DPA Student Handbook

Doctor of Public Administration Program
Department of Political Science
Valdosta State University

Updated July 1, 2021

Contents

General Information

Program Mission

The Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) program seeks to promote and to maintain a research and service program consistent with the role of a regional university within the University System of Georgia. As stated by the Board of Regents, this says, in part:

The mission will differ from that of comprehensive universities in the following areas: (1) the focus of all activities–instruction, research and service–at the regional university will be sectional in nature, not statewide; (2) academic programming at the graduate level will be generally limited to professional areas of high demand; (3) organized research will focus on needs indigenous to the section of the state served and will be practical in nature.

Approach

The DPA program blends theoretical learning with practitioner-oriented training to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of the public sector. Students in the program develop the leadership, management, communication, and problem-solving abilities necessary to succeed in today's professional environment. Our seasoned faculty's high standard of instruction broadens students' skills, while offering practical forums for the application of those skills. Faculty are devoted to the notion that learning is a life-long endeavor that challenges students to grow and develop into well-rounded individuals.

The DPA degree is designed to provide students with the analytical and research skills that may be used in a variety of professional careers. Students can utilize this type of instruction in a myriad of professional settings. The public and the not-for-profit sectors have traditionally offered the greatest employment opportunities for DPA graduates. However, given its analytical and research-oriented focus, the degree is also highly marketable in the private sector.

Accreditation

The Doctor of Public Administration program secured approval from the Board of Regents in the University System of Georgia in 2007. The Public Administration program has been in operation at Valdosta State University since 1981 when the Master of Public Administration (MPA) was created. The program and MPA was initially located within the School of Business at Valdosta State College (now University) but was transferred to the Department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences in 1983. The Head of the Department of Political Science served as the administrative head of the program until 1989, when Valdosta State University authorized the position of Coordinator of the Master of Public Administration Program. From 1989 to the present, the Public Administration Coordinator has served as the administrative head of the program, under the direction of the Head of the Department of Political Science. The MPA program received its initial accreditation from the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) in 1997, and went through successful reaccreditation in 2005, 2012, and again in 2019.[1]

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[1] NASPAA accredits at the master's level and does not separately accredit doctoral programs.

Admission and Registration

Admission Requirements

Students may enter a program of study leading to the DPA degree from the Department of Political Science only after they have been admitted by the Graduate School. Students applying for regular status as graduate students in the Department of Political Science must provide the following:

1. A completed VSU graduate school application (available online) for admission. Applicants should check with the Graduate School to ensure they are submitting the latest form and the correct documentation.
2. Official transcript(s) that verify receipt of an undergraduate degree and a graduate-level master's degree from a regionally accredited college or university. Students holding one or more degrees from a foreign institution must have their degree(s) approved by the Graduate School.
3. **Optional:** Official test scores demonstrating acceptable performance for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).
4. Three letters of reference from individuals qualified to comment on the candidate's potential for success in the program. Two from former professors familiar with the candidate's academic work and one from a supervisor of employment is recommended.
5. A comprehensive resume or CV.
6. A two-page written statement from the applicant detailing why they are interested in enrolling in the DPA program, what goals they have for advancing their intellectual abilities in the program, and how study in the program will advance their professional skills.

Candidates may be admitted with either regular or probationary status, depending upon an evaluation of their credentials. Students admitted on a probationary basis must have a Graduate Grade Point Average (GGPA) of 3.0 or better upon completing their first nine semester hours of DPA course work without a course grade below a B. Exceptionally motivated students who fail to qualify for regular or probationary admittance may petition the Department of Political Science for admission by exception to the DPA program. Students admitted in this category will not be allowed to change their course schedule, including withdrawing from a course, without the permission of the DPA Coordinator.

Any student who is inactive in the program for one calendar year or longer will be required to submit a request for readmission and, if readmitted, must follow the program requirements in effect at the time of readmission.

