



Practicum Handbook
Master of Public Administration Program
University of Louisville

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Introduction

The professional practicum (PADM 682) is the capstone of the Master of Public Administration program because it integrates the skills and knowledge accumulated during the program of study with the professional work environment. The practicum should be taken at or near the end of the program of study for just that reason.

The practicum involves a challenging professional work experience that highlights the myriad demands that face public and nonprofit administrators and managers. It fully integrates theory and practice.

MPA students who choose the practicum option should be currently employed in a responsible administrative position with a governmental, non-profit, or other appropriate organization and have been employed there for a period of at least one year. All students are required to complete a minimum of 18 credit hours in the program and obtain permission of the program director prior to beginning the practicum.

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The Practicum

The practicum is an research paper or project pursued at the student's place of employment while under the supervision of an MPA faculty member. The form and content of the project are not fixed; however, the content must be relevant to the student's experience and workplace. Ineligible practicum projects would include those already within the scope of the student's current work responsibilities. A final written product describing the experience and presenting the project will be evaluated by the faculty supervisor in determination of a letter grade.

The Application Process

Successfully securing a practicum requires that the student complete the following steps (all necessary forms are included in the handbook).

1. The student should approach his/her supervisor or someone in the workplace with management responsibilities or special skills to explore suitable practicum papers or projects. An ideal project is one that is beyond the scope of the student's current responsibilities but meets an information need in the organization or involves the student in a project in a way he/she is not currently involved. For a project, the student should prepare a paper describing the project and the outcome as indicated in the next section.
2. **ONE FULL SEMESTER BEFORE** the anticipated start of the practicum, the student should schedule a planning meeting with the MPA director or faculty supervisor to discuss the proposed project. The supervisor will want to understand how the proposed paper or project fits within the organization and explore how it relates to the student's coursework.
3. Upon approval of the program director, student will need to secure a memorandum of understanding with a mentor in the agency or organization.
4. The student should transmit the application for the practicum form to the program director (electronically) along with the signed memo of understanding. The MPA program administrator will contact the registrar's office and PADM 682 will appear as an eligible course for enrollment the next business day.
5. Enroll in PADM 682 for three credit hours unless another arrangement has been made with the program director. When PADM 682 appears on the student's class schedule, the student will be able to access the PADM 682 Blackboard website where this guide, forms, and the grading rubric are located.

Student Responsibilities

The professional practicum not only provides the student with a valuable learning experience to complement the academic curriculum, but can also help develop future career opportunities. The mentor's evaluation of the practicum is both an indication of the quality of the work and a commentary on the student's professionalism. The mentor's evaluation of the practicum and the student's evaluation of the practicum experience are required, along with the practicum paper, before a grade for the practicum is assigned. The mentor should submit the evaluation to the program director as an email attachment. Both forms are found at the end of this document.

Checklist of Student Responsibilities

1. Review the *Practicum Handbook*.
2. Complete the practicum project and submit the practicum paper on or before the last day of class in the semester for which you wish to receive credit for the practicum. Sometimes this will be different from the semester in which the practicum was completed.
3. Complete the student evaluation of the practicum.
4. Have your mentor complete the mentor evaluation of the practicum and return to the faculty supervisor.

Role of the Practicum Faculty Supervisor

The faculty supervisor will act as a resource for the intern during the internship, and if necessary will act as a liaison between the intern and the sponsoring organization. At the completion of the internship/practicum, the faculty supervisor will grade the final paper using the grading rubric provided. In many cases, the faculty supervisor will be the program director. However, another MPA faculty member may have specific skills and interests that make him/her better suited to supervise the experience. If so, the program director will work closely with the faculty supervisor to ensure a quality internship or practicum experience.

Paper Guidelines

The practicum paper is designed to demonstrate a student's ability to integrate theoretical classroom and research experiences with the body of applied skills attained during work experience. The paper should demonstrate your grasp of public administration theories, concepts, methods, and issues by relating them to aspects of the project you worked on and the environment in which you performed the project.

The MPA faculty's goal is to determine that you have demonstrated achievement of certain universal competencies. Assessment of your practicum paper is based both on the project and on a rubric developed by identifying specific skills or understandings that are linked to the competencies. That rubric is presented at the end of this document and can also be found on the Blackboard website. Depending on the nature of the practicum, not all elements of the rubric may apply. The student should discuss any inapplicable criteria with the faculty supervisor as soon as the plan for the paper is complete.

