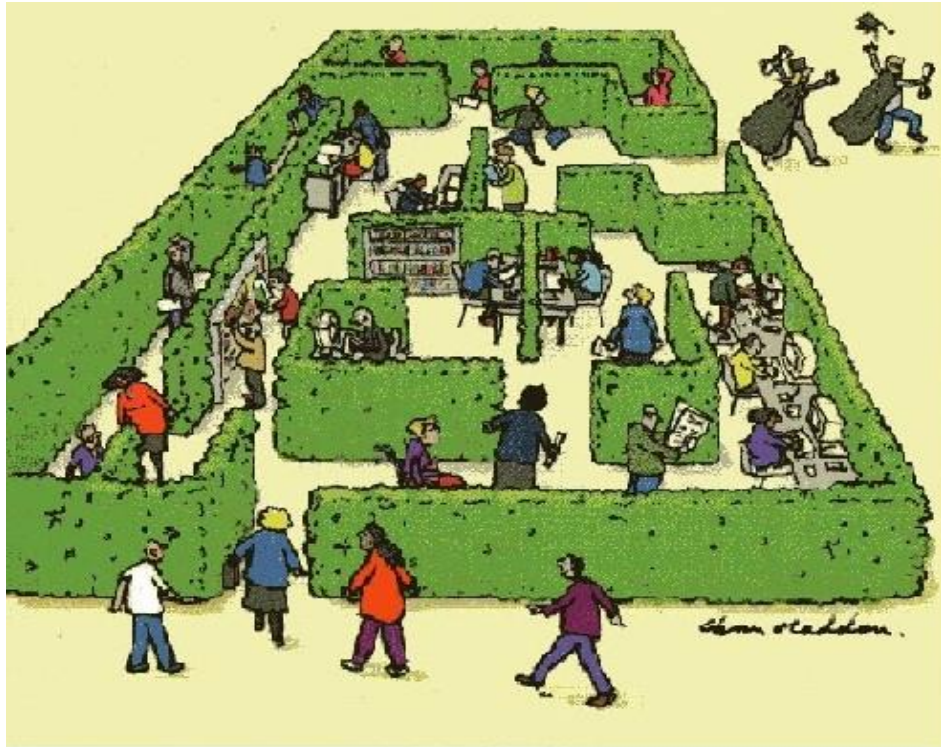


PAD 690 MPA Capstone Project Guidelines



SUNY Buffalo State University
Department of Political Science, Public Administration,
& Planning

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Capstone Experience for the MPA

PAD 690 is the capstone experience in the MPA program. Buffalo State is a member of NASPAA¹ and follows NASPAA accreditation requirements for its MPA program. NASPAA-accredited MPA programs must include a capstone experience in which students practice NASPAA's five universal competencies²:

1. To be able to lead and manage in public governance.
2. To participate in and contribute to the public policy process.
3. To analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems, and make decisions.
4. To articulate and apply a public service perspective.
5. To communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenship.

At all stages of the MPA capstone project students need to be cognizant of the fact that the Graduate Committee in the Department of Political Science, Public Administration, and Planning has designed the capstone project to ensure Buffalo State MPA students practice these universal competencies.

Course Prerequisites

Students must complete *PAD 500 Public Administration & Policy*, *PAD 680 Research Methods for Public Administration and Nonprofit Management* and *PAD 681 Data Analysis and Presentation* prior to entering PAD 690. These sequenced courses cover the public administration theories and concepts, research methods, statistics, software skills (Microsoft tools, SPSS, and Qualtrics), and formatting of and citing sources in professional papers using APA 7th. If a student plans to complete the MPA program in three semesters, the student should take PAD 680 in the first fall semester, PAD 681 in the spring semester, and PAD 690 in the second fall semester.³ PAD 680 and PAD 681 are (typically) taught face-to-face (rather than online).⁴

There are five essential parameters for conducting research in the public and nonprofit sectors:

1. A focus on administrative and policy issues – either in the public or nonprofit sectors.
2. A focus on an agency/organization setting or service delivery with which the student is familiar so that he or she has knowledge of the setting/deliverables. The

¹ NASPAA is the accreditation body for the MPA and MPP.

² MPA students are introduced to NASPAA's five universal competencies in PAD 500 Public Administration and Policy.

³ PAD 680 is offered in the fall semester only. PAD 681 is taught in the spring semester only.

⁴ If SUNY or Buffalo State University administrate mandate (due to a pandemic or other circumstance), PAD 680 & PAD 681 may be taught online during the academic year. On occasion, 680 is offered in the summer (4-week, online) at the discretion of the department chair.

