

Degrees & Pathways in Public Policy

Interested in the field of public policy, public administration, public affairs, or something similar? Learn more about three of the primary masters degree options and potential career pathways. Are you interested in becoming an APPAM student member or have a few more questions? APPAM is here to help! Visit appam.org/student-membership or email info@appam.org for more information.

Master of Public Policy (MPP)

A graduate-level degree program that focuses on preparing students for careers in policy analysis, formulation, and implementation. This is a multidisciplinary field that combines elements of economics, political science, sociology, and other related areas to train graduates to understand and evaluate public policy. Students learn to work with qualitative and quantitative data to approach current and emerging issues within policy. Some schools may offer specializations within the MPP degree.

Master of Public Administration (MPA)

A graduate-level degree program that prepares students for a career in public service and administration. This degree is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to work in various graduate, nonprofit, and public policy-related roles. The interdisciplinary curriculum covers subjects such as public finance, organizational management, ethics, economics, leadership, and more. Graduates are equipped to lead teams, make informed decisions, manage budgets, and implement programs.

Master of Public Affairs (MPA)

A graduate-level degree program that prepares students for careers in public service, public policy analysis, and administration. It's designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to work in various roles within the public sector, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. This degree typically covers a wide range of subjects related to public administration, policy analysis, management, and communications and have a strong emphasis on internships or practical experience. These programs can vary from institution to institution so it's important that students choose a program that aligns with their career goals and interests.

What's the difference?

While all three offer advanced degrees in the field of public policy and administration, they have different focuses and career applications. The Master of Public Policy degree focuses on evaluating and crafting policies, conducting research, and using data methods to analyze policy effectiveness. The Master of Public Administration degree is primarily concentrated on the management and administration of public and nonprofit organizations. The Master of Public Affairs degree typically has a broader focus and includes public policy analysis skills as well as public management and leadership skills. Typically, all three programs take an average of two years to complete full time with many schools offering part-time programs.

*Not interested in a Masters or PhD degree? Talk to our employers or speakers about bachelor degree careers.

Common Careers & Pathways

Many of the careers and career pathways overlap for all three degrees but there are still differences. Master of Public Policy graduates may qualify for more analyst positions while Master of Public Affairs graduates may lean into more of a communications role than the other degree graduates. But generally, all three degree graduates may end up in the careers and pathways below:

- **Public Policy Analyst**
- **Consultants**
- **Criminal Justice and Public Safety**
- **Education Policy and Administration**
- **Nonprofit Management**
- **Urban and Regional Planning**
- **Data Analysis and Research**
- **Legislative and Congressional Staff**
- **Research and Academia**
- **International Development**
- **Public Relations and Communications**
- **Social Services**