A conventional term paper format should be used. While no explicit length is required, approximately 10-12 double-spaced pages (including graphs and tables) should normally suffice. Please refer to the *UPA Writing Guide* for specifics on formatting the paper, including the APA standard citation style. An alphabetical list of references should conclude the paper, followed by a copy of your project report in the appendix. The number of citations will vary depending on the project. The organization of the paper should follow the general outline below:

1. Introduction: Provide a description of the organization. Include information about the organization's structure and a description of your duties and responsibilities. Your role in the unit and the unit's role in the organization is important context for the comparison of theory and practice and should be included.

2. The project: Set the project in the context of the organization's goals. What did the project add to the understanding of a problem or how did the project help formulate an organizational response to a challenge or opportunity? What was the question? What were the answers? Be sure to include a copy of your project report in an appendix to the paper. The project report can be in whatever form and format you used for your organization's purposes.
3. Public administration issues to be examined: Identify and discuss public administration concepts that are relevant to project and to your experience in performing the project. This section should comprise about one-third of the paper. In some cases, there may be only a few concepts presented, but those concepts should be fully developed. For example, an organization experiencing a funding crisis would provide an excellent opportunity to discuss cutback management from several different field areas. The process could be drawn from public finance, the execution from public management, and the results from organizational behavior or human resources. When there is no single overarching issue as was just described, another way to proceed is to consider the major fields in the discipline (finance, human resources, management, organizational behavior, ethics) and identify any appropriate subfields (administrative law, social equity, economic development, grantsmanship, etc.) that pertain to the experience. Use your course materials and the evaluation rubric to guide this section of the paper.
4. Discussion and analysis: How did the experience compare with the presentation of the selected issues in the classroom? In what ways were they similar? In what ways different? Were there important organizational events or decisions related to an issue area that were not addressed at all in class? Was there theoretical material presented in class that might have been productively used to improve the organization in a particular issue area? Were there barriers to using theories presented in class in the organizational setting? If so, how could they be overcome? This section should comprise at least one-third of the paper.

Reminder: The due date for the practicum paper is the last day of class in the semester for which you want to receive credit for the practicum (PADM 682). Check the academic calendar and make a note of the last day of class for that semester. This is the due date for your paper.

The paper will be graded on the extent to which it follows the format described above and conforms to the grading rubric that corresponds to the five universal competencies. A letter grade will be assigned to the research paper.

**Department of Urban and Public Affairs
University of Louisville
MPA Practicum**

Memorandum of Understanding

University of Louisville MPA student _____,

and _____ agree to the following:
Sponsoring Organization

1. The student is a graduate student in the MPA program at the University of Louisville.
2. The student will have a designated mentor at the organization and a faculty supervisor from the Department of Urban and Public Affairs.
3. The mentor and the student will mutually strive to develop an effective working relationship, with the mentor providing an appropriate level of support and encouragement to the student.
4. The student's project involves a work experience that is significantly different from his or her normal duties.
5. The mentor will complete a formal evaluation at the end of the practicum and return it to the faculty supervisor.

Mentor and Title _____

Organization _____

General Responsibilities _____

Faculty Supervisor _____

Signed and dated:

Intern _____

Internship Mentor _____

Faculty Supervisor _____

**Department of Urban and Public Affairs
University of Louisville
MPA Practicum Mentor Evaluation**

Name of Student _____

- Rating scale:
- 1: Poor
 - 2: Below Average
 - 3: Average
 - 4: Good
 - 5: Superior

| <u>Content Knowledge</u> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Demonstrated understanding of assigned task in context of organization's mission and goals: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 2. Grasped theoretical context of assigned task or function: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 3. Applied theoretical knowledge to a given problem or agency function appropriately: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 4. Knew how to secure relevant materials for the task: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 5. Made good choices in selecting and using relevant materials: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| <u>Research Competency</u> | | | | | | |
| 6. Could plan a course of action to address task or function: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 7. Used appropriate analytical methods for task or function: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 8. Could obtain pertinent data when needed: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 9. Demonstrated competence in statistical analysis: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 2. | Interpreted research of others appropriately: | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| <u>Professional Practice</u> | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| 11. | Met assigned deadlines: | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 12. | Work product(s) met expectations: | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 13. | Work product(s) made significant contribution to organization: | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 14. | Planned, organized and used time effectively: | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 15. | Was able to communicate effectively with staff at all levels: | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 16. | Was willing to assume leadership role or take on additional responsibilities: | — | — | — | — | — | — |

Additional comments:

What suggestions, if any, do you have for the improvement of the MPA Program?