Admissions Committee

Each academic year, the Coordinator of the Public Administration program will convene a committee of the DPA faculty to review student applications for admission to the program. The purpose of the committee will be to ensure that students meet the minimal criteria for matriculation in the program through careful evaluation of the student's prior academic performance (GPA), professional experience, letters of recommendation, resume and personal

statement, acceptable scores on the admissions exam, and involvement in the community. After identifying which students meet the above criteria, the committee will then make its recommendations to the Coordinator of the Public Administration program. Students will only be admitted for the Fall semester of each academic year, and each matriculating class will be limited to approximately 30 new students.

Advising

Before registering for classes, students should consult with their advisor to develop a program of study. Once a proposed course schedule is approved, the student's advising flag will be lifted which clears them for registration. Advising is required to register each semester. The advising and registration period for Summer semesters occurs at the same time as the Spring advising and registration period. Any questions concerning the program should be addressed to the via e-mail.

Program of Study

A program of study (see Appendix A) represents the roadmap of courses students plan to take to fulfill their degree requirements. Each student is to prepare a program of study and have that program approved by their advisor prior to completing 18 hours of coursework in the program. Students should consult the Graduate Catalog in effect at the time they enter the program to determine the requirements for their program of study. Any changes made in program requirements after the student has entered the program become optional them; that is, a student may remain under the requirements effective when he or she entered the program or may opt to finish the program under the new requirements. Students must consult with their advisor before making any modifications to their program of study. If students plan on transferring credits in, or taking courses outside the major, they must consult with the DPA coordinator.

Registration for Courses

Students must use VSU's BannerWeb online registration system to register for courses each semester. The advising flag must be lifted before students have the ability to register. Advisors, professors, and VSU staff do not have the ability to register students for classes. Certain courses may require a registration override request. Overrides can be requested by contacting the PA program at pa@valdosta.edu.

Course Rotation

DPA courses are offered on a rotational basis, with core and methods being on a Fall/Spring schedule. Students should carefully plan their program of study with extra attention being paid to required core courses. A current course matrix can be found on the PA website under "Student Information" on the right sidebar.

Program Description

Program Format

The DPA program curriculum is designed to teach the essentials of Public Administration and provide students with analytical and research skills that may be used in a variety of careers. The DPA coursework is primarily offered in an online format. The program also includes orientation weekends virtually via Microsoft Teams each Fall and Spring, seminars and meetings, and intensive individual study of a research topic and writing of a capstone project or dissertation which is supervised by DPA faculty members. Students pursuing the DPA degree must complete 54 hours of coursework. The program coursework is divided between foundation and core courses, theory and methods courses, elective courses, and capstone project credits.

Foundation Skills

Students are expected to have certain demonstrable skills upon entry to the program. These skills may be demonstrated through prior coursework, through work experience, or through examination. Students who cannot demonstrate mastery of these skills may be allowed to enter the program but will be required to take additional coursework to meet the requirements.

Students are expected to possess basic managerial computer skills, including Word processing, spreadsheet, and data management capabilities. Students are expected to have good writing skills, including the ability to write professional papers. Finally, students are expected to be familiar with basic managerial functions including quantitative applications, human resource management, and budget processes.

Degree Requirements

The DPA requires 54 hours of graduate coursework including: 15 hours of core courses, 9 hours of methods courses, 15 hours of concentration courses, 6 hours of guided electives, and 9 hours of capstone seminar/project courses.

Core Coursework (15 credits)
- PADM 9000   Administration and Government   3 hours
- PADM 9010   Financial Management for Non-Gov. Organizations   3 hours
- PADM 9020   Managing HR in Public and Non-Gov. Organizations   3 hours
- PADM 9060   Information and Data Management   3 hours
- PADM 9070   Culture of Formal Work Organizations   3 hours

Methods Coursework (9 credits)
- PADM 9030*   Logic of Inquiry in Public Administration   3 hours
- PADM 9040   Research Methods in Public Administration   3 hours
- PADM 9050   Program Evaluation   3 hours

  Must be taken during first semester

Concentration Coursework (15 credits)

Each student is to identify an area of concentration before the completion of 18 hours of coursework. Once an area of concentration has been identified, the student will work with her/his major advisor to develop a program of study, which will govern the remainder of the student's coursework. The DPA Coordinator, the Head of the Department of Political Science, the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research must approve this program of study.