- MPA capstone project results should be shared with, and presumably be of a positive benefit to the organization or agency.
3. Must have access to study participants.
 4. Must have permission from the appropriate authorities to pursue the research – supervisor, agency’s legal counsel, etc.
 5. Finally, the student should have passion for the subject matter.

CITI Certification

Students are required to obtain research involving human subjects’ certification for Buffalo State’s Institutional Review Board. **All MPA students obtain a certificate successfully by completing the free, self-paced online CITI Course as part of their course requirements for PAD 680.** The certificate is valid for three years, after which time students are required to take the refresher course on CITI.

Registering for PAD 690

Selection of first reader

1. Student fill out Parts A & B of the [Individual Graduate Study Application form](#).
2. Along with this form, students must attach a one-paragraph description of the MPA project.⁵
3. The student emails the form and one-paragraph description to Dr. Soni (sonis@buffalostate.edu) along with first reader preference (if any).
4. The MPA Committee meets to review these materials.
5. The MPA Committee considers several factors in assigning the first reader:
 - a. Student faculty preference (if stated)
 - b. Faculty expertise
 - c. Number of projects a faculty member is currently supervising. (The MPA Committee seeks to ensure that projects are shared evenly among the faculty.)
6. Upon selection of the first reader, that faculty member, in consultation with the MPA Committee and the student, can select the second reader.

IRB Approval

Buffalo State MPA capstone projects involving human participants (including analyses of databases supplied by an agency) must be cleared by the campus IRB. IRB compliance is

⁵ https://suny.buffalostate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Ind_Grad_Study_App-not721or722-Updated%202023.pdf

covered in PAD 680. IRB applications are submitted via an electronic system. Visit this website for details on the electronic IRB submission system at the university:

<http://sponsoredprograms.buffalostate.edu/suny-rf-pacs-irb-module>

You will need to fill out the [Protocol Template](#).

To submit an IRB application:

First you need to register for a PACS IRB account.

Click on this link: <http://www.rfsuny.org/Information-For/Online-Tools-/SUNY-PACS/SUNY-PACS-Login/All-Other-Locations-PACS-Login/> and then, click PACS LOGIN or Login icon on the screen.

Don't have a SUNY PACS account? (all except University at Buffalo)

[Click here to register](#). Registration is open to:

- SUNY campus faculty, staff and students.
- External SUNY campus partners who need access to the campus site in PACS, including collaborators from other SUNY campuses.

SUNY PACS Login Account

Don't have a SUNY PACS account? Click [here](#) to register.

After a student register for an account, he or she needs to create and submit a new study.

Required Texts

MPA project advisors and students will reference the textbooks required in PAD 680 and PAD 681:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7th edition. Washington, DC: APA, 2010. (Purchased in PAD 680.)

Creswell, J. W. and J. David Creswell (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Sage. (4th edition acceptable). (Purchased in PAD 680.)

Cronk, Brian. C. (2015). *How to Use SPSS*. New York: Taylor & Francis (any edition) (Purchased in PAD 681.)

Salkind, N. J. (2017). *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Purchased in PAD 681.)

Berman, E., & Wang, X. (2018). *Essential statistics for public managers and policy analysts*. 4th Edition. Los Angeles, CA: CQ Press. (Supplement material)

Pollock III, P. H., & Edwards, B. C. (2019). *An IBM® SPSS® Companion to Political Analysis*. CQ Press.

※ E. H. Butler Library at SUNY Buffalo State University provides research help to students who are willing to have research assistance and tutorials [here](#).

Required Software

1. Statistical Analysis

Students may use Excel for graphical representations and descriptive statistics. Inferential statistics require a statistical software package such as R, SAS, SPSS, or STATA. SPSS is taught in PAD 681 and is available on computers in C-104, Butler Library, and the Economics/Political Science computer lab in Cassety Hall B21. A 6-month to one-year SPSS grad pack is sold on Amazon and other internet sellers.

2. Web-administered Surveys

Buffalo State uses **Qualtrics** for web-administered surveys. To access Qualtrics: <https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/>. See <https://buffalostate.teamdynamix.com/TDClient/2003/Portal/KB/ArticleDet?ID=93800> for links to Qualtrics training sites. Qualtrics is introduced in PAD 680, with hands-on practice in writing surveys on the Qualtrics platform taught in PAD 681.

