MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Student Handbook

Fall 2026

Department of Public Administration

Jack H. Brown College of Business and Public Administration

California State University, San Bernardino

Important: This handbook supplements the CSUSB Catalog and Graduate Studies policies. If information differs, university policy and the requirements of the student's applicable catalog year take precedence.

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Welcome to the MPA Program

Dr. Robert Stokes | Department Chair and MPA Director

Dear MPA Students,

Welcome to the Master of Public Administration program at California State University, San Bernardino.

Congratulations on your admission to our NASPAA accredited Master of Public Administration program. We are delighted to welcome you to a community of scholars, practitioners, and future public service leaders.

Our faculty and staff are committed to a student-centered learning environment emphasizing ethical leadership, democratic governance, professional excellence, and service to diverse communities. Whether you are beginning a public service career or advancing as an experienced professional, our goal is to help you develop the knowledge, analytical skills, and leadership abilities needed in today's complex public sector.

This handbook summarizes academic policies, degree requirements, advising information, university resources, and important milestones from admission through graduation. Please also consult the CSUSB Catalog and the Graduate Studies Student Handbook, and contact the Department of Public Administration whenever you need assistance.

We look forward to supporting you throughout your graduate journey.

Robert Stokes, Ph.D.
Department Chair and MPA Director
California State University, San Bernardino

Quick Start: Before Your First Semester

- Activate and regularly check your CSUSB student email account.
- Attend the MPA New Student Orientation.
- Review this handbook and the applicable CSUSB Catalog.
- Register for your first-semester courses as soon as your appointment opens.
- Develop a preliminary degree plan using myCAP.
- Become familiar with Canvas and Zoom.
- Bookmark the MPA website and save department contact information.

About the MPA Program

The CSUSB Master of Public Administration program prepares students for leadership and management careers in government, nonprofit organizations, and the broader public service sector. It combines academic theory with practical application to develop ethical decision-making, effective communication, analytical thinking, financial management, strategic planning, and organizational leadership.

Graduates are prepared to serve in local, state, and federal government as well as nonprofit, healthcare, education, and regional organizations.

Mission

The mission of the MPA program is to prepare ethical, innovative, and effective public service professionals through high-quality graduate education, applied learning, and engagement with diverse communities.

Program Learning Goals

- Demonstrate ethical leadership in public service.
- Apply analytical and evidence-based decision-making.
- Manage public organizations effectively.
- Develop and evaluate public policy.
- Communicate professionally with diverse audiences.
- Lead collaborative organizations that serve the public interest.

Degree Requirements and Concentrations

The MPA is a professionally accredited graduate degree. Students complete the required core curriculum, one approved concentration, applicable electives, and professional development requirements.

Core Curriculum

Course	Title
PA 6110	Public Administration Theory and Practice
PA 6030	Research Methods in Administration
PA 6620	Human Resources Management in the Public Sector
PA 6630	Public Budgeting and Finance
PA 6640	Management of Public Organizations
PA 6800	Public Policy Analysis
PA 6550	Capstone: Strategic Planning for Government and Nonprofit Organizations

Professional Development Seminar

PA 6985 serves as a communication channel between the Department Chair and students. Topics include academic updates, professional development, networking opportunities, and guest speakers. Students are encouraged to enroll during their first semester. The seminar meets once a month on Wednesday from 6:00–7:00 p.m.

Concentrations

Every MPA student completes one concentration to develop specialized knowledge aligned with professional interests and career goals.

Concentration	Courses Required
Leadership	3
Public Financial Management	3
Community Planning and Management	3
Nonprofit Leadership	4
Cybersecurity	5
Human Resources	4

Changing a concentration: To add or change a concentration, submit a Change of Program Application (COPA) using the current forms available from Graduate Studies.

Planning Your Degree

The MPA program offers flexibility for full-time and part-time students. Because concentration and elective courses are not offered every semester, develop a degree plan early, update it regularly in myCAP, and register during your scheduled appointment.

Recommended Sequence

Stage	Recommended Actions
First semester	Take PA 6110 (required), PA 6030 (recommended), and PA 6985; develop a preliminary degree plan.
Middle of program	Complete remaining core courses; begin concentration coursework; attend the Advancement to Candidacy advising session; complete the internship if required.
Final stage	Complete remaining concentration/elective requirements; take PA 6550 and its zero-unit co-requisite, PA 6980, in the final semester; submit the Graduation Check at least one semester before graduation; register for Commencement if participating.

Estimated Time to Completion

Enrollment	Estimated Completion
Full-time	Approximately 12–24 months
Part-time	Approximately 2–4 years

Planning reminder: Actual completion time depends on course load, course availability, internship requirements, concentration requirements, and satisfactory academic progress.

Course Delivery and Technology

The MPA program is offered fully online, providing flexibility for working professionals while maintaining the rigor of a nationally accredited graduate program.

