



## *Tips for applying for admission to*

# **THE TROY UNIVERSITY MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (MPA) PROGRAM**

These suggestions were developed by members of the MPA faculty to help applicants create a successful admission package. The purpose of this document is to provide advice and guidelines on the expectations for:

- The letter of recommendation that addresses the applicant's potential for success in professional graduate studies and public service (page 2)
- The 500 word essay addressing the applicant's professional goals, readiness, and potential for completing the MPA program (page 4)
- The resume listing professional experience, certifications and other preparation (page 6)
- The MAT, GMAT or GRE scores (page 7)

*Note: A complete application also includes official transcripts from all schools attended. To be considered official, transcripts must be mailed directly from the school to TROY rather than through the applicant.*

## Suggestions for the Letter of Recommendation

A letter of recommendation is an important part of the application package and can be a key factor in the admission process. A strong letter of recommendation can strengthen your application and if there are deficiencies in your application, it may help counterbalance them. For the Troy MPA admission process, only one letter is required. Consider the following in asking for letters of recommendation:

- Choose someone who knows you well and can speak to your potential for success in graduate studies.
- If you recently received your baccalaureate degree ask for a letter from one of your key professors.
- Ask someone with an advanced degree (doctorate or masters) if possible.
- Your current supervisor is a good choice as they can speak to your organizational, communication and leadership skills.
- Letters from family, friends and co-workers are discouraged.
- If you use the standard form available online, ask your recommender if they would be willing to add some narrative comments as well.

You can help your letter writers write enlightening letters by giving each of them a portfolio that includes:

- The essay and resume you will include in the admission packet so they may reference elements from them that are relevant to their relationship with you.
- What you would like emphasized in the letter.
- Information about our MPA Program so they have the opportunity to relate their knowledge of your intellect and talents to the requirements of the program.
- If appropriate, the recommended format for the letter provided below.
- The due date of the letter.
- It is recommended you open and close your note with thanks and an acknowledgement that the letter writer's time is valuable and that this letter is important to your professional future.

Since writing a letter of recommendation can easily consume one to two hours, many busy managers or professionals may appreciate a draft or a proposed final letter. Ask before providing. The following are some considerations should you be asked to prepare a draft:

- Write from his or her perspective or point of view.
- Follow the letter of recommendation format outlined below.
- Address several personal dimensions. Obviously you want to emphasize your strengths, but be aware that too much attention to one or two aspects of your profile is often perceived as a lack of breadth in knowledge and/or skill.
- Be honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses. Don't attempt to overcompensate or rationalize weaknesses, instead accentuate the positive.
- Unless asked to do otherwise, only deliver a complete, polished version of the letter -- one theoretically ready for signing. If the signer nevertheless wishes to add or delete something, accept his or her changes gracefully.

## Suggestions for the Format of the Recommendation Letter

Section	Length	Content
Opening	One paragraph	<p>Sentence 1 - State the purpose of the letter, namely that you're writing a recommendation concerning the individual</p> <p>Sentence 2 - Explain how you know the individual. State from where and for how long you've known him or her. Be very clear about the working relationship involved. That is, explain whether he or she was your subordinate, student, etc.</p>
Body	2 to 6 paragraphs of 3-4 sentences each	<p>Paragraph 2 - Ease into the specifics contained in the rest of the body. Use this paragraph to characterize the individual in general terms.</p> <p>Paragraphs 3 thru 6 - Address personal dimensions such as those listed above that you feel are pertinent and for which you have direct knowledge. Include anecdotes to back-up your assessments. Cover 1 or 2 dimensions per paragraph.</p> <p>Final paragraph of body section - If relevant, explain why the individual is seeking a new assignment. For example, if he or she was laid off mention why.</p>
Closing	1 or 2 paragraphs of a couple sentences	Express your level of confidence in the individual. Explain the extent to which you believe he or she is suited to the job or program sought.

## Guidance for Preparing the Essay

The 500 word essay should address your professional goals as well as your readiness/potential for successfully completing graduate school.

