

Local Government Practicum: Graduate Education, Public Service, and Statewide Partnerships

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Prepared for the National Outreach and Scholarship Conference
Tuesday, October 2, 2012
University of Alabama; Tuscaloosa, AL

- Masters of Public Administration

- Largely a practitioner degree

- Preparation for students wishing to enter federal government, state government, local government, and non-profit agencies for *management* rather than *politics*

- Pulls students from a variety of undergraduate fields, including
 - History
 - English
 - Political Science
 - American Studies

- In the academic structure, the PA faculty and MPA program take on one of two forms:
 - Housed within the Political Science department
 - Independent department of strictly PA faculty

What is the MPA?

- Two year program as full time student

- Coursework
 - MPA Socialization (Orientation) – 2 Hours
 - Public Administration and Democracy
 - Public Personnel Administration
 - Public Financial Administration
 - Economic Foundations of Policy Analysis
 - Organizational Theory

 - Research Methods in Public Administration
 - Data Applications in Public Administration

 - Elective Courses/Specialization (6 Courses)

- Internship
 - 300 Hours
 - Professional Experience Paper

- Comprehensive Exam

MPA @ UGA

- Health Policy and Administration
- Higher Education Administration
- **Local Government Administration**
- **Nonprofit Administration**
- **Public Budgeting and Finance Administration**
- **Public Management/Organization Theory**
- **Public Personnel Administration**
- Public Policy
- **Generalist**

MPA Specializations
@ UGA –

18 Semester Hours/6
Courses

- An increasing number of UGA MPA students are entering as full-time, pre-service students with a small or non-existent portfolio of work and experience

- Geared toward second-year students with significant coursework-based training
 - Allows students to apply coursework to “real world” scenarios

- Client-consultant relationship *rather than* employer-employee relationship that stems from a traditional internship
 - Project-based

- Tangible results and portfolio building
 - Reports, Plans, Documents, and Presentations

Characterizing the Practicum

- UGA Department of Public Administration and Policy
 - Offers the course on a regular basis
 - Acknowledges the value of the course in multiple specializations
 - Devotes faculty and facility resources to the course
- Georgia Municipal Association
 - Recruiting city participation
 - Uses *existing* relationships with member cities to facilitate a *new* relationship with MPA students
 - Matching students with experts and GMA officials based on assessed needs and interests
- Georgia Cities
 - Identify projects for student participation
 - Provide communication, resources, and professional relationships for students to apply coursework in a client-consultant role rather than an employer-employee role
- MPA Students
 - Apply classroom material to active project/policy development, implementation, and analysis
 - Hone skills in effective communication and public speaking

Players in the Practicum

- Has been offered 7 times since inception
- To date, clients include 36 cities, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and one non-profit agency
- Students have completed 51 projects

- Cities are generally council-manager form of government, rather than mayor-council or commission
 - This ensures a full-time, experienced point of contact for the student

- Client cities include:
 - Roswell, GA
 - Douglas, GA
 - Decatur, GA
 - St. Marys, GA
 - Sky Valley, GA
 - Atlanta, GA
 - Tybee Island, GA
 - Valdosta, GA

Client Cities

- To protect the interests of the student, client city, Georgia Municipal Association, and co-instructors, an MOU was developed such that all parties understood expectations from the outset.

- For students:
 - Regular communication
 - Identify scope of project
 - Clarify expected deliverables within 1 month
- For client cities:
 - Connect students with appropriate staff
 - Provide clear, written direction
 - Attend presentation in Atlanta at conclusion of semester
- For GMA:
 - Provide feedback throughout semester
 - Connect students with field experts through GMA relationships
 - Arrange final presentations in Atlanta
- For Instructors:
 - Remain in contact with instructors throughout semester
 - Connect students with appropriate resources within and beyond the university setting

Memorandum of Understanding

- **Benchmark 1**
 - 1 page summary of the project/challenge facing the client city
 - Week 4
- **Benchmark 2**
 - Executed Memorandum of Understanding
 - Week 4
- **Benchmark 3**
 - Presentation of Research Design to Co-Instructors and Classmates
 - Week 6
- **Benchmark 4**
 - Mid-Semester Presentation of Project Status to Co-Instructors and Classmates
 - Week 9
- **Benchmark 5**
 - Rehearsal of Final Presentation to Co-Instructors and Classmates for feedback
 - Week 13
- **Benchmark 6**
 - Final presentation to GMA Officials, City Officials, Co-Instructors, and Classmates at GMA Offices in Atlanta, GA
 - Week 15

Practicum Benchmarks

(Based on 15 Week Semester)

- Personnel Assessment – Millennials in the Workplace
- Municipal Composting Business Plan
- Assessment of Development Codes and Standards
- Urban Garden Business Model
- Consolidation of Policy and Fire Services
- Downtown Marketing Plan
- City/County Consolidation Plan
- Corridor Redevelopment Plans
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Implications of courthouse relocation

Examples of Previous Practicum Projects

- 7-8 Students
 - This ensures that there are plenty of viewpoints and ideas to be shared as students work through their respective projects, but not so many that it becomes overwhelming.
 - Based on the number and variety of projects, this also ensures that students will be assigned a project/city that is of interest to them and their career objectives.