Guided Electives (6 credits)

Students will select 6 semester hours of guided electives through consultation with their advisor. Students lacking the foundation skills indicated above may use their guided electives to meet those requirements.

Capstone Seminar / Project (9 credits)
- PADM 9990   Capstone Seminar   3 hours
- PADM 9999   Final Project/Organizational Analysis   6 hours

Course Sequencing and Schedule

Students must take **PADM 9030** in the first semester. Students are also strongly encouraged to take **PADM 9000** in the first semester as well. These courses provide the foundation needed for success in the program.

Students complete **PADM 9990** (Capstone Seminar) during their final semester of coursework. This course will culminate with an approved capstone project, where students will dedicate themselves to intensive research of a topic under the supervision of a project committee.

DPA core and methods courses are on a Fall/Spring schedule with the program taking a minimum of three years to complete. To complete the required 54 hours of the program, both the concentration and elective hours may be taken with 7000-level courses. In order for you to complete the program in the designed format, courses are taken under the following schedule:

Fall I	PADM 9030 & PADM 9000
Spring I	PADM 9010 & PADM 9040
Fall II	PADM 9050 & PADM 9070
Spring II	PADM 9020 & PADM 9060
Fall III	PADM 9990 & PADM 9999
Spring III	PADM 9999

Capstone Portfolio

In addition to the research capstone, DPA students are also required to submit a professional portfolio to showcase the skills, competencies, and knowledge developed during their academic work and professional experience. The portfolio is normally completed during the final semester of coursework as part of PADM 9990 and PADM 9999. An approved portfolio

must be on file in an approved format in the DPA Coordinator's office prior to graduation. For additional information see "DPA Portfolio Guidelines" at https://www.valdosta.edu/pa/student-information.php.

Capstone Project/Dissertation

The final one to two years of a student's progress in the DPA program will involve researching a topic and writing a capstone project or dissertation. Students will petition to have a committee of three members oversee their projects. Of this number, at least one must be a full-time faculty member in the DPA program, with the option of having a third full-time faculty member or members from another department at VSU (with the approval of the Coordinator of the DPA program). One member on the committee will serve as "chair." All committee assignments must be approved by the Coordinator of the DPA program, including any changes in members later in the project.

The purpose of the dissertation or final capstone project is to demonstrate the research and analytical abilities gained through study in the DPA program while applying critical thinking and methodological skills to a topic of practical interest similar to what the student would find in a professional environment. Each student must develop a prospectus as part of her/his work in PADM 9990 (Capstone Seminar). The prospectus must be submitted to the student's committee members and the DPA Coordinator for approval before work on the actual project commences. The prospectus will link the student's topic to the academic literature and theoretical foundations that they learned through their formal coursework. Students will be required to have scheduled discussion sessions with their project committee throughout the process to ensure that they are on track with the committee's expectations.

When the student's committee is in agreement that a final draft has been successfully produced, the student will sit for a public defense, which will be open to other faculty members, students, and members of the VSU academic community. Upon the conclusion of that defense, the committee will vote using the following outcomes: Pass With No Changes (S); Pass With Changes (IP); or Fail (U); A student who earns the Pass With No Changes (S) grade will have his or her project accepted as the final document by the committee. A student who earns the Pass With Changes (IP) grade will be expected to make the recommended revisions to his or her final draft, and resubmit it for final acceptance within a specified period of time recommended by the committee. A student who earns the Fail (U) grade will be required to meet with both their assigned committee members and the Coordinator of the DPA program to determine if the project can be revised into a workable final draft that can be successfully defended by the student.

Students must be familiar with and meet the requirements of the Graduate School for submission of theses and dissertations.

Program Policies

Academic Requirements

Students must have a Graduate Grade Point Average (GGPA) of 3.0 or higher to graduate from the program. A grade of less than "B" received at Valdosta State University cannot be balanced by work transferred from another school. Students must maintain a minimum of a 2.5 GPA to remain in the program. If the GPA falls below a 2.5, the student will be excused from the program.