Format	Description
Synchronous	Live online classes held through Zoom on scheduled evenings or Saturday mornings. Students participate in real-time discussions and activities with faculty and classmates.
Asynchronous	Courses without scheduled meeting times. Students complete weekly assignments, discussions, lectures, and assessments through Canvas.

Most synchronous courses meet Monday through Thursday from 7:00–9:45 p.m .and Saturday mornings at 9:00-11:45 a.m. Pacific Time. Review the class schedule each semester to confirm whether a course is synchronous or asynchronous.

Technology Requirements

- Reliable high-speed internet connection
- A computer capable of running Zoom and Canvas
- Webcam and microphone
- Microsoft Office or equivalent software
- A current web browser

Registration and Communication

Registering for Classes

Register through the MyCoyote Student Center. Step-by-step registration guides are available on the Office of the Registrar tutorials page.

- Register promptly after your enrollment appointment opens; many required courses reach capacity.
- Monitor the online Class Schedule for changes, availability, and registration information.
- Check your schedule before the Census date to confirm that you remain enrolled in all planned courses.
- If a course is full, join the online waitlist whenever possible.
- Monitor MyCoyote for registration holds and resolve them promptly.

Common Registration Holds

- Outstanding financial obligations
- Missing university requirements
- Academic probation issues
- Required departmental approvals

Communication Expectations

Official university communication is sent to your CSUSB student email account. Students are expected to check that account regularly, monitor Canvas announcements, respond promptly to department messages, and keep contact information current in MyCoyote. Failure to review a message does not exempt a student from deadlines or policies.

Academic Advising and Student Responsibilities

Academic advising is a shared responsibility. Faculty and staff provide guidance, but students are ultimately responsible for understanding degree requirements, monitoring academic progress, and meeting deadlines.

Advising Resources

- MPA Director
- Department staff
- MPA website
- New Student Orientation
- Advancement to Candidacy advising session

Student Responsibilities

- Understand program and university requirements.
- Maintain an updated degree plan and monitor progress in myCAP.
- Register on time and maintain continuous enrollment.
- Meet published academic and administrative deadlines.
- Seek assistance when questions arise.
- Communicate and conduct yourself professionally and ethically.

Question	Primary Contact
Academic advising	MPA Director
Registration	Department staff or Registrar
Internship	Internship Coordinator
Graduation	Registrar or Graduate Studies
Technology	CSUSB Technology Support

Academic Policies

Students must comply with the CSUSB Catalog and Graduate Studies policies. The following summary highlights policies especially relevant to MPA degree progress.

Academic Standing

Students must maintain a minimum cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0. A GPA below 3.0 does not satisfy graduation requirements and may result in academic probation or dismissal if satisfactory progress is not restored.

Repeating a Course

Consult the MPA Director before repeating a required course. University rules govern course repetition, grade discounting, and required petitions. Only one course may be discounted.

Continuous Enrollment and Leave of Absence

Students are expected to remain enrolled during fall and spring semesters until the degree is completed. If you need to interrupt your studies, request an official Leave of Absence through Graduate Studies before the semester begins whenever possible.

Seven-Year Time Limit

All degree requirements must be completed within seven years of admission. Courses older than seven years may require revalidation or repetition under university policy.

Dropping or Withdrawing from a Course

Students must officially drop or withdraw through the university by published deadlines. Informing an instructor does not remove a student from a course. Late withdrawals require university approval and supporting documentation.

Internship and Transfer Credit

Public Service Experience and Internship

Public service experience is an important component of the MPA curriculum. Students without qualifying professional experience in a public or nonprofit organization may be required to complete PA 6750 – Internship.

- The internship is graded Pass/No Pass.
- It does not count toward elective requirements.
- It requires advance approval from Jessica Chavez.

Internship information and resources

Transfer Credit

With departmental approval, students who have not completed a graduate degree at another institution may transfer up to three eligible graduate courses from an accredited institution, subject to university policy.

A course considered for transfer must be graduate level, relevant to the MPA curriculum, completed with a grade of B or higher, and approved by the MPA Director.

Materials to Submit

- Official or unofficial transcript
- Course description
- Course syllabus

Advancement to Candidacy

Advancement to Candidacy is the university's formal approval of a student's program of study. Once approved, the academic plan becomes the official roadmap to graduation. Advancement is required before enrolling in PA 6550 and submitting a Graduation Check.

Eligibility

Students are generally eligible after meeting all of the following requirements:

- Complete the Graduate Writing requirement by passing the writing-intensive PA 6110 with a grade of B- or better.
- Complete at least 15 semester units of applicable graduate-level coursework at CSUSB with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- Complete the internship requirement, if applicable.
- Maintain good academic standing.
- Develop an approved graduate program plan in myCAP.
- Attend the mid-program advising session offered once each semester.

Program-plan changes: If you change planned coursework after advancing to candidacy—for example, by changing your concentration—contact the Department of Public Administration to submit a Change of Program Plan form to Records.

