

School of Public Affairs

Graduate Programs FAQs

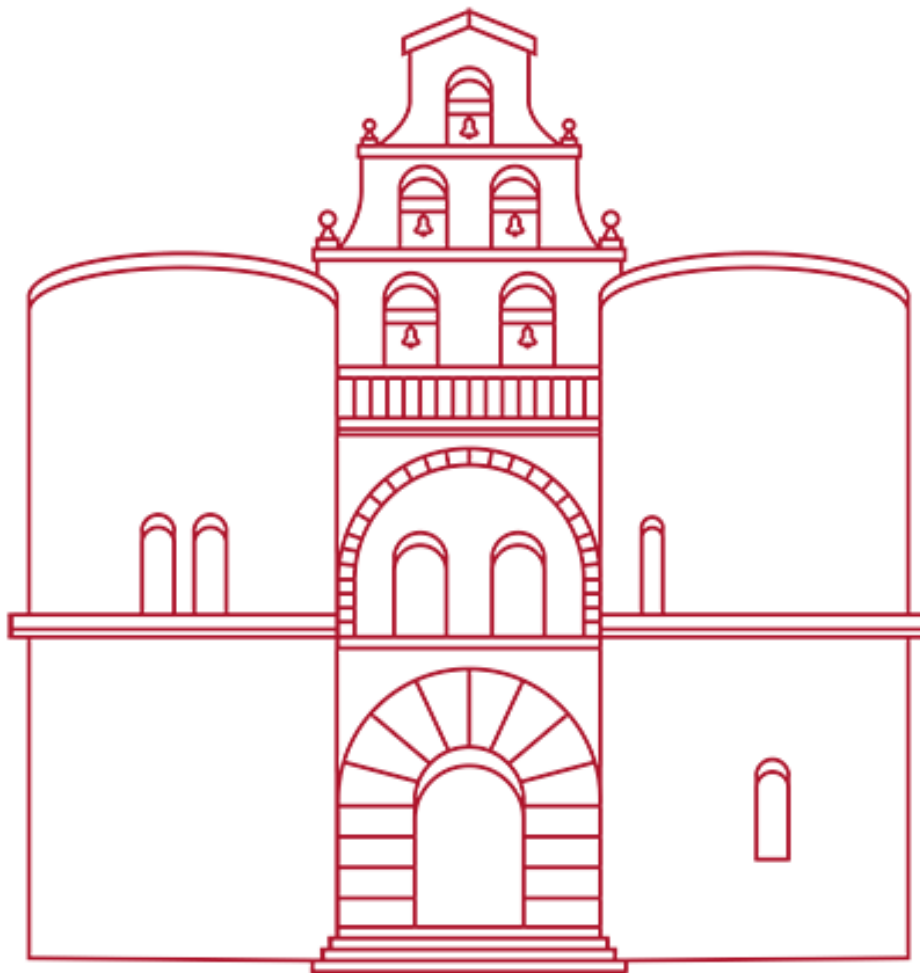


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Welcome to the School of Public Affairs (SPA) at San Diego State University (SDSU)!

Thank you for expressing interest in our master's programs at the School of Public Affairs. We're thrilled that you're considering joining our vibrant and diverse community of students, faculty, and professionals dedicated to public service, policy, city planning, criminal justice, and administration.

This guide is designed to answer many of the frequently asked questions we receive from prospective students like yourself. Whether you're curious about the admissions process, program structure, internship opportunities, or support services, we hope this guide provides clarity and insight into what you can expect as a graduate student in SPA.

We are here to support you every step of the way. Below, you'll find the contact information for our director, graduate advisors, and coordinator who can assist you throughout your application process and beyond. Don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions—we're here to help!

Note: Throughout this document, you'll find clickable links that direct you to additional websites and documents for further information.

Meet the Team:

- **Director:** Dr. Rod Colvin
- **Graduate Advisors:** Dr. Josh Chanin, Dr. Kim Kras, Dr. Madison Swayne
- **Graduate Coordinator:** Tania Mejia-O'Donnell, M.S
- **Faculty:** <https://spa.sdsu.edu/people/faculty>
- **Current Students:** <https://spa.sdsu.edu/people/graduate-students>

On behalf of everyone at SPA, welcome! We look forward to supporting you in your academic and professional journey.

How to Apply

1. What is the application process?

To apply to any of our master's programs, you will need to submit your application through **Cal State Apply** and upload your supporting documents via **Slate**. Below are links to guides that will help you through the process:

- [Guide to Using Cal State Apply](#)
- [Guide to Using Slate](#)

2. What should I know about letters of recommendation?

Letters of recommendation can come from professors, employers, or other professionals who can speak to your abilities as a graduate student. Be sure to select recommenders who know your academic strengths, work ethic, and potential for success in a graduate program.