Additional comments: _____

Signature of Agency Mentor _____

Mentor's Name (printed) _____

Title _____

Name of Agency _____

Date _____

**Department of Urban and Public Affairs
University of Louisville
MPA Practicum Student Evaluation**

Name of Student _____

- Rating scale:
- 1: Strongly Disagree
 - 2: Disagree
 - 3: Not applicable or No Opinion
 - 4: Agree
 - 5: Strongly Agree

| | <u>Content Knowledge</u> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. | I was able to relate the task to the organization's mission and goals: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 2. | I knew how to find background materials I needed to frame the task: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 3. | My coursework helped me organize and complete my written work products: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 4. | I felt confident in my ability to frame the task/problem in a theoretical context: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 5. | This project advanced my understanding of the concepts and theories in my course of study: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| | <u>Research Competency</u> | | | | | |
| 6. | I knew how to find the data I needed to complete the task: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 7. | I knew how to organize the data for the analysis: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| 8. | I knew the right statistical tools for data analysis: | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. I knew how to find other research on the topic: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 9. I felt confident that I could evaluate other research on the topic of my task: | — | — | — | — | — |

Professional Practice

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. The practicum addressed an issue, problem or opportunity important to the organization: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 12. The tasks associated with the practicum were outside my normal scope of duties: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 13. There were sufficient learning opportunities to make the practicum worthwhile: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 14. The practicum activities were challenging and stimulating: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 15. The mentor clearly communicated expectations for the task: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 16. I was provided with the resources I needed to complete the task: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 17. My supervisor was available and accessible when I had questions: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 18. I was able to relate effectively with staff at all levels of the organization regarding the task or project: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 19. I added value to my career as a public administrator as a result of this practicum experience: | — | — | — | — | — |
| 20. The practicum confirmed my commitment to a career in public/nonprofit administration, either in this organization or another: | — | — | — | — | — |

PADM 682 Practicum Paper Grading Rubric

Competency 1. To lead and manage in public governance

Assessment Tool: Internship/Practicum Paper

Possible Points: 20

| Indicators | Not Proficient Scoring Range 1 | Proficient Scoring Range 2-3 | Highly Proficient Scoring Range 4-5 | Score |
|---|--|--|--|-------|
| Analyze organizational structure using appropriate concepts | No organizational chart nor description of the structure of the organization | Organizational chart provided but insufficient discussion of structure | Organizational chart provided and structure of organization evaluated using appropriate concepts | |
| Evaluate the organization's mission and objectives using performance management theory | No discussion of the mission of the organization or its objectives | Formal mission statement and objectives provided but not linked to performance evaluation | Link between mission, objectives and measures described and evaluated in in context of performance management theory | |
| Demonstrate understanding of internal and external factors that influence management of the organization, including resources | No discussion of how factors within the larger organization or external to the organization influence management | Identification of factors within the larger organization or external to the organization that influence management | Identification and discussion of how internal and external factors (including budget and other resources) influence management | |
| Use management theories and concepts to describe organizational and managerial problems | No discussion of organizational and managerial problems | Identification of organizational and managerial problems without theoretical underpinning | Identification and analysis of organizational and managerial problems with appropriate theoretical application | |

Competency 2. To participate in and contribute to the policy process

Assessment Tool: Internship/Practicum Paper

Possible Points: 20

| Indicators | Not Proficient Scoring Range 1 | Proficient Scoring Range 2-3 | Highly Proficient Scoring Range 4-5 | Score |
|--|--|---|--|-------|
| Understand the foundational policy associated with the organization's public/nonprofit mission | No discussion of what problem the organization is tasked with addressing nor the policy foundation | Identification of the organization's origins in a policy context and the policy role the organization plays | Discussion of the organization's origins in a larger policy context and identification of policy evolution in the organization | |
| Identify relevant stakeholders and their policy preferences | No discussion of stakeholders | Identification of stakeholders without their policy preferences | Identification of stakeholders and preferences and how organization manages competing preferences | |
| Understand policy alternatives and the different instruments used to address them | No identification of policy alternatives or how they could be addressed | Identification of alternatives and instruments but without theoretical or in-depth analysis | Identification of policy alternatives and instruments and evaluation of them based on appropriate criteria | |
| Understanding of the legal and institutional environment associated with policymaking | Fails to identify the important legal or institutional factors associated with policy making | Demonstrates some understanding of the legal and institutional environment associated with policymaking | Demonstrates an understanding of legal and institutional factors and describes how those factors limit policy alternatives | |

