

# **Early History of the Master of Public Administration Program at the University of Arkansas**

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In 1966, Winthrop Rockefeller made his second run for the office of Governor of Arkansas. Mr. Rockefeller had lived in Arkansas since the early 1950s, establishing a home, a complex of guest accommodations and offices, and a cattle ranch operation on the west end of Petit Jean Mountain, near Morrilton, Arkansas.

Mr. Rockefeller had lost his 1964 run for the Governor's office to long-term Governor Orval Faubus but won the race for governor in 1966 over arch-segregationist Jim Johnson after Faubus declined to seek a seventh term. Governor Rockefeller was a Republican in a largely Democratic southern state, but, in a practical sense, was more liberal, progressive, and imaginative in his leadership of the state than many of the state's previous governors.

It is the understanding of many of the early Master of Public Administration (MPA) graduates at the University of Arkansas that the impetus for the program at Fayetteville was Governor Rockefeller. In his attempts to modernize state government, Governor Rockefeller was frequently frustrated with the lack of professionalism among senior officials in Arkansas state government. To address his frustration with this shortage of well-trained, professionally oriented public servants, Governor Rockefeller approached Dr. Max Milam, then chair of the Political Science Department at the University of Arkansas.

Dr. Milam responded to Governor Rockefeller's plea for help by proposing the establishment of the state's first Master of Public Administration program which would focus on preparing graduates for careers in state and local government. With the approval of the University of Arkansas, the program was established at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. The program accepted its first students in the fall of 1968.

Keen to ensure the strong start and success of this new MPA program, Governor Rockefeller also set aside funds to establish generous fellowships for many of the students entering the program. Using the Rockwin Fund (Governor Rockefeller's vehicle for his personal philanthropy in Arkansas and elsewhere), Governor Rockefeller approved funds for these fellowships which were crafted to cover virtually all of the costs of graduate students enrolled in this program, including tuition, housing, meals, and books. Many of the students who completed the MPA degree at Fayetteville in those early years entered the workforce with no student debt and remain appreciative of Governor Rockefeller's generosity.

Note: This information regarding the early years of the University of Arkansas MPA program was compiled primarily by Lee Gordon, with assistance from David Davies, Dan Durning, Jim Lynch, Jim McKenzie, and Neil Snyder. All were early graduates of the UA MPA program.