A student whose Grade Point Average drops below a 3.0 will be placed on academic probation and must return his or her Grade Point Average to a 3.0 within the next nine semester hours of course work. A student failing to return his or her grade point average to a 3.0 during this period may continue to pursue the DPA degree only upon the recommendation of the DPA Coordinator with the concurrence of the Dean of the Graduate School.

Students will be dismissed from the DPA program if they accumulate three or more academic deficiency points. A grade of "C" (while it will be credited toward the DPA degree) equals one deficiency point. A grade of "D," "WF," "F" or "U" (none of which will be credited toward the DPA degree) equals two deficiency points. Courses will be graded using traditional letter grades, while the capstone course (9990) and the project capstone (9999) will utilize the categories Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. A grade of "I" in a course to be counted toward the DPA degree should be removed the following semester. Any student carrying an incomplete grade "I" over two semesters may continue to pursue the DPA degree only with the approval of the DPA Coordinator.

Each student must submit an Application for Graduate Degree form no later than two semesters before expected graduation. The student should complete only the top portion of the form, sign the form in the appropriate place, and then submit the form, along with a receipt for the graduation fee, to the DPA Coordinator.

Student Responsibilities

This handbook sets forth the specific requirements and procedures established by the Department of Political Science for the Doctor of Public Administration program. It supplements but does not replace the general policies, requirements, and procedures provided in the Valdosta State University Graduate Bulletin. Students are responsible for becoming familiar with both documents. It is the student's responsibility to keep apprised of current graduation requirements for his or her degree program. While the provisions of this handbook will ordinarily be applied as stated, the Department of Political Science reserves the right to modify any provisions listed in this handbook, including but not limited to academic requirements for graduation, without actual notice to individual students. Reasonable efforts, however, will be made to keep students advised of any such changes. Information regarding such modifications will be available in the office of the Department of Political Science.

Each student taking classes in a regular classroom setting is expected to attend all classes, arriving on time and not leaving until the class is completed. Students in online courses are expected to participate in each assignment, including online discussion posts. Students who have valid reasons for missing a given assignment should make arrangements with their

instructor in advance. In case of emergency, a student is expected to inform the instructor and arrange for make-up work for missed sessions as soon as is feasible. Students who wish to take a course in a semester in which they know they will miss some of the class periods must make acceptable arrangements with and gain the permission of the course instructor before registering for the course.

By awarding a DPA degree to a student, Valdosta State University is indicating to prospective employers that the student is a person whom an organization would deem a valuable contributor in a professional, possibly managerial capacity. Thus, a student must demonstrate high professional standards while in the program.

Research Paper Formatting

Research papers are to follow APA style. All material taken from any source–books, articles, newspapers, other student papers, class lectures, etc.–must be properly cited, and all sources identified. Plagiarism is prohibited and may result in a failing grade for the assignment or for the course, and in extreme cases suspension or dismissal from the program.

Transfer of Credits

A maximum of 15 semester hours of graduate work earned at another institution may be transferred into the DPA degree program. These courses cannot be courses that were taken to satisfy the first graduate degree. Courses taken more than seven years prior to the semester of degree completion may not be used to meet degree requirements. The DPA Coordinator and the Dean of the Graduate School must approve all transfer credits.

Under extenuating circumstances, a student with the approval of the PA Coordinator may appeal in writing for a one-time extension of the seven-year course age limitation. A committee, approved by the Dean of the Graduate School, will consider the appeal and may recommend to the Dean of the Graduate School that the student be granted an extension of limitation. The maximum extension for completion of the program may not exceed one additional calendar year.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the responsibility of all students and faculty. Students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the Academic Integrity Policy set forth in the Student Code of Conduct and the faculty members' syllabi. Each student is required to read and be familiar with the section on plagiarism in the VSU Thesis and Dissertation Guide. (The plagiarism section of the Guide is taken from Virginia Tech, with permission.) Each student must sign a statement, attesting to having read the policy and that violation of the policy may result in termination from the program (Appendix B).

