University of Alabama at Birmingham

Master of Public Administration Program

MPA Internship Guide

This guide has been compiled to provide you with essential information about the process of obtaining and conducting an internship within the UAB MPA program.

Contents:

• Standards for Internships
  o Basic Requirements
  o Hours and Scheduling the Internship
  o The Internship Agreement
  o The Centerpiece Project
  o The Administrative Journal
  o The Internship Portfolio
• Internship Waivers
• Roles and Responsibilities
• Forms
• Internship Opportunities

STANDARDS FOR THE UAB MPA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The public administration internship is designed to provide students with practical, hands-on experience of the challenges, complexities, and rewards of working in the public sector. Students should be presented with opportunities in which they can apply what they have learned in the classroom within a professional workplace setting. The internship is required prior to completion of the MPA degree.

Graduate interns are equipped to provide research support, policy analysis, budgeting experience, and/or program evaluation skills to a public or nonprofit organization. Interns are prepared to provide professional assistance to existing staff members, to
provide expertise and resources for projects and activities in which the agency is involved, and contribute skills on analytic methods of program and/or policy evaluation.

During the internship, MPA students should have the opportunity to gain knowledge and expertise in the skills, knowledge and resources often utilized by public administrators. The student should gain experience through the completion of tasks and projects in accordance with the core courses offered by the MPA program, which include:

- Public policy and management skills
- Research and computer-based skills to enhance decision-making abilities
- Budgeting expertise
- Program evaluation and strategic planning
- Ethics-based decision-making
- Human resource management
- Information technology and management

**BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MPA INTERNSHIP**

**Hours and Scheduling the Internship**

The MPA program requires that interns have a minimum of 300 hours experience in order to receive 3 hours of graduate credit. Minimum requirements for the internship would therefore be the equivalent of working approximately 20 hours per week during each of the 15 weeks of a semester. If student scheduling requires a part-time internship, they can break the internship into two semesters with approval from the MPA Program Director. Interns are encouraged that when they are in need of additional work experience, it is to their advantage to arrange an internship that exceeds the minimum hourly requirement.

The internship is usually taken in the summer after the majority of your core courses have been completed. (First summer after starting the program – full time students; second summer after starting the program – part-time students).

**The Internship Agreement**

Interns are responsible for initiating an Internship Agreement with their agency of choice. Interns are encouraged to identify agencies in their area of interest (ex: nonprofit agency, local/state/federal government agency, regional planning agency, etc.). After choosing an area of interest and identifying several agencies of interest, the intern works with the MPA Program Director to establish a relationship and internship opportunity.

Once an agency has been identified and approved by the MPA Program Director, the Intern is responsible for completing the Internship Agreement with the agency contact. The Internship Agreement outlines expectations for both the Intern and the agency.
regarding the projects and skills that are to be developed and utilized during the Internship.

The Centerpiece Project

Internships should be negotiated so that the participating agency engages the intern in at least one substantial project that is represented in one of the core curriculum components. This project or projects will serve as the centerpiece of the internship experience. Examples of the internship project may include (but are not limited to):

- A policy or program analysis
- Direct involvement writing a grant
- A cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the potential of a new project or activity
- Research to identify potential funding sources
- Conducting a survey and analyzing data
- A needs assessment
- A marketing or feasibility study

The student should also be given the opportunity to learn about the organizational structure and culture of the organization. This will enhance his or her ability to both work directly with a project and understand the larger scope and mission of the organization. Within this environment, it will benefit both the intern and the agency in that the intern is required to display a range of written and oral communications and exercise decision-making skills.

The Administrative Journal

Interns are responsible for submitting a total of 5 journal entries. As a rule of thumb, you should submit one journal entry every three weeks of internship experience. During the final week of your internship, submit a comprehensive journal entry that summarizes the overall experience. The MPA Program Director will provide feedback on your entry after the first and second submission to ensure the proper format is being used.

Each journal entry will consist of several items: an event, personal reflection and response, summary, and conclusion.

- **Event:** You should focus on a specific event that has taken place, such as a meeting, project event, or a personal interaction in which you were involved.
- **Reflection:** Reflect subjectively on how you experienced the event, emphasizing your emotions, mindset, and how this contributed to the outcome of the event. Did this make you feel proud, upset, or terrified? Retrospectively, do you see the situation differently?
- **Summary:** Examine how this experience relates to other occurrences, and evaluate the broader lessons that may be associated with your past experience as well as the larger scope of public administration. How did your MPA coursework
influence your response? The focus here is to connect the event with concepts from public administration.

