



Political Science  
DEPARTMENT

Master of Public Administration and  
Nonprofit Studies

Professional Portfolio

## Overview

The Master of Public Administration and Nonprofit Studies (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 that our students become equipped with various essential skills encompassing critical thinking, problem solving, informatics and data analytics, effective communication, and the ability to succeed in a team of professionals. As such, 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 applications 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/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 non-thesis track 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 pursuit 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/her field of study. The statement must include the following:

- Rationale for seeking the MPA degree and choice of specialization and/or 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 student's:

- Ability to address scenarios dealing within complex decision-making settings
- 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.)
- Demonstration of professional writing and compositional proficiencies
- Professional experiences (internships, etc.).

**Guidelines:**

- The 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:
  - ✓ the purpose and content of the document,
  - ✓ the class or experiences during which the related material was produced, and
  - ✓ 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:

- Ability to understand and analyze a budget;
- Ability to analyze quantitative data (student used the municipal budget and analyzed pertinent ratios);
- Capacity to conduct interviews (student interviewed the budget director but not the mayor);
- Knowledge of the literature on budgeting (e.g., student cited 15 sources);
- 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);
- Proficiency in written communication (e.g., the paper was well written but showed some weaknesses in structure);
- Skill at presenting data graphically (as evidenced by xxxx figures/tables in the paper);
- 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 Overview

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 the third week of the semester.
- 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 will be shared with the graduate coordinator. Students will be 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 will then be 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 will have passed the "comprehensive exam" and the graduate coordinator may sign the student's record of progress as completed.

## Portfolio Review

Prior to the beginning of the Fall semester in which students begin their coursework, the graduate coordinator will provide them with a document with the important dates and deadlines for the portfolio process. Typically, students will provide one portfolio artifact at the conclusion of their second semester and must have at least three portfolio artifacts prior to the completion of the MPA. Even if students receive a good grade for the paper that they plan to submit for an artifact, students must consult with the faculty member for whose class the paper was written. While each instructor may have different guidelines for their class, students should inform their instructor early in the semester in they intend to use a related paper for a portfolio artifact.

Typically, faculty members will work with the student to produce an acceptable product that can also serve as a satisfactory portfolio entry. Note, an A on a paper does not automatically constitute an acceptable portfolio item. The instructor still must approve of the artifact for the purpose of the portfolio. If the student wishes to use a paper and did not initially obtain the instructor's approval, then it is at the instructor's discretion whether the paper may be used.

It is recommended that a student notify the instructor at least six months prior to the inclusion of the paper. This paper should demonstrate a particular skill a student has acquired, including but not limited to a research design paper, a quantitative research paper, a policy analysis, a budgeting proposal, a grant written for class, a comprehensive case study analysis with a methodology and a body of literature used to analyze the case and make informed recommendations based on the literature, or anything that the instructor deems appropriate for the class or professional development.

Upon completion, all students must present their portfolio at a scheduled portfolio exam date. If a student cannot make the date of the scheduled exam, then they must let the graduate coordinator know at least two (2) weeks before the exam so that a make-up exam day can be scheduled. If for some reason students cannot attend the re-scheduled exam date after signing up for a specified exam time, then they must inform the graduate coordinator immediately. Only if the student can sufficiently explain the urgency of having to miss the exam, may a makeup exam be scheduled. However, if that make-up exam day is missed, this will constitute a failure of the exam. If a student fails to appear at a scheduled exam time and does so without notifying the graduate coordinator, then that constitutes a failure as well. The student is only allowed one (1) retake of the examination.

At a date determined prior to the semester, a student must have all components of the portfolio uploaded into the [SharePoint site](#). Upon completion of all components, including at least three (3) **approved** artifacts, a student may participate in the portfolio exam. A student may participate in the portfolio exam with one pending portfolio artifact if the student is currently enrolled in a course and the instructor is reasonably certain that the student can complete the artifact. However, the student still must upload the artifact in its current form prior to the defense and must have the completed artifact prior to the end of the semester with the instructor's approval.

The portfolio exam will typically constitute a brief presentation by the student followed by a question and answer session by faculty. Immediately after the exam, students will be notified if they have passed, failed, or need to make changes prior to being assigned a passing grade.

Failure constitutes:

- a) if one or more components of the portfolio are incomplete;
- b) an artifact is not approved by the corresponding instructor;
- c) there are issues in the portfolio that likely will not be corrected easily;
- d) any evidence of plagiarism is found;
- e) if the oral portion is considered of poor quality.

Revisions are permitted only if minor changes are needed in order for exam to be deemed passable. If students fail the exam, they will be allowed one (1) additional re-take of the exam. If the committee finds that revisions are necessary, students must provide the faculty with revisions by a specified deadline determined at the beginning of the semester.



## APPENDIX

### 1. Portfolio Exam Checklist

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

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

**Graduate Coordinator**

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

**Faculty Committee**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity (names of faculty)</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>