Recommended Software

EndNote is the industry standard for organizing bibliographies and embedding in-text citations and references (bibliography). EndNote integrates seamlessly with Word. EndNote also has excellent free technical support with short wait times. At times, there's a 30-day fee trial. Here's the link to a [Student License](#).

Another option is an open access electronic bibliography system such as [Mendeley](#) and [Zotero](#). Butler Library provides training in citations [here](#).

Research Methodology, Data Collection & Analysis

Research methodology and data collection are taught in *PAD 680 Research Methods for Public Administration and Nonprofit Management*. Statistics (and the SPSS software package) is taught in *PAD 681 Data Analysis and Presentation*. Students are expected to arrive to PAD 690 in full command of these subjects. They should also be familiar with the Qualtrics Survey Platform if they intend to collect data through a survey.

Guidelines for Preparing the Master's Project

The Master's Project (PAD 690) is (roughly) equivalent to an article in a public administration journal. Buffalo State uses APA 7th for formatting, in-text citations, and references. Butler Library provides information with students how to cite materials based on [APA 7th edition](#). Students should refer to the *Public Administration Review*, the scholarly journal published by the American Society for Public Administration (PAR), for guidance on writing a journal article. It is expected students have read many articles published in PAR throughout their MPA studies, and should be familiar with the format, quality of writing, length, and so forth.

The body of the paper should be 12-point, Times New Roman type, double-spaced with margins of one inch.

References must be single-spaced, double spaced between entries.⁶ Manuscripts should be approximately **8,000 words, including** abstract, footnotes, references, tables, and figures. Appendices **are excluded** from the word count. Figures, tables, and boxes must be incorporated into the manuscript and referenced in the narrative. The point of these visual materials is to help the reader grasp the narrative – so you need to tie the two together.

The MPA project should be written in the best expository style—grammar, punctuation, and syntax are important and should be corrected. Students should make use of a writing manual when preparing their paper.⁷

In general, most research is written in the past tense, since any report on research must necessarily follow the data collection process and describe what was observed. The student should write in the third person form. Terms such as “the researcher” or the “writer” are acceptable. Students should write in the **active voice** whenever possible.

⁶ In EndNote, click the arrow in the box below “Instant Formatting.” Click: Configure Bibliography > Layout > Times Roman 12, Single Spacing

⁷ The APA Style Manual 7th ed. is required. *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White is a classic, but there are many others.

Refer to the APA Publication Manual 7th edition for paper formatting. Papers must use APA 7th heading formatting as follows.⁸

Level	Format
1	Centered, Bold, Title Case Heading Text begins as a new paragraph.
2	Flush Left, Bold, Title Case Heading Text begins as a new paragraph.
3	<i>Flush Left, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading</i> Text begins as a new paragraph.
4	Indented, Bold, Title Case Heading, Ending with a Period. Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.
5	<i>Indented, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading, Ending with a Period.</i> Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

Note. In title case, most words are capitalized.

APA 7th is the required citation style.⁹

Explanatory notes should be inserted as “footnotes” rather than “endnotes.” Use Word’s “References” tab.

Use “Professional” formatting (rather than “Student”) for your MPA project.

Format for Paper

Summary of Sections

The finished Master’s Project paper must follow the following format and include these sections listed below. Begin each section with the bolded headings on a new page.

Title Page

Center the following on the page:

⁸ <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/paper-format/headings>

⁹ In addition to the required APA manual (PAD 680), there are many APA style guides available via the internet. See, for example, <https://apastyle.apa.org/> and <https://libguides.butler.edu/citations/apa>

Title
 Author
 In partial fulfillment of requirements for PAD 690 Masters Project
 SUNY Buffalo State
 First Reader¹⁰
 Second Reader
 Date of completion

Abstract (1/2 page)
 Keywords (no more than 5)¹¹
 Table of Contents
 Introduction
 Literature Review
 Methodology
 Results
 Discussion
 Conclusions
 Institutional Review Board Statement
 Declaration of Interest Statement
 Acknowledgements
 References
 Appendix (appendices for more than one)

Master's Project Detailed Outline

This section contains a detailed description of each of the required sections of the MPA Project.

Title Page

Abstract

100-150 words

Keywords

4-5 keywords¹²

Place keywords directly below the abstract.

¹⁰ The First Reader is the faculty who you registered with for PAD 690. Your First Reader selects the Second Reader.

¹¹ Keywords are necessary to facilitate web searches in the event you submit your project for publication in a peer-reviewed journal or upload to the internet.