MPA Capstone and Graduation

MPA Capstone Requirement

PA 6550 – Capstone: Strategic Planning for Government and Nonprofit Organizations is the culminating academic requirement of the MPA program. It integrates knowledge and skills developed throughout the curriculum and gives students an opportunity to apply public administration theory to real-world challenges.

- Enroll in PA 6550 and PA 6980 concurrently during the final semester.
- Advance to candidacy before registering.
- Earn a minimum grade of B to complete the capstone successfully.

PA 6980 Co-Requisite

PA 6980 is a required zero-unit co-requisite for PA 6550. It provides the mechanism for submitting the capstone project developed in PA 6550 and completing end-of-program data-collection activities used in the MPA program's NASPAA accreditation process.

These assessment activities include an exit survey and student reflections, which support program-level assessment and accreditation.

Graduation Check

Submit a Graduation Check through the Office of the Registrar at least one semester before the expected graduation term. Students must be advanced to candidacy before applying.

Commencement

Participation in Commencement is optional and requires separate registration. Consult current university deadlines and instructions if you plan to participate.

Remember: The department provides advising and support, but each student is responsible for monitoring progress, meeting deadlines, and completing all degree requirements. Contact the department before an important deadline whenever requirements are unclear.

Career and Professional Development

Career Resources

CSUSB provides career services for students and alumni. Use these resources throughout the program, not only immediately before graduation.

- Résumé and cover-letter reviews
- Interview preparation
- Career counseling
- Job and internship postings
- Career fairs and networking events

Professional Organizations

- American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)
- International City/County Management Association (ICMA)
- Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM)
- Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)

Pi Alpha Alpha Honor Society

Pi Alpha Alpha is the national honor society for public affairs and administration. Membership recognizes outstanding academic achievement and commitment to public service. Students may be eligible after completing at least 27 graduate units, maintaining a minimum 3.8 GPA, and reaching the final term of the MPA program. Eligible students receive information about membership and annual induction ceremonies.

Building Your Professional Network

- Connect with faculty and classmates.
- Participate in department and university events.
- Attend local professional-association meetings.
- Build relationships with alumni.
- Maintain a professional LinkedIn profile.

Academic Integrity and Professional Expectations

Academic Integrity

Integrity is fundamental to graduate education. Students must complete work honestly and ethically while properly acknowledging the work and ideas of others.

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying information, and misuse of artificial intelligence or other technologies in violation of course policies. Violations may result in disciplinary action by the instructor, department, or university. When in doubt, ask the instructor before submitting work.

Professional Expectations

As graduate students and future public service professionals, MPA students are expected to demonstrate integrity, ethical leadership, respect, and professionalism in both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.

- Respectful communication
- Timely participation
- Academic honesty
- Meeting deadlines
- Constructive collaboration

Student Resources and Important Contacts

Department of Public Administration

The department is the primary resource for MPA advising, degree requirements, course planning, transfer credit, and Advancement to Candidacy.

Department phone: (909) 537-5758

MPA program website

Graduate Studies

Graduate Studies assists with graduate admissions, Leave of Absence requests, academic petitions, graduate forms, and university-wide graduate policies.

Graduate Studies website

Office of the Registrar

The Registrar assists with Graduation Checks, enrollment verification, academic records, registration dates, and official transcripts.

Office of the Registrar website

Important Dates

Review the University Academic Calendar each academic year for registration periods, add/drop and withdrawal deadlines, the Census date, course final-examination periods, holidays and campus closures, and Commencement.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I attend part-time?

Yes. Many MPA students are working professionals and complete the program part-time.

Is an internship required?

It may be required for students without qualifying professional experience in a public or nonprofit organization. Consult the Internship section and the Internship Coordinator.

Can I transfer graduate coursework?

Potentially. With departmental approval, eligible students may transfer up to three graduate courses completed at another accredited institution, subject to university policy.

When am I eligible for Advancement to Candidacy?

Generally, after completing approximately five MPA graduate courses and satisfying all eligibility requirements listed in the Advancement to Candidacy section.

Can I graduate with a GPA below 3.0?

No. A cumulative graduate GPA of at least 3.0 is required.

Can I graduate with an Incomplete?

No. All degree requirements must be completed successfully before the degree is awarded.

Can I take the capstone early?

The capstone is intended for the final semester after most coursework is complete. Advancement to Candidacy is required, and students enroll concurrently in PA 6550 and PA 6980.

Who should I contact when I am unsure?

Contact the Department of Public Administration or the MPA Director before a registration, candidacy, or graduation deadline.

A Final Message to Students

Congratulations on taking the next step toward earning your Master of Public Administration degree.

The faculty and staff of the Department of Public Administration are committed to your success. Remain engaged, ask questions, seek guidance when needed, and take advantage of the academic and professional opportunities available through the department and university.

We wish you every success in your academic journey and look forward to celebrating your accomplishments at graduation.

Welcome to the CSUSB MPA program. We are pleased to be part of your public service journey.