- **Conclusion:** This section should discuss the implications of your experience and the event for the future. How would you handle this in the future? What tips or advice would you keep for yourself to handle similar situations? For example, if you participated in an unproductive meeting, you might identify specific things you would change for the future meetings. What lessons have you learned?

* Journal entries should be typed and double-spaced, written in clear grammatically correct English. Suggested length is one to three pages per entry.

**The Internship Portfolio**

Prior to the culmination of the Internship, students are required to prepare a portfolio that includes the following items:

- Cover Page: List Student’s Name, Agency (and contact info), Dates of Internship
- Internship Agreement
- Copies of reports, articles, memos, and procedures you completed as an Intern.
- Internship Administrative Journals: complete collection of submissions including comprehensive summary at the end of the semester
- Revised Resume: should include listing of internship on resume
- Student’s Internship Evaluation Form
- Completion of Internship Requirements Form: this will be blank, to be used by the MPA Program Director

The portfolio should be submitted in a pocket folder or report cover.

**Internship Waivers**

Waivers for the MPA Internship must be approved by the MPA Program Director on a case-by-case basis. Generally, to qualify for a waiver, a student must demonstrate that they have already have significant paid, professional public management or nonprofit management experience. To apply for the waiver, please submit the following to the MPA Program Director:

- The Request for Waiver of Internship Form;
- A letter showcasing professional experience; and
- A current resume.
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INTERN CHECKLIST

_____ Check with the MPA Program Director about **enrolling** (and graduation requirements if you are **graduating**).

_____ Initiate contact and establish agency relationship for internship

_____ Complete the **Internship Contact Sheet**

_____ Negotiate your **Internship Agreement** within the first two weeks of your internship and submit it to the MPA Director.

_____ Throughout your internship, collect information for the **Internship Portfolio**

_____ Regularly submit **Administrative Journal** entries throughout your Internship. One is due at the end of every three week period.

_____ Remind your Agency Internship Contact/Coordinator to complete the **Agency Internship Supervisor’s Evaluation Form** prior to concluding your Internship.

_____ Complete the **Student Internship Evaluation Form** prior to concluding your Internship.

_____ Be sure to compile all required documents for the **Internship Portfolio**, which is **due to the MPA Program Director two weeks prior to graduation**.
FORMS

NOTE: ALL FORMS ARE TO BE INCLUDED IN THE PORTFOLIO WHICH IS SUBMITTED TO THE MPA PROGRAM DIRECTOR.

These forms can be found at the [www.uab.edu/mpa](http://www.uab.edu/mpa) website. Look for the Internship Page under “student resources”.

- Internship Contact Worksheet
- Internship Agreement
- The Student’s Internship Evaluation Form
- The Agency’s Internship Evaluation Form
- Request for Waiver of Internship Form

INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Students are encouraged to identify agencies of interest in making their selection, especially in the field in which they plan to work after graduation (such as health-care; youth services; social services; government sector). Here are a few examples of the dozens of agencies where our students have interned in the past few years:

- A+ College Ready
- Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform
- Alabama Dance Council
- Alabama Policy Institute
- Alabama-Germany Partnership
- Birmingham Humane Society
- Birmingham Pledge Foundation
- City of Bessemer Community Development
- City of Birmingham
- City of Dothan
- City of Homewood
- City of Morris
- City of Mountain Brook
- City of Vestavia
- Cooper Green
- Crohns and Colitis Foundation
- Fair Housing Center of Northern Alabama
- Gateway, Inc.
- Government Accountability Office (GAO), Washington DC
- Homes for Our Troops
- Birmingham Housing Authority
- Jefferson County Department of Health
- Jefferson County Family Court
- Jones Valley Urban Farm
- Main Street Birmingham
- Metropolitan Birmingham Services for the Homeless (now One Roof)
- Mobile County Commission
- M-Power Ministries
- Nonprofit Resource Center of Alabama
- Office of US Trade Representative
- Operation New Birmingham
- Pathways
- Rape Response
- Regional Planning Commission
- Shelby County Arts
• Spirit of Hope Youth Ranch
• The Seasteading Institute
• Spirit of Hope Youth Ranch
• Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (TASC)
• United Way of Central Alabama
• Urban Ministry
• VSA Arts of Alabama