¹² Keywords are necessary to facilitate web searches in the event you submit your project for publication in a peer-reviewed journal or upload to the internet.

Table of Contents

The table of contents is placed after the abstract/keywords. This process is much easier if you create a clickable (dynamic) table of contents, which then you can continuously update as you enter new text. Creating an automatic table of contents is a two-step process.

1. You must use the heading feature in Word.¹³
2. Inserting the clickable table of contents.¹⁴

Introduction (about three pages)

Provide a brief introduction to the nature and purpose of the research project. Explain why the study is important, who is affected by the problem, what the scope of the problem is, why this is a “problem” and why you, as a researcher, want to study the problem. The student is expected to describe and define the need or problem and explain its effect on the clients, community, or the organization. This description should include the scope, impact, and nature of the problem or need. The description should address the questions: Why is this problem, need, or issue important to research? Who does the problem, need, or issue affect? The purpose of the study section discusses the specific objectives of the study. These are the expected outcomes, products, or results of the research project. These objectives must be specific and observable outcomes. Explain why this study is important. Why are the problems or issues to be addressed important or significant? Who does the problem affect and in what manner? Address how this study will affect the problem faced by agencies or clients. This is the section where you discuss the agency (not in the literature review).

Literature Review

The literature review should run about five pages in the MPA project but can be longer if the student wishes to delve further into the topic.

A review of the literature will be accomplished to gain an understanding of similar previous problem interventions and the state of research in the field pertaining to this problem or need. Refer to PAD 680 notes, Creswell text, and journal articles in *PAR* before you tackle the literature review.

The review of the literature is extremely important in support of your study. It is important to locate in your library or through the Internet, research journal articles, books, conference papers, working papers, government reports and legislation, reports published by think

¹³ See <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/video-improve-accessibility-with-heading-styles-68f1eeff-6113-410f-8313-b5d382cc3be1#:~:text=To%20add%20a%20heading%20style,as%20the%20Heading%201%20button.>

¹⁴ <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/insert-a-table-of-contents-882e8564-0edb-435e-84b5-1d8552ccf0c0#:~:text=Put%20your%20cursor%20where%20you,contents%20and%20choosing%20Updat e%20Field.>

tanks, and any other documents that have been carried out and published in the area of your research investigation and problem. The review of the literature supports the notion that your study is or has been of interest in the research literature of public administration and non-profit management. The literature review serves as a “jumping off point” for your study. This means your literature review must **INFORM** what you will study. There must be a direct connection between previous findings and your research plan.

Finally, the literature review must be exhaustive in terms of uncovering all possible explanatory (independent) variables. If you miss a critical explanatory factor, you open up your study to threats to internal validity (review PAD 680 notes).

Methodology

A hypothesis(es), if appropriate (quantitative studies), will be included. As you learned in PAD 680 and PAD 681, hypotheses are only used in quantitative studies because one tests (reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses) through statistical analyses.

Design. Explain your study’s design, refer to Creswell and your 680 notes, and published articles using this methodology, when appropriate. Pay close attention to sequencing and identify the correct methodology. Is the design qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods? If it’s mixed methods, what type of mixed methods did you select, and why?

Sampling. Describe in detail your study population or sample. Describe the technique used to select the sample for your study. Discuss whether you are using a convenience sample, random sample, or other type of sampling technique. (Refer to notes on sampling in PAD 680, including the sampling table.) Explain to your reader why you chose the technique you are using. Your goal here is to ensure you 1) collected data according to scientific standards, and 2) because you adhered to these standards, your results will be generalizable to other people, places, and times.

If your research required IRB approval (a federal requirement for human subject research), include the IRB-approved protocol.

Data Collection Methods. Here the researcher describes the methods of data collection used in the research. A complete description of the development of questionnaires, surveys, interview questions is explained. Samples of instruments and written approvals of agencies or clients from which data are collected are included in appendices to the paper. The description of research methods should be clear, concise, and to the point. You should describe your research design in such a way that another researcher could replicate it and check on your results with another sample.

Describe the tests, questionnaires, scales, etc., which you used and how they were constructed and if they were original. If you are using questionnaires, interview questions, or focus group questions used by other researchers, cite some of these studies. (Do recall from PAD 680 and PAD 681 that is preferable to select instruments that have been used in studies published in peer-reviewed journals.)

This section of the paper should be “technical.” The actual discussion of the results in the context of your study should wait until the next section, “discussion.” (Think of this section as demonstrating your ability to interpret what the data are telling us as taught in PAD 680 and 681.) Think presentation of the data, not interpretation in terms of your problem and purpose statements.

