Public Affairs

Public affairs is an area of research and practice that includes public management, public administration and public policy. A degree in public affairs will allow students to put their passion into action and prepare them for a number of leadership and analytical positions in the public and nonprofit sectors. Public affairs is an interdisciplinary field that examines how organizational, administrative, financial, and policy factors impact the performance of public organizations. Students in public affairs learn about public sector organizations and managerial, analytical and financial skills necessary to succeed as a public servant on local, county, state, and federal levels. This degree also prepares students for a number of graduate and professional school opportunities.

Pursuing Public Affairs at Ohio State

All Ohio State freshman applicants are considered within a competitive admission process for the Columbus campus. Find admissions criteria at go.osu.edu/admissions. Upon admission to the university, students can declare a major in public affairs within the John Glenn College of Public Affairs.

Students interested in public affairs should have a functional understanding of American government as well as proficiency in writing and demonstrated quantitative abilities. High school courses that provide exceptional preparation for public affairs include English composition, mathematics, social sciences and American history.

Most importantly, students interested in the public affairs major should have a passion for service, leadership and/or public policy.

Public Affairs Requirements

The Bachelor of Arts in Public Affairs is a four-year pre-professional undergraduate degree that prepares students for public service in a variety of arenas. The major consists of a core set of public affairs courses offered through the John Glenn College of Public Affairs and an array of specialization tracks and minors offered by departments and schools throughout the university. Examples of specialization areas include nonprofit management, community organization and civic engagement, and urban policy and management. The major provides students with professional managerial and applied analytical skills and specialized knowledge in a policy or management area.

Co-Curricular Opportunities

The John Glenn College of Public Affairs encourages students to pursue internships that are related to their respective policy interest areas. The college’s Washington Academic Internship Program allows students to spend a semester in our nation’s capital interning at a public or nonprofit organization that fits their unique policy interests and career goals. Through the program, students earn twelve credit hours that can be used toward the major. Examples of recent internship sites include Capitol Hill, the Center for American Progress, the United States Department of Commerce and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Students may also join the John Glenn Civic Leadership Council (CLC). A two-time recipient of the Outstanding Student Organization award at Ohio State, the CLC plans programs and events based on policy, academics, service and community. Examples of recent CLC programming include policy discussions with nationally renowned speakers, community service trips and local projects, and academic/professional development seminars.

Incoming first-year students also have the opportunity to participate in the John Glenn Learning Community (JGLC). Students in this program live together in Baker East residence hall, enroll in a public affairs class as a group during fall semester, participate in a number of academic, social and policy-oriented programs throughout the year, and take a group trip to Washington, D.C., in the spring. For more information about the Glenn College’s co-curricular undergraduate programs, visit glenn.osu.edu.

Honors & Scholars Programs

Ohio State offers the Honors and Scholars Programs to create an environment of intellectual support and stimulation within a close-knit community of high-ability undergraduate students. Through these programs, students have access to smaller classes, undergraduate research opportunities, close working relationships with faculty, priority scheduling and unique housing options.

The Honors and Scholars Programs represent great opportunities to be part of a smaller community within a large university. For more information about these opportunities, visit honors-scholars.osu.edu.

For more information, check these websites:

Public Affairs: glenn.osu.edu/undergraduate
John Glenn College of Public Affairs: glenn.osu.edu
Ohio State: osu.edu
Admissions: undergrad.osu.edu
Multicultural Center: multiculturalcenter.osu.edu
First Year Experience: fye.osu.edu
Career Prospects in Public Affairs

A BA in Public Affairs combines a liberal arts grounding, core course work in public management and analysis, and interdisciplinary policy specializations. This combination gives students a well rounded collegiate experience that will prepare them for a number of different career options in federal, state and local government and the nonprofit sector.

The federal government is the largest employer in the United States, with over 1.67 million full-time, permanent employees. The Partnership for Public Service estimates that during the next four years, the federal government will hire 600,000 new employees, or over one-third of the federal workforce, and that many of these individuals will enter the federal workforce with a bachelor’s degree.

State governments will also experience the need to replace staff due to retirements of baby boom generation employees. According to the International City/County Management Association’s estimates, more than one-third of state and local government workers are over 50 years old. As these workers retire, there will be increased demand for employees with baccalaureate degrees in management and analysis.

In addition to opportunities within government, graduates of the public affairs program at Ohio State will also be prepared for positions with nonprofit organizations and private firms.

Curriculum Sample

This is a sample list of classes a student may take to pursue a degree in public affairs. Since university students need more than specific education in a narrow field, they also will take classes to complete General Education (GE) requirements. Because GE courses come from a variety of academic areas of study, this course work helps students develop fundamental skills essential to collegiate success and allows them to tailor these courses toward their interests. Note: This sample represents one of several possible paths to a degree in public affairs. Please consult the Glenn College’s website, glenn.osu.edu, for details on the degree program.

Freshman Year:
- Survey course 1
- Introduction to Public Affairs 3
- Public Service and Civic Engagement 3
- Leadership in the Public and Nonprofit Sectors 3
- GE courses 20
- Total 30

Sophomore Year:
- Introduction to Public Policy 3
- Policy Analysis 3
- Public Affairs specialization courses* 3
- GE courses 21
- Total 30

Junior Year:
- Government Finance and the American Economy 3
- State and Local Government Finance 3
- Public Budgeting 3
- Public Affairs specialization courses* 3
- Elective course 3
- GE courses 15
- Total 30

Senior Year:
- Public Affairs capstone course 3
- Public Affairs policy research paper 3
- Public Affairs specialization courses* 9
- Elective courses 9
- GE courses 6
- Total 30

*Examples available specialization tracks include Nonprofit Management, Community Organization, and Urban Policy.

Revised November 2013. Information subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on the public affairs program, visit glenn.osu.edu.

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