Resources

DPA Program Information

Public Administration Program
Program Coordinator: Dr. Keith Lee
Phone: 229-253-2873 • Email: pa@valdosta.edu
https://www.valdosta.edu/pa/

Department of Political Science
Department Head: Dr. Joseph Robbins
Phone: 229-333-5771
https://www.valdosta.edu/polsci/

University Resources

Graduate School
Phone: 229-333-5694
https://www.valdosta.edu/academics/graduate-school/

Office of the Registrar
Phone: 229-333-5727
https://www.valdosta.edu/academics/registrar/

Office of Financial Aid
Phone: 229-333-7570
https://www.valdosta.edu/asc/

Academic Support Center
Phone: 229-333-7570
https://www.valdosta.edu/asc/

Office of Career Opportunities
Phone: 229-333-5942
https://www.valdosta.edu/student/student-services/career-services/

Access Office
Phone: 229-245-2485 • Video Phone: 229-375-5871
https://www.valdosta.edu/student/disability/

Odum Library
https://www.valdosta.edu/academics/library/

Valdosta State University
1500 N. Patterson Street
Valdosta, GA 31698

DOCTOR OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DEGREE
PROGRAM OF STUDY

Name:	**Student #**
Address:	**Phone #**
Status: Regular Irregular Probationary	
Concentration:	**Advisor:**

DPA Program Requirements			
Core Courses (15 hours)			
Course #	**Course Title**	**Semester**	**Grade**
PADM 9000**	Administration and Government		
PADM 9010	Financial Mgmt. for Public/Non-Gov. Orgs		
PADM 9020	Managing HR in Public/Non-Gov. Orgs		
PADM 9060	Information and Data Management		
PADM/SOCI 9070	Culture of Formal Work Organizations		
Methods Courses (9 Hours)			
PADM 9030*	Logic of Inquiry in PA		
PADM 9040	Research Methods in PA		
PADM/PSYC 9050	Program Evaluation		
Concentration Area (15 hours—All Courses Must Be Approved by DPA Coordinator)			
Guided Electives (6 Hours)			
Capstone Seminar/Project (9 Hours)			
PADM 9990***	Capstone Seminar		
PADM 9999***	Final Project/Organizational Analysis		
PADM 9999	Final Project/Organizational Analysis		

* Must be taken in the first semester.
** Recommended to be taken in first semester.
*** Co-requisite courses. Must be taken during student's final semester.

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Student Statement:

I have read the policy on Academic Integrity which prohibits cheating and plagiarism. I understand that any work submitted by me in the DPA program may be submitted to an electronic data base to check for plagiarism, and that any work so submitted will be added to that data base. I understand that the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a failing grade on the assignment. I further understand that cheating or plagiarism may result in me receiving a failing grade for the course involved or in termination from the program. I affirm that all work submitted by me to be original work, except where clearly documented. I further understand that work prepared for one course for credit in another or to submit the same work for credit in two or more courses, without permission from the responsible faculty is not permitted and may also result in a failing grade or termination from the program. When incorporating past research or assignments into current projects the previous work must be cited.

_____
Name (printed)

_____
Signature

_____
Date

Sign and return to the DPA program coordinator.

This guide sets forth the specific requirements and procedures established by the Department of Political Science for the Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) program. It supplements but does not replace the general policies, requirements, and procedures provided in the Valdosta State University Graduate Catalog. Students are responsible for becoming familiar with both documents.

Both this handbook and the Graduate Catalog must comply with Board of Regents policy and procedures, and those policies override any statement in either document. It is the student's responsibility to keep apprised of current graduation requirements for his or her degree program. While the provisions of this guide will ordinarily be applied as stated, the Department of Political Science reserves the right to modify any provisions listed in this guide, including but not limited to academic requirements for graduation, without actual notice to individual students. Reasonable efforts will be made, however, to keep students advised of any such changes. Information regarding such modifications will be available in the office of the Department of Political Science.