

OVERVIEW

Professional education for careers in public service has shifted over the last century from a focus on the administration and implementation of government to the development of methods and techniques to help government improve choices. Today's graduate programs may be titled public administration, public affairs, public policy or public management but their core curriculum will include policy analysis, management, and leadership, although they will vary in their emphasis of each.

Graduates from most two-year master's programs in public policy are prepared to participate as professionals in the public policy-making process at local, state, and federal governments and in national and international public and non-profit institutions. Many graduates use their training as policy experts to work on policy issues in the private sector. Graduates typically serve as policy analysts, financial and budget analysts, consultants, legislative analysts, researchers, trade specialists or environmental analysts for people (elected officials, agency heads) and organizations (EPA, HMOs) which make decisions affecting the public interest in some way. Graduates of Ph.D. programs in public policy analysis are prepared to conduct research that improves the understanding of complex policy issues in academic institutions, governmental agencies, consulting firms, and other organizations.

Typical questions that public policy students investigate include:

"How will Medicare cost controls and changes affect the U.S. health care system?"

"What steps might or should the federal government take to protect various sectors of our environment?"

"How should hazardous waste be disposed safely and economically?"

"How can a local government cope with fiscal problems caused by the closing of a military base or steel mill?"

"What factors will impact the future growth of a state's prison population?"

"What is the best marketing plan to revitalize the patronage of a prestigious museum?"

Advanced education in public policy is offered by a variety of schools and programs, ranging from master's and doctoral degree programs in academic departments like political science to master's and doctoral degree programs in professional schools of public policy, public or international affairs, and public management.

RESEARCH A PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAM

Prospective graduate students should research all educational options. A good place to start is <http://publicservicecareers.org>, which offers advice on policy education, including graduate study, careers, researching schools, questions to ask yourself and schools, and links to the related professions of public affairs, administration and international affairs. The Public Policy & International Affairs Program (<http://www.ppiaprogram.org/ppia/>) also has a searchable database of programs.

Visit Career Services' Web site <http://career.ucsd.edu/> for links to listings and searches of public policy programs. Also consult *Peterson's Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences*. For rankings, including specialties, visit www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/pub/pubindex_brief.php.

CURRICULUM

Public policy programs train students at the master's level through interdisciplinary core curricula and elective or required areas of specialization, to identify, assess and analyze problems such as those presented by the above hypothetical questions. In addition to the core curriculum in policy analysis, management, and leadership, these programs teach advocacy skills and offer technical specializations. Programs emphasize the development of analytical, quantitative, research, writing and speaking skills which, combined with study in areas of specialization and internships, prepare graduates to become policy practitioners.

The core public policy graduate curriculum generally includes courses in the following areas: economic theory and analysis (micro and macro), public policy modeling and research methods, cost-benefit analysis, statistical methods and quantitative analysis, survey design, decision analysis, advanced analytical methods, organizational theory and analysis, the political process and policy analysis, public or non-profit management, and ethics.

Common areas of specialization and elective study typically offered during the second year include:

International and national security policy
Domestic policy
Health care policy

Family & child policy
Education policy
Urban policy

Economic policy (including labor, tax policy)
Social welfare policy
Environmental and energy policy
Development policy

Regulatory policy
Financial analysis
Communication policy
Policy and management

Public policy schools typically provide assistance to students in locating summer internships between the first and second years of the program and in obtaining initial employment upon graduation. Promotional program literature usually presents a comprehensive list of positions accepted by recent graduates.

PREPARATION FOR ADMISSION

Programs seek applicants from a diversity of academic backgrounds, including majors in the social sciences (such as economics, international studies, political science, urban studies and planning, anthropology, sociology, and communication), physical and life sciences, engineering, mathematics, humanities and the arts. Useful undergraduate courses to complete before enrolling in a policy program include introductory economics (particularly microeconomics), some calculus, introductory statistics and American government.

ADMISSION CRITERIA and THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications for admission and financial aid may be solicited directly from each program or school by the programs' Web sites.

Admission is usually selective, with importance placed on **academic performance**. Many schools require a minimum undergraduate grade point average of 3.0. Transcripts from all colleges and universities an applicant has attended are required.

Applicants are typically required to submit scores from the **Graduate Record Examination (GRE)** General Test. This test is designed to measure certain developed verbal, quantitative and analytical writing abilities important for academic achievement. Registration can be done online at www.gre.org. The GRE is a computer-based test (CBT) available throughout the year.

Letters of reference (generally three from faculty and others who can speak to the applicant's potential to succeed in graduate study) are required. Applicants are advised to solicit letters of reference well in advance of application deadlines. CSC offers the handout "A Student Guide to Obtaining Letters of Reference".

The applicant must also submit a **Statement of Purpose or Personal Statement**, which may include relevant experiences and motivation for policy study, and its purpose in the applicant's life and goals. Applicants should check each program to see which type of statement is specifically required and if there is an essay prompt or questions to address in the statement. Applicants needing assistance with this essay may pick up the appropriate handouts at the CSC office or download from the website. On request, advisors will critique application essays. A resume may also be required. Career advisors in CSC offer help with resume preparation, if necessary.

Application **deadlines** vary, but are generally in late fall/early winter for programs that start the following Fall.

ADDITIONAL UCSD SERVICES

The Career Services Center "International Affairs & Public Policy" webpage at <http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/consider-grad-school/field-of-study/international-affairs-and-public-policy.html> offers searchable links to schools and career information. There – and in the Center – you can find materials on writing your application essay, test preparation, obtaining letters of reference, making the most of volunteer experience, and financial aid for graduate study, as well as help with interview preparation. You can also submit a typed, double-spaced draft of your application essay for a critique.

Graduate school advisors can assist with many application questions and concerns. Appointments can be made through Port Triton via the Career Services Center website. Representatives from public policy schools often attend the annual Professional and Graduate School Information Fair held each Fall quarter. Internship opportunities are listed on Port Triton. Urban Studies and Planning majors may gain relevant fieldwork or research experiences through USP courses. And summer policy internships might also be useful.