Admissions

3. What are the admission requirements for the program?

Please visit each program's webpage for the most up-to-date information on application requirements, including materials needed such as your personal statement, letters of recommendation, resume/CV, and transcripts.

- [Master's in City Planning](#)
- [Master's in Criminal Justice and Criminology](#)
- [Master's in Public Administration](#) (online option via [Global Campus](#))
 - Concentrations available in City Planning or Criminal Justice. Use the same application for the MPA.
- [Master's in Public Administration and Master's in Latin American Studies Dual Degree](#)
- [Master's in Public Administration and Juris Doctor Concurrent Degree](#) in partnership with USD School of Law

4. Do I need to have an undergraduate degree in the same field to apply?

No, there is no prerequisite coursework if you're applying to a master's program outside of your undergraduate field. In your personal statement, you can explain your interest in the program and how it aligns with your career goals.

5. When can I apply to the program?

We accept applications once a year for the fall semester. We do not accept applications for the spring semester. The application window opens in October, about a year before the fall semester starts. For example, for fall 2026 admissions, the application period is from October 1, 2025, to February 1, 2026.

6. How long does it take to receive an admission decision?

We aim to notify applicants within two to three months of submission. For Fall 2026 admissions, we are introducing an early admission decision process. This means the School of Public Affairs will review your application, and if you are a strong candidate, we will offer a decision—subject to confirmation of your official academic transcripts. Final admission decisions are contingent upon verification by the Office of Graduate Studies, which begins after February 15.

7. What is an early admission decision, and how does it work?

An early admission decision is a preliminary acceptance to the program, contingent upon the Office of Graduate Studies completing the verification of your transcripts. While this allows you to secure a spot in the program earlier, the official offer will be confirmed after transcript verification is completed.

8. What materials do I need to submit with my application?

Please visit the program webpages for updated information about the specific application materials required.

9. Do you accept international students?

Yes, we do. Please visit our program webpages to learn more about the application process for international students. Additionally, our Office of Graduate Studies has representatives dedicated to working with international applicants. Check their [website](#) for contact information.

Program Structure and Experience

10. How is the program structured?

Each program is designed with a structure that includes core courses, electives, and a culminating experience. All in-person classes are held in the evening to accommodate working professionals, always meeting from 4:00–6:40 p.m. or 7:00–9:40 p.m. For specific details on the structure of each program, please visit the program handbook or catalog listed on the program's webpage.

11. Can the program be completed full-time or part-time?

Yes, you have the flexibility to complete the program full-time or part-time. Full-time students take 9 units or more per semester and typically complete the program in two years, while part-time students take 6 units per semester and complete the program in three years.

12. Can I switch from part-time to full-time during the program, or vice versa?

Yes, you can switch between part-time and full-time.

13. Is there an option to take online courses?

Our programs are primarily in-person. While some courses may be available online, please do not expect online courses. We do offer an **online MPA**, but unfortunately, there are no online versions of the MCJC or MCP degrees.

14. What is the typical class size?

On average, class sizes range from 15-20 students. Some courses are open to all graduate students within the School of Public Affairs, while others are program-specific.

15. What is the culminating experience for the program?

You have two options for your culminating experience: a **capstone project** or a **thesis**. Most students opt for the capstone project. More detailed information on both options can be found in the program handbook.

16. What is the expected time commitment per week for coursework?

If you are a part-time student, you take two classes per semester; full-time students take three classes per semester. Expect to commit approximately 9-12 hours per week for each class, including both in-class and outside study time.

Internships and Career Opportunities

17. Are there internships available?

Yes, many of our graduate students secure internships. SDSU is a reputable university with strong connections to the community, and there are many agencies and organizations eager to host our students. While we don't provide a pre-set list of internships or directly place students, we will work with you to identify potential partners based on your interests.

18. Is there an internship requirement for my program?

For MPA students, yes, there is a 12-unit internship requirement. If you are already working in a related field, you may be able to waive the internship requirement.

MCJC and MCP students do not have a required internship component, but you can complete an internship as an elective.

19. How many hours are required for internships?

To receive academic credit, the following hour commitments are required:

- **3-unit credit:** 120 hours
- **6-unit credit:** 240 hours
- **9-unit credit:** 360 hours
- **12-unit credit:** 480 hours

20. What are the benefits of completing an internship as part of the program?

Completing an internship during your graduate studies offers many benefits. Not only do you gain practical experience that complements your academic work, but you also have the opportunity to enhance your professional network and develop skills that will be valuable in your future career.

21. What types of career opportunities are available?

Graduates from our programs pursue various career paths in public service, urban planning, criminal justice, and policy development. Examples include city planning, law enforcement administration, nonprofit management, public policy analysis, and government leadership roles.

