

## **Applying to U.S. Public Policy Graduate Degree Programs**

There are several types of public policy graduate degrees in the United States. For practitioners, many universities offer two-year Masters of Public Administration degrees (MPA) or one-year professional certificates for mid-career candidates (MPP). A few also offer Ph.D. degrees for a limited number of people who may work both in research positions in government and in colleges or universities. Related professional degrees include the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) as well as Masters of Public Health for people who work in the health sector.

### **Admissions Season**

The application process takes about a year for most schools. Applications become available on line (electronically) on or about September 1. Most application due- dates fall between December 1 and January 1. Decisions are announced between mid-March and late April. A few programs have rolling admissions and will admit people at more than one point, but most have a single hard-and-fast deadline.

Note that some programs require applicants to take a standardized test and to report these scores. Information about standardized test requirements appear in the application packets for each program. It is sometimes possible to waive this requirement.

### **Admissions Process**

A committee reviews applications. It makes decisions based on a variety of considerations, including a personal statement, previous training or demonstration of capacity to do the work, professional experience, etc. It must also balance each class with people of different backgrounds and interests. Therefore, all schools turn down many qualified applicants each year.

The personal statement should respond to the question the committee has posed in the application packet. Note that you will usually have an opportunity to speak about the work you have done, the challenges you have faced on the job, and what graduate training could do to help you build an institution, improve policy, and have impact on people's lives in the future. Be *specific* and avoid general statements, such as, "I would find further study personally enriching." Talk about the kinds of contributions you want to make in the future and why you think these contributions will make a difference to people in your society or community.

Many programs want to see evidence of solid quantitative skills. Almost all require that participants take a course in statistics and at least one course in economics. They offer "math camp" before the start of the year, to provide a refresher, but many will not admit applicants who have not taken algebra or statistics previously.

Individual faculty members have no influence on admissions. It can be useful to point to people who teach courses you would like to take and say why their work interest you. However, there is no such thing as faculty sponsorship. European universities may operate differently in this regard.

You may be able to seek a waiver from application fees. Just ask the schools to which you apply.

### **Financial Aid**

A few programs will cover the costs of tuition and a modest living stipend, but others do not. Check the application brochures carefully and consider applying for assistance from one of the scholarship programs available (Humphrey, Fulbright, ...) Note that stipends are not designed to support a family in the United States. They are based on costs of living for the degree candidate only. Often they do not cover travel costs.

### **Universities to Consider**

Always apply to several programs in order to increase the probability of winning admission. Look carefully at what the school offers. Some are more applied and technical than others.

There is a [network of schools of public policy](#), which offers a [roster of accredited schools](#). This list does not include every school (for example, it does not include Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs).

There is also an [Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management](#) that produces another [list of schools](#).