Political Science
DEPARTMENT

Master of Public Administration
Professional Portfolio

Fall 2016

Overview

The MPA program in the Political Science Department at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville is designed to prepare graduates for professional or academic careers in the public or nonprofit sectors. It is our commitment to our students that we equip them with various essential skills encompassing critical thinking, problem solving, informatics and data analytics, effective communication, and the ability to function in a team of professionals.

We have adopted the "portfolio" approach as a better means to support our students in the pursuit of their professional goals. This document serves as a guide to assist faculty and students in understanding this approach and in the preparation of the portfolio.

A professional portfolio is designed to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and real-world application the student has mastered through coursework and participation in professional development opportunities. The portfolio also serves to offer greater quality feedback by providing each student with a tailored assessment of his or her professional development and the opportunity to efficiently address any shortcomings in a timely manner. Portfolios are an excellent resource for prospective employers or interning agencies to evaluate the professional competencies and potential of the student, even before they have completed the program.

At the onset of their studies, the exercise of the portfolio prompts students to understand and reflect upon the critical mix of skills, abilities and experiences they will need to become what Schön called "reflective practitioners," or professionals who are aware of the complex professional, political, policy and managerial environments in which they must exercise their craft.

The portfolio is required of all students graduating from the MPA program and must normally be completed and submitted for final review to the entire MPA faculty early in the last semester of the student's program. To assist students towards achieving a stronger portfolio, the student's ongoing related accomplishments will be reviewed during the advising sessions and be subjected to a thorough evaluation by at least 3 faculty members at the midpoint of his/her program.

The following is designed as a how-to-guide on preparing the portfolio. The Appendix includes a checklist that should be consulted on a regular basis.

Portfolio Requirements

Each portfolio must contain the following sections and materials:

- Cover Page (which will include the date of submission, name, course, etc.)
- Table of Contents
- Introduction (which will include a professional goals statement)
- Three examples of work (prefaced by a brief introduction of the material submitted)
- Summary Statement
- Appendix (student checklist; résumé; portfolio review checklist)

Cover page:

Name; date of final submission

Table of Contents:

List of all materials submitted, with descriptive file names (if applicable) and page numbers indicating where to locate the material

Introduction:

The introduction provides a brief description of the organization of the portfolio and rationale for inclusion of certain materials (e.g., how materials support choice of classes or professional experiences in support of career goals; documentation of specific skill sets, such as methodological and communication skills, or knowledge of the literature that can inform a public service professional's work). The introduction will be subject to ongoing revisions as the student progresses.

The introduction should contain the following elements:

- Time span covered by the portfolio
- Description of the author's career status
- Description of career goals (this may change as a student progresses through the program)
- Examples of various professional, academic or volunteer experiences including professional memberships (further details can be added to the résumé)

Professional goals statement: this should be a 150-300 word narrative that elaborates on the author's short and long term professional goals in his or her field of study. The statement must include the following:

- Rationale for seeking the MPA degree and choice of specialization; certificate
- Statement of the author's professional values
- Description of the author's career path that the MPA can further strengthen
- Short-term goals (next 2-3 years)
- Long term goals (next 5 to 10 years)

Examples of work:

The portfolio must be composed of at least three pieces of high quality work that the student has compiled throughout the course of the program. These include samples of the student's coursework that demonstrate capabilities relevant to the student's career goals but also to the broader understanding of the context in which public service professionals operate.

The portfolio must include three papers, at least one of which must be single authored, (including fully developed conference papers where appropriate) that exemplify the author's:

- An ability to address scenarios dealing within complex decision-making settings
- An ability to develop arguments regarding larger complex political, managerial, and/or theoretical scenarios
- Methodological comprehension and application (including a paper that identifies a research question, a data set, applied methods, etc.)
- A demonstration of professional writing and compositional proficiencies
- Professional experiences (internships, etc.)