Consider the mission of the Master of Public Administration Program when constructing an essay pertinent to admissions:

### **Troy University MPA Mission**

*The mission of Troy University's Master of Public Administration program is to strengthen the quality of public service by facilitating learning, promoting scholarship, improving practice and engaging in public service. The program strives to develop graduates who bring to the public work force the intellectual acuity, ethical commitment, and professional competence to effectively serve the public interest.*

Your essay should be organized into these major areas:

The introductory paragraph should provide an overview of your essay. This is an important part of the essay as this paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the essay. In this paragraph you will gain or lose the reader's interest.

The first part of the essay should list and discuss your professional goals as specifically as possible. These goals should relate to your interest in public service (non-profit, federal, state or local government). Some thoughts in preparing this discussion:

- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to working in this field?
- What are your five year professional goals?
- What are your ten year professional goals?
- What is your historical background for choosing these goals?
  - Family influences?
  - Work or volunteer experiences that influenced your choice?
- How will this graduate program facilitate achieving these goals? (See the MPA Mission above.)

The second part of the essay should address your readiness and potential for success in graduate studies. Some thoughts in preparing this discussion:

- Your *readiness for graduate school* could include the following:
  - Your professional, volunteer or intern experiences that provided the foundation for understanding government or non-profit operations.
  - Progression in your current or past work environment (promotions, special recognition, etc.).
  - Your personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, persistence) that improve your potential for success in the field of public administration or non-profit management.
  
- Your *potential for success in graduate studies* could include the following:
  - Success in undergraduate studies, training programs, internships.
    - Discuss your time management skills
    - Discuss your employer support and emphasis on graduate studies
    - If appropriate, discuss family support
    - Discuss skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) which you possess and can utilize to succeed in the program.
    - Discuss any research you've been involved in.
      - What were the outcomes?
      - What are the ramifications of the research?

Summarize your essay. One consideration: You could use the summary to convince the reader that you would be a stronger candidate for graduate school and more successful and effective in public administration or non-profit management than other applicants (if using this strategy, ensure that the essay provides evidence that supports this argument).

Proofread your essay. Review your essay to eliminate grammatical or spelling errors, as these types of errors will hamper your admissions prospects since the program requires solid writing abilities.

Additional essay resources include:

The Online Writing Laboratory (OWL) at Purdue University:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>

The Writing Center at Rensselaer:

<http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/resources/careers-and-graduate-school/graduate-school-essays/>

## Guidance for Constructing the Resume

The resume is critical because it is used to determine whether or not you qualify for an internship waiver and as a factor in determining your potential for success in the program. It should cover your professional experience, certifications, and other relevant preparation. Sometimes the name of your employer(s) may not indicate if it is a public, private, or nonprofit organization, so be sure you provide this information. Students with less than one year work experience in a paraprofessional, technical, or supervisory position that involves relevant service to the profession and/or public service are required to complete an internship course (PA 6694) including 300 hours of work as an intern. If you already have this work experience, it should be written in such a manner that your position and levels of responsibility are clearly stated. If the Admissions Committee determines an internship is required but you obtain this experience after your admission, you may complete a form requesting an internship waiver.

The reverse chronological resume listing most recent employment first will work best for determining whether or not you qualify for an internship waiver. The following is an example of a reverse chronological resume.

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### **John B. Student**

300 East Oak Street, Chesapeake, VA 21456

919-967-1212

[jbstudent@email.com](mailto:jbstudent@email.com)

#### **EDUCATION**

University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

B.S. Social Work, May 2001

GPA 3.56

Honors:

- Dean of Student Affairs Scholastic Achievement Award
- Phi Alpha Phi
- Student Council President

#### **EXPERIENCE**

Department of Children & Family Services, Cedar Rapids IA

*Social Services Case Manager – Nov 2003 – Present*

- Determine the need for basic social services required by clients in accordance with well-defined policies and procedures;
- Develop and carry out individualized service plans;
- Provide information about available services and arrange for referral of clients to appropriate departmental or community human services resources;
- Provide training and mentoring for seven social services workers.

#### **CERTIFICATION**

Certificate in Domestic Violence Preventions – Cedar Rapids Community College – June 2002

Association of Social Work Board (ASWB) certified – 2005

## Tips Regarding the Admission Tests

As part of the admissions process students are required to take one of three entrance exams: the Graduate Records Exam (GRE), the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) or the Miller Analogies Test (MAT). For unconditional admission, (that is, there are no pre-conditions to be met in your early performance in the program in order to remain) the following minimum scores are required: GRE 294 (verbal plus quantitative), GMAT 490 or MAT 400. **Most prospective MPA students take the MAT** rather than the GRE to capitalize on their verbal skills.

