper should be submitted after approximately one-half of the internship hours have been completed. This short paper, 3-5 pages in length, should be comprised of the following information:

- Describes the nature of the field experience and allocation of time spent;
- Describes the student's progress toward learning objectives to that point;

- Outlines any concerns or difficulties encountered and any new areas of concentration;
- Relates the knowledge and skills gained through coursework to the internship.

The final paper is to be submitted after completion of the internship hours requirement.

This 5 - 7-page paper should accomplish the following:

- Outline the knowledge and skills gained during the internship;
- Compare and contrast learning from the internship experience with learning from scholarly literature and classroom instruction;
- Address the competencies identified in the Letter of Agreement;
- Analyze the experience and results;
- Include conclusions and recommendations.

The MPA internship coordinator is the point of contact for all student and agency communication during the internship; the Field Study instructor reads and assesses the student papers and assigns a final grade. Internships are graded as Pass/Fail.

Internship Guidelines for the Host Agency

Introduction

The host agency benefits from a graduate intern's energy and fresh perspective, knowledge of current best practices, and capacity-building skills. Host agencies are contributing to the process of educating and preparing public administration professionals, thereby elevating the overall quality of public service.

Successful internships have resulted in the development of training packages, fund development calendars and strategies, policy analyses, and other special projects.

The following guidelines are intended to assist the host agency and to help make the internship as successful as possible for all parties. Questions regarding internships should be directed to the MPA internship coordinator, Pam Sawyer, at psawyer@uccs.edu.

Purpose of the Internship

The primary purpose of the MPA internship program is for students to gain useful experience in public and/or nonprofit management, research, and evaluation through their work. Host agencies receive positive contributions to their organizations via high-quality graduate student work and educationally enriched skills and perspectives.

Internship Guidelines

The following guidelines have been established for the MPA internship program:

- Internships may be hosted by public or nonprofit agencies. Private sector internships are rarely permitted and require program director approval.
- Internships may be completed locally, in another city or state, or internationally.
- At a minimum, students are required to complete a total of 240 work hours for the host agency.
- The work period can be for an academic semester or during the summer, and work schedules are arranged with the internship agency.
- Internships may be paid or unpaid.
- Students may work part-time or full-time.

Internship Process

The host agency recognizes that it shares responsibility for a successful internship experience. The agency's needs and student's educational goals are negotiated and agreed upon before work commences.

Please consider the following points when commencing the internship process:

- Before writing a job description, it may be helpful to evaluate your agency's needs and resources. What is the availability of work that is useful to you and also meaningful, challenging, and appropriate for interns? Where does an intern fit into

your physical space and schedule? How will the intern be compensated financially or benefit from opportunities?

- Students must meet requirements of both the internship host agency and the MPA program. The **Internship Letter of Agreement**, which outlines the agency's needs and the student's educational goals and describes the tasks and responsibilities of the internship position, is to be completed and signed by all parties prior to the start of the internship. The completed Letter serves as the framework for the internship.
- In the early stages of the internship, the intern should receive an overview of the agency's role and function, including an introduction to its major policies and procedures.
- The intern should be supervised by and have adequate and appropriate access to a responsible manager.
- The intern should be introduced to appropriate agency staff, and staff should be informed of the purpose, role, and expected performance of the intern.
- The intern should be able to observe and participate in administrative activities and have exposure to as much of the agency's organization as possible.
- The agency should immediately contact the MPA internship coordinator regarding concerns or inadequate progress.
- The intern's supervisor will provide feedback as requested, after completion of the internship.

Insurance Requirements

Student internships are regulated under the Colorado Worker's Compensation Statute. CRS 8-40-302 (7) states that:

(a) Any employer, as defined in section 8-40-203, who enters into a bona fide cooperative education or student internship program sponsored by an educational institution for the purpose of providing on-the-job training for students shall be deemed an employer of such students for the purposes of workers' compensation and liability insurance pursuant to articles 40 to 47 of this title.

(b) If the student placed in an on-the-job training program does not receive any pay or remuneration from the employer, the educational institution sponsoring the student in the cooperative education or student internship program shall ensure the student through the institution's workers' compensation and liability insurance or enter into negotiations with the employer for the purpose of arriving at a reasonable level of compensation to the employer for the employer's expense of providing workers' compensation and liability insurance while such student is participating in on-the-job training with said employer. This paragraph (b) shall not apply to a student teacher participating in a program authorized pursuant to article 62 of title 22, CRS.

(c) As used in this subsection (7), "cooperative education or student internship program" means a program sponsored by an educational institution in which a student is taught through a coordinated combinations of specialized in-the-school instruction provided through an educational institution by qualified teachers and on-the-job training provided

through a local business, agency, or organization or any governmental agency in cooperation with the educational institution.

Communication and Contact

The MPA internship coordinator is the point of contact for all student and agency communication during the internship. The coordinator will contact the student's supervisor at least once during the course of the internship for a progress report and again at the conclusion of the internship for feedback. Please contact the MPA internship coordinator immediately with any questions or concerns.

We look forward to working with you to provide a productive and enriching internship experience for all involved.

**UCCS College of Public Service
Master of Public Administration Program
Internship Letter of Agreement**

Intern's Name: _____

Agency Name: _____

Internship Position: _____

Agency Contact/Supervisor: _____

Contact Information: _____

Period of Internship: _____

Salary (if applicable): _____

Description of agency needs for this position:

Description of student's educational goals for this internship. Please specifically address three or more of the following competencies:

- To lead and manage in public governance/nonprofit systems
- To participate in and contribute to the policy process
- To think critically, solve problems, and make decisions
- To articulate and apply a public service perspective
- To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Description of tasks and responsibilities for this position:

Intern Signature and Date

Agency Supervisor and Date

MPA Internship Coordinator and Date

**UCCS College of Public Service
Master of Public Administration Program
Internship Evaluation – Agency**

Intern's Name: _____

Agency Name: _____

Internship Position: _____

Agency Contact/Supervisor: _____

Contact Information: _____

1. In what ways was this internship of value to your agency?

2. How might the MPA internship process, as it relates to your agency, be improved?

3. Please discuss the work performance of this intern. As appropriate, please address the following competencies as outlined by NASPAA, the MPA program's accrediting body:
 - To lead and manage in public governance/nonprofit systems
 - To participate in and contribute to the policy process
 - To think critically, solve problems, and make decisions
 - To articulate and apply a public service perspective
 - To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Please attach additional pages for comments, as needed.
Thank you for your feedback!