Reminder: You are required to obtain written permission from agencies and clients to collect data through review of case materials, interviews, focus groups, or surveys which will be included in your IRB application. This written permission can be in the form of an email to the PAD 690 course instructor. **DATA CAN NEITHER BE COLLECTED NOR ANALYZE WITHOUT OBTAINING IRB APPROVAL.** Your course instructor will let you know if IRB approval is not needed.

Results

A note on placement of figures, tables, photographs, maps, and boxes.

APA 7th suggests placing illustrative matter in the body of the paper (rather than in the appendices). Consult this with your MPA capstone faculty adviser. You must refer to any illustrative matter in the narrative. If you are using many figures, etc. in your paper, you may wish to use Word's "Insert Caption" (References<Insert Caption) and "Cross-reference" (References<Cross-reference) features.

Quantitative. Students must begin with an analysis based on descriptive statistics before moving on to inferential statistics – this is a requirement of all MPA capstone projects which collect statistical data (whether using published data sets or data derived from a questionnaire). Describe how the data were analyzed, what statistical methods were used, and the level of confidence accepted, if appropriate. Report significant and non-significant results using the templates taught in PAD 681 (See Cronk SPSS book). If utilizing a quantitative methodology that is not statistical based – e.g. cost/benefit analysis – your course instructor will provide guidance. As much as possible, use questions from existing surveys. If your survey contains multiple Likert questions forming an index/scale (such as ProQOL, Public Service Motivation, Police Legitimacy, UCLA Isolation), you must run and report Cronbach's Alpha (a test of reliability – internal consistency) on the index/scale questions.

Describe the demographic information you are using such as race, gender, age, income, education. Explain how you collected demographic information – survey instruments? interviews? focus groups? U.S. Census data? or other methods relevant to the research. Are the demographics reflective of the population? Example: You are surveying police officers on a force where 25% of the officers self-identify as African American. Your survey results should have similar percentages. If not, you need to explain why you do not think the difference in percentages skew the results or make them any less generalizable to the entire population (of the police force).

This section should contain graphs, charts, tables, crosstabs, etc. The student should strive to present the raw data in a comprehensible form. At the same time, this section should not be "overloaded" with illustrative materials. Most of these can be placed in an appendix. A "rule of thumb" is that your basic quantitative results should be summarized in one or more tables. The inclusion of one or more graphic figures will further clarify the meaning of your data. This means that you must begin by constructing clear and meaningful tables and figures before you begin your descriptive writing. Your narrative will be centered on your tables and figures and will contain more information than you discuss. The tables must be clear so that the reader can examine them and draw conclusions. This process can be facilitated by discussing in your narrative significant aspects of your findings that appear in the tables.

Validity and reliability should be considered in quantitative research. See 680 and 681 materials to review these concepts.

Qualitative. If your study is qualitative, describe results as taught in PAD 680. Students should also refer to MPA projects posted to Digital Commons utilizing a qualitative methodology. Sample information collection: focus groups, open-ended interviews, storytelling, thick description, participant-observer fieldnotes.

Mixed Methods. You must write up in the order you conducted the research. Review Creswell & Creswell Chapter 10 for sequencing the different types of mixed methods designs.

ALL STUDENTS: refer to published journal articles that utilize the same methodology as yours to model your reporting of results.

Discussion

This is the section of the paper that connects the findings with what we know about the subject matter (as explained in the literature review). This brings you one step away from solving the puzzle you laid out in your problem and purpose statements.

In this section present your findings in a clear, concise, and objective fashion with backward referencing to the literature review to guide interpretation of your findings. Example: Does the literature find that younger child welfare workers are more subject to compassion fatigue than their older counterparts? Does your study bear this out? Or has your study produced findings contrary to what the literature would predict? Why might your findings differ from what the literature predicted? Was, for example, the literature uncertain (e.g. empirical studies revealed contrary findings)?

This may well be the most difficult section of your project to compile and describe. Descriptive studies, for example, may require many tables and a lengthy discussion to cover the important findings, whereas the test of a clear-cut hypothesis may involve only an explanation of the basis for accepting or rejecting the hypothesis and the extent to which the literature predicted this result.

In your narrative, touch on the highlights, pointing out striking or significant information from one or more of the tables that make your results clearer to the reader. It is best to stick to straight expository writing and avoid conclusions as you write, rather present the facts as you found them, but always in the context of your literature review. One can see that this strength of this section is only as good as a competent literature review.