- Non-weekly meetings
 - UGA's MPA program is generally composed of once-per-week class meetings of 3 hours. This regularity is not necessary, as students commit significant time to independent research, field visits to their assigned client cities, and research/presentation preparation. Meeting days are fluid and designed to meet the needs of students.

- Conference room setting
 - The course is not lecture style, and should be treated as conversation, discussion, constructive criticism, and a time to “get creative” with new and innovative ideas.

The Ideal Practicum Setting

■ Travel

- License to Drive
 - Can students be assigned projects with the same city and carpool?
- Access to Transportation
 - Are there University vehicles available?
 - Can students rent vehicles with reimbursement?
- Reimbursement for Travel
 - Can the city (particularly those far away) make accommodations for student travel?

■ Representation by Cities

- City officials must be present in Atlanta (GMA Offices) at the conclusion of each semester for results presentations by the students
- This can involve 300+ miles of travel and potential overnight stays
- Cities were frequently not showing up, prompting a clause requiring attendance in the MOU in recent semesters

■ Enrollment

- The course had been offered *every* fall and spring semester for three years
- Enrollment was inconsistent and availability of projects from cities slowly dwindled
- The course is now offered during the fall semester only and geared toward second-year students

Challenges to the Practicum

- Continuous 100% success is difficult to achieve
 - Of the 51 projects completed in the seven offerings of the Practicum at UGA, one was not completed to the standards expected by the client city, GMA, or the co-instructors
 - Study on feasibility and a cost/benefit analysis of municipal annexation

- Relationship with the client city
 - The city invests time, energy, and resources into the project
 - Meetings with city leadership, department heads, employees
 - Potential financial investment in reimbursements for travel

- The partnerships are vital
 - Because of the joint effort between the five actors, the co-instructors of the course were able to work together and deliver a quality document to the city that successfully met their expectations and needs
 - Maintains a healthy relationship between the city, GMA, and entities within UGA

When the Practicum fails

- 165 MPA programs accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) in 41 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico
 - Accreditation is not a prerequisite
 - There is often a disparity between *number* of MPA programs in a state and *accredited* MPA programs in a state

- There are 19 accredited online MPA programs, but online coursework does not lend itself toward a practicum-type model of “on the ground” application of skills

- State Municipal Organizations
 - 49 States
- State County Organizations
 - 38 States

- BPA Degrees
 - Public Administration programs are largely limited to graduate-level – there is not a general flow, such as BBA to MBA, BA to MA, BS to MS, etc.
 - Undergraduate students may not be as well equipped to work directly with cities

Application in Other Schools and States

- Consider the MPA curriculum
 - Does a practicum fit into the curriculum?
 - Are there specializations that would benefit from the model?
- Contact your state's association or league of cities/counties
 - Are any of our alumni staff members of these organizations?
- Identify partners within the university setting
 - Are we a land-grant school with public service units?
- What is the municipal setting of our state?
 - What are the distinctions between cities, towns, villages, townships, and other incorporated areas?
 - Do forms of government lend themselves to a healthy, constructive environment for students?
 - Home Rule or Dillon's Rule?
- Embrace the reality of your state
 - Nevada's only accredited program is at UNLV – nearly 8 hours from Reno and Carson City
- Characterize the students
 - Are these pre-service or mid-service students?
 - Is the program full-time or part-time?

How do we start?

Recall the players:
Academic Department
Municipal League/Association
Individual Cities
Students

- Public Administration/Policy programs lend themselves toward the model because of their education and training for public and non-profit services and existing/established actors

- Other academic programs can utilize the model or adapt it to their own needs
 - City, Urban, Community, Regional Planning
 - Civil Engineering
 - Business
 - Environmental Design/Landscape Architecture
 - Historic Preservation
 - Social Work
 - Agricultural Economics
 - Others

Other Academic Programs and Departments

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**Questions,
Discussion,
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