Guidelines:
- Heading of each document must correspond with the heading in the table of contents.
- Each document that is included should be prefaced by a brief summary that states:
     ./ (1) the purpose and content of the document,
     ./ (2) the class or experiences during which the related material was produced, and
     ./ (3) what competencies are demonstrated.

Example: Budget seminar

- Document Heading
- Class/professional experience on which the document is based (course number)
- Semester in which the paper was completed
- Purpose of document; demonstrated competencies; single author or multiple author (in case of the latter, the author must identify the portion/s for which he/she was responsible)

Example: The student uses a budget class; the paper received a B+

The student might use the paper in the following manner to demonstrate what was learned:

Y   Ability to understand and analyze a budget;

Y Ability to analyze quantitative data (student used the municipal budget and analyzed some ratios);

Y Capacity to conduct interviews (student interviewed the budget director but not the mayor);

Y   Knowledge of the literature on budgeting (e.g., student cited 15 sources);

Y Capacity to bring information from numerous sources to bear on a particular subject (as evidenced e.g., by student's discussion of H.R. and political impacts of budget cuts);

Y Proficiency in written communication (e.g., the paper was well written but showed some weaknesses in structure);

Y Skill at presenting data graphically (as evidenced by the xxxx figures/tables in the paper);

Y Proficiency in oral communication (as evidenced by the professor giving the oral presentation 80 out of 100 points).

Summary Statement:
This is the concluding statement of the portfolio and should be approximately one page in length. The author indicates why he/she believes that the presented materials and narratives offer a good synopsis of what he/she has learned in the program and to what extent it serves a road map for future career goals.

Portfolio Review

Preparation of the portfolio begins almost immediately upon student entry to the program.

a. Portfolio requirements reviewed during the orientation at the beginning of the first semester

b. During each academic advising session, the student must present the portfolio to the graduate coordinator for review; if specific questions occur, the student should consult with one or more MPA faculty members. Students should present a log of professional experiences and any awards or recognitions they have received.

c. Students should check with their faculty members before they plan to submit materials for inclusion in the portfolio; if a student plans on using class materials for inclusion, they should notify their instructors by <u>the third week of the semester.</u>

d. Halfway through their studies, the portfolio (typically at the end of the first year or beginning of the second year) will be reviewed by at least 3 faculty members (including the graduate coordinator); students should be prepared to submit an electronic copy of the portfolio to that committee and be prepared to meet with faculty members for a discussion. The student will be notified if he/she is making satisfactory progress. If students do not schedule themselves for a review even if they work on their portfolio, they will be given an unsatisfactory progress report that is shared with the graduate coordinator. Students are asked to make any changes and resubmit again within a month of the review.

e. The graduate coordinator will retain the most current copy of the portfolio in the student's file in electronic form.

f. No later than in the second month of the student's last semester, a fully completed portfolio must be submitted to the MPA faculty for review. The student is then informed of any changes that must be made. The review committee will determine the date (through consultation with the graduate coordinator) on which the portfolio must be finalized and the MPA faculty has signed off.

g. If the student completes all requirements successfully, the student has passed the "comprehensive exam" and the graduate coordinator can sign the student's record of progress as completed.

APPENDIX

1. **Portfolio Checklist**

Cover Page	Title	☐
	Name	☐
	Final date submitted	☐
Table of Contents (with descriptive titles and page number)		☐
Introduction		
At least three examples of work (prefaced by a brief introduction of the material submitted)	Sample 1	☐
	Sample 2	☐
	Sample 3	☐
	Sample 4	☐
Summary Statement	Concluding statement	☐
Appendix	Resume	☐
	Portfolio review	☐

2.   Portfolio review (to be completed by the graduate coordinator and the MPA faculty committee)

Graduate Coordinator

Date	Activity	Recommendation
	Orientation	
	Advising (F/S) Portfolio review (1)	
	Advising (F/S) Portfolio review (2)	
	Portfolio review (mid-term)	

Faculty Committee

Date	Activity (names of faculty)	Recommendation