In this section, briefly recapitulate your problem statement and the methods by which the problem was studied. Now proceed to state the conclusions based on the findings that were

reported in the data analysis and discussion sections. The conclusions should relate back to the relevant literature reviewed in the literature review section.

Conclusions

Summary. Summarize your findings.

Recommendations. Offer FIRM recommendations to your agency – two or three is an acceptable number. Naturally, recommendations must be in line with the findings. Always keep in mind that the MPA is a professional degree program. This is not the place to be tentative or overly theoretical. Offer recommendations to help the agency improve a program, outreach, etc.

Limitations of study. Discuss any limitations of your research such as the inability to control certain variables that may have affected your results, limitations of sample size, interview bias, or other limiting factors. It is also important to indicate the weaknesses of the study if these weaknesses may have an important effect on the interpretation of the results.

Implications & Future Research. Discuss the implications of your results for the problem addressed. How do your results support a solution or explication of the problem? Does your study achieve its purpose? Suggestions for further research may include a suggestion to repeat the study with certain improvements designed to sharpen the clarity of the results. Discuss what other future research may be of use in exploring the problems addressed by your research. Discuss new areas of research uncovered by your project that may be promising in addressing the problems or issues studied. If possible, future research should be written to assist the agency in planning its next evaluation, etc. Future research takes careful thought and consideration because it reveals what you as the researcher would study next given the time, resources, and permission of the agency.

Institutional Review Board

Insert this statement:

The research for this paper was approved by SUNY Buffalo State's Institutional Review Board. IRB ID: STUDYxxxxxxx.
(fill in number listed in the "Approval of Submission" letter the IRB emailed to you).

If your project was exempted from IRB review, you must include the following statement:

This research project was not reviewed by SUNY Buffalo State's Institutional Review Board (IRB) because the results will not be disseminated outside of the INSERT AGENCY. If the AGENCY decides it wishes to share this study with unaffiliated individuals or organizations, Ms. Gina Game, SUNY Buffalo State's IRB representative, should be contacted at GAMEG@buffalostate.edu for guidance.

Declaration of Interest Statement

I have no potential conflict of interest.¹⁵

Acknowledgements

Remember to acknowledge the individual (s) who supervised you at the research site/agency/office, the individuals whom you interviewed, participated in the focus groups, etc. Basically, people who gave of their time to help you identify this project, enabled you to collect your data, etc.

References

List only those references cited in your paper and be sure to carefully check for APA 7th alignment, especially if you are typing in references by hand rather than using EndNote or another bibliographic software.

Appendices

Include in the appendix section any tests, questionnaires, rating forms, letters to agencies, consent forms, surveys, interview questions, and the “Approval of Submission” form you received from SUNY Buffalo State’s Institutional Review Board. Any other material which will not fit naturally into the context of one or more sections, but which contains important information to the reader, should also be included in the appendix.

Assessment of the paper

The PAD 690 instructor will use the following criteria for judging the quality of the project:

- The paper’s conformance to the PAD 690 MPA Capstone Project format
- Specificity of the problem statement and research objectives.
- Thoroughness of the literature review and analysis.
- Validity and reliability of the theoretical construct, data collection instruments, and data analysis.
- Congruence between findings and conclusions or recommendations.
- Is the presentation such that what was accomplished and what was observed stand out clearly?
- Does the study show an awareness of the weaknesses, underlying assumptions, and so forth, in the study?
- Are the conclusions valid and in keeping with the findings?

¹⁵ Cut and paste this statement into your paper. If you DO have a conflict of interest, you need to select a different project.

- Was the research designed adequately within the practical limitations presented?

Oral Presentation

Student will present their findings in a public forum during CEP week. The oral presentation is to an audience of MPA faculty, public and nonprofit managers from the Western New York community, MPA students, and alumni of Buffalo State's MPA program. Presenters should feel free to invite work colleagues and supervisors.

Students must be prepared to succinctly present their research and receive questions from the audience. The formal presentation should be no more than 10 minutes long, followed by about 5 minutes of Q and A.

It is very important for students to plan their oral presentation so that the most essential information about their study is conveyed to the audience. Each presentation should include a PowerPoint, which each slide answering the following questions:

1. What is your research question?
2. What is the public administration/nonprofit management problem at the heart of that question?
3. How did you design your research and what data did you collect?
4. What were your MOST IMPORTANT findings?
5. What are the implications of your findings?
6. What specific recommendations are you making?
7. What are the future research questions coming out of your study?