The test score is only one of several factors that will be considered by the MPA admissions committee. A low test score will not automatically derail your chances for admission. All elements of the admission packet are important in accessing your abilities to perform successfully in the program. High-potential students with low test scores are sometimes admitted on a conditional basis. However, test scores do factor into admissions considerations, so consider retaking the test to improve admission chances if the score is low.

**Miller Analogies Test (MAT):** The MAT cost varies among testing locations. To find the nearest location, and pricing, visit: <http://images.pearsonassessments.com/images/assets/mat/mat-ctc-list.pdf>

As the name implies, the MAT test is strictly about analogies, or things that are alike in one or more ways, often obliquely. It has a very simple format - you'll have 50 minutes to complete 100 partial analogies. The vast majority of them will be verbal, but there will be a few mathematical analogies on every test. To do well on the MAT, you'll need a good grasp of how words relate to and complement one another as well as a familiarity with the liberal arts - history, art, literature, philosophy, as well as math and science. There are many study guides available both on-line and in book stores. It is strongly recommended that you visit the MAT Home page at:

[http://www.pearsonassessments.com/postsecondaryeducation/graduate\\_admissions/mat/prepare\\_mat.html](http://www.pearsonassessments.com/postsecondaryeducation/graduate_admissions/mat/prepare_mat.html). There are also MAT workbooks that you can obtain from your local library or bookstore.

**Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT):** The GMAT consists of two main sections: a written section with two essays and a quantitative and verbal section. The GMAT cost is \$250 US dollars (USD) and is offered at various test centers. To find the nearest location, please see: <http://www.mba.com/us/the-gmat-exam/register.aspx#tab2>.

The written section of the GMAT, the Analytical Writing Assignment (AWA), is made up of two essays. In one, the test taker is asked to examine and analyze an argument, and in the other, the test taker is asked to consider and analyze an issue.

The quantitative section of the GMAT is made up of 37 multiple choice questions, which test primarily for an understanding of data presentation and problem solving. The verbal section of the GMAT has 41 multiple choice questions, which tests comprehension of reading blocks, analytical reasoning skills, and ability to correct sentences for grammatical mistakes. Each section must be completed in 75 minutes.

Both the quantitative and the verbal sections of the GMAT are taken on a computer and the questions adapt themselves to the skill level of the test taker. This means that if the test taker gets the first question correct, the next question is of a slightly increased difficulty level, while if the test taker answers incorrectly, the following question is slightly easier. Final scores on the test range between 200 and 800 points, and the questions start somewhere in the middle of this range of difficulty.

Test preparation courses are available on-line.

**Graduate Records Examination (GRE):** The GRE is composed of Analytical Writing, Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections, and takes approximately 3 hours to complete. The fee is \$160 and the test is available at testing centers. To find the nearest location please see:

<http://etsis4.ets.org/tcenter/tcenter.jsp>

The Analytical Writing section of the GRE General Test measures your ability to:

- articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively
- examine claims and accompanying evidence
- support an argument with relevant reasons and examples
- sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion
- control the elements of standard written English (this factor plays a role only to the extent that poor writing skills impede readers' understanding of the argument)

The Verbal Reasoning section measures your ability to:

- analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information obtained from it
- analyze relationships among component parts of sentences
- recognize relationships between words and concepts

The Quantitative Reasoning section of the GRE General Test measures your ability to:

- understand basic concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data analysis
- reason quantitatively
- solve problems in a quantitative setting

Test preparation courses are available online, such as <https://www.ets.org/gre/revise/general/prepare> (and there is also a test study app).

## Closing Guidelines

*These are just a few general tips offered by the Master of Public Administration faculty to assist you in preparing your admission packet to the program.*

*We hope you find this guide helpful and that it allows you to effectively demonstrate your capability of successfully completing our MPA program and becoming a member of a select group of scholars dedicated to the advancement of a professional public service workforce.*