Competency 3. To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions

Assessment Tool: Internship/Practicum Paper

Possible Points: 20

| Indicators | Not Proficient Scoring Range 1 | Proficient Scoring Range 2-3 | Highly Proficient Scoring Range 4-5 | Score |
|--|--|---|---|-------|
| Identify and summarize important components of problems (assumptions, relationship to other problems, trends, etc.) | Identification of problems but no discussion of larger context of problems | Identification of problems and some discussion of their components | Identification of problems and discussion of larger context focusing on interconnectedness and underlying assumptions | |
| Distinguish between fact and opinion, and acknowledge the value judgments associated with analysis | Opinions stated as though factual; no discussion of underlying value judgments | Underlying value judgements identified but not related to problem or recommendation | Problem analyzed and/or recommendations grounded in facts; underlying value judgements fully discussed | |
| Employ tools for analyzing, presenting and interpreting data, especially graphic data, including appropriate statistical techniques and concepts | No display or interpretation of relevant data nor discussion of techniques used to derive data | Display of relevant data in appropriate format but without discussion of techniques used to derive data | Display of relevant data in appropriate format with discussion of how data were derived and analyzed | |
| Articulate recommendations that are supported with high quality sources rather than opinion and value judgments | Recommendations not sufficiently supported with high quality sources | Recommendations supported with single source, especially source of questionable authenticity | Recommendations supported with high quality data and research; multiple sources identified | |

Competency 4. To articulate and apply a public service perspective

Assessment Tool: Internship/Practicum Paper

Possible Points: 20

| Indicators | Not Proficient Scoring Range 1 | Proficient Scoring Range 2-3 | Highly Proficient Scoring Range 4-5 | Score |
|---|--|---|--|-------|
| Identify ethical dilemmas in the context of the organization and its mission; relate to public administration | No ethical dilemmas identified nor related to public administration ethics | Ethical dilemmas identified but not related to public administration ethical theory | Ethical dilemmas identified and related to appropriate public administration theory | |
| Present alternatives or recommendations with consideration of public service values | Alternatives or recommendations presented that are inconsistent with public administration values | Alternatives or recommendations presented without regard to underlying public service values | Alternatives or recommendations presented in accordance with public service values | |
| Consider the preferences of multiple stakeholders when recommending an alternative or course of action | Does not consider how different stakeholders may be affected by an alternative or a recommendation | Considers how multiple stakeholders may be affected but without an underlying public service perspective | Considers how multiple stakeholders may be affected while articulating alternatives or recommendations from a public service perspective | |
| Evidences an understanding of cultural diversity include age, race, gender, and nationality. | Limited attention to cultural diversity or influenced by stereotype | Sensitivity to cultural diversity but without consideration as to how different stakeholders experience the organization's activities | Sensitivity to cultural diversity with consideration as to how different stakeholders experience the organization's activities | |

Competency 5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry

Assessment Tool: Internship/Practicum Paper

Possible Points: 20

| Indicators | Not Proficient Scoring Range 1 | Proficient Scoring Range 2-3 | Highly Proficient Scoring Range 4-5 | Score |
|--|--|---|--|-------|
| An ability to clearly and concisely describe problems, concepts, alternative and actions | Sentence and paragraph structure is unclear; no subheadings; jargon use obscures meaning and purpose | Paper organized for clarity and purpose; subheadings used appropriately | Paper begins with introductory paragraph that sets out purpose is organized around the purpose, accomplishes the purpose | |
| Ability to write without spelling or grammar error, format paper properly and cite sources appropriately | Writing contains errors, paper not well formatted for flow, citations not presented in APA style | Few errors, but paper lacks logical flow and/or citations are not presented APA style | Paper is error free, flows well from one section to the next and citations are well chosen and properly formatted | |
| Paper is logically presented and would be accessible to one not familiar with the subject matter and would provide insight into the issues chosen to explore | Paper assumes reader has specific knowledge of organization and mission and does not communicate central themes clearly | Paper is accessible but lacks logical flow from central themes or presents the themes without proper context | Paper flows logically, is accessible to persons without specific understanding and communicates central themes in an engaging manner | |
| Paper engages the topic of diversity of the workforce or the citizens served in a manner that demonstrates understanding and cultural sensitivity | Paper does not mention the composition of the workforce or citizens served or does so without appropriate consideration of diversity | Paper describes the workforce and clientele but without regard to diversity or how persons of different backgrounds may interpret organization activities | Paper describes the workforce and clientele with attention to diversity and how persons of different backgrounds may interpret organization activities | |