22. Does the program provide job placement assistance after graduation?

The School of Public Affairs staff and faculty do not provide job placement assistance directly. However, you have access to **Career Services** for up to a year after graduation.

23. Are there paid memberships to professional organizations available?

Yes, we offer paid memberships to a variety of professional organizations based on your program of study.

- **MCP Students:** Municipal Management Association of Southern California (MMASC)
- **MCJC Students:** Western Society of Criminology (WSC)
- **MPA Students:** American Planning Association (APA)

These memberships help you build your professional network and stay connected to current trends in your field.

Research and Networking

24. Are there opportunities for research?

Yes, there are opportunities for research, but this is something you will need to arrange after starting the program. We encourage you to explore faculty bios and reach out directly to discuss potential research collaborations.

25. How does the program help me develop professionally?

We offer numerous opportunities for professional development through workshops, trainings, guest speakers, and networking events. These opportunities will help you develop key skills in your specific field:

- **MCP:** Focus on urban planning, project management, and policy development.
- **MCJC:** Gain insights into law enforcement, criminal justice systems, and criminology.
- **MPA:** Develop leadership and policy analysis skills relevant to public administration.

26. What networking opportunities are available?

There are various networking opportunities throughout the program, including events, panels, and conferences. Additionally, funding is available for students to attend conferences, which are valuable for expanding your network.

Support Services

27. What kind of support services are available to graduate students?

SDSU offers a variety of support services, including:

- [Graduate Life and Diversity Office \(GLAD\)](#): Offers workshops and resources for graduate students.
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#): Provides mental health services tailored to graduate students.
- **Faculty Support:** Faculty members are available to help guide you academically and professionally.
- [Career Services](#): Offers career counseling, resume reviews, and job search assistance.
- [Student Disability Services](#): Provides accommodations and support for students with documented disabilities.

28. Are there student organizations or clubs related to the program?

Yes! There are a number of student organizations [across the university](#), within the [School of Public Affairs](#), and through the [Graduate Student Association](#) that we encourage you to get involved with. These groups offer excellent opportunities to connect with peers, build leadership skills, and expand your professional network.

Within the School of Public Affairs, students often participate in organizations such as:

- Master of City Planning Student Group
- Criminal Justice Student Association
- Public Administration Student Group (MPA)

These organizations are open to both undergraduate and graduate students, and SPA students are also encouraged to engage in broader campus activities and graduate student networks.

29. Are there writing or academic support services available?

Yes, SDSU's [Writing Center](#) offers support with drafting, editing, and improving academic writing. Additionally, the **Graduate Life and Diversity (GLAD) Office** and [University Library](#) offers writing assistance specifically for graduate students.

Costs and Funding

30. How much does the program cost?

For updated information on tuition and fees for California residents, non-resident students, and international students, please visit [SDSU's tuition page](#).

31. Are there funding opportunities available?

Yes, [Aztec Scholarships](#) and the School of Public Affairs offer [internal scholarships and funding options](#), as well as recommendations for external funding sources.

32. Are there assistantships available?

Yes, there are graduate and teaching assistantships available. These positions are not arranged prior to admission and must be discussed with faculty members after enrollment. Upon admission to the program, you will receive a short survey to indicate your interest in serving as a Graduate Assistant (GA), Teaching Assistant (TA), or Research Assistant (RA). Assistantship hours typically range from 5–10 hours per week, depending on department needs and ongoing projects.

33. Are there any fee waivers available for the application process?

We do not offer fee waivers directly through our programs. However, Cal State Apply offers fee waivers for California residents. Please visit their website for more information on eligibility.

34. Can I work while completing the master's program?

Absolutely! Our programs are designed with working professionals in mind. Classes are typically held in the evenings, either from 4:00–6:40 p.m. or 7:00–9:40 p.m., allowing you to balance work and study.

Diversity and Opportunities

35. How diverse is the student body?

We are proud of the diversity in our student body. San Diego State University is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). Our programs reflect this rich diversity, with students from a wide range of cultural, professional, and academic backgrounds contributing to an inclusive and dynamic learning environment.

36. Is there a study abroad option?

Unfortunately, we do not offer study abroad options within our master's programs.

Thank you for exploring our master's programs at the School of Public Affairs!

We hope this guide has helped answer many of your questions about joining our graduate programs. However, if you still have questions or need further clarification, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to help make your transition into graduate school as smooth as possible.

Feel free to contact our Graduate Programs Coordinator, Tania Mejia-O'Donnell, at tmejiaodonnell@sdsu.edu or 619-594-3252. We are excited about the possibility of you joining our SPA community and look forward to supporting you on your academic and professional journey.

On behalf of everyone at the School of Public Affairs, we wish you the best in your decision-making process and hope to welcome you soon!