

Public Affairs

What is Public Affairs?

Public affairs majors study the management of public and nonprofit organizations and the many aspects of public service and governance. Topics include political issues, group dynamics, public policy, health care delivery, economic development, human resources management, philanthropy, voluntarism, budgeting, public finance, information technologies, and neighborhood analysis. The public sector includes many kinds of agencies, working in the fields of health, law enforcement, environmental protection, transportation, and taxation, to name just a few. Because of this variety of fields, it is often useful to combine training in administrative skills (perhaps at the master's level) with specific training in another field, such as health, science, engineering, or accounting. Public administration programs usually include internships that give students actual experience working in a public agency.

Occupational opportunities

Career opportunities range from supervising a city parks and recreation program to being a policy analyst for either a legislative body or an executive department. Forty percent of all graduates from this major work as mid- or top-level managers, administrators, or executives in the non-profit sector. Fifty percent work in similar positions in business and industry. One in ten work in protective services such as law enforcement, fire or the military. Nearly 80% of graduates state that an integral part of their jobs is performing administrative, financial, and legal or accounting duties, with 50% of graduates stating that personnel and employee related duties are also integral to their positions. The retirement of the baby boom generation should open up job opportunities, even at the coveted federal level. The following is a list of career paths available to public affairs majors.

- Public advocate
- Law enforcement officer
- Peace corps volunteer
- Legislative aide
- Lobbyist
- Development officer
- City manager
- Foreign service officer
- Politician
- Freelance writer
- Pollster
- Public relations specialist
- Intelligence officer, FBI/CIA
- Researcher
- Journalist
- Speech writer
- Labor relations specialist
- Urban planner
- Ombudsman

Career Snapshot: Urban/Regional Planner

Planners develop long-term and short-term plans to use land for the growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities, while helping local officials make decisions concerning social, economic, and environmental problems. Because local governments employ the majority of urban and regional planners, they often are referred to as community, regional, or city planners. Planners promote the best use of a community's land and resources for residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational purposes. Planners may be involved in various other activities, including making decisions relating to establishing alternative public transportation systems, developing resources, and protecting ecologically sensitive regions. Urban and region planners address issues such as traffic congestion, air pollution, and the effects of growth and change on a community. They may formulate plans relating to the construction of new school buildings, public housing, or other kinds of infrastructure. Urban and regional planners often travel to inspect the features of land under consideration for development or regulation, including its current use and the types of structures on it. Some local government planners involved in site development inspections spend most of their time in the field. Although most planners have a scheduled 40-hour workweek, they

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frequently attend evening or weekend meetings or public hearings with citizen's groups. Planners may experience the pressure of deadlines and tight work schedules, as well as political pressure generated by interest groups affected by proposals related to urban development and land use. After a few years experience, planners may advance to assignments requiring a high degree of independent judgment, such as designing the physical layout of a large development or recommending policy and budget options. Further advancement occurs through a transfer to a larger jurisdiction with more complex problems and greater responsibilities or into related occupations, such as director of community or director of economic development. Most planners work for local governments with limited resources and many demands for services. When communities need to cut expenditures, planning services may be cut before basic services, such as police, firefighting, and education. Budget constraints could limit job growth in government. Most new jobs for urban and regional planners will arise in affluent, rapidly expanding communities. Local governments need planners to address an array of problems associated with population growth. For example, new housing developments require roads, sewer systems, fire stations, schools, libraries, and recreation facilities that must be planned for in the midst of a consideration of budgetary constraints. Small-town chambers of commerce, economic development authorities, and tourism bureaus may hire planners, preferably with some background in marketing and public relations.

Skills and Abilities

Public Affairs is an interdisciplinary field, requiring students to have exposure to a wide variety of areas, such as: politics, policy analysis, budgeting and financing, personnel management and law. Work in this area requires being able to:

- Analyze data
- Develop and evaluate plans
- Organize people
- Solve problems
- Manage stress
- Speak in public to groups
- Good interpersonal and communication skills
- Negotiate and budget

They enjoy positions where they can accrue authority, status, and control. They tend to be very practical, results-oriented individuals who enjoy delivering immediate and visible services to others. They can be considered thorough, dependable, well-organized, cautious, logical and systematic.

Additional Resources

U.S. Government's Occupational Outlook Handbook
<http://stats.bls.gov/oco>

American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)
www.aspanet.org

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration
www.naspaa.org

Policy discussions (nonpartisan)
www.policy.com

Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management
www.appam.org

Federal Government Information
www.usa.gov

Presidential Management Fellows Program
www.pmf.opm.gov

Revised and updated by LS&JM 07/08. Information was obtained from the following sources: The College Board Book of Majors. (2004); The Princeton Review Guide to College Majors (2005 Edition); The College Majors Handbook by N.P. Fogg, P.E. Harrington, & T.F. Harrington (1999 & 2004 Editions); The College Board Guide to 150 Popular College Majors (1992); Vault College Career Bible (2005 Edition); Quick Guide to College Majors & Careers by L. Shatkin (2002).